



Kola Kenda

for the Sri Lankan Soul

A feel-good book about Sri Lanka



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Beyond Borders is a youth-led voluntary organisation working for change in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh.

dedicated to all those who contributed..

The Story of Kola Kenda

When we first thought of Kola Kenda, we were thinking of ways in which to build a common Sri Lankan identity, we thought a feel-good book about Sri Lanka would be one way of going about it. We felt we don't need back into thousands of years in our history to find a bit of inspiration and— despite our many failings – we as Sri Lankans have many things to be proud of, after all this is the country which gave the world Muralitharan and Michael Ondaatje, the country that changed one day cricket and possibly the only place on earth which maintains a high literacy rate, low infant mortality rate and a growing economy despite a civil war.

So here it is, We've compiled the best entries we received into a PDF format for anyone to read, share and enjoy. Our most sincere thanks to all those who contributed, We hope everyone will have fun reading this, and maybe even feel a tad bit better about this country we call home.

AT-HOMES AND PARTIES, SRI LANKAN-STYLE

By Priyeni de Silva McLeod

Decades ago an 'At Home' meant the 'Home-coming' party that we now celebrate when a newly married couple returns from their honeymoon. While the term 'At Home' evolved to "home coming" among a certain class of urban Sri Lankans, it remains very much in the lingo of our villages, charmingly pronounced, 'as-tome' by most. But, the 'as-tome' has now taken on a whole new dimension and is the celebration of a spectrum of occasions.

I will begin with a record of events in Rahala, a hamlet in the village of Aranayake; to be specific, it is a record of functions as narrated by Wickremaratne who is popularly known as Wikrema. Wikrema attended his nephew's 'as-tome' recently which, in his opinion was not a grand affair at all as it happened only over two days. Close relatives from near and far gathered at the groom's home the day prior to the arrival of the couple. Female relatives and women from the village commenced the cooking while the men erected a *takarung shed for the guests, the sophisticated marquee not having emerged in the village as yet. They strung coloured lights, brought in chairs from neighboring homes and had the very important task of buying the liquor and other bottled drinks. Wikrema smirked, "we were in a state of inebriation for nearly three days." When the couple arrived, there was a lunch 'daval kaama mesayak' to which all relatives were invited. The affluent and respected villagers like the **kaday mudalali, iskole mahaththaya, vedha raala and others were invited to dinner, the 'raa kaama mesay'. Next day's lunch was for the other villagers who showed no objection to the differentiation. Dinner was for the groom's colleagues from the Navy who arrived in a hired bus. It was a regular 'men only' party and even the bride was not allowed to put a toe in. At this point I had to interrupt the narration to exclaim, "Wikrema, how unfair, it is her 'as-tome' too" but Wikrema could not comprehend, there are certain privileges men in Rahala enjoy.

He gleefully told me how they were sozzled, had 'bites' of devilled pork and beef and danced until the wee hours of the morning. (In general, no meats are brought in to most homes in the village while some make the exception for chicken.) This was the traditional 'at-home' but now, 'as-tomes' are plenty in Rahala. When little girls grow-up to be young women, the finale of the 'kotahalu gedera' is now an 'as-tome'. When a baby is born, a family moves into a new home, the opening of a kaday or business are all events to be celebrated with a jolly good 'as-tome'.

Wikrema's daughter's 'kotahalu' celebrations spread over five days. He got into debt at the time but explained that he had to invite those he called or he would have offended them, even made enemies. Women played the important role in this 'as-tome'; the men were relegated to putting up a shed and finding bananas to be served with kavum, kokis, aasmey, moong-kavum, dodol and other traditional food that all of us Sri Lankans drool over. Female relations from afar brought boxes of prepared kavums or moong-kavums but the bulk of the sweat-meats were made in the Wickremaratne kitchen and in neighbours' kitchens. These preparations go on over a week at least. Alcohol is usually not served at kotahalu 'as-tomes' but Wikrema confided that the boys always have booze stashed somewhere.

The wonderful feature about these 'as-tomes' is how the village gathers together putting their own tasks and daily chores on the back-burner. The time of preparation bonds them in work, they go back to their homes, dress in their finery and return to enjoy the 'as-tome', eating the food they prepared and chatting to the same folk they worked with earlier.

Plantation Tamils celebrate similar events, they simply call them 'parties'. They are more urbanized as many of them work in Colombo or other towns and bring home their city sophistication. Most of them get in to debt when they have parties but say they are compelled to have these celebrations or their status within the community declines. A typical 'growing-up', rudhu vaahi, ceremony goes on for a month; after the initial rites are observed the girl has to stay indoors but not in the same room as a male family member; she cannot attend school and most often her mother keeps away from work too, unless there is a grandmother to be with her. At the end of this period there is a party when the girl is dressed in saree and decked with as much gold jewelry as possible and sits upon a throne. As it often happens, they cannot afford the jewelry

but feel a compulsion to abide by customs because this ceremony has an impact on her eligibility when it is time for marriage. They have an additional expense of paying the ***Poosari who performs various rites on different occasions. The only traditional foods they make are kiributh, moong kavum and murukku preferring to serve cakes and biscuits.

I am again being specific about Gomera estate in the foothills of the Knuckles mountain range and Thambiraj is my main source of information although I glean a lot from others around me. Relatives and neighbours are exceedingly involved in each others' lives as estate workers live in close proximity to each other.

Thalawars or Trade Union leaders take charge of any event on Gomera, be it a funeral or a wedding. Respected elders and Thalawars sit at the door behind a table making note of every gift which is left with them. When Kumar married Kumari last year they hoped to settle all debts incurred over the wedding with the cash gifts they expected. The gifts were certainly received but on their return from the honeymoon they discovered that Kumar's family had used all the money for the home-coming, "how else could they have the party?" said Kumar resignedly. There was a neatly kept record of the amounts received, which over the years he will have to return in cash or kind.

If a neighbour brings a kilo of sugar to a funeral house, when there is a function at the neighbour's a gift amounting to the same value has to be given, "That is the system" explained Thambiraj. When I queried, "If a wealthy relative gives you a gift of a gold chain how will you return that?" "I have to borrow" he replied simply.

Birthday parties are extremely popular on the estate. In general, the fare would be fried rice, chicken curry and other regular accompaniments. There is always music blaring; they have rhythm within them and imitate the dances in Hindi movies. Children and young women join in the dancing and the dance-floor extends outdoors. No party is complete without plenty of booze. They brew their own moonshine, 'karingha' but for parties, the more affluent buy arrack as well.

At the end of any party the men stay behind continuing the revelry, boozing and playing cards. Events are stretched over days depending on guests who travel from far.

No function is missed by family members as it would be considered an insult if they did not attend. Most people have relatives working in Colombo and are compelled to wait for them.

It is amazing the way we Sri Lankans bond with each other when celebrating, be it parties or 'as-tomes'. It is almost as if we are looking for opportunities to rejoice; maybe we are trying to obscure the ever-present horrors and sorrows of war.

* Aluminium sheets

** Shop owner, School master, Ayurvedic doctor

*** Priest of the Hindu temple

THE BEGGER

By Farah Yoosoof

Of all the beggars that I have come across, one seems to have had a profound effect on the way I think. Whether it was because I truly sympathized with this particular one, or because of our conflicting ideals, I don't really know. I don't think I'm even going to try to analyze it. I'd rather put it down to just one of the complexities of life. Why would I be focusing on a mere beggar, one might begin to wonder. After all, a beggar is a mere mortal, just that they happen to be less fortunate than the rest of us. Their ill fate leads them to appeal to the human instincts of pity in the better-off, so that we may spare them some change. They are found two to the dozen, dotting roadsides, frequenting buses and seeking refuge on pavements, all with that unkempt, shabby appearance testifying to their sorry states. Many display bodily deformities and defects. Others plaintively tell of great misfortunes that have befallen them. All this to kindle a bit of pity from the passers by. Thus is the general picture of this intriguing group of misfits. However the beggar in question did not fit into this stereotype, for he was no ordinary beggar. He was neither unkempt, nor injured, neither unhealthy nor tragedy-stricken. In fact he was a young man, tall, smart and reasonably well dressed in a pair of jeans and a shirt. I put him in his late 20's or early 30's. No tell-tale signs of poverty were to be seen, yet unmistakably he was a beggar.

