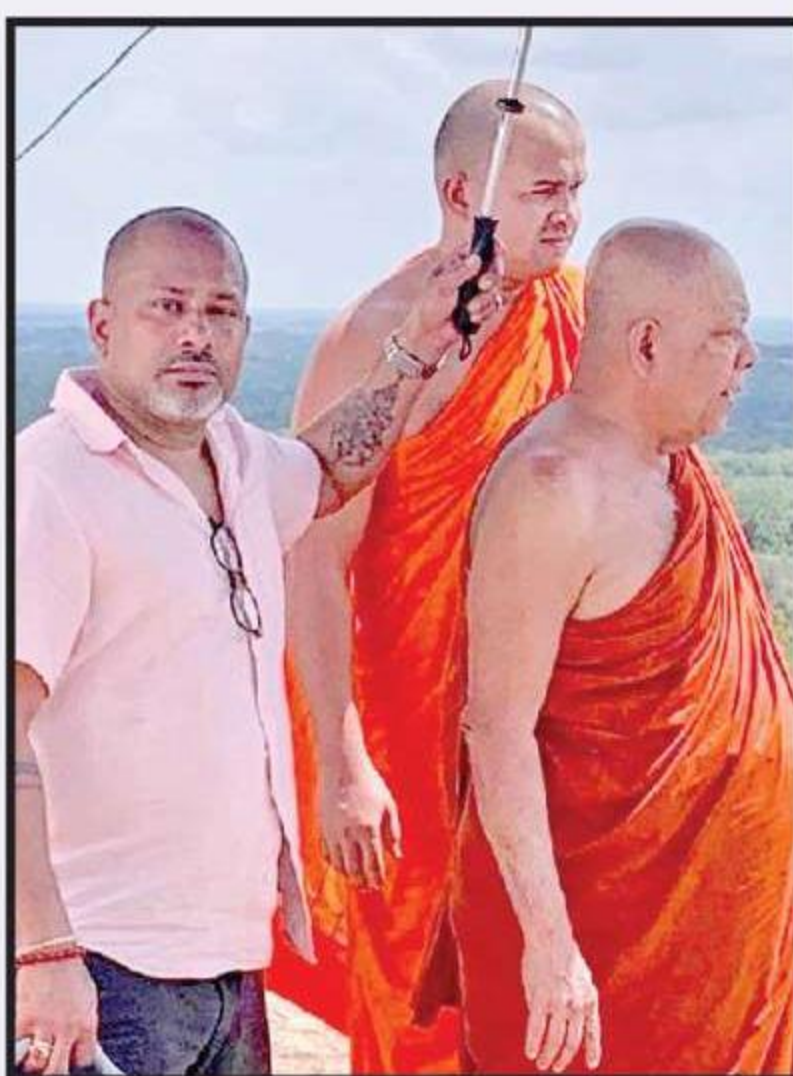
