

Cultural Tourism Potential in the Northwestern Province of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The Northwestern Province (NWP) of Sri Lanka has a rich cultural and agricultural diversity and is home to all three main ethnic groups as well as all four major religions practiced in the country. The province is largely known for its coconut related industries, besides the rice, vegetable, and fruit cultivations. Fisheries, animal husbandry, and industries, both traditional and modern, further enrich the diversity of the province. Ancient, medieval, and modern heritages showcase the prosperity of a bygone era. The remnants of Portuguese, Dutch, and British are proof to the past colonial rule. The culture in the province has evolved around natural, historical, economic and religious practices. The objective of this paper is to analyze the NWP cultural tourism potential for local and inbound tourists. Secondary data is mainly used for the analysis. Findings suggest that the NWP has a huge diverse, and versatile cultural resource base to meet the requirements of modern inbound and local tourists. Most of these resources are still untapped with regard to cultural tourism.

Key Words: *Cultural Tourism, Heritage, Development, Northwestern Province (NWP)*

1. Introduction

The NWP is one of the nine provinces in Sri Lanka, and it was demarcated as a separate province in 1845 when Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, was under the British.¹ The

¹ The Portuguese and the Dutch managed to control the coastal belt of the island about three and a half centuries. It was only the British in 1815 who succeeded in bringing the entire island under their administration. They began to establish in Ceylon a modern centralized form of government to which they were accustomed in their own country and established a common

total land area of the province, including the inland water areas, is 7,888 km², making it the 5th largest province in Sri Lanka. Administratively, the province is subdivided into two districts: Kurunegala and Puttalam. It is further subdivided into 46 Divisional Secretary divisions and 2158 Grama Niladari (GN) divisions, the country's smallest and lowest administrative division tier. In addition to those administrative divisions, the province has one municipal council (Kurunegala), three urban councils (Puttalam, Chilaw, and Kuliyaipitiya), and 29 Pradeshiya Sabhas. (Ministry of Internal & Home Affairs & Provincial Councils & Local Government, 2018).

Village is the smallest traditional social grouping (traditional clustered human settlement) both in province and the country. Accordingly, a GN division may carry one or more villages most of the time, and the province has 5861 villages. The province has become home to 2,380,861 people, representing 11.7% of the total population of Sri Lanka in 2012. The population density was 308 persons per km² in 2012. Urban, rural, and estate populations in the Kurunegala district stand at 1.9, 97.7, and 0.5, respectively, while figures in their counterpart district -- Puttalam-- are 8.8, 91.0, and 0.2 in 2012 (DCS, 2012).

The provincial GDP was LKR 1,593 billion in 2018, making it the third largest provincial GDP in the country after the Western and Central Provinces. Agriculture contributed 10.5% percent to the provincial GDP, while the contributions of industry and services were 27.2 and 54.0, respectively. (CBSL, 2019). In 2016, the poverty head count, poor population, and contribution to total poverty on the island were 2.7%, and 7.7%, respectively (CDS, 2016). The overall unemployment and youth unemployment rates in the province were 3.7% and 15.2%, respectively, in 2017 (DCS, 2017).

Major agricultural crops in the Northwestern province are coconut, paddy, and other cereals; rubber; root crops; vegetables; fruits; and cashew nuts; while the province is well known for its poultry farming, cattle keeping and fisheries. Major mineral resources of the province are silica sand, graphite, clay, miocene lime stones, and beach mineral sands. The province carries moderately fertile tracks of cultivable lands, inland waters, beaches, and the sea. The industrial sector of the province is strong as it produces cement, dairy foods, textiles, coconut-based products, and cottage industrial items.

The province is among several tourism hotspots including the Western Province, the Central Province, and the North-Central Province. The province also has a vast

system of law for the whole island, bringing all persons under the rule of law and making them all equal in its sight. By 1838 Colombo had become the capital city of the entire Island. At the end of the 19th century, the island had been divided into nine provinces for administrative purposes. See Mendis, pp.5 and 84.

tourism resource base for domestic and inbound tourists, which is untapped. There are a few isolated tourism inbound destinations in locations such as Wennappuwa, Marawila, Kalpitiya and Chilaw. Those destinations basically promote the sun, sea, and sand tourism on the coastal belt of the province. There are other opportunities in the province to develop such tourism products such as rural, agro, culture, and mountain tourism. The hinterlands of the province provide ample opportunities for cultural tourism for both domestic and inbound visitors.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the NWP's cultural tourism potential. The paper focuses on cultural heritages that reflect physical artifacts and intangible societal characteristics. Therefore, areas such as inscriptions, ruins, ancient and medieval temples, visual arts, performing arts and entertainments, sports and games, ceremonies, and cuisines are mainly highlighted.

The concept of culture encompasses all aspects of human life from birth to death in a particular society in the past and the present. The culture in a social grouping includes its beliefs, behavioral pattern, archaeology, ethnography and ethnology, folklore, local dialects, rituals, art, and crafts, building and architecture, technology, attire and ornaments, cuisines, production, exchange, consumption, religious practices, political practices and economic systems. This study emphasizes the ancient, medieval, recent past, and present through material remains and practices of social groupings.

