



# Siran - Companion, Scholar and Visionary: A Personal Note

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The year was 1969 when I first met Siran. I had completed my A' Levels and Siran arrived freshly from Cambridge after his Master's degree. Siran warmly welcomed me to the pottery room at the Department of Archaeology where he was classifying artefacts excavated from the Citadel of Anuradhapura. That was my "work-station" for one year where I was introduced to modern techniques of classification and, both, scientific information and amusing stories of Sri Lankan archaeology related by Siran. I did enjoy every minute of my work and our company and had immense respect for Siran's insights. It never occurred to me that the Citadel excavation will one day be the catalyst bringing us together in the future as Co-Directors of the Anuradhapura Citadel Archaeology Project. After a year's work, I departed to India for studies and Siran to Harvard for his doctoral research.

We met after ten years in 1980. We picked up the strands of our friendship from where we left behind and bonded for life as dear friends, archaeologists, fellow travellers, and work companions. It was indeed a companionship of quality, mutually educating each other and above all standing together and defending each other. My mind goes back to the work done together and our quest to unveil the history of the island beyond myths, biases, prejudices, and parochialisms. Siran's work on prehistory and my research on the Early Iron Age of Sri Lanka and South India probed alternative narratives beyond the chasm of inverted histories.

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Being a prehistorian, Siran took a long view of history. His need to probe the peopling of Sri Lanka went beyond the realms of traditional archaeology based on the short chronology and literature. Siran believed that stratified excavations and multi-disciplinary research will essentially provide the future basis for scientific archaeology in Sri Lanka. In fact, it is to his credit, that the 1968 Citadel of Anuradhapura Excavation (published in 1972) conclusively established the future benchmark for modern archaeology in Sri Lanka providing a firm date line for techno-cultural formations and periodization.

Siran extended this investigation deeper into the prehistoric period and produced his *magnum opus*, doctoral thesis, *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka: An ecological perspective* (1992). His ground-breaking research at montane cave sites (e.g., Batadombalena, Kitulgala Belilena, Fa-Hien Lena) and Dry zone sites at Minihagalkanda and focused research on the Late Pleistocene and Holocene, microlithic sites and Quaternary red sand beds opened new vistas of research on the prehistory of Sri Lanka for the next generation.

We had exciting times exploring megalithic and Brahmi cave sites, having discussions near a lake, under a cave or in a tent deeply debating problems of urbanisation, the date of Brahmi inscriptions, technological change, peopling of Sri Lanka and racially charged theories. Often, we discussed futuristic archaeological plans for the next generation.

Siran was a lover of Sri Lankan culture and embedded in its values. He loved his country, the monuments, flora and fauna including its heritage. He never lost his patience at a discussion but treated the opponent with an enduring smile.

Siran enjoyed his moments at Ekneligoda Walawwa, the family manor. My thoughts slowly drift to the evenings we spent at his Walawwa lost in the sound of the crickets and the music of Johann Strauss or some other classical composers taking us to the realm where music is the poetry of life...

I will miss you, my friend, and so will your family and team, the world of archaeology and a multitude of folk in Sri Lanka and the world. May you walk through the *samsaric* journey and eventually find solace in the *vimukti* you so richly deserve!