SACREDNESS, LIVINGNESS AND CULTURAL HARMONY DESTROYED BY THE HEGEMONIC HERITAGE CONSERVATION; A CASE STUDY RELATED TO KŪRAGALA ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

A country's heritage is a factor that directly or indirectly affects all sub-fields of that country, such as social, economic, political and cultural. Since something is considered heritage by a person or group, the definition of heritage is influenced by the opinion of that person of group. Therefore, defining something as heritage is a matter of caution. This is because if heritage is not carefully defined, it affects all of the areas mentioned above. This study also focuses on the Kūragala archaeological site, a heritage area that has created problems and conflicts due to ideological and functional weaknesses in the definition of such heritage. This site can be identified as an area that that initiated a racial conflict due to the unilateral intervention in the conservation of a heritage area with remains belonging to both Buddhist and Muslim communities. This study aims to identify the problem that has developed in Kūragala, investigate the factors that have influenced the creation of such a problem and suggest effective solutions that can be used to solve the problem. Also getting an idea of a suitable model for an approach that does not cause problems in heritage conservation is also done here.

KEYWORDS: *Buddhist community, Conflicts, Heritage Conservation, Muslim community*

INTRODUCTION

The word heritage has been defined in different ways at different times and in different spaces. Here, William Logan's idea of heritage as tangible and intangible as a legacy is important for defining heritage. He further states that not everything inherited from past generations is inherited. In his view, heritage is a product of society's interpretation of heritage as something belonging to the past by certain forces in society. Political authority, religious institutions, educational structures as well as new media interpret heritage today. There they use different forms and concepts to define heritage. An examination of the history of heritage conservation in Sri Lanka reveals the crisis created by the conceptual approaches to defining and conserving heritage. This inquiry is an analysis of the racial approaches commonly used in Sri Lanka for heritage conservation as a conceptual approach and the crisis situations that have arisen through it.

The main objective of this research is to identify weaknesses in the ethnic approach to heritage conservation that lead to the formation of ethnic conflicts and to make appropriate proposals for its management. The remaining objective of the research is to identify an appropriate approach to heritage conservation.

Various researches have been done on the above proposition both nationally and internationally. There have been a number of studies involving such research, but only a few have been used for further study in this review. "Heritage

and Nationalism: An Unreachable Couple?" By Tim Winter at the Institute for Culture and Society, Occasional Paper Series, Volume 3, Number 4. The article was important for the theoretical focus of this study, and was published by Salvijus Kulevičius in Historical and Cultural Studies, Vol. 2. The research paper "Nature and Mission of Heritage in Modernity: Impacts of Nationalism" published in journal 1 contributed conceptually to this study. Several Sri Lankan researchers have also conducted studies with the above objective, and this research is primarily based on Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri's New Buddhist Extremism and the Challenges to Ethno-Religious Coexistence in Sri Lanka. KB Wickramasinghe's co-authored book "Religious Interface and Contestations between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka" is also used as central pre-research. Apart from the above foreign research used for the conceptual approach, Sri Lankan research has focused on marginalized communities and not on the problematic nature of the use of a racial approach in the conservation of the heritage on which this inquiry is based. This study fills in the blanks in the field of research by focusing on marginalized communities living in heritage areas but not entitled to inheritance and the problematic situation that arises as a result.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research focused primarily on national and international approaches to heritage conservation through a literary study, as well as research on ethnic conflict and

heritage conservation, followed by a field case study. The Kūragala Archaeological Site, especially in the Sabaragamuwa Province, was also identified as a Crisis Heritage Site, and case studies were carried out. A basic understanding of the field's built environment before and after the crisis was created, followed by random interviews with residents in the field study, followed by a short questionnaire shared on social media. This inquiry was also based on the views expressed on social media as ethnic conflicts are frequently discussed on social media. The data provided in several of the above ways led to the analysis, which provided a qualitative assessment of the field situation as well as the prevailing social attitude towards heritage conservation. The next step in methodology was theoretical analysis, which oriented the basic theoretical analysis of the three concepts of power, nationalism, and heritage conservation. Theoretical queries of data from the field and the social media will ultimately lead to conclusions as well as a hypothesis about the impact of the use of an ethnic approach to heritage conservation and its impact on the continuation of heritage conservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the very act of defining heritage, all the functions of declaring and preserving it are controversial. Inheritance also interacts with the three dimensions of definition, preservation, and expression. In some cases, heritage conservation takes place even at the very step of defining heritage. But it should be emphasized here that in the above three cases, the probability of various crises not only ideologically but also physically is high. It is important to note here that there are a number of issues that can lead to crises in all three of the above steps in relation to heritage. They are,

➤ Who owns this heritage?
➤ Who are the parties to this legacy?
➤ Are there any mixed cultural features or influences in this heritage?
➤ Should this heritage be preserved?
➤ If so, what is the approach to conservation?
➤ For whom is this heritage preserved?

