



Historical Ekneligoda Walawwa in Sabaragamuwa

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Ekneligoda Walawwa holds a significant place among the many historical Walawwas located in the Sabaragamuwa province. As the members of many other aristocratic families, those who lived in Ekneligoda Walawwa were also involved in various forms of Government at that time. Especially, Ekneligoda Mohottala, a controversial figure who helped the British capture the last king of the country, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, was also a member of this dynasty.

According to historical sources, the family name of this generation is 'Akkarak Kuruppu Mahipala Wickramasinghe Basnayake Mudiyan-selage'. Arya Kamadeva, the Prime Minister of King Parakramabahu II, is considered to be the founder of the Ekneligoda dynasty which dates back to the reign of King Parakramabahu II of the Dambadeniya Kingdom. After the construction of the Saparagamuwa Maha Saman Devalaya, the king appointed Arya Kamadeva as its Basnayake Nilame. Later, several members of that generation held the post of Basnayake Nilame of the Saman Devalaya.

Verses

A collection of verses praising a god written by a disciple of a scholar named Attaragama Rajaguru Bandara who lived in the Kandy era states that when the Portuguese invaded Sabaragamuwa, the then Basnayake Nilame of the Saman Devalaya, one Kuruppu Nilame took one god statue to another place in Badulla and defended it. It is said that he was an early member of the Ekneligoda dynasty. The Savul Sandesha written by Alagiyawanna Mukavetti in the 15th century mentions another person named Nanambi Kuruppu. It is said that he grew up as a child of King Seethawaka Rajasinghe and was well versed in the arts. He is also said to be a member of this generation.

Until the reign of King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the Kandyan period, the Ekneligoda dynasty lived in a village called Akurramatuwagala on the Eheliyagoda- Idamgoda road. Akurramatuwagala Kuruppu Mudali of this dynasty was also among the 13 local leaders from Ratnapura who fought to capture the Dutch forts at Katuwana and Matara at that time.

A member of this dynasty came to Ekneligoda, Kuruwita in 1800 or thereabouts and built a house there.

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However, a member of the same dynasty had already built a house and lived in the area and the newly built house was therefore known as *Ekneligoda Aluth walawwa*. At the same time, the name Ekneligoda was added to their lineage. As mentioned above, although this generation is descended from the Arya Kamadeva of the Dambadeniya period, its most recent beginning is considered to be the lineage after their settlement at Ekneligoda.

One Ekneligoda Kalu Basnayake Nilame who was the Basnayake Nilame of the Sabaragamuwa Maha Saman Devalaya in the 1800s had built the Ekneligoda Aluth walawwa and his wife was from the Maduwanwela family.

A group of Sabaragamuwa dignitaries led by Ehelepola Maha Adikaram had conspired against the then Kandyan King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe and it is said that the Kalu Basnayake Nilame was among those who took the lead.

Later, on learning of the conspiracy, King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe ordered the arrest of Kalu Basnayake Nilame. At that time, he had committed suicide by consuming poison. Sources say that after that all the properties belonging to the Ekneli-

goda dynasty were confiscated but later returned to the family.

Ekneligoda Mohottala, who is considered to have added a black mark to the Ekneligoda dynasty, was born in 1783. He is also known as Ekneligoda Mohottala Nilame and Ekneligoda Loku Basnayake Nilame. Due to the suicide of his grandfather, Ekneligoda Kalu Basnayake Nilame, the former had a strong hatred for King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. He, along with Ehelepola Adikaram, organised a revolt against the king in 1814 but it failed. The said uprising is also known as the Sabaragamuwa Rebellion or Batugedara Rebellion.

Ekneligoda Mohottala was the leader of the group that went to capture King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe who was hiding in the house of Bomure Appurala at Gallehawatte, Udupitiya during the British siege of Kandy in 1815. He was accompanied by 500 persons from Sabaragamuwa, 300 Ja and Bengali troops and 5,000 others.

The Walawwa

The present Ekneligoda Walawwa was built in 1829. It was built by a son of Ekneligoda Kalu Basnayake

Nilame around 1800 or so as the previously built Walawwa was in a state of disrepair. This house has architectural features that can be seen in the houses built during the Kandyan period and Dutch architectural features.

The roof of the Ekneligoda Walawwa is made of very strong wood and the walls are made of granite and clay. The walls of the house are plastered with a mixture of humus clay, wasp honey and sugar cane syrup. The floor is paved with tiles made of clay. Ekneligoda Walawwa, a single storey house, has a wooden upstairs confined to one part only. Located above the central hall of the house, the upstairs has been used to hide weapons in the past.

There is a 60ft long and seven feet wide, open porch in front of the house, which is said to have been used for conversing with the people. In the front porch are seven large towers measuring 18 inches in circumference. The distance from one tower to another is seven feet. Behind it can be seen another hall, which can be identified as the hall where the aristocrats who came to the house gathered.

At the back of the Walawwa is another hall 10 feet wide porch. One can see the wooden pillars there and adjacent to the porch is a large central courtyard, about 80 feet long and 40 feet wide, which in the past held various traditional dances. Ekneligoda Walawwa has a large office room, service room, guest lounge, seven bedrooms, special guest lounge, shrine room, dining room, store room, separate dining room for children, toilets, bedrooms for maids and a kitchen.

Present status

Paul Edward Peiris Deraniyagala aka P.E.P. Deraniyagala, the first Director of the Museum Department in the country, was married to Preeni Rambukkana Ekneligoda Molamure Kumarihami of the Ekneligoda walawwa. At that time the ownership of the house belonged to the two generations of Rambukpotha and Molamure due to marital relations. However, Molamure Kumarihami bought the shares belonging to the Rambukpotha lineage and transferred the ownership to her son, Siran Upendra Deraniyagala. Accordingly, the house is currently owned by the children of Dr. Siran Deraniyagala (Archaeologist and former Director General of the Archeological Department), who passed away recently.

