An Afternoon In Mullaiyadi

Posted on



A warm greeting from the village kids

The evening breeze that blew across the village soothed us as we strolled on the gravel road. The silent ambience was playfully disrupted at times by the rhythmic tunes made by the Palmyrah leaves as they danced to the songs of the breeze and the birds. Little children of the village houses, peeping through the wooden fences greeted us with their gleeful smiles; it was a peaceful afternoon in Mullaiyadi, Palei in Northern Sri Lanka.

Words Hansani Bandara and Bhavani Bala **Photographs** Indika De Silva and Dilshi Thathsarani

Life seemed to be passing at its slow yet charming pace at Mullaiyadi. It was a groove that was unique to this village, which is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of the city. The lush gardens surrounding the majority of the village houses and mini

vegetable cultivations of Manioc, Lemon and Brinjal were echoes that bespoke the hardworking attitude of the people.

Eager to explore more, we decided to stop at one of the houses. And before us was a Palmyrah fence and gate with an arch adorned with Rukaththana flowers in bright yellow hues. Kalanidi Devendran welcomed us to her humble abode. Surrounding her house was Manioc and Brinjal cultivated in neatly lined beds. Like the majority of the village community, Kalanidi and her family too had returned to Mullaiyadi in 2010, following the conclusion of the conflict. Her contribution to the domestic economy—like most women in Mullaiyadi—comes from home gardening, while her husband engages in labour work in the city.

Bidding adieu to Kalanidi, we continued our quest further into Mullaiyadi to find what the village was hiding beneath pockets of greenery and serene landscapes.

As we trod on, we heard the rusty sounds of a wheelbarrow approaching. With all his might, a boy—not older than 10 years—was pushing a wheelbarrow full of garden waste while another boy walked beside him. Their innocent smiles warmed our hearts and we were impressed by the hard work shown at such a young age.

A bottle gourd fruit—painted in white—hanging down from the verandah ceiling or a cactus plant placed at the top most point of the roof was commonly seen in almost all houses. Upon our questioning, Mauleeswaran Mallika paid a careful look at the whitewashed fruit and said that it was to dispel away the evil eye—a common belief among the villagers. Allowing our feet to rest, we sat down on plastic chairs kept on her garden. Our eyes ran across the beds of Chilli and upon seeing the garden well, we couldn’t resist treating ourselves to its cool water to refresh our senses.

The dense cultivation of Palmyrah palms is common to the Northern Peninsula; this includes Mullaiyadi too. According to Marlimuththu Balasubramaniam, this tree is a godsend for the people in this area. As such, the tree yields a diverse range of food products including jaggery, treacle, toddy, handicrafts and timber productions.

> At the edge of the village was a vast expanse of paddy fields hued in diverse shades of green….

Marlimuththu and his wife make Kotta Kilangu—a snack that is made using Palmyrah roots. He says tender leaves of the Palmyrah palm is used to make a

variety of handicrafts such as hand fans, baskets, mats and neethupetti—a pocket-like holder where the Pittu dough is held when inside the special aluminium holder dedicated for pittu making (a vessel with two sections of which the lower section holds water while the upper section acts as a cover).

We had arrived at the edge of the village, which was a vast expanse of paddy fields hued in diverse shades of green with a few Palmyrah trees scattered across the area. We looked at the sky, which painted a vibrant picture with the setting sun and it was then, that we saw the villager tapping toddy, undoubtedly an arduous task. He was balancing himself on a loop tied on to the tree while collecting fresh toddy into a can.

The sun was gradually descending over the panoramic backdrop of the paddy fields. The villagers were hurrying back to their homes with their cattle, marking the end of a yet another day. We gazed upon the picturesque landscape of the paddy field. What a perfect setting to bid farewell to the day!