University of Jaffna

Sir Pon Ramanathan

Memorial Lecture - 2016

Conserving Buddhist Stupas and religious nationalism in Sri Lanka

by

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on
Thursday 21st January 2016
at 3.00 p.m

at
Kailasapathy Auditorum
University of Jaffna

Sir Pon Ramanathan

Message from the Vice - Chancellor

Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan Memorial Lecture along with the Lady Ramanathan Memorial lecture has become an annual event in our University. It has become a tradition to hold these memorial lectures immediately following the General Convocation. The Ramanathan Memorial lecture is funded by an Endowment instituted by the Board of Directors of Parameswara College in 1980. The theme of the lecture usually centres on topics related to tradition, religion, society, technology and human values.

We are indeed thankful to those who instituted this endowment for giving the opportunity to cherish Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan's memory upon his services and establishing educational centers in this region.

This year the Sir Pon Ramanathan Memorial Lecture is being delivered by Prof.JegathWeerasinghe, Director, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology of University of Kelaniya on “Conserving Buddhist stupas, religious nationalism and archaeology in Sri Lanka”

By engaging with the issues brought into the surface with the Conserving of Abayagiriyastupa of Anuradhapura this talk critically analyze the possibility of discipline of archeology as a critical discourse in Sri Lanka. Based on the

concepts of 'habitus' and governmentality this talk tries to expose the epistemological and ideological fix in the practice of archeology. By illustrating the link between the archeology and nationalism this talk also problematize the relationship of archaeology with heritage and historiography.

On behalf of the University I thank Prof.Jegath Weerasinghe for delivering this lecture.

Prof.(Ms.)V.Arasaratnam
Vice Chancellor

Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaffna, the Deans and the Professors of the University, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends.

I really have no idea what my adequacy to deliver the Sir Ponnambamal Ramanathan Memorial Lecture in this esteemed institution – the University of Jaffna. The honor is entirely mine. I consider this a great privilege endowed upon me by the organizers of this prestige lecture.

It's in my youth that I became to know about Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan in a substantial form. But I always new the name of this illustrious person - my father used to tell us about him. My father, who used to work in the Supreme Court of Jaffna as the Clerk of Assize in 1960s and 70s, from time to time, had so many friends from Jaffna. I remember them talking about Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. I clearly don't remember or even understood what they were talking about, but the name left a peculiar rendering – sort of a musical one - in my memory as a child. My father was a leftist, and in my youth he used to ask me to read about Sir Ramanathan – he would end his advice with a particular line. He would say 'he was a man with a great vision for this country'.

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanatha was a visionary of a future that this country would have benefited. He was an outstanding national leader and statesman that could see through and act above socially, culturally and ethnically

established borders, edges and margins. He was both a statesman and a philanthropist. It's in this unique combination that Sir Ramanathan became an embodiment of a future, embodiment of a vision for a future. It is our burden and our responsibility that we should strive at re-discovering and re-reading the idea of Sir Ramanathan. The historical moment we are living in – right now, right here – demands us to get back to this great man and do an 'archaeology of knowledge' in order to comprehend the materials, the features and the artifacts that constituted the 'idea-world' of Sir Ramanathan.

I do not intend to speak more about Sir Ramanathan to a gathering of scholars and intellectuals in Jaffna, for that would be rather redundant. I shall proceed to my lecture now.

Conserving Buddhist stupas, religious nationalism and archaeology in Sri Lanka

Jagath Weerasinghe
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Historical background

The variegated nexus that archaeology and heritage has with nationalism is a well documented phenomenon in the history of archaeology. The ways in which archaeology has been put to political uses in nation building programs has been the subject of number of scholarly publications (Trigger 1980, 1984, 1985, 1989; Khol and Fawcette 1995). Nationalist archaeologies are a dominant form in countries like Sri Lanka and India that are erstwhile colonies. These nationalist archaeologies have, by default, tried to construct strong tie-ups between ancient peoples and places and the nation state and its modern inhabitants. Nationalist archaeology of Gustaf Kossinna (1858-1931) that helped to fortify German nationalism that paved the way for Nazi ideology in the second quarter of the 20th century is perhaps the most poignant example for this in the modern era. His writings argued for the case that similarities and differences in the archaeological record correspond with similarities and differences in ethnicity (Trigger 1989:165). This is a core argument in any

nationalist or racist archaeology. Archaeology's relationship with nationalism in Sri Lanka has been the scholarly focus in Elisabeth Nissan's (1989) 'History in the Making' essay and Pradeep Jeganathan's (1995) 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land essay, where both of them investigate the idea of Anuradhapura as a result of nationalizing process. Nissan and Jeganathan has shown the workings of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism manure with colonial findings and expressions in the making of a particular kind of history for Anuradhapura – the most ancient capital of Sri Lanka in the north-central peneplain of the island. As Nissan (1989:40) phrases it, 'Anuradhapura came to be shaped by a new nationalist consciousness: that of Sinhala Buddhist nation as a historically constant, homogeneous, bounded entity'. The purpose of this kind of history, as mentioned above is to assert tie-ups with the past within an imagined history of a preferred ethnic group: the very stuff of extreme nationalism!

