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Karuawela Wewa

Serene waters

by *ROHAN CANAGASABEY*

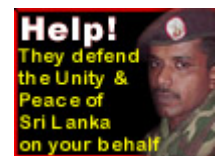
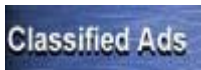
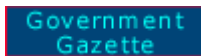
The scenery that unfolds on the three-dimensional screen around the waters of the wewa, particularly as dusk begins to envelop the valley below in an impending darkness, is awesome.

It is a cliché, but such a true one, that apologies are not needed for repeating it. Water is the source and sustenance of life. And one such watery repository and source of life is Karuawela Wewa, near Wasgamuwa national park. Waters that are used to irrigate the fields of villages around it.



I stood on the tank's southeastern fringe, within the makeshift veranda of an eco-friendly property of a non-governmental organisation. An NGO outfit that was working with the people in this area, to improve their social and economic circumstances. People, for whom serenity meant being free of the daily or monthly, as the case may be, struggle to live. But as I was free of such an immediate burden, appreciating the finer points of nature's beauty was open to me.

The sun's orange light of dawn shone its light, like a celestial torch, onto the placid waters below, where a few birds greeted the dawn with an early flypast, as it rose over the bund in the east. On the rock beside the rising sun, stood a lone tree, set against the sky. Gradually as the light became stronger, it pierced the inevitable spaces between the tree branches and shone through onto the rocky floor in dozens of varied angles. Sunshine later reached into every hidden nook and cranny on the hills encasing the waters of



the tank below.

Later that morning, I stood outside the NGO cottage and gazed around. The tank's southern horizon is dominated by a mountain range. I stretched out my clenched fist, positioning my knuckles against the outline of the undulating mountain range, to see if they appeared to match. And so they did, to some extent anyway, thus answering my personal query, on whether the Knuckles, north of Kandy, had been appropriately named. Very often, the morning mist or subsequent clouds mask the peaks of the Knuckles, leaving one to wonder, how far they reached towards the heavens above. Today the morning mists that hug the mountain tops had already cleared, revealing their majesty.

At mid-afternoon, clouds began to slowly appear over Karuawela Wewa. Except for one rain conveying dark bluish grey one in the corner, they were white clouds, of varied shapes, that appeared to have been painted in different locations by a giant hand onto the rich blue canvas of the sky above. And painted in such an intricate pattern that it left one in awe and reduced the otherwise serene view of the waters below, to a secondary status. On the waters edge, down on my left, a lone man had come by bicycle to bathe and cool off in the waters of the tank. As would others, mostly in late afternoon, though mostly women and children, the women bringing their washing along as well.

On my last day there, during my recent short visit, I strolled along the road, towards the main village nearby. The sights on either side of the road were well worth walking back and forth a few times. It was harvest time, and on my right, golden bundles of paddy had been guillotined free and stacked in various locations to be threshed and sold to middlemen, who in turn passed it down the supply chain, each making their profit. To my left, in the waters of a small lake that bordered Wasgamuwa national park, bathers in the form of single-cloth covered women and men, stood on the edge of the sloping bank of the road, while scrubbing themselves clean. The children though, were more often to be seen enjoying paddling to stay afloat, while smiles or laughter lit up their faces.

News that came down the human grapevine, revealed that a couple of foreign guests at one of the two lakeside "Safari" hotels, had seen a herd of wild elephants quenching their thirst at this lake, in late afternoon, only two days earlier. Perhaps it was appropriate that foreigners should witness this rare spectacle, as the locals always have another day to catch such a sight.

As one sits in the wall-less veranda of the mud-caked NGO cottage, built on one of the hills overlooking the waters of the Karuawela Wewa, in deck chairs whose cloth support,

hug the contours of one's body, its easy to relax and appreciate the serene scenery that unfolds on the three-dimensional screen around the waters of the Karuawela Wewa below. Particularly as dusk began to envelop the valley below in an impending darkness.

The tepid heat of dusk has brought out flocks of birds in many different varieties. A thin streak of black against the near eastern horizon, changes shape like a black rope being whipped by an invisible giant. But as they get closer, the black shifting line set against the backdrop of a pinkish sky reveals itself to be a flock of small birds.

Another flock of birds skim the surface of the waters of the reservoir below, like a natural flotilla of hovercrafts. But these birds then soared away, unlike the man-made tame imitation. In the trees nearby, that obstructed the view of the tank's shoreline below, another flock of birds gathered, though I do not have the faintest idea which species, as I am not a bird watcher. And as if on cue, whisked themselves away towards the setting sun in the west, hidden by the rock behind.

As dusk gathers pace and darkness cloaks the valley below, one is left with only the sounds of myriad insects to keep one company throughout the night, until the next dawn. And so the cycle of dawn and dusk continues, but each day brings different opportunities or losses, to people and animals, but in different proportions, in this serene place. A serene location hidden from the fast paced world of commerce, though to which it is inexorably tied, through the selling of its harvested paddy, the mainstay of the villagers' life, but a minor factor, taken for granted by city folk in Sri Lanka.

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