Data for this study is largely collected from secondary sources such as articles, book chapters, books, reports, and web sources. The mixed method is used to analyze the data. The historical monuments and remnants of the province are brought under chronological order as ancient, medieval, and modern periods, while other components of the culture are based on thematic analysis.

The first part of the remaining section starts with the heritage of the ancient period, starting from the 6th century BC to the 13th century AD. The Wijaya-Kuweni saga is important in this section. The other key heritages of the ancient period are Hatthikutchi Monastery, the Ras Vehera Buddha Statue, and the Panduwasnuwara remains of the royal palace and the old monastery. All three are popular tourist destinations in the province's dry region.

The second section explains the heritage of the Medieval period spanning from the 13th century AD to the 19th century AD. It starts with the Dambadeniya kingdom, the first center of administration after the island's civilization shifted from Pollonnaruwa due to the Magha invasion. Thereafter, the other kingdoms: Yapahuwa and Kurunegala, are discussed along with their remnants. Similarly, medieval cave shrines (*Len Vihara*), shrines on pillars (*Tampita Vihara*), native rest houses (*Ambalamas*), Munneswaram and other Hindu temples, the Dutch Fort at Kalpitiya

Peninsula, Robert Knox, the 17th century British open prisoner, the Kaffirs community, Catholic and Christian churches, and temples of deities are discussed.

The third section deals with the Modern period from 1830 onwards. It covers bungalows and rest houses, railroad stations, bridges, and culverts in the province. The fourth part elaborates on the traditional practices, including visual arts, performing arts and entertainments, sports and games, and *ceremonies*.

The fifth section is on the proposed culture and tourism products for the provinces. It consists of the Vijaya-Kuweni trail, ancient religious pilgrimage sites, visiting legacies of the medieval period, the legacies of British rule, and existing traditional practices and cuisines. The last section is the conclusion.

2. Heritage of Ancient Period (6th Century BC to 13th Century AD)

It is a long-standing tradition to account for the history of Sri Lanka as commencing from 544 BC on the basis that Vijaya, the prodigal son of a royal Aryan family in Bengal, north-east India, made a quite unexpected but important arrival on the island (Brohier, 1982). Then there were, legends say, primitive people belonging to three clans. Vijaya captured the throne with the help of a clan queen called Kuveni after eliminating the clan chieftains. He had arrived with seven hundred of his followers and kept close contact with India after settling down in the country (*Mahavamsa*, 1950). This conquest brought a considerable number of people to the island from their ancestral land, possessing admirable skills, knowledge, and culture. The ultimate result of the settlement was to transform the island's society from a primitive into a civilized one (Wimalaratana, 2016 November 10).

There are scholars like G.C. Mendis who in accordance with the popular European model categorize the entire history of the island as ancient, medieval, and modern. They claim that each period has distinct characteristics of its own, even though the division into periods does not always correspond to European chronology (Mendis, 1948). The NWP has an unmatched heritage from the arrival of Prince Vijaya through the ancient, medieval, and modern periods, so that the rest of this work is mainly organized according to ancient, medieval, and modern periods.

In this long period, the kingdom is said to have shifted from its original site of Thammannanuware to Wijithapura, Anuradhapura, Magama, Sigiriya, and Polonnaruwa. The period is considered to have been the heyday of Sinhalese civilization on the island. This period is invariably referred to as the "ancient period," the "Rajarata," or the "Anuradhapura-Polonnaruwa" periods. The civilization of this period was essentially that of the Dry Zone of the country, and the people lived in

isolated villages, produced their own foods and most of their necessities, and depended little on the rest of the country (Mendis, 1948) ².

Kudiramalai: This is an important destination of the ancient period heritage in the province. It is considered as the location where prince Vijaya and his followers landed and rested for a while before they met Princess Kuweni 544 BC. After resting on the shore, they noticed that their palms were a copper colour due to the copper-colored soil. Therefore, they named the island "*Tambapanni*" because of the color. Guneratne (2016) posits that this name is still used by the locals in the area to refer to the location in the NWP.

Brodie (1853) recorded that the first capital of Sri Lanka, built by Vijaya, received the name of Tambapanni, Tammanna Adaviya, or Tammanna Nuwara. It was visible about six or eight miles to the east of Puttalam, where a few rough pillars and slabs scattered at random in a thick jungle were the only remains visible (Brodie, 1853). According to Guneratne (2016), this ancient city is in the northernmost part of the Puttalam district and is within the Wilpattu national park. It is a natural harbour opens into the Gulf of Mannar, then it was world renowned for the pearl banks and was named "Hipporus" harbour by the ancient Greeks.

