



Pictures by Saman Sri Wedage

## Sri Dalada Maligawa

### Hallowed precincts of the Buddha's Tooth Relic



In a bid to highlight Sri Lanka's national treasures, the Daily News in association with Abans Ltd has been instrumental in successfully carrying out a competition to preserve and protect our country's national assets.

#### Suharshi Perera

Witnessing the rise and the fall of a kingdom, the glittering silver water surrounding the palace glides rhythmically, encompassing the tales of glory and pride of the place where religion, history, tradition and culture meet in sanctity, undisturbed, yet majestic. The Sri Dalada Maligawa - one of the most revered places of worship for Buddhists for being blessed with the presence of the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha is placed amidst the most luxurious treatment of nature. Yet, the architectural grandeur of the palace, the lake surrounding it and the temple has undoubtedly complemented and added to the breathtaking beauty of the landscape and the historical and religious setting epitomized by the Maligawa.

#### Nature's best

Nature is at its best feet when it comes to the location of the Sri Dalada Maligawa. The blue Hanthana mountain range at the backdrop, the majestic royal palace is

#### Pioneers in building the Maligawa

- King Wimaladharmasuriya I (1592-1604 A.D.) built a two storeyed Temple for the Relic which had been concealed in Delgamuwa near Ruwani in Sabaragamuwa.
- Wimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707) built a three storeyed temple and Kirithi Sri Rajasinghe (1747-1782) built the existing inner temple and Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe built the Pettitippawa.
- King Narendraasingha re-built and had paintings of 32 jathaka stories on the wall of court yard.

situated in the heart of the hill country in a vast expanse of land, overlooking the bustling Kandy town and the winding roads leading to the city and beyond. Blanketed with a thin sheet of mist floating over the skies above, the majestic temple palace of the hill capital is pampered by the cool, refreshing breeze sweeping across the silvery Kandy Lake which is well shaded by giant trees on one side.

Laced by the beautiful lake on its one side which once built as a military strategy to protect the temple, the Maligawa enjoys an oblique view of the remains of history, bustling modernization of the Kandy city and the soothing nature encircling it.

#### Pinnacle of Buddhists

Leaving aside its abundant beauty of its landscape, the Maligawa is the pinnacle of Buddhists here end world over, the reason which heightens its beauty, glory and esteem in the map of Sri Lanka. The sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha is well secured in the main palace and highly

enerated by all. Everyday hundreds of people converged on Kandy to pay homage to the Buddha's sacred Relic and daily a series of poojas are conducted to pay homage to the sacred Tooth Relic. All these poojas and ceremonies are led by a special custodian (Wimala) appointed to the services of the sacred Tooth Relic. The customs and traditions of these services to the Tooth Relic are deriving from the very early era of the Sinhala Kingdom starting from the Anuradhapura era.

#### Architectural glory

The Maligawa and its landscape stand for the magnificent architecture of the Kandyan era. The beautiful Bogambara Lake built to enhance the splendour and security of the Maligawa is undoubtedly a sparkling proof of the engineering skills of the ancient Kandyans.

Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, the last king of Kandy, decorated the lake with the 'walakulu berama' (clouds wall). The ponds and fountains in the garden of the palace and the slanting roofs sheltered with fat roof tiles made during the era, are gold plated, paint a unique picture of a majestic palace. The wooden floor and the wood carved pillars of the main palace and its other surrounding halls are the legacy of the Sinhala art tradition.

The elevated balcony of the palace (Geshthippawa) is another remarkable creation that boasts of our ancient architectural skills. The king used to be in this balcony to view the Kandy perahera and address the people. The occasional building is situated on the right of the main entrance and this particular section stands as the symbol of the Dalada Maligawa in photographs and paintings. Another attraction of the Maligawa is its brightly, colourful frescoes that belong to the Kandyan era.

#### The annual pageant

The annual cultural pageant of Sri Lanka is centred around the Sri Dalada Maligawa. The Kandy Esala perahera is a huge tourist draw card as during the month of August the Kandy city is thronged by local and foreign tourists.

The perahera is an elaborate cultural pageant demonstrating Sinhala traditional dance forms and folk culture. The golden casket with the sacred Tooth Relic inside is placed on the Maligawa's elephant and the caparisoned elephants and perahera parade the streets of Kandy for three days.

Placed in a picturesque location in the central hill country, the Sri Dalada Maligawa encapsulates religion, history, culture, tradition, all in one.

It is one of the prime places of religious worship among the Buddhists and a very important tourist attraction. Thus it is undoubtedly a great wonder and a heritage of Sri Lanka that we all can be proud of.



Dalada Perahera



Herisa Mandepaya



A view of the Sri Dalada Maligawa

## A symbol of kingship

Hidden in the sanctum sanctorum, surrounded by the serene chants of devotees and their poojas, lies the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. This miraculous relic, known as the Danta Dhara, is probably the most revered object of worship by Buddhists worldwide.

The bodily remains of the Buddha had been distributed in various states and enshrined in stupas while the four canine teeth were believed to be separately enshrined. The right canine was taken by Sakra and worshipped by the gods while another was estimated to be worshipped by the king of Gandhara in Pakistan. The third is hidden in a golden shrine room in the Naga domain. The fourth, the left canine, rests in the temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy.

