

Perseverance And Philanthropy

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In the town of Tissamaharama, primarily sustained by its agriculture, is where Samapala Manamperi calls home. His acumen to not only engineer and drive his own ventures but efforts to meet the multiple needs of people have earned him recognition from both the town's people and the clergy as an entrepreneur and philanthropist.

"I began by driving a lorry owned by my uncle while conducting my own business," states Samapala of his modest beginnings. From thereon he contrived to grow exponentially from renting a mill and transporting rice, to later purchasing five lorries and gaining ownership of the mill. It was in 1996 however that through his perseverance he purchased buses from a leasing company. "At first they only brought down four buses. I got the first bus from that lot. since then I have grown to 16 buses, although now it is difficult to gain permits," explains Samapala. His fleet of buses proved to be much more than a business venture. With three buses commuting from Kirinda-Bundala, providing the only transport available there, it is also a free service for up to 600 school children on a daily basis. "During bus strikes where children needed to get to their exams on time, or during funerals to transport crowds, I have provided these buses free of charge," adds Samapala on the occasions of service rendered.

Incidentally he is a member of the Director Board of the Bus Owners Association and also runs a Kataragama-Kandy bus services which he regards as a valuable service with night buses from Kandy and Kataragama. "I do not allow the buses to become overused and old, and make sure that they remain new and comfortable. If one breaks down I have two extra buses as replacements," he states.

Aside from his services to the transport system, Samapala holds a pivotal role amongst the farming community servicing 200-300 farmers. Lending tractors to plough lands, machines for harvesting and funds to construct paddy fields and to purchase fertilizer, pesticides and other necessities, he is the provider of ample resources for its sustenance. Once the harvest is packaged and stocked transport is provided free of cost to deliver to the market till the next harvest season. Expenses are then deducted and the balance of profits distributed amongst farmers. Adding further emphasis to his benevolent nature he runs the presidency of the Dayaka Sabhawa of the Tissa Temple, and functions as the treasurer to the Perahera Pageant for Poson. His inclination to afford services beyond trading has led him to hold many other similar roles including membership in the Director Boards of the Merchant's

Association, and Commerce Committee, Treasurer of the Rice Producer's Committee, Outdoor Welfare Camp and Hospital Committee. "I believe that what I do is useful and that makes me happy," he says simply.

Prospects for the future are promising as Samapala steps into what he believes is a favourable economy. While establishing his company as a group of companies, Dilantha Group, he keeps a keen eye out for future ventures – needs to be met or services necessitated. "With the consumption of diesel increasing particularly during the harvest season the fuel station at Tissamaharama becomes crowded. I have already requested for a permit to set up another," he says of a more recent initiative. In the more distant future he hopes to gain further ground in both the transport and agriculture sectors of the region. Some of his aspirations are to be able to introduce luxury buses on the new highway, and on agriculture he says, "I hope to take that business forward too. The rice mills have helped the farmers prosper. We have a very good relationship with them, with 70 employees at the mills. I hope to introduce a mill to boil paddy which could provide jobs for 40-50 more people."

Similarly he aspires to further his involvement in non-profit services as well. "I have been able to come all this way as I have always been with the people of Tissamaharama and helped build the society," he acknowledges. In turn the people of Tissamaharama have shown their gratitude placing numerous accolades of appreciation in his hands. The Best Entrepreneur Award in 2003 and 2004, Best Socially Responsible Person in 2009, Best Service Provider in the bus sector, a humanitarian award from the clergy – Malwathu and Asgiri Chapters and more that extend to a long list of recognition. "People don't need to rely on money to prosper. If you have a good heart and perseverance you can," he says meaningfully and his life's work speaks for itself.