Significance & Issues of Developing Heritage Tourism at Godawaya for Peace in Sri Lanka

D.L.A.H. Shammika[1]

H.M.R.P. Wijerathna[2]

Abstract

Godawaya in Hambanthota district in Southern province of Sri Lanka retain archaeological evidences of a prehistoric civilization. Considering the potential tourism products, this site can be developed as a major heritage tourism destination. Archaeological artifacts from many parts of this country reveals about a later Sinhalese-Buddhist civilization. It annoys Tamils especially from North areas of the country, who are polarized and strained after the instrumentalist application of them by the British colonialists. This is a no-prejudice site and can accommodate people from any ideology. The failure to construct a cohesive identity suffers a major drawback in Sri Lanka's nation-state building process. The researcher has explored the potential of this site which can channel the conscientization process to rediscover a common inheritance and identity between the two ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamils which can lead to foster peace. Not only that, we can treat the notion of heritage as a social construct and as a resource for action as it is also vehemently associated with the tourism sector in its forms of construction and mobilization which consider the social and cultural dynamics of a given space highlighting the inter-cultural exchange which leads to the construction of social identities. As heritage is a complex and highly political phenomenon, it can be used for the benefit of communities which have moved away from violent conflicts. As this category of tourism is based on education, it can contribute to reduce the stereotypical attitudes in the society and it may lead to a behavioral change and then to reduce social contradictions. This article also discusses how different ideological representations would like to perceive the history, the land and the heritage of Sri

Lanka as well as how primordial sentiments are developed leading to the ethnic segregation. The methodological approach taken to answer the research question was based on grounded theory. This theory has been constructed based on the meaningfulness or understanding of the conversations, observations and interpretations made at the research field. under the grounded theory were used 50 interviews and 100 questionnaires with various kind of persons. They belonged to many age categories and got further information by field visits and observations. Were used historical places, historical written things and historical environmental evidences to certified the data.

Keywords: **Peace, Prehistory, Heritage Tourism, Sri Lanka, Grounded Theory**

Introduction

This article examines how the way of promoting heritage tourism in Sri Lanka has connected with the process of nation-building and how it has influenced the ethnic polarization and as "heritage" is constructed, constantly reconfigured and as a social concept it evolves and changes with time. In another way, this can be interpreted as a social construction. Another significant aspect is, the potentials it has to redirect the country towards peaceful coexistence by alleviating stereotypic attitudes and promoting mutual respect and understanding war is an important conservation problem in some regions. Unfortunately, nations and ethnic groups, they are often targeted for destruction by enemies in times of conflict. Sri Lankan conflict is between the majority ethnic group Sinhalaese and a minority Tamils. They both have cohabitated on Sri Lankan soil from time immemorial. The causes for more than thirty-five-year-old ethnic conflict are miscellaneous and complex. A major causative factor for the conflict in post colonial era is the failure to integrate minority groups in to the mainstream of nation state building. And it is important to mention that heritage tourism is also commonly used to build patriotism at the domestic level, and further heritage places and event are also commonly employed as tools to build nationalism and patriotism. Rich examples can be cited as

battlefields, cemeteries, monuments to national heroes and other places important in the national psyche which can be regarded as central to this particular use of heritage. This paper scrutinizes the problems encountered in the Sri Lankan nation building process with particular concern into its peculiarity and uniqueness. The author believes that the attempts to analyze the problems of third world by applying universal theories have created confusion and misperceptions in the world. With that view the discussion will be undertaken more on the grounds of real-life situations in Sri Lanka. The starting point of this paper is to view the Sri Lankan conflict as a reflection of failure in the process of state formation during the post-independent era. This is a situation that is also found in many other countries that have emerged from a colonial experience. Colonial expansion put an end to the autonomous existence of a variety of social formations and political frameworks. 'Concepts and reality were homogenized. The export of the nation state model to the colonies posed a host of difficulties, because no appropriate foundations for this kind of construct existed in the extra European world (Scherrer, C., 2002:2). Decolonization created new states whose mandates exceeded previous experiences; the prerequisite to fulfilling these expanded mandates was integration at three levels: integration of territories, integration of administrations, integration of the various people who lived in new territories and under new administrations (Rajagopalan, S.,2006:2). The latter level of integration is the most difficult because it challenges groups' demands to remain separate and distinct, to retain the uniqueness markers of their identities. Heritage tourism is an important medium which provides markers for communicating identity. One of the most useful recent developments in the study of museums, heritage centres, and tourism in general is the analysis of all these attractions as forms of media (Morgan and Pritchard et al, 1998). Marshall McLuhan foresaw future with his famous sentence 'the medium is the message' (Babic, D., 1996: 207). Tourism fits to be a 'medium' or a channel of communication or expression through which information or impressions are conveyed. Attractions that focus on a group's history and culture, and on the distinctive appearance and practices of the group, certainly convey information and impression, or 'messages' about the group. The phrase stands for the idea that the

