

Resumption of Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya construction work

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The construction work of Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya (stupa) which was in abeyance for quite sometime has now been re-commenced with the dawn of the New Year 2003.

Minister of Irrigation and Water Management, Gamini Jayawickrama Perera has initiated a series of religious activities including all night pirith chanting and the offering of alms to Maha Sangha in the premises of the Sacred Bodhi Tree at Anurādhapura. These religious rituals are being held to invoke blessings on the resumed Maha Seya construction work and on all those including the Minister who have dedicated themselves to this sacred duty. Further it is in effect a New Year blessing.

Kotmale Valley has from very early days on, been a prosperous settlement. Over and above this, the valley is picturesque and alluring, nesting 5500 feet above sea level.

The ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka associate this region with the heroic monarch of this land King Dutugemunu. The chronicles describe with marked relish, how, young Prince Gamini spent his youth in Kotmale Valley. There is a view that states, that Prince Gamini came over to this region to acquire weapons for his planned military campaign. This implies that various minerals and metals existed in this area. Metal workers of great skill practised their crafts in Kotmale region at that time. Even today, there are artisans excelling in the making of iron and steel products. Whatever that may be, in ancient times, as much as today, the main economic pursuit of the people was paddy cultivation. When we delve into the history of this area, Kotmale is referred to, for the first time in the Sinhala classic Pujavaliya. The name Kotmale is given as Kothumala.

According to chronicles, the Tooth Relic that had been concealed in Kotmale was taken to

Dambadeniya in the reign of King Vijayabahu the third (1232-1236). Kotmale is referred to in the narration of the reigns of King Wickramabahu the third (1357-1374) and Rajasinghe the first.

Today the valley of Kotmale assumes a special significance, because of the Great Reservoir that has been constructed there. The reservoir which is part of the accelerated Mahaweli Development Project, is the artificial tank built at the highest sea level, in this country.

It could be considered a gesture of destiny, Gamini Dissanayake the pioneer in the implementation of the Mahaweli Development Project should construct the Kotmale Reservoir in the Kotmale Valley where he himself was born. He was prompted to allow the villages and lands in which he grew up and roamed about as a child to be inundated by such a massive reservoir, undoubtedly because he fully and far-sightedly realised the tremendous benefit the reservoir will render to the

People of the land

The state has decided to name the Kotmale Reservoir, after Gamini Dissanayake as tribute and in memory of this great personality.

Kotmale Reservoir that came into being due to the active national service of Gamini Dissanayake, provides water to dry zone. In addition, it supplies power to the whole island. This way, Kotmale Reservoir performs a crucial service to this country. Thousands of people lost their homes and lands because of this project. Hundreds of religious edifices also went under water. Their cultural heritage and sacred cities suffered the same fate.

Gamini Dissanayake took steps to compensate these people and to re-settle them in lower and upper Kotmale Valley Regions.

Gamini Dissanayake felt the need to make amends for the cultural heritage and the sacred sites that went under water. As a symbol of heritage people lost, he decided to construct Kotmale Mahaweli Maha Seya in the village of Kaddora. Historically

it is interesting to note that in the Kotmale valley frequented by Prince Gamini, a modern Gamini should plan to construct a Maha Seya. The intention of Gamini Dissanayake was to set up Mahaweli Maha Seya to mark the completion of the victorious Mahaweli Project.

With due deference to the great King Gemunu it was decided by Gamini Dissanayake his Maha Seya a single foot less in height than the great Ruwanveli Seya.

Unfortunately just as King Gemunu did not live to see the completion of his beloved Ruwanveli Seya, Gamini Dissanayake too could not see the completion of his beloved Kotmale Mahaseya. The honourable task of completing Kotmale Mahaseya has now devolved upon yet another Gamini. That is Gamini Jayawickrama Perera.

Mahaweli Maha Seya Project is the first construction of this magnitude ever to be undertaken by C.E.C.B as a Design and Built Project by employing direct labour.

The Mahaweli Maha Seya envisages the construction of 61m diameter, 280mm thick Shell-type Dome on 32 nos. bored pile foundation of 1m diameter, Square Chamber, God's Chamber, Spire and Pinnacle forming a Dagaba of total height 88m at an estimated cost of 140 million rupees in 1989.

The dome is a reinforced concrete hemispherical shell while the Square Chamber, God's Chamber and Spire is an integrated steel structure fabricated out of mild steel galvanised square hollow sections and clad with stainless steel plates.

The Square Chamber is erected on top of the upper ring beam of the dome. It is a huge steel structure, square in shape having each side 20.4m length and 10.75m in height. The God's chamber which is cylindrical, rests over the Square Chamber. This chamber is of 12.5m diameter and 3.7m height.

Over the God's Chamber is a tapering tower-like structure which is usually called the Main Spire. It is 22.55m high.

On the top the Spire is

mounted a bronze Pinnacle set with a precious topaz crystal at the top. The structure has been designed and is being constructed entirely by Sri Lankan Engineers, technical staff and work force.

The Shell-type concrete Dome has been fully completed after driving the foundation piles and constructing lower and upper ring beams. Fabrication and erection of the Square Chamber is fully completed. Fixing of stainless steel cladding on to the four faces of the Square Chamber commenced at the time of stop work. Final finishes on exterior and interior of the Dome are also completed. Fabrication and erection of the God's Chamber and Spire are yet to be done along with most of the works in Pesawa and architectural windows between exposed piled columns.

Mr. Gamini Dissanayake possessed the uncanny knack to select the right man to the right job. Once the two matched perfectly Mr. Dissanayake would not interfere and had very little to do by way of supervision of the experts he identified for this construction effort, on outstanding personality was engineering wizard Vidyajothi, Dr. A. M. S. Kulasinghe. He is still associated with this project.

The Swedish construction giant Skanska helped the Mahaseya Project lavishly. The team behind this work consisted of Central Engineering Construction Bureau (C.E.C.B) and whole series of outstanding personalities like P. T. Senaratne, Director General, Mahaweli Authority, H. B. Jayasekera, Chairman, CECB, Palitha Pelpola, Suren Peiris, Sivapala Bandara, Mahinda Wijesundera, D. M. G. Ekanayake among others.

The inspiring spiritual force behind Mahaweli Maha Seya Project has always been Ven. Tispane Jinananda Nayake Thera.

The blessings of the continued series of religious rituals, no doubt ensure that the Kotmale Maha Seya will be successfully completed speedily and efficiently with the lavish funding it so pre-eminently deserves.

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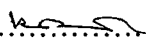
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