

Madu Kanda Temple: Along The Trail Of History

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Ancient ruins amidst the present day structures

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Away from the Vavuniya town along the Horowpothana road is a little known temple, secluded quietly in a historic village- Madu Kanda. A recognised archaeological site, as a signboard just outside its entrance indicates, the Madu Kanda Temple is also named a “Sri Dalada Viharaya” – a temple of the Tooth Relic. How it became linked with the famed and much venerated tooth relic of Kandy kindled our curiosity. Vavuniya region it appears lends echoes from a past embroiled in significant events and the Madu Kanda Temple sits secretively, burying mystifying archaeological findings and whisperings of legendary historical accounts.

In its modest bearings it wouldn't impress upon anyone the role it is said to have played in the significant historical events that unfolded centuries ago. A fairly well-preserved ruin of what appears to be an image house, and other remnants of ancient structures connect to one another in a logical arrangement of a once flourishing temple. Remnants of its age-old entrance stand faintly at the east whereas the present day entrance stands at the south. Ancient stone steps, foundations, guardian stones and columns that have yielded haphazardly to influences of time are among the ruins that can be observed here.

The resident priest of the temple had much to enlighten us with. In established historical accounts of Sri Lanka, such as the Datu Wansaya and Dalada Siritha, it is mentioned that it was during the reign of King Keerthi Sree Megawanna or Kith Siri Mewan that the Sacred Tooth Relic was brought to the shores of the Island. With threats to its existence, the custodian of the Tooth Relic in India, King Guha Seewa sought for its safety and entrusted the task of transporting the sacred relic to safety to his daughter Hemamala and son-in-law Prince Danta. It is said that the pair bearing the relic disembarked the Island incognito, to dispatch the relic to safety in Abhayagiriya of the Anuradhapura Kingdom. The knowledge of this secret mission remained only between the two kings.

2600th Sambuddha Jayanti

The 2600th year of the enlightenment of Buddha will be commemorated in May this year with the Sambuddha Jayanthi. The occasion where Siddhartha Gauthama attained Nirvana and Buddhahood holds much significance to Buddhists all over the world and is celebrated with great reverence.

Although historically, the royal pair, Hemamala and Danta, disguised as hermits are said to have landed in the Lankapattana, a shore identified as the east of the Island in Trincomalee, the Madu Kanda Temple lies along a route that hints at a different positioning of events. The inconspicuous Mullaitivu harbour situated north of the Island not only served better for a secretive mission, the east harbour was not known to be used by previous visitors from the neighbouring country. Even King Vijaya, the first such arrival is also said to have disembarked at the north of the Island.

According to the hallowed text, following the arrival of the sacred relic to the Island, it was received by King Kith Siri Mewan at a place known only by name, Megaghiri Viharaya. Although no place is identified at present, it is surmised that it may be in fact Madu Kanda Temple. As further evidence to support this argument, along the route from the north to Madu Kanda it is said that there are over 2,000 ruins of ancient temples where the Tooth Relic had found shelter. Kiri Vehera – where milk food was offered in obeisance, Kachchakodiya, where a flag (kodiya) was made

from a cloth (kachha), Wee Mangalyaya and Thapas Eliya (Thapas – hermits, Eliya – emerged) are some of the names of places that fall along this route. Furthermore, a trail of such places continues on from Madu Kanda Temple to Anuradhapura.

A temple complex at the time, the King who laid in wait for the arrival of the Relic, resided in a palace atop a mountain that resembled a rain cloud. It is this characteristic that resulted in the name derived from Megaya – rain, Giriya – mountain. Interestingly even today one can see this tufty mountain in the distance just beyond the Madu Kanda temple premises. Furthermore the name Madu Kanda too has its origins connecting to the historical events. Once the Sacred Relic was safely deposited at Abhayagiriya in Anuradhapura, the news of its arrival at Megaghiri Viharaya spread amongst the people who built a series of “Mandapa” or Madu – structures in veneration to the Tooth Relic – transforming the temple premises, thus earning its title as Madu Kanda Temple. Out of reach from this village lies a famous stone inscription, Thonigala comprising of 17 lines that is also said to mention this Sacred Tooth Relic temple.

Like the missing links in a chain, archaeological findings and tales of yore piece together an intriguing past of this unassuming little temple. It may be, with more findings coming to light along the Sacred Relic trail, a clearer picture may emerge and one day the temple would find its place alongside the many places of veneration around the Island.

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