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currently available media shapes human activities, more so than we are aware of. In other words, media themselves affect our society not so much through the content delivered, but by the characteristics of the medium itself. By serving as a medium in which people's 'stories' are told and their history and culture portrayed in appealing ways, tourist attractions could be part of a campaign to reshape group images and group identities. The representation of heritage will have substantial implications for both collective and individual identity and hence for the creation of social realities (Hall, M.C., 1998:180). However, heritage is not only considered a link between past and present, it is also a well of meaning for understanding the world. Identity attractions often 'stress' the importance of emerging self consciousness and self determination of the ethnic minority, the need to correct the historical record in so far as it undervalues the contribution of minority, and [remind] the visitors of past discriminations against the minority (MacCannell,1984:387). And this the critical point: When attraction to do these things, then the 'messages' sent through tourism come to resemble those contained in activists' ideology and rhetoric. This is why 'heritage has an identity-conferring status' (MacCrone et al 1995:181).

Methodology

The qualitative nature of this study presented many potential frameworks for investigations. But the research question is less explored so far and contentious in nature that grounded theory approach shows more suitable to this research. Before entering the study field, we had no "preconceived" theoretical framework. The theory was to be discovered in the data gathering process of answering the research question. At the outset it was only the general disciplinary knowledge on the subject matters of the research that set forth the initial planning and setting of research question. But at the end the process of approaching the answers to the research questions is to discover unknown theories. In grounded theory; having identified a problem or topic in very general term and selected a site where that problem could be studied the researcher was then to allow the evidence, they accumulated to dictate the emerging theoretical agenda (Day, I., 1999:3). According to Shank (2002:82), 'grounded theory, by its nature, moves from the specific to the general.

The theory was constructed based on the meaningfulness or understanding of the conversations, observations and interpretations made at the research field. Data for this research were collected primarily through a combination of field work methods. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of inquiry help the reader to see and hear vividly the people and situations in the area under study. The main qualitative methods incorporated to grounded theory were participant observation, unstructured interviewing, observation and documentary materials. The specific locus chosen for the study was special in its geography and demography. Random sampling method was used to select the people for the questionnaires and interviews. Further Concern about people's knowledge, memories, ideas, and vision about the field at the data gathering. Hambanthota is a 'peripheral' area in Southern Sri Lanka which makes home for an array of tourist destinations. Hambanthota is marginalized in political and economic terms, but at the same time is a region charged with enormous development potentials (Southern Development Master Plan, 2000: 124). They provided a rich research background to let the study grow from specific to general on grounded theory basis. According to grounded theory, data is central and superior. Therefore, care has been taken to select the most appropriate method for gathering data.

Literature: Heritage Tourism for Peace

Heritage tourism has been introduced as a force for peace by Poria, (2001:115) in the Middle-East. The author assumes that the use of heritage in tourism is a sensitive and dynamic area of development, and there is a critical need to know how to manage this phenomenon, especially in the context of communities which have moved from war to non-war and were involved in violent conflicts. The author suggests that in post war period if the groups are truly willing to create a culture of peace there are changes that need to be made relatively quickly on both sides. There is a need for both sides to understand that neither of them is presenting the real thing. And the presentation of some parts of history, and non-presentation of other parts of history, may influence the long-term future of the peace culture. The author's argument is condensed in the expression that 'a more responsible and open

presentation of the past can be used as a weapon for peace'. Such a presentation if promoted in a way that is perceived by tourists from both sides as fair and reliable may lead to mutual tolerance and warm rather than cold and fragile peace.

