Colours Of Mullaitivu

Posted on

The Nandhikadal Lagoon from the Wadduwakal Causeway

For many years it was a place that we had heard of consistently, but were not able to visit. We knew that this existed but could only grasp at the fragments of our parents' memories of their travels to this place during their younger days where they enjoyed the free spirit of youth. We could but only listen enviously… hoping for the day that we too could experience the exuberant colours of the district we know as Mullaitivu…

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe Photographs Mahesh Bandara

Colours… signify life and that is what Mullaitivu represents; a new beginning where green vegetation, red soil, blue water, yellow sand and orange hues of faith resonate the versatility of the landscape.

Green…

We were driving along the Paranthan-Mullaitivu road, the once abandoned paddy fields had been prepared and planted. Neat plots of green paddy fields spread far and wide into the distance seemingly merging with the blue sky at the horizon. The road took us through jungle area that was interspersed with human habitation, waterways and bare land. As the rainy season was upon us the dry scorching heat usually associated with this area was at a more bearable level, another reason could be that we had decided to travel in the late afternoon.

Life was returning to Mullaitivu and this was apparent by the people on the road and the makeshift shops on the way. Another interesting aspect were the large crowds coming in buses to visit Mullaitivu from all around the country.We passed Puthukkudiyirippu, a more residential area where residents were returning to their homes. On and on we drove drinking in the beauty of the surroundings. At times it was the vast uninhabited plains that were so breathtaking. Once domesticated cattle now strolled freely with herds of more than 100 each. They had made the land their own and would not even move off the roads. It would take a bit of coaxing for them to finally allow us to pass.

Maybe it was the quiet solitude, maybe it was the sense of hope and new beginnings that brought out the simplistic beauty of Mullaitivu. Green shoots sprout out after the rains, signifying the dawn of a new day.

Orange…

Passing Mullavalai we arrived at the Vattappalai Temple, which is situated on the banks of the Nandhikadal Lagoon. For me, the orange hues were striking against the many vibrant colours that adorned the Gopuram. As we entered, the temple was blissfully quiet. There was a group of women preparing the various pulses to make the '*Murthan Buth*' for the *poojawa*. Walking along the corridors around the sanctum, the paintings on the walls depicted narratives of the Hindu Deities.

Vattappalai Kannakki Amman Temple is dedicated to the Goddess Kannakki Amma. As such there is an outer building within the Temple premises that especially details the story of the Goddess' arrival to Sri Lanka. According to Karna legend, Kannaki from Madurai arrived in Sri Lanka and rested in ten different places. The tenth place she visited was named Paththam-Palai (Paththam-tenth, Palai-residence) where her anger completely receded. Over time the name evolved into Vattappalai.

Vattapalai Amman is believed to be a deity of myths, mysteries and miracles. It is said that when Kannakki Amman visited Vattappalai as the tenth place in the form of an old woman, she met a couple of shepherd boys and mentioned to them that she was hungry.

The young boys served a meal of pongal rice made from milk and rice in a small *vidathal* leaf that turned into a lotus leaf. By that time the sun was setting and it was getting dark. When one of the boys tried to bring an oil lamp, the old woman said it was not necessary and that the full moon will provide ample light and that the water from the Nandhikadal Lagoon can be used to light the lamp. To their amazement the lamp was lit with the lagoon water. The villagers realised that this visitor was Kannakki Amman, and the temple was built at the exact location she was seen by the boys.

Her devotees come from various parts of Sri Lanka. Vaikasi Visaka Pongal Day, is a special religious festival that falls in the month of May and coincides with Vesak Poya.

For two weeks the entire temple premises becomes a centre of festivities and celebrations and ends on pongal day. During this festival hundreds of devotees gather to show their devotion to Vattappalai Kannakki Amman. Continuing the tradition that was begun by the two shepherd boys, during the festival, water from the Nandikadal Lagoon is filled into pots and threads dipped in ghee are lit amidst prayers.

The flames flicker for 24 hours. There are strong beliefs connected to the lamp and the collection of water.

It is said that the Vattappalai Kannakki Amman Temple holds great divine power and it is felt by those who enter its doors.

Another interesting story that relates to this Temple is about a Perismmon (Panichchai Maram) tree. During the Dutch period, one General visited the temple with the intention of mocking the priest and the devotees. The General challenged the priest to make the Persimmon tree, which was beside the sanctum of the temple, dance. The priest asked him to come on Monday, and when the General was riding along the temple, the priest shook the tree with a silver stick as instructed by Kannakki Amman in his dreams.

The tree shuddered violently and all the fruits fell and hit the General and his horse continuously, until the General fell off the horse. The tree literally kept ‘throwing’ the fruits at the General until he left the environs of the Temple and reached the Fort in Mullaitivu. Since that day the tree has not borne any flowers or fruits. It is said that during the dry season and once the water of the lagoon recedes, the route taken by the Dutch General can be seen.

Blue and Yellow…

We proceeded towards the beachside of Mullaitivu passing the shimmering turquoise waters of the Nanthikadal Lagoon. The town itself was small with signs of new shops coming up. We passed a somewhat small three-wheeler park and ventured into Maritimepattu, the beachside residential area of Mullaitivu.

The houses themselves were yet to be rebuilt but there were signs of people returning. The beachside was lined with boats and there were families enjoying a relaxing evening on the yellow sand. The saintly silver and white church stood as a calming presence reminding those of its resilience as it stood the test of time.

We left Maritimepattu and headed to Pudumathalan. The road we took brought us again to the Nandhikadal Lagoon. It was at the point where the Lagoon met the sea that we crossed the Wadduwakal Causeway over to the other side. The sound of flowing water was soothing and the scenery was breathtaking. The sky and water was a mystical blue. The Wadduwakal Causeway is a significant part of the A35 as it connects Mullaitivu to Puthukudiyirippu. It is over this causeway that 100,000 civilians crossed over to safety.

The travel by road at times was eerily quiet yet comforting as people from the rest of the country headed in buses to see the numerous landmarks. As we passed the remnants of a past, it saddened us but gave us renewed hope that the people in this area were regaining their lives.

We soon reached the Farah-3 merchant vessel which played a significant role in the recent history of the country. Only its shell remains but it reminds us that the past should not be forgotten. It was at this location that the historical link between the Northern and Southern formations of the Sri Lanka Army was made.

It was getting dark but there were a few more places that we wanted to see. We were told that there was a submarine yard close by. As we entered the premises we

saw a path leading to the sea.

The light of the vehicle illuminated the route and we proceeded farther. As we started climbing a slight slope, one of our friends shouted, ‘be careful, STOP!’ Yes, if we had not stopped we would have dove straight into a deep pool of water, which was the testing pool for submarines!!! A disassembled submarine lay a few metres away. As we walked along its length and examined its design and technology,

we were pensive. As night fell, we proceeded back to Paranthan. The night was further cooled by a slight drizzle that fell on the red earth.

YES…I HAD EXPERIENCED THE COLOURS OF MULLAITIVU…I HAD EXPERIENCED THE COLOURS OF LIFE.
The Colours Described Are As Perceived By The Writer

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