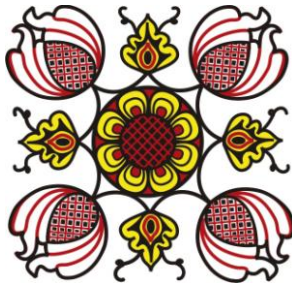


# **Quarterly Tours – No. 17**



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**26th February 2011**

**Compiled by Nilan Cooray**

## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

***Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011.***

### **Programme**

0700 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0745 - 0815 hrs.	Visit Keragala Padmawathi Parivena
0845 – 0945 hrs.	Visit Pilikuttuwa Vihara
1000 – 1045 hrs.	Visit Way-side Rest Halls ( <i>Ambalamas</i> ) at Ambagaspitiya and Averiyawela
1130 – 1230 hrs.	Visit Algama Water Fall
1315 – 1430 hrs.	Lunch
1500 – 1545 hrs.	Visit Watupitiwela Hospital
1615 – 1645 hrs.	Visit Mottunna Vihara at Veyangoda
1730 - 1830 hrs.	Visit National Basilica at Tewatta, Ragama
1930 hrs.	Arrive PGIAR

## Keragala Padmawathi Parivena

Situated at Henagama, about 4 kilometers from Weliveriya along the B 23 road towards Kirindiwela, Keragala Padmawathi Parivena was a thriving monastic college during the Kotte Period of Sri Lanka's history. It is said to have been established by Princess Padmawathi, the sister of king Parakramabahu VI (1412 – 1467 AD). This institution is enchantingly described in the Sinhala classic, the 'Hansa Sandesaya', which was composed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the famous scholar monk, Veedagama Maitriya Thero.



The vertically standing stone plaques with inscriptions on either side and with several stone pillars, some of which are ornamental, have survived to display the antiquity of this site. The present Parivena also retains the largest *Dharmasala* (preaching hall) of the Gampaha District. Its supports are built of stone blocks and these support a roof of a multiple type that is clad with clay tiles, resembling the *prasada* roof of Sri Lanka's classical architecture.



Another interesting artifact found at the Parivena is an ornamental bed with timber carvings resembling the Victorian furniture of the British colonial era.

## Pilikutthuwa Vihara



The site at Pilikutthuwa with its boulder associated landscape features is immensely rich in cultural and natural interests. There are ninety-nine drip-ledged caves scattered in an area of around 500 acres. From the highest point of the site, the panoramic view offers a magnificent array of distant landscapes. It does surprise many that this natural haven lies within less than a radius of 30 kilometers from Colombo, on the Wathurugama Road which branches off the A1 highway at the Miriswatte junction.

This patch of blessed ground with a distinctive topography has made Pilikuttuwa an important focus of human activity through various historical periods. The archaeological investigations

carried out at the site reveal that the site dates back to pre-historic period. The cave shelters found at the site were, undoubtedly, habitats of prehistoric man. At around the third century BC, the site had become the location for one of Sri Lanka's largest early monastic settlements of the forest-dwelling Buddhist monks, who had adopted the natural caverns as the dwellings of the monastery. These early monastic settlements are marked by drip-ledges cut along the brow so as to prevent rain water flowing into the caves. However, only three of the donor-inscriptions carved below the drip-ledges have been identified so far. Marked in the Brahmi script, these inscriptions range between the third-century BC and the second-century AD. The folk-lore ascribe the formal establishment of this monastic settlement to king Valagamba (103 and 89-77 B.C.), a ruler of the Anuradhapura dynasty associated in popular belief with nearly all the ancient rock-sheltered monastic sites in the country. The site also consists of a large pond for utilitarian needs of the early monastic community.

The origin of the name Pilikutthuwa is also very much debated. It is speculated that it originated from the word Pili Kotuwa. Some believe that in ancient times this village had supplied clothes/ apparel to king Valagamba and hence came to be named Pilikutthuwa, as 'pili' in Sinhala means clothes. Others say that the royal clothes worn by his queen had been removed and kept at a cave here, and this was the reason for the name.

