

# The KAHATA





The  
KAHATA

## ***The Kahata***

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Pages 133-153 of this publication contains a series of articles published by scholars, journalists and various other scholarly writers on the 'Thé Kahata' photographic exhibition. The opinions expressed in these articles are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of CPA or GIZ.

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## Foreword

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**T**he Centre for Policy Alternatives is indeed proud to have launched the *Thè Kahata* exhibition of photography by members of the Up Country Tamil community bearing witness to the everyday hardships and privation of their lives.

Sri Lanka takes pride in her tea industry and for many years the name Ceylon was synonymous with tea. However, behind the celebratory rhetoric and good wishes was and still continues to be the stark reality of the living conditions of the people who have plucked the “gold” of Sri Lanka for over a century. It is sad but true that in certain cases living conditions have not changed for over a hundred years and that wages lag far behind what is adequate and just. For Sri Lanka to move ahead as a country made up of many peoples and in which there is Unity in Diversity, serious attention should and must be paid to the living conditions of the workers on estates. At the Centre for Policy Alternatives, we are proud and yet sad that we had to launch an initiative to get postal addresses for some 3,000 workers. Apart from the practical issue of being able to receive mail for example on time and not suffer the consequences of delay, the dignity of having an address is surely a right of every Sri Lankan citizen.

We are proud too, to have involved the young people of the community in this exhibition. Who better to understand and record for posterity the daily reality of life on the tea estates? The talent of the youth who participated must be commended and I



hope that it will be nurtured and nourished in the future. Moreover, I sincerely hope that the exhibition will spark off a much needed conversation and spur political commitment to improve the lives of the community and that our opinion and decision makers will place human dignity above else as the motivating force of their efforts.

Avishai Margalit wrote about a decent society and a civilized society – one in which institutions do not humiliate citizens and one in which citizens do not humiliate each other. We should bear this in mind in respect of developing the conditions on the estates and indeed in whatever endeavor we embark upon to make our land united and prosperous.

**Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu**

Executive Director

Centre for Policy Alternatives

# Foreword

## The Kahata photo book

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**S**ri Lanka's plantation communities, together with apparel and migrant workers, form a trifecta of labour vital to Sri Lanka's economy. They also highlight how complex the standards of labour are. This is an issue that Europe grapples with by continuously reflecting on the terms of trade. Inclusive trade provides a greater number of people with access to the benefits of global markets. Europe champions trade because growth opportunities can drive development, address poverty, and improve living standards.

In fact, the EU and the Member States regularly update their trade requirements to ensure that trade openness results in better living standards for partners, including through GSP+ compliance with International Labour Organisation Conventions. Yet, it is not enough. The benefits of trade are not automatic. It requires policies which direct gains to workers and the wider community. Sri Lanka's already impressive results in human development can further improve by addressing structural inequalities in communities' access to education, underemployment, poverty, and personal debt.

This double challenge for Europe and Sri Lanka is captured in these photographs because they are about the lived experiences of plantation community members. While a collection of this size can only provide a small window into the complex lives of the diverse people it represents, we hope it lends itself to reflecting on what inclusion means for all Sri Lankans.

We thank the community members featured in these photographs for their willingness to share their lived experiences, including those whose photos do not appear in this printed collection. These emerging photographers are amplifying the voices of their communities by making these images and stories accessible to a wider audience.

This collection is an initiative of the Strengthening Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka (SRP) project, which is co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office. SRP supports government, non-government, and grassroots partners to address key elements of reconciliation and social cohesion. Congratulations to the implementing partners Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the British Council, as well as the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Uva Shakti Foundation, and Suva Shakti Institute for their ongoing work to advocate for upcountry Tamil communities.

**Denis Chaibi, Ambassador,**

Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka

# Foreword

## The Kahata photo book

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**F**or those working in the peacebuilding sector in Sri Lanka, the first question asked by new acquaintances is often: “So you work in the North and the East?” Some may ask why a reconciliation program would support a photography initiative focusing on the hill country. After all, up-country Tamil communities did not play a direct role in Sri Lanka’s decades-long civil war.

But for peace to be sustainable, it needs to be inclusive. All communities need to have opportunities to participate meaningfully in Sri Lankan society – including those who were only granted citizenship in the 21st century following decades of advocacy and marginalization. This is what is known as “positive peace”. It is more than just the absence of war.

Looking through this extraordinary collection of photos, we are proud to have supported the journey of these young people through the program Strengthening Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka (SRP), which is co-financed by the European Union and the German Government. By engaging communities in dialogue through art and culture initiatives such as this one, SRP and its partners invite people to critically reflect, challenge their assumptions, use peaceful means to address shared issues, and create inclusive communities.

In addition to community dialogue initiatives, SRP promotes constructive and well informed public discourse on reconciliation issues through its research, media and historical dialogue work; improves access to quality psychosocial support to help conflict affected communities deal with the past and cope with daily challenges; and supports public officials to deliver bilingual services in key areas such as policing and healthcare.

We invite readers to appreciate the composition, color and vibrancy of the photos in this collection, the scenes and personalities they depict, and the emotions and thoughts that may surface, whether positive or challenging. We also invite readers to take the opportunity to reflect on their assumptions, and be inspired to contribute to a peaceful and inclusive future for all Sri Lankans.

**Holger Seubert,**

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Sri Lanka



## Sorrow hidden in the taste of your cuppa tea

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**H**ave you ever delighted in a cup of tea while relaxing, reading a book or watching a film? Isn't it an absolutely blissful kind of refreshment? But...do you know of the sadness hidden in that delicious cup of tea? Have you given a moment's thought for your fellow citizens who worked so hard for that cup of tea? We came here to tell you the story of their lives, and bare the sorrow hidden beneath the flavor of that pleasant cup of tea.

From the very day of their arrival in Sri Lanka, the up-country Tamil community make an invaluable contribution to uplift the country's economy.

Sri Lanka is world renowned thanks to its tea related products, famously known as "Ceylon tea". But as for the up-country Tamil community who provide the backbone to the entire process by plucking the tea leaves, trimming the plants and fertilizing the cultivation- they have not reached a decent standard of living at all. In political, economic and social contexts, they have not received the place they deserve. They have a right to be given that recognition. We owe them the strength needed to win the rights of privileged citizens.

There are so many poems, songs and other creative works written about our fellow citizens in these picturesque estates. There are sensitive, imaginative creations as well as creations that could broaden the space for understanding within society as a whole and

hopefully that could bring about reforms in the political sphere. There are works of both these categories among them. The main aim of these photographs is to show the viewer a cross-section of the lives of the upcountry Tamil community. We want it to reflect the realities of their lives, while giving an insight into the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of their lives.

For the first time, this collection includes photographs captured by young men and women hailing from four estates in hill country. The young participants came from Holyrood and Logie estates in the Nuwara Eliya district and Atampitiya and Uva Highlands estates in the Badulla district. This is their story, presented by them.

This eager group of youth trained, receiving technical knowledge on photography, knowledge on art forms, and socio-political awareness as well as the understanding about using art as a non-violent tool for creating social change. The training workshops spanned nearly two years, and as a result they managed to capture the day to day life of their own communities through the third eye, a camera lens.

This is an experimental programme.

This promotes social consciousness in youth while exploring the realities that prevail in their lives. This will also provide them with the foundation necessary to build up a better social life.

Similarly, when you look at these photographs as spectators, you get the chance to obtain that awareness of the life of the up-country Tamil communities through another perspective.

While the up-country youth and their communities are the major contributors to the success of this program, the Uva Shakti Foundation and Suva Shakti Institute joined hands with this process as partners. Similarly, Mr Ajith Senavirathne and Mr Nadishka Ranasinghe, two experts in the field of professional photography, worked tirelessly and enthusiastically with the youth giving them a thorough and valuable grounding in the technical knowledge of photography.

**Lionel Guruge**

Centre for Policy Alternatives

# New Kids pick up the Art of Photo Journaling

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**T**his is a strange story. It was scripted by some of the amazing youth in the plantation sector. Most of them are Tamils. Some are Sinhalese and some are Muslims.

We do not understand Tamil. Many of them do not understand Sinhala. Photography then became the common working language. We had to give them with theoretical knowledge at the start. Many of them had never touched a digital camera and some had never seen one in real life.

A three-day training session on the technical background and functionality of the camera was followed by a journey of several miles for practicals, through the misty cold climate, blazing sun, and torrential rains. The goal: obtaining photographs that captured the varied emotions within the hearts of the people, drawing on backstories complex enough to fill several pages.

With each step of the way, it dawned on everyone that structuring a photograph is a complex task even though it initially seems quite simple.

We did not try to teach them how to take photographs by niggling about details or pointing at every step. We did not believe in smothering them, but we did have numerous conversations about the photographs they had captured. Sometimes we



criticized, maybe they were disheartened... and yet the next day they would return with a great shot filled with energy. They would keep at it with great persistence, commitment, and resilience. The youngsters were an energetic bunch filled with lots of self-confidence.

Eventually these youth mastered the language of photography... They became accustomed to writing, speaking, and looking at the world with a new perspective, a new pair of eyes. They became very sensitive, conscious, and aware of social issues and the social environment. Inside each one of them was a photographer capable of developing creations that could be taken to the world stage.

All we did was to nudge them a bit in the right direction, and nag them so the artist within was woken...

And that's what we remember when we taste a cup of tea.

**Nadishka Ranasinghe and Ajith Seneviratne**

Veteran photographers

## Photo Journey

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**W**e travelled over months to different pristine places far away and we captured in our pictures, emotions that were too complex to spell out, thoughts that would fill many pages, and sighs too soft to be heard.

