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*An Electronic Networking for Sustainable Development in Kashmir*

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### Save Dal makes no sense where Anchar goes dying

Sprawled over a wide swathe of the area along the east side of Srinagar - Ganderbal road, Anchar Lake is in pathetic shape. Lake is barely visible with weeds growing dense and deep where water should have been. And where weeds are absent the thickets of willows take over shutting off from eyes a major expanse. For a moment one misses the once beautiful lake for a dirty marsh which is just in the process of drying up.

Lake encroachment is taking place at a rate of 0.142 Sq. Km /year. Annual pollution load of 5.73 tons of Phosphorous & 82.39 tons of Nitrogenous substance has converted the once non productive to highly productive one and finally a lagoon . Lake has shrunken from 19.54 Sq. Km to 6.8 Sq. Km in just 10-20 years.

The conversion of a large proportion of the lake area for permanent landmasses , fuelwood plantations and paddy cultivation, compounded with the problem of siltation, has resulted in shrinkage of the Anchar Lake from 19.54 Sq. Km (1994) to just 6.8 Sq Km , out of it 3.6 Kms is stinking marsh.

A decrease in biological diversity and loss of some important endemic and endangered species due to human pressures are quite apparent. Effluent brought in by the Sindh Nalla , agriculture wastes and entry of raw sewage from the entire catchment (especially catchment spread over 66 Sq. metres ) have choked the lake.

Biomedical wastes & radioactive substances from S.K.Institute of Medical Sciences, Soura ( Largest Hospital in Northern India ) is the latest addition to the list of materials being dumped into the lake. Such activities have deteriorated the water quality. There is the incessant flow of the bio-medical wastes including radio active substances from the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences despite the hospital having a well-established treatment plant, silt from the Sindh nallah, refuse from surrounding areas, proliferating floating gardens, cultivation of willow wickers etc.

Early signs of an otherwise impending extinction are disconcertingly obvious. And to make it worse no one is bothered, least of all the Lakes and Waterways

Development Authority charged with the responsibility to rehabilitate the valley's water bodies. There are a host of other factors too which together with the official indifference are tending to usher in a premature doomsday for the lake.

The LWDA, however, may be partly to blame for the present condition of the lake not only because of the sheer unmanageability of the gigantic magnitude of the crisis but also because of the woeful lack of the funds for the purpose. Besides there are no Dal-like plans for the lake which for all practical purposes has been abandoned as a vast backyard sewer of the Srinagar.

"And at a time when even the Dal development has run into a mess and the project is being starved of funds on one imaginary pretext or the other, Anchar stands relegated to the margins", says a LWDA source on condition of anonymity adding in the present circumstances to expect even a moderately-funded rehabilitation plan for Anchar was a wishful thinking.

Meanwhile, the lake is hurtling dangerously into extinction with nobody particularly caring. Leave alone any ambitious plan for the lake, there is not even an effort to check the most obvious sources of effluents which are inexorably killing the lake.

People inhabiting the banks have taken to now age-old practice of earth-filling the

portions they have ownership rights on. Doing this could have been easily stopped given the fact that their ownership rights are exclusively on water.

But so far there has hardly been any official effort to check the polluting activities and thus halt the descent of the lake into a stinking guttery expanse which it has increasingly begun to look like.

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