During the succeeding centuries, one of the caves has been converted into an image shrines. Some of the wall paintings within the shrine represent the 18<sup>th</sup> century Kandyan style and the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century maritime tradition. One of the interesting paintings is the *dvarapala* (guardian) figures painted on either side of the doorway to the inner chamber, depicting the sward



bearing Portuguese soldiers with typical Portuguese war uniforms of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To the left of this image shrine is a high natural arch formed by two boulders, under which a stupa of modest proportion has been housed.



Another interesting feature is a roofed bridge across a small natural water course. Built of structural timber, and clad with burnt clay tiles on the roof, it possibly belongs to the Kandyan period and resembles a miniature version of the better known Bogoda Bridge.



Modifications carried out during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to some of the cave shelters are also noticeable as reflected by their architectural details of the colonial tradition. The present *Avasa* (monk's residence) also belongs to the same period of construction. Although the large and spacious present *Dharmasala* (preaching hall) is of the same period, like the one at Keragala, its roof is of a multiple type, resembling the *prasada* roof of Sri Lanka's classical architectural style.



Another interesting artifact found at the vihara is a timber palanquin of considerable antiquity.

It is said that Dugula, which belongs to the family of eagles and a certain species of mangos called Pilikutthuwa Mangos are only found in the jungle of Pilikutthuwa.

### **Ambaspitiya Ambalama**



Located between Waturegama and Kirindiwela, Ambaspitiya *Ambalama* (way-side rest hall) is constructed of ornamental stone pillars to carry a doubled pitched hipped roof, popularly known as the Kandyan roof. However, the *pekada* (the ornamental brackets on top of the pillars) reflecting typical Kandyan style is out of timber. The stone pillars have peculiar carvings depicting the scenes of *Ramayana* such as the Hanuman with the chunk of earth with medicinal plants, which are all rare themes in Sri Lanka. It is believed that this structure dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Averiyawala Ambalama**

Not far away from the Ambagaspitiya Ambalama is another way-side rest hall constructed upon an outcrop of rock within an open field. Unlike the one at Ambagaspitiya, the roof of the Averiyawala Ambalama is held by a timber structure. The vertical timber posts are supported on a raised horizontal timber frame, which sits on a series of small boulders placed on the rock outcrop. The roof is covered with cadjan. Its location in the open field and its reflection on the sheet of water in the foreground offers a unique setting to this humble and modest structure.



According to folklore, the queen of king Walagamba in the 1st century B.C. had used this location for bathing and she had left her tress (knot of false hair) there and the name Averiyawala is a corrupt version of the name Hawariya-wala (the place where she left her tress).

## Algama Water Fall



Situated at the village of Uduwaka, the Algama Water Fall is a lesser known natural feature of great beauty. This fall could be reached by turning left after proceeding about 4 kilometers from Pasyala Junction that follows the Attanagalle Road, and then turning left again onto the Algama road at the Haggala Junction. Then passing through Algama one continues up to this fall.

It is a 6m fall which can be viewed from close range due to a convenient nearby rocky ledge. After the fall, the flow of the water is often obscured as it flows through a narrow gap under rocks. Further downstream, a three meter-long crevasse can be found, and the water is once again hidden amongst the branches of trees, only to emerge again beneath a rock protuberance. Finally it continues to form the Athanagalu River.

## Watupitiwela Hospital



This is located about four kilometers from Nittambuwa along the Nittambuwa – Attanagalle Road. The oldest building of the hospital at Watupitiwela dates from 1910. These buildings were established by the Obeyesekere family in memory of Don Christoffel Hendricus Dias Bandaranayake. The architecture of

the main block in front is unique for a hospital building in the Island, for it vaguely resembles the Gothic Revival style as seen in its arcades. The massive front court together with the single storied symmetrical block with its arcades offer an inviting attraction and establishes a sense of self confidence to the patients who wish to receive treatment at this hospital. Its massive central courtyard behind the main block is defined by the roofed corridors and single storied wards that are spacious and peaceful, a soothing character that is much conducive towards healing the sick.



