

LIVE IN THE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF SINHALA NEW YEAR

Watching my 8-year-old swim in the lined pool in the Center packed with people from diverse communities, I began to wander down the memory lane to my childhood. Water always terrified me though it never failed to bring coolness when surrounded. The beach wasn't too far from where my father had bought a piece of land to build us a home; to call our own. We had the opportunity to accompany him on his little visits to this land over the weekends. As we enter the lane on which our land was on we could sense the emptiness. The vast array of bare land engulfed with wild flower bushes manages to give a glimpse of a house or two that had already come up. There blew a cool breeze from time to time fading our sweat and thirst, an oasis in the unsheltered space.

Time flew with our house rising up from brick to brick. So were those around us too. The lane was live and warm with people mostly to my recollection young families. The warmth of a residential suburb emerged disturbing the wild, green; calm and quietness. The school wasn't too far to walk. All you needed to do was gallop on to the broken line of school kids walking along the footpaths on the local road. Though the little feet were tired smiles, fun and the chitchat refreshed the journey.

The community grew and families came to know each other. Diverse it was in its own nature believers from Buddhism, Catholicism and Christianity joined as one to celebrate be it Sinhala New Year, Vesak or Christmas. The memories of such times take you a long way in the journey through life. Sinhala and Tamil New Year is a time of family and togetherness. It is a time where our hearts and minds find peace and harmony. As people born and bred in Sri Lanka I trust you remember your own encounters of 'Awurudu' celebrations. Exhibiting the vibrant history and culture of the exotic island we share our exclusive cuisines and take part in folk games and activities. More prominence is given to the rituals taken part in worshipping Gods reflecting on the fruitful harvest received in abundance. Significant among the rituals is the extra special attention paid to the auspicious times or the 'nekath' as it is known in Sri Lanka. It would appear as



the one and the only single incident where all Sri Lankan awurudu celebrants take their food exactly at the same time i.e. at the auspicious time which perhaps be the only such incident recorded worldwide.

There is preparation from months ahead. The homes are color-washed to give a new look inviting a bright future. Mothers are busy gathering all and sundry to ready to cook 'kevum' and other sweet treats. Kids make sure they



have a newly made dress to wear on the day. The celebration brings a feel of wholeness, newness and happiness.

I saw it all in the community I lived in. Just before the auspicious time for the dawn of the New Year I have seen our residential street crowded with those who desired to share a plate of sweets with their neighbour. The plates overflow with delicious home made sweets like kevum, kokis, aluwa and mun-aluwa to name a few. At our door-step they waited impatiently, their faces clad with a huge smile, for the moment to wish 'suba aluth awuruddhak wewa!'. Some were young kids; others too small to carry the plates on their own were accompanied by a parent. Often there was an 'Awurudu kreedha event organized by the elders in this neighborhood followed by a musical item or 'paduru party' to end the celebrations. It has been so long but the memory is so vivid of how I lined up with other kids to 'hit the pot' (kana mutti) and finish the hundred meters race in a flash. One of my favorites was 'filling the bottle with water', where the participants were given a narrow neck bottle to fill up with water. They stood in a circle and ran to the middle of the circle where the water bucket is kept. You could only carry water in the palm of your hand to fill the bottle up. How could I forget the muddiest puddle we ever created and accidentally filling someone else's bottle.

Life has taken its course; we then kids, have grown up and moved out. The neighborhood has changed. Sinhala New Year comes and goes yearly as to remind us that life strolls on passing over the challenges from a generation to another.

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