

equality, liberty, fraternity has yet to touch the lives of destitute Hindus and Muslims. The Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic celebrates the freedom of those at the top of the heap. Freedom for the slum dwellers is an illusion that hangs before their limited human eyes. They chant:

*When the people are hungry  
Independence is a lie  
Forget caste and creed  
Join the Family of Workers  
Demolish the Parliament of Lies  
It is a false rule.*

The struggle in the critical present is not just one of excavating subaltern histories from beneath the rubble of dogmatism and tyranny. History is canonized in the name of Manu and Mohamed, Bible and Zend Avesta, *Mahabharat* and *Mahawamsa* by god men who carry AK 47, the cyanide capsule, *Bhagavat Gita*, Quran, *Thripitaka*, *Thirukkural* at the same time. As the films amply demonstrate, the hardest struggle is to win back the freedom in the widest sense, in relation to oneself, to one's multiple histories. The marginalized who resist from the margins show courage, which is ultimately a value not of art but of life. The forward march to freedom is no easy battle as the 15th century poet Saint Kabir of the working class makes it abundantly clear:

*Saints. I see  
The world is mad  
If I tell the truth  
They rush to beat me  
If I lie, they trust me  
Hindus claim Ram as the one  
Muslims claim Rahim  
Then they kill each other  
Knowing not the essence  
With prayer beads and caps  
And brows of holy paint  
They lose themselves  
In sacred hymns  
But know not their own souls  
Many holy men I have seen  
Teachers of holy books  
They acquire disciples  
Venerate graves  
But know not god  
The world goes on like this  
And yet they call me  
But Kabir asks  
Who is the one insane?*

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## THE BALANGODA MAN

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**T**he objective of this short essay is the presentation of an outline of the fragmentary prehistoric record of Sri Lanka. Special emphasis will be placed on some selected prehistoric sites found in the Sabaragamuwa Province, the recovered prehistoric hominid remains and the associated material culture.

Based on the present fossil, geological, and genetic data, scientists conclude that the human ancestor, australopithecus, diverged from the ape line about five to six million years ago. The emergence of the anatomically modern humans or *Homo sapiens sapiens*, to which biological category all the people in the world belong to, can be traced back to at least 100,000 years.

Three models compete to explain the origin of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* or officially named as the *Homo sapiens sapiens*. These three hypotheses are known as the multiregional hypothesis, the population replacement hypothesis, and the genetic replacement hypothesis, which is basically a synthesis of the above two hypotheses (Feder and Park 1997: 304-341).

The basic idea of the multiregional hypothesis is that *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved independently in different regions of the world. According to the population replacement hypothesis, *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in a limited geographic area in the world. Afterwards, they migrated from this limited area into other regions of the

world, physically replacing the indigenous groups of archaic *H. sapiens* in these habitats. Genetic replacement hypothesis states that *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in a limited geographic area in the world, migrated from there and mated with indigenous archaic humans in other geographic regions of the world. This migration and interbreeding resulted in modern genes replacing archaic ones.

The present palaeontological, genetic and archaeological data favor the population replacement hypothesis. The dominant narrative in physical anthropology is that the *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in Africa, south of the Sahara, from a local archaic *H. sapiens* population, sometime after 200,000 and before 100,000 years ago. From their place of origin, the newly evolved *H. sapiens sapiens* migrated to other regions of the world and interbred with the indigenous archaic *H. sapiens* of these regions such as, the Neanderthals and other archaic groups in Europe and South West Asia and possibly even with the vanishing *H. erectus* population in South East Asia. Due to some adaptive advantage, moderns replaced the archaics everywhere there was contact between these two groups.

