

Re-creating the Bamiyan Treasures in Sri Lanka

We were all devastated when a millennia old heritage was ruthlessly vandalised in Bamiyan by the Taliban back in 2001. It was a sacrilege against Buddhism. But sometimes good things can come out of even atrocities. Upon hearing about the pillage of the Bamiyan statues - vestiges of the Mohinderjao and Harappa civilizations - the young generation of Rideegama village, decided to direct their anger towards people of another religious faith in the area. But the learned Ven. Egodomulla Amaramoli Thera of the Monaragala Vidyasagara Pirivena, who was also distraught by the sacrilege, after many hours of patient listening told the young men that such an act

of retaliation is completely against the principles of tolerance, compassion and kindness as preached by the Buddha himself.

He explained to them that a community in the area could not possibly be responsible for what happened thousands of miles away in Afghanistan. The young men walked away, not completely pacified. The Ven. Thera woke up next morning resolved to utilize the energy and passion of the youth for something more constructive. He called for an immediate gathering in the Vihara. He said to the gathering that, not only them the whole world and even Muslims in Afghan have been shocked by this heinous crime against Buddhism, committed by an extremist militant

group. He further reiterated the fact that followers of a religion who have lived peacefully among them for generations should not be punished for the deeds of a misguided and politically inclined few.

Then the Ven. Thera announced that they should join hands to react to this ordeal in a more positive manner - build a statue similar to that of the destroyed Bamiyan statue in their village. The Ven. Thera has found the most suitable way of challenging the heinous act in it that it reflected the Buddhist principles.

Although this was a task of mammoth proportions, the cost of which would ultimately amount up to millions, it was initiated with a mere Rs. 1358.00 collected and presented to the Ven. Thera by the children of the Rambadagalla village.

Thus the task that was to one day put Monaragala Vidyasagara Pirivena on the map commenced. After months of travel in search of the best craftsmen who could take on this task, Amaramoli Thera heard about a group of sculptors

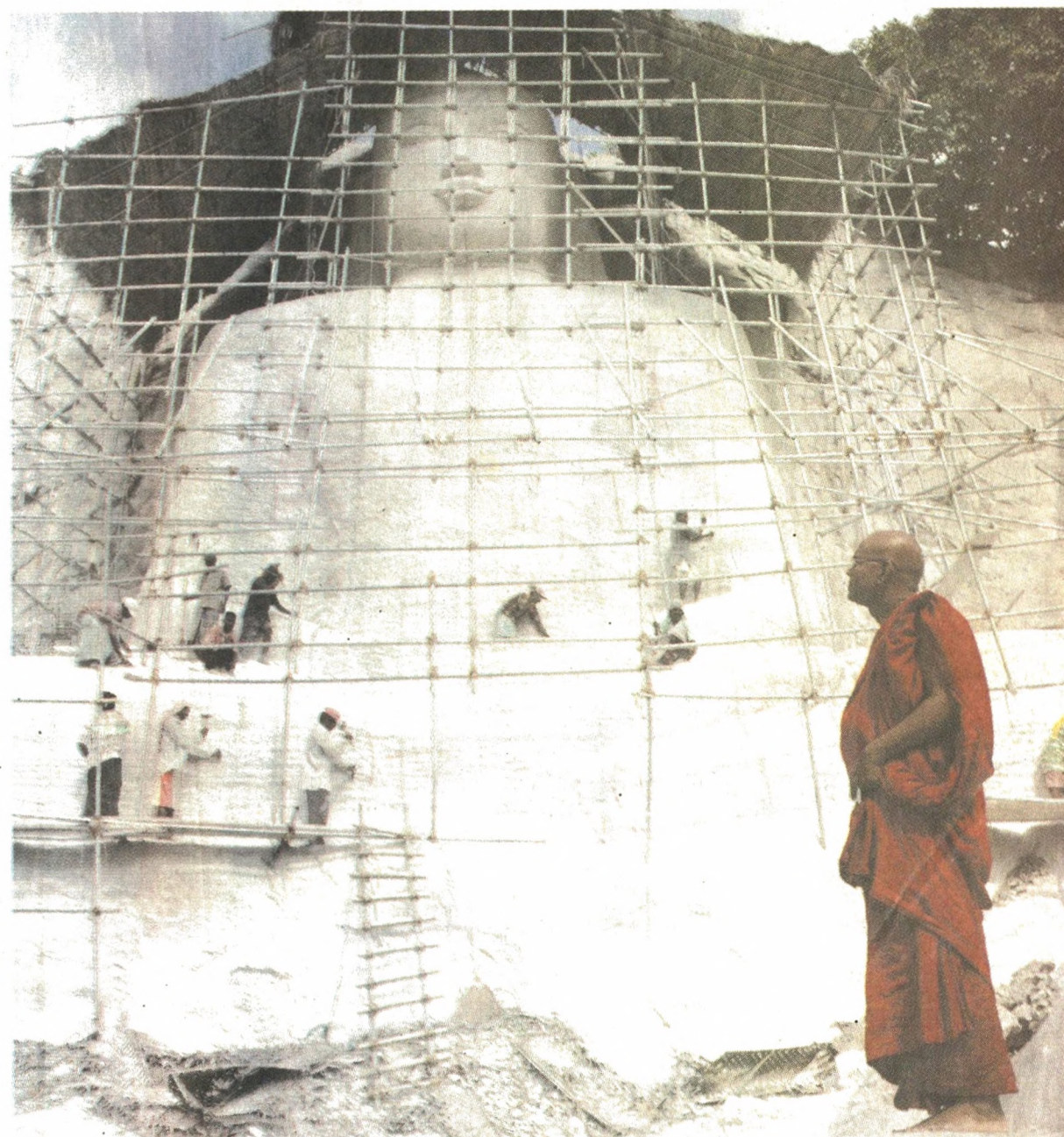
from India who had completed an excellent job in Ramboda.

Thus Ven. Amaramoli Thera met with businessman and social worker, Deivanayagam Easwaren. After an inspection of the site he arranged a meeting with R. Sivaraman, the architect to produce the blue prints. Shri Muthu Mutiah Sthapathy, Advisor on religious Sites and Temples to the Indian Government was also introduced by D. Easwaren.

He brought in experienced sculptors and craftsmen from Tamil Nadu. Meanwhile Nirupama Rao, the then Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, who had heard about the project had taken special interest in the ambitious task.

Wasting no time she visited the site and upon seeing the potential of the project donated Rs. 2.5 million. President Mahinda Rajapaksa also contributed Rs. 2.5 million in aid of the project.

Aids by philanthropists and other successful professionals now amount to over Rs. 20 million. The former Minister Karu Jaya-



Construction of the world's largest stone Samadi Buddha statue in progress

suriya as well as late Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle - who is a catholic by faith - have contributed in many ways including by contributing their precious time. This 67.5 foot statue which is to be the largest Buddha statue in the world, together with the proposed largest medita-

tion hall in the world, which can accommodate 5000 pilgrims would cost at least Rs. 100 million more to complete.

This was when the project came to the attention of Nandadasa Rajapaksa, a devout Buddhist and Chairman of DSI - D. Samson and Sons (Pvt) Ltd. He

then embarked on the task of campaigning for the project. He strongly believes that this project, a joint effort by the Sinhalese and the Tamil, will help to bridge the breached trust between the two races, Murugan the Supervisor of the project shares the same sentiments.

This is a true labour of love, which men of different faiths have joined together to complete.

This also depicts that two countries can continue to serve their common histories, while also being a beacon of the huge potential of the combined effort of different races.



Ven. Egodomulle Amaramoli Thera with Mr. D. Eswaran