

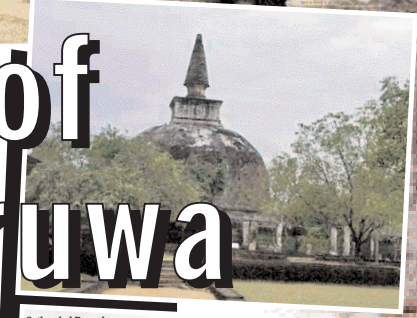
Glory of Polonnaruwa



Gal Vihara - 'Hiti Pillima'



Gal Vihara - 'Satha Pena pillima'



Sathmahal Prasada



Parakrama Samudra



Jathaka murals at the Tivanka Pillima Geya (Image House)

Nilimā Dole

As we enter the Siva Devale temple, the priest smiles and places his hand on our head and chants, "May you live long, have a good life, may you attain success." With these words, we have ever more courage and yearning to venture into the beautiful medieval site of Polonnaruwa.

However, it's sad to say, the place isn't included in the itinerary of travellers - especially the domestic ones. Many think of the dangers that lurk nearby as it is a stopover point to Batticaloa or even parts of the North, but experts have shunned this belief. Says the Director of the Central Cultural Fund, Dr. Sudharshan Seneviratne, "Sometimes when there is fighting in certain parts in a country, many opt to travel far away from the scene like in the case of Sri Lanka, where tourists would go on trips to the south or up-country not sticking around too long in Colombo or even the East".

It was the Tourism Minister Milinda Moragoda's idea to regain the lost glory of Polonnaruwa that will help boost its interest and in turn, its economy.

Dr. Sudharshan Seneviratne said, "Polonnaruwa is a sacred place because it unites not only Buddhists and Hindus but we can also see an Arab connection as there were many traders who used to frequent the market places". Being a religious sanctuary, this sacred site was under the Hindu Tamils in the 13th century before it came under the Sinhalese.

The Polonnaruwa District Secretary Nimal Abey Siri said, "We are working on to spread the message of visiting Polonnaruwa and are also in the process of developing the infrastructure to make it accessible and easier to see. We hope we have the fullest cooperation of the public to revive Polonnaruwa." It's definitely time to protect Polonnaruwa because since it is home to the great 'Parakrama Samudraya', Today's reservoir is made of three original reservoirs connected with each together. The oldest one is at the northernmost part, Topa Wewa that was built around 386 AD. The middle Eramudu Wewa and the southern Dumbutulla Wewa were constructed during the reign of King Parakramabahu (1153 - 1186 AD) during which period the ancient irrigation system drew the maximum attention for development. But with continuous invasions, the Polonnaruwa kingdom was abandoned leaving the lake bed to turn into a jungle.

In 1945, the dam was reconstructed and the lake got filled once again.

According to the IUCN's Sri Lanka Wetlands Information and Database, illegal timber felling and poaching are the major threats. Illicit gem mining in the Amban Ganga is still prevalent. Due to encroaching by villagers pollution has been on the rise. Fishing in the tank with prohibited type of fishing nets pose another problem. The spread of invasive alien species such as 'Lantana camara' is also problematic and the discharge of sewage and agrochemical residues have resulted in a condition, leading to algae growth. While the 'Parakrama Samudraya' and its surroundings are popular destinations amongst the tourists for bird watching and boat excursions, the high historical and cultural values is what really brings them here. The only conservation measure taken is that part of the catchment of this reservoir is located within the Angammadilla National Park that was declared a sanctuary in 2006. But in the long run, we need to educate people to protect Polonnaruwa and keep it for our future generations.

Pix. by M. Rami Mohamed



Moonstones and guardstones at Hetadage



Statue of King Parakramabahu