

# Humble beginnings to graceful exits!

Reminiscences of Lanka Viththi ලංකා විත්ති by Channa Cabraal Lokuliyana

It was a period of transition. Married and two children, I did not want the children growing up in the west because I had no faith in the education system of the UK. So I had dropped my family in Sri Lanka and returned to live in a menial rented accommodation, a single room with shared facility.

My trip to Sri Lanka took me to remote areas that I had never visited before. Thanthirimale, Mahakongaskanda and Gomarankadawala. They were villages that we had supported from the UK to survive amidst LTTE terrorist advances of massacre and genocide.

What I learnt while there was how innocent and vulnerable our indigenous Sinhala people were. Their aspirations were not based on fashion, glamour or exuberance, all they wanted was a decent opportunity to cultivate the land of their forefathers and raise their children. They never even aspired towards a life in Colombo.

They had lost all hope of the Colombo elite whom they knew did not care of those who lived in these remote villages. The elite knew they were safe at the villagers' expense. They spoke of "Peace talks" while village children were getting hacked to death. There were no young men or women left in these villages. Just grandparents looking after toddlers. All able bodied people had been killed by the terrorists appeared every 6 months to loot the harvest and killed every one on sight.

The armed forces were stationed in these areas. But they just held their post. The glory of fighting for their motherland or sacrifice was not theirs. Often they were bored and frustrated as much as the villagers because we, as a people, did not have a leadership or the belief that this was a winnable war.

Politically we were so bankrupt, only the challenge offered by the late Ven. Gangodawila Soma Himi to lead the Sinhala people, lifted the Sinhala aspirations.

I was surprised to receive a call from Daya Ranasinghe one day, where he told me we should meet as he had something big to say. We met at my rented room in Wembley Park

where I told him about my trip to Sri Lanka over a cup of tea.

After listening eagerly to my citation of the pathetic nature of our people and the need to lift the morale and self-belief he said: "Channa.. that is why I came... I plan to do a Sinhala Language newspaper as a rallying post for all our people. I need your support."

Daya and I had worked on common Sinhala projects before but never together. I was computer literate so enabled graphic matter while Daya was a journalist of repute. I had tried to keep at a distance with him because I was never too sure if he liked my company. This is why it took me by surprise that he wanted to see me. I was extremely pleased when he announced that he is willing to take me on his team to launch a newspaper which he had titled - "LankaViththi."

At the very start, we had challenges to overcome. Word processing of Sinhala in the modern form had not evolved then. We could write a three-word slogan in Sinhala easily. A paragraph will take half a day but a whole newspaper was unthinkable. The computer we used was an old 386 and to type one Sinhala character we had to use 4 key-strokes. We worked till 3-4 in the morning each night to see the First Edition of Lanka Viththi born.

It's been 16 long years since that day. Looking back, Lanka Viththi has managed to fulfil all its obligations to justify its existence. It's not only lived through but actively supported efforts of front line defence morale by linking the expatriate to the vulnerable and often isolated soldier in those difficult times.

Every month there were poems and essays written in dedication to the soldiers. Daya as the editor personally requested all patriotic readers who were well versed in Sinhala literature and poetry to write to Lanka Viththi praising Rana Viru youth in the battlegrounds.

Contributions arrived from all corners of the UK, France, and America basically from all five continents. Those that got published were sent to those front line personnel.

The message was clear. " You are not alone... in mind and spirit.... we are with you."

We knew that each copy got photocopied many times over and distributed at the camps up in the North and the East and the feedback had been amazing.

Years later, we rejoiced loudly, cheerfully and colourfully the end of the gruelling war. Though Lanka Viththi as a tabloid never carried a gun or bullets over its shoulder in winning wars, it brought valued focus to overcome the plight that overshadowed our country and for the Sinhala people.

Job Done! Last year when 15 years of Lanka Viththi service was celebrated by those near and far... there was a sense of accomplishment felt by those who were at the core of Lanka Viththi. While many appreciated Lanka Viththi's contribution and willed its continuity, longevity... many missed the signal in Daya's voice at the celebrations when he said 'Job Done'.

Had he meant it both ways; an Accomplishment and an End to Lanka Viththi ?

I, too missed the point he was making at that time, but Daya phoned recently to announce the date and venue of the 16th year celebration and then he dropped the bombshell!

The publication to coincide 16 years will be the last. The End of Lanka Viththi! Saying - "Adieu"

Amidst protests and deepening sadness expressed that lasted over 45 minutes over the phone, many anecdotes were exchanged. This time Daya was adamant. Having seen so much of print media rise, thrive, struggle and fail, Lanka Viththi wants to exit while it's still at the top. But isn't that going to cause a void ?

