



**Once unknown and unheard of, Kebithigollewa rose to fame one morning not so long ago... Though years have passed, to many Kebithigollewa remains a mere name of a village without a face. Hence, we drove all the way up there, to paint the picture of what Kebithigollewa really is...**

***Words Thilini Kahandawaarachchi Photographs Mahesh Prasantha***

### **Arable Lands**

Driving past Medawachchiya from Anuradhapura, Kebithigollewa is about 50km to the North. As the car zooms along the empty road that stretches as far as the eye can see, the view through the car window is acres and acres of paddy fields swishing by. With paddy

cultivation on the cusp of the new season, the villagers are busy preparing the fields to sow the seeds. Men and women work hand in hand, ploughing the thick loam soil. The tractors in the distance turn the wet topsoil, and flocks and flocks of storks have gathered to pick on the worms that expose themselves to the predators with the newly turned earth. As the tractor roars towards them, the storks take flight only to land a few feet away to continue picking their prey.

### **The Dance Of The Cormorant**

Almost going past a lake hidden by massive trees along the way, we change gears to reverse and step off the vehicle. The piercing call of a peacock is heard in the distance as we walk along the bund of the tank. A villager grappling with her weekly load of washing at the steps to the tank inform us of the name of the tank- Ethakada wewa. A few yards away, a cormorant is in a dance with another bird, the cormorant swims with its head above the water, then lifts its hind wings up to dive and comes up and swims again...the other bird without a name dances around the cormorant, as if waiting to grab some food off the beak of the cormorant every time it breaks the surface of the water... a secret of nature to which I am not privy, it seems. It is then I realise that the cormorant can actually swim, fly and of course strut!

### **The Sleepy Hamlet**

By the time we reach the town centre of Kebithigollewa, it seems to be taking a midday nap. The tiny shops selling everything from mobile phone connections to fashion clothing and food items are open but few people seem to be around. The women selling their harvest of boiled corn, bananas and an assortment of back garden crops gaze on...waiting for the next customer to patronise their humble huts.

### **Tractor Wash**

Driving past Kebithigollewa town down Horowpothana road, we come across Aiyathige wewa or tank. Unlike the usual car washes in the city, here it's a tractor wash. A man is busy giving a good scrub to a bright red tractor. The machine that has replaced the bulls and buffaloes in paddy fields is half immersed in water, it's engine on and running and getting a good soak after a long day at work in the fields.

### **Hiding By The Sack Load?**

Bare bodied men drag bulging sacks into the water. Curious as to what they are doing, we

inch closer, only to catch a glimpse of the sinking sacks and to notice the big bubbles burst at the surface of the water. Later on we learn that they are soaking paddy seeds to prepare them for sowing. Enlightening us on the intricacies of paddy sowing the villager informs us that paddy seeds have to be soaked for 36 hours in order to prepare them for sowing.

### **Back From School...**

Around midday a few kids come walking by along the tank, some of them are sucking on packets of ice perhaps to beat the heat, the walk back home from school seems to be quite something to look forward to... for one thing school's over, the other the iced treat!

Women who seem to have been busy in their fields also make their way home... Mammoty on her shoulder and a jug of water in her hand, she seems to rush home in time for her children to get back from school.

### **Collecting Firewood**

Walking across a paddy field, a woman comes laden with a load of firewood that she seems to have collected from the woods near by. Her shy smile greets our camera, without a single word.

### **Freshly Boiled Corn On The Cob**

We stop by at a roadside hut, to sink our teeth into a boiled corncob. The young girl at the stall tells us that we just missed a walk through the cornfield where she plucked corn to be sold during the day. In a big cauldron filled with salty water she boils corn. Just like us, passers by stop to pick up some corn, either boiled or raw, all freshly picked that morning.

### **Scaring Away The Crows**

With agriculture being the main source of livelihood, the people in Kebithigollewa engage in chena cultivation as well as paddy farming. In order to protect their crops from wild boar and other animals, they spend the nights up in tree houses in their chenas. Pumping up a stick man with hay and dressing the stick man in old clothes and a pot for his face, a scarecrow is brought to life to stand through the sun and the rain and to scare away the birds that come to eat away their harvest.

Going about their day to day life in the fields, the chenas and around the tanks, the smiling faces of these hard working people and thier children walking back from school paint the picture of this agriculture based community in Kebithigollewa.

## Kebithigollewa: Painting The Picture

