The Shimmering Sands Of Manalkadu

Posted on



The vast expanse of sandy landscape

The bright afternoon sky hung heavy upon the pale golden sands that reflected its wild luminescent light and the heat of the sun.Spread across acres before our eyes was what resembled a semi-desert heightened by the presence of a few hefty dunes. They loomed up like giants, standing out against the otherwise bare landscape. The spectacle that unfolded before us though, was mysteriously breathtaking.

Words Kamalika Jayathilaka Photographs Prabhath Chathuranga

Making our way from Point Pedro to Jaffna we turned off the main road just after passing the town, and drove through a straight narrow tar road running through land empty but for rows of palmyrah trees in the vicinity and a thick undergrowth of thorny bushes keeping them company. The road ran elevated from the rest of the ground and its sandy white edges sloped on either side spreading out as far as the eye could see.

Moving further we reached our destination: a clearing with nothing in the way between us and the overpowering blue sky. Exploring the strangeness, we followed a trail of dusty sand to what seemed like an extended sea-less beach. This to us felt ‘not right’ being used to associating the sand with the sea. The very feeling kept us

on our feet walking farther and farther out into the sandy expanse taking in the surroundings as if in search of the missing sea. Instead, the dunes appeared like huge heads emerging out of the earth and the bushy vegetation covering their tops seeming superbly green against the light coloured sand.

As the sun rose high in the heavens and the silvery white clouds were blown across the blueness in the opposite direction, we trudged on against the wind humming at our ears, struggling as our feet got engulfed every now and again by the fiery hot sands. This mini-desert, a wondrous creation of nature at the very northern tip of the country is believed to have been formed with the sands blown on shore by the waves and currents from the coast of South India during the monsoons. The sands were of the softest kind, powdery and were effortlessly lifted and carried around by the wind like wisps of smoke occasionally stinging our eyes.

Building their lives upon these sands were the village folk who called this their home, their compact little houses with palmyrah-thatched roofs fenced in by palmyrah stalks seeming small against the vast landscape. An elderly man relaxed by his Kotta Kelingu (palmyrah roots) spread out on a mat to dry on the sand before they are ready to eat. A few women sat in the shade of a solitary palmyrah sprouting out of the sand chatting and laughing in the dry afternoon breeze. Their children played tag on the sand, totally disregarding the scorching heat of the sun, and as they ran in pursuit of each other into the open distance, they dissolved into mere dark dots, like a swift line of ants on a trail of sugar.

As we retraced our steps back through the sand leaving the vast vacant expanse, the wind kept gently pushing us on, as if encouraging us to leave its untarnished territory; and as we scurried on, its human guardians the desert dwellers bade us farewell, returning to their simple daily routines. The sand dunes shimmered in the sun behind them, still… silent and unforgettable.

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