The great chronicle of Sri Lanka, *Mahavamsa*, dated to sixth century AD or somewhat later, or the fifth century AD writings of the Chinese traveler Fa Hsein describe indigenous inhabitants of Sri Lanka as sprits, *yaksas* and *nagas*. These historical sources are conspicuous in lacking any detailed account on these early inhabit-

ants of Sri Lanka. Palaeoanthropological and genetic evidence suggest an early southward movement of modern humans out of Africa, as well as subsequent migrations. We can reasonably assume that Sri Lanka was colonized by hominids from the subcontinent of India during the Pleistocene, the geological time period from about 1.6 million years ago to 10,000 years ago. To date we have not found archaeological or hominid fossil remains that can be dated to an earlier period in Sri Lanka. The landmasses of southeast and west Asia were located too far a distance for prehistoric seafaring to have taken place during the Pleistocene. A drop of ten metres in sea level would have created a land bridge across the Palk Strait. According to Deraniyagala, the most recent severance of such a land bridge took place at 7000 years BP (1992). There are considerable similarities in the cranial morphology between the Vanniyalaye *atto*/Veddas and Indian populations, indexing prehistoric migration patterns.

*H. erectus* was present in the Indian subcontinent by middle Pleistocene. *H. erectus* remains have not yet been discovered in Sri Lanka. The Ratnapura Beds, some of the oldest quaternary deposits in Sri Lanka have yielded an incisor tooth, which has been compared, to *Gigantopithecus* (Deraniyagala 1992:431). The age of this fossil is not yet determined. *Gigantopithecus* is a fossil ape genus that lived from twelve to one million years ago in Asia. It is estimated that *Gigantopithecus* may have been twelve feet tall and weighed 1200 pounds. It is the largest primate known. Site 49 in the Iranamadu formation, the coastal tracks of the semi-arid area of the northern part of Sri Lanka, has yielded artifacts with a postulated date of 75,000 years BP (Deraniyagala 1992). No hominid remains have been recovered from this site. Based on the eight fossil remains at Batadomba-lena, a cave site in Kuruwita, Sabaragamuwa Province, we can state with confidence that anatomically modern humans or *H. sapiens sapiens* were present in Sri Lanka 28,000 years ago (Kennedy and Deraniyagala 1989). The hominid remains found at Batadomba-lena are some of the oldest *H. sapiens sapiens* remains found in the world and the oldest in South Asia.

Apart from Batadomba-lena, fossil remains of Balangoda humans have been recovered from Bellan-Bandi Palassa near Embilipitiya and Beli-lena in Kitulgala. All of these sites are located within the Sabaragamuwa Province. Balangoda humans are anatomically modern humans or *H. sapiens sapiens*. As stated above, the oldest of these remains are dated at 28,000 years BP at Batadomba-lena.

Kennedy and Deraniyagala portray the phenotype of the Balangoda humans in the following manner: "...these (remains) were from populations of a body height of 1,520-1,650 mm with moderate to pronounced cranial and post-cranial muscular-skeletal features, medium-sized permanent molar teeth, prognathic alveolar facial proportions, and low incidence of bone and dental pathological conditions" (1989:396). The morphological traits of the Balangoda humans are most prominent among the Vanniyalaye *atto* population. Kennedy's morphological analysis leads to the conclusion that Vanniyalaye *atto* are the phylogenetic descendents of Balangoda humans (Kennedy et al. 1987).

Balangoda humans were hunters and gatherers. Our reconstruction of the prehistoric subsistence pattern is primarily based on the data from Beli-lena and Batadomba-lena. Faunal evidence from these two cave sites indicates that the Balangoda humans relied on a large variety of small game, especially herbivores, for their protein intake. There were no changes in this broad-based non-specialized subsistence strategy from at least about 28,000 years BP onwards. Evidence for plant foods such as the carbonized shells of the nut *Canarium zeylanicum*, wild breadfruit (*Artocarpus nobilis*) and the remains of the wild banana (*Musa paradisica*) have been recovered from these two cave sites. The general robusticity of the bones of the Balangoda humans indicates balanced nutrition (Deraniyagala 1992:453).

The reconstruction of the prehistoric subsistence technology is a difficult task. Differential conditions of preservation result in a biased picture of the prehistoric subsistence technology. Most often lithic artifacts remain while artifacts made of organic material decay beyond any trace: especially artifacts made of plant material. The earliest traces for a stone tool tradition in Sri Lanka are found in the Ratnapura beds. This is a chopper tradition and tools made of quartz and chert have been found from these beds. The above tradition is commonly known as the Ratnapura Industry. Except for an incisor tooth suspected to belong to a hominoid and a premolar of a hominid, no other hominid remains have been found in association with the Ratnapura Industry.

