

Trip to Jaffna

It was good to go back to the country of my birth after nearly 8 years. My family and I had planned the trip earlier in the year to attend the wedding of my brother in law. One of the items that was foremost on our agenda 'in things to do' was a visit to Jaffna.

So on 3rd January we got up early morning and took the bus operated by the airlines from Wellawatte to Ratmalana to board the plane. We landed at the unrecognizable Palaly air base and from there proceeded to Jaffna town by bus escorted by the Police. We hired a white Austin Cambridge car to Chundikuli where we stayed.

I was breathing the Jaffna air after 9 years. I just could not wait to explore the land of which I was so much a part of. I borrowed a bicycle which I had not ridden for 9 years and went for a sight seeing trip on Main Street, Kandy Road and Old Park Road. As I came to the St. John's Church from where I received my Christian nurture from childhood to youth, I saw a familiar figure limping in the front yard of the Church. It was David the Church keeper. I stopped to have a chat with him. David had met with a very bad accident and was recovering from the injury. While I was talking to David I saw one of my teachers coming out of St. John's. It was none other than the internationally well known our Jeevanantham master. He looked the same and it was a joy to see him. He of course recognized me and we started talking. During the conversation I gathered that he was coming after meeting with the Principal Mr Thanapalan regarding admission for his grand son who had lost his mother (Mr Jeevanantham's daughter in law) to the Tsunami tidal wave. She was in that fateful train to Hikkduwa. Miraculously the son survived. I could see that he was emotionally disturbed.

After a brief chat by the side of the road I went into the school by the main entrance and saw the new Administration block majestically standing architecturally designed to match the St. John's Church building. It was named after my late Father Mr C.E. Anandarajan. I did not stay very long as I had planned to visit the school first thing the next morning with my mother, family and brothers in law. Dushy also had taught at SJC for nearly 9 years. As I rode the bicycle around the college on Main Street, Kandy Road and Old Park Road I did meet with some familiar faces. It was indeed a surprise to meet Mr Satgunam, a well known photographer who now lives in Colombo. He had come to Jaffna to take of photos at a wedding. The Bastian junction was the same. I stopped at Chandran's cycle workshop opposite the former vicarage where now the Eliyathamby building stands. Chandran did recognize me which came as a surprise.

After a brief surveillance of the place it was time to get back as my wife Dushy would be wondering where I had gone without having lunch. The next day we had decided to spend the morning visiting St. John's College and Chundikuli Girls' College. It was a pleasant sight to see the well laid and groomed flower beds as we strode into SJC. I had arranged to meet with Mr Thanapalan and the Rev Gnanaponrajah. As we went in we met them in front of the Peto Hall. After a brief chat we went into the Hall as I was particularly keen to show my children the photo of their grand father displayed along with other Princi-

pals. Above all this hall held many nostalgic memories. I was then a student when it was built for the 150 years celebration. I had sat in the pews as a student during assemblies, been on monitor and prefect duty at assemblies and important functions, conducted the combined schools choir at the combined schools carol service and attended many other functions both official and social.

From there we went to visit the Admin block. Mr Thanapalan was kind enough to take us around. We saw the computer room well equipped with around 20 computers with the plan of extending that into the library. We had a discussion with Mr Thanapalan regarding the future building projects and the needs of the College. It was heartening to see the campus kept clean with the impressive buildings. One building that needs attention to better the look of the campus is the Williams hall. After having a good tour of the admin block we visited the grave of my late father and had a time of prayer led by the Rev. Lalith an old boy. From there we visited CGC and met with the Principal Mrs Rajaratnam. She took us around CGC. This was where Dushy grew up. My daughter Shmithra was born while Dushy lived with her parents at the Principal's bungalow as I was away in Bangalore studying for my Master's Degree. After having a good look around the campus it was time to get back as we had a very busy schedule in the afternoon.

The next day we decided to visit some of the areas devastated by Tsunami in the North. We could visit only Point Pedro (we bought Parithithurai vadai) and Manatkaadu as the other areas were made accessible only for those doing relief work. As we talked to people who had experienced the tidal wave and saw the destruction it had caused we knew what a terrible ordeal people had gone through. In Manatkaadu alone we were told there were 73 casualties. They were yet to recover two bodies. Life will never be the same again in that village.

The Jaffna town was full of people and it was also the beginning of Mango season. We did enjoy some delicious karuthakolumbaan and sweet (Itharai) bananas. We did not forget to take a box full of karuthakolumbaan to Colombo where it was twice the price. Apart from the company of the mosquitoes we enjoyed our stay even though it was very brief. As we left we decided next time we visit Jaffna it would be a longer stay.

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