"During the reign of Emperor Claudius, a Roman tax collector by the name of Annius Placamus was caught up in a storm while in the Red Sea and blown off the coast of Arabia landed at the Kudiramalai harbour. This is believed to be during the reign of King Chandamukasiva. It is possible that Prince Vijaya landed here as well. The Roman historian Pliny mentions about the "Hipporus" harbour and about a settlement in close vicinity to a hill, which is most likely the Kudiramalai Mountain. According to the Bible (Old Testament 1 Kings 10:22) during the reign of King Solomon, (around 1000.B.C.) ships came to Tarshish and took sandalwood, gems, ivory, gold, silver, and peacocks. French Biblical scholar Samuel Bochart is of the view that

² Except for a short spell in the Southern Magama kingdom, the whole civilization and seat of government had been centered in the northern Dry Zone of the country during the ancient period. *Lekam-mitiya* or the Sinhalese registers keep the records of old Sri Lanka's villages and departments. King Pandukabhaya fixed the boundaries of villages in all parts of the country in 437 BC See: Reimers 1928: 18. The political division that existed in the ancient period consisted of *Rājadhāni* or districts under the immediate supervision of the kings, *Janapada* or districts under chiefs, *Nagara* or cities, *Patunugam* or seaport towns, *Gam* or village communities with heads of villages. In addition, there were *Batgam*, villages granted by the king to individuals for special services or as special marks of honor, *Ayagam* villages paid taxes to the king, *Gopalugam* villages were occupied by herdsmen. There were also *Anabim*, pasture grounds, *Dabim*, game preserves, *Vanantara*, forests. see: de Silva 1928:64.

Tarshish was Kudiramalai.” (Guneratne, 2016, p.23).³ Broken bricks, pottery, building materials, and remnants of old buildings can be seen in the area and surrounding areas. Unfortunately, most of the ruins were washed away by frequent high waves.

Kuweni’s Palace at Wilpattu National Park: Princess Kuveni, a descendant of the Royal line of King Ravana, lived in Sri Lanka when Vijaya and his 700 followers landed on the island (Dhammavasa, 2017). She was the first wife of Vijaya, the first king of Sri Lanka and had a son named Jeewahatta and a daughter named Disala. ⁴ Vijaya became the king of Sri Lanka after eliminating all the native chieftains with the support of Kuveni. The legends suggest that Princess Kuveni lived in a palace and ruled Kali Villu, which is the present Wilpattu National Park area. A few rough pillars and slabs in a thick jungle park are all that is visible now. However, no archeological excavations have been done to confirm whether these ruins are of a palace (Guneratne, 2016). Vijaya and his followers eventually chased her away from the place along with two children and married an Indian woman. Legends say that Kuveni committed suicide by flinging herself from the top of the *Yakdessagala* mountain of the NWP leaving behind her two children at *Bambawa* area (presently a village).

Thonigala Rock: The location is also called Lathonigala; its literal meaning is the rock of lamentation. Legends say that Kuveni lamented at the bottom of this rock on the way to her relatives after being evicted from the place by King Vijaya. It is said that she was cursing Vijaya at this location for the unjust deed committed on her. The rock is located close to Anamaduwa town, off Puttalam town. There are two well-known rock inscriptions dating back to the 1st Century BC on the *Thonigal* rock, written in early Brahmi scripts. Those are about a grant of an irrigation tank and village to a Buddhist monastery by a king. The large rock and the protected inscriptions are visible at the location now.

Yakdessagala Mountain: A tourist attraction with a height of over 540 meters can be found in Gonagala, Wariyapola of the NWP. Disillusioned Kuveni returned to her relatives in the Gonagala area to share her grief and dismay with them. Instead, they insulted her and chased her away for conspiring with an outsider to betray the clan.

³ Kuveni is also known as Kuvanna and Sesapathi in the literature. Aborigines of Sri Lanka venerate her, and they use such different names Maha Loku Kiriamma, Indigolle Kiriamma, Unapane Kiriamma, Kande Kiriamma, Divas Kiriamma, Wellasse Kiriamma, Kukulapola Kiriamma and Bili Kiriamma to refer her fondly.

⁴ Claudius’s reign covers 24 January 41 – 13 October 54 AD (13 years and 9 months) and he was born 10 BC and died 54 A.D. (He died at the age of 63 years in Rome, Italy).

Disappointed by the rejection of her own people, Kuveni climbed up to the top of the Yakdessagala mountain, cursed her disloyal husband, and plunged to death.

Tomb of Vijaya: Medagama hill (*Medagama Kanda*) locates just about 6 km south-east from Panduwasnuwara archaeological sites discussed above. At the top of this hill lies ruins of an ancient pagoda (*dagoba*) conserved by the Department of Archeology since 1986. There is a strong belief that this pagoda contains the remains of the King Vijaya. The Department of Archeology carried out carbon dating of the ashes found inside the pagoda during conservation work. Findings suggested that ashes were about 2,500 – 2,600 years old (Amazing Lanka, 2023). The tomb of Vijaya (*Vijaya Sohona*) site can be reached via two routes. One of them is through the *Nikasala* hermitage (*Nikasala Aranya Senasanaya*). The other route is through the Medagama Kanda Rajamaha Viharaya (Pradeepa, 2019).

Hathtikutchi Monastery: *Hathtikutchi*, or *Eth Kus Wehera* (an elephant stomach-shaped pagoda), is a 300-acre archaeological site dating to the 4th–3rd centuries BC. The name of the location has been given due to a large rock resembling an elephant's stomach. Now it is visible in the middle of the ruins. Archaeological evidence suggests that the site was built by King Devanampiyatissa (307-287 BC), who oversaw the proselytization of Buddhism on the island. The exiled King Sirisangabo (251-253 AD) offered his own head to a passing passenger at this site to save the innocent people of the kingdom.⁵ This archeological site is located close to Galgamuwa town in the Kurunegala District.

