In Search Of Bandagiriya

Posted on
The newly renovated stupa and the age old one remaining at the top of Badagiriya temple

On we went passing paddy fields and narrow roads lined with houses in the quaint village of Bandagiriya… A way of life unfolds as we went in search of Yahangala and the Bandagiriya Raja Maha Viharaya that spoke of a time that seemed to be forgotten by many.

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A turn off from the Pallemalala junction along the Hambantota-Tissamaharama-Kataragama Road will bring one tothe small village of Bandagiriya abundant in paddy fields, greenery and small cottage industries. However, on a different quest… we were at Yahangala Rock Temple where a boulder with a Stupa on top loomed over a lone and faded Image Shrine. We skirted the periphery to come across an area where the boulder flattened out making way for a fairly easy and short climb.

Bent on reaching the top, which was only a small distance away, we were oblivious to our surroundings and were startled to see upon reaching the top, that below us were several ruins with columns protruding from the ground. It is said that

Yahangala was a hallowed complex where many Arhats resided and we surmised that perhaps these ruined structures were their abodes long ago. Atop the boulder were two stupas, made of bricks and on a raised platform—one tumbledown with just the base and the other still with its dome intact. Further, it seemed that the steps might have been cut into the rock long ago to reach the stupas and now shows signs of having wasted away with time.

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Descending, we next headed towards the Bandagiriya Temple located six kilometres or so away. Glimpses of a way of life of the people living in Bandagiriya village were visible at every corner. Stopping at a small canal that flowed along the road we were travelling we observed a fisherman throwing a fishing net and people hard at work in the paddy fields lining the sides of the road.

Reaching the ancient Bandagiriya Raja Maha Viharaya, we glanced over the more modern structures built in front before ascending the steps situated behind the buildings. Halfway through, the concrete steps were replaced with steps that were cut into the rock outcrop, noticeable only here and there. It is said that the temple complex is spread across an area of 25 acres and all the structures were once built atop the rock boulder. Believed to have been built by King Mahanaga, an inscription carved onto the rock holds brahmi script that was barely visible to the eye. At the summit of the rock were two stupas, one seemingly restored recently as it was painted in white, though washed out, and the other still in its reddish brick structure.

Beside the Bandagiriya rock are two other rock outcrops called Giri and Veheragala and these are connected with another rock. Many believe that this phenomena would have led to this area being called Bandagiriya (the connected rock) in the olden times.

The top of the Bandagiriya afforded a bird’s eye view of the surrounding area, which could only be described as breathtaking. The Bandagiriya tank, the water purification tanks, the countless paddy fields and the roads that snaked through—all showcased how the old splendour mingled with the onsetting modernity creates a charm of its own. Taking a minutes respite before we headed out seeking another

journey, we took a moment to enjoy the solitude of the Temple, drifting back to the days of yore where perhaps wonders never ceased to occur…