We invite you to join us on a soul changing journey, through the beauty, pain, love and despair, in solidarity with a community touched by tears and hardships, guided patiently by kind elders, and forever hopeful of a better, more dignified tomorrow.

Join us to taste, hear and feel life among the *Thè Kahata*.





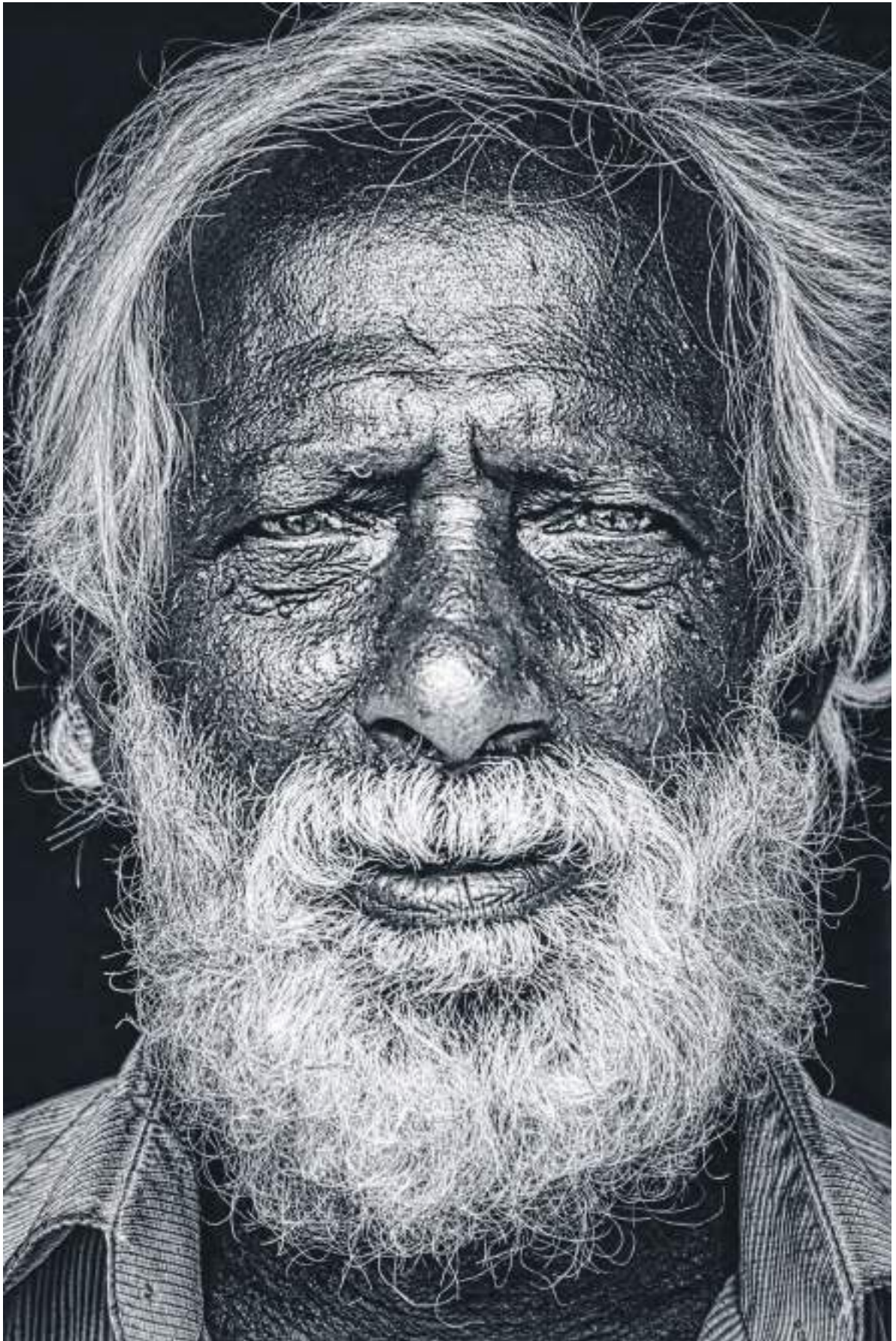
S. Ashwini / Holyrood / 2020



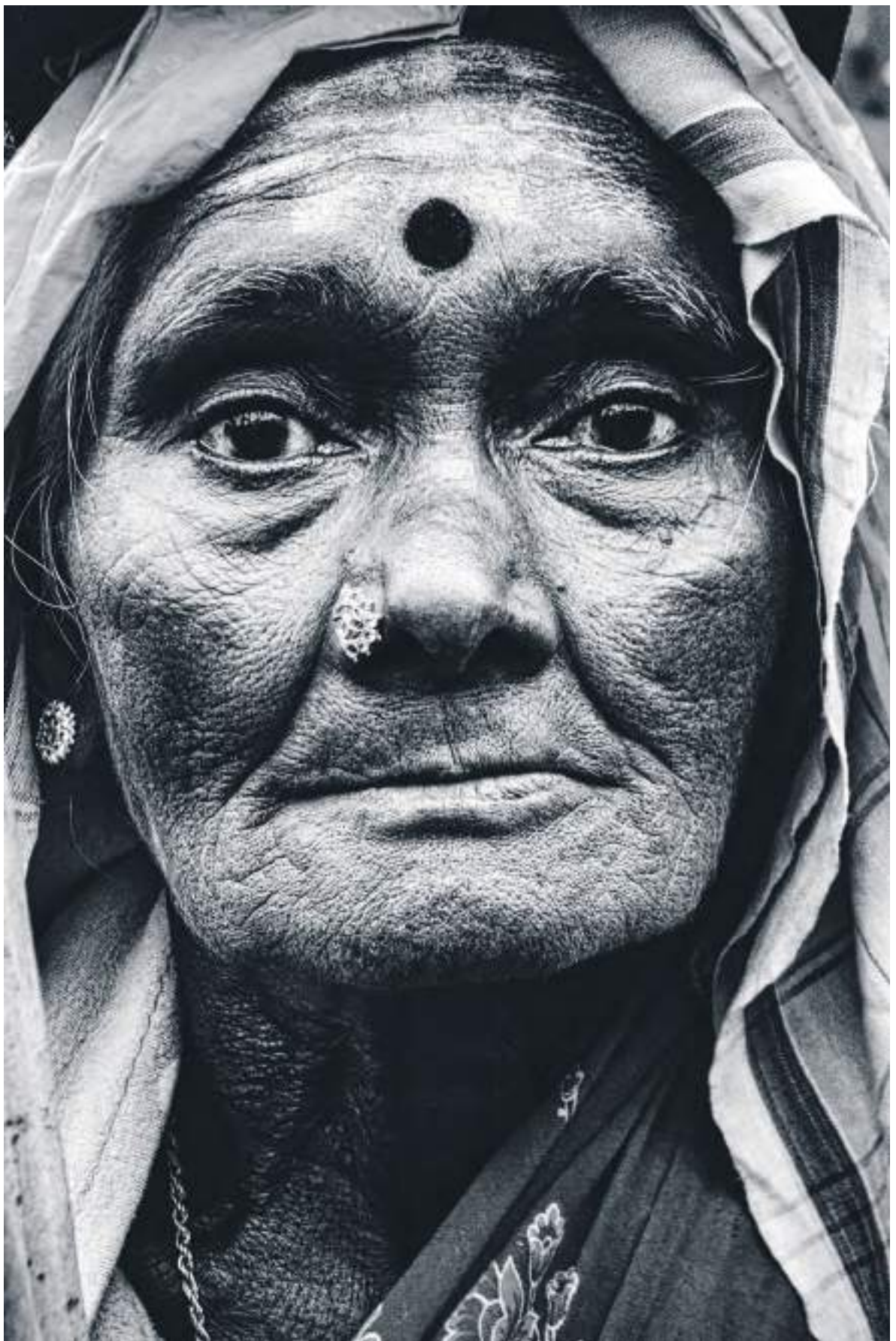
W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020