Rock-Cut Ras Vehera Buddha Statue: It is also known as Sasseruwa 33m height standing Buddha, carved out from a huge granite. This 2nd century statue is somewhat akin to the famous Avukana standing Buddha statue located just 11 km from this site.⁶ The statue is an incomplete yet fantastic artwork. The robe of Buddha, one ear,

⁵ Siri Sangabo was a highly devoted Buddhist monarch who ruled the Anuradhapura kingdom during 252-254 BC period. The saint like monarch never violated Buddhist principles as explained in the doctrine for personal comfort. His chief minister rebelled against him as he knew the weak point of the king. Siri Sangabo abdicated the throne by himself to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and lived as an ascetic in Haththikutchchi without divulging his identity. The chief minister, the new king, announced a big reward for the head of the former king to deter a possible future risk. Several innocent individuals had been killed by greedy soldiers and others to claim the reward. A passing peasant disclosed what was happening in the kingdom while partaking his lunch parcel with the ascetic one day. The ascetic divulged his identity to the peasant and asked him to take his head and claim the reward. The historical records suggest that ascetic decapitated his head by himself for this purpose. See Wimalaratana, W and Silva, DAC (2004)

⁶ Legends say that Ras Vehera and Avukana Buddha statues are results of a competition between teacher (guru) and pupil (gola). The teacher carved out the Aukana image and the pupil made the Ras Vehera one. Both agreed that the first one to accomplish his job had to

ornament above the head and pedestal are not complete. This is an archaeological site cum temple consisting of a pond, ruins of pagodas, painted caves, inscriptions, moonstone, and a sacred Bo tree (fig tree) planted by king Devanampiyatiss (250-210 BC).

Panduwasnuwara: It is located 27 km away from the Kurunegala city. The roots of this ancient city can be traced back to the reign of the first king of Sri Lanka, Vijaya. This sub kingdom was first built by Upatissa, the chief minister of Vijaya in the 6th century.

This subkingdom was also known as Parakrampura of Dhakshinadesha (South Country) while it was ruled by Parakramabahu the Great (1123–1186), a sub-king of the region, before he moved to Pollonnaruwa as the monarch of the country. The ruins of the site are scattered across 20 hectares and the main attractions among others are monasteries, a palace, shrines, pagodas, living quarters for priests, carved pillars, guard stones, inscriptions, moats, and brick ramparts.

3. Heritage of Medieval Period (13th century AD to 19th Century AD)

This period runs from 1235 AD until the whole island became a British colony in 1815. The invasions from southern India and the civil wars forced the Sinhalese rulers to leave their ancient irrigation civilization in the northern parts of the country and to establish themselves in the south-west, the "wet zone," of the island, which was the least developed area during the ancient periods. This is sometimes considered the dawn of the medieval period of the island's history (Mendis, 1948). The power of the Sinhalese monarchy was greatly reduced with the shift to the south-west, and several princes began to control the various parts of the island (Rajaratnam, 1961). Throughout this period, except for a brief interlude during the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1412–1468), the country had more than one monarch. It was during this period that the strengthening of feudal bondage, the decline of ancient prosperity, the mushrooming of small kingdoms, and the European invasions took place.

Dambadeniya Kingdom: This kingdom lasted from 1232 to 1293 AD, just over six decades. Several kings reigned in this kingdom beginning with King Vijayabahu the Third, and he built the fortress in the kingdom. The visitor will enjoy seeing the remains of the fortress, palace, temple of the tooth, six ponds, granite staircases to the

notify it to the other by ringing a bell. The teacher finished the job earlier and signalled it by ringing the bell. The pupil stopped his work once he had heard the bell without finishing the work as he lost the competition.

top of the rock, and paintings and images of the temple at the bottom of the rock. The site is located just 26 Km away from Kurunegala city.

Yapahuwa Kingdom: A short-lived citadel built by King Buwenakaba (1273-1284 AD) in the aftermath of a South Indian invasion on a massive, 90-meter-high rock boulder in flat land. The medieval period Buddha statues, remains of a pagoda, a tooth relic house, caves used by priests, paintings, carved staircases leading to the top of the rock, moats, ramparts, and a lion stone sculpture are great attractions for the visitors. The site is located close to Maho city in Kurunegala district.

Kurunegala Kingdom: Kurunegala, the current capital of the Northwestern Province, is also alternatively known as Hathi Shayla Pura, Athugal Pura, and Ethagala due to the elephant-shaped rock (the city of Elephant Rock) in the middle of the city. As the capital of the island, this kingdom was ruled by five kings. The main ruins of the kingdom are a stone staircase leading to the top of the rock and nearby old tanks.

Medieval Cave Shrines (*Len Vihara*): A cave is a natural chamber protected by an overhanging rock from rain and other natural forces, as well as from creatures. Sometimes drip lines are carved to keep the interiors dry. These chambers were converted into Buddha image rooms as well as living quarters for Buddhist priesthoods in the ancient and medieval periods in Sri Lanka. In addition, some of the caves were dedicated to local deities. One of the most famous cave temples dedicated to Buddha in Sri Lanka is located at Dambulla (1st century BCE), in the Central Province. The Northwestern Province has nearly a hundred such medieval cave chambers with images, murals, paintings, and carved wooden entrances (Sugathananada & Sumana, 2018).

