CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION
It would be evident from this study of the chain of events from 1762 to 1802 that the main participants during this period were: the Kandyan King of Sri Lanka, the Dutch who were occupying the Maritime Provinces surrounding the former's kingdom, and the British who were emerging as a powerful force in South India.

A careful study of the records cited makes it clear that all the three powers had a common aim. They were after the control of trade in cinnamon. The "Helen or Bride in the contest" of the island of Sri Lanka was "the finest and purest cinnamon". Trade in this spice was so lucrative that it attracted all the European countries engaged in commercial activity in the eastern waters. The Portuguese came first, then the Dutch, and after them the British. All of them shared the same purpose.

Even though the Kandyan kings wished to export this commodity themselves, they were unable to do so, having allowed foreign powers like the Portuguese and later the Dutch to surround them. They also lacked the infrastructure facilities to take this commodity to international markets. The Kandyan kings were prisoners
in their own land. When they invited the Dutch to drive out the Portuguese occupying the Maritime Provinces, they thought that the Dutch were only mercenary forces, and expected them to go away once their job was over. This was a miscalculation. The Dutch agreed to drive out the Portuguese because they wanted to step into the former's shoes. With this aim in view, after "the operation clearance", they presented the king of Kandy with an exorbitant bill towards the cost of expenses involved in the military operation, fully aware that he could not afford to settle the dues. To justify their occupation of the Maritime Provinces they claimed that they were holding it as collateral security for the money due from the king of Kandy.

The Kandyan kings of the time, the Nayakkars from the Madura country, tried, unlike their Sinhalese predecessors, to use their South Indian connections to expel the Dutch from the Maritime Provinces. There were only two indigenous Princes who could have helped. Mohamad Ali, the Nawab of the Carnatic and Tippu Sultan, of Mysore. The former did not take any initiative. The latter could have helped them if he wanted to. He hated the British and had been conspiring with Napoleon
Bonaparte of France against them. But there is no indication in the available records of the Kings of Kandy seeking his support.

When the Kandyan kings approached the French, they did send a fleet and took possession of Kottiyar. The Dutch acted swiftly and turned the French out of Kottiyar and carried the war in the Coromandel coast where they expelled the French from Santhome, in Madras, which was seized from the Portuguese by the French.

Similarly, when they found that the Kandyan ruler was keen on encouraging trade by the British, in the Bay of Bengal, from their ports in the eastern coast of Sri Lanka, the Dutch became apprehensive about the Kandyan ruler's control over these ports since they feared that it threatened their economy and trading interests. There was the danger that "trade links could mature into political ones". Hence, to forestal such developments, they acted quickly and took possession of Trincomalle in 1665, fortified it, and kept a naval watch on the ports.

The British who were carrying on small scale trade in the Bay of Bengal between the ports in the
region were naturally waiting for an opportunity to break the Dutch monopoly in cinnamon trade and take their share in a flourishing South India-Sri Lanka trade. The main constraint for them in taking any hasty steps to achieve their object was that they were not only guided by local considerations, but also global ones. At that time, the Dutch and the British were at peace in Europe after signing the treaty of 1667. Under article 34 of the treaty, "the fleets or vessels of one of the powers entering into the ports of the other should not undertake hostilities or anything which may do the least prejudice". Therefore the British could not send any official embassy to Kandy for trade purposes. However, they denied the Dutch claims of monopoly and took the stand on the freedom of the seas and free mutual relations with Asian rulers.

The lure of cinnamon was so strong that the British broached the subject of trade with Sri Lanka, when they attempted, in the previous century, to free, through correspondence, Robert Knox and his companions, imprisoned by the Kandyan king, Rajasimha. The harsh terms of the treaty of 1766 with the Dutch, and the restriction on free trade forced the Nayakkar kings of Kandy to turn to South India and seek British help
to expel the Dutch. The British did manage to send Pybus to Kandy on a spying mission. They were not willing to offer him any help, but vainly expected the king to give them concessions in trade. Thus the Dutch relations with the Kandyan kingdom were on the verge of getting intertwined with the wider network of power rivalry in South Asia. In a sense, the advent of the Nayakkar kings of Kandy was the first step that paved the way for the coming of the British.

