Tracing The Story Of Lanka Patuna

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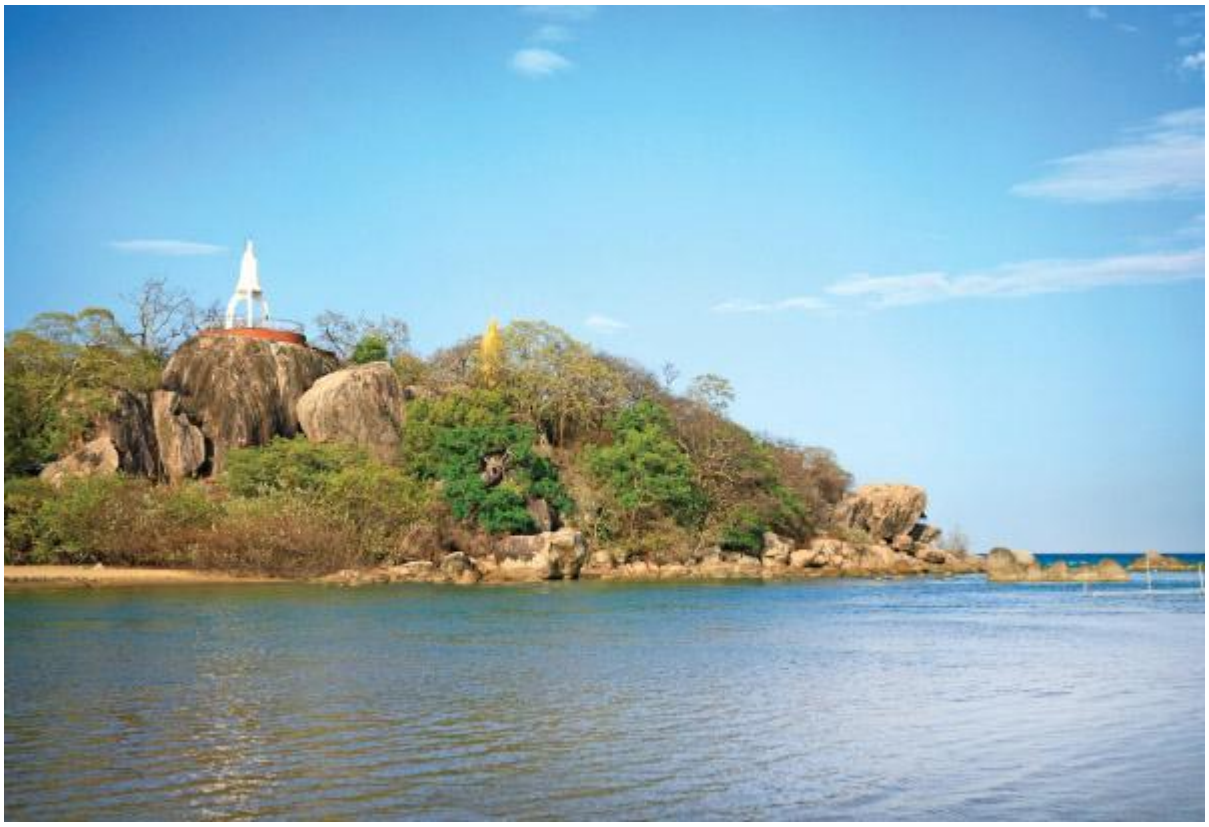

The view of Samudragiri Viharaya from ashore

Fair winds and good tidings bore prince dhantha and princesses hemamala to a landing where the azure sky and the turquoise sea regarded each other in seemingly close proximity.

Words Chamindra Warusawitharane Photographs Indika De Silva

A simple hair pin holding up the Princess' lustrous black tresses concealed a treasure that they guarded with their lives. Disguised in Brahmin attire, the royal couple from India were on a secret mission to safely deliver the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha to King Kithsiri Mewan of Sri Lanka from King Guhasiva of Kalinga as he could not protect the relic from his enemies. The two first landed in Sri Lankan soil at the 'port of Lankapattana' in Kottiar Pattu, Trincomalee. Thus, unfolds the story of the arrival of the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha in Sri Lanka. The port of

Lankapattana where the royal couple first landed is now called Lanka Patuna and we arrived there via Thoppur to explore the lingering traces of its eventful past.

Serenity engulfed Lanka Patuna seas lulled by the gentle waves lapping against the sand and the white globular form of the chaithya in the temple on a rock gleamed against the sky. At first glance, the wide expanse of beauty in intense shades of blue, beige and green made my heart miss a beat. The atmosphere seemed to be guarding its secret past under a veil of stillness. Crossing a bridge, we trooped towards the Samudragiri Viharaya (Temple on the rock by the sea) where Prince Dhantha and Princess Hemamala watched over the sacred relic overnight before taking it to present to the King. The story unravels how the Prince and the Princess set sail from Tamralipti, a port at the mouth of the river Ganges and arrived in Lankapattana one fine day at dusk where they remained under shelter on the nearby rock until dawn before heading towards Anuradhapura.

According to archaeological findings the ancient temple had been built in the style of the Anuradhapura era. To this day certain traces of the ancient temple exist in the form of a pond and a dilapidated stone stair case. Climbing a circular ascent while pausing to take a look at some of the remains, we came to a rocky landing of the temple, where the ancient pond stood in the shade of a tree.

A magnificent panorama of white beaches, miniature trees and a sketch of many shades of blue and green greeted us

The incumbents of the present day temple have slowly commenced rebuilding the site to its former glory by adding a chaithya, a statue of Lord Buddha and a place of worship. We also witnessed a larger than life image of Prince Dhantha and Princess Hemamala being sculpted in the rock face. Observing these additions as well as remains of the ancient temple, we climbed to the top of the rock.

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A magnificent panorama of white beaches, miniature trees and a sketch of many shades of blue and green greeted us. From the top we could see the vast expanse of the ocean and the Lanka Patuna beach, and I tried to imagine that day, as the story unveils, when a Royal Prince and a Princess in disguise landed on this part of the Island intent on completing their mission.

According to the narrative, when the Buddha attained Parinibbana, his body was cremated in a sandalwood pyre at Kusinara in India and his left canine tooth was retrieved from the funeral pyre by Arahat Khema who gave it to King Brahmadatta. This tooth relic then became a royal possession in Brahmadatta’s country and was kept in the city of Dantapuri (assumed to be present day Puri in Orissa). Many years later, following numerous wars fought over the possession of the tooth relic (based on the belief that whoever possessed the Sacred Tooth Relic had a right to rule) Prince Dhantha and Princess Hemamala arrived in Lanka Patuna bearing the sacred relic to the Island nation, where it continues to be a revered symbol of Buddhism.

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