Medieval Shrines on Pillars (*Tampita Vihara*): A Buddha image house hanging on raised rock pillars, usually not more than 3 or 4 feet in height, is referred to as a "*Tampita Viharaya*" (shrine on pillars). Pillars are in an exposed state, and the chamber built on them carries a wooden platform and wattle walls supporting a timber-framed roof. The inner walls are decorated with murals and paintings, and the inner chamber is for Buddha images. The roof is two-pitched and covered with flat tiles. One entrance with a carved, thick door frame with decorated doors and a wooden ladder are common features. There are some occasions where such shrines have narrow verandas encircling the main courtyard. The medieval *Tampita Viharayas* are visible in some parts of the island, even though most of them are in the Northwestern Province. It is maintained that there are nearly 50 such shrines visible in this province (Sugathananada & Sumana, 2018).

Medieval Native Rest Houses (Ambalama): Ambalama is used to refer to a simple structure meant as a resting place for those who were passing the village. It is mostly used by peddlers, travelers, and those who are on pilgrimages through perilous footpaths. It was built and maintained by villagers, and resting facilities were provided free of charge. The *Gam Sabhava* (village tribunal) is also assembled in Ambalama. The famous 13th-century Panavitiya Ambalama is located near Dambadeniya, on the road between Dambadeniya and Naramamala.

Most males spent their free time in the *ambalama* discussing matters pertaining to agriculture and court affairs. Transport and communication in the countryside were very limited, and it was not found necessary to develop those facilities (Wimalaratana, 2000). There are three more *amabalamas* located in Karagahagedara, Delvita and Katupilagolla in the NWP (Sugathananada & Sumana, 2018).

Munneswaram and other Hindu Temples: This temple complex is in Munneswaram village, a mixed community neighbourhood of Sinhalese and Tamils in Chilaw city. It has existed for at least 1000 years, although legends suggest that its roots go back to King Rama of India. There are five temples in the complex, including its Buddhist temple. The central temple is dedicated to the god Shiva, and others are dedicated to Ganesha, Ayyanayake, and Kali. Annual festivals of the temples are conducted in August–September.

In addition to the above temple, there are many other Hindu temples both in Kurunegala and Puttalam districts. Among others, the Sri Muththumari Amman Temple of Mawatagama, the Sri Selva Vinayagar Temple of Kurunegala, the Sivan Temple of Rajakandaluwa, the Sri Thirowpathai Amman Kovil of Mundel, and the Sri Raakkurushi Amman Kovil of Mundel are well known (Kiriella, 2019 October 05).

Dutch Fort at Kalpitiya Peninsular: In 1544, the Portuguese invaded the Kalpitiya area and built a chapel and maintained a small garrison. In 1659, the Dutch captured the area from the Portuguese. This fort was built by the Dutch during the 1667–1676 period while they were controlling certain coastal areas of the island. The fort is four meters high and built with coral and limestone gathered from the area. It is maintained that the yellow bricks at the entrance were brought from Holland. In 1795, it was captured by the British. A church, a large hall, two old wells, and two blocked tunnels are still visible inside the fort (Explore Sri Lanka, 2019 July 10).

Robert Knox, the 17th Century British Open Prisoner: Robert Knox was an English sea captain employed by the British East India Company. He was taken prisoner by the men of the Sinhalese king while he was on shore with another fourteen people, including his father, after their ship had dropped anchor in Trincomalee's natural harbor, the Eastern Ceylon, after being damaged in a storm. He lived as an

open prisoner (1660–1681) of the Kandyan kingdom and mostly lived at Bandarakoswatte, close to Wariyapola town in Kurunegala District. His father died nearly one year after the captivity. Knox's book, 'An Historical Relation of Ceylon' written with the help of his cousin, Rev. John Strype, after his return to England, was first published in 1681. The book was an immediate success, and Dutch, German, and French translations soon followed. Knox lived in the Kandyan kingdom as a villager for nearly twenty years. (Hulugalle 1976: 106–107). The visitor can first read Knox's *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* to get a sense of 17th-century culture in Sri Lanka, and then visit Bandarakoswatte, the village where he lived, to understand the cultural changes that have occurred in the society since that time.

Kaffirs Community in Sri Lanka: In Portugal, black Africans were called *Negros* and *Pretos* even though they had borrowed the Arabic term *Cafre* when they came to the East. The Dutch and the British used its adapted version, *Kaffirs* or *Kaffers*, and the Sinhalese and Tamils used it as *Kaapiri* and *Kaapili* respectively. They were first brought to the island in small numbers during the Portuguese period to work as mercenary soldiers, domestic laborers, and to do other menial tasks as needed. The Dutch and British also brought some other Kaffirs, again in small numbers (Arachchige, 2017). All three European nations involved in the rule of the island employed Kaffirs in one way or another. At the same time, some of them defected to the Sinhalese controlled areas during the Portuguese and Dutch periods. There were 255 *Kaffirs* on the island in 1921, and 155 of them were in the NWP (Puttalam District had 135). The others were living in the Western, Southern, Central, Northern, and Eastern Provinces (Jayasooriya, 2008). The *Kaffir* concentration, numbering twenty-five families, is now visible in Sirambiadya in Puttalam District. They still perform their inherited music and dance. Their traditional dance, the *kaffiringa*, and songs are in Portuguese Creole, a mix of Portuguese and Swahili. Two drums, tambourines, metal spoons, coconut shells placed on a wooden box, and an empty bottle with coins completed their musical instruments (Saldin, 2011).

