

The Sounds Of Freedom



An image of a causeway like structure emerged through the large green trees along the road

It is easy to miss, the little by-road hidden behind scrub jungle but with one quick manoeuvre we entered the road in search of the sounds of freedom...

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe **Photographs** Indika De Silva and Damith Wickramasinghe

We journeyed along the narrow road, swaying in rhythm with the sandy terrain. Errant branches scraped the sides of the vehicle making us cover our ears. We earnestly looked for tyre marks on the road to ensure that we were on the right path. Earlier warnings about wild elephants kept us on alert, but the sheer excitement of actually being able to visit the place - Marvil Aru - that had been the pivotal point that paved the way for the end of the conflict, kept us wide awake.

Marvil Aru was supposed to be six kilometres from the point we had turned off from the B347, therefore we kept counting the kilometres we had travelled. There

was no one around, not even an elephant! Soon amidst the greenery and sandy red soil the shimmering water of a large tank was visible. Farther we went as an image of a causeway like structure emerged through the large green trees along the road. As we drove on to the cement structure we were intrigued by the fact that there was water only on one side almost to the level of the 'causeway' and the other side was dry except for a few pools of water. Upon closer inspection we realised that there were columns with the level of water marked. Where could we be? we wondered and then it suddenly hit us that we were at the bottom of the tank!

We all started measuring our heights and realised how short we were compared to the massive tank and imagined how it would be if the water level was high. We drove straight ahead and my friend suddenly slammed down on the brakes. We were on a precipice, one step further and it would have been like in the movies, flying through air! We reversed the vehicle and drove along the alternate path, clearly the monsoons had been hard on the surrounding infrastructure of the tank. The scenery was beautiful and calm as we drove along the bund of the massive tank. We were the only humans there and I could not help but think how peaceful it was.

Drinking in the surrounding beauty as afternoon became early evening we finally saw the famous anicut that we had seen so many times on television. As we walked towards it all of us were deep in thought. Only the sound of gushing water that was flowing from the tank through the anicut to the canal towards agricultural land could be heard - it was the sound of freedom. The water flowed with nothing to hinder its progress, it is difficult to even imagine that the anicut had been closed, where water was deprived to the land located down stream, as the water flowed so freely. Yet, as we stood there reflecting on the significance of this place, Marvil Aru seemed to be oblivious to the place it holds in the hearts of all Sri Lankans. I leaned forward to see the gurgling water moving through the opening, I could not get enough of the soothing sound of the flowing water. We wandered down the bund to get a view from below, looming above the anicut stood like a protective sentinel.

Maybe I was emotional, but who would not be... I never thought that I would be able to visit this area in Sri Lanka, but now because of the sacrifices of the heroic Armed Forces I can travel to any part of the country.

Freedom is everyones right, it defines who we are...

It was difficult for us to leave but as the sun slowly receded from our view we decided to journey to Trincomalee where we were staying for the night. We did not go back on the road we came from but journeyed through villages, passing friendly inhabitants and smiling soldiers. Majestic eagles flew above us as if guiding us, one swooped down and landed comfortably in a paddy field looking right at home.

Freedom is everyones right, it defines who we are. Having heard the gushing sounds of freedom, we should never let that sound be taken away from us. To me, Marvil Aru personifies the freedom of this island nation.

