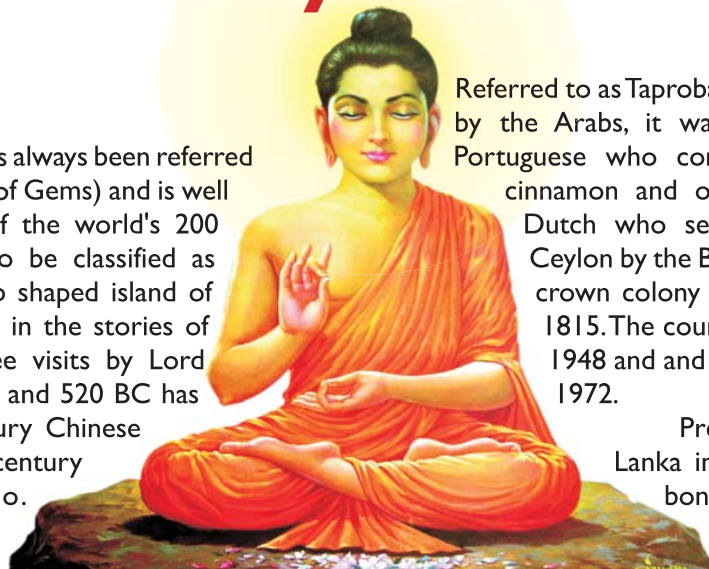




Exploring **Footsteps** of **Ramayana** in Sri Lanka

By Ragasudha Vinjamuri

Sri Lanka has always been referred to as Ratna Dweepa (Isle of Gems) and is well reputed for having 75 of the world's 200 minerals which qualify to be classified as Gemstones. The teardrop shaped island of exotic beauty mentioned in the stories of Sinbad, this land of three visits by Lord Buddha between 528 BC and 520 BC has also impressed 5th century Chinese Monk Fa-Hien and 11th century traveller Marco Polo.



Referred to as Taprobane by Romans and Serandib by the Arabs, it was called as Ceilao by the Portuguese who controlled it from 1505 for cinnamon and other spices, Zeilan by the Dutch who seized control in 1656, and Ceylon by the British who finally established crown colony and controlled it wholly by 1815. The country gained independence in 1948 and adopted its current name in 1972.

Predominantly Buddhist, Sri Lanka interestingly shares a special bond with India geographically,

historically, culturally and spiritually. The epic Ramayana begins with King Dasaradha's Ayodhya in India and climaxes in Ravana's Lankapura.

Millions of years ago, Sri Lanka was said to have been geologically linked with India and other countries in a land-mass called Gondwana and was seismically propelled into a separate landmass while part of it submerged into the sea. This submerging is widely attributed to Ravana's misdeeds.

The following are the sites associated with Ramayana:

Werangantota (located close to Mahiyangana town): The first place where Ravana brings Sita Devi into Lanka in his plane Pushpaka Vimana and holds her captive in queen Mandodari's beautiful palace at Sita Kotuwa (now in Gurulupotha



near Hasalaka Town) before moving her to Ashok Vatika. The palace is said to have been surrounded by streams and waterfalls in a beautiful setting. Werangantota means a place for aircraft landing in Sinhalese language.

The Chariot Path (Ramboda Hills): This is the beautiful route taken by Ravana while relocating Sita Devi to Ashok Vatika. Part of the path is still visible. A pond is believed to have formed by the tears of Sita which has not dried up even during severe droughts when the adjoining rivers do. This area is also unique to



bright coloured Sita flowers which have a peculiar configuration resembling a human figure with a bow.

Sita Eliya and Ashok Vatika (close to Nuwara Eliya city): Sita was held captive in Sita Pokuna at the top of Hakgala Rock jungle. The Hakgala





Gardens located at the base form part of Ashok Vatika.

Istripura (in Welimada area): An area having a network of caves, tunnels and paths, it refers to the place that had retinue of ladies Ravana made available to look after Sita.

Ussangoda (on the southern coast): Lord Hanuman uproots trees and causes destruction to gain Ravana's attention and invite battle. As a punishment, his tail was set ablaze by the rakshasa guards. This is one of the torched areas which hold burnt effect as a reminder of Hanuman's escapade.

Rummasala Sanjeevani Drops (near Galle): Hanuman was summoned to get life-saving



herbs from Sanjeevani Parvatha situated near Mount Kailash in the Himalayas necessary to save unconscious Lakshmana hit by powerful arrows. As Hanuman was not able to identify the herbs, he is said to have uprooted the whole mountain and brought it. Besides here, parts of the mountain fell at 4 other places in Sri Lanka.

Laggala (behind Dunuvila Lake near Matale and Wasgamuwa National Park): The sentry point from where glimpse of Rama's army was sighted and reported to Ravana. Lord Rama shot Brahmastram arrow from Dunuvila which eventually killed Ravana at Laggala.



Divurumpola (near Sita Eliya): The place where Sita Devi performed Agni Pariksha, the test of fire. Villagers still pledge their fidelity or take oaths here. It is noteworthy that even the legal system permits and accepts these oaths at the temple while settling disputes.

Manavari, Tiru Koneshwaram, Tiru Keteshwaram in Sri Lanka and Rameshwaram in India: Ravana was a Brahmin. Killing him results in Brahmahatya Dosham. Upon praying at Muneshwaram and seeking remedy for removing it, Lord Shiva was said to have advised Rama to install and pray at the four Lingas at these places.

Kelaniya Buddhist Temple (near Colombo): Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, ruled this place after being crowned by Lakshmana. Murals are enshrined outside the temple depicting the crowning.