

An Archaeological Study on Correlation of Caves and Ancient Society in Kegalle District, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Human and the environment are deeply interconnected and the environment directly affects the nature of the society such as culture, behavioral patterns and the beliefs. Caves and rock shelters which are one of the components of the environment have unforgettably played an important role in ancient Sri Lankan culture. Geologically a cave can be defined as “a natural cavity in a rock, which is large enough for a human to enter.”. The nature of the connection between caves and the culture is varied from time to time, with the changes of intentions of the contemporary society. Sri Lanka is a country rich with caves and rock shelters with a varied distribution regard to the geology and climate. The caves and rock shelters in the Sri Lanka were used for different purposes throughout the history. . The correlation between the society and the caves of the country varies due to the geographical nature and the historical background of a certain area. Of cave rich districts in Sri Lanka, Kegalle district which covers an area of 1692.8 km² is rich in caves and rocks shelters which are abundantly distributed in its North-eastern and South-eastern quarters. The district is also significant archaeologically because it has played an active role in every era of the Sri Lankan history. Unlike any other district, the ancient society of Kegalle had

a strong relationship with those caves in the region throughout the history. The objective of this research is to identify the nature of the correlation between caves and the ancient Sri Lankan society.

Methodology

Two main activities were adopted in methodology for collecting the data. A literature survey was conducted to collect the already published and existed data in order to identify the historical background of the district. .. A field survey was carried out to confirm the collected data and also to collect new data from the study area. During the field survey, information on caves and rock shelters of the district was gathered through interviews with the government officers and the villagers. And also some selected sites were explored and speleological data were gathered.

Results and discussion

According to the collected information it is well noted that the caves and the rock shelters were correlated with the culture from pre historic era to the end of the Colonial period. During Pre historic era the caves and rock shelters in Kegalle became dwelling places of “*Homo sapien balangodensis*”. In the Mesolithic period of Sri Lanka the rock shelters such as Kithulgala Belilena, Maniyangama

Belilena, Asmadala lina, Urakanda lina, Alulena and Dorawaka kanda were inhabited by these cave dwellers and evidenced by rich archaeologically yielded information. Also in the Pre historic era the Caves and rock shelters in Kegalle were used as canvases to express the artistic emotions of Human. Dorawaka kanda, Urakanda and Galgodahenwatte are the best examples. Thus Caves in Kegalle became artistic expression medium for pre historic man lived there. Even in the proto historic period the caves in Kegalle continued to have used as dwelling places as evidences in Dorawaka kanda lina.

With the dawn of historic period the usage intentions changed its course from personal to religious motives. Caves in the early Anuradhapura period became humble abodes of Buddhist monks. The detached atmosphere of Cave sites suited monks' intentions and hence a lot of these sites gradually developed into monastery complexes. Yatahalena, Mampita, thimbiripola rajalena, lenagala, Salgala, bambaragala, Danakirigala, Hunuwala are good examples to this

Later in Polonnaruwa and Dambadeniya periods the cave complexes in Kegalle came into use of military fortresses and hide outs. Wakirigala, Beligala and Batalegala are examples to this. From time to time during political turmoil kings seek refuge in these cave complexes. In Polonnaruwa era king Wijayabahu I used Wakirigala as a fortress when he fought against Chola. Another change in the usage of caves comes in 14th -15th Centuries AD when the caves and rock shelters in Kegalle were converted in to image houses of Buddhist monasteries where the locals congregated to fulfill their religious needs. This trend continues to the end of Kandyan period as seen in Danagirigala, Wakirigala, Kawudugala, Dewanagala, Mampita and Selava.

With the beginning of the colonial period the Caves and rock shelters in Kegalle

started serving as hide outs for the local people as the Europeans invaded Kandyan kingdom. Even in the Colonial period these caves provided shelter to freedom fighters that fought against British Empire.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that throughout the long history of Kegalle the caves and rock shelters have been used for different purposes from time to time. The serving purposes of the Caves have varied from dwelling places to military purposes to suit the motives of the contemporary society. It is implied that the nature of correlation between caves and the ancient Sri Lankan society varied with the society's intensions. Thus a mutual correlation existed between the Caves and the contemporary society of Kegalle during its long history.

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