I watched him climb into the bus, tambourine in hand. By this time, he had caught the attention of many of the other passengers and many eyes were focused on him as he made his way to the front of the bus. Some faces had distaste written across, while others were merely intrigued on what his game was. I was in the former group, for there was no mistake about his intentions. He looked healthy enough, and didn't look like he was suffering from any mental illnesses

Why was a job, however menial, hard to find? What type of sorry story had he cooked up for the poor unsuspecting souls on the bus that day? I was about to find out. In a deep voice, the young man began his story. “Ladies and Gentlemen, you may be wondering why a young man, apparently healthy and fit has come to beg of you.” “No doubt about it”, I muttered to myself. “You find it easier to steal the hard earned money of poor, unsuspecting souls rather than lift a finger of your own. He continued, “You may also be wondering how I could stand before you, unabashedly, a young, fit man, and ask for money from you.” It was as if he had read my mind. “Why do I do as I do? More important, I think is what I don’t do. I don’t take the easy and obvious path. Instead of turning to crime like so many of the youngsters today, I have chosen an honest path. I could easily join the ranks of the thugs and the thieves, the murderers and drunkards to make some fast and easy money....but I haven’t. I stand before you an honest citizen, not even thinking of the dirty money that comes out of crime, but pleading for your assistance.”

“I also lived a good life once upon a time. In fact I worked in Dubai for over 2 years, earning around 20,000 a month. Why did I give up that job you wonder? Well, no other reason than because of my dear, sickly mother. She’s old and all alone here in Sri Lanka. I couldn’t bear to be away from her. I wanted to be with her, take care of her as she took care of me when I was small, for if not for me who else would? I have neither sisters nor brothers, my father died when I was a child. It was she who worked hard and tirelessly to bring me up. Is it not my duty to repay her? To me, my mother is more precious than all the worldly fantasies of young people these days. Would you deny me the right to be with her as her days are coming to an end?” By now most eyes and ears of the rest were on the beggar.

At this point he launched into his musical number, a touching song about the love of parents to children and vice versa, sung in a deep voice. He was definitely not a star but his zeal was enough to capture the gaze of those who had averted their eyes up to now. I was still adamant.

“I appeal to the kind souls here, the mothers and fathers, daughters and sons. Think of your own families and spare some change for me so that I may be able to feed my dear mother.” This said, he proceeded along the aisle of the bus,

his upturned tambourine moving from left to right, to accept the offerings of those who had been moved by his speech and song. I was not surprised to hear quite a bit of clatter and clang as coins and notes were added to his collection, the Sri Lankan heart having a soft spot for anything to do with elders and respect. With each donation he made a little comment thanking the donator and wishing him and his family the best of everything or making a little prayer for them. For those who didn't oblige him, he uttered not a word.

After making it to the back of the bus he said, "I thank the people who have so kind heartedly helped me. I pray for everyone of you, that you and your families are always happy and together and that tragedy should never befall you. I am not one to say so and so gave me only 5 cents and so and so gave me only 10 cents. I humbly accept what is offered, however small." So saying he made his way towards the front of the bus, again holding out his tambourine so that any who had changed their minds would oblige him.

At the front of the bus he turned around and announced, "Thank you all for your generosity. It is your kind hearts that will allow me to buy the medicines that my poor mother dearly needs. I hope and pray for you and your families that you may always be together and lead a happy and prosperous life. Good bye!" With that he was gone. I looked up just in time to see the back of his head as he descended the stairs of the bus.

At that point I was distinctly aware of something nagging me from inside. I was unsure of my reaction to the beggar. I had been suspicious and cold hearted right from the very beginning. A story I once read suddenly flashed through my mind. It went like this. A man came across a little boy, no more than 12 years, trying to push a heavy cart loaded with coconuts up a slope. Feeling sorry for the youth, the man, offered to help the boy. Puffing and panting they reached the top of the slope. Wiping the sweat off his forehead the man retorted, "What type of man is your boss? Does he expect you to push this cart all alone up this hill?" "Oh no" was the reply, "He told me not to worry and that some old fool would come along, see me, and surely come to my assistance!"

To me, the passengers on that bus were akin to fools. Or on second thought, were they better people than me, more human that is? Was it right for them to be moved by the beggar's words, by his affection to his mother? Was I the odd one out, selfish and

unmoving, suspicious of every character on the street? Was I the fool to deprive the man of a few rupees which I could have easily parted with? I pondered the issue over the entire bus ride.

I stepped out of the bus with a new insight into the true Sri Lankan...the one who is not afraid to be a fool....when the circumstances are right. I had learnt a great lesson in life. After all, they do say that a wise man is not as certain of anything as a fool is of everything

By Farah Yoosoof , Age- 24, Medical graduate. Born and lived abroad most of her life. Sri Lanka has been her home for just over a year and is just getting to know the country and its people.

Contribution to – The Sri Lankan people. How they have helped/touched your life to make a difference.

BRINGING THE HARVEST HOME

By Aditha Dissanayake

I am a daily paid worker today, on a farm called 'Teal Forest' in Serukelle, Chilaw. My wages are Rs. 250.00 per day, with lunch and two cups of plain tea. I will be cutting the maha season's paddy, gathering it and piling it for winnowing with six others on an acre of paddy land in the dry zone, in time for the New Year.

The Manager of Teal Forest, is not that keen to hire me. He does not believe my educational qualifications, and experience earning a living with the weapon of mass description, will be of any use on his paddyfields. But when Malkanthi sends word through her sister saying her husband Kiri Chooti requires her help today because one of the cows are in labour, he has no choice other than to allow me to fill the vacancy.

'Tck' says Ariyawathi giving a disapproving look at my attire. Here is someone who does not believe in the comfort and convenience of a faded denim and a cotton shirt. Removing the piece of cloth tied round her head she gives it to me asking me to tie it round my waist. I oblige her for a few minutes but give up when the cloth begins to slip down my knees every five minutes and the others begin to laugh saying, 'Onna, onna, onna, aiy watuna' (there it comes down again).

My colleagues don't mind teaching me how to cut the paddy. 'Hold a bunch of paddy like this, in your left hand" says Jeevan, who had skipped school today to join his elder brother Nilantha and his father, Sunil, to help with the harvesting. "Take the knife into your right hand, and with one clean sweep cut the stems".

It seems easy when you watch, but try it for yourself and you realize how difficult it is to hold the paddy in one hand and make 'one clean sweep' with the knife. 'One shot, non stop" Nilantha tells me the mantra of the paddy harvesters.

Standing knee deep in mud, bending double to reach the paddy, everyone works in dead silence. Except for the srrrrrs, srrrrrs sound made by the knives and the occasional call of a peacock, there is no other sound around us.

“Aren’t there songs to sing when you harvest the paddy?” I finally break the silence wondering whether it is taboo to talk on the paddyfield and that this could be why everyone is silent. ‘Yes, there are goyam kavi, but I don’t know any of ‘em’ confesses Nilantha, who is surely a modern farm-hand with a waterproof watch round his wrist and a camera phone in his pocket.