It should be noted that the above-mentioned issues are creating heritage-related crises. The Kūragala Archaeological Survey, which is used as a case study for this discussion, focuses on the above issues conceptually and understands its real crisis when inquiring about the crisis that has arisen in it. It identifies the real crisis, inquiries into the factors that influenced the construction of that crisis, studies the factors contributing to the existence of the crisis, and identifies an appropriate methodology for resolving the crisis. The final step in the research is to identify the appropriate conservation approach to utilize the case study as a whole for heritage conservation.

CASE STUDY RELATED TO KŪRAGALA ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD

Kūragala Archaeological Site is located in the Balangoda Divisional Secretariat area in the Ratnapura District of the Sabaragamuwa Province and the Kūragala

Archaeological Site is located about 24 km from Balangoda on the Balangoda - Kaltota Road. There are various stories about the historicity of the Kūragala archaeological site and it is important to focus on the archaeological finds.

Inquiry into the historicity of Kūragala reveals that the earliest history of the Kūragala field dates back to prehistoric times. Stone tools, fossils, and oysters have been found in Kūragala dating back to the Middle Stone Age, about 8000 years ago.

Kūragala, a human settlement in prehistoric times, is said to have continued to be inhabited by BCs. This is confirmed by the inscriptions dating back to the 3rd century. These inscriptions found in the vicinity of the Kūragala cave date back to BC. 3 - AD. It is written in the original Brahmi script of the period between 1 AD and mentions the offering of caves for the residence of the monks (Collins 1932; Paranavitana 1970).

In addition, Archaeological finds such as a stupa dating back to the 7th century A.D. confirm the existence of a settlement around Kūragala and that Kūragala was an early Buddhist monastery.

In the recent history of Kūragala, which was an early Buddhist monastery, an Islamic mosque has been built and various sources have been cited to confirm the historicity of the mosque.

As mentioned above, it seems that there are relics belonging to two religions in the field of archaeology at Kūragala. Whether they have the ability to be confirmed archaeologically or not, there have been constructions here that represent some time.

There is a need for some sort of identification of the origin of the Kūragala crisis and its trajectory. In compiling information on this crisis, it is important to study the facts on both sides of the controversy over Kūragala.

KŪRAGALA: TODAY

The approach road from the village was repaired and resurfaced in 2013 during a major reorganization of the site and ends in the valley in a car park. From here, pilgrims walk up the hill. There is a beautiful staircase carved into the rock, resembling rock-cut staircases in other ancient Buddhist complexes, such as Mihintale and Anurādhapura. Its 'unusual' feature is that access to the steps, recently inscribed with Muslim names, is through a large white entrance arch with green minarets on either side. This flamboyant arch, with Islamic motifs, was constructed in 1982 (Aboosally 2002). Some local residents identify this new construction as a "Muslim Torana", the latter being a specific religious emphasis and designation usually associated with Buddhist sites.

After climbing the steps to a plateau, the way turns downwards through a line of shops on either side. The plateau also hosts several buildings, including offices and quarters for the employees of Daftar Gīlānī or 'Jungle Rock Cave Gīlānī'. There are temporary constructions in this area used during the annual Kanturi, or Kandoori, festival as well as a temporary police post. These new buildings were relocated here following the reorganization of the site in 2013. Before that,

poorly constructed and unplanned buildings covered much of the area around the mosque. The remodeling, under the supervision of the Defense Secretary, was a government response to growing communal and religious tensions over competing claims to the site from the two communities. Specifically, it followed demands for immediate action from activist groups, such as the Bodu Bala Sena (The Army of Buddhist Power) and the Sinhala Ravaya (The Sinhala Roar), and the Jatika Hela Urumaya (National Sinhala Heritage), a political party who only fielded Buddhist monks in the 2004 elections. In terms of legal jurisdiction, it would have been better if the Director-General of Archaeology had stepped in to take conciliatory measures to manage the emerging crises rather than the Defense Secretary. In the event, the Defense Secretary had discussions with the mosque trustees, resulting in the relocations. This intervention also enabled the Department of Archaeology to conduct exploratory excavations which discovered a prehistoric skeleton, as well as Prof. Raj Somadeva's survey (2015). Prior to 2013, the sacred site and the entire valley was dotted with buildings such as shops, kitchens, rest rooms and living spaces. This was in contrast to Kūragala's setting, a scenic place with the aesthetics and atmosphere of an ancient forest cave monastery, offering splendid views of the plains stretching all the way to the borders of Monarāgala District and the east coast beyond. The view of the ancient temple at Budugala, close to Kūragala, and the surrounding paddy fields is breathtaking. To the south, on a clear day, one can see Hambantota and the new Mattala Airport. Kūragala contains abundantly rich features of a religious sanctuary of bygone era, still ideal for contemplation and meditation practice.

