



**The tarred stretch of Maha Oya Road from Aralaganvila, felt very much like a soothing balm to the mind. You could only wish there were more such roads in the bustling cities. The aligning trees arched to form a natural tunnel leaving us oblivious to the hot sultry sun of a particularly warm day. Heading towards Maduru Oya Reservoir had already become a pleasing one.**

***Words Prasadini Nanayakkara | Photographs Mahesh Prasantha***

To reach the reservoir we took a turn off that fell across the Maduru Oya National Park. The last stretch transformed to untarred road that kicked up a storm of dust as the occasional vehicle passed by. This did not take away from the natural surroundings. Vast open field on either side, the mountains and the forest reserve in the distance left us in isolation with the hidden wonders in the distant shade and we were eager to catch sight of inhabitants of a mammoth scale.

The approach to our destination turned out to be a rickety drive and the bund rose above the valley stowing away a view of the reservoir. First though, we ventured to investigate an

ancient sluice gate hidden among the tall grass in the vicinity. A closer look revealed a pair of structures assembled with sizeable boulders further layered with bricks it seemed for additional protection and preservation. A helpful signboard relayed its historical background beginning with its discovery during construction of the new sluice gate in 1981. Although the origin of the sluice gate is said to be unknown, studies reveal that it dates as far back as the 1st Century BC, long before the arrival of King Vijaya (6th Century BC). A popular belief held is that the Yakshas (ancient tribe) living in that period initiated the original design of the sluice gate.

**Discovered during construction of the new sluice gate in 1981 the origin of the ANcient sluice gate IS said to be unknown. studies Have revealed that it dates as far back as the 1st century BC, long before the arrival of King Vijaya (6th Century BC) to Sri Lanka.**

Furthermore, the history also discloses the origins of Maduru Oya, as the Mahadaragalla Tank constructed by King Mahasen in 273 AD. A name, which evolved to Mahadara and then Madara to finally, what it is known today - Maduru. From the foot of the elevation to the bund the tarmac veered gracefully around the valley. Along its length the Reservoir slowly emerged into view, the temptation to beat the heat and leap into this vast stretch of gently undulating water seemed too great to resist. The Dam's crest stretched to a distance of 150m at which end rose a Buddha statue, offerings of temple flowers lay bunched at its altar plucked from nearby trees. Additionally, a notice detailed particulars of the Reservoir putting a number to this seemingly endless body of water at almost 6400 hectares.

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In the opposite direction the valley stretched below, lending a vista of stunning landscape. In the distance the NDK Reservoir could be spotted implying that once upon a time both these reservoirs would have stood as one and the valley then submerged. From the crest the road spiraled downward towards the Reservoir where we gladly soaked our feet and enjoyed a view across the water at eye level. Its stillness seemed to creep upon us as we stood quietly gazing over its quiet depths.

From the crest the road spirals downward towards the reservoir where a view across the water at eye level can be had. Its stillness seemed to creep upon us as we stood quietly gazing over its quiet depths.

After much tarrying about to soak in as much of the surroundings as possible we returned on our way towards Maha Oya. Our hopes of spotting wild elephants seemed to slip away. The afternoon sun would have sent them ambling farther into the depths of the reserve we thought dejectedly. Along the way we passed the Omunagala Rock in the distance, its distinct pinnacle looming over the landscape further adding to the unique beauty of the surroundings. A little distance away from here good fortune finally favoured our path... An excited shout alerting the presence of elephants snapped us from a stupor to a clamour of activity. A whole herd could be spotted scattered about in the distance. Grazing quietly with their inherent lazy elegance, the herd had chosen a spot rich with tall blades of grass. A few had come out into the open while many more stood hidden in the shade. We could just about spot a youngster in their midst as well. A scrumptious meal it seemed was too much temptation even in the blistering heat for these majestic foragers. Their tough hides were covered heavily with dust, maybe the remnants of powdering after a bath. We stood watching them feed mouthful after mouthful, wondering if these highly perceptive animals could feel curious pairs of eyes upon them. If they could, humans certainly didn't interest them.

After many minutes of eager observation we quietly set on our way once again leaving the elephants in their peaceful setting, our day's excursion complete. We had revelled in the many wonders of Maduru Oya, to the manmade structures from both the past and the present, to its inimitable natural environs. With a feeling of mission accomplished, hunger pangs were duly noted.

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