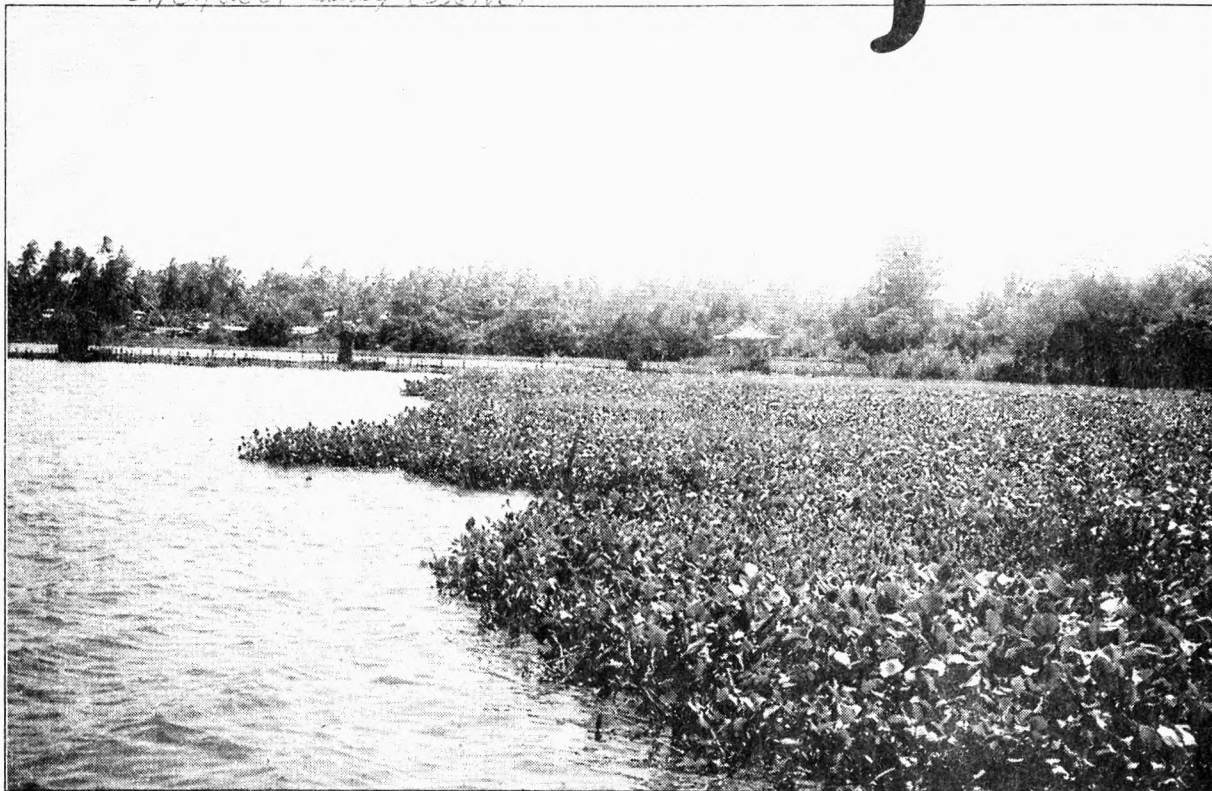


Bolgoda in trouble

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Invasion of salvinia plants.



Boating on the Bolgoda lake.

by JAYAMPATHY JAYASINGHE

The day was gloomy. It had rained heavily the previous day. It was our second visit to the Bolgoda Lake after a lapse of nearly three years and we made it there to make our own environmental assessment of the lake and its surroundings.

The lake has now become the dumping ground for refuse despite protests by environmentalists.

We toured the length and breadth of the lake in a boat and found to our dismay that things had only changed for the worse. Timber mill owners were dumping several tons of saw dust into the lake daily.

There are about 50 such mills located on the banks of the lake and around 20-30 tons of saw dust is being dumped into the lake almost daily.

Environmentalists say that dumping of saw dust into the lake has an adverse effect, which reduces the supply of oxygen to marine life. The dumping racket has gone unabated for several years as the central government nor the present Kalutara Pradeshiya Sabha have taken action to curb the menace.

Experts say the present toxic level in the water is high due to the continuous dumping of saw dust.

In fact Bolgoda is the largest natural freshwater lake in Sri Lanka which covers almost two-thirds of the Kalutara district stretching from Anguruwathota to Piliyandala. It joins the Kaluganga at Anguruwathota from one end and flows to the Indian ocean at the Panadura estuary.

Villagers say that it is possible to travel by boat along the Kaluganga up to the Sabaraga-

muwa province, where the river flows down from Adam's Peak.

Today the lake looks horrific due to the invasion of salvinia plants from all fronts. The villagers call the plant Diyaberaliya - the weeds have washed into the lake from the Kaluganga during the heavy monsoons.

An interesting fact about Deyaberaliya was that the juice of the plant was made use of to add colour to fake currency notes printed in earlier times. Villagers say in earlier times policemen viewed with suspicion at those who cultivated the plant.

