



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA
THURSDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Ancient Irrigation in Sri Lanka: Some Issues Pertaining to Cascade Systems, their Origins and Functional Linkages

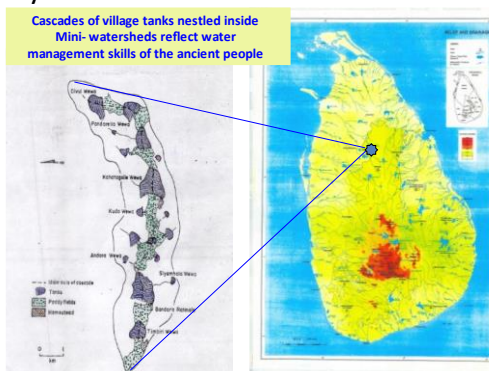
The 138TH Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust will be delivered online on **Thursday 30th September 2021 at 6.00 pm.** by Prof. C M Madduma Bandara.

Link to lecture: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88627928606>

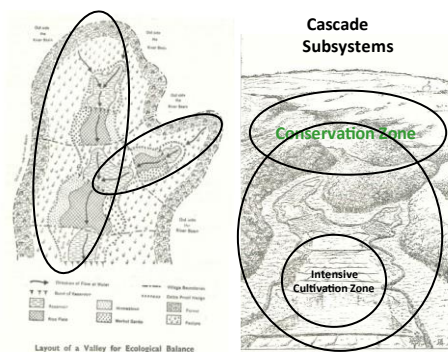
The origins of irrigation in Sri Lanka are deeply buried in the blurred earliest periods of history, except for some glimpses from folklore and the imaginative narrations of historic chroniclers. Whether irrigation, like most other forms of Islandic culture traits had reached here from *jambudweepa* or whether they have evolved themselves independently, continues to remain debatable and often unresolved. As an Island, Sri Lanka inevitably falls within the aura of the macro cultures of the Indian sub-continent. Even so as in other spheres of eastern cultures, whatever that reached this Island from outside have undergone significant transformations to suit its land, climate, and long periods of living experience. In general, it may be conceded that, studies in this vast field could so far unravel only a minute proportion of the marvels and mysteries that remain unexplored, despite the seminal contributions made by reputed scholars such as Bell, Brohier, Parker and Kennedy. These early studies were further enriched by local scholars of similar stature like Paranavitane, Gunawardhana and a few energetic writers of the present generation.

Madduma Bandara in his countless journeys through the geography and history of the Island, ventured into less trodden fields such as small village tank systems and their associated ecological settings, and could not but marvel on how such systems continued to exist for amazingly long periods of history, and in some cases how such man-made structures have been adopted by nature and even become part of nature itself. He thought about the ultimate goals, philosophies, and cosmic views of those who created and contributed to create these stupendous irrigation structures. Influenced by scientific and quantitative research in Cambridge and other leading seats of learning in the West, led him to introduce the seminal concept of small village tanks and their organization into 'cascade systems' and their wider ensembles, that gained international recognition since the mid-1980s.

This conceptual approach attracted new definitions and dimensions largely due to the efforts of a succession of reputed scholars whose collective efforts have resulted in declaring these village tanks cascade systems as a World Heritage under the 'Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems' (GIAHS) by the FAO.



Bandara Rathmale- A Village Tank Cascade System Near Mihintale:



A Pictorial Configuration of Inter-connected tanks

Prof. C M Madduma Bandara was educated at Peradeniya and at the University of Cambridge, England. At Cambridge he specialized in Land Water Interactions and obtained his Doctoral Degree in 1971. He was the Head of the Department of Geography at Peradeniya, who rose to the rank of Professor on Merit. He also functioned as the Vice-Chancellor at Peradeniya for three years. He served the Government in the capacities of Chairman of the Presidential Land Commission, Interim National Water Resources Authority, Academic Board of the National Institute of Education, and the National Environmental Council. His research covered a wide spectrum of academic disciplines but were mostly focused on issues pertaining to water resources, environment and, land policy. He won an Award of Merit from Lanka Jalani (Global Water Partnership), for his contributions to the Water Sector. Sabaragamuwa University conferred an Hon. D Sc. for his contributions to research and higher education. He had been a Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences, Sri Lanka, and the Royal Geographical Society of London.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month at 6.00 pm. The lectures are open to the members and the public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0777397403