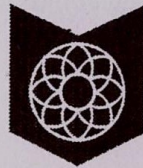


Polonnaruva *Civilization*

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Uda Hettige



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INTRODUCTION

The city of Polonnaruwa and its existence for a short duration of time as the medieval capital of Sri Lanka becomes vitally important as it makes the turning point in the history of Sri Lankan civilization. The fall of Anuradhapura, the first capital of Sri Lanka with a long continuous duration of life extending to eleven centuries, resulted in selecting Polonnaruwa as the second capital of the island by the ancient Sinhalese rulers. It appears that the intention of the kings in establishing Polonnaruwa as the capital was to make it another, Anuradhapura. This intention could well be seen by the pattern of planning and the method of construction of the allocating areas of immense importance to the Buddhist monastic complexes apart from the Kings' palaces. Kings like Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I wanted to make it a ceremonial centre of the island. But due to various uncontrollable factors of the time created by dynamics of the historical process resulting in the intrusion of new elements and pluralistic society there arose internal conflicts among the royalty and the nobility by the ingress of the military commanders into the political arena and assuming the powers of the king makers.

The period of alien rule for more than seven decades appears to have resulted in neglecting and abandoning the age - old popularly accepted norms, conventions and traditions of the country which protected and maintained the socio - economic fabric that bound the people together with patriotism and national consciousness. The liberation of the island from the foreign yoke was possible not because that Vijayabahu I was unconditionally accepted by the people as the legal claimant to the throne but the people were in dire necessity to save the country from the foreign yoke. The religious nationalism instilled in the minds of the people during the Anuradhapura period was still echoing and

lingering in their minds awaiting an effective leadership to extricate the country' from alien rule.

The change of capitals appears to be a normal feature in the history of the world due to various dynamic forces at work. Internal instability or external aggressions mostly compel to change the established capitals of any country. Internal disorders and confusions begin to appear in any country due to the growth of social complexity and pluralism. No country seems to have existed with only one language and religion.

Vijayabahu I utilising all the resources available worked effortlessly to rebuild the country and revive the past glory but the period of peace and prosperity regained by him did not last long. The disuse and neglect of strict disciplinary social observances and customs which protected and maintained the age - old traditions and conventions regarding the legal and right succession to the throne paved way for the powerful princes, nobles and the Buddhist monks to act obdurately. After the death of Vijayabahu I the tradition of succession to the throne was violated by failing to nominate Vijayabahu's son Vikramabahu as the next ruler in succession to the throne after Jayabahu, Vijayabahu's brother. This violation led again to crop up political disputes within the royalty. Buddhist monks, nobility and a certain section of the members of the royalty were directly responsible for this disorderliness. However the country plunged again into a state of chaos and until the Parakramabahu I ascended the throne the political confusions of the island were not settled. What Vijayabahu I did for the betterment of the country was undone during this period of about four decades. This unsettled conditions, complexities and pluralistic social atmosphere disrupted the socio - political spectrum, consequently leading to disuse and disrespect the traditions and conventions of the country. It was under these circumstances that even Parakramabahu I who had no direct claim to the throne could ascend it. He had the necessary stamina and courage to overcome all the obstacles that came upon his way. His perseverance, tenacity of purpose and persistence made him to tread his path until he achieved his goal. Parakramabahu I realised that it was an age of no

tradition'. What the time required was sheer physical force and bravery to gain the throne.

Parakramabahu I was quite successful in his mission and endeavour and brought about an unprecedented prosperity. Nevertheless it was only peace and during his strict rule that peace and prosperity prevailed. With his death the era of decadence set in. He had no future plans for the continuous existence of that era of prosperity.

The dynamics of this period unlike of the former have been the existence of immense complexities in the socio - political sphere with an increasing forms of pluralism. The conflicting factions were active within the royalty, nobility, the order of Bhikkus and the expanding mercantile and agricultural communities. The relationship between the capital city and the provinces of Dakkhinadesa and the Rohana has been unfriendly and unaffable. The established traditions of the early Anuradhapura period for the maintenance of cordial and friendly relations with them had been shattered due to the infusion of new elements and the development of socio - political complexities and pluralism in society. The trend of centrifugalism was more strong than centripetalism. The social and ideological order has been altered significantly. The entire political and social spectrum has overgrown with complexities.

After Parakramabahu I Polonnaruva begins its decay which though Nissankamalla was able to arrest and maintain for nearly nine years the declining process continued unrelentlessly and completed within the following three decades. With the fall of Polonnaruva kingdom eighteenth century old Rajarata civilization based entirely on hydraulic agrarian economy disappeared forever, and began a new era with the formation of a new economic structure more inclined towards trade and commerce. The island became a nation politically unstable, socially complexed, economically uncertain and religiously unsound. Hence the Polonnaruva period altered the life pattern and destiny of the Sri Lankan nation and the civilization.