



Ukkunna

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It is a true story happened sixty years ago based on the discrimination of child in a family. Kunarasa is the true name of my uncle's third son. The name implies that he is the king of a good character. So he is in his character. Kunarasa was nicknamed Ukkunna. He is the third child in a family of four. The first two children were boys and the last a daughter. A month after Kunarasa was born to my Uncle who was working in Ceylon government railways as Foreman plate layer (FPL) met with an accident while on duty, and was in the hospital for treatment for the fracture in the right leg. My aunt was upset and was of the view that the new third born son has brought bad luck to the family. Before Kunarasa got the nickname, there was a Sinhalese servant in the name of Ukkuna in uncles' house. He was a lazy boy and never understands what is being asked to do work. Things have to be repeated thrice for him before he acts on it. Kunarasa was poor in his studies and did not show much interest in learning. When the servant boy Ukkunna left uncle's house after stealing some items, the responsibility to do all odd jobs fell on Kunarasa. He was twelve years when he stopped going to school and started doing housework. My aunty treated him as a servant and showed partiality on him when compared to other children. She was under the impression he was an unlucky child with poor intelligence. He scored very poor marks in the class. The fourth child in my uncle's family was a daughter Rajeswary, and everyone cared for her. My uncle got a promotion as Engineer when she was born. That was enough for her to get right royal treatment in the family. She was a proud girl. Rajeswary treated Ukkunna as a servant and not as an elder brother and treated him shabbily. My aunt gave him food from what was left over.

My mother and my sister did not like the way my aunty treated Ukkunna showing partiality on him. Ukkunna collected water from the tap, went to the adjoining forest and fetched firewood, did the marketing, looked after the garden washed the toilette, etc. My father was working in Puttalam Kachcheri. Whenever we go to Jaffna and return by train, we stop at Uncle's house in Anuradhapura for lunch. Being an officer in the Railway, my uncle had a government quarters close to the Railway station, just next to the railway crossing on the main road. Ukkunna was always there at the station to carry our bags. He respected our family because we liked him so

much because he was polite and very helpful. We did not see as to why uncles' family treated him differently. The hate towards the family made him a boy to take vengeance.

When we stop over at uncle's house, we had lunch. My aunty ordered Ukkunna to wash the plates and arrange the kitchen and eat what was left over. I was friendly with Ukkunna. Normally I sit with him when he has his lunch. There were three papaya trees in the house. Ukkunna climbs the trees without fear and plucks the fruits for me.

About half a mile from my uncle's house, there was a historical tank named Nuwara Wewa. It is the largest tank in Anuradhapura constructed by [King Valagamba](#) in the 2nd century AD. It is 7 km (4 miles) across and 40 ft deep. Ukkunna took me to view the tank and pluck the lotus flowers that filled the tank. He was a good swimmer and exhibited his skills to me. I warned him that the tank might be full of crocodiles as such he should be careful in swimming in the tank. Ukkunna was fearless and can swim a long distance without fear. He told me a story about the tank. The king who built the tank had two daughters. The giant that protected the tank did not permit the king to build the tank unless he sacrificed one of his two daughters. The king fulfilled the giant's request and continued building the tank. There are many such stories narrated by the residents of the area he said. He knows in and out of all sections of the forest. I told him that I had read such a story in a children's book called "Ambulimama" as such I am used to such stories.

Ukkunna is good at aiming the birds and squirrels with stones using a catapult. Whenever he goes to the forest, he carries the catapult with him. One day he fearlessly swam in the tank full of crocodiles. Plucked the red lotus flowers and took them to the Buddha Vihara located closer to the bund. He brought the lotus yams to cook and eat. I told him that it was too dangerous to swim in the tank and pluck the yams as he would have got entangled in the lotus plant.

During school holidays, my father spoke to my uncle to send Ukkunna to our house in Puttalam. He was happy to come to our house and play with me. I took him and introduced him to my friends. I introduced Cader, the boy who stole my Parker 51 pen. He warned him severely not to touch any of my things. Ukkunna was not happy to get back home, but at the request of my aunty, she was forced to return home

After returning home within a week, we never expected Ukkunna would do a daring thing. I knew that he was a quick-tempered person. He never thinks of what action he will take. One day there

was a call for my father to his office from my uncle to find out whether Ukkunna returned to Puttalam. My father was shocked to hear that inquiry from my uncle.

My father sent him by bus to Anuradhapura and gave him some pocket money for his expenses. Two day's later after Ukkunna left Puttalam my father was but was shocked to hear Uncle reporting that Ukkunna is missing. They have reported the case to the Police. The police inspector Perera who was working in Puttalam, a friend of my father, now worked in Anuradhapura Police. My father gave him a call and told him about Ukkunna's relationship with us. " It is a habit for the children of Ukkunna's age to leave the house when they have a small dispute with the parents and later after realizing their mistake normally return home after few days. The inspector made First information Report (FIR) and started searching for Ukkunna. My father decided to go to Anuradhapura and help uncles' family in the search. I too joined him to search for Ukkunna.

When my father spoke to Ukkunna's parents we came to know that the day Ukkunna disappeared, aunty slapped him for being harsh on their daughter. After that incident, aunty ordered him to chop firewood, wash the dishes and ordered him to get some firewood from the forest and come home quickly. Last they knew that he went out with a rope and knife, dressed in a sarong and went to collect firewood.