A remarkable tale of phenomenon follows the relic's history. It is believed that Arhath named Kiema removed the relic from the funeral pyre of the Buddha and left it in the possession of Brahmaciatta, king of Kalinga. The relic next came into the hands of the powerful King Pandu who conquered King Brahmadatta's kingdom. King Pandu in turn witnessed the miracles of the relic and put it in the hands of the commander of his army, Cityana. While the king's city, Pataliputra, was under attack he sent the relic back to Kalinga to be kept in the custody of his son-in-law, prince Danta.

As signs of defeat descended on the party, their

main concern was the safety of what they held most precious in their kingdom. Thus it was vital for prince Danta and his wife, Heramala, to embark on the voyage of bringing the sacred Tooth Relic to the shores of Sri Lanka and handed



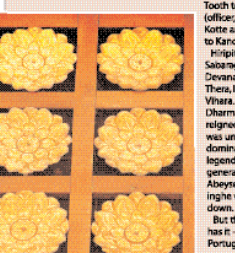
The twentieth century wall painting by artist Sallus Mendis depicting the arrival of the sacred Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka

to king Sri Meghavarna. According to the legend prince Heramala hid the relic in her hair for safe keeping while the enemies were in pursuit. The couple was disguised as Brahmins and while on board the ship the relic had drawn miracles. Supernatural beings had appeared to pay respect to the relic as it flowed along the waters making its way to the port of Lankapattana in Trincomalee. It was first placed on the throne as a token of devotion by King Sri Meghavarna before being kept in a special shrine.

For years the relic had become a symbol of kingship and prosperity as each ruler tried to conquer kingdoms to take possession of it. The possessor of the relic was considered to be the most powerful in the land and many strove to take the position.

Many a drought and famine had been driven away by the power of the Tooth Relic and even today many believe in its power to bring rain. Ancient chronicles back this belief when they state that the prince and princess took shelter at the Megha Vihara (Temple of the Rain - cloud) the shrine of the rain god, Perajanya, after entering the island. Even today many expect rainfalls after the Dalada Perahera had taken to the streets and after its exhibition and often their faith had been rewarded for there is no end of miracles performed by the island's most prized possession which lies hidden within a shrine in the hill capital. - Ruwini

## How Dalada came to Kandy



Hiripitya Rala had a dream, A white-clad human approached him and uttered: Kotte kalala ksilila, danta mesigama rala. This oromantic pattern sounds puzzling in Sinhala and weird when said in English: 'Kotte's rug in armpits, better brush your tooth officer'. Hiripitya held the rank equivalent to today's Diyawarna Nilama, the chief officer in charge of Dalada Maligawa, which was then in Kotte. He deciphered the cryptic statement: 'Infection for Kotte is gone to the trash bin, bring the Tooth to the centre officer' (officer: give up affection for Kotte and move the Tooth relics to Kandy).

Hiripitya Rala left for Sabaragamuwa to see Ven Devanagala Rathanalankara Thero, Incumbent of Delgamu Vihara. This was when King Dharmapala Parakramabahu IX reigned the kingdom which was under Portuguese dominance. We still have this legend thanks to elder generation, likes of Tissa Abeyaratna D P Wickramasinghe who have written it down.

But the threat - as the legend has it - was not yet over. The Portuguese were after the

relics too for they shared the common belief of attributing royal symbol of authority to the sacred relics. They feared a rightful Sinhala Buddhist king in possession of the relics. Delgamu Incumbent had to make a strategic move. He made artificial replicas in ivory, replaced in its original place and gave the other to Vidya Bandara. The genuine one, he kept to himself, well preserved inside a grinding stone, in Palisabada until he met the rightful heir to the treasure.

Portuguese were taken in by the fake relics and sent it to Goa. They somehow got the wind of accurate news later on, though in part. They still relied on anti Portuguese Vidya Bandara, who they feared would become a king. Bandara was arrested in Jaffna on orders of Goa's Archbishop who then destroyed the relics. Portuguese were yet to know the fate of genuine relics still preserved inside something they would never ever fetch.

Don John, who grew up with the Portuguese, ascended the throne by then. Delgamu Incumbent went all the way to see the new king with the relics. The king was happy too. He gave up Catholicism and became known as Wimaladharma. Two of his major tasks were to build a separate mansion for the relics and a temple

for Delgamu Incumbent. How did Wimaladharma - who was Don John - easily give up his faith and what made Delgamu Incumbent trust him? It is but an interesting saga about Wimaladharma's ancestry. King Sivavaka Rajasinghe killed Sundara Bandara and the latter would take over the kingdom. For Bandara's luck he had a son who was known as Konappu Bandara. Following the father's death Bandara took up Roman Catholicism becoming Don John and lived along with the Portuguese. His motif being to avenge his father's death. However he was expelled to Goa for something he did in Colombo. He won the favour of the Portuguese after a while, and was sent back to Colombo. For the throne there were disputes: Don Philip descending from King Karalliyasde who reigned before King Sivavaka Rajasinghe demanded more rights to the throne, though John proved himself to be more effective. The Portuguese finished off all affairs with a Don John letter. John was any way not in good terms with the Ceylon's first European invaders. This only wreaked an unwanted havoc for the Portuguese. John risted against the Portuguese and Philip, having mustered the support from Kandyan aristocrats. - Sachitra