Catholic and Christian Churches: Sri Lanka received direct European cultural influence, including Christianity, with the arrival of the Portuguese in Colombo in 1505. They established a chapel in the same year and spread the new religion mostly in the coastal belt of the island. The coastal belt of the Northwestern province received much influence not only from the Portuguese but also from the Dutch and the British, in that order. The churches built in the 17th century in Wennappuwa, Marawila, Chilaw, and Puttalam testify to the emerging European culture along with Christianity. There are many beautiful and well mainlined churches along the coastal belt of Puttalam district as well as the hinterlands of the same district and Kurunegala district.

Temples of Deities: There are Sinhalese, Tamil, Buddhist, and Hindu and Veddha deities either locally or nationally believe by some people. There are even female deities, even though most deities are male. Four deities—Vishnu, Saman, Kataragama, and Vibhishana—are regarded as the guardians of Buddha-sasana (Buddha's doctrine and practice) on the island.

4. Modern Period Since 1830

Britain successfully captured the entire island in 1815, paving the way for the country's modern era. Sri Lanka's economy was basically still overwhelmingly feudal in nature, so economic stagnation continued in the country until the 1830s, when the gradual success of coffee culture revolutionized the economy (de Silva, 1977). It is from this point in history that the decay of the medieval economy becomes most apparent (Vandendriesen, 1960). The 1840s were a period of progress and the beginning of economic diversification (Karunatilake, 1971). The expansion of the coffee plantations in the country from the 1840s to the 1870s created profound changes in the economy and society of the island. New towns, roads, bridges, and the sheltered port of Colombo came on the rising tide of the coffee culture; and a banking system, engineering workshops, hotels, department stores, and a flood of imported goods followed. (The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce). The modern 'export economy' was fully established in the country before the end of the nineteenth century with the growth of the coffee industry (Corea, 1975). The coconut plantation expanded into large, medium-sized, and large-scale estates during the British period in the NWP. A new production, distribution, processing, and exporting culture emerged because of the coconut cultivation. In many parts of the NWP, modernization forces have infiltrated even the villages.

Bungalows: There are many bungalows built during the British period, even though a few of them date back to the pre-British period. Mathawa Bungalow (Kandy Period); Madampe, Gadigamuwa, and Puttalam Bungalows (Dutch Period); Government Agent Residence of Kurunegala, Rajapihilla Rest House of Kurunegala, Mahabaddegama, Pannala, Dodangahapitiya, Katuwapitiya, Malagamuwa, and Giriulla Bungalows (British Period).

Rest Houses: There were no restaurants or hotels when Europeans arrived on the island. When the British officials travelled in the hinterland, they did not have facilities for refreshments, meals, and accommodation, so British rule established restaurants throughout the country. There are several such old restaurants still visible in the NWP.

Special accommodation facilities were developed for migrant Europeans in Sri Lanka, especially in the hinterlands, as there were no such facilities for travelers except in *Ambalamas* on the island. As places for travelers to rest for the night, they

were developed by the British colonial administration by extending the network for travelling officials begun by the Dutch. Rest houses were usually built in superb locations, each within a day's horseback ride of one another (Ellis, 2010). The Dutch administration started rest houses in the coastal belt, and the British administration expanded those facilities to be close to important locations, especially in every small city center that emerged during the period.

5. Traditional Practices

In any society, traditional practices and customs are ingrained and have evolved for centuries. People have practices and beliefs that are learned since birth and passed down from generation to generation. Traditional practices and customs are fundamentally creative aspects of the achievements of any civilization. The NWP province has its own unique practices in addition to the common practices on the island.

Visual Arts: The scope of this area encompasses craft, architecture, sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, filmmaking, graphic design, fashion design, fashion, and decorative arts. Traditional drums and other musical instruments; coconut and palmyra leaf based traditional products; clay and wood based traditional products; cane and bamboo-based products; traditional handloom products; lacquer products, coconut shell and timber-based products; aquatic grass-based products, etc. are practised and visible in the NWP.

Performing Arts and Entertainments: The theme of performing arts covers a range of disciplines such as music, dance, theatre, and circus. The province is home to folk lore, folk dance, and folk music; traditional healing practices (such as Kem); and traditional dance rituals (such as Shanthikarma, Yaksha Pelapali, Kohomba Kankariya, Bali Shanthikaramaya, Gammadu, Pandam Dolaha, Devatha Pasdena Pideeme Shanthi Karmaya, and Sarwadosha Niwarana Shanthikarmaya) are still visible in NWP.

Sports and Games: Physical activities are involved with games and sports. There are plenty of traditional as well as modern such activities in the province. Puttalam district, especially the coastal belt, is famous for soccer, *Elle*, volleyball, etc. at the school level as well as at the club level. Similarly, at the school and club levels, Kurunegala district is well-known for cricket, *Elle*, netball, and *Angampora*. During the traditional new year period of the second half of April, many traditional games are played.

Ceremonies: The most important ceremony, which is widely celebrated in the province, is the Sinhala-Hindu traditional new year, falling in the middle of April. It carries both secular as well as religious components, though the former is more

dominant. It is a cluster of ceremonies and sports, so nearly a week-long celebrations are held.