The role of heritage tourism in formation of identities is another central phenomenon that is discussed in the existing literature on heritage tourism's relevance in conflict and peace. In many fields, identity differences are seen to be a root cause of conflict. For an inter-group (e.g., racial, ethnic, or religious) conflict to occur, the opponents must have a sense of collective identity about themselves and about their adversary, each side believing the fight is between "us" and "them" (Kriesberg, K., 2003:1). It is identified that areas of local importance play a predominant role in the construction of identity (Gonzale, M., V., 2008:807). In literature changing identities and transforming intractable conflicts are deeply discussed in categorical form. The ways to modify identities so as to reduce the intractability of a conflict several policies are introduced in three settings: (1) within each group, (2) In the relations between the groups, and (3) In their social context (Kriesberg, K., 2003:5). Utility of heritage tourism in modifying identities can also be analyzed in this framework. There is mounting interest in the cross over between heritage and other sectors of the tourism industry. However, there is a need to refine these ideas further the and to understand the various power relations at ply when planning and developing the heritage tourism. And it is significant to understand heritage as a form of expression and social differentiation brings us to contemplate the idea of continuity between past and present. The ways of harnessing heritage tourism can also be identified in three different directions of policy orientations that: (1) help prevent conflicts becoming intractable (2) Help stop the prolongation and escalation of intractable conflicts and help transformed and resolved intractable conflicts (Kriesberg, K., 2003:5). Gonzale (2008:809) explored the trade-off between existential intangible heritage tourism and modern destination image. He examines the relationship between existential intangible tourism and personal identity in his conclusion he suggests the role of existential heritage tourism when building cosmopolitan identity. In some of the relevant literatures heritage tourism's

role is discussed under the all-inclusive theme of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is said to overlap heritage tourism, rural tourism, educational tourism etc (Craik, J., 2001:114). Therefore, the assertions on cultural tourism have also been regarded for this literature review on heritage tourism. According to Burns (2006:13) 'if it is argued that culture (and nostalgia) can be appropriated as a resource by the tourism sector, tourism needs to be understood in terms of contested cultures, created by (a) the collision of local realities and globally driven commercialism and (b) the collusion between state and the tourism sector to construct social identities and to fuse (and perhaps, muddle) histories. The interpretation of history and culture is central to national identity building because revised narratives of the nation, as well as recover or invented culture and traditions, are key resources for constructing national consciousness and infusing that consciousness with pride, affection, and loyalty (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:1-14). These same resources come into play when a redefine identity is projected outward, to an audience beyond the group. It is precisely because of their power to interpret history and culture that "museums and historical sites have, indeed, become major participants in contemporary efforts to construct culturally shared, historically anchored representation of 'self' and 'other'" (Katriel, 1993:70).

Discussion

The interpretation of the history and culture is central to national identity building because revised narratives of the nation, as well as recovered or invented culture and traditions, are key resources for constructing national consciousness and infusing that consciousness with pride, affection, and loyalty (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In Sri Lankan conflict historical legacies, archeological sites and state symbols can be seen to be interpreted in different ways justifying each party's involvement in the conflict. According to the 'Mahawamsa', a reordered history of Sri Lanka the Sinhalese majority claims an exclusive possession to the island. Based on the 'Mahawamsa' the Sinhala race originated in the island with the arrival of King Vijaya and his seven hundred companions some time in the fifth century B.C. They were all from Northern India. Later migrations were from Bengal and

Orissa as well. Buddhism came to the island later. According to the 'Mahawamsa', it was during the time of 'Ashoka' the great of India that the Sri Lankan king 'Devanampiyathisa' (250-210 B.C.) was converted to Buddhism. With royal patronage thus received Buddhism spread in the island (Silva, 1983:3-11). The origin of the Tamils, according to the same historical source, can be traced to the third century B.C. They're existed commercial contacts between the Sri Lankans and South India's ports and there is a strong likelihood that the Tamils came to the island as traders, invaders or peaceful immigrants. For Sinhala Buddhist nationalist 'Mahawamsa' is an irreplaceable source for the reconstruction of the early history of the Island.

The Tamil demand for autonomy and the North- Eastern province as an autonomous Tamil region has been built around the concept of a 'Tamil home land'. The 'Tamil home land' concept argues that the Tamil community has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity and the Northern and the Eastern provinces have been the historic home of the Tamil speaking peoples who have allegedly, through out in the past lived in this territory (Iyer, 1989:102). These opposing arguments catalyze the ethnic polarization of Sri Lanka. It has been agreed that in order to achieve peaceful settlement it is necessary to discourage the vicious process of ethnic polarization. Tourism has been recognized by many informants as a vital force to enhance intercultural understanding and to demolish prejudices. How are ethnic divisions, symbolized by ethnic markers selected for tourist promotion, reconciled with national integration and the assertion of a national identity? This question emerged in the research process in several situations and the answer also could be saught by further investigations and clarifications.

