



The dwarfed structures beside the Maha Gala

**An ancient cave temple built centuries ago, mammoth rocks that warrant a climb to some unknown pinnacle... and little else was known. All we had was a name - Parama Kanda Raja Maha Viharaya.**

***Words Prasadini Nanayakkara Photographs Menaka Aravinda***

Travelling along the Chilaw Road in Anamaduwa - a small town in the Puttalam District - the temple is approached by the narrow gravel road named Vihara Mawatha. Just midway along the path a high-rise of gargantuan boulders filled the sky and earth around us, offering an inkling of the temple's whereabouts. Soon enough a signature arch of the temple entrance appeared just beyond and we instantly stepped into a veil of stillness. Even in the sultry afternoon the cool shade of trees offered an oasis for our wandering feet.

The diminutive nature of the new structures did little to obstruct the antiquity found at every turn. Our first site of interest was the image house sheltered within a cave of one of the large rock outcrops. Within were aged murals of Buddhist imagery and statues of hues and tones that have been likened to those of the Anuradhapura era. Tracing the walls along

the corridors we find a replica of the Thonigala rock inscription, the original of which is located a short distance outside of the temple premises. This stone inscription of the 1st century BC is one of few isolated records that give credence to the temple's antiquity with its references to the temple. Scrawled in clear neat lines the odd Brahma letterings of the replica did little to enlighten us. According to the Chief Priest at the temple its translation by historians finds mention of a leader, Watta Gamini Abhaya, more commonly known as King Walagamba, the founder of the temple and his heir Tissa, and both of whom functioned as active patrons of the temple. It also includes a King's decree which declares that the taxes from water and fisheries in two surrounding cities must be made towards the temple's benefit and for bare necessities of the clergy.

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The original name of the temple we discover was *Achcha Giritha Tissa Pabbatha* which reads as Tissa's bear-like rock. How this transformed to Parama Kanda is unknown. The lore carried through word of mouth also suggests that the temple had been an offering to Arahats or Buddhist ascetics, and duly the name of the fourth large rock in the premises is the '*Rahat Gala*' where it is believed they had resided. The other large boulders that diminish all else have been aptly named '*Maha Gala*' and numbered chronologically. However it is to *Rahat Gala* that we venture where we are promised the most breathtaking spectacle to ever set eyes on. We follow the shaded path that falls by the Image House and reach a long ascent of steps.

A hundred and many more steps later we reached the top of the outcrop. Atop stood an unusual arrangement of rock structures, one of which seemed to just hang in the balance, teetering heavily over the edge, for centuries defying gravity. In its dark shelter lay a glassy pool of water. Another seemed to soar away into the sky as though a high tidal wave reaching the heavens. Beyond unfolded a dizzying expanse of greenery that rushed to meet the horizon. We edged our way up the 'tidal wave' to reach its apex. From up here the surrounding rocks sat meekly below amidst thick mobs of greenery. Lakes, boulders, shadows of clouds lay quietly below and all was still and silent. It felt like the edge of the earth. One can only imagine the ascetics in quiet meditation here, their silent presence undetected.

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