Kingdom of Nallur: A Timeless Discovery

Posted on



Manthiri Manai – Minister’s Abode

The tinkling of bangles, the surreptitious music of melodic instruments, the soft hum created by the mingling of countless voices, the quick and the slow footfalls of people scurrying by… I cannot help but let my mind wander over to the past as I let my gaze linger upon the remnants of a kingdom that had once stood tall and proud, slowly trying to kindle the glorious times of yore of the Nallur Kingdom in my mind’s eye.

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Leaning my head against the window of the vehicle I was soon lost in a dream as we

sped along the Point Pedro road. Each passing scene merged together, making the landscape mundane for the curious eye. A flash of gold! My attention was at once caught by a curious statue that contrasted heavily with the dull colours encompassing the area. Stopping, I inquired from a passerby about the statue. His answer surprised me as he chattered on about Kings of the Aryachakravarti Dynasty and directed us to various places of the Jaffna Kingdom, or the Nallur Kingdom as referred to by many, that still withstood the test of time…

Nallur
Nallur was designated as ‘Singai Nagar’ – the City of Singai – and functioned as the capital of the Jaffna Kingdom for many years. However, today, Nallur is a small town located a mere three kilometres from the exuberant town of Jaffna. Looking at the modern streets and structures of the area, it is quite hard to imagine that the place was once the focal point of the Jaffna Kingdom, harbouring the aristocratic abodes of Kings, Brahamin Priests, Ministers and other officials of the Kingdom.

A Lineage of Wonder – The Aryachakravarti Dynasty
According to some beliefs the name ‘Aryachakravarti’ came from a military leader that was sent by the Pandyan Empire. Yet another version speaks of a Tamil King by the name of Sethukavalan who ruled the Kingdom of Jaffna designating himself as the ‘Aryan King’. As the rule of this royal family became renowned throughout the world, the dynasty was called ‘Aryachakravarti’ – Arya Emperors. The dynasty led a rule from the 13th Century to the 17th Century after which the glory was dimmed due to the arrival of the Portuguese.

The Dwindling of an Era
With the Portuguese invasion in 1505, much of the grandeur of the Kingdom was muted, due to the destruction of many eminent structures and overtaxation. The people of the surrounding areas shifted, seeking refuge in other parts of the country while the decline in trade and other comforts suffered an adverse effect that prevailed for many years to come.

Sankili II – Last King of Jaffna
Though there were many monarchs that ruled the Kingdom, none are more famous than Sankili II. His rise to power in itself is shrouded with mystery and much controversy as he is said to be a nephew of King Ethirimana Cinkam (1519-1617). Sankili II resisted the Portuguese authorities with much zeal and due to certain matrimonial ties shared between the Royal family of Jaffna Kingdom and the Aristocrats in the Kandyan Kingdom, he received considerable military support for

the resistance. However, all attempts to claim the Kingdom from the Portuguese were met with defeat. In 1619, King Sankili II and the Royal Family were captured and taken to Goa ending the Dynasty of Aryachakravarti while 1621 marked the end of a significant era of the Jaffna Kingdom.

Stepping outside Manthiri Manai, I was entranced by the architecture of this amazing abode

But to this day, King Sankili II is remembered among the people as a hero who fought to safeguard the people and the Kingdom. As I gazed upon the golden-coloured statue of King Sankili II seated atop a steed, dressed in the attire of a valiant King with his left hand gripping the hilt of a sword, it was easy to let my mind drift to those turbulent days where the King had shown unrestrained bravery to protect the Kingdom of Jaffna.

Remnants that Still Stand…
An archway entrance to the Royal Palace, named Sankilithoppu, believed to be originally a part of King Sankili II's palace still stands alongside the road of Point Pedro. Sheltered by a roof, the facade shows much wear and tear. Nonetheless, the subtle designs employed in the architecture are still intact, showcasing the intricate compositions of old.

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Beyond the archway I found myself near a pond tucked in a corner in the midst of a small housing area. The pond filled with green-coloured water is believed to have been built by a King named Singai Pararajasekaran (1478 – 1519). The flourishing of the Kingdom of Jaffna is attributed to him and according to many beliefs he took prominence in reconstructing the Hindu Temples that were once destroyed. Built with a stone casing that entraps the water in its midst, legend tells that King Pararajasekaran filled the pond with sanctified water from the sacred Yamuna River of India, hence naming the pond Yamuna Eri or Yamuna Lake.

Manthiri Manai – Minister's Abode – is a dwelling that dates back to the 15th Century according to many believers. Some believe that the abode used to be part of the King's Palace while others reminisce that it belonged to Prince Paranir Pasinghan, a son of King Pararajasekaran. The architecture of the building is very striking with many enticing features and the exterior shows signs of small modifications

according to Dutch architecture presenting signs that the dwelling might have been occupied by the Dutch at one point. Consisting of many spaces, the interior structure has wooden carvings embedded with intricate designs. Emerging through the back of the abode, we stopped at a hole filled with debris, surmising that this might be the legendary tunnel that is said to lead from Manthiri Manai to the Yamuna Eri.

The subtle designs showcase the intricate compositions of old…

Stepping outside Manthiri Manai, I was entranced by the unique architecture of this amazing abode that showcases the ingenious talent possessed by the people of the ancient Jaffna Kingdom. An amalgamation of old and modern features existing in harmony, there is still much to be discovered and understood about the rich history that once prevailed in this enchanting Kingdom of Nallur.

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