Breezing through Kaluwaragaswewa

Posted on



The scenic Thabbowa Tank

Leaves rustled in a silent whisper; the soft breeze that swept across the lush pastoral landscape carried with it the smell of earth from the incessant ploughing. I stood admiring the greenery that surrounded me and its sheer power to sooth the eye and mind. Around me, life typically unfolded, with each stroke of the mammoty against the stubborn earth, with each seed that was planted along with a million hopes, and with each smile on the faces of the tireless rice farmers of Kaluwaragaswewa…

Words Kamalika Jayathilaka **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Passing by the bustling town of Puttalam, we headed north along the road to Anuradhapura and a few minutes' drive brought us to scenic Kaluwaragaswewa. The tank that is also known as the Thabbowa Wewa had once been surrounded by Kaluwara trees, which had eventually led to the name '*Kaluwara gas wewa*' and because of this, the area too had begun to be called thus. On account of our relentless thirst for adventure, we found ourselves turning left at the Kaluwaragaswewa clock tower and driving straight into the heart of Sri Lankan country side, into the height of tranquillity.

The tracks were narrow and stirred clouds of dust as we rolled through, before long we were driving along the bund of a giant body of water that glistened in the glow of the morning sun. As we rocked our way forward passing humongous earth movers and loaded tractors full of boulders, men were busy at work restoring the ancient reservoir. The picture perfect scenery was breathtaking; but there was more to this tank than its superficial allure. It was the source that fed the boundless acres of paddy fields, and so the lifeblood of the dwellers of Karuwalagaswewa.

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We made a turn off into a smaller track and followed an irrigation canal into the heart of the Thabbowa village. Along our left ran the chocolate coloured water-way across from which stood a few small houses. From the sparse little make-do foot bridges that fell over the stream to the wattle and daub houses everything had a touch of simplicity. On our right lay several blocks of rice fields that met the clear blue skies at a far off horizon.

At the sight of the very first occupant of the village, we made a stop. Thanel was an elderly man who has lived most of his life in the village. “Farming and fishing are the two main livelihoods of us villagers,” he voiced, “and both thanks to the Thabbowa Wewa.”

The Thabbowa tank has been constructed damming the Nanneri Oya, a major tributary of the Mee Oya and the locals believe that it has been constructed by King Kawantissa. “This tank and the water is almost revered out here, it is what brings us our daily bread.” His words vouched for the numerous little shrines we passed along the way, where the villagers at harsher times may have lit lamps and hung twigs before their respective deities in anticipation of rain which would bring them prosperity. The lamps were now forgotten, old twigs dried out, for the lake was a swell, brimming with water.

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Long ago, a Buddhist monk had been on her way to Anuradhapura taking a Bo plant with her, a symbol of Buddhist religiosity. It is believed that she had placed the plant in this area which is why it had subsequently been called ‘*Bo Thabba’* which had then turned into ‘Thabbowa’. Having thus refreshed his memory about his village, Thanel bid us farewell as he headed his way to work.

We ambled along various village trails enjoying the quietude and the undefiled simplicity of local life; and watched men and women battle the harsh soil and plant the seeds that would not only feed their offspring but an entire country. While some prepared the soil with their bare hands and sprinkled their plots with seed paddy, others sought the strength of machines. Impressed by the strength and determination of the paddy farmers, we turned around and headed towards the tank once more.

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That’s when we spotted Ajith and Ananda, who waded, their rods held high, at the edge of the water. Around Ajith’s neck hung a plastic bottle-bottom that held his bait. He had a bag tied around his waist in which he collected the fish when caught.

As soon as he caught a few fish he took them out from under a rock in the water attached to a wire, like pearls on a string. He took out the fish from the bag worn on his waist and attached them carefully on to the wire. Ajith and Ananda were from Thevanuwara, another village close-by and would arrive at the tank each morning to make a living.

An army of colourful butterflies dotted the air like a shower of petals from a delicate flower; they beckoned us to follow as they headed in one direction. As I closed my eyes, I filled my lungs one last time with a wisp of the pure, unspoilt atmosphere and my heart with the colourful memories of this wonderful place called ‘Kaluwaragaswewa‘ before heading back home into the midst of chaos and perplexity.

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