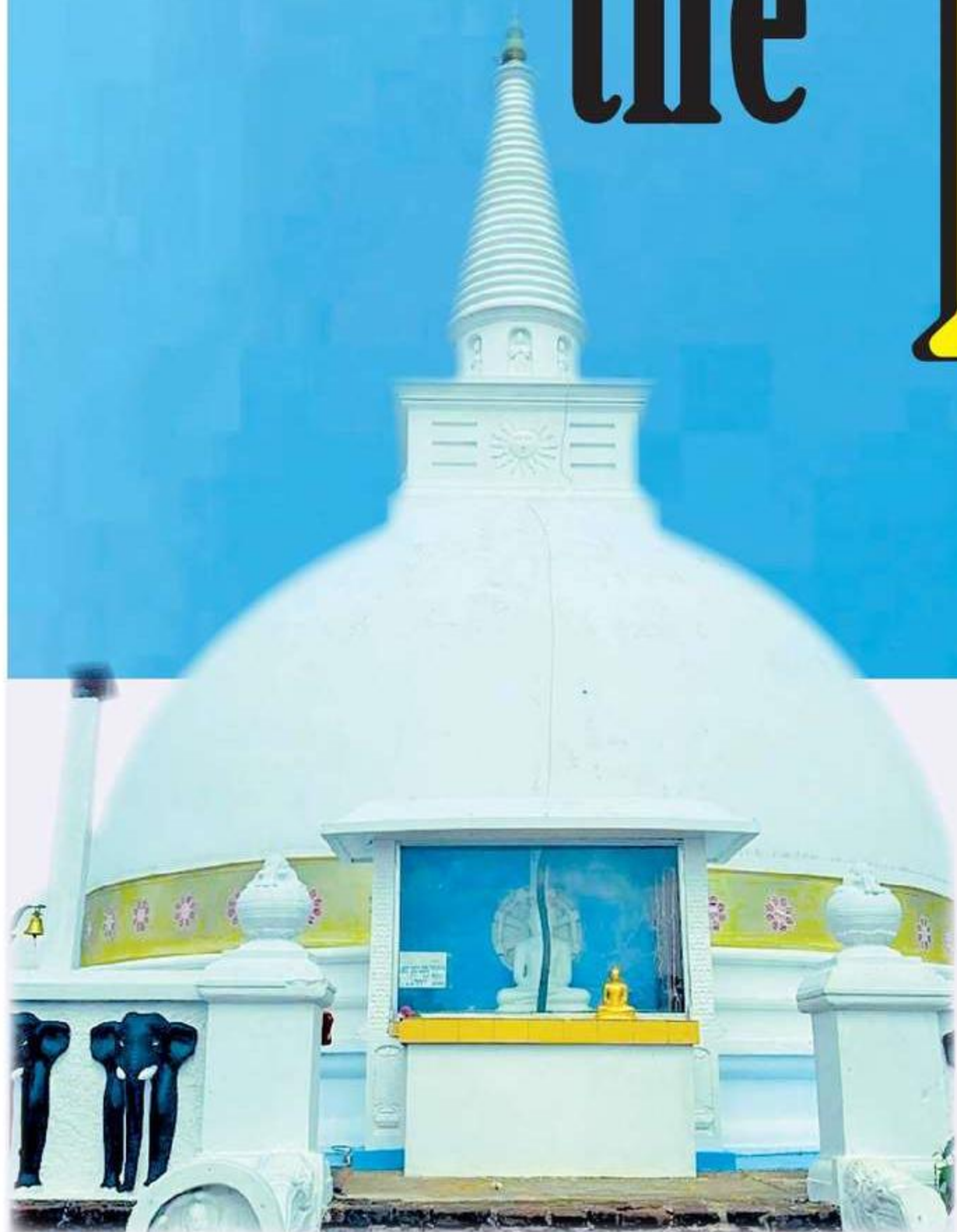