My father questioned the uncle as to whether any serious incident took place between Ukkunna and aunty. He said that he returned from office after 4 pm and aunty complained that Ukkunna was missing from home for more than three hours. He said that " Ukkunna went out in anger saying that he will teach all a lesson for the way they treat him in the house." He was arguing with aunty for slapping Rajeswary. My father immediately knew that something serious would have happened. He informed his friend Inspector Perera about the incident, who cross-examined Ukkunna's parents.

" Now that unexpectedly an incident has happened, Once Ukkunna returns home, please humanly treat him and don't be harsh on him. Remember that he is an also your son. Do not show partiality" My father advised Ukkunna's parents. They have respect for my father.

After Ukkunna was missing three days passed quickly. One day morning my father wanted to go for a walk to the tank bund. I too insisted that I will join him. I had the habit of reading detective novels in Tamil as such I had an investigative mind. When we approached the tank, suddenly a hare jumped out of the bush and ran. The crows started making a big noise. I looked in the

direction from where I heard the noise from the birds. The bad smell I got, upset me. I told my father about the smell and walked with my father in the direction of the smell.

After we walked about fifty yards into the forest, the bad smell of a dead body increased and was unbearable.

I told my father "let us get back home."

He said " No let us find out where the smell is coming from" and we proceeded walking. Suddenly I saw a body hanging half naked in a matured a Neem tree full of white flowers.

"Appah look there. Oh my god!. That is Ukkunna's body. He has committed suicide using the rope he carried. Let us call the Police immediately ", I shouted.

"True. Ukkunna was dead. His tummy was burst. Crows were eating the intestine and eyes. Let us go back and inform Inspector Perera. You don't say a word to Ukkunna's parents. Let the Police handle it." My father was upset but did not show it out to me. We both quickly walked out of place.

I started shivering out of fear. It was the first time I have seen a body hanging in a tree in that condition. That was a rare experience for me. I have only read detective story where killing has taken place. I never expected that Ukkunna will commit suicide using the rope he took to collect firewood. I saw his knife he took to chop wood lying in the ground. There were some lotus flowers under the tree proving the fact that he would have taken a swim in the tank, plucked some lotus flowers before he died. Probably he would have prayed in front of Buddha statute before he hanged himself. His tummy was burst open with intestines displayed. The eyes were damaged by the crows. Because of many trees surrounding the Neem tree from where Ukkunna's body was hanging, no one would have seen the body other than me and my father. That was a lonely place hardly anyone go to that area. I was sure that only Ukkunna knows that area well as he often go there to collect firewood. I have seen that Neem Tree before . It was the tallest matured tree.

Mr. Perera arrived at the scene with two constables. My father reported the whole story to Inspector Perera. Within an hour the police removed the body to do a post-mortem.

Inspector Perera took a special interest in the case because of his friendship with my father. He told my father that he should have taken my uncle and aunty to the police station for cross-examination, but because he knew my father well, he confined the investigation of the uncle's house. He took Ukkunna's parents to the bedroom locked the door and cross-examined them about two hours, He concluded that it was because of the bad treatment is given to Ukkunna that

the Ukkuna was forced to kill himself. My father warned me not to open my mouth if the police question me. He knew that I am furious with the aunty the way she treated Ukkunna.

My aunty's cry could not be controlled. Was she trying to pretend that she is worried over Ukkunna's death? My mother and sister both came down from Puttalam to pacify her. " I thought to myself, why is she crying? She is responsible for my friend Ukkunna's pathetic death. She never treated him as her son, showing partiality with other children. What wrong has he done to them?" , My mother warned me not to express my sorrow in front of the crowd.

The day Ukkunna committed suicide was a bad day. My mother was not happy about the "Panchami thithi." She said to my sister that she feared that bad things might follow Ukkunna's death. On my mother's advice, when the body was taken to the cemetery for cremation, they kept a chicken in the coffin as a sacrifice. My mother, although had such beliefs, she, at times comes predicts things that may happen. My aunty told my mother that after Ukkunna's death she heard noises in the night in the house as if someone was walking in the house and coughing and moving things in the Kitchen. They were scared to get out of the room once they go to bed. A Hindu priest was brought down to do puma to drive away the bad from the house After Ukkunna's death they did not want to live in that house. They moved out of that house due to fear.

Six months quickly passed after Ukkunna's death. We came to know that Ukkunna's mother has conceived. My mother said that Ukkunna is going to be reborn in the family to take vengeance. I told my mother not to say such things as my father do not like such talks.

One day morning Uncle and aunty came in a car to Puttalam on their way to Colombo. We came to know that in Anuradhapura hospital, they have instructed them aunty should be taken to Colombo hospital and operate out the fetus. At Puttalam, she had severe pain and was rushed to Puttalam hospital. It was very unfortunate the doctor advised to take her to Colombo as soon as possible. It was too late. Her soul left when the car was parked under the tree in front of our house. My mother wanted them to take the body back to Anuradhapura, but my father insisted that the funeral should be held in Puttalam as the Aunty's soul left the world from our house. Aunty's funeral was followed by three funerals one after another within a year. The first to go was my mother's father. The next was my father and finally Ukkunna's father.

I was living in Puttalam house with fear always thinking about Ukkunna. One day I dreamt Ukkunna is talking to me" Don't worry machchan, I will not do any harm to you. You are my friend."

It is a true story that happened fifty years ago and stuck to my mind like glue, and I cannot forget it.