When one goes down the steps, passing into the valley, the first feature encountered is a Muslim tomb near the bottom. Another second tomb is visible about 100 metres along the path to the mosque. They are the first of the five tombs within the site and appear to belong to a more recent period, as pilgrims, mystics or patrons were interred there once the Kūragala pilgrimage became popular among Sri Lankan Muslims in the second quarter of the twentieth century. To the visitor, the tombs give the impression that this ancient archaeological site has now been fully taken up by Muslims of the twentieth century and one could argue that this has occurred without little regard for the cultural heritage, history, archaeology or monuments of Kuragala. The Daftar Gīlānī mosque itself is located on the rock outcrop close to a rock shelter to the south. This outcrop is called Hiṭuvangala, or 'standing rock' in Sinhala, but in Tamil, it is known as the Kappal Malai or 'ship mountain'. To the southwest is a peak called jin malai or 'spirit mountain' in Tamil, with further five-rock shelters, widely believed to have been used for meditation by Buddhist monks as well as Sufi mystics. To the east is the peak with the rock shelter called Kūragala or in Tamil *curankam malai* or 'cave mountain', in which the Persian Sufi mystic Muḥyīuddīn 'Abdul Qādir al-Gīlānī spent time on his way to Śrī Pāda. It is alleged that this rock shelter contains a secret passageway to a building located in the plains far below. The peak also houses a half-built stūpa in an ancient style, which was repaired in the early 1970s by the

Department of Archaeology, leading to controversy. This historical and archaeological site of Buddhist origin becomes vibrant annually during the Kanturi festival of the Sri Lankan and Indian Muslim community. This festival emerged to commemorate the death of Gīlānī. Large crowds of Muslims of various persuasions gather at Kūragala and this tranquil location, suddenly becomes crowded with pilgrims.

There were a number of legal battles among Muslims themselves concerning the affairs of the mosque as early as 1922. However, it was only in the late 1960s that Buddhists got involved significantly in religiously and politically motivated activities at the site. Legal battles followed in such involvements, including a case in which the Government filed a lawsuit against a mendicant, Trinco Bawa, for constructing a building in defiance of the Antiquities Ordinance (Aboosally 2002).

The twenty-first century has witnessed increased tension in the area, as well as in Sri Lanka more widely, on the issue of the legitimacy of a Muslim group controlling the affairs of ancient Buddhist Kūragala. The Bodu Bala Sēnā and Sinhala Rāvaya pressed the Mahinda Rajapakse Government to address the issue and resolve potential threats it may have for peace and harmony. As a result of the pressure, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Defense Secretary (later Sri Lankan president), visited the site in April 2013 and ordered all 'illegal' structures, such as the shops and resting places that had grown around the immediate vicinity of the mosque, to be relocated (McGilvray 2016). As a result, many facilities, including the police station, shops, and pilgrim rest houses were been relocated along the road leading to the sacred premises.

Wathurakumbure Aththadassi Thero, the chief Sangha of the Nelligala Vihara, built a Buddhist temple complex over the past two years on the religious creations of the Muslims who were completely destroyed. Kūragala has been attracting a large number of Buddhists from all over Sri Lanka in the last few months. The use of social media shows that the lion statue that makes sense of the Sinhala nation that has been built there has gained more popularity among the people. Although the disputes created by the Buddhists over Kūragala in the last decade have been centered on religion, more recently the disputes have been centered on the Sinhala nation. Although it started with the slogan that Buddhist heritage should be preserved, field observation shows the extent to which its present constructions have damaged the ancient monastic landscape.

SACREDNESS; LIVINGNESS; CULTURAL HARMONY

The field of archaeology at Kūragala clearly embodies both sacredness and livingness. The problem, however, is that there are two religions. This is the root cause of the conflict between religions and races. Officials should pay special attention to any kind of conservation work carried out at such a sensitive archaeological site to preserve it in a manner that creates unity among nations. But it has been avoided by conservationists. If such a place was preserved with the right vision, it would be a place where peace and coexistence would flourish without conflict. We have two prime examples of

interracial and intercultural coexistence occurring in the same place. Namely, Sri Pada and Kataragama. The opportunity to make Kūragala such a place has been destroyed by the hegemonic heritage conservation. In the end, much of its true Buddhist face, archaeological value, and national unity has been destroyed. Therefore, we can identify Kūragala as an archaeological site which was destroyed its sacredness and livingness due to conservation strategies.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the above it is clear from the recent conservation that the Kūragala area has been a human settlement since prehistoric times and was once a Buddhist religious center and at another time a Muslim religious center and later problems arose as to who the real owners were. It has created an ethnic conflict by destroying its Muslim remnants and turning it into a full-fledged Buddhist center.

This conservation cannot be termed as just archaeological conservation as it has destroyed the sanctity of one religion. Conservation in such sensitive areas not only adheres to solutions that are mutually agreeable, but racist conservation threatens even the very principles of conservation. Therefore, it is the role of conservationists to take sensible action in such field conservation without resorting to hasty and racist solutions.

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