Vesak (Buddha Poornima) is celebrated grandly in the province on the full moon in May, with many decorations, observing precepts at temples, giving food and blood donations, lighting candles, and illuminating religious places as well as city centers and private houses. Going on pilgrimages, singing carols, and participating in religious processions are some of the other important aspects of the ceremonies. Two-to-three days are set aside for the ceremonies, depending on the attraction of the location.

A similar function is held the following month, on the full moon day, to commemorate the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka by the son of Indian Emperor Ashoka. In addition, on every full moon day, there are small gatherings and ceremonies visible at Buddhist monasteries. A few Buddhist monasteries also host processions or pageants at various times of the year. More religious ceremonies are visible during and at the end of the Buddhist priests' retreat period of the year.

There are numerous household-level ceremonies, ranging from conceiving and delivering children to first feeding, first hair cutting, first time reading letters, puberty, traditional weddings, new house construction, burials, and cremations, transferring merits to departed ones, and ceremonies related to fresh rice harvest, among others.

Cuisines: There is a rich and diverse culture of cuisine in the province. It has been shaped by historical, cultural and external factors. More traditional vegetable varieties and delectable fish-based cuisines can be found in Kurunegala and inner Puttalam districts. The coastal belt of the Puttalam district is famous for meat and fish-based cuisine with Portuguese and Dutch influence, especially among Christian communities. Similarly, the Hindu and Muslim communities in the province practice their own delicious cuisine.

Rice and curry together are considered the staple diet in the province, although there are also different types of yams, bread, hoppers, string hoppers, and flat bread (rotti and parata) made from wheat flour as well as finger millet flour that are available in the province. As a centuries old practice, when dishes are prepared, coconut milk, coconut oil, and lots of spices are added. Kee Rotti, a kind of dessert made from rice flour, coconut milk, and sugar; Thelkola Embula, a kind of creeping green leafy vegetable; yellow-colored coconut salad, a kind of half boiled grated fresh coconut with spices to eat with string hoppers; and baby cashew nut curry are unique cuisines mainly confined to the province.

6. Cultural Tourism Products for NWP

Cultural tourism encompasses archaeological sites, culinary activities, events, or heritage sites such as monuments and religious venues such as monasteries, temples, and churches. Any culture creates its own authenticity and distinctiveness for the visitor. Cultural tourism arouses tourists' desires to discover, learn about, and enjoy the tangible and intangible cultural assets offered in a destination.

Vijaya-Kuweni Trail: Tambapanni, now Kudiramalai, is a cape on a mountain range in the Wilpattu National Park. It is an ancient port town located on the northernmost west coast of the park. The distance from Colombo to this location is approximately 180 kilometers. It takes nearly four hours and 30 minutes to travel from Colombo to Kudiramalai; from Puttalam, it is one hour and 10 minutes. There is one hotel in Kudiramalai and many hotels in nearby towns, including Vankalai, Nanattan, Kovvankulam, Mannar, Puttalam, Mahawewa, and Negombo.

The legends suggest that Princess Kuveni lived in a palace and ruled Kali Villu, which is in the present-day Wilpattu National Park area. A few rough pillars and slabs in a thick jungle park are all that are visible now. The location is one hour's drive from Kudiramalai (Wijesinghe, 2019 October 7).

Thonigala Rock, where Kuveni lamented on the way to her relatives after being evicted from the place by King Vijaya. The distance from Puttalam to Thonigala is 24 km, and the travel time is 30 minutes. The travel time from Wilpattu to Puttalam is 1 hour, and the distance is 52 km.

Records suggest that disappointed by the rejection of her own people, Kuveni climbed up to the top of the Yakdessagala mountain, cursed her disloyal husband, and plunged to her death. The distance from Puttalam to Yakdessagala is 79 km, and the travel time is 1 hour and 45 minutes, depending on the traffic congestion.

The tomb of Vijaya is located at Medagama Hill in Paduwasnuwara, just 6 km away from the Paduwasnuwara archaeological site. The distance from Puttalam to this location is about 74 km, and the travel time is around 1 hour and 40 minutes.

It will take a traveler nearly 3 days to cover the Vijaya-Kuweni trail if he covers Wilpattu National Park and climbs up to Yakdessagala. Accommodations, resting places, and quality food supplies are available in and around the cities and on the way for the traveler. Colombo-Puttalam, Kurunegala-Puttalam, Anuradhapura-Puttalam, and Mannar-Puttalam are the key access roads to the Vijaya-Kuweni trailer.

The Wilpattu tour, including Kudiramalai and Kuweni Palace, is either a one-day or half-day tour. The visitor can select either a private or group safari, which is provided by the private tour operators in Wilpattu. A half-day tour is also available, but it will not be sufficient for the traveler to get the best value for his money, so it is better to

go for a one-day tour. Visitors should leave their hotels in Negombo, Chilaw, Puttlam, or Anuradhapura early in the morning. The Wilpattu Park is open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Ancient religious pilgrimage sites: The roots of Panduwasnuwara date back to the reign of the first king of Sri Lanka, Vijaya, in the 6th century BC. The distance from Colombo to Panduwasnuwara is a little over 100 kilometers via the Katunayake expressway, or nearly one and a half hours of travel time. It will take nearly three hours to cover the site. From there to Haththikutchchi, it takes nearly one and a half hours, and the distance is nearly 70 kilometers. The visitors will find many ancient ruins in this location. The distance from Haththikutchchi to Sasseruwa or Ras Vehera is about 24 kilometers, and the visitor will take forty minutes to reach the site from Haththikutchchi. The site is in Kudakathnoruwa village. It is an attractive, scenic place with a colossal granite Buddha statue and a pond nearby. It will take an hour and a half to cover those three sites. There are a few hotels, restaurants, and resting places close to each site in the region.

