

Draw Inspiration from Past Royalty

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It is ventured to suggest that it would do well for present day leaders of Sri Lanka or for that matter anywhere else in the world to hark back to the past for beneficial inspiration as the saying goes that 'all our hopes of the future depend on a sound understanding of the past' because it is seen, especially, in this country that the standard of most politicians is below par when compared to most leaders of yore.

In this context, Professor Senarath Paranavitana in University of Ceylon 'A Concise History of Ceylon' on the civilization of the early Anuradhapura period says: "From the earliest times to which our available records, literary as well as epigraphical, go back, the Government of the Island had been of the monarchical type. The titles gamani, 'leader of the community' and Mahaparumaka, 'great lord', borne by the early kings of Ceylon seem to suggest that the institution of kingship was preceded by a Government of popularly elected leaders. The Sinhalese kings claimed to be Ksatriyas; the word is often found in literary works as synonymous with raja 'king'".

Righteous conduct

This connotes that popularly elected leaders either lost the people's confidence or that the progeny of the king continued to rule as his performance was found to be beyond reproach and in most cases commendable thereby giving rise

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to dynasties such as the Vijayan, Lambakarana and Moriya, next to the king being the uparaja usually the younger brother of the sovereign or his son. It was believed that the king, by his righteous conduct, ensured the prosperity of the land.

The king during the late Anuradhapura period wielded absolute authority, and had the power of life and death, over the most exalted of his subjects. This absolute power, which the king possessed, in theory, was, however, limited to a great extent in practice by public opinion which demanded that the ruler follow the fundamental principles of justice and equity and custom and precedent as established by the policies followed by earlier rulers who served as models of kingly behaviour.

Early training

The idea implanted in the mind of every member of the royal family, by his early training as well as by the social milieu in which he had his being, that the ruler should hearken to the counsel of the elders of the Sangha also limited his freedom of action. A king who disregarded former custom or offended the Sangha alienated the sympathy of his subjects. Moreover, the king had to

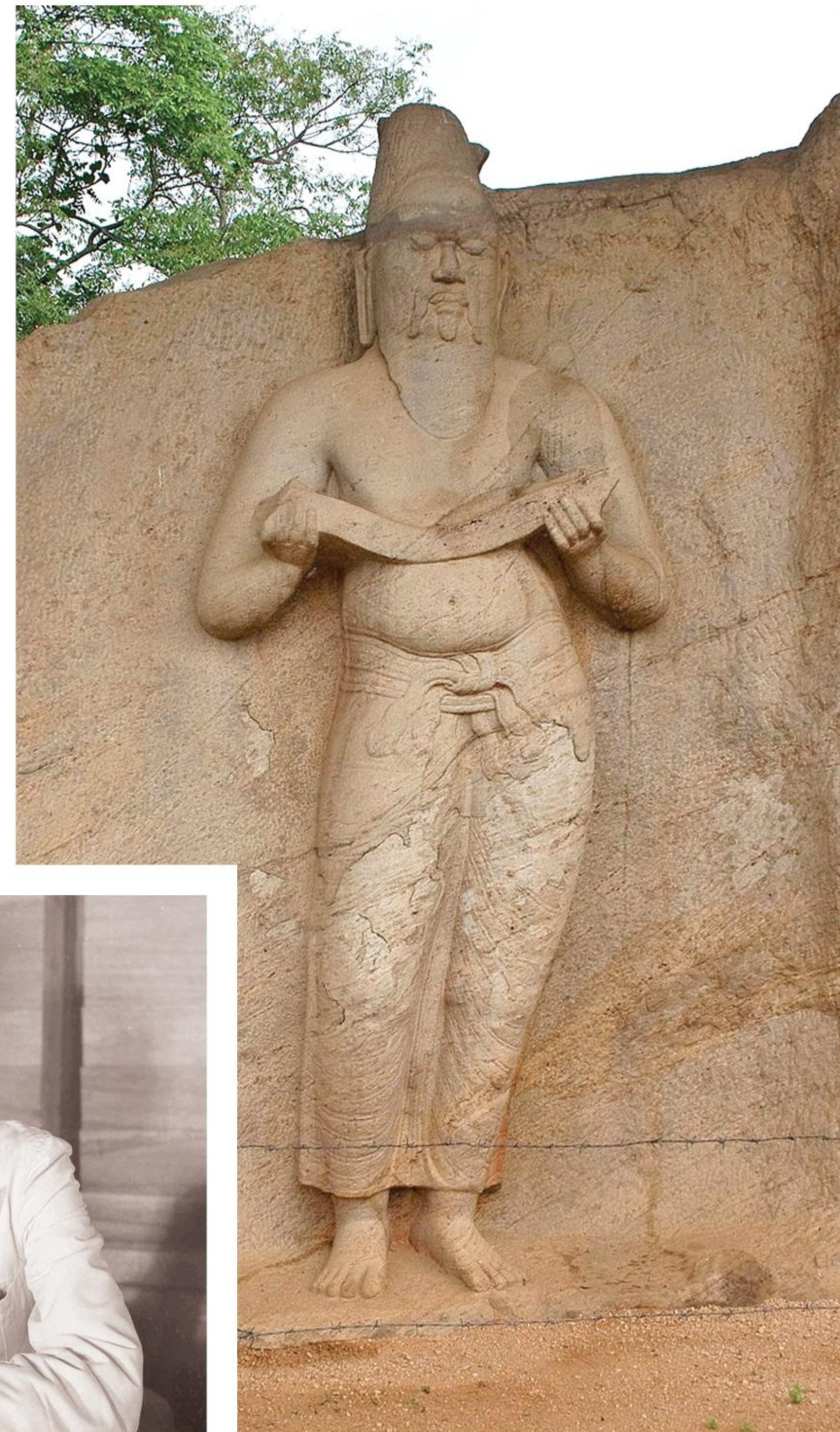
enforce his will through the instrumentality of higher officers of State, and these, as a body, advised him on every important matter which affected the well-being of the State.

