



### A89 An Anthropology Roadmap: Sri Lanka

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the current status of forensic anthropology in Sri Lanka.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing the historical background, current status, and future developments of the field of forensic anthropology in Sri Lanka, opening a channel for discussion and comparison between other nations.

The history of forensic medicine in Sri Lanka goes back to the inception of Western medical practice by the British rulers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Forensic medicine practitioners, referred to as Judicial Medical Officers (JMO) in this era, took the responsibility of handling forensic anthropology casework since there were no trained forensic anthropologists in Sri Lanka. In those days, Sri Lanka was a comparatively peaceful country, the forensic anthropology case load was very minimal, and most of these cases were limited to partially or completely skeletonized bodies found in abandoned areas probably due to suicides or animal attacks. Ordinary medical officers attached to government hospitals handled most of these uncomplicated cases with their limited knowledge gained during undergraduate training and experience gained by handling these types of cases. The few forensic experts (consultant JMOs) who were trained in the United Kingdom took the responsibility of handling complicated issues of forensic anthropology in this era.

The Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) established in 1980 took over the responsibility of training local forensic experts in Sri Lanka. Analysis of skeletal remains was incorporated into the curriculum of both post graduated Diploma in Legal Medicine (DLM) and Doctor of Medicine (MD) training programs since 1980. Those who completed the MD Forensic Medicine program possessed a reasonably good knowledge of forensic anthropology, and this was further improved during their post-MD overseas training. Attending workshops and seminars conducted by overseas forensic anthropologists and international seminars and workshops in forensic anthropology helped them to further improve their knowledge in this field.

On August 23, 2016, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the Act to establish an Office of Missing Person (OMP). The purpose of this act was to investigate people who disappeared during the 30-year-long civil war that prevailed in Sri Lanka until 2009. Furthermore, the Sri Lankan government recognized the need for an expert to oversee the forensic anthropology works in the country. Therefore, the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka appointed a Consultant Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) to the Institute of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology (IFMT) Colombo, the premier medicolegal institute of Sri Lanka. Responsibilities of the Consultant JMO appointed to this new post are as follows: (1) take the responsibility of investigating skeletal remains/partially skeletonized bodies recovered from all over the country in order to establish the identity, cause, and manner of death, and other relevant issues, and report to the court of law; (2) coordinate the forensic work with the OMP and be involved in investigations of mass graves, if found; (3) improve the existing anthropology lab at IFMT in order to carry out the skeletal analysis; and (4) set up a museum in order to train both undergraduate and postgraduate trainees.

Additionally, the PGIM has taken an interest in training more post-MD trainees in forensics, which will be conducted during the post-MD overseas training. Service of the first trainee trained in forensic anthropology will be available by the end of 2019. Specialists trained in this manner will be appointed to various parts of the country. Thus, in the future, Sri Lanka will have a sufficient number of trained forensic anthropologists with a forensic medicine background.

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#### Forensic Anthropology, Sri Lanka, Current Status