

A temple of yore

Delgamuwa Rajamaha Viharaya

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Entering through a huge *Makara Thorana*, I make my way through the narrow pathway of Sri Dalada Mawatha. It is a brisk ten-minutes walking in a rustic setting with a breathtaking view of the awe-inspiring mountains and glimpses of Sri Pada. The 'Sal' trees laden with blossoms lie in the temple premises. Heaps of fallen Sal flowers had been freshly swept into piles, emanating a glorious fragrance.

Peace and tranquility is the first thought that comes to your mind as you step into less known Delgamuwa Vihara. Dating as far back as the Kingdom of Seethawaka, Delgamuwa Vihara holds a significant place in our annals. At a glance it may look like any other temple complex, but it is the role that it played providing protection to the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha for over 40 years in the (*Kurahangala*) grinding stone from invaders that makes it unique.

Delgamuwa Vihara is in a sleepy village of Delgamuwa in Kuruwita, Ratnapura and can be reached via the A4 (Colombo-Batticaloa) road. Located close to Kuru Ganga on a hillock with a grand vista of the countryside sprawling below at the edge of a vast stretch of paddy fields of Delgamuwa, the ancient chronicle Rajawaliya, refers to this as Labujagaama Vihara.



Grinding stone (*Kurahangala*) in which the sacred Tooth Relic was hidden during the reign of King Mayadunne in Kingdom of Seethawaka

Seal of sovereignty

Ever since the 4th Century AD, when the Gautama Buddha's Tooth Relic was brought to Sri Lanka hidden in Orissan Princess Hemamala's hair, the Relic had grown in repute and veneration in Sri Lanka and throughout the Buddhist world. It became not only Sri Lanka's most prized possession, but the very seal of sovereignty. The national capital was regarded as the place where the Tooth Relic was permanently housed.

With the fall of the Anuradhapura Kingdom in the face of Chola invasions in the tenth Century AD, the Sri Lankan Kingdom was constantly on the move and the sacred Tooth Relic was also moved from Kingdom to Kingdom with all the pomp and pageantry of royal patronage and protection.

The Sacred Tooth Relic's narration with Delgamuwa Vihara is an interesting episode during the days of King

Mayadunne in the Kingdom of Seethawaka. Chief Incumbent of the Vihara Ven. Mahalle Vipulatissa Thera told us the history of the Vihara.

According to chronicles, in the time of the Kotte Kingdom, Keerawelle Hiripitiya Nilame - the Diyawadana Nilame of the time to whose protection the sacred Tooth Relic had been bestowed - saw a dream where he was advised to take the sacred Tooth Relic

away from Kotte. After replacing the sacred Tooth Relic with an imitation, the Nilame fled to the Pepiliyana temple to meet a bhikkhu for a better interpretation of his dream. There, the bhikkhu urged him to take the sacred Tooth Relic to the Central region as danger was imminent.

The sacred Relic was taken to King Mayadunne of Seethawaka Kingdom, who gave it to Ven. Mahindalankara

Thera of the Delgamuwa Vihara. The Thera hid the sacred Tooth Relic in a (*Kurahangala*) grinding stone which has been kept in the Vihara for over 40 years. However, King

Ven. Vipulatissa Thera told us that he was told of this episode by a few elderly persons in the village who had seen it when they were small boys.

The temple is divided into two sections as the upper and lower terraces. While the residence of the bhikkhus (*Avasa Ge*) lies in the lower terrace, a path leads towards a flight of stone steps to the upper terrace of the temple. Ending my ascent, I came upon a white dagaba along with a modern image house which was rendered with colourful paintings.

Glimpse into the past

Today what remains of Delgamuwa Vihara gives you glimpse of a ruined foundation of a building, a few stone carved flights of steps, two ruined stone carved flower altars and most significantly a massive (*Kurahangala*) grinding stone which provided protection for the sacred Tooth Relic, placed in a specially built structure in the upper terrace under the shade of centuries old Bo tree with its sprawling branches spread out in all directions in the upper terrace.

As I ventured further into the Eastern side, lies another oval shaped two storeyed building housing some artefacts. Ancient coins, tiles and pieces of porcelain plates which belonged to different periods of time have been excavated from the temple grounds and are now exhibited in this well protected place.

Looking at the surrounding vistas, what drew me was the profound serenity of this spiritual site. With history at the seams, the chief bhikkhu said if an extensive archaeological excavation is carried out at the site, new discoveries will be unearthed here.

We decided to leave it to archaeologists who may one day rediscover the temple's glorious past and tell the long forgotten tale of Delgamuwa Vihara.



The upper terrace of the Delgamuwa Vihara



Artefacts found in the protected room in the Vihara



The mural of the temple depicting the hidden of the Tooth Relic in the grinding stone