G. Kalaiyani / Uvahighlands / 2020



N. Priyadharshini / Holyrood / 2020



R. Anojini / Logie / 2020





T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



S. Manilanayagi / Attampitiya / 2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



A. Ajithkumar / Uvahighlands / 2020



W.T. Amila Nuwan / Holyrood / 2020



S. Ashwini / Holyood / 2020



A. Ajithkumar / Uvahighlands / 2020



S. Ketheeshwaran /Uvahighlands / 2020







P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



K. Sanushalini / Holyrood / 2020

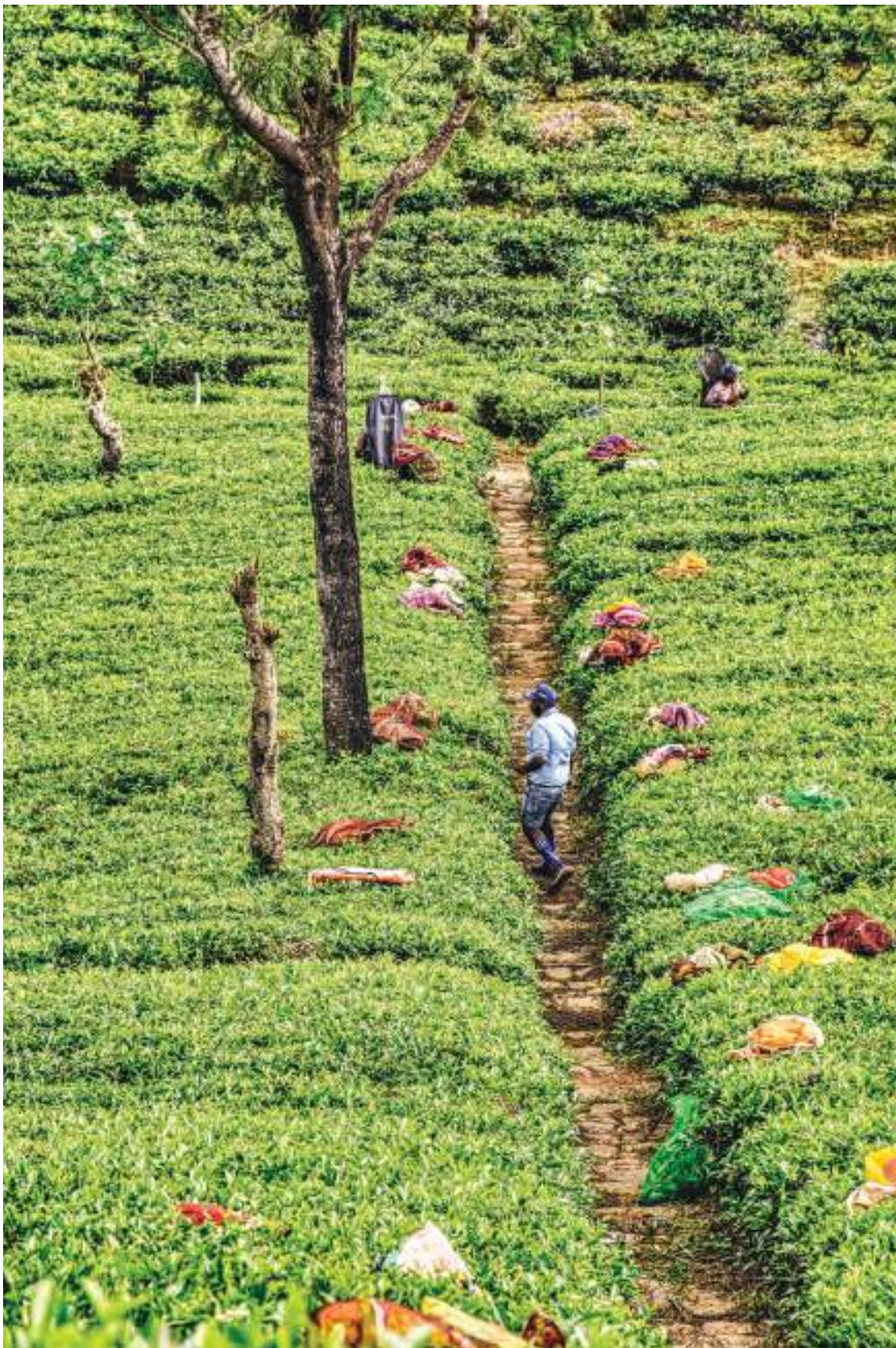


T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



A. Ajithkumar / Uvahighlands / 2020





K. Sanushalini / Holyrood / 2020











T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



A. Idayawanan / Attampitiya / 2020



S. Duwaragan / Holyrood / 2020



M. Sindhujahn / Logie / 2020



W.T. Amila Nuwan / Holyrood / 2020





A. Ajithkumar / Uvahighlands / 2020

S. Ketheeshwaran / Uvahighlands / 2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020





P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



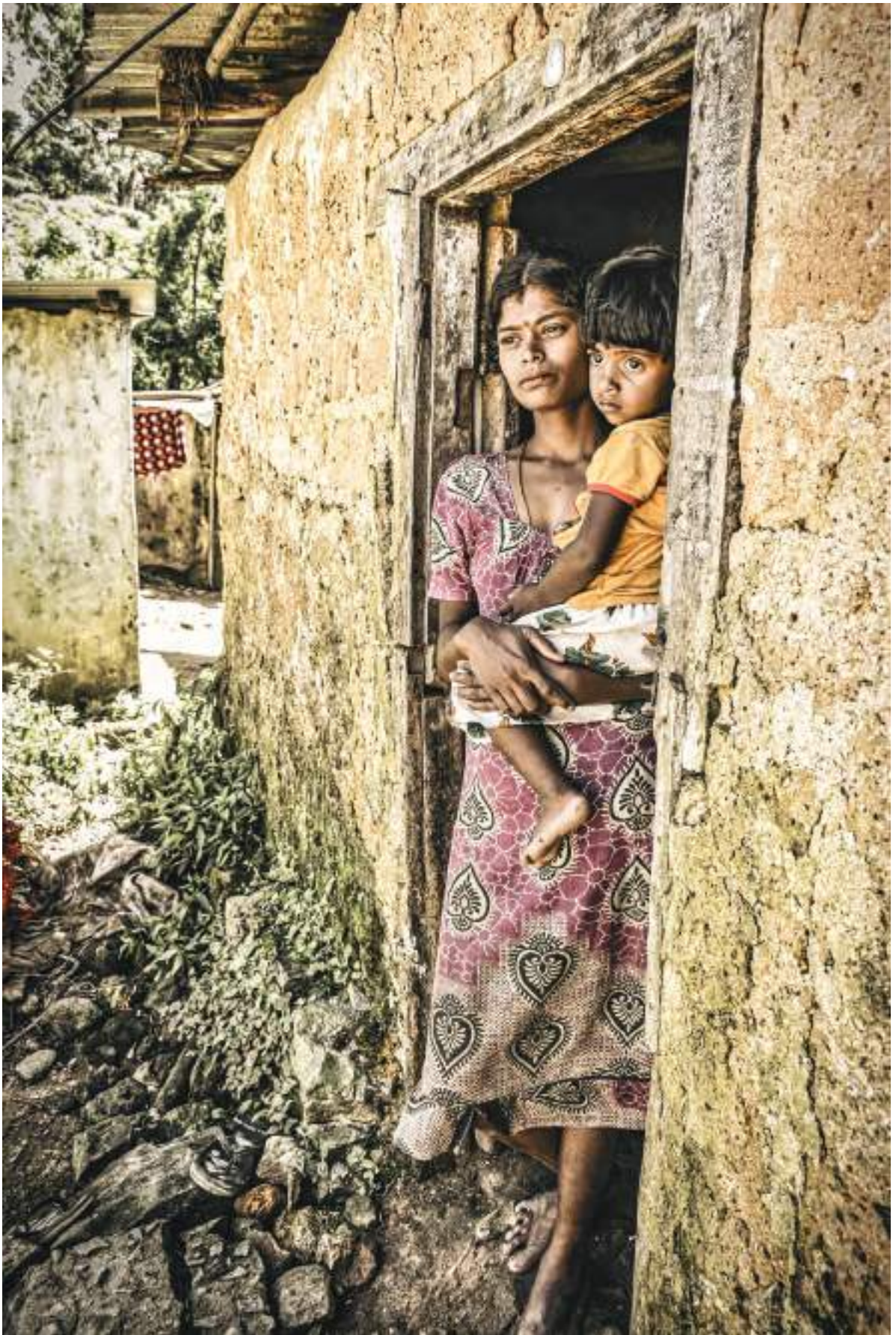


M. Niroshan Gayathiran / Uvahighlands / 2020





L. Kapilnath / Logie / 2020





W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020





W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020





S. Ashwini / Holyrood / 2020



W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020

S. Ashwini / Holyrod / 2020



J. Dushanthini / Attampitiya / 2020



Nethmini Samudra/Attampitiya/2020



G. Kalaivani / Uvahighlands / 2020



N. Priyadharshini / Holyrood / 2020



C. Kogilapriya / Attampitiya / 2020



K. Sanushalini / Holyrood / 2020





M. Sindhujahn / Logie / 2020



C. Niranjan / Attampitiya / 2020



M. Niroshan Gayathiran / Uvahighlands / 2020



W.T. Dhanushka/Holyrood/2020



W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020









S. Ketheeshwaran / Uvahighlands / 2020



Nethmini Samudra/Attampitiya/2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



