



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

“Hidden Gardens in the *Giri* Monasteries of Sri Lanka”

by

Dr. Shanti Jayewardene

The Monthly Lecture Series No: 156 of the National Trust

Thursday 30th November 2023 at 6.00 pm

at the Auditorium of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka,

No. 6, Independence Avenue, Colombo 7.

(For those who join online: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84368157566>)

Sri Lanka has a special place in Asian garden history because her surviving garden forms are rare in Asia before the 13th century. Following colonial archaeological practices, investigation of the garden remains of sacred sites and the original flora has hardly begun. This talk presents a preliminary descriptive outline of the garden design principles of one particular garden type - the terraced gardens of living *Giri* monasteries – some of which have been in fitful occupation since the third century BCE. The plans seen today, evolved through accretion, are substantially organic. Small, interconnected terraces, hanging off forested rocks or mountain slopes, form the core signature of the type. Supplementary components to the terraces include steps, paths, bridges, artificial boulder-pools, residential caves, forest flora and distant views. Since the monasteries appear as almost completely natural environments overall, the hidden terrace gardens and their design qualities have to be searched for and isolated. Typical exemplars of the genre are Rajagirilenkanda, Bambaragala, Hindagala, Varana, Situlpahuwa, Yatagala, Dowa among others. The sites possess affinities with the archaeological remains of the boulder and terraced gardens at Sigiriya and the aesthetic themes of the stylized, minimalist 15th century Zen gardens of Japan.



Dr. Shanti Jayewardene has a Dip. Arch. and MSc. in the History of Modern Architecture from University College London, and a DPhil in Modern History, from the University of Oxford. She has a particular interest in the intersection of imperial and south Asian architectural historiography. She has taught history and design in the UK and Sri Lanka and is presently collaborating on a book on the ancient gardens of Sri Lanka, initiated by the late Professor Senake Bandaranayake. Her published works include several articles and two books *Imperial Conversations: Indo-Britons and the architecture of South India* Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2007 and *Geoffrey Manning Bawa: Decolonizing Architecture*, National Trust of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2017.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures generally on the last working Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the general public.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel.0112682730/ 0719566929