Say what?

Posted on
The breathtaking view of the mountains and a glimpse of Ratnapura city from the Angammana Temple

Cruising through the somewhat unfamiliar terrain of Ratnapura and its outskirts, village names strange to our ears and unheard of before piqued our curiosity. Here are just a few stories that we discovered as to how these names came about…

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Sabaragamuwa and Ratnapura

Many historians explain that Sabaragamuwa was originally known as Saparagrama, evolving through the ages to Saparagamu, Saparagomu, Saparagamuwa and finally to Sabaragamuwa. The name is thought to have been influenced by the many traders who visited the hills in search of gems, which the area has been renowned for since ancient times. Saplar, sapar and other similar names have been used to describe gems.

Further, history suggests that Ratnapura was called Saparapura, and Sapara is

believed to have its origins in Greek.

However, if we are to disregard historical facts and listen to a more vivid tale of how the name came about, then pay some attention to a tale related in the Ramayana epic. The arrow shot by Rama to King Ravana in Balangoda is said to have travelled many miles, finally finding a resting spot on a *habarala* bush (a big rooted taro). This place was called first Habralagamuwa, which later changed to Habaragamuwa and then Sabaragamuwa.

Karapincha

When hearing the name Karapincha, your mind undoubtedly will conjure up the Karapincha that we use as a flavouring item when cooking. However, if you were to travel a little way from Ratnapura along the Hidellana-Karapincha road, you will reach a village called Karapincha. It is but a small village, with sparse houses, a tea estate by the same name, rubber plantations and paddy fields. No one seemed to know how this unusual name came to be, but many villagers recall how their fathers and grandfathers came to the village many years ago when it was less prosperous.

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Scenic views of rubber plantations and workers carrying buckets of rubber latex to be processed add to the rustic feel that is inherent to the place, while the laid-back nature and the friendly greetings of the villagers will welcome any inquisitive traveller.

Ekneligoda

There is a poem written in Sinhala detailing step by step how Ekneligoda got its name.

Once in a paddy field, a paddy seed was planted From that one (ek) seed, a pod of paddy (vee karala) grew And in that pod of paddy, paddy seeds fertilised and yielded a paddy seer (naliyak: a South Asian unit of measure, which is about one kilogram) And from this one unit of seer, a lot (godak) of paddy were harvested.

And that’s how the name Ek-nali-goda was decided upon.

Situated along the Kuruwita-Erathna Road, nowadays Ekneligoda is an obscure little village with scattered houses. It is only mentioned now and then when someone recalls the name of the Ekneligoda Walawwa, the ancestral home of Ekneligoda Dissawe, now closed up and viewed only by appointment. A paddy field is a rare sight in the area, while the most breathtaking view is that of the distant mountain ranges that become more visible as you go up the road to reach Batathota.

Batathota

The Batathota Port is where the Kuru Ganga, which starts from Adam's Peak and flows through Erathna, joins Maha Dola. Lord Buddha in his visit to Sri Lanka journeyed through the sky, and alighted at this port, and thus the port was named Bata-thota—the port where he descended (got down).

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Batathota is well known for the Batathota Gal Len Viharaya (temple), nestled in the Batathota Mountain. The temple is made up of several caves and the most famous of all is the Diva Guhava. It is said that during the day time the cave is filled with sunlight and that is how the cave got its name *Diva* – day, *Guhava* – cave. The cave is 150 feet long, 70 feet wide and 50 feet tall. According to legend when Lord Buddha visited Sri Lanka for the third time, he journeyed to Adam's Peak upon the request of Sumana Saman, a deity, to leave his footprint. And afterwards along with his chief disciples and 500 Arahats he had come to the *Diva Guhava* and rested awhile.

A path, flagged by makeshift shops on one side, leads the way to the foot of the Batathota temple. The shops were strewn with little trinkets and snacks. The path to the top of the cave is a combination of steps and upward slopping concrete pavements, sheltered with a roof at certain points where the climb is quick but strenuous. At the top where the cave stands, a steady stream of water drips to a small pool, lending a cool air, while inside there are two Buddha statues for pilgrims to worship.

