University Of Peradeniya: A Walk Through Enchanted Landscape

Posted on



Students under the giant Javan Fig Tree await the ceaseless drizzle to pass

As the morning sun hid suddenly behind a bunch of dull grey clouds, a soft drizzle as cold as ice began reaching the already damp earth, after being carried horizontally across like a batch of pin sized arrows. The pale pink edifices of the University of Peradeniya in its old-world charm, stood blissfully against the backdrop of the surrounding Hantana Mountains, mysteriously drawing you into a world of its own.

Words Kamalika Jayathilaka Photographs Prabath Chathuranga

As we turned in through the ‘Galaha’ junction at Peradeniya, the gateway that leads to the first ever university of Sri Lanka, we were promptly greeted by the

cooling embrace of the ancient sprawling Mara trees. The road curved its way through their tunnelling rows on either side, making way into the vast expanse of land of about 700 hectares that bear this enchanting establishment that has cultured and cultivated many young minds for decades.

Occupying the largest land area owned by a university in the country, the University of Peradeniya is home to the most exquisitely landscaped gardens and unique buildings designed during the early 1940s by late Archt Shirley De Alwis. They sublimely blend in with the surrounding natural foliage making the University undoubtedly the most beautiful in Sri Lanka.

Passing the Medical Faculty, the Science Faculty and the students' halls of residence that line either side of the road, was a sudden clearing where the university grounds lay. Far across the distance, colourfully clad figures playing football resembled moving specks on the bright green grass that stretched out like a soft carpet. Looking skywards from where we stopped, the looming Hantana Mountains stood mysteriously still in a darker shade of green, silent witnesses to the years of comings and goings of the world below.

Looking skywards from where we stopped,the looming Hantana Mountains stood mysteriously still in a darker shade of green…

Very close to the grounds and past a little white bridge, we stumbled upon a unique creation of nature just opposite the distinctive Arts Theatre where the Faculty of Arts began.

The singular Javan Fig Tree, no taller than seven feet had snaking roots and curving branches that mingled with one another beneath a roof-like verdant canopy. Sheltering tired students from the scorching heat or the pouring rains for eons, the tree bore resemblance to a large house with a green roof. On this particular morning, an excited bunch of students sat on the spiralling branches awaiting the ceaseless drizzle to pass.

Taking the Palm tree lined lane that stretched straight along the length of the main buildings of the faculty, we walked through admiring the ancient looking structure that stood majestic against the ashen rain clouds. Small cliques of students on bicycles and on foot passed us by, absorbed in cheerful chatter and carefree laughter. The path extended all the way up to the seven storied main library behind which ran the Mahaweli River.

We trudged all the way up to the Akbar Bridge that connects the Faculty of Arts with the Faculty of Engineering over the river. Passing beautifully landscaped gardens with lush green grass and more colossal trees, we stopped awhile on the age-old footbridge. The mud green water of the river beneath reflected the dull skies overhead; a flock of birds suddenly took to the skies from the forested river banks. As we enjoyed this unworldly serenity,

a long line of student monks approached from the Arts Faculty to cross the bridge, their saffron robes a stark contrast against the damp green grass.

We retraced our steps around the long building appearing on the other side of the Arts Theatre. Here, sitting in the middle of a vast open grassy patch was another giant Mara tree, larger than any we had so far witnessed. Profuse and delightful creepers cascaded down from its crest making it difficult for one to distinguish between the tree and the vines. Under its expansive shade sat more university students with open books or idle chatter.

We walked further towards the Hilda Obeysekera Hall along the winding road, darkened by the absent sun and the shade of the trees. The tranquillity of the whole atmosphere was disturbed only by an occasional passing vehicle or a group of students rushing towards the Arts Theatre in time for their morning lectures. As they came out of their hostel buildings they ran down the beautifully carved age-old steps that snaked down the grass onto the road.

The expansive green gardens, sprawling trees, the stately timeworn buildings and the surrounding mountains all blended in to give the University of Peradeniya a timeless magical touch that set it apart from the rest of the changing world. As the wind shifted direction and the clouds revealed the sun for a brief moment, we reluctantly headed back out into the real world in all its haste.

[nggallery id=190]