

Tourism and Manuscript Heritage of Sri Lanka: Towards Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Traditional manuscript heritage of Sri Lanka completely consists from palm leaf manuscripts with exception of some documents written on metal plaques. Both tangible and intangible segments of the palm leaf manuscripts heritage in the island have been deteriorating rapidly due to number of environmental and anthropogenic factors including those associated with tourism. Manuscripts are stolen from repositories and sometimes deformed to sell tourists as antiques and aesthetic objects. Thousands of Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts have become properties of foreign collections and tourism has played a major role in this terrible circumstances.

In contrast to that phenomenon, tourism can be identified as a main potential source to utilize for preservation of palm leaf manuscript heritage in Sri Lanka with its intangible and tangible components. Positive relationship between tourism and palm leaf manuscript heritage which is generated using concepts of craft tourism, cultural tourism, creative tourism and living museums will provide economic benefits, new employment opportunities and strengthen the national identity in tourism market while safeguarding the manuscript heritage.

Key words: Manuscript heritage of Sri Lanka, Sustainable development, Craft tourism, Creative tourism, Living museum

Introduction

Sri Lanka possesses one of the richest unbroken literary traditions of the world, going back thousands of years. Palm leaf manuscripts had been remained as the dominant writing material of the country from before the dawn of Christian era to 20th century AD. Four plaques unearthed from Anuradhapura Salgaha Watta 2 excavation have been proposed as palm leaf manuscript covers indicating earliest existence of writing on palm leaf (Young and others 1996, 570).

Palm leaf manuscripts are prepared by a traditional technological process incorporated with some cultural practices, utilizing Palmyra palm (*Borassus flabelliformis*) leaf or Talipot palm (*Corypha unmbraiculifera*) leaf. Palm leaf manuscript tradition was interwoven with number of elements of the ancient society including religion, culture, economy, technology, art, rituals and so on. Therefore it can be recognized as a widely spread manuscript culture, exceeding limits of a mere writing material. These manuscripts are invaluable source containing great deal of knowledge and wisdom, which were acquired by ancient Sri Lankans within thousands of years as results of experiments and