‘Umba papol malak vaage goyam kapana kale hamuwoo...’ begins Jeevan, but stops in mid- sentence when he sees the Manager walking towards us to joins us and finish one “liyadda” while talking with Sunil, about giving a dane at the temple with the newly harvested rice.

After the mid-morning break for plain tea, the work continues till lunch, the ambula, is served under the shade of a murunga tree. The meal has the traditional curries prepared during the harvesting season - pumpkin curry, dried fish and cabbage leaves. While the men continue cutting the paddy, the women gather the bundles to form a mountain of paddy. This is called ‘kola karanawa’. ‘Things were different in the past’, says Ariyawathi. ‘When I was a lass, the paddy was gathered into a Kamatha and no woman was allowed to step into it’.

Today the machine the villagers call the “Agrimat” does all the work from eparating the grains to winnowing, while the final phase of milling the rice too is done at a rice mill in the town.

Work comes to a stop at dusk with a dip in the village tank, and another steaming cup of plain tea. Pocketing my hard earned wages I wonder if I should return the next day for another day’s work but realize I better not. Like how everyone keeps telling me, if you are a street sweeper, be the best street sweeper in the world... and I know I will never make it on the paddy fields of Chilaw.

FAITH OR FATE

By SK

Traveling down from Polonnaruwa late 2005 in an eight seater van in which I am the sole passenger thus allowing various pieces of my luggage, .i.e. CD player, backpack, bottle of water to each occupy their own seat. Nearing Minneriya passing my favoured trinity - temples, tanks and tress and thinking about getting an 'I love NCP' (North Central Province) badge, when one of the realities of the province – an army guy sticks his hand out. He needs a ride to the next post, if he doesn't get there in the next hour he will miss the shuttle bus service that will put him in the bus to go home. He has been waiting for the bus for the past one and a half hours. He is very upfront – tells me yes I know you are a lone female passenger and you have no obligation to take me - dilemma – I ponder while inanimate passengers stare back at him. The driver looks to me because he knows it's my call to make. The road divides – do I justifiably refuse or do I accede – worst case scenarios numbering one come to mind -he will hold a gun to the driver's head, divert the van and drag me off. I agree. He gets in the front seat and we get talking of external university degrees, his family, the weather in Polonnaruwa, my work, a youth organization he was a member of, the best bathing spots, I get back to my book and he continues chatting with the driver, he gets down and gives the driver his mobile number telling him to call anytime we are in the area and need help.

3 months later

Due to no other fault except my own of having left Colombo late I am on the Habarana road at 9:30 pm. I remember warnings of weak mobile signals, elephants, vast tracks of 'uncivilized' (not even a random thambili seller) roads and yes there is a tyre puncture. A driver, a van and me (ah I should have defined me – 26 years, female, short).I'm not stressed - tyre change doesn't take long, expect that we don't have a spare tyre. Saving grace? We have coverage. Now whom from Colombo should I call? How long will we

have to wait, potential dangers by prioritization – robbers, elephants – for some reason I assume the latter are far less dangerous. I wonder when the last bus is , debate calling ‘The Village’ - there’s the name of my accommodation in Polonnaruwa. Option B) leave van and both of us and go to find help, not a good idea this van is this man’s source of livelihood B) I stay in van and he proceeds on the basis that he will not venture into ‘uncovered’ (no mobile telephony) areas. I hear the driver engaged in an animated phone conversation. He is grinning and says help is on the way, on realizing that my look of incredulity needs further explanation he says ‘oh I called the army guy we gave a ride to 3 months back, he’s not at the camp but he will speak to someone there and get back to me’. In half an hour there are three of them (armed – which makes me question need and attribute to it to regulation). Two stay behind with me and the other takes the driver and the tyre in his vehicle. I offer chickbits (may the house of Maliban expand to a scheme!) to my companions and wonder ironically whether this situation would have been termed ‘even more’ unsafe. One knows my previous passenger, the other doesn’t, he answered a call for help.

Watching the sunset over Parakarama Samudra the next day from my favoured spot, the base of a tree opposite Pothgula - I wonder how much control we have over our circumstances. Agreed that this exchange of assistance may not be uniquely Sri Lankan but I believe that ‘Sri Lankanness’ was a driving force.

FOOD FOR MY SOUL

By Ashanthi Dias (singer/songwriter)

The warmth of the sand beneath my feet,
Salty ocean breeze, breathing bliss upon me...
I lay and watch the browning coconut trees
Almost as if they are dancing to the rhythm of life
Far away in the tree tops the ko-ha pipes his tune,
Trying hard to out do the beat of the rabana.
Captivated in sensory crescendo, I am content.
This is my island home.... food for my soul.

I WANT TO LIVE

By Priyeni de Silva Mcleod

For many years I have thought about this dream, over and over again. It has been in a corner of my heart, my private treasure revealed to only very few but I feel now a compulsion to share it.

Due to four previous serious abdominal surgeries, I had severe formation of scar tissue resulting in adhesions of my internal organs which caused strangulation of the intestines. Quite some time was taken to diagnose my condition. Pain was intense but could not be relieved with medication as I was under observation. I ranted – “*Why God, how could you do this to me? Where is God? Is there a God?*” I was delirious and am told I was rambling crazily about wanting to die. We still laugh about an amusing exchange during this time when I continuously kept asking my husband Randy for cyanide to end it all and in exasperation he had said, “Why, do you think I’ve joined the Tigers to carry cyanide capsules with me?” Three days passed in this delirious, semi-conscious, miserable condition; the many physicians who examined me could not diagnose the cause - *There is no God, where is God?*”

Professor P R Anthonis, who had passed his seventieth birthday at the time, with his years of experience had taken one look at me and decided on immediate surgery. Akka, my sister, who had been a student of his in Medical College had absolute faith in his skills. By this time, wracked with pain, I was weak and unconscious. Gangrene had set in the strangulated intestines and it was a long and difficult surgery. The operation had taken nearly nine hours; something happened outside the surgery that day which still warms my heart and makes me feel really good when I remember. Randy had fainted while waiting! Of course an excuse has evolved, something about eating a stale pastry but I say, “does that make you faint? It only makes you rush around looking for the Men’s”. Although I was not aware of this rare display of emotion in ‘Macho Land’ at that time, later, hearing about it hastened my recovery.

Back in the hospital room sans sixty centimeters of my intestines, my heart beat and pulse rate would not stabilize. The monitoring equipment stuck all over me with lights blinking, squeaky beeping sounds making the nursing staff whisper and tip-toe about hurriedly, added to the scary atmosphere. - *The pain, the unbearable pain, where are you God?* Professor Anthonis said there was nothing more to be done and the rest was up to God - *but there is no God!* All I remember is the agonizing pain. When conscious, I asked whoever came near me to pray that I would die soon. I could not bear this suffering anymore. Lying there in hospital I thought of previous surgeries, similar painful experiences - *You have been very unfair to me God.* The horror of a burst fallopian tube as a consequence of an ectopic pregnancy in Passekudah, the excruciating pain, my travails in the Batticaloa Base hospital as there was no time to take me anywhere else - *You are supposed to know the desolation and grief I have been through. Why God are you picking on me? Unfair! So unfair!* Being told that I was fortunate to survive that emergency because only very few do, did nothing to help me. I was steeped in self-pity. - *I am such a wretched person, no one has to suffer like me. It all happens to poor me.*

In the mean time family and friends surrounded me with love and prayers for my recovery. - *Who asked for that? I just want to die.*

It was then, that I had the dream, no, it was more a nightmare, I awoke screaming in terror. Akka was with me and she thought I was hallucinating. To my horror, the next night I saw the same dream. - *Help! Oh help me. I've had enough of terror.* Though I was barely conscious, I remember the dream vividly. There was a face very close to mine, it was bruised, purple and disfigured. There was a twist of a thick plant stem on his head like a wreath but there were no flowers, only thorns like huge needles that pierced his head and blood dripped down his face. Sweat and blood oozed from every pore. His teeth were broken and mouth bloody. He whispered hoarsely through distended lips, "This is what I suffered for you". The face was contorted with pain and tears streamed down. He seemed semi-conscious. Who was this man? - *Go away, please go away, you are frightening me so.* The thought came to me slowly, very slowly, could it possibly be? Could this be Jesus? But the face I saw was nothing like the handsome, serene face of Jesus Christ that I have seen in pictures and statues, fair complexioned with light brown hair. This man was dark skinned with black hair. I

told no one. – *God, am I now losing my mind?*

Next morning, Professor Anthonis sat on my bed and said “We didn’t think you’ll make it, you are strong”. I recovered fast like I always have.

