

## **RECONCEPTUALISING SACRED CITY MEANINGS: CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF THE SACRED CITY OF ANURADHAPURA**

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According to the dominant Western view, the heritage space is only a quantitative reality than a qualitative and symbolic truth and leaves little room for conserving the sacredness and livingness of a place. One wonderful feature of historical religious past sites in Sri Lanka is that they are the result of a living religious tradition. This study investigates by way of adopting qualitative study techniques including literature survey, observations, stakeholder interviews and case studies, as to how far the implication of the World heritage designation and the global grammar of heritage conservation has affected conserving the living sacred heritage identity of the Sacred City of Anuradhapura. Over the past four decades (1977-2017) practice and policy implementation in terms of planning, management and conservation of world heritage sites in Sri Lanka have proven the difficulty of attaining sustainability by reconciling living sacred heritage conservation with community needs. Inside the Sri Lankan cultural context heritage places have evolved reflecting the physical and emotional interactions related to social and cultural processes. Subsequently, Sri Lankan sacred cities are not just physical conglomerates that have been built as an ensemble, but have a kind of archetypal reality. Therefore, it is suggested that living heritage conservation should be considered as a vehicle for capturing and nurturing the way that the community understand and connect with heritage and in the long run makes contributions to the continuity and long-term sustainability. The associated cultural community ought to be given the opportunity to practice what they believe and perceive is their right. This study revealed that archaeology-based, material-centric conservation approaches of both *Jetavana* and *Abhayagiri* stupas of the Central Cultural Fund have ended up with the disturbing 'spirit of place' and keeping apart community rights from their sensitive sacred heritage places. Consequently, this research raises a couple of issues regarding the disparity among authoritative substances primarily based conservation practices and related cultural network desires. In Sri Lankan cultural context, holding the sacred background is dynamic, emerging and largely a cultural and social process. It is constantly created, maintained and modified by associated people and their belief systems. That is the key point to be considered in conserving and keeping the sacred background. It is, therefore, taking truly associated community as the primary anchor, we argue that many of the issues and complexities associated with Sri Lankan living sacred heritage management and conservation can be better understood and context-sensitively addressed to a greater extent.

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