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**The dirty truth of our lakes**
ByGarima Prasher / Updated: Aug 27, 2023, 06:00 IST
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**Highlights**
Water in 68 of city's 128 lakes unfit for drinking, even bathing after being treated; 40 lakes unsuitable for fisheries too
Entry of untreated sewage and industrial effluents major cause of pollution
Bengaluru's water bodies have been in a dreadful state for long now and it seems there is not even a slim chance of recovery in sight. According to the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board's recent water quality report, not even a single waterbody in the city falls into the category of Class A, B, and C. The board monitors 123 lakes in the city and while 68 lakes have been categorised under D making them unfit for drinking and bathing even after treatment, 40 lakes have been put under class E; water quality is not suitable even for fisheries.

However, the scenario is not the same elsewhere in the state. KSPCB monitors the water quality of 121 river stretches and 197 lakes across Karnataka. Out of 197 lakes, 123 lakes are in Bengaluru and 74 are outside Bengaluru. Out of 74 lakes, while the water quality of four lakes was categorised under Class B, 12 lakes were found to have water quality of Class C waterbodies. Only 15 lakes outside Bengaluru were categorised under class E. Out of 121 river stretches, while 37 were put under Class B, the water quality of 61 river stretches was confirmed to be that of Class C category. As many as 18 fell under Class D and one was categorized under Class E.

**Age of sewage**
Experts say the bad state of Bengaluru lakes is due to the entry of untreated sewage and industrial effluents.

"Our lakes are loaded with untreated sewage and chemical effluents from industries. Unless we arrest the entry of these pollutants, the water quality will never improve to Class B or Class C. A good lake model to be emulated can be Jakkur Lake. The waterbody has a secondary treatment plant along with a wetland and an algal pond. Such an arrangement ensures water treatment at the tertiary level. All Bengaluru lakes need such treatment," said Dr TV Ramachandra, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

**Spotlight on KSPCB**
Ecologists also highlight the lack of pollution mitigation programmes by KSPCB. They opine the board should have strictly implemented the polluter pays principle long back and booked the industries polluting the water body.

"An effective implementation of this principle should happen as the first step towards abatement of water pollution. Industries and municipalities responsible for the situation should have been fined heavily," said a city-based environmentalist.

KSPCB monitors lake water quality under the National Water Quality Monitoring Programme and classifies the lakes as A, B, C, D, and E based on the parameters as per primary water quality criteria released by CPCB.

As per guidelines by the Central Pollution Control Board, the water quality is derived based on various parameters such as dissolved oxygen (DO) level, biological oxygen demand (BOD), fecal coliforms (FC), and total coliforms (TC). A waterbody with a DO level of less than 4 mg/L, BOD of more than 3 mg/L, FC of more than 2,500 MPN/100 mL, and TC of more than 5,000 MPN/100 mL are categorized under classes E and D.

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Although the report has categorised many river stretches in the state under Class B and Class C, experts say the methodology used by KSPCB should be questioned.

"Many stretches have recorded good water quality probably because they are not receiving a lot of contaminants. KSPCB's monitoring stations along river stretches in Karnataka are highly inadequate. Looking at the locations of these stations, one gets the impression that these locations are selected strategically. These are the stretches not receiving a lot of pollutants.

Stretches with higher degrees of pollution are not being monitored," said Dr Ramachandra.
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