C. Kogilapriya / Attampitiya / 2020



G. Kalaiyani / Uvahighlands / 2020



A. Idayawan / Attampitiya / 2020



K. Suganya / Attampitiya / 2020



A. Ajithkumar / Uvahighlands / 2020





G. Kalaivani / Uvahighlands / 2020



M. Niroshan Gayathiran / Uvahighlands / 2020



T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



T. Kalaichelvi / Attampitiya / 2020





T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



G. Kalaivani / Uvahighlands / 2020



P. Sagidharan / Uvahighlands / 2020



R. Gowshalya / Holyrood / 2020





S.Sridevi/Uvahighlands/2020



S. Sridevi / Uvahighlands / 2020





S. Sridevi / Uvahighlands / 2020



M. Niroshan Gayathiran / Uvahighlands / 2020





W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020



S.Sridevi / Uvahighlands / 2020

W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020

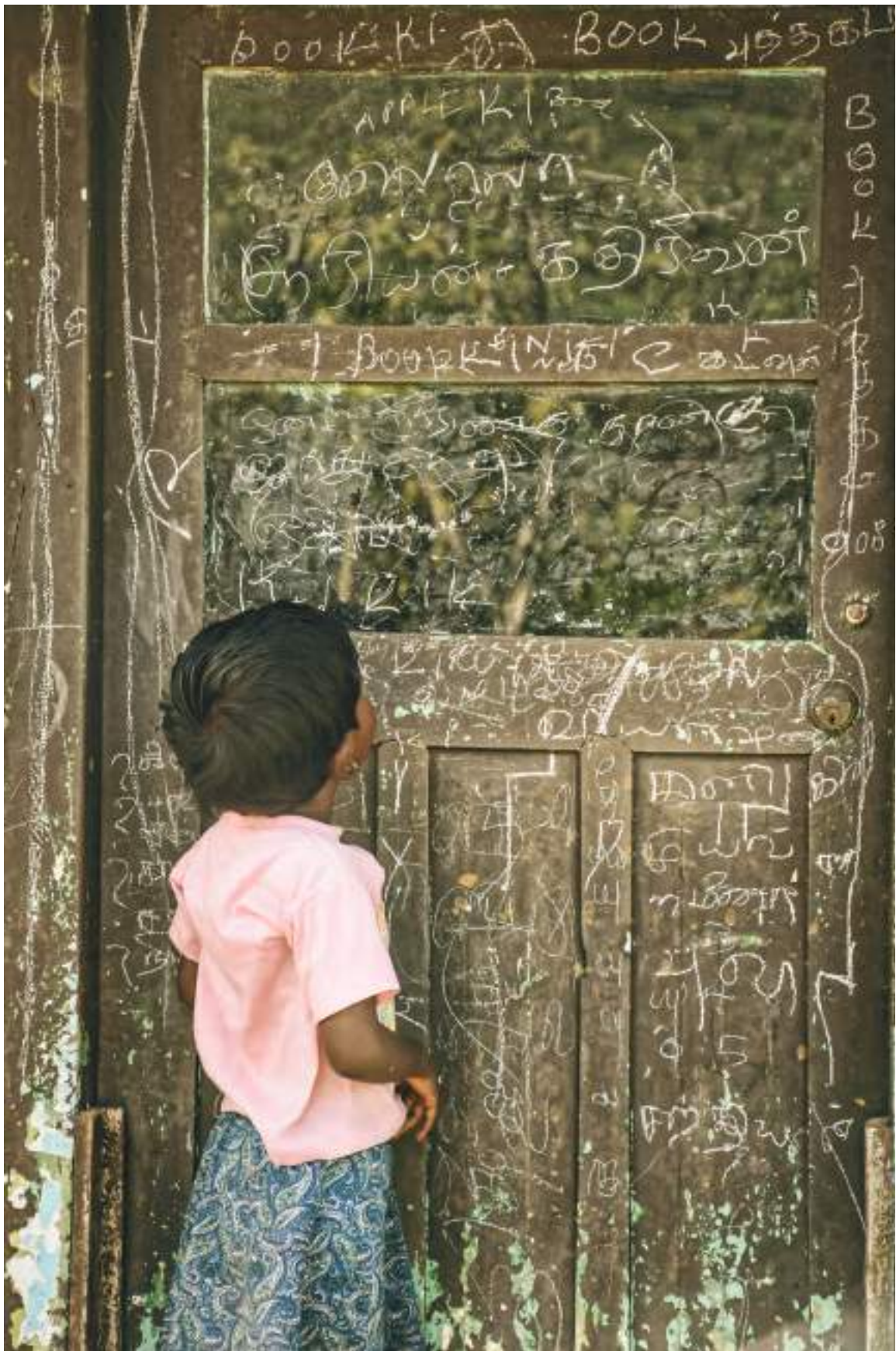


S. Ashwini / Holyrood / 2020

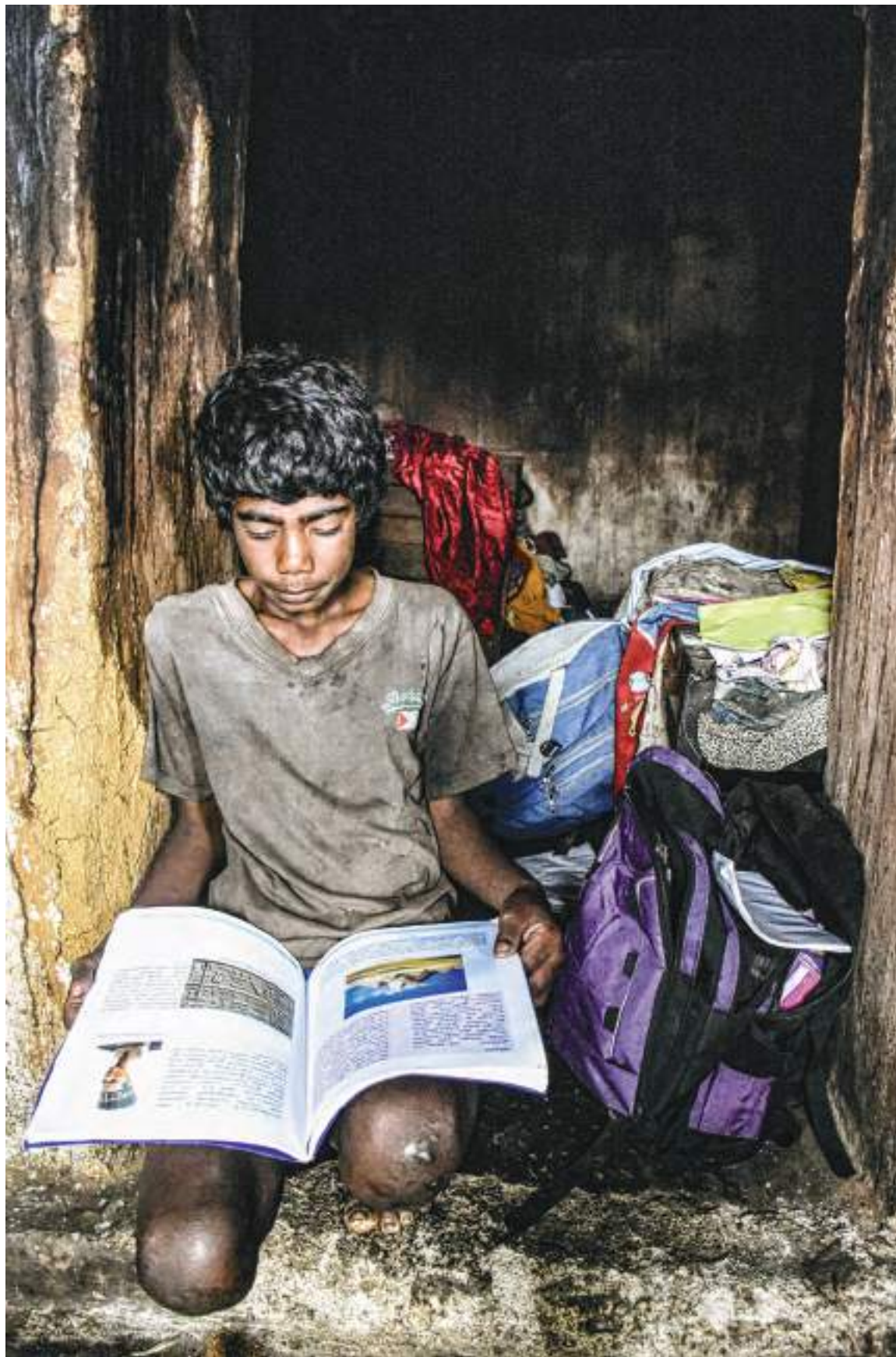




W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020



W.T. Dhanushka / Holyrood / 2020





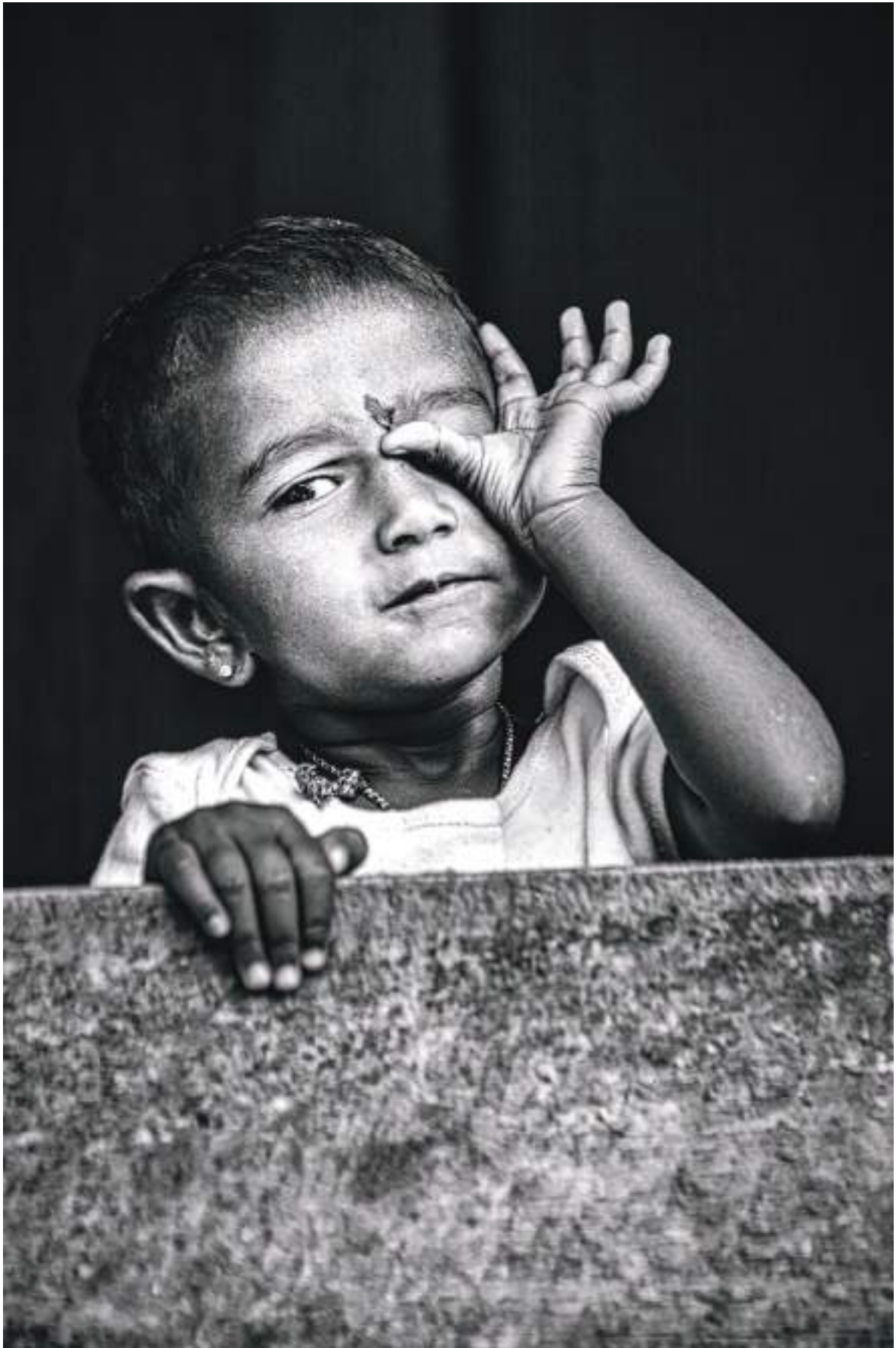
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S. Ketheeshwaran / Uvahighlands / 2020





