



Leisure Land

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Hambantota, even a few decade ago, was simply a sleepy town with a beautiful beach located conveniently near a "Rest House" that overlooked the sea. It was known for its salt industry. It offered a convenient stop for those driving from Colombo to Kataragama; that shrine originally built to deity Alexander (Iskander in Persian, or Skhanda in Sanskrit) who conquered parts of India in the 4th century BC. Today, Hambantota has become a name which is attracting much international attention.

The mega developments in the area, with its strategically located brand new port, as well as airports and highways which are most certain to come, will position it as the industrial and commercial hub of the South. Meanwhile, Galle will become that beautiful old town for the antiquarians, the literati and the glitterati.

Where does the name "Hambantota" come from? Various dubious toponymic explanations for the place name are given in popular discussions. We wish to add our views so that interested readers can bring out their knowledge on this subject. The most likely origin of the name for the coastal town is from the word "Sanka", Sanskrit for Conch shell. Even the English words "Chank", and Shank, probably come from the Sanskrit "Sanka". The Sinhala words "Hak" (e.g., Hakgedi), and "Sak" are directly from the Sanskrit.

Thus Hak-baan-thota would mean the place where "Hakgedi" etc., were downloaded. (Here we may note that "Badu-baanava" in Sinhala stands for "unloading goods"). Thus the name Hak-baan-tota, which has transformed to Hambantota, most probably indicates that this was an unloading location for Chank fishery. The phonetic transformation "Hak-baan" to "Hamban" is quite reasonable.

We note that in many Sinhala words like "Duk-path" in changing to "Duppath", the "k" sound gets muted and replaced by the leading sound. In the same way, "Hak-baan" - Habbaan - Hamban" are a set of valid transformations. Such transformations have been discussed in, for example, Pandith A. M. Gunasekera, 'A comprehensive Grammar of the Sinhalese Language' (1891). The area has indeed been known

Hambantota- where did the place-name come from?

for Chank (Gastropoda: *Turbinella pyrum*) fishery since antiquity.

Chank shells, or Konches (Hakgedi) are considered sacred in Hindu lore, and associated with MahaLakshmi. The sinistral *Turbinella pyrum* (with the spiral turning left when the apex is held up), called Dakshinavarti in Sanskrit, (i.e., right-turning spiral, with the apex held down). These are very rare, but they have been found in Hambantota. Another area known for Conch-shell fishery is Kirinda. Cowries, cones, murex and other shells are also important. In 1998, 260,000kg of sea cucumbers, 796,000kg of seashells and sacred shanks, and 11,400kg of mollusks were exported from Sri Lanka. Hence, in our view, "Hambantota" is a name resulting from the conch-shell fishery associated with this location since very ancient times. For a recent scientific report on Chank fishery,

see Fairoz, M.F.M. and Cumarantunga, P.R.T.; Preliminary investigation of the Chank (Gastropoda: *Turbinella pyrum*) fishery at Hambantota and Kirinda, Southern Sri Lanka, proceedings of the 59th annual session of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, December 2002, Colombo. We also mention some of the other "explanations" that have been offered for the origin of the place name. 'Hamban' is sometimes said to be a reference to Muslim or Chinese sailors who used "sampan" boats and used this harbour. "Sampan" are either Chinese or Moor(Arab) boats, and Muslim people are allegedly called "Hambaya", based on their use of these boats.

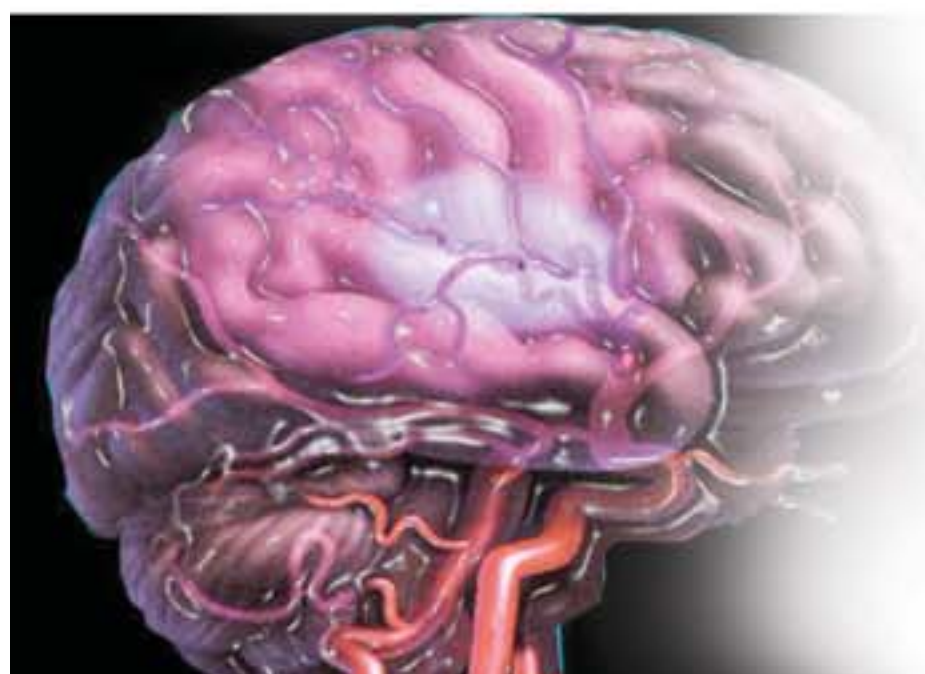
"Sampan" is defined in dictionaries as a loose term used in East and South East Asia to designate various small harbour craft and local coastal craft. But early travelers applied the word and its variant forms more widely. We may note that there is a "Hambantota" in Bogawantalawa, casting doubt on simple "sampan-boat" explanations of the place name. The up-country "Hambantota" is a corruption of "Ambanthota".

It is near Ambagamuva. On the other hand, the coastal town Hambantota is not in a specifically mango-growing area, and it has no special association with "amba" (mango). Was Hambantota an ancient harbour? Ananda Guruge has given a discussion (Mahavamsa, 2nd revised edition, p 220) of contacts with Sri Lanka from as far back as 3rd century BCE.

Continued on page 2



Hambantota fisheries harbour



Low public awareness of a major cause of stroke is putting thousands of people at risk, campaigners warn today.

Two-thirds of people surveyed did not know that an irregular heartbeat - known as atrial fibrillation - is a possible warning sign of a future stroke.

About 750,000 people suffer from atrial fibrillation, which is one of the most common heart rhythm disturbances seen by doctors. The most common symptom is a fast, irregular heartbeat, which sometimes speeds up to over 140 beats per minute.

Steve Benveniste of The Stroke Association, which carried out the survey of 1000 members of the public and 1,000 GPs, said awareness of the link was "incredibly

Thousands at risk of stroke who don't know it

low" among the public.

He said: "Atrial fibrillation is a major risk factor for stroke. It accounts for 14% of all strokes and 12,500 strokes a year are thought to be directly linked to the condition."

Professor Gregory Lip, an expert on stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Birmingham University, said: "We

could prevent around four and a half thousand people from having a devastating stroke every year if more people had greater awareness of atrial fibrillation and sought out the appropriate treatment from a medical professional."