Archaeology in Sri Lanka began in Anuradhapura, so to speak. Sri Lankan archaeology as a field practice has been mostly concerned with surveying, excavating and conserving Stupas and other religious buildings. Conserving and restoring of Buddhist Stupas has always taken the center stage

in Sri Lankan archaeology. Even today conservation or restoration of Stupas commands the attention of the highest political authorities in the country. This paper takes one such example as its main focus of engagement: the conservation of the Abhayagiriya Stupa in Anuradhapura.

The study of the past of the island became a fully institutionalized vocation with the establishment of the Archaeological Survey Department in 1890 following decades of archaeological activities that began in the 1860s (Godakumbura 1969:1-38). The year1890, the birth year of the Department is considered as the birth date of 'scientific archaeology' in Sri Lanka (Ibid). Thus one may argue that the 19th century marks the origin of the institutionalization of positivist historiography in Sri Lanka. An epistemological tradition that is highly contested today, but still continued to date in the 'heads' of Sri Lankan archaeologists. What this means, for this author, is that the way we imagine the past today is still located in the colonial past of Sri Lanka deeply enmeshed in colonial idioms of the 19th century. Our almost unshakable and popular perceptions of the past of Sri Lanka 'is the real effect of the authoritative epistemological conquest of the nineteenth century (Jeganathan1995:130).

The founders and animators of this positivist origin in Sri Lankan scholarship were the British civilians and officers who were fascinated by the ruined buildings that were hiding under layers and layers of thick jungle, especially in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. Sir James Emerson Tennent, Colonial Secretory, H.C.P. Bell of Ceylon Civil Service and Georeg Turnour played important roles in forming the modern ideas of Sri Lanka's past. European historical longings and the local chronicles of island's history converged in these three, and many other colonial individuals to form a 'scientific history' for the island. Bell became the first Commissioner of Archaeology in 1890 of the newly formed Archaeological Survey of Ceylon. Tenent published a two-volume monograph on Sri Lanka, titled 'Ceylon: An account of the Island, Physical, Historical, and Topographical in 1859 and Turnour in 1837 did the first acceptable translation of Mahavamsa and paved the way for Mahavamsa to be the authentic history of the island. The establishment of Mahavamsa as the authentic and authoritative knowledge of the past of Sri Lanka was achieved with the help of archaeology; actually the relation between Mahavamsa and archaeology was and still is a two-way equation that continues to authenticate each other. This equation has established a seriously flowed notion that past is

synonymous with history; this is a belief that has been hindering critical appraisal of historical and archaeological data in Sri Lankan scholarship.

The reason my singling out of Tenent, Bell and Turnour, from among many other colonial writers on Sri Lanka is that, in my opinion, the formulations in Tennent's and Turnour's writings and in the archaeological works of Bell regarding the 'ideas of the past of Ceylon' constitute the parts and pieces that make up the habitus of Sri Lankan archaeologists, the concept of habitus taken here as defined by Bourdieu (1984:170). For me, the concept of habitus as defined by Bourdieu, where he explicates, 'The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (principium divisionis) of these practices' provides a path in to the mentality of Sri Lankan archaeologists that is so reluctant to take archaeology and heritage preservation as critical practices. Their aversion to restoration seems more an expression of a taste for certain things than of rigorous academic reflexivity.

Sri Lankan archaeologists are so reluctant to get rid of the 'positivist straitjacket! This is an idea to which I come back

at the end of this essay. Further I'd also like to bring in the idea of governmentality into the discussions to give an edge to the docility of Sri Lankan archaeological personalities. If one understands the concept of governmenatlity as a process in which scattered mechanisms of power are maintained in the service of state ideologies my coupling of the Bourdian concept of 'habitus' with the Focauldian concept of governmentality may allow us to see through the so called scientific facade of Sri Lankan archaeologists.

History of the Department is largely a history of conserving large monuments in the island, such as colossal stupas in Anuradhapura. The stupa is the most prominent ritual building of Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka. It is meant to enshrine relics of the Buddha, and as such is considered a symbolic manifestation of Buddha himself. Stupas are colossal brick structures – the Abhayagiriya stupa in Anuradhapura, the main feature in my paper, is 315 feet tall. Archaeological excavations and systematic examination of stupas and monastic buildings in Anuradhapura, the ancient city in the north central province of Sri Lanka, now a World Heritage Site began in 1884. My intention in this paper is to critically discuss the crises-laden path that the conservation of

the Abhayagiriya stupa in Anuradhapura took and the issues surrounding the launching ceremony of the conserved Stupa. At the end of the paper I argue that Sri Lankan archaeology needs to take archeology as a critical practice if they were to rescue archaeological data from becoming nationalist and gullible participants of partisan politics.

