Conserving Sri Lanka’s Heritage

Posted on
The Prestigious Publications Series of the National Trust

The National Trust – Sri Lanka, a non-profit, voluntary organisation that protects the rich cultural and natural heritage of Sri Lanka, commemorates its 10th Anniversary in May this year.

Photographs Isuru Upeksha

Since its founding in 2005 by eminent Archaeologists Prof Senake Bandaranayake and Dr Roland Silva, the National Trust – Sri Lanka has been safeguarding monuments, sculptures, paintings, artefacts, music, dance, fauna and flora of Sri Lanka. That is, those that do not fall under the Archaeology Department and the Central Cultural Fund. The National Trust also functions as the intermediary between these institutions with authority over cultural property and the general public to facilitate better understanding.

More than 40 countries have established similar entities and have joined to form a prestigious international organisation gathering leading professionals from across the world. Its current President is Professor Nimal de Silva supported by a distinguished Board of Trustees all serving in a voluntary capacity.

Among its main functions, the National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts a lecture series on the last Thursday of every month, which has become a popular cultural event drawing a wide and varied audience. Some of the most recent lectures have covered topics such as ‘Excavation and Conservation of the Royal Stupa at Uda Aludeniya (Gampola Period)’ by Prof Nimal de Silva, ‘Maritime Archaeology in Sri Lanka’ by Somasiri Devendra, Malik Fernando and Rasika Muthucumarana, ‘Kovils of Sri Lanka’ by Prof S Pathmanathan, ‘Sri Lankan Heritage: A Gateway to the World Map’ by Dr Gamini Wijesuriya and ‘Cultural Mathematics’ by Prof J B Disanayaka.

> The National Trust also engages in special projects such as the conservation of the Fort at Malwana. And the first stage of conservation has already been completed. Work is also in progress for the preparation of an index of artefacts

In relation to natural heritage, the lectures conducted have included ‘Sri Lanka’s Nature – Red Alert’ by Dr Sriyanie Miththapala and ‘Butterflies’ by Michael Van der Poorten, while on the design side, Archt Tilak Samarawickrema has taken the audience on a voyage of Sri Lankan design. Moreover, there have been lectures on Sri Lanka’s traditional dance and music with live performances. For instance Tissa Abeysekera traced the various strands which form popular Sinhala music of today through live performances by renowned artists such as Ravibandu, Harsha Makalande and Jananath Warakagoda. These performances are available by popular demand on DVD. A lecture on the ‘Evolution of Music in the Sinhala Theatre’ by Dr Jayalath Manorathne (2014) with live performances by Dr Jayalath Manorathne, Mahanama Wickramasinghe, Nissanka Diddeniya, Rathna Lalani Jayakody and Rodney Warakaula is also available on DVD.

Membership fees contribute towards the National Trust as well as individual donations and proceeds from the sale of publications and sponsorships by reputed corporate institutions. The publications made available to the general public make a significant contribution while reaching out to diverse interests. Books available for sale include ‘Birds of Sri Lanka’ by Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne (2008), ‘Heritage Buildings in Sri Lanka’ by Prof Nimal de Silva and Archt D P Chandrasekera (2009), ‘20th Century Painting in Sri Lanka’ by Prof Senake Bandaranayake and Prof Albert Dharmasiri (2009) ‘Archaeology and Photography The Early Years 1868–1880’ by Arch Ismeth Raheem (2009), ‘Coral Reefs of Sri Lanka’ by Nishan Perera (2011), ‘Flowering Plants commonly encountered in Sri Lankan habitats’ by Dr Sriyanie

Miththapala, Dr Siril Wijesundara and Dr Janaki Galappatti (2012), and ‘Maritime Heritage of Lanka: Ancient Ports and Harbours’ edited by Sarala Fernando (2013).

Furthermore, the Seven Arts of Sri Lanka series covers The Sculptures of Tissa Ranasinghe by Neville Weereratne (2013) and ‘The Protection of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Property’ by Justice A R B Amerasinghe (2007). Smaller publications include the ‘Architectural Heritage of Sri Lanka: Fortifications along the Kelani River’ by Archt D P Chandrasekara (2012), and Heritage Day Tours – Volume 1 by Archt Nilan Cooray (2014).

The National Trust also engages in special projects such as the conservation of the Fort at Malwana, of which the first stage has already been completed. Work is also in progress for the preparation of an index of artefacts. The 500 page first volume authored by S Lakdusinghe, former Director General of the Museum will soon be published, and covers the artefacts in several temples in the Gampaha District. Another project is on Lawton’s photographs, which hopes to provide support to the Department of National Archives towards conserving and co piling the first photographic impressions of Sri Lanka in the 19th Century.

The trust conducts a quarterly tour on the last Saturday of February, May, August and November each year for members. The sites are introduced and explained by experts and the Trust publishes a booklet on each tour.

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