In the prehistoric record of Sri Lanka as in other regions of the world, there is a tendency for tools to get compact and more refined. The hallmark of the European Mesolithic is the appearance in 10,000 years BP of the geometric microlithic techno tradition. We have unequivocal evidence at Batadomba-lena and Beli-lena, among some other sites, that this particular geometric microlithic techno tradition was well established in Sri Lanka at least from 28,500 years BP onwards (Deraniyagala 1992). Apart from the geometric micro tool component, the Balangoda material culture includes crude choppers similar to those of the Ratnapura Industry, pestles, mortars, hammer stones, pitted hammer stones, grinders, grindstones, and nut stones.

Apart from lithic artifacts, artifacts made of bone, antler and shell are also found in the Balangoda culture phase. Small points made of bone or antler are ubiquitous and these date back to 28,500 years BP at Batadomba-lena. Longer single points, spatula and picks made of the above stated material are also common (Deraniyagala 1992). The specific functions of these tools are hard to infer. Some speculate that these points were used as arrowheads and spatula to scoop out marrow. Apart from the above stated artifacts, digging sticks, celts, amygdaloids, gouges, pestles, and boring instruments made of antler and bone have been recovered at Bellan-Bandi Palassa (Deraniyagala 1958).

We have evidence for controlled use of fire as early as 34,000 years BP at Fa Hsien cave near Bulathsinhala, Kalutara district. It is believed that *patana* grasslands of Uva are anthropogenic. It is assumed that these areas were periodically set on fire to facilitate hunting efficiency during prehistoric times (Deraniyagala 1992).

But conclusive data is yet lacking to substantiate this particular hypothesis. Has the introduction of fire technology led a corresponding shift in the prehistoric demographic structure? Deraniyagala has hypothesized that with the introduction of the fire technology, prehistoric people started to roast or boil their meat and such a cultural practice resulted in the destruction of harmful parasites in the meat and hence, decreased the incidence of parasite disease among prehistoric population (1992: 464-465). Even though there is evidence for controlled use of fire as early as 34,000 years BP, deposits of carbon and calcined bones are scarce and such a condition can lead to a counter hypothesis—prehistoric people in Sri Lanka ate meat raw.

The earliest evidence for personal adornment in Sri Lanka comes from a shell bead dated at 28,500 years BP at Batadomba-lena (Deraniyagala 1992:465). Beads made of bone have also been recovered from Beli-lena. Perforated shells of the tree snail *Acavus* dated at 6,500 years BP at Bellan-Bandi Palassa are also believed to be used as personal adornment. Sri Lanka does not have a rich tradition of prehistoric art. With the exception of pecked drawings on the wall of a cave at Doravaka-kanda, no prehistoric art has been so far discovered in Sri Lanka. Red ochre is found in ritual contexts in prehistory. It is commonly applied by prehistoric people on disinterred bones. In Sri Lanka, only at Fa Hsien cave and Ravanalla cave do we have evidence for the use of red ochre on human bones.

The reconstruction of the prehistoric mortuary practices is based on the data from Bellan-Bandi Palassa, Beli-lena, and Batadomba-lena sites. In all these sites no distinct area for burial/cemetery has been found. Human bones have been discovered from habitation areas along with faunal remains, charcoal and ash. Such an association of human remains (sometimes with cut marks) with kitchen debris such as faunal remains, charcoal and ash has led some archaeologists to suggest cannibalism. But we know from ethnographies on the Vanniyalayc *atto* (Seligmann and Seligmann 1911) that the mortuary rituals of these people were very minimalist. According to the custom, when a person dies, the corpse is left exposed in the cave and the kin group abandons the cave. The cave is reoccupied only after a long lapse of time, when the bones are turning into dust. Once the cave is reoccupied, kitchen debris are dumped only in a limited area rather than throwing it everywhere. Evolution favored hygienically conscious ones! What better place to dump garbage than the preexisting garbage dump—the decaying pile of bones. The lack of complete skeletons in the kitchen debris and the cut marks on partial skeletal remains may be due to the activity of scavengers when the cave was unoccupied. In this light, the association of skeletal remains with kitchen debris does not necessarily lead to the conclusion of cannibalism. There is evidence to indicate that Balangoda humans engaged in a variety of burial practices. They practised flexed burial, where the corpse lied on its side. In the bag burial, the corpse was placed inside a bag of hide or bark. And finally, in fractional burial, a part of the skeleton is buried later after coating it with red ochre (Deraniyagala 1958:82).

