

A PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE *PANSAL GODELLA* SITE IN PUTTALAM DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Introduction

The site locally called *Pansal Godella* (8° 05'.42" N 79° 52' 58.07" E, 5m from MSL) (the temple mound) is located in the *Mailakumlam* GN division (637/1) in the *Vanatavilluwa* DS division of the Puttalam district of Sri Lanka. This site is also bordered by the *Thewanuwara* GN division (640B) in *Karuwalsgaswewa* DS division of the same district. According to geological evidence, areas such as *Tabbova*, *Andiyagama* and *Aruwakkalu* represent some ample floral and fossil faunal evidence which belong to several million years ago (Tantrigoda *et.al.* 1991). Archaeological evidence in the region proved that this area was a focal area for ancient inhabitants beyond the modern administrative boundaries. However, the human history of the North and North Western sectors of the Island can be traced back to the prehistoric period (Deraniyagala 1992). Furthermore, chronicles, some historical texts as well as folklore and legends indicate that this region was named as *Tambapanni* in the ancient times which directly belong to the legend of Prince Vijaya and his followers who landed on the island around 6th C.B.C from northern India. (Sumangala 1957, Nandaratana 1984). According to the archaeological evidence this region can be taken as a continuous attractive region for ancient settlements from the prehistoric period to later historical periods.

The research objective of this paper is to examine the archaeological significance of the ancient Buddhist holy place located in the remote area of the North-Western province of the country.

Methodology

At present, archaeologists need multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological frameworks to examine the complex contexts of their sites. Therefore, the methodology of the present work is also contained

with multidisciplinary approaches such as archaeological, geophysical and remote sensing approaches. According to the research design of this paper literature review is the one of the major components. It helps to understand and summarize the settlement history of the study area. Parallel to the literature review, a cartographical research has been done. This survey is vital to obtain a basic idea on the physical and cultural landscape of the study area. It helps to identify locational significances of the site called *Pansal Godella* and its relationship with other archaeological evidences scattered in the study area. One-inch maps, metric maps, and satellite images have been used for this purpose.

Exploration methods play the main role in data retrieval from the field. According to the research design at the initiate stage, the total space of the study area was explored by remote sensing exploration method. This would help to understand a contrasting picture of archaeological evidence scattered in the study area considering their physical as well as its environmental settings. In the next step, the site *Pansal Godella* is explored in detail. Pedestrian survey method is the primary exploration method in this research. Eye observation is a necessary data retrieval method to examine the formation processes and present condition of the site. Personal communications with the villagers were also utilize to understand the folklore and legendary history of the *Pansal Godella* site. The Global Positioning System (Magellan GPS receiver) and Geographic Information System (GIS)¹ are used to obtain the absolute location of the site and analyze and interpret the spatial locational significances of *Pansal Godella*.

Results and Discussion

According to the previous studies the existing archaeological landscape of the region proves that there was a continuous settlement history in this area. During the survey, writers noted that majority of the visible archaeological evidences in the area belonged to the ancient Buddhist monastic sites. The site called *Pansal Godella* located in the western corner of the present *Mayilakulam* village and located on right bank of the *Mee Oya*. At present this archaeological site located in the private land block which belongs to Mrs. Ranmenika (77 years) who is the volunteer caretaker of this place. According to the archaeological

¹ ArcGIS 10.3 software has been used for spatial analysis of the study.

evidence scattered on the ground, it can be noted that there was an ancient monastic site in this place in the ancient times.

A ruined Stupa is the primary archaeological evidence that can be seen on this site. This ancient Stupa is profoundly disturbed by various archaeological site formation processes. A thick vegetation cover grown on the Stupa has mostly destroyed this monument. Root systems of trees grown on the Stupa have affected bricks to make displacements from its original location and conditions. Except floral disturbances faunal activities on this mound also disturbed its original condition. Rodent activities on the Stupa mound is highly affected to make various physical disruptions. According to observations, this would be a medium size Stupa approximately 10 – 12m in diameter. Brickbats and other evidences including stone pillar and basal stones scattered around the mound proved that the history of this Stupa can be traced back to the Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa period. Legendary and folklore history in the region also provide same ample evidence to prove this matter. (Personal Comm. with Mrs. Ranmenika at *Mailakulam* village) However, this idea should be verified through further investigations.

Apart from the above mentioned evidence, writers could observe other two remarkable archaeological evidences from the *Pansal Godella* site. The first is a partially damaged anthropomorphic Terracotta figure. This figure is 3.5 inches in height and 2.5 inches in width. History of research related to the Terracotta figure in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the 1920s. (Hocart 1924). This type of artifacts are recovered from especially the dry zone of the North Central and North Western parts of Sri Lanka (Deraniyagala 1960, 1972, Manatunga1990, Manatunga 2015). Researchers believe that this type of artefacts belong to the dry zone agrarian societies who inhabited the Island in ancient times (ibid).

Chronological sequences of this kind of artifacts are varied (Deraniyagala 1960, Dodanwala 1998, Deraniyagala 1997). History of research shows that this type of figurines is commonly found from lands belonging to the paddy fields and Chena cultivation. Therefore, they believed that this culture would belong to the ancient dry zone agrarian societies (Manatunga 2015). The terracotta figure found from *Pansal Godella* also represents rude and simple characteristics. Observations proved that this anthropomorphic figure shows female features. One hand is broken and

small two clay balls were used to mould the breast of this anthropomorphic figure. However, villagers believe that this figure belongs to the god *Hanuman* (Personal Comm. with Mrs. Ranmenika at *Mailakulam*). However, there is no doubt ancient inhabitants would have used this type of figures for their ceremonial purposes.

Next, the remarkable evidence is a crude rim shard with the dual trident (*Thrishūla*) symbol. Writers observed that this trident symbol was moulded on the rim of the pottery. This shard is the only remaining part of the whole pot and 6.5×1.5 inches in size. According to the rim shard, this would be a medium size pot approximately 30cm in diameter. This is a red ware rim shard with medium surface luster. Detailed observations show that this rim shard is highly corroded due to the various formation processes. The dual trident symbol on this rim shard is vital because this symbol indicates some information on Hinduism. Both Hocart and Deraniyagala believed that above mentioned Terracotta culture belongs to Shiva worship (Hocart 1924, Draniyagala 1960). If it is true, this site also provides both Terracotta and trident symbol which indicate some information on Hinduism.

Conclusion

In one hand, *Pansal Godella* can be taken as an ancient Buddhist monastic site. On the other hand, the terracotta figure and trident symbol show that there were other religious activities in this place parallel to Buddhism. Observations proved that this place is still in danger due to the treasure seekers' activities. The writers noted that treasure hunters disturbed few stone pillars and basal stone with ancient carvings and other artifacts was scattered on the site. On the other hand, this land is located in an isolated place in front of the paddy fields. Using this advantage treasure seekers can easily access this land. Therefore, authorized institutions should need a proper plan to protect this archaeological heritage.

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