On A Road Less Travelled

Posted on

Maha Oya to Chenkalady, the road where everyone can travel

Life in many ways represents the roads we decide to take and not take. A country too is a confluence of those decisions that its people make. It takes courage for a person to travel on a road less travelled…

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Many thoughts ran through my mind as we began our journey. Though literally we were travelling from Yala to Passekudah via Bibile, Maha Oya and Chenkalady, on a road that indeed had been less travelled, I could not help but feel a sense of anticipation of what we were to expect.

Passing Sella Kataragama and Buttala, we sped through while drinking in the

breathtaking landscape and simplicity of the environment. Through lush paddy fields and tree covered green mountainous terrain we started our ascent, winding through roads entering from the southern region to the Uva province. Wayside kovils provided us with divine blessings while makeshift shops quenched our hunger pangs. And on we went… Tea estates and water falls, the scenery was ever-changing, while we had come from the dry zone, we now seemed to be in the wet zone.

From the A22 we turned to the A5, passing Bibile we continued and as we reached Maha Oya it was late afternoon. Through the bustling town of Maha Oya, we proceeded on the Batticaloa road. It was quiet and tranquil with the occasional sound of the birds and the wild. During the time of the conflict, people would hesitate to travel on this road. We saw houses scattered here and there, where corn had been laid out to dry. A lone shop with knickknacks also seemed to be a good place for a chat. As we continued on our journey, the simplicity of life was mesmerising. We were in an area called Pulaveli where a large cultivated area drew our attention. In a daub and wattle house lived a family, where they cultivated corn, black gram and cowpea on a rotational basis. While the corn was being dried, black gram and cowpea had been planted for the next season.

We mapped the route of our journey and from Yala to Passekudah it was 254.70 Km

Daylight was receding and we were soon in Periyapullamalai. We had crossed an imaginary line that had been placed during the conflict separating the communities from both sides of the line. That was not so today. It was as in any other place in the country, where people at the end of a hard day’s work relax with each other. The people of the area were leisurely walking around. It was almost misty and gave a surreal appearance. However, the signs of a war that had caused destruction, still prevailed. But as through every dark cloud there is a silver lining, the people in the area are very friendly and are moving ahead. The main thing that everyone says is that, ‘life is good now.’ And, why shouldn’t it be?

A blue and white church of Our Lady of Holy Rosary Shrine stood serene against the evening sky. We ventured forward and came across a gathering spot of some sort, where the people of the area had gathered for an evening chat. There were two shops, which also served tea and snacks. A makeshift Amman kovil was on the opposite side of the road. While we chatted with the people around, a sweet old lady smilingly asked us to come into her house, she just wanted to talk! We were strangers, but that did not matter.

The road stretched far ahead of us. With the sun having completely receded to the background, we had no choice but to return in the morning. Yes, we went all the way to Passekudah in the night and returned in the morning so that we could see more.

The sun was bright and we were feeling quite hot. More life could be seen. Bullock carts drawn by two white bulls, then people transporting their goods in bicycles, a bull drawn plough being taken back after finishing its work, corn and cowpea being laid out to dry were just a few of the day to day happenings that we witnessed. We were thirsty and just as I uttered the words ‘wish we could have a cool drink’, there was a small saruwath stall under a tree.

Scrambling out of the vehicle, we called out to the people in the house as there was no one at the stall. Soon a concoction of freshly squeezed lime, pineapple, sugar syrup and water mixed with ice was served with an addition of kasa kasa seeds. There are no fridges in the houses and as such they bring the ice all the way from Chenkalady.

At Karadiyanaru, there was a small town of sorts and the bus halt was full of people who were waiting to catch a bus. From here we turned off in search of a large tank by the name of Unnichchai Reservoir. It was massive.

As we drove across we met four school children enjoying themselves in the water. Soon, they started showing their skills in diving and expertly jumped from the bridge into the water. Though we shrieked telling them to be careful, they were calm and wondering why we were telling them so. ‘Ondu, Rendu, Munu’ and splash!

Lines are there to cross, especially when they are imaginary, a road is there to travel especially when it brings people together

The land in the area was fed by a number of tanks, it is no wonder that the land was fertile and lush. We were back on the A5. How surprised we were when we came across an ice-cream seller, with its characteristic tune… did I mention that it was extremely hot? Well it was, and we had to cool ourselves with a bite of ice-cream. We sat on the side of the road as we sunk our teeth into our ice-cream. As morning became afternoon, we proceeded back to Passekudah. We continued on the A5 passing the monument that signified the liberation of the Eastern Province by the heroic Sri Lankan Armed Forces – upon crossing into Chenkalady we had reached Batticaloa and thus crossed another imaginary line.

I got back to how I started on this journey… we had ventured on a road less travelled and were richer with the experiences and the memories we had gained. Lines are there to cross, especially when they are imaginary, a road is there to travel especially when it brings people together, life is there to live especially when we live in a country as diversely enriched like ours.

The people we met had the courage to journey on a road less travelled, they had the strength to cross that imaginary line, then it should be our responsibility to ensure that our country never falls pray to division, because at the end of the day we are all one people.

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