'Godawaya' is an ancient harbor situated in Southern costal area of Sri Lanka that provided many research materials to answer the above question. This destination encompasses a monastery, an ancient settlement and a harbor. The site was neither publicized adequately nor visited frequently by tourists. Major sites that have been promoted as tourist attractions in southern province share some commonalities that typify the core interest in the tourism agenda. Mulkirigala,

Thissamaharamaya, Naigala, Kasagala, Rambawehera, Siththangallena, Bandagiriya, Karadulena, Situlpauwa are some of the heritage tourism destinations in Hambanthota. These heritage sites are mainly Buddhist temples built in third century B.C till 1300 A.C, by Sinhala kings which bolster Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Promoting only the heritage of Sinhala Buddhist prosperity in past indirectly means reinforcing Sinhala Buddhist exclusiveness. Those heritage sites are visited mainly by Sinhala Buddhist people and to a lesser extent by foreign tourist. Why is it hard to see any person from minority ethnic groups visiting these sites? Do they feel excluded inside these Buddhist temples? One informant in my research who is from minority ethnic group bears the idea that 'the feeling they get inside these heritage sites is no different from that they get in a touristic site in another country'. They don't get any belongingness there. In brief they feel like being surrendered to the 'Sinhala exclusive' idea. Heritage tourism sites recognized by the Sri Lankan government for promotion are selective implying a conscious choice to value some manifestation from the past above others and to enhance tourism products rooted in selected representation of the past.

The archeological excavations first started in the 'Godawaya' in 1994 by the archeological department of Sri Lanka and Bonn University as cooperative project. According to the information gathered from the interviews with villagers the author's main argument is that 'for an archeological excavation to become socially significant and tourism-wise effective that should be conducted in an open manner attaining credibility of the villagers and also most importantly the national policies shouldn't be partial to interests of one party. According to the authorities in archeological department, in 1991 the Archeological Department and the German Institute of Archeology agreed on archeological excavations in the Southern province within the ancient citadel of Thissamaharama. To compliment this project, in order to give the research a broader basis, the University of Bonn commenced investigations at 'Godawaya', one of the major harbors of the Ruhuna, as well as at an ancient monastery in Ambalanthota. In addition, according to the department they are not financially able to preserve it *in situ* for any development as a touristic

destination. The author sees it as a failure of the archaeological department for reality being not transmitted to the villagers correctly. The same site exhibits how misperception and improper communication between these two parties lead to adverse consequences. The discontent villagers show no interest or respect over any statement from archaeological department. They have built a play ground for pre-school over a piece of land which has been identified as archaeologically important by the archaeological department.

Though it is neglected 'Godawaya' is peculiar because it contains opportunities to have several types of tourism attractions in one place. A place for safari, wet land for nature trail, a river for boat riding, shallow sea for diving, ancient port, monastery and ancient settlement are situated at one place making it a special location to attract many different types of local as well as foreign tourists to this place. This opportunity is golden to convey a message that could have an effect in peace building at national level. The conventional way of prioritizing the tourism destinations for development need to be reconsidered, to promote 'Godawaya' like destinations which consists evidence that make people to re-think on stereotypical attitudes over 'others.

Conclusion

The fate of archeological excavation at 'Godawaya' exemplifies that in Sri Lanka the heritage sites with potentials in promoting national integration have been neglected deliberately or unintentionally by authorities. The active choices made at the top level have been a determinant in shaping ethnic identity at tourism site. These choices however are always constrained, and they are made by a range of actors-a range that increases as tourism enters the picture. In the example discussed in this paper, local people have been victimized and relatively passive along the tourism development projects. The top-down approach in heritage site development in Sri Lanka has undermined public interests in heritage tourism which carries viable options for building a collective Sri Lankan identity via heritage tourism. In Sri Lanka, the author identifies the existence of different interpretations and stories about the history and promotion of heritage tourism in line with those differences

representing only certain aspects of the history and culture has caused more ethnic polarization. Sri Lanka is a multinational country and its ethnic reconciliation is very important to drive the country to an aimed point. Sri Lanka suffered from three decades of war lost the reconciliation and Godawaya can be used to create good images in people's minds to rethink the historical ethnic harmony under the tourism industry. Not only that one as tourism blooming area Hambanthota district can be used Godawaya promote its historical potential and protect Sri Lankan heritage managing the place as a symbol of the peace under an essential manage. In addition, at the same time the author identifies opportunities in heritage tourism to promulgate collective identity in Sri Lanka.

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