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ABSTRACT

Buddhist sites and monuments of Sri Lanka: Issues related to conservation, maintenance and landscaping in multipurpose contexts

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There are six World Heritage Sites and hundreds of other Archaeological sites in Sri Lanka. These sites contain thousands of monuments which are predominantly sacred to Buddhists who are the majority of Sri Lanka throughout its history. Some of these sites are in ruined state and having only historical importance yet some of them are still venerated as Buddhist religious places.

Among these Buddhist sites, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva, Dambulla and Kandy which include into the Cultural Triangle of Sri Lanka and having some of the most important monuments of the Island are considered in this study as examples for issues related to conservation, maintenance and layout of archaeological sites in Sri Lanka.

Archaeological Survey Department of Sri Lanka has been established by the British Government in 1890 and its headquarters were found at Anuradhapura since it is the most important site of the Island. After a decade of work at Anuradhapura, it started to work at Polonnaruva which was the medieval capital city of the Island. As there were huge brick monuments at Polonnaruva, the Archaeological Survey subsequently expanded into conservation works in addition to excavations, explorations and collecting of artifacts. Systematic landscaping and regular maintenance of archaeological sites such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva, Kandy and Dambulla were conducted by the UNESCO –Sri Lanka Cultural Triangle Project since 1980 and presently by the Central Cultural Fund.

One of the key issues related to conservation, maintenance and landscaping of these sites is that all these sites have been functioned in a multipurpose context. There are various stake holders for each site and monument and the Heritage Manager must have to consider all of them in view of a better management plan. Archaeology, Religion, Politics, Trade and Tourism are some of the key contexts where these monuments and sites are enveloped.

As all of these ancient sites are sacred places for Buddhists and some of the old monuments are still venerated, the Religion and the Archaeology always confront each other on the rights of these sites. Public attraction, popular interest, media publicity and political manipulation are some of the other aspects to be coping up with the Heritage management. Trade and economic interests, Development activities and Tourism cannot be forgotten in this regards.

The present paper meant to address above issues and bring forward potential solutions with Sri Lankan experiences.

Key wards: Sri Lanka, Archaeology, Religion, Heritage.

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