History of archaeology in Sri Lanka

Archaeology in Sri Lanka has a125 years of history behind it. This long history is also the history of the Department of Archaeology – then known as the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon - begun in 1890. Wijesuriya (1993) has divided this history in to three distinct periods in order to grasp the changing attitudes towards conservation of religious monuments in the country. The three periods Wijesuriya has proposed are, 1.Exploratory Period- pre 1910; Consolidatory Period- 1910-1940, and 3.Explanatory Period. The last period is further divided into 2 parts as, I (1940-1960), and II (1960-1990) (ibid: 15).

The Exploratory Period was marked by the colonial interests in systematically documenting the ruined monuments for the purpose of recording them. The main objective of this period, as it seems today, was to bring in a

certain order to the seeming chaos and disorder of the ruined monuments by making measured drawings that are so perfect in their attendance to details. The chaos of the ruined entities from the past was transformed to quantifiable and rational scientific data.

These drawings – so perfect and seemingly accurate and saturated with confidence- as Wijesuriya (1993:16) has noted provided the foundation and motivation for archaeological work that followed. These orderly and methodical explorations of the ruined monuments in the field and their transference on to drawing papers as measured drawings were accompanied with the study of historical sources such as ancient chronicles and other texts, and attempts were made to correspond the information found in historical texts with the archeological ruins. Thus laying the foundation for the conversion of archaeological truth claims to those of historiographical ones – a habit continued to date in Sri Lankan archaeology. This is the habit that stitched the notion of past with the idea of history

It was during the Consolidatory Period from 1910 to 1940 that the ruined monuments were taken as archaeological

entities requiring conservation. Conservation of archeological ruins in Anuradhapura began in the early 20th century. What the early archeologists of the colonial government did when they claimed to have done conservation was actually consolidation of excavated architectural structures such as stupas (Wijesuriya 1993: 16-17).Restoration of stupas was not considered a prerogative of the Archaeological Survey (now called the Department of Archaeology)(Ibid:17). For the Department of Archaeology, restoration of excavated stupas was not within the boundaries of scientific archaeology! Up until 1940's, the Department of archaeology maintained an anti-restoration stance. This was also the period that tensions between archaeologists and religious communities began to take shape on the question of restoration of stupas. Such tensions had actually begun very early in the 20th century that had roots in the conflicts between Buddhists and Christians in the south of Sri Lanka. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century Walisinghe Harischandra, the Buddhist revivalist leader from the south, had already begun his campaign to claim the restitution of the caring of ruined religious buildings of Anuradhapura from the colonial masters (Nissan 1996:33).

The Explanatory Period was the time that saw further consolidation of the construction of historiographical truths based or grounded on archaeological findings by interpreting them. Now that the archaeological truth claims about the past are articulated as scientific and objective truth claims – because archaeology is a scientific discipline – the historiographical truths that are argued to be grounded on archaeological truths also acquired the scientific respectability that could boast of objectivity! The main proponent of this interpretive-process was Senerath Paranaviatane, who was the Commissioner of Archaeology from 1940 to 1956. He was the first Sri Lankan who was also a Sinhalese to head the Department of Archaeology. This was also the period that the Department began to consider restoration of monuments as one of its responsibilities. It may not be a coincidence that an elevated interest in interpreting excavated or ruined monuments and the Department of Archaeology assuming the role of patron to restore Buddhist stupas happened at the same time under a Sinhalese Commissioner of Archaeology, who was an expert in epigraphy with a strong linguistic background. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Paranavitane is the most popular and famous archaeologist of Sri Lankan

History and the significance of the Stupa in Sri Lankan archaeology

It may not be an exaggeration to say that Sri Lanka is a land of stupas of varying age and scale. The first Sri Lankan stupa was supposed to have been built in the 3rd century BC. The most recent one with colossal dimensions is being built in Anurdhapura shrouded in controversy regarding its location in close proximity to archaeological sites of Anuradhapura and the threats that it can pose to the processes of national reconciliation in the post war Sri Lanka.

