Mahamevnawa: Serenity amidst the Wilderness

Posted on



Sambuddharaja Maligawa, lit up against the night sky, is home to sacred relics of the Buddha and Arahants
Photo credit: Mahamevnawa

Away from the life in the city, Mahamevnawa and its idyllic environs soothe the mind of the visitor with its serenity and spirituality.

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Most Ven Kiribathgoda Gnanananda Thero, Founder and Chief Advisor of the Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery

Seventy-seven kilometres away from Colombo, untouched by modern-day complexities of blaring horns, fast-paced life and short-lived moments, lies the serene village of Waduwawa in Polgahawela. In beautiful contrast to the lush greens of the village, gleaming in gold and white sits the Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery. A tribute to magnificent Buddhist architecture, the monastery complex is home to over 120 monks and 50 lay devotees who are awaiting ordination.

Accompanied by the light breeze and the musical sound of flowing water we stepped on to the monastery grounds, cool and soothing beneath our bare feet. The sight that greeted us was breath-taking. Sambuddharaja Maligawa – The Sacred Gautama Buddha Mansion stood looking dignified in amber, its exterior adorned with intricate wooden carvings and lifelike statues that represented deities and Buddhist legends. A small conduit of water, with red lotuses blooming sporadically on the surface surrounded the structure.

Inside the building were statues and paintings that depicted significant moments from the Buddha’s life and in the centre lay the main Buddha statue of the monastery complex. Finely painted in gold and bearing an expression of utmost compassion, the Buddha statue evoked deep reverence. The ambience was tranquil; one could sit in silence beside the enormous statue and feel the calm of a spiritual life.

The upper-most floor of the Sacred Gautama Buddha Mansion houses the Fragrant Chamber, holding a sacred reliquary containing the relics of the Buddha and Arahants. While the chamber is not open to the public, we were privileged to witness the beautiful interior, permitted by the generous Bhikkus. However, photographs were not allowed. The chamber is panelled entirely in sandalwood tiles, and the wooden ceiling is adorned with intricate wooden flowers embedded with gemstones. In the centre was a magnificent chandelier, and right beneath it was the gold reliquary in the shape of a stupa. The fine craftsmanship was spectacular, in consistence with the architecture of the monastery.



The pristine white Dhammachakka Stupa draws great veneration of the devotees
Photo credit: Mahamevnawa

To the far north-east of the Mansion, was a pristine white stupa – Dhammachakka Stupa. When we got closer, we discovered that the stupa was built on the top of a chamber, in which a grand statue of the Buddha in seating position was located, depicting the first ever sermon by the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

Kiribathgoda Gnanananda Thero founded the Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery in 1999, with the intention of spreading the Dhamma, simplified so that anyone would understand. What started out with two small makeshift huts, grew into the colossal complex seen today, in less than two decades. The devotees who flocked around the simplified teaching of the Dhamma, contributed to the accelerated growth of the monastery.



Within the Dana Shalawa, the sermon and chanting of gatha prior to the serving of food

Today, Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery is spread across the island and is also in 14 countries such as United States of America, Australia, United Kingdom and South Korea.

Hundreds of devotees visit the monastery daily. Even as we walked around the premises, families, groups of devotees and foreign visitors could be seen paying homage to the Buddha. All devotees clad in white, it was a peaceful sight to see.

The monastery provides guided tours, meditation classes and ample opportunity to discuss the Dhamma with the Bhikkus. One can participate in a Pirith ceremony, offer food to resident Bhikkus, or simply revel in the reverent serenity of the premises.



The disciplined and composed mannerisms of the Bhikkus according to the teachings of the Buddha

An appealing fragrance of jasmine greeted us as we made our way towards the Sacred Bodhi Tree complex. A sapling from the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura has been planted at this site, and another four Bo trees accompany the main one in the centre, adding a soothing rustle to the air filled with the flowery aroma and the music of water.

The monastery grounds are fully maintained by the Bhikkus and the devotees themselves; they continue to make great effort in order to sustain the pristine quality of the hallowed grounds.

Mahamevnawa welcomes anyone who wishes to visit, at no cost. The monastery premises are open to visitors daily except on Mondays, when the weekly maintenance activities are done.

The Mahamevnawa Monastery in Polgahawela is an ideal escape from the usual hustle and bustle of life. The tranquillity in the premises, invoked by reverence and nature would heal one’s mind and soul.




