
CRYSTALLINE LIMESTONE: AN ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLY PEOPLE'S INDUSTRY

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Limestone related industries in Sri Lanka have a history of 2500 years. The major cultural heritages and Buddhist shrines in ancient Sri Lanka has some of extraordinary paintings and sculptures carved out from limestone marble and mixture of paints.

The paper reviews a people initiated, locally managed and environmentally friendly crystalline limestone industry popularly named as 'Matale Aluhunu'. Limestones are used to produce lime in the building industry, fertiliser or soil conditioners depending on the composition. Marble chips are used in terrazzo industry. There are 3 major types of lime industries; lime kiln, dolomite and lime query. Total number of industries is 177 of which more than 50% are small scale. The cost of production of such small scale lime industry to produce 1 ton is around Rs. 6500 and the income is around Rs. 7800.

Lime Industries Association in Matale is an organisation which was established about a decade ago to protect small industrialists from middlemen exploitations and price fluctuations in the market. Further it was also established with the intention of protecting the natural mineral beds (limestone and dolomite etc.) in the district. There are about 1500 direct beneficiaries and 200 indirect beneficiaries who receive a modest annual income to maintain their families. The salient aspect of this lime industry maintained by this local organisation is its commitment to fulfill all the environmental and safety conditions set by the government. They have all the necessary permits; environmental safety assurance permit, trade license, local administrative permit, geological license, explosive permit and the security permit.

This paper reviews the issues that need to be addressed to develop this rural people initiated industry further, market and quality improvement support to expand the industry as a large scale enterprenuship, attract capital investments from outside, research on production of lime for better environmental sustainability, exploring the possibility of developing ecological tourism around this industry etc.