Daya replied ... " so let some other youngster fill the void... It's time to move on."

When others fail, they dissolve unannounced, leaving debts to those who supported it in its hay day. A concept as noble as Lanka Viththi should not fail, be indebted or abandon its readership or society. Let us be graceful in exit and move on.

Moving on, gives me a sense of hope than abandonment. Let us not speculate on pretences and what is probable. Let it be another door open while Lanka Viththi shuts. Let us be thankful to Lanka Viththi and equally recognise the void out there. Let it be an opportunity to another while we move on.

Yes, it's time to move on.

♦ Channa Cabraal Lokuliyana Wembley, Middx UK



Teenager, Anushka De Alwis from Harrow, UK, was the 1st Cover Girl of Lanka Viththi 1997 April Issue. Today she is a doctor attached to the the Hospital of Manchester.( This 1997 Photograph by : Ananda Kariyawasam, Berks UK)

සිංහල අවුරුදු පහන ළඟ බුලත් අතක් ගෙන සිටින මේ බාලිකාව ලන්ඩනයේ හැරෝ පෙදෙසේ එවකට පාසැල් ශිෂ්‍යාවක සිටි අනුෂ්කා ද අල්විස් ය. ලංකා විත්ති ප්‍රථම කලාපයේ (1997 අප්‍රියෙල්) කවරය සැරසුණේ මෙම පින්තූරයෙනි. අද අනුෂ්කා මැන්චෙස්ටර් රෝහලේ වෛද්‍යවරියක වශයෙන් සේවය කරන්නීය.



ලංකාවිත්ති දඹදිව වන්දනාවේ යන සිංහල සැදැහැවතුන්ටද කියවීමට අපි සැලැස්සුවෙමු. ඉන්දියාවේ වෙන්නායි හි මහාබෝධී මධ්‍යස්ථානයේ පාලක පුජ්‍ය කල්‍යාණ මහානාම හිමියන් 2006 මැයි මස ලංකාවිත්ති කලාපය කියවමින් සිටින අවස්ථාවයි මේ. ජායාරූපය -සුජීව නිවුන්හැල්ල - ශේෂන්

## Sri Lanka placed 4th among boozing nations

Sri Lanka was placed 4th in a survey conducted by the Capital Alliance (Cal) on the level of hard liquor consumption. It has discovered that each Lankan is recorded to have consumed 11.2 litres of alcohol.

According to CAL the total consumption volume of hard liquor in 2009 was 65 million litres, which shot up to 85 million litres in 2012. Sri Lanka's hard liquor consumption in the pre-war era is appeared to have received an instant stimulus right after the conclusion of the war. While we are in the 4th place, Czech Republic, France and Russia are in front of us. Five years ago Sri Lanka was in the 79th place.

## ලොව 4 වන බේබිදු රට ලංකාවයි

ළගදී කැපිටල් එලයාන්ස් නම් ආයතනය මගින් කරන ලද සමීක්ෂණයකට අනුව ලොව වැඩියම මත්පැන් පානය කරන රට වල් අතුරින් ශ්‍රී ලංකාව සිටින්නේ 4 වන ස්ථානයේ බව හෙළිවේ. රටේ ජනගහනය සමග එය සසඳා බලන විට එක ලාංකිකයෙකු දිනකට මත්පැන් ලීටර් 11.2 හිල දමා තිබේ. 2009 දී පානය කළ ලීටර් මිලියන 65 ප්‍රමාණය 2012 දී මිලියන 85 දක්වා වැඩිවී ඇත. යුද්ධය ජයග්‍රහණය කිරීමද, 2005 සිට දේශපාලන යින්ට හා ඔවුන්ගේ නොවැසියන්ට බාර් අරින්නට අවසරපත් දීම ද ඊට හේතු බව කියති. එසේම මත්පැනින් ජනතාව වලකවත් නට කිසිම වැඩසටහනක් අද ලංකාවේ නැත. ලංකාව මත්පැන් පරිභෝජනය කරන 4 වන රට වන අතර ඉදිරියෙන් වේක් රාජ්‍යය, ප්‍රංශය හා රුසියාව සිටිති. වසර 5 කට පෙර ලංකාව සිටියේ 79 වන ස්ථානයේ ය. කොහොමද ලංකාවේ දියුණුව ?

ලංකාවිත්ති පත්‍රය දහසය වසරක් පුරා කළ අගනා කැපවීමට අපේ අවංක සිතුවිලි!

**Lankan Restaurant SEKERA** ශේෂන්

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