The Tale of a Sacred Grinding Stone

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A beautiful painting of Ven Shatbasha Parameshwara Mahindalankara Thero and Keerawella Hiripitiya Diyawadana Nilame hiding the Dalada Vahansa in the Sacred Grinding Stone

A mammoth, plump stone lies quiet, undisturbed by the test of time. Centuries ago, in its midst, this sacred grinding stone ingeniously hid the Dalada Vahansa.

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We were in Kuruwita town, in search of the serene and historic Sri Dalada Delgamu

Viharaya.

The pathway from the Ratnapura road was rustic, and at its end the temple beamed quaintly. Today the surroundings are leafy with a few homes in sight. Yet, during the reign of the Kotte Kingdom, this area was a forest where wild island breadfruit (*val del*) grew aplenty and well-rounded. It gave the area it's name 'Delgamuwa', meaning a 'thicket of breadfruit'.

The Sacred Tooth Relic of the Supreme Enlightened Buddha had an adventurous journey throughout the island before it was safely placed at Sri Dalada Maligawa in Kandy. One famous old legend relates how the Sacred Relic sought sanctuary from Portuguese invaders in a grinding stone in the thick of the jungle of Kuruwita. The Sacred Relic was the undisputed sign of leadership in Sri Lanka, to attain power over the island, the Portuguese therefore sought its possession. They were deviously bettered by Keerawella Hiripitiya Diyawadana Nilame who secretly brought the Relic to the temple in Delgamuwa, it was hidden in the pendant on his hip chain. To outwit the invaders further, Ven Shatbasha Parameshwara Mahindalankara Thero, then Chief Incumbent of the viharaya, placed the sacred relic casket in a crevice set within a large, and almost unmovable grinding stone. It is said the grinding stone was placed behind a statue of the Buddha. There the Sacred Relic remained undiscovered for 43 years despite many abrupt search parties conducted by the Portuguese.

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During this time the viharaya, known as Sabaragamuwa Viharaya, at the time was part of the Kingdom of Seethawaka and thus was under the protection of King Mayadunne. Despite his constant struggle with the Portuguese, the King ensured the protection of the Relic and thus donated land to formally establish the Delgamu Dalada Viharaya. His son, Rajasinghe I of Seethawaka is credited to have initiated the Esala Dalada Perahera, which was held at the Sabaragamuwa Saman Devala for 11 years during his reign.



The Sacred Grinding Stone, in which the Sacred Relic was hidden for decades

This thrilling, epic tale of the Dalada Vahansa being brought to the temple is vibrantly illustrated in the Viharage or Shrine Room. In tribute to the brave heroics of King Mayadunne, a beautiful illustration of him adorns one of the walls of the Viharage. The gaps are filled with delicate motifs, which stay true to the island’s indigenous ancient art form.

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The Sacred Tooth Relic was taken in grand procession to the Kingdom of Kandy, the eventual bastian of the Sri Lankan monarchy once King Wimaladharmasuriya I was established as King. It was hence transferred from the humble grinding stone to an elaborate golden casket.



The Viharage displays exquisite paintings relating to Buddhism and the journey of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka

Today, the sturdy grinding stone remains sanctified, protected and revered. Though it is jarred on one side, possibly damage sustained during Portuguese raids, the Sacred Grinding Stone shows signs of resilience. Other remnants of the past are an ancient stone flower stand with a faded motif as well as tools and pottery displayed at the octagonal shaped temple museum.



The quaint, chaste grounds of the Sri Dalada Delgamu Viharaya

The charming and quaint Sri Dalada Delgamu Viharaya is replete with Kotte as well as Kandyan era architectural styles. The Bo tree, said to be over 800 years old, offers shade to the sanctified grounds. It is a historic and hallowed site that has a humble and chaste aura, and many stories to tell.