What the British first sought from Sri Lanka was its precious cinnamon. Lord Hobart, the British Governor of Madras, advised promotion of trade with the Kingdom of Kandy by bartering rice, salt and cloth for cinnamon, pepper and betel-nut. Later, while cinnamon continued to be desirable, Trincomalle became another focus of attention in Sri Lanka. Along with it came the necessity of denying the use of this fine natural harbour to the French in their design to conquer India. Though the British embassies from South India under Pybus, Boyd, and Andrews were failures, the British army paved the way for the capture of the Maritime Provinces which coincided with the political and economic decline of Holland.
Though cinnamon was the chief attraction, it was the interplay of economics and politics that drew the British to Sri Lanka from South India. In any case, the island could not have escaped the attention of the leading power on the mainland. That has been the case at every period of South Indian History. It shows how foreigners from six thousand miles away could first make conquests in India, and then in the neighbouring island wholly or entirely due to their command of the sea.

An important factor that favoured the British intervention in Sri Lanka was the strained relations between the Dutch and the local rulers. However, the British were very cautious in their approach. Their position in international affairs was not very favourable. In fact, as in the case of India, and so also in the case of Sri Lanka, the political vicissitudes of Europe shaped the British policies and manoeuvres. The British were gaining a foothold in India in the Madras Presidency, and so naturally, they operated in Sri Lanka through Madras.

The British followed a go-slow policy which they could well afford. After all, they already had a footing nearby; if Sri Lanka could be occupied, it would merely be an additional gain, but if they failed,
they lost nothing. But they were careful not to prejudice their political relations with their neighbours in Europe. They were not willing to antagonise the Dutch in India at the risk of their own rise in European politics which could be hindered by the enmity of Holland.

The British were also benefited by the Kandyan Nayakkar kings' perpetual struggles against the Sinhalese nobles. The presence in the Kandyan Capital of many collateral branches of the royal family, the relatives of the innumerable queens, present and past at any given time, led to disunity and conflicts. In the reign of the last Nayakkar a relative claimed the throne and sat on it for a few precarious days before being executed. No doubt unity among Nayakkar kings and Sinhalese nobles would have prevented the consolidation of British power in Sri Lanka. Their failure to achieve it undoubtedly provided opportunities which the British empire builders made use of. On the whole, the Nayakkar dynasty led a distracted existence and was bound to succumb to the British, who, early in the nineteenth century, had already begun sweeping the world.
It is often said that the "Madras Officials" were responsible for the problems that confronted the British after their take over of the Maritime Provinces. But it must be remembered that this was the first time that Indians went to Sri Lanka as civilian officials in the employment of a second foreigner. Indians have been visiting and settling down in an island hardly twenty miles away, for centuries. But the Indians who went to Sri Lanka in the wake of the first British conquest belonged to a different category. They were employees of a foreign conqueror and inevitably attracted the dislike of, to put it no higher, the erstwhile subjects of another foreigner, the Dutch. It was hardly likely they would be welcomed with affection. In fact, on the other hand, it is alleged that their "extortions" were mainly responsible for the revolt of 1796-1798. There is no basis for this harsh view. What was responsible for the revolt was the ignorance of the officers who went from South India in attempting to run a system with which they were not familiar, and not their "avarice".

If the final verdict on South India's association with Sri Lanka during the period of this study is that it was a failure, it should be realised that the British in
Madras laboured under many handicaps. They were foreigners in India, and were dealing with another foreign country, Sri Lanka.

Further, the eighteenth century was a time of lax administrative probity in India. The official robberies in Bengal, in which every British functionary from Clive downwards flouted rules and amassed quick fortunes, and the widespread corruption in Madras about the same time centering on the debts of the Nawabs of the Carnatic, influenced the Madras officials, and they took the bad habits to Sri Lanka. This explains the unpopularity of Madras civilians. As for the Indians who accompanied them, they were only doing what their betters were doing. But between themselves, the British officials and the Madras lower officials brought a bad name to Madras administration in Sri Lanka.

The British in Madras were not free political agents. They were under the control of two masters, in Calcutta, and in London. These two masters did not always agree between themselves. The long delay in receipt of the orders from these places also contributed to an enervated administration. Consequently, the
British at that time had no clear idea about the administration of conquered territories. However, when the Peace of Amiens finally made over the Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka to the British in 1802, William Pitt described it in British Parliament as "the most valuable colonial possessions on the globe, giving to our Indian Empire a security it had not enjoyed from its first establishment".