



# Unwritten memories of Dr. Siran Deraniyagala

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Since hearing about 'Ekneligoda Nilame' a long time ago, in the 1970's I received some information about a family that resided near the town of Kurunegala on the Kurunegala-Kandy Road. A member of that family informed me about another branch of the Ekneligoda family in Kuruwita. He gave me a long description but most of it escapes my memory now. Nevertheless, I recollect what Mr. Hugh Molagoda told me about the Ekneligoda family during a brief conversation I had with him after the death of his father M.B.K. Molagoda Nilame of Molagoda Walawwa, Kurunegala who was married to Gertrude Dullewe Kumarihami.

".... his father was Loku Deraniyagala. His son is our Siran....." He gave me further information "In Dambawinna Walawwa at Ratnapura, yes, that is our Wije....."

When one of us asked him "whether the Wallawwa with the elephant Kraal belonged to the same family", he answered in the affirmative. Dr. Deraniyagala confirmed the story when I mentioned it to him one day at Ekneligoda Walawwa in Kuruwita. Thereafter, he and I had a trusted and close relationship.

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I studied prehistory under Senior Professor Anura Manatunga at the University of Kelaniya and under Professor R.M.M. Chandraratne of the University of Peradeniya. Since then, I developed a preference to study prehistory and when I informed my teacher Professor Senake Bandaranayake of this he said, “you must talk with Siran.....”. That was when I started working with Dr. Deraniyagala on prehistory and related subjects after the 1980’s. I was able to meet Dr. Deraniyagala and told him of my desire. Since he was busy at that time he introduced me to two persons mentored by him, namely Dr. W.H. Wijeyapala and Dr. Nimal Perera, and facilitated my meetings with them. I met Dr. Wijeyapala and learned the basics of the subject from him.

Thereafter, I had direct contact with Dr. Deraniyagala during the excavations directed by Professor Klaus Klein (Director, KAVA Institute in German) at the upper terrace rock shelter of Pidurangala in 1986-88. There was a discussion about microlithic stone tools found in the above cave, after the excavation of a foot of the reclining Buddha statue in the upper rock shelter terrace was completed. Although Dr. Deraniyagala confirmed that they were microlithics, he declared that the layers were mixed, the reason being that the stone tools were found among pottery shards. I was an undergraduate then and lacked the confidence to argue with a giant in the field like him. However, his position on this matter puzzled me for 25 years.

I encountered Dr. Deraniyagala next during excavations with Robin Coningham at ASW2 Salgahawatta, Anuradhapura in 1989. Dr. Deraniyagala was the director as well as the chief consultant of this excavation. I met him often because he was residing at the former prison building while the excavation continued for a considerable period. His satisfaction with the quality of our work in excavation gave an opportunity to associate closely with him. Dr. Deraniyagala visited us once during the excavations by my friend Priyantha Karunaratne and myself with the SAREC Project at Aligala rock shelter, Sigiriya. He had an extensive discussion with me on that occasion. Later, we came to know from Professor Senake Bandaranayake and Dr. Mats Mogren that Dr. Deraniyagala had formed a positive opinion of us. He had appreciated the excavations conducted by us and always mentioned it in his writings when discussing the prehistory of Sri Lanka.

In our subsequent meetings, Dr. Deraniyagala discussed our subject as well as his family history. On several occasions the late Mr. T.B. Ekanayake, former Minister of Cultural and the Arts joined our discussions at Ekneligoda Walawwa. There were many instances when Dr. Deraniyagala spoke with us throughout the night. He was a scholar, a teacher and an intellectual who imparted his vast knowledge with utmost generosity and modesty. He candidly spoke about his own life with us.

Dr. Deraniyagala, being an eminent scholar of prehistory, frequently stressed with us the necessity to disseminate knowledge about the subject through our university curricula. The discussions we had with him were very productive in the establishment of the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology. He had a simple lifestyle but was always deeply contemplative of life. We were honoured that during the last few years of his life he used to visit us often at the research unit of Bio & Geo Archaeology at PGIAR and advised us on keeping current with our subject knowledge. The generosity and humility of this great scholar were apparent in the

way he shared his vast knowledge with us. There were scholarly agreements as well as scholarly arguments or no comments. However, he always possessed the ability to later clarify and clear any issues that arose.

I mention with gratitude that Dr. Deraniyagala encouraged, advised and gave his utmost assistance to us at the PGIAR, emphasising that it should be the foremost institution in teaching and researching prehistory in Sri Lanka. He spent time in selecting and obtaining publications for our library to help broaden the knowledge in these subjects and donated a number of his own books to our library as a Loan Collection. He contributed to and advised our board of management, staff and research committees. He was very progressive in training, analysing, publishing and promoting archaeological research and excavations. Although Dr. Deraniyagala is no longer with us, he has left behind so much for us.

*Sir, the memories of you and the knowledge you imparted  
are still very much alive with us!*