# ISINBASSAGALA the Rock of Sages



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**S**ri Lanka is a resplendent island bestowed with centuries of Buddhist history. Delving into this history one finds surprising new facts, which can be contested by historians. In order to understand today's narrative we must pause and reflect on ancient history, perhaps from a new angle.

During the Anuradhapura period, in the times of well advanced kingdoms in Deva Hela, prior to pre-Vijayan period, it is noted that well advanced kingdoms prevailed in Ruhuna and the East. Scholars also attest to the fact that well preserved books, texts and documents written in Hela language and Maghadhi language were used and referred to by the ancient scholars who once lived in this county.

The books and texts of this nature were stored in the libraries in Heladiva. Our history shows the facts which point to the destruction of almost all these books by fire due to political and cultural attacks faced by our ancient country from time to time. The great kings such as Wesamuni, Wiroodha, Viroopakkha and Datharaadtha found in the Aataanaataa Sutta and in the Tripitaka literature as Chaththaro Maharaja, are the four Guardian Deities who are respected and worshipped by our people even today.

#### ANURADHAPURA PERIOD

In the ancient times, prior to the shifting of the capital city to Lankapura – to Anuradhapura – well developed towns and villages were situated within this Helabima in the Eastern coastal belt. Such settlements were also found in Ruhuna and in the central regions of the country. The Kingdom of Magadha of which the city of Rajagaha was the capital city (present day Rajagala in Ampara), the Kingdom of Lichchavi in which the city of Visala was the capital city (presently is assumed this is the area covered by the Yala wildlife sanctuary), the kingdom of Rawana Dynasty which dominated the areas such as Kegalle, Rathnapura and also Mahanuware region.

There is a thought process which points that the kingdom situated in the



city of Varanasi in Kasirata (present day Mullaithivu and Vavuniya), the Kingdom of Kosala of which the city of Savath was the capital city (present day Ritigala area) were the very powerful kingdoms in the ancient Heladiva.

Certain Buddhists believe that today what we read as *Mahavamsa* is the "*Pali Mahavamsa*" translated and written in Pali language after 300 years of the original Mahavamsa written in Hela language. We have three more chronicles, namely, *Daathu Vamsa*, *Thoopu Vamsa* and *Bodhi Vamsa* which were written after the Anuradhapura period, at the end of Polonnaruwa period or the period even after that. There had been one historic Hela book called *Deepavamsa*.

Isinbassagala is a rock plateau located off Medawachchiya. The word "isi" is derived from the Sanskrit word "rishi" (meaning sage). This is the rock from which the sage descended. It is believed that this is the true location from which the prudent Buddha had delivered his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. Some would contest this fact, and that is their democratic right.

I set off from Colombo with some learned Buddhist monks and two friends Janaka Fernando and Vinod Amerasinghe to this historical Buddhist site. We left Colombo at 4.30 am and reached Anuradhapura by around 8.30 am. Travelling these rural roads gives you many beautiful scenes. We were blessed to see the first rays of sunlight, effortlessly penetrating the mist laden forests and fields. Peacocks proudly spread their feathers. Buffaloes resting in the cool mud gazed at us as we drove by.

Hundreds of parrots flew across the clear blue sky. Storks were resting in the paddy fields. Men on bicycles carried fruits and vegetables to village markets. It was nice to see a bullock cart drawn by two sturdy bulls, something not seen in digitally dominated Colombo.

We reached the historic rock by 9.30 am. We had some refreshing king coconut before commencing our climb. The rock rises very slowly to a height of about 530 feet. It is an easy climb that will take just 30 minutes. Even senior citizens can visit this place without any worry. There is a staircase, and then we began the ascent. On our right side we came across a large pond, cut into the rock's surface.

This water is actually fresh rainwater. This shows the wisdom of our ancient forefathers.

The little stupa is part of a complex that was built by King Devanampiyatissa during his reign. It was built after Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka and although it is not the original structure, it was re-created in the early 20th Century after excavations had unearthed an ancient Naga Gala and a footprint of the Buddha known as Sri Pathul Gala.

The discovered Naga stone gives evidence of a Naga tribal community that had existed during the pre-Buddhist period of ancient Lanka. The Sri Pathul Gala is a relic of the past giving a clue that the noble Buddha did descend upon Lanka.

#### BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDINGS

A carving of a white dragon sits at the entrance of the rock and a short ascend up the steps reveal a golden Buddha statue and of King Devanampiyatissa which stands facing the stupa. As you reach the top of the plateau, you will see the main temple of Isinbassagala Viharaya, where devotees visit to seek blessings.

This complex holds a cave room on the side. A unique feature of this sacred site is the panoramic 360 degree view of the beautiful surroundings. Lush green fields laced with dense thickets of trees. It is said by some to be a place of strong positive energy force fields. Those engaging in deep meditation claim of being able to connect to clear fields of energy.

The cave room has an ancient statue referred to as Arahath Guhawa, this manifests the legendary belief that Arahath along with several other Buddhist monks had arrived first to this historical region before reaching Mihintale; hence the translation of Isinbassagala as 'the rock that the sages came from.' After spending an hour on this rock we began our journey to Colombo.

The most important thing is to be awakened from within and live our lives to enhance the lives of others, and spread love, tolerance, forgiveness and kindness. When we choose this path the natural universe will support us in our endeavour.