My dream burned bright, it made me think, it helped me comprehend things that I was unsure of and cleared some doubts. I realized that I had a very special experience - *Thank you God I don’t want to die, I want to live.*

INDEPENDANCE

Freedom, autonomy, individualism...all describe that oh so sacred word "Independence." Enter your teenage years and young adulthood, and all of us, at some point, have strived to define that notion of independence, in our mind. Once we do, or think we do, we proceed to justify that notion, and all that we believe comes with it.

Easily being some of the best days of our lives, it's a given that every young person would fight for that intangible, but completely liberating feeling of control, essential to survive in this big, (seemingly) bad, adult world. And parents, teachers, older siblings, the extended family, society at large, or simply your age, or even being female, could be some of the many obstacles that restrict this independence we yearn for so much.

It could be a simple scenario where all you want to do is to use public transport and go spend Saturday at your best friend's house. Or wanting to go for a friend's party, which also happens to have girls and guys your parents have not met before, attending. Or driving yourself to a particular destination, on your own, of course while having a legitimate driving licence. Or maybe even insisting that you want to use in-house accommodation, as opposed to staying with your aunt, during your first year at university abroad, adamant not to miss out on the best part of campus life. But of course the list of restrictions is endless, and the fight never-ending.

Explanations will range from "you are too young," "you're a girl," and "what will people think," to "though you are careful, there are lots of crazy people out there." And when you're friends are making decisions of their own, and are being taken seriously, none of this rationalization really makes sense. Attempting to make sense of the restrictions, we question the parties concerned on the "trust" issue, and go to great lengths to prove that we, indeed, deserve to be granted some independence.

So should independence really be something that we fight for, or is it a notion that should come instinctively, over time? Should it even be something that could be defined based on your age, circumstance or sex? Shouldn't it simply be earned, and not yearned for?

Having an "independent" state of mind, from a young age, certainly does make you a more rounded individual – that's a given. And this would obviously lead you to becoming a more useful citizen, more aware of those essential responsibilities you owe your country, for all that it's given you – an identity, a sense of belonging, the ability to proclaim that you are Sri Lankan. Though complete with all of its conflicts, deficiencies and hindrances to development, this is still the country that we loved watching thrash the Aussies in the World Cup. It's the country that makes us most home sick when we are continents away and every dish in the world is on the menu, except a spicy pol sambal.

It's also the country that despite all of its ethnic issues, could have a church, a kovil, a mosque and a vihara within walking distance, and still have virtual peace prevail. And when the dust settles at long last, shouldn't it be us, essentially its future, who ensures that this country becomes "independent" in the true sense of the word? This year, Sri Lanka celebrated its 59th independence day. Take a moment and reflect...

THE SQUARE

By Hasna Ghany

The 10th of February 1948 marks a historic day in our sunny isle of Sri Lanka. It was at this moment in time that the opening of the parliament in the specially constructed assembly Hall in Torrington Square, was done by the brother of King George VI of England, H. R. H. the Duke of Gloucester. While the present generations might remember this historic site as guarded by stone lions, home to the statue of Rt. Hon D.S. Senanayake - the first President of Sri Lanka - and a place where numerous cremations have taken place, to me the Independence Square has a deeper significance.

From the time I was about two feet above the ground, the square - fondly called 'Torrington' - has always been a favourite haunt. We started off going there with my parents and the never absent cousins, to play 'run and catches' or 'hide and seek', in the garden on the far end. The ample bushes provided plentiful hideout for us small tykes and it was always an enjoyable game! Only now is realization dawning, that maybe, just maybe, we were taken there to rid us of the boundless energy we seemed to possess those days, so that we wouldn't play the same furniture-breaking, parental-nerve-wracking games inside the house!

A few years on with Sri Lanka making a name for itself in this sport, subsequently winning the 1996 World Cup, the country was riddled with cricket fever. Everywhere you went you saw people hard at the game: at the beach, in a car park, down a lane, at the Parliament grounds or any grounds for that matter, basically any place which offered some sort of space. We made sure the Independence Square was no exception. As the vehicle parked on the curb and the five of us emerged, from then on, it was with bats, the famous green tennis ball and a one set of wickets or a chair my mom had grudgingly agreed to part with for the moment.

The fun part of it all was running for cover when the ball struck a diligent walker or even worse, went sailing towards someone's car, only to land safely a few inches away! But the highlight of the cricket memories was when my brother, at that time an aspiring cricketer, was once so intent on catching a ball that went soaring into the air, that he landed in the pond with a resounding splash! Some credit to him though, because had that not turned into an unexpected bath, it would certainly have been a marvelous wicket!

Sometimes when the enthusiasm to play cricket was missing, we would all strap in our bicycles into the vehicle one way or another, and religiously do our daily dozens around the square. This was followed by the era of skateboards and roller skates, and hot on its trail were the sleeker roller blades. On these contraptions with wheels, we practiced upstairs on the tiled surfaces so that although accidents were many, consequences were minimal.

Now, a little higher than five feet above ground level, the square, to me, has taken on a different role. While it is still a hub of activity, the reasons I go there are different. No more running around, hiding behind bushes or pillars, or pretending the stone lions were the real thing. Instead it is to do a quick paced few rounds around the square, which I have learnt takes approximately five minutes each, and if you are lucky enough to get interesting fellow walkers either ahead of or behind you, you can be equally sure of tit bits of interesting information! Other times it is a place to gather during the Hawker's Street food fiesta, a starting point for a rally, a place to watch vintage cars and the more modern BMW's, Mercs, Jags and Ferrari's doing their ritual rounds on Sundays, a place to meet friends you have not seen in a while, to pretend to study when exams are around the corner and to watch remote controlled cars literally burning rubber and above all, to sit back and let the memories of the years gone by wash over you. And to think this is a place that was once intended as a Parliament!

Hasna Ghany

Age: 20

Designation: Student/ Teacher

School: Ilma International Girls' School

College: Royal Institute of Colombo

WHY I AM PROUD TO BE SRI LANKAN

By Shifani Reffai

A friend of mine asked me a very controversial question some days ago, 'what about your country are you proud of?' My country, Sri Lanka; what about it am I proud of? Let's face it – many things in our little paradise island are not quite right today – we've got crafty politicians whose word is law, their personal lives splayed on the papers with scandal, a serious anti-environmental issue what with the plastic bags, mounds of garbage and stray cows all over the roads, and those same roads are covered from end to end with ever-paranoid soldiers with machine guns these days, looking for bombs, demanding that even school children carry postal IDs in the evenings, and to top it all off, our country is at its brink of a complete outright ethnic war.

I don't mean to sound pessimistic by the previous paragraph, but all of the above is sadly the whole truth with no exaggeration. And yet, although many of my acquaintances tell me 'I can't wait to leave the country with all this haa-hoo going on!' I just can't get myself to agree with them. There is something about this place, that feels just so... right.