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R. Gowshalya / Holyrood / 2020



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S. Sridevi / Uvahighlands / 2020



K. Suganya / Attampitiya / 2020



A. Idayawan / Attampitiya / 2020



M. Sasipriyan / Uvahighlands / 2020



A. Idayawan / Attampitiya / 2020









A. Idayawan / Attampitiya / 2020



S. Ketheeshwaran / Uvahighlands / 2020



S. Duwaragan / Holyrood / 2020

K. Sanushalini / Holyrood / 2020



M. Sindhuja / Logie / 2020





T. Yuwarajan / Logie / 2020



*The Kahata:*  
The featured photographers  
Bringing us their stories...

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**Gnanasekaran Kalaivani**

My name is Gnanasekaran Kalaivani and I live in the old Division of Uva Highlands Estate. I was educated at Uva Highlands Tamil Maha Vidyalaya and have now completed my education.

Joining this program gave me the opportunity to learn photography as well as take various photographs.

I gained a deeper understanding and insight into the problems faced by our people as I visited various estates in the hill country. I had no idea of what a digital camera was but at the end, I was able to operate it skillfully and correctly.

The photos I took in the early days were glaringly white. Subsequently, I was able to take good photographs. Exposure



to photographs taken by world-renowned photographers also helped.

I see this photographic exhibition as a valuable opportunity to capture the lives of the people of the hill country, to highlight them and to take it to the people.



### **Anandan Idayavanan**

I live in the Second Division of Atampitiya and study at the Uva Highlands Tamil College. Although I had a desire to learn photography from a young age, I never got the opportunity. However, I finally got the opportunity to get involved with this program.

It was not just a photoshoot, it was an opportunity to learn about the way of life and the problems of the Tamil community beyond the beauty of the plantations. I went to various estates and heard about the problems people were facing. I was convinced that their lives had not changed through the years and that they were like kundumani seeds in a pile of rubbish (diamonds in the rough). These photographs can be depicted as an opportunity to highlight those lives and their culture to the world outside.



### **Mahamuni Niroshan Gayathiran**

I am an Advanced Level student of the Uva Highland College and live in the second division of Uva Highlands. Through photography, we learned how to take social issues, diverse

cultures, ethics and values into the outside world. The main purpose of our photography is to expose the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the plantation community to the outside world. This will provide an opportunity to find solutions to their problems.

As a socially responsible photographer, and a youth from the estates, I am happy for the opportunity to communicate the problems faced by our people through art in order to find solutions to them.



### **S. Kethishwaran**

I successfully passed the GCE Ordinary Level Examination at Uva Highland Tamil Maha Vidyalaya and completed my Advanced Level in the Commerce stream at the same College.

My father works as a vegetable vendor and my mother is a housewife. From an early age, I was very good at playing cricket. I have achieved various achievements at the school and provincial level in cricket. I got to know through the Uva Shakthi institute that there was a programme regarding photography at the Centre for Policy Alternatives while I was practicing cricket in Badulla.

As a result of this program, I gained a lot of knowledge about photography and matters that are pertinent to life.

I also had the opportunity to lay the foundation for my future.



### **J. Dushanthini**

I live in the second division of Ettampitiya, I had the opportunity to join this photography program while I was developing my skills in drawing, singing and writing poetry as a hobby. I am studying A / L in the Arts stream at Vivekananda Tamil Maha Vidyalaya, Bandarawela.

Despite my talents, I was stuck within the four walls of my house. The opportunity to get involved with this program enabled me to share my talents with others. The strength and confidence I gained from this programme enabled me to take these photographs and to express my views without fear.

It is through photography that words uttered about the splendour of nature have been transformed into storytelling in a different way today. I intend to pursue the journey related to photography while continuing my studies.



### **Sivaperuman Niranjan**

I live in division one, Ettampitiya and study at Vivekananda Tamil Maha Vidyalaya, Bandarawela. I thought photography was just about capturing the natural beauty of trees, animals, mountains and waterfalls. But when I got involved with this program, I gained an understanding that photography is not only about capturing natural beauty but also much broader subjects. I was able to acquire foundational technical knowledge about photography.

There is nothing that we cannot accomplish as stated by the profound reality in the words of the poet Vairamuttu, 'there is no night without light at the end, no sorrow without an end, no flood that never subsides, no life that does not live.'

### **R. Goshalya**



I am studying at Watagoda Tamil Maha Vidyalaya. I live in the lower part of Holyrood's lower division. When I was younger I used to think that photography was something that could be easily learned. But it was only after I joined this program that I gained a systematic understanding of this photography. In addition to photography, I learned many useful things for life and my future.

### **P. Sagitharan**



I live in the Moragolla area in Badulla and was educated at the Moragolla Tamil Maha Vidyalaya. After school, I did various vocational training and then I gave up everything and stayed inside the house in a corner. I joined this programme after a friend sent me a message. When I joined this program, I was able to learn and take better quality photographs and also provide greater insight. As a result, I improved myself a lot. I was also moved to take intense photographs of people in the plantation areas. Until this time, I used to live with my head bowed in front of society, but after this program, I have developed the confidence to the level where I can live with my head held high.



### **Kadireshan Sanushalani**

I am from the Ratnilagala area in Thalawakele, I am studying for my GCE Advanced Level in the Arts stream at Talawakele Tamil Maha Vidyalaya. My desire is to be a presenter in the media field. I am already involved in various programs in the media field. After joining this programme I took a lot of photographs and they were also selected for the exhibition.

Photography is an art that everyone enjoys. I also have a passion for this subject. I am happy that I got the opportunity to become a photographer as a young female in the hill country.



### **P. Kalaiselvi**

I was educated at Vivekananda Tamil Maha Vidyalaya, Badulla and Uva Highlands Tamil Maha Vidyalaya. I joined this program after completing my A / L education. In the early period, I did not have any knowledge about photography. But here, under the guidance of the consultants, I learned how to handle the technical details when taking a photograph and also to tell a story through photography. I also had the opportunity to go to various estates and villages and take photographs and I got the chance to learn a lot. The other important thing is being able to gain insights and awareness of many things that are not yet known about the plantation community. The important aspect we learned in this process is how to raise awareness amongst the plantation sector so that they could be an

informed community. We do this same process through these photographs. I am confident that I will definitely continue with photography throughout my life.

### **S. Sri Devi**



I live in the beautiful estate of Uva Highlands and studied at Uva Highlands College from my childhood to A / L level. After completing my External Degree in Commerce for Higher Education, I continued my teacher training from the Adalachenai Government Teachers School. I am currently working at the same Uva Highland College where I studied.

During my school days, I was involved in sports, extracurricular activities, scouting, first aid and various programs of the Youth Services Council, as well as arts and cultural activities and contributed fully to social service activities. It was this program that constantly increased my interest to learn something new. Photographs can refresh anyone, regardless of race, religion, language, or caste.

Learning the art of photography towards social transformation has been a great experience in my life. Photos can create a conversation for a new world. Photos have so much energy. I think learning about photography in relation to the use of art to bring about social change is a seed sown by me for a future revival of the plantation.



### **Arul Prakasam Ajithkumar**

I live in Ellawalai Estate, Bandarawela. I think photography can make a positive difference by taking the message of suffering and the way of life of the people to the wider society. It was also a good opportunity for us to recognize the distance between society and the youth, and to be able to facilitate discussions of the issues of the estate community through photographs.



### **C. Kokila Priya**

My hometown is the hilly and lush green area of Rowberry. I was delighted to have the opportunity to pursue a degree in Arts from the Eastern University after completing my studies at Uva Highlands College. I got involved with this wonderful program when I was at home after finishing school. Without using a language, photos can speak volumes. How emotional is that? How meaningful? How many problems are solved? How many answers are provided?

You can talk about a lot of things through photographs.



### **S. Manilanayagi**

Educated at Vivekananda College, Badulla and Highland College, Uva, I am currently pursuing a Graphic Design course. My hobbies are listening to music, planting flowers and doing social work with the youth associations in the village.

I learned a lot by joining this program at a time when I had no idea what photography was. I also realized that this has the potential to transform society.

Through photography, we had the opportunity to highlight many problems in our society.

### **Sundararaj Shantinipriya**



At first, I felt that photography was an easy thing to do.

It was only when I started following the various thematic areas in our training sessions that I realized that this was a complicated task. But I increased my knowledge every time I took a photograph.

Here we learned about photography as well as the plantation society. Today I am well versed in going on a journey in the field of photography.

### **Suresh Duvakaran**



I was interested in taking photos but did not know how to use a camera. After this program I learned how to take photos with a camera and how to use it as art. I am planning to work as a photographer after finishing school.





