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These kids can teach Bangalore civic body lessons in lake management

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Even as most lakes in Bangalore are left in the lurch, here is a bunch of kids who have been monitoring Varthur Lake and have come up with alarming statistics on the lake, plus tips to save the water body.

The lake is so polluted that the children could not resist seeking help from the teachers to save it. "The kids have been working on this lake for 10 years now. There are 120 active members of the club and some of them are alumni too. The lake monitoring team has 15 members from VI to X standards," said MA Khan, headmaster, KK School.

The journey began in 2002 when Khan visited Indian Institute of Science's Lake Symposium and wanted his schoolchildren to be involved in some social activity.

"I had attended the lake symposium in 2002 and from then on, I trained my schoolchildren to think differently. In 2006, the children presented a paper at IISc in the Lake symposium and bagged a special prize too. Then we set up a Sahayadri Eco Club which has been involved in various activities," he said.

The kids are meticulous in their work and follow their seniors' work religiously.

Hema R, a Class X student said, "In summers, the lake would raise a stink. We asked Khan sir why it was so smelly and he asked us to take samples of the water to test it. He took us to some colleges where we used the labs and found that the lake was highly polluted."

Deep dirt

The kids found alarming rates of dissolved oxygen (DO) and biological demand for oxygen (BOD) too. "We started at six in the morning, and took samples of water every hour and tested them for the standards. We found that at noon, when the BOD and DO is supposed to be the highest, it was zero. This is a major indicator that the lake is polluted beyond repair," said Anusha, a Class IX student.

The students even found the lake to be full of faecal matter. "We found 1,300 parts per million of faecal matter in the lake," she added.

If this is not surprise enough, the kids also did an in-depth research on the lake.

"We have written a paper called 'Fixing the economic value of Varthur Lake', where we concluded that the local farmers and fishermen, if they use the lake for various purposes, it can fetch over Rs1.5 crore per annum. We published the paper at IISc too," Umraz of Class X, said.

Managing waste

The Sahayadri Club has not limited itself to Varthur Lake. They have gone beyond their school boundaries and have taken up solid-waste management programmes to keep their homes and neighbourhoods clean.

"We used to have a lot of plastic bags flying around here. We asked Khan sir and our teacher Allirani what would happen if the cattle ate them. Fifteen of us came together and formed a new branch in Sahayadri for waste management," said Afiya Siddrath of Class IX.

Plastics galore

The kids know exactly what they are supposed to do with the collected plastic and can give you a good run for your money too.

“We have collected 1,300 kg of plastic in one year. With the help of Khan sir and Allirani ma'am, we approached a vendor named Rasool Khan, who makes asphalt for roads. He agreed to buy the plastic we had collected at Rs6.10 per kilo. We use this money

for our eco club activities for prize distribution and buying equipment etc,” said Kiran, a sixth standard student.

Waste is good

After segregating wastes, we don't throw away wet waste like vegetable peels, and greens etc. Instead, these are converted into compost used for the school's garden.

The school has plantain, guava, pomegranate and chickoo plants and they reap fresh fruits too. “During the seasons, we take the fruit and cut them in the class and share with all,” said Kiran.

Working with a premier institute

The students have been exposed to many symposiums which the Centre for Ecological Sciences has been conducting. They have been actively involved with the IISc to work on many papers and have even helped PhD scholars with their material.

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