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[Home](#) [News](#) [Election 2016](#) [New Delhi](#) [Business](#) [Supplements](#) [Sports](#) [IPL 9](#) [Entertainment](#) [Videos](#) [Opinion](#)You are here: [Home](#) » [Intense City - Bangalore](#) » Yemalur village, a hotbed of disease, despair and disorder

Yemalur village, a hotbed of disease, despair and disorder

Naveen Menezes Jan 31, 2016, DHNS



Located right behind the HAL Airport, Yemalur village is one of the key approaches to the Bellandur lake from its North East periphery. This is exactly where the dramatic fire on foam had caught everyone's attention, bringing the lake's unbearable filth in sharp focus. Here is a closer look at the village, which once depended so heavily on the lake, its lifeline.

The stink hits you rightaway as you enter this erstwhile City Municipal Council (CMC) area, its addition to BBMP in 2007 making no change whatsoever to its pathetic state. Beyond its bad roads, streets with garbage pileups and improper footpaths, the lake looms large. Reeling under the multi-pronged hazards posed by the water body's unbearable stench, foam and mounting muck on the lakebed, Yemalur residents feel they have hit a dead-end.

Untreated sewage remains the most toxic pollutant. To make it worse, countless bags of garbage are dumped right into the lake and its feeder canals. This muck piles up on the edge of the water body, eventually getting washed into the larger filth.

Venkatesh Yemalur, a resident of the area, notes that over 40 per cent of the city's sewage ends up untreated in Bellandur lake.

"If BWSSB is not able to treat the sewage, what right do they have to collect sanitary cess from the public?" he demands to know.

The lake's high pollution and its proximity has inevitably made Yemalur constantly in a diseased state. Acknowledging this dangerous, unhealthy trend is Shilpa H, who works at the Yemalur Primary Health Centre.

Over the past seven years, she has seen a drastic increase in the number of patients. "We receive about 50 patients daily with complaints of wheezing, respiratory and skin related problems," Shilpa informs.

The locals cherish those long-gone years when they would swim and fish in the lake. Today, they even dread to walk past it, repulsed by the stench from the incessant flow of untreated sewage from multiple inlets. Largely covered by hyacinth and garbage, the lake spews froth and foam.

Chinna Krishnappa, a 72-year old farmer recalls how Bellandur lake was an important part of every villager's life. "During paddy cultivation, we used to walk to the fields with food and never carried water from homes. Every farmer would use this lake's water to drink, which was crystal clear. Now, the bond with the lake seems almost lost," says he, sadness personified.

The loss of farming as a livelihood was inevitable. He explains that transition: "More than 90 percent of the farmland was sold to companies in the last two decades. We were forced to stop farming after the lake water turned poisonous. We incurred huge losses due to poor yield and eventually all the farmers gave up farming."

Nagaraja Basappa, another farmer, used his eight acres of land to cultivate both paddy and ragi until he sold them in the 90s. By 1995, most farming activity had ceased in Yemalur. Sixty-five-year-old Narayanappa was among the very few who cultivated paddy until 2005.

"There was a yield up to 35 to 40 quintals for each acre of paddy cultivated. I used to cultivate two crops a year, but shifted to one due to lack of good water. I gave up farming once the lake water was totally contaminated," he recalls.