

SHENUKA COREA
BRISTICH COUNCIL
SRI LANKA

SECOND PRIZE, CLASS C
IN THE 2009 COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION

THE BUTTERFLIES ' PILGRIMAGE

The tourist balanced carefully on her surfboard, moving gracefully along the wave and enjoying every minute. The wind in her hair, the sun on her face! What more could she ask for? The waves crashing on the beach made a glorious sound. Sunlight sparkled on the tops of the palms that shaded the snowy, white sand. Then she saw an unbelievable sight. First one, then two, then a thousand tiny yellow dots were fluttering above the beach. The board wobbled. She tried hastily to gain control, but slipped and fell into the water. She swam ashore to watch the butterflies.

Where were they going?

The fisherman was mending his net on the doorstep of his hut. Carefully he wove the thread under one, then over another, his fingers moving fast. Then he heard the sound of a thousand tiny wings, beating rapidly. Turning around, he saw the butterflies. He frowned as they went past. He did not like when things weren't as they should be. There weren't any strange happenings like this in the village of his childhood.

Where were they going?

The child was on her way to school, absent-mindedly swinging her bag, her head filled with sums. She heard a sound like rustling paper. A butterfly flitted past her ear followed by a million, no a trillion more. The butterflies had come! Laughing she tried to catch one, but they were always too quick. She ran with them, all thoughts of equations blown away by the beating of tiny wings.

Where were they going?

It was the harvesting season. The farmer was hard at work cutting paddy and piling it into bundles. The cloth tied around his head was damp with sweat. The sun scorched his back and the backs of

his companions. Sunlight reflected off almost everything dazzling his eyes. He heard a noise. He looked up. There was yellow everywhere. The butterflies cast shadows on the upraised faces of the tired workers.

Where were they going?

Two leaves and a bud, two leaves and a bud... .. the tea plucker was plucking tea. She wore a brightly colored sari and a bright red pottu between her eyebrows. Her fingers worked skilfully to find just the right leaves to pluck and she paused only to throw the leaves into the basket that hung on her back. Plucking tea had put bread on the table all her life. Suddenly a shadow was cast on the waist-deep bushes she was standing in. The butterflies had arrived. She had not time to watch them. With a sigh she continued her work. She had to pluck eighteen kilograms of tea before the day was out if she hoped to earn anything.

Where were they going?

The gem miner had found something. He climbed out of the pit coated in dirt but he didn't care. Clutched in one grimy fist was what looked like an ordinary, worthless stone, but he was sure this stone held a great secret. His hand trembled with excitement as he immersed it in clean water. He brought it close to his eye and examined it carefully. He cried out in delight at the sight of a flash of blue. A blue sapphire! This was his lucky day! Then, with a flash of yellow, the butterflies arrived. He raised his hands to the heavens and laughed out loud, happy to share his joy with them. In the dying light he watched them head towards the mountain.

He knew where they were going!

The old pilgrim stood at the peak. She watched as the host of beautiful yellow butterflies made their way up the holy mountain. She had made the pilgrimage to the mountain several times in her life and worshiped the holy footprint of the Lord Buddha. This, she thought, would be the last time she would climb the four-thousand steps to the peak. She was as old and weary as the butterflies were now.

The butterflies, now weary and weak, flew across the glowing, pink sky and, as the great yellow sun rose above the hills, they fluttered gracefully down to earth and died.

The mountain had many names: Adam's Peak, Sri Pada and Samanala Kanda Butterfly Mountain!