### **M. Sasipriyan**

I am studying Accounting for A / L at Uva Highland College. I am also very interested in sports like cricket, kabaddi and elle. I joined this program and I have learned a lot. We have even gained recognition in our community as photographers. We can share the story of the plantation community with the outside world by taking a photograph instead of speaking. I hope at least this will pave the way for a better life for the plantation community.



### **Selvaraj Ashwini**

After completing my A/L's from Hatton Kafex Tamil Maha Vidyalaya, I worked at Sarvodaya Pre-School and was a member of Sarvodaya. I am currently working at Suwa Shakthi and also work at the Nuwara Eliya District Human Rights First Aid Center.

My future ambition was to become a lawyer. As the results from the examination were not sufficient, I turned to the media field. But I did not get a chance. Joining this photography course is an opportunity to enter the field of media. Also, as a responsible citizen, I had the opportunity to highlight to society many unseen areas of the community.



### **Nethmini Samudra**

I am studying in the Arts Department of Badulla Viharamhadevi Girls School. I gained an understanding of the various problems of the estate community by participating in this program. My knowledge of the plantation community expanded. So I learned that I could use photographs to start a new conversation in society regarding the issues and the life of the estate community.

At first, I had no skill to take photographs. Now I am mastering this art. I hope to pursue photography as a direction in my life.



### **M. Sindujan**

I read books, watch movies and write movies as my hobbies. I was also interested in photography. I had taken photographs before but did not have enough knowledge about photography and camera. I gained a significant amount of knowledge by joining this programme. There is so much more to learn about photography. My exploration of this will only increase.



### **N. Priyadarshani**

People's interest and participation in photography is at a very high level during this period. In the modern age, girls are drawn to many forms of art. Photography helps to convey to the people clearly the many issues that exist in society. In

this program I was able to gain not only knowledge about photography but also about many things that are important in life.

### **Mailvaganam thanushika**



I live in Coomwood Estate, Logie Division in Thalawakele.

During this voyage of participating in photography - like a boat leaving the shore, adding colour to life, - I learned thousands of things during this year-long journey. I went from village to village taking photographs that were instruments to spread the hidden mystical magic into the divine world.

### **T. Yuvarajan**



I live in the Logie Estate in Thalawakele and I am a young man from an ordinary family living in line housing. I have faced many problems in the plantation sector. I had a desire for several things and that I could not accomplish in life and photography was one such major area.

I did not have the money to study or pursue photography. But I was drawn to make short films. I have written and directed several short films.

I managed to join this programme by chance and was able to learn about photography which was one of the dreams I had. It also contributed a lot to my filmmaking work. My future goal is to highlight issues in our society as well as in other areas through photographs as a skilled photographer.



### **Kumar Suganya**

Educated at Bandarawela College, Badulla, I live in the second division of Atampitiya. My biggest dream is to contribute to making a difference in the society I represent as a female.

When I look at my society, most people in our society face endless problems. Unfortunately, those in authority who are responsible do not pay attention to these issues. I got involved with this photo program at a time when I was looking for a way to highlight these issues in the community.

I can use photography to create social consciousness to find progressive and speedy solutions to the various problems facing our society.



### **T.W. Danushka Bandara**

I live at the Holyrood Estate in Thalawakele and was educated at Sumana Secondary School, Nuwara Eliya. Although I had a basic idea of photography, it was only after joining this program that I gained a broader understanding. I also learned how to take the kind of photo that communicates a message to the community through photography. Photography is a language that anyone can understand. I hope to engage in professional photography and do the best I can for the community in which I live.



### **Wadunthanthrige Amila Nuwan**

I live in the eastern part of Holyrood in Thalawakele. I am studying at Sumana Secondary School. From this program, I learned that photography is the study and recreation of what one sees with one's eyes in an even better form. Also, I gained a wider understanding of the life of the Tamil community living in our areas,

I was able to tell their story to society through these photos. I believe it is possible to pursue solutions to some of these problems through photographs. We also gained a lot of experience. The way we worked as a team, the way we faced various challenges, and so on, we received a lot of important lessons for life.

## A Few Words on “*Thè Kahata*”

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**L**aunched at the Lionel Wendt Art Gallery Colombo, in September 2020, the “*Thè Kahata*,” photography exhibition displayed 100 striking photographs captured by 40 young men and women from their lives in the hill country.

When considering the photography exhibition as a whole, it wove a story around the day-to-day lives of the Tamil community who live and work in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka. This is not the kind of story that is narrated by researchers or other such professionals who visit the area as outsiders. This story is being brought to us by a group of young men and women who themselves live in the hill country. In other words, this is their own story, one that they know too well. To be honest, this is the most impressive collection of photographs I have ever seen regarding this community. Actually, I feel that this is the most powerful discourse related to this community that I have seen or read to date.

As a researcher and a university lecturer, I have read many articles written by many academics and researchers on this community’s origins, history, their lifestyle and politics. However, I realise that when compared with them, what these young people have expressed as a visual discourse is more powerful, genuine and visceral. In my opinion, the caption given for one of the photographs ideally epitomises this entire exhibition. It says- “This is poverty; not simplicity.” In a nutshell, these young people are sharing the story of their lives, bound in poverty and mired in numerous other challenges that are so difficult to overcome.

This is not the story you see of paradise that is usually found in tourists' flyers and colour postcards. This series of photographs exposes the unfortunate reality hidden behind those myths. During the exhibition, none of the photographers spoke. However, I looked at each of the displayed photographs two or three times. Then I realised that the reason for the silence was that they had already communicated their stories visually through these powerful photographs.

There was nothing further to say.

There is another discourse we face through these photographs. That is the story of the deceit, hypocrisy and stupidity so deeply rooted in Sri Lankan politics. What made these young people present their real life story in such a sorrowful manner in 2020? It is clear that from the post-colonial period to date, national politics has done nothing meaningful to save this community from their unfortunate circumstances. Moreover, the All Ceylon Estate Workers Union and other such political groups who claim to represent this community too have only further trapped these people in poverty.

When I saw these photographs, they reminded me of famous Indian Photographer Raghu Rai's captures of the numerous refugee camps established marginally in various locations of India. (A few years ago, the Department of Social Sciences of the University of South Asia exhibited a part of Raghu Rai's collection, as a part of an academic curriculum.) In that case, what Raghu Rai photographed were refugee camps, whereas these young people have photographed their own day-to-day surroundings. They show their own homes, their surroundings, and their own kin. These are not refugee camps and they are not refugees. They are Sri Lankan citizens.

As I feel, the main question these young people are trying to raise from their photography is - who is responsible for their plight? It is unfortunate that half of the people who hold the responsibility for this suffering live among them, and the balance live among us.

**Prof. Sasanka Perera**

University of South Asia  
Patitha.lk/ 26.09.2020

## *The Kahata:* Pain through the artists' lens

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**T**here was this one question practically everyone asked at the exhibition. That was: 'Why are you just focusing on sadness? What about happiness?' 'Take a look- these photographs show only suffering and hopelessness. They create a sense of regret.' There were people who also made this kind of heavy comment. We had the answers already. 'There are lots of others to show you happiness: In fact-they practically represent happiness. What we wanted to do was to show you the underlying misery and show you the truth. We wanted to say that happiness is far away. To show the world that sorrow lies at the heart of the happiness the others show off. A capture of dreamy scenery from a tea plantation does not show you the knotted roots. But if you take a look at those roots closely, you may glimpse the sheer misery hidden beneath.'

That is S. Sri Devi, a young school teacher from Uva Highlands Bandarawela, sharing her experience as a contributor for this exhibition displaying photographs taken by youth from the estates. She is speaking from just outside the long, wide hall of the Kathiresan Kovil in Thalawakele. A photograph taken by Sri Devi too was among the 100 exhibits. These young photographers, who were from Badulla and Nuwara Eliya districts, and represented the estate workers' community, were beginners. None of them possessed



their own cameras. A young community of photography enthusiasts from Atampitiya and Uva Highlands Estates in the Badulla district and from Logie and Holyrood Estates in the Nuwara Eliya district had taken part in this exhibition, by contributing content. Expert trainers Ajith Senevirathne and Nadishka Ranasinghe conducted training sessions on photography and photo-editing while inspiring and motivating the young participants.

Lahiru Kithalagama, a poet and activist and the coordinator for the project stated that it was no easy task to pick just a hundred from approximately forty five thousand vibrant visuals depicting the rhythm of life among the hills. These moments were fixed for the world to witness so as never to fade over the space of time.

“The up-country Tamil community represents a significant portion of Sri Lankan economy. Even though Ceylon tea is so popular, no one talks about these people who have been underprivileged for 200 years. Therefore, we wanted to initiate a discussion about them. We felt that it should reach the policy level.” Kithalagama the poet explores the origins of yet another poem.

### **Rebellion is possible**

“We chose art over conflict as a means of rebellion. We chose photography specifically because it would suit this young group. In a way we also gave them a sort of vocational training. Now, these youth have made a name within the estates because they know how to take photos. But that is not the biggest task. We made them understand that art could be used as a tool to initiate change within society.” While Lahiru Kithalagama went on to describe the extent of the change, there were indicators of some minor issues. While they were working on preparing the hall of the Kathireshan Kovil to hang the photographs, shadowy figures seemed to hover in the atmosphere and seemed to ask “what is this?” and “what is the purpose of doing something like this?” That is where the irony arises. One had only to glance at the exhibition line up and feel the misery that

was so prevalent. Like the painting by Cézanne, "The house of the hanged man." The atmosphere was of sorrow, gloom and loneliness. Their struggle for a daily wage of Rs 1000/- that had stalled along the way... old news of political discussions about granting them ownership of their homes...the struggle to win respect that has not progressed at all...

The bitterness of life is not as satisfying as the bitterness of tea.

