

Introduction: Inventing Archaeology: The Tourist Board's "Ramayana Trail"

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The Archaeology Department has strict rules and laws against the destruction of archaeological sites; however there are no laws for the opposite - creation of bogus sites and artefacts. The so-called "Ramayana Trail" of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority is such an invention.

Preamble

The Ministry of Tourism is marketing Sri Lanka as the abode of Ravana. They have invented a series of mythical sites which have no historical basis. They have also established a committee titled the "Ramayana Trail Executive", chaired by one Mr. Kiriella, an unknown academic. The Tourist Board's "ramayanaresearch" gives details while a series of videos titled "Following the Trail of Ramayana in Sri Lanka" adds other fictional sites. Mr. Kiriella names his other "experts": as Dr Suriya Gunasekera, "an authority on Sri Lankan pre history" as Mr. Kiriella designates him; Dr Subash Chawla according to Kiriella, "an authority on International Ramayana".

The RASSL tried to trace their expertise from tourist authorities, but failed. We asked their "experts" to address a closed seminar of the RASSL but they never came. Mr. Kiriella telephoned requesting further two weeks' - long passed - and we asked him to send details of the expertise of his "experts". He did not.

We could not find any prior formal academic background for Mr. Kiriella in Sanskrit, archaeology, history, Sinhalese, Pali studies and related subjects. He seems to be a layman. We searched for the credentials of Suriya Gunasekera and found that he had been in the Sri Lanka Administrative Service. The third expert Dr. Subash Chawla is a Pettah shopkeeper. He is also a practitioner of "Alternative Medicine". He is the Chairman of a Hindu fundamentalist Krishna Consciousness sect. His Facebook entries claim "I Am Proud to Be an Indian", "Indian Flag", " Ganesh" and " Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi devotees". He is an Indian nationalist. These "experts" who have been reluctant to present their "evidence" to the RASSL had given a presentation at the Indian Cultural Centre.

The "Evidence"

Mr. Kiriella claims that Ravana was the "King of Heladiva". He says that Ravana was the first to discover missiles and bombs including nuclear bombs. He claims that there are cave inscriptions of Ravana and of his dynasty in Sri Lanka explored by the Ministry of Tourism's Ramayana Trail Executive Committee. "Dr" Suriya Gunasekera says that Ravana "ruled over seven continents from Lanka.."

A tsunami, according to Mr. Kiriella removed evidence of Ravana's kingdom. He claims that there are rock edicts pertaining to Ravana and his dynasty in Sri Lanka. He says, "historians and archaeologists kept away from exploring the pre-history of Sri Lanka, as they were not permitted or not concerned in doing so". But, he informs that "Sri Lanka have used a developed alphabet since 17,500 BCE." He further informs that there are "two caves alongside in Vessagiriya, Anuradhapura in accordance with Ramayana". And the Vessagiriya, "Man and Horse" sculpture is of the Ramayana, inscriptions confirm this. A team of his Committee visited "Wegiriya, Molagoda, and Rahalagala to decipher and photograph three inscriptions". Kiriella says that at Sigiriya, there is "an inscription [which] confirms that Seetha was held in captivity" there.

The "expert" on inscriptions seems to be one Jayarath Pathiraarchchi. We have been informed that he is a lorry driver with no professional training in epigraphy, If corrected, the RASSL will put the record straight. Kiriella's other "evidence" includes the Seetha Amman Kovil built by Tamil estate laborers who came to the country only in the 19th century. He asserts that Ravana Ella Cave was related to the Ramayana myth and was excavated by "Shiran Deraniyagala". Kiriella says, Lakegala, is an abode of Ravana. Kiriella claims that NASA photographs give evidence to the existence of a bridge between Sri Lanka and India. Suriya Gunasekera, gives more amazing results.. He claims that the Americans have "even tested a prototype of the Pushpaka," the alleged flying machine of Ravana and succeeded. Gunasekera "discovers"

“Wariyapola” as the “Air-Ship-Port” (Waa=air) with Ussangoda a place for landing aircraft. Further truly earthshaking "evidence" is found in the tourist board websites.

Indian Hindu fundamentalist commentators have taken this fiction as true. Thus an article titled “Sri Lanka government approves Ravana a part of their history” is revealing. It asserts that unlike the work of Indian academics, the Sri Lankan government has declared "Ramayana no more a Myth - Now Authenticated" and has "recognized & authenticated Ravana's existence". It maintains that the coffin of Ravana is "expected to be available in a coffin in an inaccessible cave". The "aeroplane" Pushpak Vimana is available and that "five airports used by Ravana" have been found confirming that "advanced technology in fact existed in those eras". These fundamentalists defy the findings of India's own experts which according to the article, have "condoned & scorned" the Ramayana and considered it not history.

The Tourist Board has also got reporters to interest Thais in Sri Lanka Ramayana tourism ignoring that for Thailand and the whole of South-East Asia Sri Lanka is the home of their Theravada Buddhism and many of our *Atamasthana* sites are familiar to them.

Indian authorities, judicial courts and academics dismiss the Ramayana as myth- subsequent to the demolition in the early 1990s of the Babri mosque and Hindu extremists' objections to the Sethu Samudra project. India's tourism authorities do not promote any alleged Ramayana sites, but sponsors a Buddhist Circuit to attract its Asian tourists. Sri Lanka sponsors of this fictional and ultimately anti-national venture started apparently under the guidance of a Tamil bureaucrat. This is similar to a few Tamil bureaucrats in 1961 which created the ideological group Pulip Padai ("Army of Tigers") which prepared for the LTTE. This Hindu fundamentalist tendency could be a not-too-subtle attempt to plant another invented homelands just as LTTE supporters and India invented a "traditional homelands of the Tamils" prior to their war.