Isipathanaramaya Through Grounds of Reverence and History

Posted on



The Stupa and stately Image House at Isipathanaramaya

Gleaming in brilliant white, the solemn structure of Isipathanaramaya is a prominent sight in Havelock Town, beckoning those who pass by to stop for a moment and reflect on their inner self.

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Kihibiye Vijitha Nakaya Thero , Chief Incumbent, Isipathanaramaya

A statue of Edward Henry Pedris, a national hero and prominent in the Sri Lankan Independence Movement indicates the turn to the Isipathanaramaya temple. Although located in bustling Havelock Town, Isipathanaramaya preserves its own tranquil atmosphere, a silence that makes one oblivious to everything around. A sense of sheer serenity greeted us as we stepped into the temple.

Kihibiye Vijitha Nayaka Thero, Chief Incumbent of Isipathanaramaya seated in the verandah reflected back to the past. He spoke about a history spanning more than a century, which he knew due to oral tradition.

The then Chief Incumbent Thero, Dangedara Saranapala Thero had requested D D Pedris, a wealthy aristocratic merchant from Colombo to build a temple for the monks who came from Galle to study at the Vidyodhaya Pirivena in Maligakanda.

His beloved son, Edward Henry Pedris served in the British military as the Captain of Colombo Town Guard – a regiment attached to the Ceylon Defense Force. Henry Pedris attempted to bring peace among the communities during the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915. However, he was court martialed on false charges as the British were jealous of his wealth, education and stature in society. He was also a great proponent of the independence movement.

Edward Henry Pedris was executed by the British on July 7, 1915. Thus, his father D D Pedris donated his wealth to develop the temple. Every year a commemoration ceremony is held to celebrate the bravery of Henry Pedris, a legendary national hero of the country.

> Exquisite paintings by M Sarlis Master, renowned Sri Lankan maestro of Buddhist paintings adorn the image house.

Painted in soothing white, the stately Image House or Budu Gey comes into view. The exterior of the image house resembles a colonial mansion, indicating the heavy influence of the British architectural styles. Seated under the detailed dragon arch at the entrance is a meticulously sculpted statue of Maithree Bosath.



Intricate sculptures inside the Image House

Exquisite paintings by M Sarlis Master, renowned Sri Lankan maestro of Buddhist paintings adorn the image house. The paintings portray intricate details of the reality of life, where the artist has used myriad shades to imbue each illustration with life. The vibrant murals within the Image House depict various scenes from the Buddha's life and the ceiling is embellished with paintings of the Solosmasthana. Four life size portraits of the Pedris family members also majestically adorn the walls of the Image House.

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Demonstrating the three major iconographies of Buddhist sculpture, the Budu Gey houses graceful statues of seated, standing and reclining Buddha. Many milestones from the life of the Enlightened one are brought to life by deeply expressive and elaborately carved statues, reflecting the skill and dexterity of the craftsmen.

Lulled by the spiritual ambience of the temple grounds, we climbed the stone steps to reach the sanctity of the Devalaya, which paid homage to the Navagraha and

Satharawaram Deviyo. The looming presence of the Bodhi exudes strength and majesty, offering shade to many a devotee who comes in search of inner peace and spiritual powers.



The tranquil and elegant Dharma Shalawa

At the entrance to the stupa, lies a detailed moonstone influenced by carvings of the Anuradhapura era. The sight of the 120 feet high stupa glimmering in immaculate white against the clear blue skies creates a picture-perfect moment.

We next proceeded to the Dharma Shalawa. The solidly constructed octagon-shaped Dharmasanaya set inside the Dharma Shalawa is an intricate manifestation of artistic work.

On the far side of the hallowed grounds is a library that houses a great collection of Buddhist literature. The monochrome photographs of the noble Pedris family that adorn the library walls give a flashback to the colonial past. Made out of Rangoon teak, the ceiling of the library is a magnificent element of art.

Isipathanaramaya is a realm of tranquillity and history nestled in the heart of Colombo.










