

# Tannivelle Devalaya: A Symbol Of History Entwined With Sanctity



**At the threshold of a quiet suburb lies a spiritual sanctuary enveloped with mysteries and historical memories of a legendary Prince and his gallant white horse; a Prince that touched the hearts of an ancient community with his benevolent and heroic acts, whose blessings and protection are invoked even today by a grateful and devoted people.**

***Words Shehara de Mel Photographs Prabath Chathuranga***

Sitting serenely, embraced by the waters of the Thinipiti Wewa is a place of devotion, worship and mystical sanctity; the Tannivelle Devalaya. It is a prominent sight in the town of Madampe beckoning those who pass by to break their journey and pay obeisance to the divine powers sheltered within. People from various backgrounds, faiths and beliefs flock to the Devalaya to offer their humble worship and respect and it is this rare sight that spurs one to venture in and discover its mystery.

## **The Tale Of A Warrior Prince**

Steeped in historical tales and influence, the Devalaya was originally built in recognition of Prince Taniya Vallabha, a legendary figure during the Kotte Kingdom renowned in the region for his heroic and gallant efforts. The son of the second queen of Viraparakramabahu VIII, the Prince was appointed Viceroy of the Madampe region. Famed among the community for fearlessly driving away foreign invaders and restoring traditional lands, Prince Taniya Vallabha reconstructed ancient tanks, repaired small village tanks and provided sufficient water for cultivation. In honour of his efforts and great benevolence, the people built the Devalaya paying him obeisance as Tannivelle Deviyo. It is dedicated as a place of religious ritual by a grateful people whose belief that offering worship to Tannivelle Deviyo would give them bountiful harvest and success in their endeavours.

Intrigued by the sculpture of the white horse, visitors gather around to explore this illustrious symbol belonging to that era. According to folklore, the Prince was a great warrior often seen riding his majestic white horse. Many therefore claim that they have seen the supernatural sighting of the Tannivelle deity floating through the air on horseback during the time of the annual harvest. Mystified by this tale, many stood still, gazing beyond the giant horse towards the glistening waters of the tank, imagining a visual of the deity floating through the air on a white horse. Their wonderment was a spectacle for devotees gracing the shrine, but only for a moment; nothing, not even a few wide-eyed visitors could distract them from their sacred rituals.

### **A symbol of spiritual awakening**

Spreading its branches like the wings of an eagle and sheltering the Devalaya is the Bodhi tree, believed to be more than 250 years old. □Its looming presence exudes strength and majesty, a testament of its divine power. An offshoot of its tree stands closeby. While much of the structures in the Devalaya have been constructed or improved by the Tannivelle Maha Devalaya Trust that ancient aura of holiness and devotion is still maintained.

### **The Tannivelle Shrine**

The main shrine known as the Tannivelle Devalaya, is dedicated to the deified Prince and contains the statue of the deity, symbolic weapons and regal ornaments belonging to the Prince. Faithful believers stand before the shrine paying reverence to the Tannivelle Deviyo while others break coconuts as a ritual to ward off evil. The door to the inner shrine of the Devalaya is opened to the public on Wednesdays and Saturdays as a special pooja is conducted. Ornaments including symbolic weapons enshrined within the Devalaya are taken out once a year and washed in fragrant water during the 'Nanumura Mangalya', a special festival held in August attracting thousands of devotees.

### **Two Faiths Interwoven Under One Sanctuary**

A few steps away from the Tannivelle Devalaya lies the Kadawara Devalaya dedicated to the Kadawara Deviyo. This sacred shrine, with a white and copper exterior, is graced by a number of people offering worship and reverence. Resting in the shadows at the edge of the site is a Nuga tree, adorned with colourful ribbons and pieces of cloth. These serve as signs of vows made by people in

return for blessings and protection. Displaying the strong historical connection between Buddhism and Hinduism, a new addition adjoins the wall surrounding the Bodhi tree: the Vihara or shrine sheltering the Samadhi Buddha statue. A tiny structure at the rear end of the Devalaya houses a large collection of clay pots used for milk boiling ceremonies.

Although located by the main road, the Devalaya preserves its own tranquil atmosphere, a silence that makes one oblivious to everything around and renders even the jarring noise of a bus horn a distant sound. Lulled by the spiritual ambience of it all, only the abrupt sound of a coconut breaking against the cold stone stirs one back to reality from the mystical world of the Tannivelle Devalaya.

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