I've lived here for 14 years after my first 2 years of life in the UK, and although I've seen and heard of all the gruesome and mad tales of this Lankan circus of an island, I cannot imagine living a happier life anywhere else. Perhaps the saying is true, that there is no place like home? But maybe there is more to it than just that.

Let's take a hypothetical situation- you're in a foreign western country, you're driving your car around and your tyre gets spiked, you have no spare, and you're stranded on the side of a busy city road. You look around, and all you see are men and women walking straight ahead, minding their own business, perhaps some motorists will give you annoyed glances at blocking traffic, some may give you a few sympathetic looks,

and in the end, you'll just end up talking to the city police after a few hours of being stranded in busy traffic, and will finally get your car towed away and fixed up in a garage a mile away.

Imagine the same thing happening to you in Sri Lanka – as soon as you spike your tyre, you only have to get out of your car, to see an auto-driver or a pedestrian come up to you and ask you what the matter is. You get the instant service you so rightfully need: a couple of fellows will round up in less than half an hour and help you push your vehicle to the side, a passer-by will take out his cellphone and call for help, and within that hour there will be atleast a dozen men standing next to your vehicle and helping you out in any way they can. At the end of this experience, you are not even obliged to pay any of them for their kind service and they will happily give you a 'see you, *mahathaya*' or '*tata, nona*' with an additional smile after all that help without any request of payback, unless you feel like it. Many a time have I witnessed this sort of good-Samaritan behaviour among our Lankans on the road on a busy weekday and it's what gives me a warm fuzzy feeling inside!

You won't find people willfully smiling at you for no reason in another country, but there is almost a total guarantee, that if you smile at anyone you make eye contact with in this island they will most certainly smile back. Our city life especially is a strong contrast to the city life overseas, where people move along hurriedly, everyone about their own business, no time for smiles, just metallic black and white suits and suitcases and faces lost in their own thoughts; but it's a thankfully different story here. There's a wonderful sense of community in Sri Lanka, where people smile and talk to you even if you're a total stranger. If you find yourself thoroughly lost and broken down and don't know where you're going, you'll be sure to find a friendly person come up to you and ask you what your problem is and give you immediate directions to whatever place you want to go. You may be given funny looks or completely ignored if you stop your vehicle on the side of the road and ask a complete stranger for directions on a busy highway in Singapore, but this sort of asking for help comes only naturally in Sri Lanka.

Whether you're a little boy or an old aunty it doesn't really make a difference abroad, but there's a pretty discrimination on our island between the young and the old – the old automatically are given seats in a crowded bus or helped down the stairs of a

subway station, by the young. There are no trends and no solid style you have to follow to be part of Lanka – when you walk down Galle Road and take a moment to take a good look around, you'll find people of such a variety it's almost shocking – there'll be people with torn jeans and dyed hair, people with traditional sarees and sarongs, people with a lot of clothing, people with hardly any clothing, Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims, all sorts of types of people of all colours just walking together in streams of crowds, like the luminous contrasting colours of rows of fish in the sea.

There is an oblivious sense of great tolerance and community-wisdom that has been born into Lankan society as a culture and as tradition and refuses to let go, and that is exactly what I'm so proud of, and what I will miss with such a passion if ever I should leave this place.

Yet I'm sure everyone is aware of the western rule that is slowly taking over the country as it takes over the whole world, and though the west does have a very interesting vibrant culture, many of us fail to recognize what beautiful culture and understanding Lankans already have inculcated in us. Instead of trying to mimic the ways of other societies, let us breathe in and frolic in our own, because the ways of a particular country are always unmatched, and so are the ways of Sri Lanka. Come what may, whether tsunami or political war or complete environmental pollution – thanks to the people of this island, I will always be able to say that there is without a doubt no place like home – no place that can bring a broader smile to my face or a more fulfilling feeling of pride in my heart than my home, Sri Lanka.

Shifani Reffai,

Age: 16

Designation: Student of 11th year

School: Ilma International Girls' School, Colombo 05

Other details: I enjoy poetry, satire and pianist music by Ludwig Beethoven

MR. FIX-IT LIKE IT IS

By Sanjeevani Wijeynaike

Pyarathne: handyman extraordinaire. He has been known to fix anything from a faulty faucet to a job elsewhere for one of your employees. He plays pied piper to your purse, and when he is leaving, be warned that half your staff might be merrily trailing along

Constantly smiling, he is a very rare specimen to find. He is about five feet six inches tall, and is thin, but not thin enough to be called skinny. His head is rather on the large side compared to the rest of his body. He has a square chin, and wears a gigantic grin capped by a moustache that looks like an upside down smile. His bowl-cut hair is usually messy and dotted with paint flecks, sawdust, or whatever remnants of his chore du-jour. Pyarathne always wears shorts and a long sleeved shirt with the sleeves folded up past his elbows. His accessories, depending on his mood are measuring tape, reading glasses, and a screwdriver.

It is hard to believe, but he brings rain wherever he goes. So if you have a leaky roof, you might face a conundrum on how to get it fixed if he is your handyman of choice. I always tell Pyarathne he could make millions just by showing up in any country experiencing major drought. In general, this Mr.Fix-It has a herd mentality. When he does show up he usually brings about half a dozen or so lazy looking 'assistants' (stress is on the first syllable) with him. Most of these apprentices are usually former employees at places Pyarathne worked previously.

A perfectionist in theory (but not practice), Pyarathne is prone to Leonardo Da Vinci-esque ideas, and when he has to put your money where his mouth is, he usually takes an eternity to finish a job, mostly because he has to constantly 'run an errand' or 'go to his village to check out his papayas'.

He leaves the work half tended to, and usually seemingly never finished. But not to worry, Pyarathne won't leave unless he has taken some sort of heavy furniture and/or appliance and precariously placed it in the way of a major exit route or something, thereby rendering you completely helpless and gazing at the horizon for his return. 28

When Pyarathne comes up with those wacky glorified ideas of his, be prepared to cough up a pretty penny or two. His ideas do not come cheap. To make it worse, this handyman charges by the day in addition to cost of labor (his little helpers), despite the fact that he would take half a day or more to go five blocks to buy something as mundane as a piece of mesh or a pot of paint (normally he selects the most expensive ones at the store). He loses track of time (and its effect on your dime) because in between purchasing the goods he needs to work, he gets distracted and stops by his mom's house to have a lengthy lunch, chat with a couple of friends, perhaps stop to watch a rock grow moss, etc.—all on your account.

Of course when Pyarathne submits his final bill, he takes into account neither his meanderings and personal outings, nor the fact that had he not been loafing, the job would have been done in a fraction of the amount of time he spent. That is mostly because he is too busy grinning away and contemplating the fruits of his labor, and dreaming longingly of the papaya farm he started in his village. Our jovial Mr. Fix-it has a highly ingenious means of calculating his fees. It is a rather simple procedure. First, he decides what his favorite number for the day is. Second, he adds three to four zeros behind that number. Presto—his bill.

Although Pyarathne will send you to the hardware store fifty times a day, only to go himself and waste half a week, and although he will take you to the cleaners when he puts forth his bills, and although a couple of days after he finishes a job and vanishes you will realize that he left his job half done, he is so infectiously pleasant, that it is thus incredibly hard to get angry with him.

You almost look forward to his next visit—yet you wonder to yourself how you can be fond of someone so impossible! So, next time you hear thunder, smell rain and spot a merry bunch of men with a grinning man in shorts leading the way, be warned and be glad, Pyarathne, our modern day Piped Piper, is coming soon to a home near you...

THE SOUTH ASIAN GAMES

By Dhinesha Perera

The most joyous, memorable occasion in 2006
The 10th South Asian Games.

“The tongue of experience has most truth.”