The ancient chronicle Mahavamsa (17:36) records a series of events related to the construction and restoration of the first stupa in Sri Lanka: the Thuparamaya (circa 3rd century BC) in Anuradhapura. The history of this stupa is of particular interest to our discussion as it demonstrates an ancient practice of restoring ruined or old religious buildings from time to time as and when required. Mahavamasa records,

> 'It was built by Devanampiya Tissa (B.C. 247-207). Laljatissa (BC 119-110) added a stone mantling to the thupa. The Thupaghara (Vatadage) was built by Vasabha (67-111

AD). Gothabhaya (249-263 AD) restored the thupaghara. Upatissa l (365-406 AD) made a gold casing for the pinnacle of the thupa. Dhatusena (455-473 AD) carried out repairs. Aggabodhi II(604-614 AD) completely renovated the thupa and thupaghara, his repairs extending to the temporary removal of the collar-bone Relic from the Relic chamber: the Relic chamber itself was renovated and many new reliquaries were placed inside. Kassapa II (650-659 AD) restored the thupa. Manavamma (684-718 AD) restored the roof of the thupaghara. Aggabodhi VI (733-772) repaired the doors and transposed the pillars of the thupaghara. Mahinda II (777-797 AD) enclosed the thupa in a gold and silver casing. Dappula II(815-831 AD) covered the thupaghara over with golden bricks and installed doors of gold. Sena 11 (853-887 AD) restored the gold plate casing, and Udaya II(887-898 AD) also covered the thupa with gold plate. Mahinda IV (956-972 AD) covered the thupa with

> strips of gold and silver, and installed a golden door in the thupaghara. Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 AD) restored the thupa and thupaghara. (Nicholas 1963, 131-32)'.

As one can see 15 kings have intervened with this small stupa in a span of 15 centuries. Stupas contain extremely high religious values and they are also politically strong symbols. Buddhists worship them and a range of rituals is performed in venerating Stupas. Construction as well as restoration of stupas is considered to invoke high religious merit to the pious patrons.

The foundation of a stupa is often built on the bedrock or on a specially constructed base. An upper terrace, the dome, the square (hataras kotuwa), a spiral and a pinnacle are the main architectural parts of a stupa. The entire structure is built with burnt bricks. Finally a thick plaster layer is given, that which protects the brick structure and gives a glittering white surface to the stupa. When a stupa is neglected for a long time, the first part to collapse is the pinnacle, which can fall down breaking the dome. In a couple of centuries of neglect a stupa

can be converted to huge heap of earth with over grown vegetation. However when a stupa is transformed to a heap of earth, that very earth will also preserve the lower parts of the structure with its details from rain and vegetation. When excavated by archaeologists, most stupas usually give sufficient information to imagine its scale and form; an impulse for restoration is embedded in the ruin itself.

While the Stupas of Anuradhapura played an important role in the emergence of 'scientific archaeology' and in establishing a regime of historiographical truths in Sri Lanka in the late 19th century (Jeganathan 1995: 109-10, 123-25) the stuaps and other archaeological ruins of Anuradhapura also gave rise to another regime of truths: a regime of modern Sinhala nationalism that transformed archaeological data into heritage data. This transformation occurred through the use of the very historiographical truths established by colonial scholars about Anuradhapura (Ibid 128-290),setting into motion claims for rightful preservation and Buddhist guardianship of Buddhist ruins of Anuradhapura;these ruins, excavated and consolidated by colonial archaeologists, came under the stewardship of Sinhala-Buddhists devotees who have formed 'Restoration Societies' in the early 20th century.

The campaigns to reclaim Anuradhapura, as mentioned earlier began with Walisinghe Harischandra. For Harishchandra the colonial government was desecrating the sacred city of Anuradhapura because they were not continuing a history that was ancient.

History of Stupa restoration

As the case of ancient Thuparamaya shows, the restoration of stupas is not a new approach. This has a long history. The Mahavamsa description of the Thuparamaya stupa shows us that it had been subjected to changes both to ensure the longevity of stupa and its political potential. However the colonial archaeologists and the Department of Archaeology in the late 19th century and in the early 20th century did not see restoration of stupas as a scientific option available for them. For them once a ruined stupa brought to light with a trowel under the scrutiny of an archaeologist, it's no more a 'stupa' as such but an archaeological entity that lives outside of religion or culture – because archaeological data are scientific data. The archaeologists were not ready to align with the tradition of restoration of stupas since for them, stupas are more about a particular past fossilized in its material fabric rather than the presence of a continued idea, a

tradition.

This was a position that was diametrically opposite to the wishes and aspirations, both religious and political, of the pious Buddhists of the time who have formed 'Restoration Societies'. It was this extreme archaeological or fabric-based approach of the Archaeological Department to the stupas that allowed a vociferous political space for nationalist campaigns to reclaim Anuradhapura from the authority of the colonial government and the Department of Archaeology. The nationalist revivalists saw the activities of the colonial government and the Department of Archaeology as desecrating Anuradhapura.

When the anti colonial struggles and anti Department of Archeology campaigns took the form and rhetoric of a campaign to clamoring to safeguard and preserve the sacredness of Anurdhapura and its stupas in the campaigns of Walisinghe Harishchandra, this had a transformative impact on 'archaeological data'. It was this campaign that converted 'archaeological data' in to 'heritage data', or to be specific 'uruma data'. Uruma is the Sinhalese word for heritage and it is the adjectival form of the very popular noun 'urumaya'. The

concept of urumaya is a very powerful political tool enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum of nationalist politics of Sri Lanka.