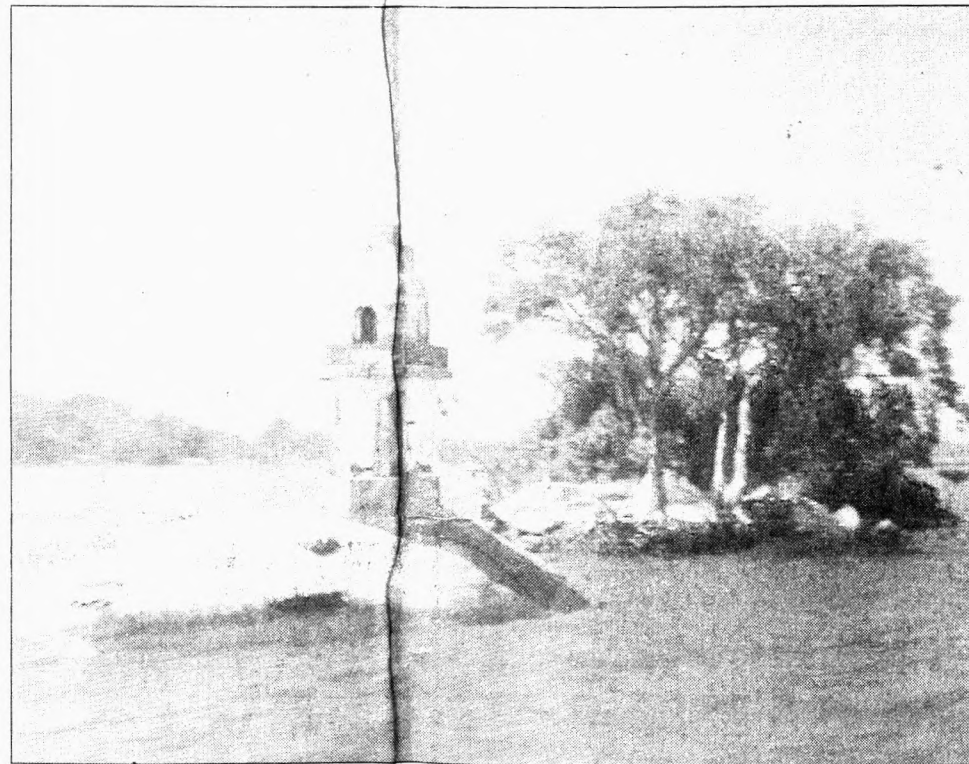
In fact the Diyaberaliya plant has posed a big problem to fishermen and other users of the lake as it hinders the movement of fishing boats on the lake.

The Bolgoda lake, undoubtedly has the trappings of a popular tourist resort, but one has to be mindful of the damage it can do to the fragile eco-system and marine life on the lake.

To our surprise we found a large number of motor boats crisscrossing the lake. We were told that those boats belonged to foreign expatriates and wealthy locals who patronise a popular club on the Bolgoda lake. The situation however was quite different long ago when there were few motor boats on the lake. Windsurfing and sail boat rides were the most popular form of sports those days and these were not a threat to the environment.

However there is tremendous potential to promote eco-tourism at the Bolgoda lake. The Kalutara Pradeshiya Sabawa and the Central Environmental Authority should enact new legislation to prevent dumping of saw dust and regulate the number of speed motor boats operating in the lake.

We met a Sri Lankan, Norman Armstrong at



The Hindu shrine named Angulu-Eliya Dewale.

(Pix by Kapila Somaratna, our Panadura Group Corr.)

St. Lucia's island, a resident of U.K. trying to promote eco-tourism in the island.

Armstrong said that the best way to lure Sri Lankan expatriates residing in U.K. was to invite them to spend their winter holidays at St. Lucia's Island.

Here we found an upstairs bungalow being renovated to accommodate tourists. "The

island is an exotic locale to get away from it all," he said.

Armstrong had started on this project about seven months ago and was now putting the final touches to the building on the island.

"On a clear day even Adam's Peak could be seen from the island. It is one of the most beautiful sceneries that one could see during

the sun set. I do not think that any one had photographed it before," he said.

While touring the vast expanse of the lake we came across several Prawn and lobster traps set in the lake among the Kekatiya plants, a delicacy among the villagers of Bolgoda.

We next arrived at a Hindu shrine called "Angulu-Eliya Devale" perched on a rock stone in the middle of the lake. The amazing thing about the shrine was that it never gets submerged even during heavy rains. The shrine was believed to have been built by Prince Reevidev during the reign of King Parakramabahu II, natives say.

The water level near the shrine is quite deep and many shun going near it. The myth that surrounds the shrine is that a treasure is believed to have been buried at bottom of the lake.

They say the treasure is guarded by a fish with luminous fins. "Many people avoid getting near the shrine as the water is deep down there," General Manager of Ranmal Hotel, Jayawardena, said.

Having surveyed the lake and its surroundings we found a few motels which had sprung up on the banks of the lake in the Hirana and Kaduruwa areas. Many entrepreneurs have reclaimed the lake with gravel.

Meanwhile, villagers say that in addition to the dumping of saw dust, industrial waste from factories at Ratmalana is also brought to the Bolgoda lake to be dumped there during night. It was reported in the newspapers two years ago that three persons had died after bathing in the Bolgoda river, under mysterious circumstances. Thereafter authorities forbade people from bathing in the lake.