

## **Changing Landscape of Kandy**

A.S.M. Nawfhal

*Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

### **Introduction**

The planning process of Kandy is continuing, the road frontages as well as the buildings that are listed as heritage monuments are on the verge of destruction or being defaced with modern architecture. Some buildings have already been demolished. Except the Esala Perahera, many other cultural events like Kandyan dance and handicrafts are losing their heritage value as a result of urbanization and modernization. Consequently, the entire city is under the threat of losing its heritage importance. This is a very unfortunate situation in view of the fact that every element of the city has been designed to illustrate the legacy of royal patronage extended to Buddhism for the purpose of maintaining the supremacy and the legitimacy of the rulers of the past.

### **Methodology**

Through a literature survey, a profile of the historical landscape was extracted. Data and information were collected from relevant authorities involved in planning and implementation process of the city. A comprehensive questionnaire survey was conducted to collect information from the occupants of 24 randomly selected buildings named as heritage buildings by the KMC. Additionally, samples from haphazardly developed shops were also taken into consideration. The spatial data and information of the city were processed by employing GIS technology to develop models of the lost heritage.

### **Changes in cityscape**

Kandy city has gone through several phases of change in its physical and cultural landscape. After the establishment of the Kingdom, the city was made the capital by its first king in 1592. The city landscape had been laid out by taking account of the physical features, security requirement, and also the social hierarchy of the kingdom. The cityscape at that time was unique because of the grid street layout of the city which is still visible. In addition to the Maligawa complex there were other monuments within the landscape of the sacred

area. During the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch, the city was destroyed by arson more than four times.

The British changed the face of the city by constructing buildings such as 06 schools, 05 churches, 06 company buildings, and hotels. Some old residences were changed for their administrative or trade functions. The prison complex located within the core of the city is a miniature of a fortress in Europe. In the post independence period, many houses and buildings were built in the core area without proper planning. As a result, the city centre and its surrounding areas have buildings that are not in harmony with the cityscape or not compatible with the heritage buildings.

After opening 4 main arterial roads, the flow of commodities to the city from outside increased rapidly, and it became a multi-functional urban centre. Administrative functions of missionary activities, trade or commercial functions, transactions related to tea and other local produce were expanded. British companies established their branches, hotels and restaurants, where liquor was served. Consequently, the cultural impact of the British was severely felt. All these converted the religio-political environment of Kandy into a commercial one in central Sri Lanka. The British however, preserved some of the cultural monuments like the Temple of the Tooth relic and its peripheral and traditional functions like the Perahera.

The changes that have taken place in the recent past are reflected by large shopping complexes, under-passes, commercial and bank buildings, car parks, new roads, school buildings, and other new structures. Further changes have begun to take place along new roads. The result of all these obviously change the heritage and cultural values of the façade of the road.

Kandy was declared a World Heritage city by virtue of the fact that it possesses rich cultural mixed historic buildings, monuments, structures and living traditions of the past. This can be observed from the list of 440 buildings comprising old houses, business places, office

buildings and monuments in the core/built up area gazetted by the government. A systematically demarcated zoning plan has also been gazetted to control the pressure on land use. The need also has been recognized to protect paddy lands, unstable lands, stream and road reservations. These measures are expected to minimize the damage to the existing landscape.

The challenges ahead for Kandy city can be considered in terms of this increasing demand for services, controlling traffic, waste management and minimizing natural disasters. In order to protect and safeguard the city and its socio-cultural heritage from the internal and external pressure or modernization, careful planning is required.