Restoration of Stupas and the Pious Vandals

To the considerable distress of colonial archaeologists, the early decades of the 20th century was a period of confrontation with 'Restoration Societies' that were campaigning for and actually doing the restoration of Stupas in Anuradhapura. The wave for restoration of ancient Stupas and religious buildings of Sri Lanka, especially in Anuradhapura, was part of the religious revival movement that is related to the anti-colonial struggle gathering momentum in this period (Bandaranayake 1975: 11; Fernando 1990: 79). The Department of Archaeology, headed by colonial archaeologists and empowered with the Antiquities Ordinance of 1900, could not do much to halt the restoration wave lead by popular nationalist figures wielding much popular-political power with a strong anti-colonial rhetoric (Wijesuriya 1993: 33-34). Colonial archaeologists saw this as 'vandalism' and named the people engaged in stupa restoration 'pious vandals' (Wijesuriya 1993: 33). In the first three decades of the 20th century alone, the Restoration Societies restored two important stupas in Anuradhapura – Thuparamaya and Ruwanveli stupa - with funds collected from the public (ibid: 33). The biggest problem in these

interventions is that there are no records available on the procedures taken to restore them.

The pressure of the restoration wave seem to have been such that the Department of Archaeology sought to control the situation by revising the Antiquities Ordinance in 1940, because the 1900 version didn't allow the Department to intervene with restoration work carried out on ancient buildings such as stupas that are not in crown land (ASCAR 1933). The 1940 revisions of the Antiquities Ordinance actually did not prohibit restoration of religious buildings, but prohibited 'unauthorized restoration' and made restoration a prerogative of the Department. This is a rather peculiar development for this meant that the Department of Archaeology became the patron of restoration and maintenance of ancient religious buildings, which are by default living sacred sites of the country – and a majority of them are Buddhist! By the early1960s, caught up in the nationalist politics that ensued with regaining political power from the British rule in 1948, the Department found itself engaged in restoring Stupas at a wider scale across the country under pressure from the religious community. In a way what happened with the revisions to the 1900 Antiquities Ordinance, the Department – by implication the government

became the caretaker of ancient Buddhist temples – a development that inadvertently couched a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist streak in the practical application of the Antiquities Ordinance.

Restoration of Stupas by the Department and the Central Cultural Fund

The restoration approaches for ancient stupas used by the Department varied from total to partial restoration. It must be mentioned here that total restoration of Stupas was carried out when the Department couldn't convince the incumbent monks to agree on partial restoration. This is an important aspect for this discussion. Even today, the general sentiment in the Department of Archaeology and among the majority of Sri Lankan archaeologists is that restoration is something to be avoided because such interventions disrupt and destroy the 'authenticity' of ancient stupas. However the Department of Archaeology has a six-fold approach to restoration of stupas with its first principle asserting the point of view of devotees as follows: 'to obtain the form and final appearance required by the religious community'.

When the Cultural Triangle Project of the Central Cultural Fund (CCF) was launched in 1980 with the

endorsement of the UNESCO, the Stupas in the CCF projects were required to be conserved to preserve their 'authenticity' as defined in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention. This was a requirement since four religious sites within the Cultural Triangle were being prepared to be nominated for inscription on the World Heritage list. They became World Heritage Sites soon after the launch of the Cultural Triangle, with the Sacred City of Anuradhapura being inscribed in 1982.

The Crisis

The Sacred City of Anuradhapura has three Buddhist monasteries with three major stupas: the Great Ruvanweli Stupa was restored in the 1930s by Restoration Societies. The Jetawana and the Abhayagiriya Stupas were to be conserved by the Cultural Triangle and conservation plans were discussed with the relevant incumbent monks of the temples in the Eight Sacred Temples of Anuradhapura. Archaeologists and experts of the Department of Archaeology and the Cultural Triangle convinced the monks to agree to the principle of minimal intervention, only to conserve the remaining historical fabric with minimum additions for structural strength. It was decided that the stupas would not

have a final white plaster layer since that would cover the original fabric of the stupas. These discussions and the resulting agreement were concluded in the mid-1980s by all parties. 30 years later however when the Central Cultural Fund was ready to ceremonially launch the conserved Abhayagiriya stupa, the monks demanded that the stupa should be restored to its ancient glory with the final coating of white plaster. Sri Lankan stupas are necessarily white in color and have no painted decorations. The ceremony, to be attended by the President, was postponed. The archaeologists were angered and felt betrayed, and the National Archaeological Council lodged their contrary opinion with the President by signing a petition.

