

Thursday At The Good Market



Massages being performed by blind persons

Thusare Talking Hands

Ishikawa Naohito, Chief Advisor to the Japanese NGO Action for Peace, Capability and Sustainability, met a blind person while working in Nuwara Eliya, providing relief for persons affected by landslides. "He shared with me the difficulties he faces in making a living," Ishikawa said. In Japan, it is quite normal for blind people to engage in this kind of vocation. "A quarter of massage therapists in Japan are visually impaired. We realized that the blind population in Sri Lanka does not have many avenues for working and making a living," he added. The NGO worked with the Seeduwa Vocational Training Centre in association with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to send one blind person, Sanjeewa, to Japan to be trained as

a vocational trainer by Japanese shiatsu Master Saburo Sasada. "Over a period of 10 months he learnt the skills and came back ready to spread the knowledge he had gained," he said. Even after training, however, these blind persons had trouble finding work. "In Sri Lanka, there are many barriers regarding massages. Some people are uncomfortable with being touched by blind people. The people who frequent Good Market are well-educated and are keen on checking out progressive movements. We have been here for three weeks, and hope to gain a customer base over time," he added. The Thusare Talking Hands Shiatsu Centre is located at 103/12, Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7, and can be found at the Good Market every Thursday.

Text and Pictures by Imaad Majeed

Having opened to the public last December, The Good Market has swiftly built a reputation among the environmentally conscious population of Colombo as a weekly festival of natural foods, local art and crafts, and live entertainment. What sets the Market apart from the average pola is that it is a curated event, with each stall serving some good to society. The Market allows small and medium sized entrepreneurs to sell their products without giving up an arm and a leg to commercial institutions. Colombo has an increasing population of educated consumers that do not want to feed

their families pesticides and preservatives, and so the Market has carved this niche and secured a loyal customer base.

The Good Market brings ethical producers and ethical consumers together in an environment that is open, where sunlight abolishes the need for lighting, and the breeze replaces the need for air conditioning. Also, being a volunteer-driven event, there is a sense of community that has been nurtured by the organizers which is noticeable to those who have been part of the project from its inception. The Sunday Leader spoke to the vendors to learn their stories and what they make of this venture.



A Good Market consumer looks into the CCA stall

Cancer Care Association

Dr Samadhi Rajapaksa, President of Cancer Care Association (CCA), finds the Good Market to be the ideal location for a good cause, through the sale of spices and rice. "Here, we are in an open environment, and the people are receptive," Dr Samadhi said. "We can talk to people and exchange ideas." It's a good environment. The CCA was set up in 2003, and is based in Colombo with branches in Anuradhapura and Galle districts. The CCA set up their stall at the Good Market just four weeks ago. "We chose this location because

it attracts a different type of individual. The consumers who frequent the Market are people who want to contribute to the good of society. It is visited by good people with open minds. They want to buy something organic and traditional, and they are for the cause," he added. All the proceeds are donated to the CCA for the hospice, drugs, and investigations that cancer patients have to go through. "Our first four weeks have gone very well. It is very affordable as a vendor to set up at the Good Market. We would not be able to do as well at a department store or other shopping platforms."



Locally Sourced - Locally Made - Blessed with Love



Crocheted hats, accessories and cushion covers

Crocheted for a Cause

Norwa has always had a penchant for crocheting work. "When we started this business, we could not find the labour willing to work. I visited orphanages and was inspired to find my labour among those disadvantaged because they gain from this as well," she said. She now employs women with special needs, the disabled, and those neglected by society from the Colombo area to create her products. "We teach them the skills behind the art of cro-

cheting over a period of six months and sell the end product. We do not have any outside source of funding; all investment has been out of our own pockets." Norwa said. When asked why she chose the Good Market to sell her wares, she said, "People do not buy crocheted items. We could not sell anywhere else. The customers at Good Market are mostly foreigners who are quite keen on our efforts and the cause. Many will donate instead of buying any product". She said that when they approached department stores with their product, the high-end stores were not interested in the product or the cause. "The big fashion chains expect us to give away our product for a meagre amount. We want our freedom to have a better life, and through the freedom that the Good Market affords us we can do that. This is a time-consuming process and our workers deserve a fair price for their hard work," she added.



