



# Deraniyagala the Unwavering Supporter of Researchers

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I met Dr. Deraniyagala for the first time in the mid 80s when I was an undergraduate at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, during an archaeological conference held in Colombo. I can remember that day vividly, Dr. Deraniyagala was discussing Anuradhapura Gedige excavations. His distinct white attire and unassuming smile had never left him even when I met him last in 2018 at the PGIAR (Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology), Colombo. The person who had the most influence in my life as an archaeologist, besides my foremost mentor the late Professor Senake Bandaranayake, founding Director of the PGIAR, was Dr. Siran Deraniyagala. The initial meetings with Dr. Deraniyagala during my early undergraduate years were brief encounters, limited to the exchange of a few words. During my third year at Kelaniya University as a student in the archaeology special degree stream, I was fortunate to participate in Dr. Deraniyagala's archaeological research projects at the Anuradhapura citadel.

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The discussions I had and the training I obtained under Dr. Deraniyagala's direction allowed me to hone my skills on excavation methods, and to develop a thorough understanding of the stratigraphic sequences of the 9 m deep occupational layers at the Anuradhapura citadel tell. The guidance I received from him paved the way for me to gain valuable experience in dealing with complex stratigraphy, which subsequently helped me engage in excavations at various regions of the world - in the USA, Europe, Kamchatka (Russia), and Sri Lanka.

During the early 90s as a young faculty member at PGIAR, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Deraniyagala regularly when he visited the Institute. We discussed various research topics on Sri Lankan prehistory and protohistory. During one such meeting, Dr. Deraniyagala invited me to lead the Anuradhapura Salgahawatta III excavation project, which I accepted without hesitation. A major part of the data utilized for my Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the University of California, San Diego, which focused on the formation of early Iron Age state level societies in Sri Lanka, was collected during this research. Further, some of the ideas I developed for my dissertation were instilled by the influence I gained through numerous discussions I had with Dr. Deraniyagala. Although Dr. Deraniyagala was renowned as a leading prehistorian in Sri Lanka and internationally, the contributions he made to early Iron Age archaeology in Sri Lanka and South Asia is significant. His findings at Anuradhapura citadel excavations revealed that the Brahmi script was probably in use as early as 600 BC (a few centuries earlier than 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., the date epigraphists had agreed upon), and reached Sri Lanka possibly through trade. These insights were thought-provoking and instrumental for me to brainstorm on how and in what circumstances the initial seeds for urbanism and state formation sprouted in north central Sri Lanka.

Dr. Deraniyagala's foresight in developing future archaeological research in Sri Lanka and his unwavering support of students from different institutions, besides from the Department of Archaeology, was inspiring. Through this approach he provided me with numerous opportunities and life changing experiences, which paved the path for me to develop my skills as a field archaeologist for which I am grateful.

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