The wish of incumbent monks and traditional custodians to see the stupas restored to their 'ancient glory' is not something new; this wish has a tradition behind it. Preservation of older religious buildings by way of restoration is not a new concept as shown by the history of interventions that had gone into making the Thuparamaya stupa in the historic periods (Wijesooriya 1993: 78-79). Bandaranayake (1975,1-2) has identified three traditional approaches towards the preservation of religious monuments in the ancient world.

They are 'Metaphysical Preservationism' as concealed in the concepts of Pyramids, 'Reproductionism' as in the case of Japanese Temples and 'Reconstructionism' as in the case of Buddhist monuments in Sri Lanka. But the modernist and colonial ethos that defines and informs the nature of Sri Lankan archaeology refuses to engage with this tradition of restoration taking it as a critical reasoning process. This may be because, as this author sees it, such an engagement may not agree with the 'generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments' of the habitus (Bourdieu 1984:170) that the modernist ethos has created for Sri Lankan archaeologists. As Bourdieu explains it, the habitus is a relational position and that the habitus is defined by two capacities, 'the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted' (ibid). The world of the archaeologist is required to differentiate itself from the worlds of 'non-archaeologists'. The idea of 'non-archaeologists' in Sri Lanka is a complex one. Generally, for many archaeologists, historians and heritage people fall within the category of non-archaeologists. Since archaeologists are working with hard-material data from the past, the work of archaeologists are

akin to that of a scientist in the natural sciences, and this is not the case with historians who work with 'written documents'. Heritage people are not archaeologists - obviously they were the ones who were up against the archaeologists since late 19th century – because the concept of heritage is usually twisted together with political, cultural and social issues. In the wider world of archaeology there exist a category of issues called AHM (Archaeological Heritage Management) issues. The AHM issues, for many archaeologists are not really archaeological (Smith 2008:64) because they are linked or associated with emotive aspects of a specific place and a time, hence not 'scientific'.

Decision of the monks

Having described the crisis in its historical and theoretical setting and considering the position of the idea of heritage – specifically AHM - in the field of archaeology it is now necessary to ponder why the monks departed from a 30 year old agreement. Another question that arises is whether there was an agreement in the first place. As a general rule, no Buddhist monk wants a brick-colored and incomplete stupa in a temple. Further, I suggest if a monk agrees to a brick-colored and incomplete stupa because these visual attributes confirm

its archaeological value and its antiquity, then it is not because he wants it, but because he has no power and language to negotiate successfully with the experts from the Department and the Cultural Triangle. I say this because monks who commonly wield power do not listen to experts nor do they respect the Antiquities Ordinance.

In my view during the 1980s the monks of this monastery pretended to be convinced by the experts; it was a very different political climate. A climate not buttressed by Buddhist populist nationalist slogans. This changed very quickly by 1983 with the Tamil guerilla war (LTTE) claiming a separate state for Tamils. In the war against the LTTE the Buddhist monks played a vital role and the Sacred City of Anuradhapura being a historic place with a number of very sacred sites in the country played a pivotal role. It was here that popular Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist sentiments were proclaimed to mobilize the Sinhala-Buddhist south of the country against the LTTE under the regime of former President Rajapakse. After the government of Sri Lanka won the war in 2009,there was further consolidation of nationalist sentiments in the Sinhala-Buddhist south. These involvements empowered the incumbent monk of Abhaygiri Viharaya with the support of the other monks of the sacred city to voice their interpretation of what is authentic in a

Buddhist stupa and depart from the 30-year agreement.

The problem that arose at Abhaygiriya may seem to portray the monks as monopolizing political power for their needs, but that reading is too simplistic and misses the point. The Buddhsit monks have always wanted the stupas plastered and white washed since the emergence of ancient ruined stupas as archaeological, and heritage expressions in the late 19th century. Monks usually express their interpretation of conservation or the restoration of an ancient stupa as their religious and traditional right and condemn the approach of experts as Western, and non-religious. Such contests arise when heritage is brought into programs of revitalization (see Schmidt 2014:174-75). Traditional custodians of ancient religious sites under the purview of the Department of Archaeology become anxious and agitated when programs of revitalization visit properties under traditional ownership. This is because archaeologists and heritage experts are famous for valuing and prioritizing the past over the living qualities of heritage, thus depriving any degree of local developmental aspirations for heritage sites. Heritage experts rely on the concept of 'authenticity' while the traditional custodians of heritage places and their associated

communities rely on their lived experiences to imagine a future for their heritage and themselves. Both groups seem to think of heritage as facing threats and agree that heritage needs to be protected. Defining heritage in relation to a perceived threat constitutes a major thread in modernist thinking (Harrison 2013: 26-28). The experts believe that the threat is to authenticity while the local custodians see a threat to continued uses of heritage to form a future from the past.

