

A bit of Heritage.....

**NAGADEEPA STUPA and
PURANA RAJA MAHA VIHARAYA**

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Ancient Nakadiva or Nagadeepa according to scholars is the northernmost part of Sri Lanka which includes the Jaffna peninsula and the surrounding islands. The exact southern boundary is not known.

Presently, Nagadeepa is one of the islands off the coast of Jaffna. It can be reached by a ferry starting from the jetty at Kurikattuwan in Punkuduthivu. The island of Nagadeepa is approximately four square kilometers in area. During the months of October to February the seas are quite rough making this journey even more challenging. Despite the island being an ancient settlement, today it supports a small population of about 3000 inhabitants.

Nagadeepa or Nainathivu is known to be the place which the Buddha visited in the month of Bak around 550 BCE, five years after attaining enlightenment. It marked the Buddha's second visit to Sri Lanka.

The chronicles, Mahāvamsa¹, Deepavamsa, and the ancient Tamil Buddhist epic, Manimekhalai written during the 5th or 6th CE describes in detail the visit of the Buddha to Nagadeepa. The island is described as Manipallavadeepa in Manimekhalai and Maninagadeepa in the Pūjāvaliya.

1 References to Nagadeepa: MV I,54;xx,25; xxxv,124; xxxvi.9,36; CVxlii. 92. Jaffna Peninsula; EZ IV p.237



Nagadeepa Viharaya

It is believed that in ancient times Nakadiva or Nagadeepa was populated mostly by the Naga people. Seeing the impending clash between two Naga Kings, Mahodara the uncle and Chulodara a nephew, over the possession of a gem-studded throne, the Buddha, the Compassionate One, thought it fit to intervene and mediate in settling the dispute. It is said that the Nagas were very powerful mystical beings and to subdue their pride and arrogance, the Buddha had to use psychic powers. Having made them submissive and receptive to his teachings the Buddha descended amidst the Nagas and seated on the gem-studded throne, which was the item of dispute, counselled them, preaching the “*Doctrine that begets concord*”. It is said that having listened to the doctrine the Naga Kings and the Nagas paid homage to the Buddha and overcome by piety offered him the gem-studded throne. He advised them to consider the throne as an *uddesika dhātu* (a relic used by the Buddha) and returned it to the Kings.

There is a belief that the Stupa at Nagadeepa was built enshrining the throne and came to be known as the Rajayatana Stupa. A Kiripalu tree which provided shade to the Buddha was also planted at the site as an object of veneration. The Chronicles state that Maniakkhika, the Naga King of Kelaniya, having witnessed the event, invited the Buddha to visit Kelaniya in the future.

The Stupa thus established had been developed and renovated by King Devanampiyatissa and Dutugemunu during the earliest periods.

During the 17th Century, the original Stupa was destroyed by the Portuguese. The ruins of the Rajayathana Stupa were discovered and restored by Ven. Randoimbe Somatissa Thero when he visited Nagadeepa in the 1930s.

The island of Nagadeepa also houses another Buddhist viharaya recent times and known as Buddha Walauwa and the Nagapoosani Amman kovil, an ancient Hindu monument.

There are several stupas, dagabas, monasteries, temples and other Buddhist edifices in and around Nagadeepa island and the adjacent areas.

Kadurugoda Viharaya (Kantharoadai in Tamil) situated on the mainland, is the most important of these sites. Early records indicate around sixty small stupas, about 8 to 12 feet in diameter. Most of these are now destroyed and presently only twenty-two can be seen. But recent research has yielded the foundations of more stupas.

Many Scholars believe that this is the site at which the Buddha made his sermon to the Nagas, although so far, there is no proof substantiating the exact site.

Excavations in the environs of Nagadeepa island, have yielded artefacts indicating human activities dating to the pre historic period.

There are ruins of many ancient Buddhist monastic complexes scattered on the islands situated close to the Nagadeepa island such as in Delft (ancient Nadundiva), Veherapitiya ruins in Karainagar on the mainland (ancient Karadivaina), Punguduthivu (ancient Puvangudivaina) and more.

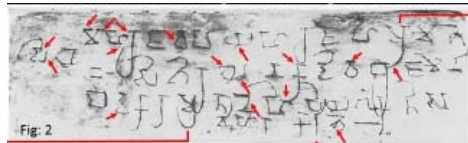
Several ancient ports and harbours dot the landscape around the island of Nagadeepa. On the mainland in Kankesanthurai is the harbour of Dambakolapatuna, from where the sacred Sri

Maha Bodhi tree was brought to Lanka from India by Therini Sanghamitta. The island known as Kayts or Velanai is the ancient port of Ūratota or Sūkaratissa.

A slab inscription found in the premises of the Nagapoosani Amman kovil states the manner in which foreign ship wrecks and traders should be dealt with at the port of Uratturai (ancient Ūratota, now, Kayts). The inscription is attributed to Maha Parakramabahu (1153–1186 CE) and is written in Tamil.

An *Attani* fragmentary stone pillar inscription written in Sinhala script of the first half of 10th century CE was discovered in Kadurugoda. It records certain immunities granted in respect of land belonging to the Abhayagiri Viharaya, Anuradhapura, which were situated in the Jaffna peninsula. Late Professor Ranawella (2004) attributes it to King Dappula IV.

A gold plate inscription of King Vasabha (126-170 CE) found at Vallipuram in the Jaffna District establishes that a Minister of King Vasabha by the name Isigiriya, governed Nagadipa (Nakadiva), indicating that the northern region was under the jurisdiction of the King. Further, it is of much religious significance since it mentions the construction of a viharaya called Piyuguka Tissa Viharaya in Badakara athana (supposedly in Velipura, today's Vallipuram). The language used in the inscription is early Sinhala and the script is 2nd Century Brahmi.



Vallipuram Gold Plate