## The End of Prehistory and the Beginning of Protohistory

**W**hen does the prehistory end and the protohistory begin in Sri Lanka? We have not yet found in Sri Lanka a transitional zone from pre to protohistory with any degree of clarity. The protohistoric period in Sri Lanka begins at 900 BC, based on the excavations at Anuradhapura citadel. This is known as the early protohistoric period and lasts till 600 BC. This is succeeded by the later protohistoric period from 600 to 250 BC (Deraniyagala 1992).

The distinguishing features of the early protohistoric period are the appearance of the iron technology, rice cultivation, the domesticated horse and cattle, and pottery. In the early protohistoric horizon of the citadel of Anuradhapura, the stone technology is totally replaced by the iron technology without any trace of the former. Iron Age human remains have been found at Pomparippu on the west coast and numerous other sites toward the north of Sri Lanka, most notably at Ibbankatuva near Dambulla. According to Kennedy and Deraniyagala (1989:397), the Iron Age tradition in Sri Lanka shared many stylistic and technological features with Iron Age traditions of India. The question is with which Iron Age traditions of India did the Sri Lankan Iron Age tradition share many stylistic and technological parallels? The answer to the above question will not be without controversy in a country with boiling ethno-nationalist politics. According to some scholars, the Sri Lankan Iron Age culture closely resembles the South Indian Iron Age culture (Goonatilaka 1985).

Who are these Iron Age people? They cannot be the Indo-Aryan speaking Sinhala people who according to the chronicles colonized Sri Lanka during the fifth century BC. The beginning of the late protohistoric period at 600-250 BC and the date of arrival of Vijaya and company as mentioned in the chronicles coincide. According to Deraniyagala, Iron Age people of Sri Lanka can be the Naga ethnic group mentioned in the chronicles who came to dominate the Balangoda humans, who were identified as the *yakkas* in the chronicles (1992). More research on the physical remains of the Iron Age humans is required to properly identify who they were.

In this short essay I have made an attempt to present a brief outline of the fragmentary prehistoric record of Sri Lanka. We believe that *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in Africa sometime after 200,000 and before 100,000 years ago and migrated from their place of origin to other regions of the world and replaced the archaic *H. sapiens* wherever they came into contact due to some adaptive advantage.

Sri Lanka was colonized by hominids from the subcontinent of India during the Pleistocene. Based on the hominid remains discovered at Batadomba-lena in Kuruwita, Sabaragamuwa Province, we can conclude that anatomically modern humans were present in Sri Lanka by 28,000 years ago. These hominid remains are some of the oldest *H. sapiens sapiens* remains found in the world and the oldest in South Asia. This prehistoric *H. sapiens sapiens* population is known as the Balangoda humans and their fossil remains have also been discovered at Bellan-Bandi Palassa near Embilipitiya and Beli-lena in Kitulgala. The phylogenetic descendants of the Balangoda humans are the Vanniyalayc *atto* or Veddas of Sri Lanka.

We have not yet found a transitional zone from pre to protohistory with any degree of clarity in Sri Lanka. Based on the excavations carried out at the citadel at Anuradhapura, protohistory in Sri Lanka begins at 900 BC. Early protohistoric period begins at 900 BC and lasts till 600 BC and the later protohistoric period begins at 600 BC and lasts till 250 BC. The distinguishing features of the early protohistoric period are the appearance of the iron technology, rice

cultivation, domestic horse and cattle, and pottery. Iron Age culture of Sri Lanka had many stylistic and technological parallels with Iron Age cultures of India.