And so it is important to view the painfully artistic nature of their lives through their own perspective. "These photos should be lined up in order just like a film. Then it would one day be a memory about the beauty of the struggle," says M. Sivalingam, a writer from the hills. "The trees in these hills are calling us to our graves now. Before leaving the world behind, we want to tell these young ones to build up this withered society. The politicians from the hill country should try to present these photographs to the parliament, to those who have authority, to force them to confront the pain of a minority," says Sivalingam.

### **Awakening from inertia**

"Actually, this is not a photo exhibition for portraying problems. Our aim is to create social consciousness within ourselves about us." The owners of the photo credits say and they are not simply repeating something they have memorised. That was the honest feeling that had been born within them while covering every square inch of the hill country on foot, carrying a camera.

"We, who never bothered to consider society in-depth, learned to have a deeper understanding after this task," says Sri Devi, "These pictures depict our own lives. But all these days we never discussed these lives, nor the problems surrounding them, nor thought out of the box. When we framed those lives as photographs, we saw that compared to the rest of society we are living through misery and going backwards. With

this, we are hinting to our estate employers and the politicians from the hill country that this is the art behind our struggle," she says.

N. Priyadarshane from Hatton joined this programme while awaiting her A/L results and learned much from this experience. "When we saw what we see every day through these photos, we felt sorry for ourselves, thinking 'Is this our life?'" she says. "The people who came to see the exhibition were impressed with our skills. Yet the content made them sad," she stated further, showing how happiness and sorrow were focussed on the same point.

Young Yuwaraj too says that he is happy about getting an opportunity to explore the various challenges in his life through art. "Many people were saddened by viewing these. It was that sadness that pleased me. That is because this is a kind of rebellion against society in a way. Other people's lives are far better than ours. They have things that we do not have. We are showing everyone the suffering we have gone through for two hundred years."

Co ordinator M Pradeepan, who supported by translating for Yuveraj, added "Actually, the first thing they mentioned with us was their weariness. All of them were simply exhausted from living. It was not such a big deal to teach people who had never seen a camera to take photos. It is the impact that matters. The plantation owners visited the Kadireshan Kovil with the impression that they are going to see some sort of an exhibition. But seeing this gave them quite a shock. It is just like there is a deep pit in front of everyone, and when they lean to look inside, they see people who have fallen inside: That is the desired impact. On the other hand, we gave recognition to children of people who had no recognition," he says, with a vision about the future.

"Even Jeevan Thondaman (MP State Minister of Estate Housing and Community Infrastructure, General Secretary of the Ceylon Workers' Congress and advocate for the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka), who came to see the exhibition, was shocked. He said that

there were photographs of international quality in this collection. He also said that he is willing to help. However, the role of the politicians is not buying cameras for kids who can't afford to buy them. Through that they should help them win the fight for survival.' That is the feeling shining in the eyes of the proud photographers. Now, even without a camera, they have a vision. They have a viewpoint of their own and a struggle to succeed. You can watch it too and experience the same feeling.

**Lasantha De Silva**

Journalist

Anidda Newspaper/ 30.08.2020



# Tears in your teacup

## As yet unheard voices from Sri Lanka's plantation sector

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**O**ver decades, the name of Ceylon reached fame worldwide in reference to the Indian Ocean island's beauty, serenity and tea. Tea contributes to the backbone of this island nation's economy and in turn the foundation of the tea industry is its labour force made up of Indian origin Tamils whose ancestors were virtually slaves brought to Sri Lanka by the British centuries ago. This is a community for whom time has stood still, in terms of standards of life, development and human rights and who continue to be politically, economically and socially marginalised even in the current day and age.

*"Thé Kahata"* is a photography exhibition with a difference.

This exhibition features strikingly professional photographs from the estates brought to us not by established city artists, but by youth of the plantation sector themselves. The exhibition gives us at its rawest, a glimpse into how communities themselves experience life among the illusionary beauty, the raw challenge and the deep pathos of life in the plantation sector of Sri Lanka. Here we see how the upcountry Tamil community who pluck the tea, tend to the plantations and uphold the production process, benefit the least from the industry that fuels the economy of the entire country.

By numerous development indicators, this community is far behind compared to the rest of Sri Lanka. Bereft of some of the basic civic rights that other Sri Lankans have, and paid the lowest incomes in the country, members of these communities are often unable to even own the pitiable cramped "line rooms" they have lived in for generations. And as with most marginalised peoples, women of the plantation sector are the most exploited both in terms of income and rights. The struggle continues for the minimum daily wage of 1000/= rupees (around GBP 4/=) and workers continue to be paid only a few dollars a day for back breaking labour of picking and carrying 16-18kg of tea over one day, fully exposed to the elements, with women always being paid less than men. Discrimination faced by estate worker communities includes inequality in access to ownership of land and property, lack of basic infrastructural facilities such as a postal address for their homes, and prolonged statelessness with citizenship only having been granted to them as recently as 2003. Meaningful citizenship continues to be illusive in an environment where the plantation management have taken over many of the functions of the state such as sanitation, road access and rudimentary health care, to such an extent that even personal mail<sup>1</sup> is delivered to central offices and held there often without real accountability. Estate power dynamics are often such that even access to narratives from within the estates requires permission and the agreement of the estate management as though their human resources are in held in modern day slavery, as if "owned" by their employers.

*"Thé Kahata"* features photographs taken by 40 young youth of four selected tea estates of the up-country region namely Holyrood and Logy estates representing the Nuwara Eliya District, and Etampitiya and Uva Highland estates representing the Badulla District. A programme conducted by the Uva Shakti Foundation of Badulla held workshops training the youth with the technical knowhow on photography and creative photovoice concepts to effectively drive the communication of their narratives. The participating youth began through a process of social consciousness building, to better understand their social and political background with a vision towards social transformation. The process was carried through a full year in the midst of serious challenges due to the

1. <https://www.cpalanka.org/vilaasama-safeguarding-civil-rights-of-plantation-sector-workers/>

Easter Attacks in Sri Lanka and then more recently through the Covid19 pandemic. The enthusiastic youth (with ample support from their parents) were determined to capture and present visuals of their communities through their own lenses, by themselves. The final aim of the exercise was to initiate a discourse engaging the upcountry Tamil community in better social and economic development of their position in society; a subsidiary aim is empowering the youngsters with a professional photography qualification which would serve them well in future, both within and outside the estates, should they decide to follow such a career.

**The 'Thé Kahata' Exhibition in photojournalism from the estate sector was held at the Lionel Wendt from 26-27 September 2020.** The exhibition and the overall project which sought to empower estate sector youth and create an increased space for discourse on plantation community issues through photovoice communications, was facilitated by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in partnership with Strengthening Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka (SRP), a program co-financed by the European Union and German Federal Foreign Office.

The program owes its success also to the Uva Shakti Foundation of Badulla, together with the active involvement of the upcountry Tamil community and the collaboration of the Holyrood, Logy, Etampitiya and Uva Highlands Estates who permitted the workshops to be held in their estates, and also supported the program throughout, up to the exhibitions. Professional training in photography was provided by well-known photographers Ajith Seneviratne and Nadishka Ranasinghe

**Chandrika Gadiewasam and Nadeesha Paulis**

Freelance Journalists and Writers

Daily FT Newspaper/ 03.10.2020





# The Conscience of the Estate

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## The photographic exhibition called "*Thé Kahata*"

**T**he "*Thé Kahata*" exhibition was organised to bring home a message to the world: That things have not changed for over 200 years in the lives of the plantation community. Not in their infrastructures, not in their dwelling places. This photographic exhibition held at the Lionel Went Theater, Colombo 07, highlighted the inaccuracies of the conclusion that the politicians have come to that living conditions of the people in the plantations have been completely transformed through housing schemes.

*"Thé Kahata"* is a national level photographic exhibition featuring a selected collection of photographs captured by young people living in the Badulla and Nuwara Eliya districts in Sri Lanka. This exhibition was an open attempt to understand the richness of the plantations through the lenses of the young photographers. They themselves represented the community and were given the novel opportunity to narrate the hopes and aspirations of their people through the work of their captures. The exhibition drew criticism on certain social media platforms saying that it only exposed the dark side of the plantations and had deliberately covered up and ignored the development projects. The organisers maintain that while they are open to criticism it should be constructive criticism to be effective.

Two young photographers who had contributed photographs to the photo exhibition received an opportunity to work in the studios of Dominic Sansoni, the renowned Sri Lankan photographer. Many of the other photographers have been invited by various media institutions in the island to work with them.

The photographs on exhibition epitomise the entrenched hardships and struggles of plantation workers today. Smiling faces of little children living in the plantations take our minds back to a place bearable once again, after the onslaught of photographs of life in congested "line" rooms with very little space, the weight of the baskets on bent heads as they struggle through the difficult terrain to weigh the tea leaves and a life devoid of the most basic amenities of life.

Cooking in a small nook where the toilet and kitchen are adjacent to each other, parents trudging saddled with baskets of plucked tea leaves, as the children walk to school, women taking a sip of tea from discarded bottles of liquor with the liquor label sitting on a rock and taking their meagre meals in discomfort are all photographs that merely depict the ordinary day-to-day events in lives of the community.

The photographs also indirectly illustrate that it is the plantation workers who have paved the way for the luxurious life for the trade unionists who live in luxury with millions acquired in membership fees...

In fact, the photographs only display a facet of the issues and challenges faced by the plantation workers. There are deeper issues that cannot be explained further and these will need to be highlighted through the camera lens as well in the future.

The identities of the society we represent in the dying world were explored and displayed as valuable. The forgotten arts of dance that are becoming extinct as culture and identity dilutes, were duly fixed as visuals.

It is important to have the struggles of the people in the plantation areas on display in a national art gallery such as this. The public and community life of the plantations can

be easily understood through the photographs, which transcend beyond. The facial expressions of the people we see in the photographs communicate more powerfully than words.

