

# **An Investigative Study of the Diplomatic Role of Portuguese Priests during the Kandyan Kingdom from 1542 to 1638**

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'Diplomacy' refers to the art and process of conducting business between nations. Portugal was the first European country to have diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Kandy. The Kingdom of Kandy was the most affected by foreign influences among the historical kingdoms of Sri Lanka. At that time, the method of negotiations and envoys was used in the relations between the royal court and the Portuguese. Accordingly, this study has been conducted in accordance with the historical research method by referring to the source for the purposes of identifying the reasons that influenced the appointment of priests as Portuguese diplomats, identifying the functioning of those diplomatic relations, and identifying the results that arose from it. The special feature of the diplomatic activities that started during the reign of the Kandyan ruler Jayaweera (since 1542) with the Portuguese who came to Ceylon in the sixteenth century is the use of Catholic priests as envoys. In 1547, Franciscan priest Pascoal and his followers came to meet King Jayaweera. There, after discussing with them, the king expressed a strong desire to embrace Christianity. Also, the king agreed to give a large amount of land to build their churches and houses. In 1638, the Portuguese again sent two priests of the Agonite sect and the Franciscan sect to the Kandian kingdom as envoys for peace. Several reasons influenced the Portuguese to use priests for diplomatic work. Among the main objects of their coming to the East was the spread of their religion. For that purpose, the priests came to the East, and they possessed knowledge of the law, political experience, submissiveness, tact, ability to travel safely, and to keep secrets as confessors, which caused them to be chosen for diplomatic work. Even in difficult cases, the priests discussed with the rulers of the hill country and resolved political problems. Thus, it can be concluded that the willingness of the people of Asian society to agree with religion and cultural traditions influenced more than any other matter the use of priests for diplomatic purposes as well as the spread of religion by the Portuguese.

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