

Dutch rule in Sri Lanka started in 1640 and ended in 1796. The Dutch were ceded some territory by the Portuguese, the rest came through conquest. The Dutch conquered Negombo and Galle in 1640. Then they entrenched themselves in Galle and started taking control of the lands around. They took Colombo in 1656 followed by Mannar and Jaffna (1658), Kalpitiya (1659), Trincomalee (1665), Batticaloa and Kottiyar (1668).

The Dutch controlled far less territory than the Portuguese. Rajasinha II had taken a large chunk of Portuguese territory while the Dutch and Portuguese were fighting. Then in 1683 the Dutch withdrew from some of the Kandyan lands they were holding. By 1688 Dutch territory in southwest consisted of a stretch of about 10-15 miles inland from Negombo to Walawe Ganga, and about 30 miles inland beyond that, taking in Hapitigam, Siyane, Alutkuru, Hewagam, Salpiti, Pasdun, Rayigam Wallalawiti, Galle, Weligam, Morawaka and Dolosdas korales.

The agreement with the Dutch was that the Dutch would eventually return the Portuguese forts to the Sinhala king, who wanted to raze them to the ground. Instead of handing over the forts, the Dutch took them over and strengthened them. Rajasinha II was furious. He took the position that the Dutch had no legal right to territory in Sri Lanka. In terms of the Sinhala-Dutch treaty of 1638, all lands belonged to the Sinhala king. Kings who came after Rajasinha II also took this position and said so in letters to the governor in 1688 and in 1736. Udarata never budged from this position.

The Dutch were militarily weak and could not hope to defeat Rajasinha II in war. They had once brought in sailors from passing ships and made them march into the interior along with the available Dutch and Sinhala troops, to indicate that they had a much bigger army than they actually did. The Dutch East India Company headquarters in Jakarta (Batavia) had opposed territorial expansion. They said the Company lacked the strength to conquer and rule large areas. They did not want territory they could not administer. The Dutch in Sri Lanka were instructed to concentrate on trade, especially cinnamon and elephants.

Batavia had also instructed them to somehow keep Rajasinha II and his successors at bay. So the Dutch engaged in bluff. They said that they were holding the lands on the king's behalf and would return them soon. Governor Pyl declared that the whole island belonged to the Sinhala king. The Dutch governor called himself 'The king's faithful and humble servant' and Colombo was 'His Majesty's city of Colombo'. Letters exchanged between the Dutch and Udarata emphasized that the Dutch were subordinate to the king. Sri Vijaya Rajasinha was addressed as 'Invincible emperor of the island of Ceylon.' Abeyasinghe notes that 'emperor' had occurred 16 times in 72 lines of writing. But from 1697 the Dutch were ordered not to use terms that made the king feel that that the Dutch were under him.

Throughout their period of rule the Dutch were forced to deal with Udarata. A large proportion of the Dutch exports came from Udarata. Udarata provided almost the entire collection of cardamom, a sizeable quantity of cinnamon and a large part of the pepper and areca. The

Dutch needed the king's permission to peel cinnamon and to send their elephants to Jaffna through Udarata. Every year the Dutch had to send an embassy with expensive gifts to secure this permission. But even after granting permission, the king could and did obstruct the peeling of cinnamon and transport of elephants.

Diplomatic negotiations with the Dutch were conducted by the adigars and disawas. The royal audience was mere ceremonial. In the case of lesser embassies, the emissaries did not even see the king. Courtiers opened the dispatch, discussed the contents, reported to the king, and sent the reply. The Dutch were instructed to cultivate these chiefs. The disawas, acting as the king's envoys, came down to Colombo to pursue matters when necessary. A water colour (Reimers) shows both teams seated round one table on identical chairs at a meeting in 1772. Roberts says this showed that the disawas were given equal status. These chiefs were knowledgeable. At a 1757 meeting, they had discussed the situation in Europe before making their demands.

The Dutch-Udarata boundary became fixed under Wimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707). But due to the stigma of usurped authority, the Dutch found it difficult to rule over their territory. The Sinhala king commanded great prestige among the Sinhala population in the Dutch controlled areas. Whenever a new king was consecrated in Udarata the Sinhalese in Dutch occupied lands went in groups to salute him. There were celebrations in the Dutch occupied areas as well. Lascarins had deserted their posts and gone when Wimaladharmasuriya II was consecrated. As late as 1762, the Dutch governor reported that the Sinhalese in Dutch territory tended to regard the Udarata king as their sovereign. He said the Sinhala chiefs in Dutch territory readily accepted titles from the Sinhala king, and on their return to the Dutch territory they refused to perform their former duties on the grounds that they now held higher rank. Inhabitants in frontier areas looked to the Sinhala king and his officials for instructions. When the Dutch and Udarata clashed, these Sinhalese supported Udarata either by active assistance or 'subtle subversion'. The Governor complained 'people are ready at the slightest wish of the king to rebel against us.'

The Dutch had to tolerate the Sinhala king interceding on behalf of the Sinhalese in Dutch territory. Cinnamon peelers regularly deserted to the Udarata. This is seen as yet another indication that the Sinhalese in Dutch territory had the right of the protection of the Udarata king. In 1696, the king ordered back some cinnamon peelers who had sought refuge, but urged the Dutch to treat them less ruthlessly. In 1736 the peelers who rebelled said that they did so in the name of the king. They were allowed to stay in Udarata Kingdom. The chiefs advised the Dutch to administer the peelers better, refused to discuss the matter further and brought the proceedings to a close. The cinnamon peelers revolt of 1757 resulted in further revolts in the southwest in 1758. Udarata chiefs came in saying that they were investigating the complaints that had been made to them.