There is an opinion that the problems of the people are taken up and highlighted by politicians. In fact, this goes further with artists, writers and even civil society activists highlighting them in their own respective mediums. Photography is also a medium and a language that civil society should make an effort to highlight. Former Member of Parliament Mylvaganam Thilakarajah, who was present at the event, said that he sees this as an exhibition of the 'ignored people'.

After 18 months of training, the young photographers exhibited their first "*Thé Kahata*" photo exhibition in the year 2020 in Nuwara Eliya on August 23 and on August 29, September 14 and 15 in Badulla. They have captured through their lens incidents that are directly related to them in real life. Each of these photographs tells us a story and conveys a message to us, the photographers have been able to present the evidence of where we are, and how far behind the plantation community is placed in society. While this is the reality of the people in the plantation areas, we need to change the future of this narrative.

This immense responsibility falls on the shoulders of the wider society.

"This photo exhibition is the result of a year-long effort by us. We have taken these photographs to explain the livelihood of the people in the plantation areas." A young photographer commented that out of 40,000 photographs taken by 40 photographers divided into two groups, only 100 high quality photographs were displayed at the exhibition.

For the past two years, photographers have worked hard to articulate the plight of the society they represent. "This is not just a random photograph; it is a seed that is planted in us in relation to the life of the people with the hope that those seeds will grow into a large tree in the future. There is a need for us to highlight the plight of the people.

The reason we have not progressed is because of the reliance and dependency on politicians, from that day till now.”

The people of the plantation areas have been facing various problems for the last 200 years. The purpose of this exhibition was to make people understand the problems they face through photographs. Writers and artists, especially young people, living in Colombo have highlighted the problems of the plantation community from various angles. Our main objective is to make other communities living in this country aware of the problems we face and the real situation in this sector.

Displaying the housing schemes that have been implemented, will only fulfil the aspirations of politicians and if we had done so, they would have criticized us for doing a political campaign. The photographs provide us the visuals of the development work done or not done for the plantation sector in the last 200 years and what the estate companies have done. The communities are so backward that some people even question to what era the photographs belong. The people from the community who are now living in Colombo detaching themselves from the plantation sector are the ones who say that this sector is now developed. When we place these photographs before the plantation community, they are ready to take us to areas where the situation is even worse. This simply means that there are even darker realities in the plantations.

People who claim that the plantation sector has developed can learn lessons from this exhibition. It is not correct to measure development by considering only one area in the plantation sector as an example. Some people can only criticize. The coordinator of the exhibition says that despite the criticism, the efforts will continue.

Special mention is due for the support of the European Union and the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs that co-financed the Strengthening Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka Programme, to Uva Shakti Foundation and the Centre for Policy Alternatives for this exhibition which was held in Colombo on the 26th and 27th September 2020.

**K. Prasanna**

Journalist

Udaya Sooriyan Newspaper/ 01.10.2020



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## What follows from love

**A** couple of years ago, I toured the hill country along with a few colleagues as we had a new programme in mind. The first step was to find a number of youth, candidates for this project. We had given them some prior notice and there was a large number of eager applicants waiting for us at the allocated locations. In fact, there had been a notice circulated which said “We are seeking applicants from among estate sector youth for a new programme in Photography training”

The youngsters who had turned up represented Atampitiya and Uva Highlands Estates in the Badulla district and Logie and Holyrood Estates in the Nuwaraeliya district. They came hugging their certificates, awards, and files of their credentials. Finally, we had to shortlist ten applicants from each estate, making a total of forty.

So this is how the *The Kahata* exhibition started out.

These youngsters had never touched or possibly even seen a digital camera, and may have not dreamed it possible that at the end of the programme their works would be displayed in areas around the country and finally in the famous Lionel Wendt Art Centre in Colombo. "We must never stop dreaming, dreams provide the nourishment for the soul just as a meal does for the body," the famous writer Paulo Coelho had said, and we retold this to our young team, because for any success to be achieved there has to be a faith in dreams. Regardless of the many challenges and obstacles faced nevertheless they persevered with determination in following their dream.

The curriculum included such areas as foundational photography skills, art, use of art for social change, and conflict and conflict analysis and we shared materials with them on these areas. Thus began the deep discourse which expanded their social and political consciousness. The result, citizens with social responsibility. The discussion opened with: as a young person or as a photographer what is it we can do? What should we do? And the final decision was unanimous: They would walk through their communities and try their best to capture the hitherto untold stories of their lives, which they would relay through photography. This story which society did not know had to be taken to society, through the visual means. The world knew about the beautiful and famous legend of "Ceylon Tea"- but did it know the backstory of how it comes to you? Within Sri Lankan society was there a discourse of trying to understand the people who carried the burden of tea? As citizens of this country, did they get their place among its people?

That is how we got these youngsters from the hill country together to take their story to the world, through this "*Thè Kahata*" photography exhibition.

Upto now I have introduced you to this "*Thè Kahata*."

Now let's turn to the present

"Can you share your sorrow and solve your problems? / What do you gain from photographing their problems? / This is also some project/Why does this only show sorrow? / Is there no development in this society? / You have not shown the development

of the people in estates?" are some of the comments that reached us during the intervals of the exhibition. From Sinhala society as well as Tamil society, equally. That is true. We know that problems are not solved by taking photographs of them. We know that it is not enough to solve the problems faced by a community for the last 200 years, within one day. We don't have the power to do that, nor the access to those with that kind of power. While through voting the citizens authority has been derived and a set of representatives are functioning in parliament and in the government, we know that they can address these problems gradually.

During discussions after the exhibitions in Talawakele and Badulla, the critique from members of the Tamil community was that the development that had happened was not showcased. This question arose in the Colombo exhibition too. On that note, I'd like to share the answer given by S Shri devi who was a young teacher representing the photographers, "What do you actually mean by development? Politicians representing the up country people and people who have left the hill country and gone on to develop themselves, often claim that some development has happened. They may be ashamed to speak about the real situation. This exhibition shows the real situation we faced after trekking through the estates. These are the questions faced by our communities even today. These are not photographs that we have made up. If one person develops himself or herself does it mean that whole of society is better off? We don't want to keep showing these problems again and again. We want to come up with solutions which banish the problems. We want to create awareness in people outside"

In truth what is the concept of development that is in the minds of the upcountry communities? Can you say that a toilet built by some NGO, or a road built by the estate management is development and then wash your hands off the matter? Have the problems of housing, land, education, health etc been properly addressed? Does society outside understand the problems faced by these communities, simply by not having addresses to their homes? While this can be discussed in reports that are pages long, this isn't the space to do that. The efforts taken by these youngsters is merely to bring this to the attention of society. Revolutionary changes have never happened in society



overnight. None of the privileges we currently enjoy as citizens have been won overnight or handed to us on a platter. They have been won by relentless struggles, and by blood, sweat and tears over a long time of effort. It may be that someday they too will be able to enjoy the privileges that we now have.

So this is only a starting point in creating social discourse and some social consciousness towards these efforts.

The struggle continues, where people descend to the roads with our demands written on boards. This struggle is needed. This was an experiment in how the struggle could be helped by art creating awareness using visual support. How do we push a social discourse about problems while ensuring that violence is avoided? We can use non-violent direct actions. How do we do that? How do we advance people's attitudes towards that? There is a deep meaning behind the photography exhibition. There is a discourse not visible on the outside.

And it's true that there are so many poems and songs written about the hill country communities. Some of them are illusions. Some are results. According to American Professor Martha Nussbaum, it is not producing creations that sympathise with some segment of society, it is initiating socio-political development through a sympathetic coverage of their realities, that matters. (Amarakeethi Liyanage, in the foreword to Kayanna Liyaanna) So it is the inquiry on how to bring out such a discourse through such a clear medium as photography as is happening now through this *Thè Kahata* exhibition.

Certainly, there may be instances of mistakes and omissions in photographic norms. Is this from professional photographers? It's not relevant as to how long they have been handling cameras, we can understand from subsequent developments that these photographs lead to a certain advancement in social consciousness. There are instances where a community has analysed public life. There are instances where certain cross sections of society discussed this with us with sensitivity. Not only that, there were a number of instances where through social media we were requested to provide information, from many parts of the island. So isn't this a good start?

I stated all of this not to brag about *Thè Kahata*. This is a timely intervention to help out our brethren in the estate communities. I wanted to appreciate the dedicated efforts of these youngsters whose names are on the other side of the photographs.

There are a number of people who contributed to this group effort. The main stakeholders are the hill country community, and these youngsters. The support given by all the estate administrations represented by these youngsters was invaluable. The program Strengthening Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka (SRP), the Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Uva Shakti Foundation and the Suva Shakti Institute contributed a great deal to the success of this endeavour and prominent photographers Ajith Seniviratne and Nadishka Ranasinghe too gave their fullest support. Apart from that there are many whose tireless efforts contributed to the success of this exhibition. We extend towards them, our unfailing gratitude.

I take your leave with an observation by Professor Sasanka Perera:

“The photos here are an impetus to the initiation of a discourse on the problems of the upcountry communities. I believe these are the most powerful photographs I have ever seen of the upcountry communities and this would be one of the most meaningful discourses opened.”

Finally, I want to say “*Thè Kahata*” isn’t just a photography exhibition. It is what follows from love and humanity.

**Lahiru Kithalagama**

Writer/ Researcher  
samabima.com/ 21.01.2021



Photography training workshop



Photography training workshop



Photo taking session in the field



Photo taking session in the field



Photo taking session in the field



conflict analysis workshop





Photography Exhibition Preparation



Photography Exhibition Preparation

















C P A P u b l i c a t i o n

