Nilavarai Bottomless Well: An Infinite Experience

Posted on

The aquamarine depths of Nilavarai

A lone figure that stood atop the wall of the Well caught my eye. Squinting, I tried to comprehend what he was doing up there. AHHHHH!! SPLASH!!! All at once with a yell he jumped and I rushed towards the site, wrought with worry, only to glimpse him and many others swimming quite happily amidst the aquamarine depths of the Nilavarai Bottomless Well.

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Situated along the Puttur road in Jaffna and flanked by a modern Sivan Kovil, the

Nilavarai Bottomless Well showed no signs of its unique existence. If a visitor were unaware of its location, they might probably pass right by it due to its unremarkable surroundings. However, this was not to be the case as our search for the Well proved to be quite easy with the place abuzz with people, much to our surprise.

By The Well…

Slowly we made our way towards the Bottomless Well, dodging through the crowd that scurried back and forth in front of the Kovil, and came upon an opened gate with a flight of stairs that ran down to the waters of the Well. People ran up and down these stairs some emerging through the gate, only to climb atop and jump into the depths below again. At first we were taken aback and worried. However, hastening to one side of the Well where some stood watching the ensuing spectacle, we were able to put our doubts to rest upon seeing a tethered rope in the midst of the Well in order to help the swimmers pull themselves out of the water. Reassured and relaxed, we eagerly observed all surrounding activities while enjoying the wisps of conversations that floated around us.

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Mystic Depths…

Nilavarai Well – a natural underground water well – thought to be bottomless has many enthralling legends adding to the mysteries that encircle it. Almost all legends are connected with the Ramayana, which includes the chronicles of Rama – the seventh avatar of God Vishnu. According to legend, Seetha, wife of Rama, while on the return journey to India was overcome with thirst and as there was no water to be found, Rama had gallantly shot an arrow on to the earth creating a well. Some believe this to be the origin of Nilavarai. However, varying legends replace different characters such as Hanuman, a devotee of Rama, shooting an arrow to create the Well in a bid to quench Rama’s thirst and so on. Regardless, since the olden times the Well has been a source of fresh water that never seems to deplete and is also used for irrigation activities in the area.

People around the area claim that the first 40 feet of the Well contains fresh water while the water after this point is deemed to be salty, probably attesting to a connection to the sea at Kankasanturai. The Well has two tunnels and some say that these tunnels are connected to the Keerimalai ponds located near

Naguleswaram Temple in Jaffna, while others say that the Well has a connection with an underground tunnel in Matale, which is hundreds of miles from here. A bystander also told us about an experiment carried out by a gentleman, who put a marked lemon in the waters to find that it surfaced at the Keerimalai ponds.

Adding to the Well's enigmatic aura, according to the folk who live in the area, some foreign scuba divers had attempted to explore the Well with the aid of ropes and oxygen tanks; their attempts to reach the bottom though, proved futile. It is said that they commented on experiencing strong currents; and beingunable to discover the bottom, they left a rope marking the depth that they had been able to reach in their exploration of this remarkable though mysterious Well.

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End Of An Adventure

Gradually we walked onto the side of the main road by the Well to watch a procession that emerged from the nearby Sivan Kovil, feeling somewhat hesitant. However, the smiling and welcoming gazes of the people around us assured a sense of warmth as we bid them good-bye and softly wished that the blessings of the gods would protect them through their journey. As the sounds of the procession faded and passed, we turned towards the Well and paused for a moment. Who could have thought that the ramshackled Nilavarai Bottomless Well with its discoloured and chipped walls could unfold such intriguing secrets among its unassuming aquamarine depths.

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