

Historical Background of Matale

The history of Matale dates back to the period when in the pre historic era the inhabitants are believed to be from the Yaksha tribe. According to the historical findings. Up to now these tribes have lived mostly in the northern & eastern regions .The natural setting of the isolated rocks had been beneficial for their livelihoods. Excavations have revealed that these historical details after a three thousand year old corpse were found in Ibbankatuwa in Dambulla region.

The place called Lakegala or Lankapuraya in the Laggala area was earlier presumed to be the place where world famous king Rawana had lived almost 4000 years ago. This place is believed to be the capital city of king Ravana .There is a number of places in Laggala bearing the name of Ravana.

The place presently called Bambawa in Galewela is claimed to be the village in which Kuweni was weaving when king Vijaya landed in our island according to legend her father was called Bamba and he was the ruler of the area at that time. After the annihilation of the Yaksha tribe these places turned and to be deserted ruins.

In the first century B.C. when the Ariyans arrived with the Sri Maha Bhodiya new settlements were established in this in this area according to history. The main reason for the establishment of settlements in this area was due to the easy access to irrigation facilities to cultivate paddy. King Gajaba 1 when he invaded the chola land had brought 12000 people and they are believed to have been settled in places close to Matale according to legend. According to the book of Matale the Ariyans had been settled down in many places in the country out of which around 17 such areas are presumed to be situated in Matale district. Most of these areas are in the areas of Galewela and Pallepola.

The most remarkable and unique period of the history of Matale was during the reign of king Walagamba from 89 to 77 B.C. The Thripitakaya which was written in Aluwiharaya had been done during this period of rule. The next golden era had been from 479 to 497 A.D. prince Kashyapa after assassinating his father usurped power had established his kingdom in the place called Sigiriya close to Dambulla. He had managed to bring about the splendor of Anuradhapura to Sigiriya and had created a masterpiece in art at Sigiriya through architectural talent. Sigiriya which was hither to a forest heritage being transformed into a magnificent Alakamandawa had made king Kashyapa a famous ruler. He had ruled in his kingdom for 18 years and the magnificent artistic creations done by him. He is world famous even today. The construction work carried out by him in and around Sigiriya in the spheres of architecture and water technology is considered a great challenge to the modern engineers. The Sigiriya frescos on the walls of the rock are considered great artistic creations.

During the reign of king Manawamma in the latter part of the Anuradhapura era another endowment received for the district of matale was the renowned Nalanda Gedige. This is considered to be built according to the Pallawa architectural tradition under the influence of Hinduism. The Nalanda Gedige according to its location is considered to be the centre of the island of Sri Lanka.

The first ruler of Pollonnaruwa king Vijayabahu conspired to overthrow the Cholas for the first time in Menikdena close to Dambulla. Then onwards he chose the same site as his main centre to attack the enemy. Prince Parakramabahu the 1st chose Nalanda as his base to fight against King Gajaba. In addition to this he established sub camps at Selagama, Laggala, Ranamure and Ambana for the same purpose.

The last ruler of Pollonnaruwa king Nissankamalla has reconstructed the Dambulla Viharaya by gold plating it and had named it Rangiri Dambulla Viharaya. He had also transported a huge rock from Beliyakanda to be cast into his throne.

King Vikramabahu the 3rd who lived and ruled in Gampola had fled to Raigama when he heard that a Dravidian king by the name of Arya Chakrawarthy had sent a battalion to attack his kingdom. This Dravidian army was stationed at place near Matale Township. The people of Matale were believed to have fought with them easing many casualties and the remaining Dravidians had fled. This is reported to be the first instance in the history of our country that a group of people had organized themselves to attack an enemy without the guidance and directions of a ruler.

King Parakramabahu the 6th who ruled in the Kotte era ended his period of rule and that was the end of unity of Sri Lanka. After that the region of Matale which was a portion of the Kandyan Kingdom came under the rule of prince Wijayapala an heir to the throne. At this time kingdom of Kandy was ruled by king Senarath the father of Prince Wijayapala. Prince Wijayapala built his palace in Godapola and ruled from there and he was a talented fighter. He was able face the Portuguese army and defeats them in battle. In the year 1635 prince Wijayapala fled from the Matale area and from hence forth matale came under the Kandyan kingdom. 1815 Kandyan kingdom including Matale came under British rule. Matale was important to the British for plantation and also because the Kandy – Trincomalee road passed through Matale.

During the Chola and Dravidian invasions the kings of Rajarata used the road through Matale to the Kandyan kingdom. Very specially the Kandyan, Rajarata and Trincomalee were connected via Matale. 1803 and 1815 invasions of the British were done via the Matale route. In 1803 the British built the MacDowall fort but with the failure of the invasion it too was destroyed. At present the public cemetery of Matale is the place where this MacDowall was and its ruins could be seen there. The rebellion of Matale in 1848 is a historic event of Matale. This rebellion was planned and executed

within the Matale district. This was led by Veera Puran Appu and Gongale Godabanda but when it failed all the leaders were arrested and killed.

The historical heroes who brought fame to Sri Lanka namely Ehelepola Nilame, Etipola Nilame, Brave Medduma Bandara and the first governor of the recent past William Gopallawa were born in Matale. In addition to this the most trusted Nilames and also officials of the Kandyan Kings were mostly born and bred in Matale Region.