After a period of fifteen years, Sri Lanka the “Pearl of the Indian ocean” was able to host the “mini Olympics” in South Asia for the second consecutive time in Colombo. The 10th South Asian Games was held from the 18th to 28th August 2006 in grand style. This gala sports festival was held at the Sugathadasa International Stadium. The official symbol was the traditional “Porapol”, an ancient sport of coconut fighting and the mascot of the games was “The Jungle Fowl.”

I was indeed very lucky to witness both the opening and closing ceremonies of this memorable sports fiesta. The opening ceremony was held on 18th August. The arrival of the chief guest His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksha was heralded by a fanfare. Then the National anthem of Sri Lanka was played. The traditional “Porapol” welcome display was held next. Depicting the peak of our economy, a graceful Tea plucking dance, “udarata kandukara” was performed thereafter. Next was the parachute display by personnel of the armed forces. It was a highly commendable performance. Amidst beating drums the Pageant entered the arena. The pageant consisted of the South Asian Games Board, flag bearers displaying the national flag colours, national symbol of games, flags of the International Olympic Committee and mascot of the games. Thereafter the participants of the member countries marched into the stadium with pleasant, smiling faces. We greeted them with a loud applause. The order of countries in the march past were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and host nation Sri Lanka. The athletes bearing the torch arrived next. They were six Sri Lankans. Mrs Sriyani Kulawansa was honoured to light the main torch amidst blowing of conches, beating “Magul bera” and fire works. Simultaneously the

South Asian Games flag was hoisted. The 10 th SAF Games came alive in grand style. After the welcome address by the president National Olympic Committee Sri Lanka and the Sports minister, His Excellency the president declared open the South Asian Games, amidst the enthusiasm of local and foreign spectators. Thereafter the athletes and game officials took their dignified oaths. The eight sporting teams dispersed with hopes of doing their best to bring glory to their motherland. Next the South Asian games unity song was performed by prominent figures in the musical arena. It depicted that although we came from different lands in the South Asian region, we mustn't divide. We should knit together in love, harmony and service throughout the games and forever. Many enjoyed the Cultural Pageant which was held thereafter. Traditional dances belonging to various provinces in Sri Lanka were displayed. Some of the dances were mask dance, "Lee keli", raban, "Sawaran dance" and Kandyan dance. The pageant included whip crackers, hewisi, stilt men and even calisthenics displays. It was indeed a picturesque view! School children participated in the oriental/ western band performances. At about 9.30 pm there was a splendid fire works display courtesy of People's Republic of China, which revealed the conclusion of the grand opening ceremony.

The sporting events unfolded on 19th August and were held until the 27 th of August. Adding vibrant colour to the sports extravaganza there were 20 different types of sports during the SAF Games. The sports were athletics, swimming, archery, badminton, boxing, rowing, cycling, squash, football, hockey, karatedo, shooting, table tennis, kabaddi, wushu, weight lifting, taekwando, judo, wrestling and our national sport volleyball. These sports events were efficiently held in different parts of the island. The organizers and officials indeed did a tireless job well done in coordinating each aspect of the games. I believe all participants would acknowledge, Sri Lanka is a place like home. "Home sweet home." In fact the young lions and lionesses were filled with potential, drive, courage, goals and positive winning spirit.

"Success is the child of Audacity."

Denoting a distinct conclusion to the SAF Games sports arena, the closing ceremony was held, on the 28th of August. It was certainly a magnificent, unique event for all spectators. After the guests, invitees and spectators took their seats, the Hon. Speaker W.J.M. Lokubandara was herald by a fan fare. A traditional Fisheries Folk dance,

depicting the plight of the fishermen community was performed at the beginning. I guess the foreign spectators would have been enriched with an essence of Sri Lankan culture.

Thereafter, the participants marched into the stadium in mixed groups, victoriously. It seemed like a string of different coloured beads. Each one was a single bead fastened together by a “cord” named Games which instilled companionship and international relationship amongst all. The South Asian Games flag, national flag of Sri Lanka and the Bangladesh national flag was hoisted in the arena. Bangladesh will be hosting the 11 th SAF Games in 2008, in the capital Dhaka.

The entertainment arena was illuminated with the Sports musical evening. A remarkable dance item was presented by Bangladesh. The closing declaration was done by the Speaker of the Parliament. The South Asian Games flag was lowered and handed over to the President of Bangladesh Olympic committee as a gesture of goodwill. During the laser show the torch faded off gradually, indicating the official conclusion of the 10 th South Asian Games. Pleasing “Drum Tattoo” and the theme song “Hela Jathika Abimane” was one of its kind and fancied by many. The proceedings successfully concluded with an astonishing fire works extravaganza. We cheered, enjoyed and encouraged the players throughout the games. Yet as the proverb confirms;

“All good things must come to an end.”

The host nation was placed second in the medals list with 178 medals. India and Pakistan were adjudged champions and second runner up respectively in the South Asian sports fiesta. Our own sprint queen Susanthika Jayasinghe, Mayumi Raheem, Chinthaka Vidane, Rohan Pradeep did Sri Lanka proud. We salute you! Surely many experiences would have been gained by participants, officials and spectators during the games. As participants “Failures are the pillars of success.” It is not whether we win or loose it is how we “play the game.” “Practice makes perfect” to gain victory one must create positive goals and work daily to achieve triumph! “The secret of success is constancy to purpose.” Organizing skills, leadership qualities and ability to handle responsibilities, the officials certainly would have experienced. “Might is right” Also each one has their own down falls. Positive thinking and team effort is vital. “Weak things united become strong” Then all plans would run smooth on a silk carpet!

“Union is strength.”

Flowers presented as a sign of warm welcome, the mementoes and souvenirs indeed increased the spectator’s enthusiasm. As a nation we revealed to all around us, what great things we can do, with God’s grace! Last but not least we as Sri Lankans experienced a legendary event! “Time and tide waits for no man”, yet in our minds we cherish the undying memories of the 10 th South Asian Games.

“Experience is the best teacher.”

Dhinesha Perera

Age- 19 years old

School- Methodist College, Colombo 03.

Chapter –topic written for – Memorable experiences in Sri Lanka(2)

She is at present doing my Associate Performers diploma in Piano music. During her free time she composes short stories, creative verses and poems for the print media. She’s likes architecture and is currently awaiting university admission.

STAINS

By

The road that Meena took to her office at the university curled like the discarded skin of a serpent. On either side of the road overgrown gardens possessively hid dilapidated houses. Clogged drains and garbage threatened the olfactory senses. This was a shortcut and a hardly used entrance to the university. Stray dogs lay resignedly listless in odd places such as the middle of the road, and inside an abandoned wheelbarrow that once belonged to the campus gardeners as if in revolt against man's manipulation of space.

Meena walked strongly uphill, careful not to step on stones and twist her ankles and thereby damage the hem of her sari. She had ruined many of her saris that way. Her briefcase was heavy today, and she could not help but imagine her twelve students' faces when she told them they were going to watch a DVD today instead of having the usual lecture. She must get Ekanayake to move the DVD player and the television set into her lecture room she thought. She quickened her step as she checked the watch on her wrist, which read eight thirty three. She still had a few minutes to organize everything so that she could start the movie by 9 a.m.

As she turned onto the road leading into the English department, she could not help noticing the different coloured plastic bags that hung from string tied from one lamp post to another. These colourful agents of pollution were poised primly in the air, disturbing the green of the trees. Some were torn after last night's wind and rain, and bits of green, red and blue plastic littered the road and bobbed about merrily on the damp campus lawns in the light early morning breeze. She remembered that the elections were around the corner. These political decorations, red, green and blue bags mingled as they floated about, in agreeable camaraderie mocking at the humans whose parties they represented.