Devipahala

A long time ago the jewellery belonging to Saman Deviyo (a deity) in the Saman

Devalaya at Deraniyagala, was tainted due to a priest’s error. The God’s jewellery consisted of a golden arrow wrapped in a white cloth. After the jewellery was tainted, the God did not want to reside at the Devalaya. And as such the jewels, through divine power, alighted at the Gavari Mountain in Kuruvita. There was a village there and in one house lived a grandmother and her granddaughter. One day, during the evening, the granddaughter was sweeping the garden when the grandmother asked her to fetch some water from the stream. However, since she was not done with her task, she refused.

The grandmother went to the stream by herself. Immersing the water pot in the stream, her eye soon picked up a shadow shimmering in the waters. After staring for a while she looked up towards a na tree by the stream and saw the figure of Saman Deviyo.

> The village where the god manifested (Deviyo pahalavuna) was thus named Devi-pahala. Today the most discerning feature of the village is the power plant that is still in the process of being built

She called out to her granddaughter, and she came running with the whisk that she was using to sweep the garden. Pointing towards the tree, the grandmother inquired whether she saw the deity. Assuring the grandmother that she saw as well, she pointed the whisk at the deity who quickly disappeared. Affronted, the deity then alighted at the Saman Devalaya in Ratnapura where the jewellery is preserved and worshiped to this day.

The village where the God manifested (*Deviyopahalavuna*) was thus named Devi-pahala.

Today the most discerning feature of the village is the power plant that is still in the process of being built.

Angammana

In the olden days, one king, King Keerthi Sri Rajasingha disguised himself and went from village to village. En-route to one village, he met a villager climbing a kithul tree. On learning where the King was headed, the villager warned him to not step into the village, as there was a dangerous wild buffalo and he would not be able to return alive.

However, not heeding the man’s words, the King went into the village and lo and behold, a wild buffalo came charging towards him. Not fearing the menacing beast, the King stood his ground. When the buffalo drew close enough to harm the King, he took hold of its horns and hurled it to the ground. Taking the horns of the wild buffalo, the king left the village and met the villager climbing the kithul tree again. The King handed over the horns to the villager and advised him to bring them to the castle.

The man took the horns to the castle as he was bid, and was startled to see the King, who had appeared disguised as a traveller before. The King, pleased that the villager warned people against the danger that lay ahead, presented him with a village. As the village (gama) was given because of horns (ang), it was named Angammana.

The most conspicuous place in the village today is the Angammana Raja Maha Viharaya. It is a place where people of all walks of life gather, from youngsters who practice traditional Kandyan dancing to those who come to worship at the temple.

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It is said that the origin of the temple dates back to the 1700s, to the time of Angamman Nilame who was a member of King Keerthi Rajasingha’s court. One day as he was travelling on a boat along the river to see the ‘water cutting’ site of the Saman Devalaya at Athmal Ella, he noticed a trail of smoke rising from the forest nearby. Seeing some people melting treacle within some caves, he deemed that these caves would be a perfect spot to build the Angammana Temple.

Batugedara

The first village you come across along the Ratnapura-Badulla road from the town of Ratnapura is Batugedara. One tale about how the name came to be is that once lunch was taken from one house to the farmers who were busy harvesting in the fields. When one farmer got ready to eat, the lady of the house regretfully said that the eggplants (batu) were left at home (batu gedara). All present at the occasion,

realising the fact, repeated it, asking whether the eggplants were left at home (batu gedara neda) and from that time on the village was named Batugedara.

Another story goes that there were two ports to reach the river and as such the place was called *Batadedora* (two doors to get down). Later it evolved to Batugedara.

Batugedara is now a small town with plenty of shops, twinkling lights and modern roads with no signs of eggplants, at least not by the roadside.

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