Dasun and his drums

Drum House

Dasun Fernando did not learn art and music at school. "To me, art and music is everywhere. This Earth is my school. That's what I believe," Dasun said. After finishing school, he moved to Hikkaduwa, a place he refers to as the melting pot of "tribal music and art in Sri Lanka". "Percussion has become my passion," he said. "I believe in many lives, and this is not my last life involved in the arts. This is a long

story. I am here on this Earth to make music, to make drums and inspire people". Sourcing his materials from locations down south, Dasun uses mahogany and wood from jak trees for his instruments. "I learnt to play these instruments while I was at Hikkaduwa, and was enraptured by the sound," he said, "but soon I became interested in the body of the instrument and not just the sound." Scouring the Internet, he found

catalogues on drums from around the world, and decided to go ahead and give it a try. "I chose the Good Market as a location because, even though this is a new platform for Sri Lanka, I have seen similar markets when I travelled to Europe," he added. He would much rather sell his product at the Good Market than waste his money through a commercial institution. "This crowd enjoys the music," he added.



Biopower Lanka

Biopower Lanka is a Control Union Certified bio fertilizer manufacturer. Having started their research and development in 2004, the company has grown into a trusted source for organic fertilizer. Sathya Kandaswamy, Microbiologist at Biopower Lanka, claims their product is completely organic with no synthesized chemicals. "It is composed of beneficial microorganisms. The soil is a basic input for agriculture. Microorganisms add life to the soil by their presence and activities; even an earthworm is of value. Chemical fertilizers will not nourish the soil. They provide a short term yield, but in the long run it will leach out of the field and contaminate ground water," Sathya observed. Their product Biogold is a liquid formulation that fixes atmospheric nitrogen in order to control the health of plants by preventing disease. When asked why the enterprise chose Good Market as a location, she said, "The chemical fertilizer groups are too huge to fight against, and it is difficult to educate the masses. We do not need to educate the consumers at Good Market because they are already aware; there are those

who are interested in organic farming, and sustainable agriculture. The Good Market is well-organized". Sustaining a bio-farming industry is difficult as agriculturists want to see short term returns on their investment. "People want bigger tomatoes; they can't wait for the effects of sustainable bio-farm-

ing," she added. Organic marketing, let alone farming, is becoming a global phenomenon as people are concerned about where their food is coming from. "We encourage people to use compost, but we insist that this product is different because it is carefully formulated," Sathya informed.

Biopower Lanka's range of products



Dhammika serves Soursop juice to his customers

Natural Juices and Bamboo handicraft by Dhammika

When the Golden Key scandal left thousands of people in the dirt, Dhammika was among those who had trusted their hard earned money. He did not give up on his talents, and continued to work with bamboo, creating works of art to be sold. Eventually, he decided to sell juices as he was keen on the benefits of natural foods. He has often felt like quitting this business and finding

employment that would provide him quick money, but he has kept at it because quick money will not help him. He is now established as the source of fruit juices at the Good Market and has secured a loyal customer base. He wakes up at 3 a.m. to prepare the products he sells at the Market. He brings down produce from Dambulla to make his juices and supports his family through this venture.



Sunara teaches kids handicrafts

PLAYSHOP

Sunara Jayamanne is a multi-talented artist and DJ who started visiting the Good Market at the invitation of a friend who was running her own stall. "At first I started up as an artist, making my own things within the Artist Stall and over time my friend saw my material and asked the organizers if I could conduct an arts and crafts workshop for kids in my own stall," she said. She feels that it is a collaborative platform. "I've been a part of the Market for about five months now and I can say Good Market is a really cool place. There are lots of new things and new people with good ideas that are environmentally conscious."



Marco and Nilan with a Filipino VSO volunteer

Fund raiser for Filipino victims of Typhoon Haiyan

Pia Dissanayaka and her two sons are raising funds to help families in the Philippines. Her sons insisted that they help and so they set up a stall at the Good Market. "It's great that it is outdoors, the concept has a good message that is less materialistic than shopping malls. The people who visit are nice and friendly. We are collecting funds to provide relief for those affected by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. We are here because my two boys, Marco and Nimal, wanted to sell their toys and books to raise funds for those affected."