The problem of 'authenticity'

In order to proceed further it seems necessary to engage with the idea of 'authenticity' that plays a decisive role in the heritage professions and its implications in a context like Sri Lanka – a context inscribed with postcolonial anxieties, nationalist sentiments and democratic-political rivalries.

Given the complex history of archaeology and heritage in Sri Lanka and the complexities of contemporary Sri Lankan political culture, it is clear that the idea of authenticity as defined within the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) cannot be applied without redefining its scope. AHD sees authenticity of heritage within the perspective that heritage is static; heritage is frozen past. This

has given rise to a fabric-based perception of authenticity that sees heritage as an objectified past. This formulation of authenticity in heritage has very limited space for the performance of intangible heritage. The concept of authenticity became a problem when it was presented as a necessary criterion to be observed in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World heritage Convention in the 1970s. The Guidelines required the world heritage to meet the 'test of authenticity' and that authenticity was considered in the four areas of design, material, workmanship and setting of the sites considered for inscription in the World Heritage List. Heritage sites that are also living sacred sites could not easily fit with the established notions of the concept of authenticity as couched in the Operational Guide lines, without giving rise to a crisis in heritage thinking in contexts where past and traditions are being performed and reenacted in living sacred sites at an everyday basis. This crisis contains within itself far reaching political implications that are directly connected with regional and national political campaigns and struggles. I am visiting this aspect again in the final paragraphs of this paper.

A singular definition of authenticity for all situations

is not tenable in an increasingly globalized world. The very idea of World Heritage as a universal concept and uniform set of standards is not politically realistic in the contemporary world. The World Heritage Convention is not the only universalizing modernist document in force. Other conventions such as Convention for Intangible Heritage and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions are also in force that allows the traditional custodians to speak a different language of power and do away with 'heritage experts'. Ideas and terminology of these documents have already entered the argumentative parlance of some of the traditional custodians, of course with an added quota of self-interest. A good example is the World Heritage Site of Dambulla Golden Rock Temple in Sri Lanka. The powerful incumbent monk of the temple has re-imagined part of the ancient temple on his terms by building a colossal gold painted Buddha statue and other structures and a long line of painted concrete statues of monks holding begging bowls – for some this is vulgarization, but for the hundreds of people who worship there and for the traditional custodians of the temple it is not vulgarization but continuing a tradition and asserting their traditional rights to the temple. The kitsch the experts see in the new additions

doesn't really matter to the devotees and the monks. The past for contemporary rural individuals does not live so much in materials, but in rituals, in ways and manners of thinking about things.

The problem in Sri Lankan archaeology

As I review the current contests between local religious communities and heritage experts, I would consider Dambullaan extreme case in 'indigenism' gone wild, while Abhayagiriya is an extreme case in internationalism gone wild! I must make it very clear that my argument is not that we should be restoring Buddhist stupas to their perceived ancient glory as such, but my concern is about the reluctance or the inability of the community of Sri Lankan archaeologists to take archaeology as a critical practice and engage with archeological issues that have embedded social, cultural and political imperatives. In my view, this is a serious problematic condition in Sri Lankan archaeology. Archaeology can't be reduced to a series of methods in the field or in the laboratory. In the rest of my paper I shall be engaging with this condition that inhibits Sri Lankan archaeology from becoming a theoretically reflective, socially responsible and anthropologically informed social practice. What is meant by

social practice here is that theory and thinking are social and they are embedded together in the practices of social life obscuring the distance between object and subject (see Hodder 1992: 1-6 for a detailed treatment of the concept).

As I was working on this paper preparations were being carried out by the CCF to launch the restored Abhayagiriya stupa by the current President who came to office in January 2015. The conserved Abhayagiriya stupa was launched on July 31, 2015. The voice of the incumbent monks that was heard by the previous President seems to have been silenced or not heard. The voice of the archaeological experts of the CCF seems to have prevailed. But as for me what has really happened, as what has always been happening in Sri Lankan archaeology, is that the national-party-politics is deciding matters pertaining to heritage preservation (and archaeology). One must not think that politicians are commanding or enforcing their ideas on the archaeologists or the monks. The archaeologists and the monks are acting from their respective ideological positions that are nationalistic and in sync with national politics in varying degrees and scale. The nationalism of the former is loaded with rhetoric of 'indigenism' while that of the latter with the rhetoric of

internationalism, or to be precise, with the so called 'scientific archaeology', which Wijesekara (1990) claimed to have been born in 1890 under the auspices of the white colonial master. But the real problem is that even the rhetoric of 'scientific archaeology' has more often been nationalist and has bred mostly regimes of historiographical truth claims of the past. This has been so because Sri Lankan archaeologists, not all but a majority of them would transform archeological data into historiographical ones as soon as they are unearthed. The archaeological truth claims that can be deduced from archaeological data are not rigorously pursued instead presented as markers of historiographical truths that stoke nationalist sentiments. This, conversion of archaeological data into historiographical data, is a long established tradition in Sri Lankan archaeology that has survived to this date. This is a tradition that has played a vital role, in conjunction with national media, in putting archaeology in the use of nation-building project and political use since independence (See Kohl and Fawcett (eds) 1995 for a comprehensive global coverage of issues similar to this).

