Shady Grove Avenues

Posted on

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A cool relaxed walk in the daytime is certainly not all that tempting, specially with the ever present bright sunshine. Some people just love to walk, it’s good exercise, very relaxing as well, but just ask them to come for a walk during the day and you won’t get much of a reply. If you want to get to know a place then the best possible way to do so would undoubtedly be to walk, walk and walk all over and all around it.

The busy roads in Colombo, big and small that wind across the city provide good walking space. However all these roads are not sunny, in fact there are quite a lot of very shady roads in the very heart of the city. Avenues of shade, Colombo may perhaps be the only capital in the whole of Asia with so much green to be seen, trees, shrubberry, flowers, colourful roundabouts and most .of all the trees that tower as high as the buildings, blending well to give the impression of a city that has retained much of it’s naturalness despite the inroads of modernisation. The roads in the city are indeed a joy to walk along, avenue upon avenue of shade, it’s a treat.

With nothing much to do one day I decided to walk along as many shaded roads as I could come across. Starting off from Kumarathunga Munidasa Mawatha or Thurstan Road as it’s more commonly called, near the magnificent old building of the University of Colombo with it’s large ground across which one is able to get a glimpse of Reid Avenue. Undoubtedly one of the most popular of roads, this stretch of the road is completely shaded by the huge trees that grow on either side. These trees are the flamboyant or flame tree (poinciana regia) big, tall and sturdy trees whose branches spread across a large area. The leaves which are of a deep green are usually small and grow very close to each other. The flowers of the Mara ‘tree are of two varieties, one red and the other yellow. The red grow in. little bunches which from afar looks like big red lanterns hung up on the trees. The yellow variety (Peltophorum), a small flower with a lot of little petals grows on it’s own and not as a bunch like the red variety. Come the flowering season in April or May, it looks as if red and yellow lanterns have been lighted in the trees, and the pavements and road are all carpeted an inch deep with the faded flowers too heavy to linger any longer on it’s perch on the branches. Indeed a truly beautiful sight.

An unusual feature of the trees on this particular stretch is that all of them have a tiny grass like fem growing on the trunks and branches, almost as if huge caterpillars were crawling on the trees. Near Thurstan College the trees are fewer and the road is not so shady. Coming past the Navarangahala Theatre and the Royal Primary School I turned to my right on to Rajakeeya Mawatha. This stretch of

the road is usually quiet, not much traffic, except of course for the noise of the myriad insects that live on the trees. And what a racket they make. In a way it's quite pleasant, makes one feel as if one is walking in a forest. The trees on this road too are Flamboyant, but unlike on Kumararhunga Munidasa Mawatha the trees grow so close to each other that their branches which reach up to form a canopy overhead completly blot out even the tiniest blink of sunlight. Coming out of the avenue I have to shade my eyes from the sudden glare of the sun on Reid A venue. I decided to walk up Reid Avenue past I.akpahana, the Shopping centre for ri 1ankan arts and crafts on my left, and on my right a section of the grand stand of the old Race Course followed by the more modem and newer buildings of the National Archives. On to Maitland Crescent and again I turned right at the beautiful roundabout on to Independence Avenue. The National Archives still on my right and the CCC grounds on my left, I ventured forth. One of my favourite routes, Independence Avenue is wide, straight, with the magnificent tall, swaying Indian Willows (Polyalthea longifolia) growing on either side like a guard of honour leading' straight up to Independence Square and the Independence Hall. Situated next to the grounds are a couple or two of beautiful bungalows with large gardens, probably faint reminders of the ample days of the British. In contrast to these bungalows are the modem buildings on the opposite side. Past the Water Resources Board Plant Nursery and I am right in front of the Independence Hall, a beautiful pillared structure of a building dominated by the lone statue of D.S. Senanayake the first Prime Minister of Independent Sri Lanka. I stopped in front to take in the view. 1his place truly awes me, it's quiet, serene with a touch of history. The place where Independence from British rule was announced.

On my left I could see a few athletes practising in the Sports Ministry grounds and decided to take the road alongside the grounds and Independence Hall. This section is not at all shady and I walked fast to get out of the way of the scorching sunlight. Round the grounds and on to Maitland Place where it's much, much shadier. Here too it's the Flamboyants that grow along the roadsides and the walled enclosures of the SSC and NCC grounds which take up the entire right of the road. In between the "Mara" trees there were a few Cherry Blossom (Samaniya Saman) trees and a few others, however neither giving as much shade as the Mara trees. This stretch of the road is very lonely, rather deserted, in fact ideal for a quiet walk or jog. The road falls on to Maitland Crescent, in from of St. Bridgets Nursery school. Should I walk back towards the roundabout or not? I decided not and instead turned right and walked up towards Horton Place. This leg of the walk was a bit noisier as there's a little more traffic and I was kept company by the sound of the little insects on the

trees. Very lively creatures, these insects, constantly screeching day and night, a bit like the noise of gurgling water. Horton Place and I turned left, more sunny, not many trees. However the pavements are shaded by the drooping branches of the trees that grow inside the huge gardens on either side. The brief walk brought me up to another roundabout, not so colourful as the one on Maitland Crescent Independence Avenue. I crossed over on to opposite side to Coomaraswamy Mawatha. Past the Municipal Council grounds at my left, a lot of grounds on my walk, and the densely thick area of the Viharamahadevi Park at my right. The road on this stretch is very wide, two separate lanes of traffic with a centre island having huge trees dividing the two. The trees are of a mixed variety, Flamboyant as well as Cherry Blossom and a few others, more Cherry Blossom, though much of the shade comes from the Flame Trees which grow on the boundary of the Park on the opposite side.

Lots of interesting places on this stretch too despite the fact that almost the whole of the right side’s taken up by the Park and at the other end by the Public library of Colombo. However situated on the left are quite a few interesting places-the John de Silva theatre, the Art Gallery, the Mahaweli Museum and a little portion of the Sri Lanka Tennis Association (SLTA) grounds. A very long walk, a bit tiring, but never the exhaustion that would have been but for the constant shade of the tropical trees. Colombo has many more such shady avenues, for a relaxing and pleasant walk-among them sections of Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Wijerama Mawatha, Gregory’s Road, Guildford Crescent and Albert Crescent, and Inner Flower Road.



Thurstan Road a haven for the pedestrian under the giant trees that give shade.





Gregory’s Road-another shady avenue in the city.