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Kannada chronicles: Shooting at Bellandur Lake

By Prathibha Nandakumar, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: Dec 18, 2018, 06:00 IST



The Bellandur Lake has been in news since 1997 when the fishermen of Kempapura and Yemaluru submitted a petition to the then Chief Minister J H Patel complaining that untreated factory and domestic effluents were flowing into the lake, leading to the death of fish. Patel promptly asked the Department of Fisheries to look into the complaint. Instead of preventing the pollution of the waterbody, the Fisheries Department released large number of baby –fish (fishlings) into the lake. All the fishlings died.

The Bellandur Lake water was potable until 1970s but in 1999, following a High Court order drinking water was to be supplied to the residents of Bellandur and the neighbouring 18 villages by the BWSSB. In the next 20 years, the lake has not only become a health hazard but also a dangerous toxic zone with chemicals from factory effluents producing largescale frothing and emitting smoke and fire. Almost on a daily basis the froth spilling over to the road and residential area in the surrounding area is reported in the media. Even the National Green Tribunal (NGT), conducted a trial on suo motu cognisance and penalised the state government and civic bodies for their inaction. The state government constituted an expert committee consisting Namma Bengaluru Foundation, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Indian Institute of Science and other important institutions. The committee conducted an in-depth field work and submitted a report to the government recommending, short-term, mid-term and long-term measures to be taken to clean the lake.

Even in 2015, an online petition with over 47,000 signatures demanding stringent action merely resulted in superficial measures that gave very short time remedies. The problem is far from over. To trace the NGT inquiry into the matter itself takes another tangent. Now, the point in focus is that film actor Rashmika Mandanna had a photo shoot at the Bellandur Lake as she felt "it's high time we start talking about pollution and working on this issue," and the photos have gone viral. Also she tweeted, "We wanted to do the underwater shoot to showcase how grave the situation is and how bad things are going to be if we3 don't change."

Of course in tackling a pollution case as bad as the Bellandur Lake any bit of campaign helps and Rashmika Mandanna's photo shoot is definitely a huge push. But, Rashmika did not enter the lake for obvious reasons. It was too risky. She was photographed standing near the lake looking morose and her actual underwater photos with plastic bags floating about was said to be taken in a friend's swimming pool. The photographs are stunning and definitely carry the message. It also brings to public knowledge that there are still people who are not aware of the "world-famous Bellandur Lake foam" after the photos and videos go viral periodically. Rashmika said in her tweet that it was the first time she had even gone to that part of the city and "as soon as I saw the crowd of people living there I was heartbroken. I did not feel like leaving my car and I thought how could people breathe this air. There was so much foam and it was flying around everywhere."

She also said she would "rather not want to be in that space" and urged that the "Karnataka government should take steps to control the pollution in the lake." She should be informed that on Dec 6, 2018, the NGT issued orders asking the Karnataka government to keep aside Rs 500 crore for the implementation of the action plan proposed to clean up the lake. The NGT has also directed the BBMP to deposit Rs 25 crore with Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the state government to pay Rs 50 crore to the CPCB. If the Karnataka government fails to implement the action plan, it has to give an additional Rs 100 crore to CPCB to set up sewage treatment plants.

The report of the inquiry by NGT reads interesting because the lawyers for the state were often clueless while lawyers arguing for the Commission set up by NGT had all the data on their fingertips. When the lawyers stated that it was not easy to drain out water from the 900-acre lake, as suggested in the report, NGT slammed them and quoted the example of Dal Lake in Srinagar which was cleaned out without draining the water.

The state government had submitted an action plan stating that it would clean up the lake "within 10 days".

We are waiting. So is Rashmika Mandanna.

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