“Good morning miss” the guard at the security gate greeted her as usual, interrupting her wry observations - a bright young man who never failed to catch her eye whenever she passed. “Good morning Khan” she nodded and hurried in the direction of her office.

Ekanayake had just had his breakfast of kiribath and lunumiris which his wife had packed for him and was busily washing his hands and mouth and spitting into the department wash basin when Meena walked in. She could not fight off the smile that imposed itself on her face when she recalled the countless number of times Ekanayake had been pulled up by the Head of English, Professor Gamage, for infecting the English Department wash basins with virulent red stains of betel spit among other things such as grains of rice and bits of green mallum.

Meena knew perfectly well that telling Ekanayake to stop spitting in the sink was as futile as trying to ask him to stay in the department during lecture hours without wandering off to other departments to chat to his colleagues. Meena didn't like Ekanayake's persistent shreds of flora which were the remains of his leafy diet or the colourful designs he made in the washbasin either; so she simply got used to washing her hands in another wash basin in the Department of Western Classical Culture. She had learnt to live around Ekanayake without stepping on his toes. She now felt that she had finally learnt to “endure” Ekanayake in the proverbial sense of the word.

Professor Gamage had been livid the first time he had discovered Ekanayake's 'crime'. He had shouted and raved, “You fellow, what do you think you are doing, you should not spit here you silly foolish man” and Ekanayake had been shocked that the new professor was against something he had been doing for nearly twelve years. “Sir, I am spitting here everyday, it is here only I am washing my hands, after eating, so I am spitting and washing my hands here after eating only...” When Ekanayake spoke, his mouth took on a particular shape, to prevent bits of his betel from falling out; because it was almost always over full, his cheeks bulged and his teeth and tongue were always bright red like the fake blood of a monster at a Halloween Ball. After Professor Gamage had shouted at him, Ekanayake had walked out- only to return with a fresh chew of Betel in his mouth.

The professor, had felt bad about having shouted and had later called him and said “Listen man, if you want to spit, go out, it is not nice to spit in the wash basin, we sometimes wash our faces in that wash basin, and now it is so dirty with all your betel stains and other things..” and Ekanayake had consolingly replied “ok ok sir, next time I will go outside” and a spray of beetle juice had accidentally flown out of Ekanayake’s mouth in the direction of the professor’s face. Meena had winced, and she still shuddered in an attempt to control a giggle as a vivid image of Professor Gamage stepping backwards to avoid the missile of bright red betel juice projected itself acutely in her memory.

Meena now made sure she was standing at least five feet away from Ekanayake as she faced him.(She assumed that the distance spit could travel from one person’s mouth to another’s face was less than five feet). She was in a hurry “Good morning Ekanayake, please set up my DVD player in lecture room twenty two, I will be going there now, do you think you could bring it there in ten minutes?”

“Good Morning miss” said Ekanayake “and miss did you remember my dana on Saturday?” Meena remembered that she had promised Ekanayake some money for an alms giving in memory of his mother. “Oh yes” She fished out two hundred rupee notes from her wallet and gave it to Ekanayake. “You will be blessed” said Ekanayake and accepted the money which he put into his shirt pocket. “Ah yes miss don’t be frightened, I will bring the DVD to the room now, you go miss.”

Meena gathered her books, her white board marker, and her flask of coffee and swept out of the room, anxious to start on time, because she had to finish on time in order to be able to attend the faculty meeting at ten thirty.

As she walked into lecture room twenty two she thought she heard heavy thuds that sounded like people running. Was it some commotion? She wondered, but then on campus one was used to such things, so she didn’t pay much attention to it. She used a piece of wood about the size of a pencil that always conveniently lay on the big table to make the fan work. This was because, the fan switch did not exist, and where the switch once was, now lay a tangled mass of wires over a hole in the wall. The best way to make the fan turn was to press the wires together with the help of this piece of wood. She had a strange and fleeting image of herself electrocuted and stuck to the wall as the fan began to rotate.

On the wall someone had written in English “Fan Broken this is a dangerous” and in Sinhala below that “Ithaama avadanam.”

Meena realized that this certainly was dangerous business, but always ended up using this bit of wood.

Meena realized that Ekanayaka’s ten minutes was up when Tehani, one of her students walked into class “Good morning madam, the others are on their way” “good morning Tehani, did you see Ekanayake? “no ma’m” “I’ve been waiting for him to bring in the DVD player and he is not here yet” The other students walked into the class in twos and threes, Kushani, with her yellow streaked hair, belly button and sleek silver cellular phone and the only boy in the group also known as the ‘mobile dictionary’ Dimitri with his unkempt locks and horn rimmed glasses, “Morning ma’m, I almost missed the bus.”

“Yeah sit down all of you I’ll be back in a tick” and Meena hurried out of the lecture hall clicking her tongue while her high heeled slippers echoed her exasperation, “Where was this wretched man?” She could hear her students laughing behind her, glad to have time to check their “sms” and have their sandwiches and flirt. She ran across the yard towards the Department of English when she realized that there really was some kind of commotion going on. She spotted two men holding a stray dog and giving it an injection. She saw another man drag a screaming dog towards these two men, some girls were shouting “Aney pau ballanta ” “Poor dogs” They were probably inoculating the dogs she thought with a sense of relief, and as she tried to push open the English department door she realized that it was locked. “Oh bother, where on earth is this idiot” she said out loud, and tried to force the door open but it was firmly shut. She knew then that it could only be locked from the inside.

She banged on the door and shouted “Ekanayake! Ekanayake! But there was no answer. She placed her ear to the solid wooden door and listened. There was too much noise in the corridor and passing students were all talking at once. She could not hear much except some muffled sounds, perhaps the whirring of the old fan. She expected that Ekanayake had locked the door and returned the key to the key room, so she took the stairs two at a time and rushed to the first floor, where the key room of the faculty of humanities was located. She stared in utter dismay at the board on which

the keys were normally hung. The English department key was gone, she checked the key log and realized that no one had returned the key since Ekanayake himself had taken the key at seven thirty in the morning, as he always did. Meena could not understand it. Had she missed him on his way to the lecture hall with the equipment? But then, why was the door locked? He never locked the door when he went on his usual short migrations and errands around the campus. The only explanation was that someone was inside the department, locked in, with the key.

As she came downstairs, to try the door again, she saw about five or six men dragging huge sacks across the landing and shoving them into a van that was parked on the eastern side of the building. They were killing the dogs; it came to her in a sweep of horrifying realization. That is what the men had been doing, giving the dogs cyanide injections. She heard a boy shout to some other students, above the din of chattering laughing “Elections coming, they are cleaning up now” She realized with horror that this sudden “cleansing” had something to do with the officials and the upcoming elections, and the votes.

She ran to a window and watched the van leave, heading towards the science faculty. A sudden feeling of nausea contorted itself and performed jinks in her stomach. She went to the door of the English department she now felt that she had enough negative energy to slap this man when he appeared, and where in heaven’s name was her DVD player, she wondered in rage. She would never make it to her meeting, she would never finish her lecture.

Meena was seized with a sense of resentment coupled with impotence. Those wretched animals, this awful man, frustrated thoughts rushed through her mind in a confused swirl. She raised her hand high and clenched her fist - she would break down the door, but before her fist reached the door there was a sudden click and the door opened and she was nearly thrown over when about six dogs rushed out the door knocking on her knees and shins, brown dogs, black and white dogs, grey dogs and there stood Ekanayake smiling jubilantly, holding a small puppy in his hand!

