Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya: A Royal Dedication

Posted on



Kotamale Mahaweli Maha Seya is only second in height to Ruwanweli Maha Seya

Rising above the landscape, Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya stands as a spiritual protector.

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The stupa entrance with cobra (Naga) engravings symbolise the ancient hydraulic civilisation

It is not quite what you expect to encounter near a massive dam, which is located in the central highlands of the island. The Kotamale Mahaweli Maha Seya appears to be relatively new, mainly due to the recent completion of the stupa and having only little more than three decades to look back to. The winding roads parallel to the

Kotamale Reservoir provide glimpses of the bright white Stupa in the upland. As you enter the site, you tend to wonder if this magnificent Stupa, which is only second in height to Ruwanwelisaya in Anuradhapura, has at least a local folklore ascribed besides the documented history, which goes back to early 1980s. After a whole day spent on fact-finding, an underrated yet credible narrative emerged.

Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya is the brainchild of former Minister Gamini Dissanayake. The stupa was built as a dedicatory and most importantly to compensate the loss of many temples and properties submerged during the construction of the Dam. Rare sights of the ruins of some shrines can still be spotted when water levels recede; one of them is the Kadadora Vihara. Most of the shrines including Thispane Vihara, Morape Devalaya, Othalawa Vihara, Pattini Devalaya and Madagoda Vihara were completely submerged by the Mahaweli Development.

Though the construction of the stupa was initiated in early 1980s by the late President J R Jayewardena, the completion reached its target only in June 2016 after thirty-three years and three months since the foundation stone was laid. The chief guests of the opening ceremony of the stupa were President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The stupa may not have a strict ascetic depiction, however the atmosphere of the Seya highlights elements of tranquility. Anyone looking for a brief escape from the frenzied pace of day-to-day life can revitalise their tired souls by taking a stroll around the Stupa. Pin drop silence should be maintained to avoid the echoing. Even the sound of a sigh is echoed inside the stupa. Within stands four magnificent Buddha Statues facing the cardinal directions. At each entrance lie a perfectly carved moonstone, guard stone and wing stone adapting a decorative approach for a typical monastic entrance. Amidst the mist, the reflection of the sun off the bright white dagoba only made it appear more majestic. The Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya overlooks a picturesque smoky hilly area.

> The foundation stone of the Seya is thoughtfully laid 100 feet above the Pihiti Gala to prevent being inundated in case of an anomalous rise in water in the Mahaweli River.

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Pihiti Gala to prevent inundation in case of an anomalous rise in water in the Mahaweli River. Vidya-Jyothi Dr A N S Kulasinghe, who designed Mahaweli Maha Seya has fashioned the framework to stand on thirty-two lofty stone pillars. The inner view of the spire that surmounts this mighty hemispherical dome keeps you transfixed for an indefinite period of time. The massing of the Stupa is meticulously symmetrical. Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya was designed to stand 289 feet in height, which makes it only second in size to the sky-high Ruwanweli Maha Seya.

Much to my surprise, I found a correlation between the two Stupas that moves my story into a realm of seemingly believable conjecture. Despite the traditional urbanised resemblance of the Stupa, there was a compelling tale unfolding before me.



The detailed moonstone in which the carvings are influenced by the Anuradhapura era

King (Dutu) Gamunu / Gamini is considered to be one of or the most formidable of Sinhalese Kings who ruled Sri Lanka. He is renowned for defeating King Elara, the Chola ruler who reigned the Rajarata Kingdom and took control. He is also celebrated for the large-scale beautification of the citadel of Anuradhapura. Since his younger days, Prince Gamunu was determined to defeat King Elara and conquer Rajarata Kingdom. His father King Kavantissa warned him against it. Despite the warnings and reasonings given by his father to not head for a war, Prince Gamunu was adamant to succeed. These disagreements lead the father and son duo to have a fractured relationship. The young prince once sent his father King Kavantissa a message ridiculing him for his lack of courage and called him a ‘woman’. Along with the message, a woman’s dress and bangles were sent. This infamous act angered King Kavantissa and he authorised an immediate on-sight arrest of his son. The prince’s behaviour earned him the name of “Dutta Gamini or Dutugamunu”, which

translates to wicked Gamini.

Prince Dutugamunu went into hiding to avoid being arrested and groom an army of his own. In Mahawamsa, it is documented that he passed “Kadadora”, which was the entrance to Kotmale, where he stayed for more than two decades of his life. He crossed the Mahaweli River and entered Kadadora and hid his royal sword inside a tree. This entrance point is known as “Dehadu Kadulla”.

Today, Dehadu Kadulla is restored and flanked by two stone layered walls. The legendary tree he hid his royal sword is marked too. There is a raised surface of stone steps to approach the village through scenic woods overlooking the Mahaweli River. Here, at this site, one can relive the glory which was part of our legendary history.

The Kadadora locality was chosen to build Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya. Builders ensured that the stupa is two feet shorter than the Ruwanweli Maha Seya, which is considered a masterpiece of King Dutugamunu’s reign.

Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya is at its picture perfect best during the dawn-and-dusk glow amidst a lush green backdrop.