We are still at a loss to identify who those Iron Age humans were. But these champions of civilization were on the island well before the arrival of the Indo-Aryan speaking Sinhala people as mentioned in the historical chronicles.

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## THE MYTH OF ARYANISM

**A**ryanism is much in vogue just now. The whole edifice of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is built round the racial superiority of the Aryan Germanic race. The following definition of Aryanism is from the *Penguin Political Dictionary* compiled by Walter Theimer:

Aryans, a term originating in the science of languages and erroneously applied to the field of racial and national questions. The word "Arya" is Sanskrit, and is the name by which a warlike northern Indian people is described in ancient Indian scripts about 3000 B.C. The name means "lord." It became usual in philological science to speak of an inter-related group of Indian languages as "Aryan". A German scholar, Friedrich Max Muller, who lived at Oxford from 1848 until his death in 1900, invented the theory that the mythological Aryans had not only spoken the primitive Indo-European language from which all present languages of this family (ranging from Hindustani to English) derived their origin, but had even been the Aryan or Indo-European "Urvolk," primitive race. Nationalist and romantic writers in Germany and also England seized upon this idea, and a myth arose of this Aryan descending from the snow-clad peaks of the Pamir and spreading not only over all India and Persia but, more important, across the wide Russian steppes into all Europe to lay the foundation for all future civilization. It was claimed that all speakers of Indo-European languages were descendants of this "Aryan race," to whom extraordinary qualities were attributed. Later research has proved beyond doubt that the Indo-Persian groups of languages, the "Aryan" group in the philological sense, is not the eldest or primitive Indo-European language. Nobody knows what the people who first spoke a language of the family were like, where they lived (except that it was somewhere in Asia) and whether they bore any resemblance to any of the races inhabiting Europe at present. There is no historical proof of any "Aryan" people coming from India to Europe. The Aryan Languages may as well have come to India from Europe, and generally speaking, languages may migrate without a corresponding racial migration. The Romanic elements in the English language were not introduced by a Romanic People but by the purely Teutonic Normans. The people or peoples who brought the Indo-European languages to Europe, wherever their cradle may have stood, need in no wise have been of Indo-European "Aryan" race. Recent studies on the Aryan language of the biblical Hittites have even suggested the idea that the Aryan-speaking Urvolk was Semitic, long nosed and black haired.

Muller recognized his error in later years and wrote a good deal to repeal it. He emphasized that "Aryan" was only a philological term, and meant neither blood nor bones, nor hair, nor skull. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as an Aryan in Europe. The myth, however, has survived its creator and become the principal weapon of Anti-Semitism. Thus, "Aryan" is often merely synonymous with "non-Jewish."

[Courtesy "Kesari" *People's Weekly* of Wednesday 2 July, 1941]

This small essay which appeared in a weekly published in 1941 has, I feel, relevance even today. When going through a few of the contemporary discourses in the publications and letters to the editors, one finds that concepts such as Aryan and Dravidian are used politically and sometimes culturally with disastrous consequences. In this connection I want to take up an issue that was in mind for a long time.

I am somehow intrigued by the fact that intellectuals and university lecturers and others use the word "Dravida" to refer to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. I have been told by knowledgeable sources that the term "Dravida" connotes respect and is used in written Sinhala language as the word "Demala" has connotations of disrespect. I was all the more intrigued when I realized that when referring to Tamils in the English language, "Dravida" is not used but the word "Tamils" is used by the very same people.

Does the word Demala have a history in Sri Lanka?  
Has it connotations of otherness?  
Has it connotations of racial inferiority?

Strangely it is only in Sri Lanka and only among the Sinhalese that the word "Dravida" is used to refer to the Tamils. Dravidian means a group of languages. If the usage is extended to refer to a linguistic groups of people then it should include all those who speak that group of languages such as Malayala, Telugu and Canarese etc.

Tamil is a Dravidian language. Tamils are not Dravidians but speak a Dravidian language.

**Sely Tiruchandran**