“Madam Maara wade somehow I saved these fellows from those barbarians” He stood there smiling like a child, caressing the little pup while all the other dogs sniffed the

ground and ran outside. Meena felt a sweeping sense of relief inspite of a conflicting urge to slap Ekanayake in the face for spoiling her day. “You are....you are...she said, staring at him in disbelief, she was lost for words. He just laughed out loud and said “Simple no miss, I heard the noise, called as many as I could, pushed them inside and shut the door and hid in the room with them.

Meena realized that she had miscalculated the distance that Ekanayake’s spit could travel but she was smiling as she headed towards the wash room.

CASE OF THE TALKING 3-WHEELER

By Adithe Dissanayake

In case you think you have seen better ones, elsewhere in the world, let me tell you, you have not.

Stuck in heavy traffic on the way to office every morning, the small hand on your watch ticking furiously past eight-thirty, do you worry yourself to death about being late yet again? Follow me and no worries from now on.

Engross yourself in this great past-time; scrutinize the three-wheelers around you. Reading, pondering, analyzing the minds of the drivers who cram their inner psyche into the space above the number plate at the back of their vehicles, you will find yourself thrilled, disgusted, tickled, so much so that by the time you reach the office you'd hardly notice you had clocked in twenty minutes late - yet again.

Most three-wheelers have messages that are bound to annoy, reassure or entertain you. Is this art? Or is this junk? Judge for yourself.

Wednesday morning. At the Maradana traffic lights - the first to catch the eye says "Day and night service". Next comes "Super Racing Fox" followed by 'Nobody perfect in the world' (somebody has scratched off the s). A lapse of three minutes. "Hard Target cruises past living up to its name while a second later another, courteously crawls by, claiming Sri Lankawa buduge deshayai.

It takes all but thirty minutes to note the following; copied from popular lyrics - Yanawanam yanna mang arang (if you are going, take me with you), Duras wannata me lesin aida apa hamuwune (why did we have to meet if we are to part like this?) Sithin vitharak pem karannam (My love for you is platonic), Kawadda aye enne hamuwanna ma ithin (when will you come to see me again?) and Waradak kalath hithakin nowe (Sorry, I didn't mean it).

Among the other slogans you might spot within a day are secular ones like Mahansiyen hammbakaralai meka gaththe (I bought this with hard earned money) and the practical Gathe amaruwen vaddanna epa, punchi-apita nadda idak? As well as the philosophical Irisiyawa vinasayata mulai (jealousy causes harm) Ape nai apata kotai, sathutuweyalla iirshyawa athaharapalla.

Some drivers use this space to flaunt their affection for their families- the favourite being Amma often written with the adjective sudu or ratharan. Jeevithaya Mal, Amma innakal (Life is great till your mother lives), as well as Amma ratharan nam thaththa piththalada?. One that hit the nail on the head however, aptly describing the journeys made in these no-seat-belt-cans-on-wheels is Maruwa samagai vase... (I live with death).

But the most memorable is the three-wheeler with a huge safety pin stuck to its back. Why? The driver, a cynic to the core of his being says the pin (katuwa)symbolizes all womenkind. (Hama ganima katuwak).

But of course, the best ones are those that evoke laughter - “Don’t kiss me”, Atha Hitha Nandammage - (Everything’s from my mother-in-law) and Dura yanna yanna obe suwanda lung una!

That’s it. This ought to do it. In case you are not hooked already remember the mantra is, keep reading. Clever, hopeful, funny, down right mean or plain stupid, the canopy at the back of three-wheelers, are bound to provide great entertainment when you need it the most - stuck in heavy traffic.

Chances are one of the first inscriptions you read will be Ivaseemen sanaseema labe.

THREE DAYS OF BOOZE

The three days of booze, fun and being simply care free – The Royal Thomian Big Match.

This year's Royal Thomian Cricket encounter was supposed to have been held on a low key but that was certainly not the case on Day two of the 126th Battle of the Blues! These boys and men sure know how to have a good time even in a restricted environment.

The organizers had been asked to not have the famous *papare* bands and to not sell alcohol. It was not even called a 'Big match' but simply a 'Cricket match', this year! With the help of sponsors money was being raised for tsunami aid as well.

In fact on the first day when I was walking to the grounds, it didn't even feel like a big match without the famous *baila* and *papare* music playing.

But the fun was certainly not forgotten to these Royalists and Thomians and of course the many visitors who were at the match.

They were asked not to sell alcohol, instead most opted to bring their own refreshments' and on day two there was even a DJ in one of the tents, so there was music and everyone was having the time of their life. Day one was not as high-spirited. I suppose they were just getting warmed up for the two days, which lay ahead of them.

What makes the Royal Thomian Big Match so 'Big'??? Hmmm... Yes, it is the prestige of the two schools, who have been playing this match for the past 126 years, thus making this the oldest inter-school cricket match in the world, in fact not even the world war could stop them... but there is more than just cricket here. Come to think

of it, while these cricketers play, how many actually focus on the field from 9am to 6.30pm???

Yes, there is definitely more to this than just cricket...

These are three days where the schoolboys have two days off from school and can spend time waving their respective or even both school flags while the runs are being scored and the wickets are being taken. But it is more three days where the older boys and men get to drink as much as they want and be totally care free. Nothing, and I mean nothing external seems to worry them. They are there to just be themselves and be with their mates and dance, shout, cheer or jeer whichever team they support or are against and have pure fun.

In fact, one of my mates had taken it upon himself to give a 'moral boost', to the batsman of the rival team, walking into the grounds, and once he was out, he boosted the poor batsman's 'morale' even more! He proudly did this as each batsman walked on to the grounds and walked back into the dressing room as well!

I have been to quite a few cricket matches but I doubt that any of them actually have the same spirit and enthusiasm that this match has.

Apart from the boys from the two schools, many young lasses and families are seen at these matches as well. What makes them want to come? The reasons can vary. For the families of course, if your dad is an old boy of either school then you have a free ticket to be a part of the atmosphere. But if that is not the case, you can just come and be a part of the atmosphere anyway. There are no rules here, the rules in fact as one of my friends kept reminding me while I was there, was to 'have fun, smile, drink and dance!'

My dad is not an old boy of either school, thus the only connection I had to this match is that my friends are from one of the schools, which gave me a perfect excuse to be at the match, and of course a good chance to get off work early, (after finishing my quota for the day of course) and hop a tuk tuk to be at the grounds!

While I was there, I could not help but see what a good time my mates were having. Without a care in the world and irrespective of who was around, they danced and sang their cares away. It was so nice to see them not worry about reality for those few hours. It is amazing to see these people having so much fun and supporting their schools. It is as though they never left college in the first place. The atmosphere is really out of this world. You have got to be there at least once in your life to witness this event because there is actually none like it.

So with one more day to go, I wonder what the outcome of the match will be? Will it be a draw as usual or will there be a result? We'll just have to wait for day three and see. But at the end of the day, the result is not what really matters it is the unity and fun and the memories that they have, as they walk away from the SSC, at the end of the match, on Saturday.

March 2005

I WOULD REMEMBER MY COUNTRY

By Dineshka

I would remember my
Country divine
Not for its heavenly sun
That scares away mist;
Nor for the subtle stone that make canvas
For work of artists old
With glorious skill
Or for the ageless pilgrim hill.

Not for the shoreline brown
With sea-worn crown
Where fisher-folk daily toil;
Or for the virgin forests
And their pristine life
For whom the Rupees knell

Not for the mythical mind's
Wondrous beast
The trespassing elephant;
Whose many crimes
Soon forgotten in time
Only elegies could tell.

Not for the heartfelt pride
That evokes and blinds,
Cultured over thousand years;
Which through many shows of might
Could never catch plight
To shame the yoke of Powers.

But I would remember my
Country divine
For brewing a storm harsh to weather,
For each day it dawned
That preached fear and scorn
For blood that is utterly other.

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