Barathanaga Lena

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A cave with a front face had drip ledges

A drive through Tantirimale took us past resplendent lakes and beautiful views to reach the secluded cave complex known as Barathanaga Lena.

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The rock with a majestic cobra-like hood

As we approached the place it was quiet yet tranquil. There were rock outcrops on either side. We walked farther in and reached a large cave that had with time been made into a hall. The roof of this space was that of a sloping rock. While the cave was being used for temple activities even in the present day, there were numerous caves spread across the land, which during ancient times had been used for meditation.

The caves had been gifted in the name of the *Sangha* (Buddhist monks) by various patrons. There were also caves where *Upasaka* and *Upasikawo* (male and female lay devotees) engaged in religious activities. The stone inscriptions mention inhabitants as well as those who had gifted the caves. It is said that over 2300 years ago a person by the name of Barathanaga donated the largest cave of the complex to the *Sangha* after necessary preparations. The tranquil environment has been a centre for meditation ever since.

We climbed to the top of a rock outcrop placing our feet carefully on the small steps cut into the face of the rock. A small plaque was the only denotion of the location of the stupa. The panoramic view from this point was breathtaking.

We continued on our exploration walking along the numerous paths and pausing at each *lena*. Due to the climatic conditions over the years the caves had taken unusual shapes, one such cave was in the shape of a cobra. Large trees provided shade to the complex, and small mediational rooms had been made with clay in more recent times for monks to meditate.

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The greenery of the surrounding spreads tranquility

There were about eight caves, each significant with inscriptions in ancient text. One such cave had the fading shades of rock paintings that were disappearing over time. The inscription in another narrated the tale regarding the creation of the Chathragopaka clan by a person. This clan had arrived to the country at the same time as the sapling of the Sri Maha Bodhi tree.

A pond that was barely visible had steps leading down. There was much yet to be discovered in the area. As we ventured farther under the cool shade of the large trees that had stood the test of time we reminisced of a by-gone era where humans had discovered spiritual enlightenment co-existing alongside the simple beauty of nature. Hidden within the realms of Tantirimale, Barathanaga Lena is a peaceful experience.

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