It is said that the name ‘Watupitiwela Hospital’ means the hospital constructed for the people who were serving in the estates and fields (*watu-piti*) owned by Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranayake, the father of S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake.

## Mottunna Vihara at Veyangoda



Situated off the road leading to Veyangoda from Nittambuwa, Mottunna Vihara has a history dating from at least the Kandyan period. The *tampita vihara* (shrine on stilts) is the oldest structure that has survived from the historic period. The timber deck of the shrine is raised on comparatively short stone stumps and at present it is approached by a masonry staircase of modern construction built at the front of the structure, which destroys the historic value of the shrine. A seated Buddha image in meditative posture is the principle image within the inner chamber. The walls of the inner chamber are also decorated with paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Kandyan style. Unfortunately, the paintings are deteriorating due to increased humidity which is a result of the lack of ventilation.

## **National Basilica at Tewatta, Ragama**



The origins of this shrine date back to the beginning of the 20th century, when a little shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes (little Chapel) was erected by a few Catholic laymen and Father A. Kieger OMI, in 1911, the area being then a part of the parish of Ragama. On 11 November 1917, Father A. Collore built a small Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes assisted by some Catholic workers from Colombo. The Chapel was later enlarged to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims.

When World War II was declared in 1939, this Shrine gained prominence because of a vow that the then Archbishop of Colombo, Mgr. Jean Marie Masson, made to Our Lady (26 May 1940), that if the Island was spared the horrors of the War, he would build a Votive Shrine in her honor under the

title of Our Lady of Lanka. The mantle of fulfilling this vow and building the votive Shrine fell on the shoulders of his successor, Archbishop Thomas Cooray, (the first Sri Lankan Archbishop as well as the first Cardinal of Sri Lanka). The construction of the edifice was completed in 1974. The Holy Father Pope Paul VI endowed the Church with the title of a Minor Basilica in 1973. The Basilica was consecrated on 6 February 1974 and Our Lady crowned as Our Lady of Lanka the same day.

When the architectural design for the National Basilica was considered, it was suggested that the architectural form of the edifice should represent the national and regional character while preserving the universal catholic identity. Designed by architect Valentine Gunasekera, the Basilica reflects a unique fusion of the architectural tradition of the Sri Lankan, Indian and the Oriental West.







The raised granite plinth of the Basilica resembles a typical base moulding of the Anuradhapura period and was the contribution of the faithful who donated Rs. 10 for each stone. The front view is that of an Indian temple and the twin towers, common to most churches symbolized the two great commandment of Christianity, the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. There are six pillars facing the front as one climbs the steps leading to the Basilica. These six pillars represent the six dioceses of Sri Lanka, at the time of the war viz. Colombo, Chilaw, Galle, Jaffna, Kandy and Trincomalee. These six dioceses were expected to contribute the cost of a pillar each. The Cross in front that has the figure of Christ in bronze sculptured by the renowned Sri Lankan artist Mrs. Leila Peiris, resembles the same facial expressions of the figure in the shroud of Turin. The central dome resembles that of Santa Sophia in Istanbul which was for long considered oriental architecture.

The tablets made of bronze and fixed to the external facades provides that additional lustre to the Basilica, which is not mere embellishment to the building, but vital effects to catechize the pilgrims and especially the children, concerning Sri Lanka's catholic past, its Christian heritage and the spiritual contribution to the country's culture and heritage.

From the front steps of the right wing of the Basilica, one is able to view the soothing sight of Adam's peak through the early morning mist.



This Basilica is a popular pilgrim destination for the Catholics all over the country and there are annual arranged services specially meant for the sick and the children. The vast grounds surrounding the Basilica is shaded by the many canopies of tropical trees, and so the whole ground transforms itself into the camping areas of pilgrims during the festive seasons.