In the Polonnaruwa period King Vijayabahu I had to re-establish the kingship after seventy-seven years of Government by the local viceroy of the Chola emperor, and he restored the institutions connected therewith on the same model and legal basis which had existed in the late Anuradhapura period, says historian C.W. Nicholas who co-authored University of Ceylon 'A Concise History of Ceylon' with Professor Senarath Paranavitana. "It was a firm doctrine that the king of Ceylon must be a Buddhist, and a descendant of Vijaya, the eponymous hero of the Sinhalese," says Nicholas.

The principal officers of State below royalty were the Commander-In-Chief, Prime Minister, Chief Secretary, Chief Territorial Administrator, Deputy Commander-In-Chief, Chief Judicial Officer, Head of the Mercantile Corporation, Principal Secretary for Legal Affairs, Minister of External Affairs, Minister of Education, Chief Physician, Chief Astronomer and Astrologer and Director of Charities, indicating that although there was an elaborate organisation of governance for the country it was not cumbersome as to be a



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King Parakramabahu the Great

burden on the Treasury and thereby taxing the economy.

The king was seated on the Lion Throne and those in attendance in the royal court who were immediately below the king who was seated on the Lion Throne were Uparaja the Heir apparent, Princes, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces, chief regional administrators with military responsibilities, principal dignitaries, lesser regional administrators with military responsibilities, Registrars, Record-keepers, Accountants etc.,

and Members of the Mercantile Corporations.

Polonnaruwa period

A noteworthy feature of the team assisting the king in governance during the Polonnaruwa period which under King Parakramabahu the Great, President Ranil Wickremesinghe referred to as the era of economic excellence is that there were the Prime Minister and only two Ministers, in addition to the Uparaja.

It is presumed that the Royalty, Ministers and Officers of State were by and large patriotic, honest and *ipso facto* efficient, looking after the people as their own children as otherwise their misdeeds would have been recorded in history just as Prince Vijaya was described as a wayward youth, Choranaga led the life of a rebel, Kashyapa I killed his own father King Dhatusena, Captain General Jeronimo de Azavedo was the very personification of cruelty and dishonesty.

