

Kalutara: Forgotten Heritage of Boundless Faith

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Abstract: The heritage of Kalutara goes back to more than 2500 years. However it has become a hidden city in Sri Lankan history. According to the legends there are two towns (Kalutara South and Kalutara North) were called as Velapura and Desastra. The Velapura was the capital of the south Indian invader Wickrama Panday according to R.L Brohier's article. The most famous spiritual historic symbol is Kalutara Bōdhiya. The Chronicle Mahawamsa describes that the Kalutara is one of the 32 places where the saplings of the sacred Sri Maha Bodhi were planted. There was another famous spiritual historic place, which was worshiped by Buddhists called as Gangatillake Viharaya which was located on the top of a mount which facing Kalu Ganga. Portuguese invaded West Coast of Sri Lanka in 1505 A.D. After the King Rajasinghe the Kalutara was captured by the Portuguese and built a Fort where the Gangatillake Viharaya located. Later Kalutara was captured by the Dutch and they modified the Fort. When Sri Lanka was invaded by British in 1796 and it became a British colony. The Fort was modified by the British and used it as an Office and as the Residence of the Government Agents. Then British decided to "Kalutara Bhodiya" as prohibit area for the general public and further they have decided to construct a Railway Line by removing the Bodhi. General public rose against the decision and forwarded a petition to the Queen Victoria, and then she considered it and ordered to continue the Project without removing the Bodhi. The construction project of present Stupa on the upper terrace was begun in 1964. The design based on the ancient structure called as "Wata Da Ge". The project was completed and opened to the public in 1976. From the beginning there is no chief Buddhist monk residing inside the KalutaraBodhiya. The administration and the financial services are done by The Kalutara Bōdhi Trust. It was established in 1951 through the pioneering efforts of Sir Cyril de Zoysa, president of the Senate of Ceylon. He established Bōdhi Trust Fund, which maintains the sacred area.