



The Vilakku Tree at the Shrine grounds

**The slight clink of a coin settling on more coins reached my ear and I bent my head in reverence, seeking the blessings from the powerful Deity of Madampe Tanivelle Shrine. More clinking noises resounded through the air, and I realised that I was not alone in my reverent as countless others encircled me, emanating the same veneration that I felt. And as August approaches the shrine grounds holds even more allure, for devotees who come to witness the annual festival.**

**Words** Krishani Peiris

If travelling along the Colombo-Puttalam main road, making a stop at the Tanivelle Devalaya is a ritual that many refuse to forego. Held in much prominence and belief, people from all walks of life stop by to offer tributes seeking the blessings of the enshrined deity to ensure a safe journey or to fulfill their innumerable hopes.

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### **is said to be the symbol of the horse ridden by Prince Taniya Vallabbha**

The Shrine is said to have been named after Prince Taniya Vallabbha, who was the ruler of the region and son of the second queen consort of King Veera Parakramabahu VIII. Built in the Kotte period, Tanivelle Shrine has a proud history and a Bo Tree that dates back more than 250 years. In that time Madampe, where the Shrine now stands, was a focal point in the trade of tusks, precious stones and rice generating much revenue for the Kotte Kingdom. To rule such a powerful source of income, the King entrusted the reigns to Prince Taniya Vallabbha who ruled the area with much compassion and sagacity winning the hearts of all people with his bravery and competence. He is said to have defeated an impostor of the Mukkar clan, from South India, who posed a great threat to the trading in the Kingdom, together with his equally heroic brother, Sakalakala Vallabha, viceroy of Udugampola. Further he was renowned as a ruler who revived the agrarian culture of the region paving the way for a self sufficient and prosperous era. As a homage for his deeds, the Prince was deified, after his demise, and the Shrine was built to venerate and solicit his blessings in agriculture and the path to success of the people.

The most striking edifice of the Shrine is the prancing horse adorned in white that is said to be the symbol of the horse ridden by Prince Taniya Vallabbha. Recounts of the Prince riding like the wind through the region, bstride on the white beast with a white turban wrapped on his head has led to fascinating stories through the years. Half a mile from the Shrine is the Senanayake Aramaya built by Gate Mudaliyar, L M W Senanayake, D M W Senanayake, Doris Senanayake and family utilising their own funds in the 1950s. A Stupa, named the Sri Sambuddha Jayanthi Stupa, erected as a commemoration of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lord Buddha's parinibbana, engages the gaze. Modelled out of solid granite and hued in a light brown, the Stupa enshrines many rare sacred relics of Buddha and Arahants received from Pakistan and India.

Come August and a festive air holds the temple grounds captive in its grasp as the Shrine prepares for its main festival and the groundwork begins on the Wednesday that leads to the festival day, which usually falls on a Saturday. On Wednesday, around seven in the morning, a bunch of unripened bananas are first buried in the ground. As part of the rite, a hole is dug and smoked before the bananas are buried. The next day is reserved for Kevum making, where 25 Kevum are made for the residing deity separately, following traditional cooking methods, while more are made for the visiting devotees. This may at times continue on until Friday.

### **The Madampe Tanivelle Shrine Festival will take place on August 17, 2013**

The Kapa Thorana, which is to be positioned in front of the Devalaya at 12 noon on Saturday, is made early Friday morning using an arecanut tree - about 17 feet tall. The tree is cleaned and then decked with the tender leaves of a coconut tree (gok kola) and with triangular structures made out of arecanut strips. Later, in the afternoon of the same day, the Dekum Wattiya is arranged. A wewal basket is decorated with 100 betel leaves, arecanut flowers, 100 karunga puvak (arecanut) and coins before being set aside until the pooja on Saturday. Parallel to the wattiya, seven clay milk pots - garnished with 21 betel leaves, rathmal (red rhododendron flowers) and gok leaves - are further prepared and kept aside for the pooja as well.

Passing midnight on Friday, towards the early morn, the festival rituals are initiated with the Nanumura Mangallaya. Jewellery designated for the Tanivelle Deity are taken out and then washed with a specially concocted mixture.

The mixture contains various essence of plants such as babila, ambul dodam, beheth nelli and amu kaha to name a few. Once the jewellery is washed, they are carried around the Shrine three times before placing them, following the smashing of three coconuts, inside the Maha Devalaya.

Next step of the festival is the gas pe kireema or the offering of a tree. Five pieces of the jewellery are separated from the rest and are offered in an elaborate ceremony starting from the steps of the Maha Devalaya, then at the Bodhi Tree, Kadavara Devalaya, Kapa Thorana and finally at the sacred Nuga Tree in the Shrine grounds. Subsequently the prepared Dekum Wattiya is offered to the Deity while the clay milk pots are first boiled in a space named the Kiri Maduwa (Milk Hut) and then offered to the Devalaya, ending the early morning rituals of the festival.

Exactly at 10.30 in the morning, the preparation of the alms giving is commenced where 26kg of rice, 800kg of pumpkin, 800kg of potatoes and 300kg of dhal, to cite a few, are cooked for the masses that come to witness the festival.

### **a Vilakku tree, a tree decked with countless narrow torches - offerings by devotees - is erected and then set ablaze before one in the afternoon**

Around 12 in the afternoon, Gotuwa Deema is set in motion and for this ritual, at a selected space on the Shrine grounds an Avari Kanuwa or an Avari Stump is created. A raw timber strip is used as the Avari Stump where a flare is blazed before offering the 25 Kevum, bananas, seven king coconuts and milk rice. Here the priest confers blessings to the

## Madampe Tanivelle Shrine Evoking blessings

gathered crowd and the whole country. Close by a Vilakku tree, a banana trunk decked with countless narrow torches - offerings by devotees - is erected and then set ablaze before one in the afternoon, concluding the festival. From thereon devotees gather into the Alms hall to partake in the alms giving.

An exciting history coupled with a fascinating festival brings Madampe to life in the month of August as thousands of devotees swarm the Shrine grounds to amass the blessings that unfurl through the borders.

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