

*A Little bit of Heritage .....*

## **KELANIYA – කැලණිය<sup>1</sup>**

*by*

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Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihāraya is more than a famous temple near Colombo—it's a living timeline of Sri Lanka's spiritual history, cultural resilience, and identity. The story begins with the Buddha's **third and final visit to Lanka**, believed to have taken place on a **Vesak Full Moon Poya Day**, eight years after Enlightenment. Kelaniya (also known in ancient sources as Kalyāṇi) was once a prosperous Nāga kingdom with a key port



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1. Full article on Kelaniya is in the Bosat Website : <https://bosat.vajirarama.lk>

(Kalyāṇi Paṭṭanam) and a busy river route connecting the interior to the sea. That alone tells you something powerful: spirituality and civilization grew together here—trade, community life, and faith were deeply connected.

This final visit happened because **Nāga King Maniakkhika**, who had met the Buddha during the earlier Nagadeepa event, invited him to Keḷaṇiya. The Buddha arrived with **500 Arahants** and was welcomed with great honor. One detail makes this moment especially meaningful: the Buddha delivered a discourse while seated on a **gem-studded throne**—the same throne that had once triggered a serious conflict between two Nāga kings at Nagadeepa, until the Buddha intervened and prevented violence. In other words, Keḷaṇiya stands for a timeless message: **peace is always greater than victory**, and wisdom is stronger than power.

After this sacred moment, King Maniakkhika built a **stupa (dagaba)** to enshrine the throne in a unique “heap of paddy” shape called **Dhānyākāra**, later rising to about **ninety feet**. On the opposite bank of the Kelani River, he also built another stupa to enshrine the Buddha’s **bathing robe**, later developed by King Kith Siri Mevan—hence the name **Egoda Keḷaṇiya Kith Siri Mevan Vihāraya**, also known as the **Sivuru Dagaba**.

What makes Keḷaṇiya even more inspiring for a younger generation is its survival story. Across centuries, many kings supported the temple with repairs, grants, villages, and paddy lands. But Keḷaṇiya also faced devastating destruction: the invasion of **Māgha of Kālinga (1215 CE)** caused major damage and long plundering. Later, the temple entered a golden period during the **Kotte era**, partly because monks from Keḷaṇiya contributed strongly to literature—works like messenger poems (Sandeshā Kāvya) mention Keḷaṇiya as a major spiritual center.

Then came one of the darkest chapters: in **1575 CE**, the Portuguese razed the temple, plundered treasures, and burned priceless ola-leaf manuscripts—texts that carried not only Dhamma, but also centuries of knowledge on literature and medicine. The Dutch later even tried to prevent worship at the ruined site. Yet Keḷaṇiya did not disappear. In 1780, after resistance and struggle, restoration began again under **King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe**, whose efforts gave the temple many of its Kandyan-era paintings.

In modern times, Keḷaṇiya’s revival is tied to an extraordinary figure: **Mrs. Helena Wijayawardena**, born Christian and married to a Buddhist, who in 1880 initiated major restoration when the temple had again fallen into decay. She supported the creation of the temple’s world-famous murals by **Solias Mendis**, making the inner chamber a true art gallery. And Keḷaṇiya continues as a cultural heartbeat today—especially with the **Durutu Perahera**, started in 1927, and the devotion shown at the **Devālaya of God Vibhīshana**, believed to be a protector for the western region.

It is worthy to mention that one of the poems in *Kāḷaṇi Hālla* (කැලණි හැල්ල) has a verse ending, “*Upan dā siṭṭa karapu pavu naeta varak vaendot Kāḷaṇiye*” ‘උපන් දා සිට කරපු පවු නැත වරක් වැන්දොත් කැලණියේ’ meaning “All your sins accumulated since birth are obliterated if you worship the Keḷaṇi Vihāraya once (in your lifetime)” is deeply embedded in the popular collective consciousness of the Sinhala Buddhists, even well after 225 years of its composition.

Keḷaṇiya ultimately teaches a powerful “young” lesson: **sacred places are not just about the past**. They are about what we choose to protect—peace over conflict, knowledge over destruction, rebuilding over giving up, and identity over forgetting.

