

A bit of our Heritage

Mutiyangana Raja Maha Vihāraya

by

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In the Province of Uva lies another site hallowed by the visit of Lord Buddha.

On his third and last visit to Lanka, the Buddha visited many places either on the invitation of a local Chieftain or to rest in meditation. The site where presently the Mutiyangana Viharaya (මුතියංගන විහාරය) is situated is one such location. It is situated in the heart of Badulla, the capital of the Uva Province.

Uva is known for its rugged landscape replete with verdant grassy plains, thick evergreen forests, magnificent waterfalls, tea plantations and blue-green mountain ranges with high peaks such as Namunukula, being 2036 meters at its highest point. The area is also known as the mighty Rāvanā's Country. It also boasts of several ancient monuments.

This region is steeped in folklore and legends going back to the days of the Rāmāyana. There are many place names associated with Rāvanā and Seetā as reflected in place names such as Rāvana Ella, Seetā Koṭuwa and Seetā Eliya.

The Uva basin was very fertile and rich in agriculture even during ancient times. It provided refuge to Kings and nobles whenever the country was invaded or under siege from foreign rulers. It was also their launching ground for many a battle after having fortified themselves with troops and supplies.

Mutiyangana Viharaya is one of the Solosmasthanas, the sixteen sites revered as having been sanctified by the Buddha by visitation and thus held sacred.

Buddha's visit to this site was initiated as a result of Indraka, the Deva Chieftain, the ruler of the Namunukula range and its environs inviting the Buddha to visit that part of the country. The Buddha gracefully accepted the invitation and having delivered sermons to those gathered gave Indraka a few strands of his hair as a token of veneration. It is said that Indraka built the Mutiyangana Stupa enshrining these hair relics.

Curiously, there is no mention of the Mutiyangana Viharaya in the great Chronicles, but finds mentioned in the Pali commentaries

of *Samantapāsādikā* written by Buddhaghosa Mahā Thera in the 5th Century CE.

The Mutiyangana Vihara complex has a few buildings with unique architectural features. Of these, the main entrance with a six-tier *torana* (archway) is worthy of mention. At the first level are two passage gates. There are seventeen steps leading to the next level. The second level contains a makara or dragon head along with two guardian figures and lion figures. The third tier represents two dwarf figures and two lions. The fourth has figures of two decorated bulls displaying Hindu symbolism. At the fifth level is a seated Buddha statue and at the sixth level are figures of two peacocks taking the shape of the arch. The architect or the period in which this distinctive ceremonial gateway depicting Hindu iconography was built, is not known.

There are two image houses within the temple complex.

The entrance to the Main Image house has a beautifully decorated Makara Torana. It also has a sculpture of Maitreya Bodhisatva. Inside the image house is a large seated Buddha statue with images of protective deities on either side. One of them is the deified Indraka, whom local inhabitants now worship as their protective *deva*.

The Meda Vihārage, the Centre Image House, also has several murals and houses a large petikada (පැතිකඩ), which is a painting done on



cloth illustrating the Vessantara Jātaka belonging to the Kandyan period. It is taken out in procession when the farming community of Uva is awaiting the rains.

The impressive stupa was rehabilitated in 1956 and now stands 20 meters high with a diameter of 80 meters. It is bell shaped which is reminiscent of the Anuradhapura period and houses the sacred relics of the Buddha.

The Maluwa or the sacred compound has four Bodhi trees. The oldest is known as the Dathispala Sri Maha Bodhiya. This is one of the original ‘Ashtapala Bo saplings’, which are from the Sri Maha Bodhiya at Anuradhapura. There is also a Bodhi tree of which the sapling has been brought from the Jetavana Monastery in Srāvasti, India. This Bodhi tree is referred to as the Ananda Bodhiya. Another Bodhi tree under which the last known Arhant of Sri Lanka, Maliyadeva Thero delivered sermons is named the Maliyadeva Bodhi tree.

After the initial construction of the stupa by Chieftain Indaka in 5th Century BCE, King Devanampiyatissa enlarged the stupa and planted the Ashtapala Bodhi tree. During the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods (3rd to 11th Century CE), King Jetṭhatissa I, Dhatusena, Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I are some of the more prominent Kings who extended much support towards the expansion of infrastructure marking extensive restorations. During the Kandyan era, King Rajasinghe II (1635 – 1687 CE) implemented a major restoration of the Viharaya, damaged due to constant battles with the European colonial rulers. He had the Image Houses refurbished in the Kandyan style.

The Mutiyangana Viharaya holds an Esala Perahera during the months of July and August, showcasing the heritage of the Uva Province.

There are several interesting ancient monuments in this area. One such monument is the famous Bogoda bridge at Bogoda Raja Maha Viharaya made entirely of wood including the nails required for fastening.