Visiting legacies of medieval period: The medieval period roughly extends from the 13th century AD to the dawn of the 19th century AD. The ruins of Dambadeniya Palace and the nearby royal temple are important to the visitor. The distance is nearly 75 kilometers via the Katunayake expressway. It will take nearly 4 hours to cover all sites. The distance from Dambadeniya to Yapahuwa is nearly 67 kilometers. The visitor will need 5 hours to see all the ruins at this site. Panavitiya Ambalama is on the way from Dambadeniya to Yapahuwa, nearly 9 kilometers. One hour would be sufficient to cover this important location. One day is sufficient to visit all three locations if the visitor leaves Colombo early in the morning.

From Colombo to Munneswaram, the distance is 86 Km. Just one hour is sufficient to visit this Hindu temple. From there to Kalpitiya, this distance is 89 Km. It is a tourist peninsula with an attraction and developed facilities for inbound tourists. Medieval shrines on pillars, and cave shrines are scattered in several locations in the province. Medieval Catholic churches as well as mosques are also visible in the province.

Visiting the legacies of British rule: The visitor will pass through the coconut groves of the province for most of the travel time, except for the northern dry areas of the province. While traveling the province, he will come across the bungalows built during the British period, and most of them have been converted to hotels and restaurants now. Similarly, there are British period rest houses, administrative buildings, and railroad stations scattered throughout the province.

Experiencing the Traditional Practices and cuisines: There are villages in the province famous for visual arts, performing arts, and entertainments. However, the visitor can see sports and games, ceremonies, and cuisines that are widely available throughout the province during different seasons. In more remote areas, the visitor may find traditional practices in pristine form to a great extent, although modernization forces have changed many characteristics for a considerable period in the past.

7. Conclusion

The NWP Province has a huge, untapped cultural resource base that can be promoted among locals and inbound tourists to develop the provincial economy. The community-based cultural tourism products will generate new livelihoods for educated people and markets for local products. Similarly, there will be demand for transportation, accommodations, and local products. There is a possibility to tie up cultural tourism with other tourism products such as rural tourism, mountain tourism, wellness tourism, agritourism and spiritual tourism. The overall economic implications by way of creating new jobs, investments, demand for local products, etc. will be high if overlapping tourism products are promoted.

With regard to cultural tourism, the Vijaya-Kuweni trail, which deals with popular stories about the origins of Sri Lankan society, will be in high demand among local tourists. This tourism product will certainly overlap with the adventure, mountain, and rural tourism products as the Vijaya-Kuweni trail passes through forests, sanctuaries, rural areas, mountains, etc. The inbound tourists will be interested in experiencing the traditional practices such as ceremonies, cuisine, visual arts, etc.

It is possible to introduce a few more packages reflecting the different cultural aspects of the province. Three specific tourism attractions would be ancient, medieval, and modern period related packages. Similarly, products related to NWP cuisines, ceremonies, and religious places can also be promoted. Many tourists do not have sufficient knowledge about the culture and tourism resources inherited by the province.

The major local and inbound tourism flows, such as those to Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Habarana, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, and Jaffna, pass through the province mainly by roads and rail roads. Still, the province has not exploited its vast tourism potential in general or its cultural tourism potential. Now, a few private tour operators are promoting cultural tourism in the province in a small way. Similarly, various volunteers and organizations offer limited web-based information to prospective visitors. A concerted effort, however, has not been taken officially, either at the national or provincial level, to promote tourism in the province.

The promotion of tourism, including cultural tourism, will bring a welcome relief to the province by way of generating employment and livelihoods and improving the tax revenue of local governments, the Pradeshiya Shaba, and the provincial council. Household income in the province will increase directly and indirectly, and it will increase the standards of living while reducing poverty. Interactions with the tourists will open doors for the local people to explore new economic opportunities within their neighborhood. The expansion of tourism will help increase the provincial GDP as well. The dependency on government subsidies will also go down with the growth of new economic opportunities. There will be negative implications such as environmental degradation, growing crimes, and erosion of local cultural values if the industry is not properly managed.

Cultural tourism potential in the province is basically in rural areas. This potential showcases the heritage, old structures, traditions, rituals, cuisines, values, and lifestyles of rural communities. A participatory approach in cultural tourism has more potential for promoting it in rural areas. Communities in the countryside still guard their cultural heritages, so participation in local societies can be considered a step toward the realization of self-reliant sustainable development and a reasonable distribution of economic opportunities among tour operators and local communities. Participatory planning to promote cultural tourism builds trust between policymakers, tour operators, and community members. This trust can be considered a steppingstone for future tourism development in rural Sri Lanka.

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