

Blooming Beauties of the Island

Posted on

Blooming above from the murky waters in lakes and ponds, the vibrant petals of the water lilies and lotuses reflect a sense of peace and charm. For years, these aquatic beauties have been part of the island's tradition and culture. They are commonly known as Olu, Nelum, and Manel and symbolize purity, divinity, and beauty.



The Nelum flower, known as the sacred lotus, is a cultural symbol. The flower is a divine blossom that beautifully connects with the country's heritage. From adorning the walls of temples to offering them as sacred flowers for worship, the flower has a great significance on the island. In fact, one of the oldest paintings of the lotus flower is found in an ancient temple, in Matale. The flowers are also woven into the famed stories in Buddhism and Hinduism.

The sacred lotus flower or Rathu Nelum is intertwined with Buddhist philosophy. It reflects the emergence of glowing petals amidst the dark, muddled waters. This metaphorical way of describing depicted the growth of an enlightened person from the ignorant world by thriving elegantly and motivated. The water droplets that slip off the leaves symbolize the enlightened person remaining unaffected by the temptations of the materialistic world. It also said that the Gautama Buddha walked seven steps after his birth, and with each step, these Lotus flowers had bloomed. Quite often, the Buddha is also portrayed seated on a lotus flower. And God Maha Sumana Saman is also depicted crowned and bejeweled, holding a lotus flower.



Nil Manel (Blue Water Lily) continues to capture the islanders' hearts.



Blooms of delightfully attractive Rathu Nelum (Pink Lotus) are offered for worship.



Dainty white Olu (White Water Lily) is a symbol of purity

In Hinduism, the lotus is seen as goodwill, peace, prosperity, and happiness. The pink lotus is the seat of Goddess of Wealth – Lakshmi, and the white lotus is the seat of Goddess of Wisdom – Saraswathi. Other deities are also sometimes seen seated on this divine blossom. According to legends, it is said that a lotus emerged from the navel of Lord Vishnu (the Protector), and Brahma (the Creator) is known to have seated on it, and after that, he proceeded to create mankind.

The lotus is also associated with yoga, where the lotus posture – padmasana, is practiced as the best posture to adopt when meditating. By visualizing the flower, the posture retains a sense of calm in the minds and bodies of those who practice it. As the pink petals unfurl slowly under the glowing sunlight, it is indeed a beauty of nature to admire.

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The yellow pod encasing the seeds under the warm glow exudes an aroma that attracts bees and beetles to feed on the nectar. Each and every part of the flower, from the roots to the petals, is used for various purposes. The water-resistant circular leaves of the plant are used as plates to serve food.

It is also used to wrap food, and the flavors it retains are exotic. The seeds are often used in the making of rosaries. The stalks are used as wicks for temple lamps. The lotus flowers, seeds, young leaves, and roots are edible, and the roots (Nelum ala) are a much-loved Sri Lankan delicacy. The subtle fragrance is also used in the cosmetic industry, and it is quite popular among skin and hair care products.

The Lotus flowers are used for wedding decors, especially in decorating the Poruwa, where it is beautifully combined with other kinds of flowers to create an enchanting look.

Interestingly, according to Hindu traditions, the pink lotus buds are intricately woven to make garlands and offered to deities and worn by the bride and groom in Hindu weddings. Water lilies are aquatic herbs with perennial rhizomes or rootstocks anchored in the mud. They are commonly called Manel and are available in three color variations – white, pink, and violet-blue. Blue and white manel are

widely spread in dry zones, such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Jaffna, Ampara, Chilaw, and Kurunegala.

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Pink Lotus, the seat of Goddess Lakshmi signifies, wealth and prosperity.

The Nil Manel (Blue Water Lily), with violet-blue petals and strikingly yellow inner pod and being the country's national flower, is often seen growing in grassy wetlands and tanks. In ancient Sanskrit and Pali texts, even the Nil Manel has been associated with virtue, discipline, and purity. These attractive flowers can be found frequently in places of worship, especially in Buddhist temples, where devotees offer them. It evokes a sense of tranquility and peace. One can also admire the maidens of the frescoes clasping these blossoms in their hands at the historical Sigiriya rock fortress. The tubers are edible. It can be boiled or roasted and enjoyed. Besides being stunningly beautiful, the blue water lily has soothing and anxiety-relieving properties, and it is used in ayurvedic medicine too. The subtle aroma is also prominently used for making fragrantic perfumes. It has been used by ancient Egyptians as a substance to attain higher levels of consciousness.

The Olu, with a subtle tone of pale pink-white petals, is also known as White Lotus or Tiger Lotus. It is commonly grown in clear, still, and slightly acidic waters. One can sight an abundance of these stunningly attractive flowers as buds (pohottu) or as bloomed beauties in the lakes in the Anuradhapura district. The roots of Olu are edible, too, and Olu Haal Kandha (Olu Rice Porridge) is known to be a nutritious dish that is prepared from the seeds taken from the flower. Various parts of the plant carry medicinal features.

Lotus and water lilies dotting the serene lakes of the island evokes a sense of charm and serenity. Besides being ornamental beauties, these divine flowers are woven into the island's culture and tradition.



The frescoes of maidens at Sigiriya holding elegant lilies.



A reflection of ethereal and sheer simplicity.



Tantalizing forms of Nelum ala (lotus roots) prepared in authentic styles of Sri Lankan cuisine.



The fragrance of the aquatic blooms is soothing and subtle.