
Volunteer in Sri Lanka, Language practise

I had always known Sri Lanka through the back of my hand—missing out on sleepovers and high school dances in exchange to travel and help the war-affected orphans. Voices that were speaking in my native language during the weekends, pushed aside by my weekly interactions with my English mates. But it was a culture separated from a certain situation and that would only be possible if it was a separate nation. Only from a secure distance did I marry the two—reading morning headlines that described the bloodshed dripping from my country.

When a colleague asked me to help develop a leadership program with her parents for war-affected orphans in the north and east of Sri Lanka, I said yes, because I wanted to help. Fresh out of high school, I wholeheartedly embraced the promise of volun-tourism—one-part rewarding, two parts adventures, with the added potential for self-discovery. Rumbling across the island with a bus full of volunteers, I had come to save lives and, perhaps, change my own. We drove through the middle of the country, what was once destroyed by war. Right before we were to get off the bus, one of the volunteers asked me, don't you think it would be beneficial to send the money we spent to get here, to improve the lives of these war-affected children? I couldn't believe that might possibly be true.

Anjuli was one of the participants in our adventure to help those who are in need. She was 14 when I first met her, one of seventy-eight girls who lived on an acre of land located near the ocean. At the orphanage she, like many others, didn't fit into the definition of an Orphan, as she told me, "I am here because my amma (mother) wanted me to live in a safe place." Safe from whom, I didn't want to know that yet. I only came to jump easily on the task at hand, but I was preoccupied by their traumatic stories. At least a dozen times a day, my mind was disturbed, and I would question myself—why am I here? Marilla, saw me as one of her own—a familiar alien. Marilla's father had left her, to join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), freedom fighters on a movement to fight for a separate Tamil nation against the government. Her father was caught by the Sri Lankan Army and was brutally tortured by them. He was a broken man when he returned to a home destroyed by war, only to sink deeper into poverty. The violent outbursts that he was experiencing made Marilla scared. I had to banish from there, she says, uneasily, silently. For a complicated problem, could there be a fast, straightforward solution? The safe space of a child's home filled with childlike joy seemed insufficient but, by whom?

My own appa (father) called the church home one evening. How is it? He asked, anxious. I thought for a moment. I feel...uncomfortable but, peaceful at the same time. Throughout the evening, there was story telling by many kids. Scraps and pieces of their stories would forever be etched as a memory in my mind. In all the children, pain was evident in their eyes, even as

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

they laughed, communicating what you needed (and yet you didn't want) to know.

Anjuli carefully stirred the pot of stew and said, "If the war arises again, I will join the free fighters." In the orphanage, such odd comments have no value. It was a moment in history where I have seen the pure emotion of shock—from everyone at the orphanage but me. As I was constantly responding to my parents, a part of me was stuck, watching the first death tolls flashing across the television screen. Anjuli and Marilla were very quiet. Back inside the walls of the orphanage, Anjuli sits next to me, sketching a dove as she told me that, "My sister is part of the LTTE, she says she feels comfortable there. In my village the army comes to look for families connected to the movement. They won't come here." In a place where strict orthodox traditions determined the appropriate size of earrings and lengths of skirts, Anjuli's sister was stomping through the forest in military boots with a group of freedom fighters. She was among the roughly one-third of LTTE fighters that were female, filling ranks from foot soldiers to high-standing guerillas.

In our final days we took a bus ride to the beach, a first for many of the children in the orphanage. It wasn't until I had made the familiar trek across the island, a lady was crying. On the sand next to a collapsed church, she cried out loud and said, "My arms still ache. I cannot hold anything since I lost my child." I don't remember the woman's name, there were too many people crowded on the beach that day, but I remember the way she looked through my soul. The collapsed church is where her child was. She didn't ask for food, medical attention, and she didn't bother to call for help. She only needed a stranger like me, to understand that her child was dead.

As I was pulled back from the women's constant cries, I have realized that the things left unsaid and unexplored on the original trip forced me into figuring out everything on my own. I wanted to know more about what was occurring around me but, no one wanted to share about it because they were told that they were being watched by someone.

All too soon there were tearful goodbyes, names of those I met, and addresses scribbled in my notebook—hopeless to remain in contact between two countries. As we drove away my friend turned to me and admitted that, "Ok, by coming to Sri Lanka we had been impacted by many, and then we would have by only sending money." Even though the intent of sending money was honourable in the first place, the impact was quite problematic for me to understand. What has happened in the past between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army that impacted these war-affected orphans so much, that they wouldn't tell the higher officials?

I had only discovered what was occurring to them when, I was lost in texts on ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka that deepened my knowledge on unequal power regarding federalism and resistance in that country. My summers were spent on the island, where my conversations with girls from

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

the orphanage have grown more thoughtful every year. I still remember what Marilla told me 5 years ago, using her sarcastic voice on how most Western countries view Sri Lanka as. She said, "Let them finish off the messy part of eliminating terrorism, and go in later with Development."

It was difficult to locate their narratives and to verify the stories that have been told by them but, to collect evidence of a woman's pain came with its own politics. For instance, a medical report is reliable; a grandmother who cannot erase what she has witnessed and the cruel intentions of those around her was not credible. Here you'd have to reveal the number of burials for anyone to give a tiny shit, but when people are living in shit...that won't turn any heads. Using the pen that I had on my hand, I wrote down my thoughts on my diary.

There might be something liberating about letting go of what you dreamed about and while you're at it, tell them a good make-believe story at the end.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)