

Ramayana Trail: Misinterpretation of natural factors

Dhanesh Wisumperuma

A number of natural geological features or environmental factors in Sri Lanka are included in folklore as sites related to the Ramayan legend. This presentation is to present accepted scientific explanations for these legends.

A number of isolated and prominent hills are often mentioned as the remnants of the rock that Hanuman brought from the Himalayan region. Ritigala, Dolukanda and Rumassala are such places, but there is no historical evidence for this. Geologically the above rocks were formed during Precambrian Eon (542-4500 million years ago). Folk tradition associates the flora abundant in these places with the Himalayan flora, but scientific evidence shows that there is no such connection. The number of endemic plant species found in these localities shows that the flora in the above localities is associated with Sri Lankan flora.

“Adam’s bridge”, the islands and shoals of shifting sand located between Pamban Island in India and Mannar Island in Sri Lanka, is given as a bridge build by Hanuman when Rama invaded Lanka. All credible scientists have pointed out that these islands and shoals are natural formations.

Ussangoda is a place linked with Ramayana trail as the landing place of Ravana’s plane before it was burned by Hanuman. Geologically this is a serpentine rock formation and the surface is covered with Red Earth. The soil contains high concentrations of various elements including heavy metals. Only the plants that can tolerate these metals can grow in such an environment, which is the reason for the low diversity of the vegetation in such sites. There are other sites in Sri Lanka which have a similar soil composition like this, including Yudaganawa in Wasgomuwa.

There is a folk story associated with the *ma-ratmal* (Rhododendron spp) is shown linked Sita’s existence in Lanka claiming that it is found only in a limited area. However, this is a common plant in the upper montane zone of the country and found in many forests and patana lands where similar geo-climatic conditions exist.

The lack of tree cover on the top of the mountain ridges in several central hills is due to the climatic and geological conditions, and not due to any link to the Ramayana story as pointed out by Ramayana Trail promoters.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the association of these geological and environmental factors to the Ramayana lacks any evidence. The connection of these to the Ramayana legend however undermines the actual importance of these localities which have important natural and environmental significance.