The problem of 'scientific method in archaeology'

The current subservient nature of Sri Lankan

archaeology to national-party-politics and to racially and nationalistically bound interest groups lead by ideologues, in my view, has been made possible and plausible by an outdated belief that what archaeologists do are 'scientific method' and that the archaeological data, which are thought as necessarily and exclusively empirical, are free from theories and therefore theories can be tested against data (Wylie 1989: 18-27). In short the problem with Sri Lankan archaeology is that it is still wearing the straitjacket of positivism in various guises that prevents it from critically engaging with archaeological situations that are anthropologically informed (see Hodder 1992; 1-5 for a comprehensive discussion on similar issues relevant to archaeology in general). As Latour (2008: 321) argues Positivism 'is not wrong because it forgets “human consciousness” and decides to stick to “cold data” instead; it is wrong politically. It has reduced the matters of concern into matters of fact too fast, without due process' (author's italics). Efficacy of 'scientific method' in fields of studies that deal with human relations and interactions from social, cultural, and historical perspectives have been questioned by a number of thinkers ranging from social theorists to philosophers to sociologists (Foucault 1972; Habermas 1975; Derrida 1978; Harding 1986). The scientific method has been critiqued not

only from outside but also from within the positivist camp. The Harvard philosopher Willard Van Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism (1951) was the first hard punch on the positivism's celebrated notion that concepts and data can be categorically distinct from each other. The next major critiques of positivism came from Thomas Khun (1970) and Feyerabend (1975).

Sri Lankan archeology being mostly busy with constructing regimes of historiographical truths, a colonial habit continued up to now, shows no interest in engaging with archaeology as a critical discourse. The consequences of our reluctance or failure to engage with archaeology as a discursive formation and do archaeology as critical practice with the understanding that our field's primary data sets are necessarily caught in a minimum of double hermeneutics could be grave and frustrating. Not only we are lagging behind the rest of the world, but also losing respect as scientists. Doing any discipline devoid of theoretical engagements and reflexivity could amount only to one thing; that's doing 'bad and boring science'. Bad science is the ground where party/partisan-politics enact its perceived rivalries and victories as could be seen from the case of the

Abhayagiriya stupa restoration and the contests surrounding its re-launching. An approach based on critical heritage practice would have given very different results keeping the archaeologist as the facilitator of a dialogic process. As argued earlier in this paper traditional custodians are also embedded in global networks of information flow and they are also powerful constituents of local political power regimes (Weerasinghe2011:145-146). This is a condition that demands a change in the role played by the archaeologist or the heritage 'expert' in managing living sacred sites, and further this is a condition that challenges Sri Lankan archaeologists to take archaeology as a critical practice.

A critical approach to archaeology would have dealt with the problem of restoring the Abhayagiriya stupa from a very different position of engagement that would have departed from the established ways of thinking about past through and from archaeological data. What the established mode of archaeological thinking is doing, in its final analysis, is not seeing the 'difference' between past and presence – the same manner the 19th century nationalist revivalists argued for Anuradhapura. When a Sri Lankan archaeologist claim, upon finding an archaeological data pertaining to, for example, prehistoric technology, that this how ancient Sri Lankans

lived, what that archaeologist is doing is not seeing the difference between past and presence. This is so simply because there was no Sri Lanka, or Sinhalese or Tamils, as we understand these terms today, in the past. Recognizing the 'difference' of the past in archaeological data enables us to grasp the presence in a perspective that is comparative (Tilly 2008:80) and to see the specificities of the presence. The insertion of the past in to rhetoric of 'sameness' does only one thing, that's the 'creation of a fictional unity of a collective consciousness' (ibid.) and prevents us from asking the most important critical questions from our archaeological data. Whose heritage? whose memory? whose significance?, whose values? and which public? (ibid.)) are the critical questions that we forget to ask from our database. Not asking these questions reveals a belief in Sri Lankan archaeologists: the archaeological past has a self-evident relationship with the nation state. (see Hodder 2003:55 for similar comment regarding European archaeology). This is the working of governmentality of Sri Lankan archaeology and this is what prevented Sri Lankan archaeologists to see the presence of Abhayagiriya stupa as different from its past and that it has a life that is an expression of the specificities of the presence. The habitus that define and inform the ways and manners of thinking in Sri Lankan archaeology has not yet acquired any

'taste' for reflexivity and other voices.

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