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BangaloreMirror

Aiming for biodiversity, with just 2 types of trees

/ Aug 9, 2022, 06.00 AM IST



BBMP planted 400 saplings of only two species of fruiting trees in the bund area of Doddakallasandra Lake

BBMP starts planting saplings at Doddakallasandra Lake; but citizens wonder why just couple of fruit-bearing trees chosen for bio-diverse area

The forest division of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has started work on bringing up a biodiversity park at Doddakallasandra Lake located off Kanakapura Road. The Palike has started its plantation drive in the lake area with around 400 saplings.

However, as per a citizen group that has been actively involved in the upkeep of the waterbody, the saplings belong to only two species of fruiting trees.

“The residents of the area have been taking care of the waterbody for over four years now. However, when the Karnataka Knowledge Commission recommended developing the lake into a unique biodiversity park, we decided to put a break on our plantation drive. However, the saplings brought in by the BBMP belong to only two species of fruit-bearing trees. How can they create a biodiversity park with just two species? It is not the right thing to do at a lake that houses a lot of biodiversity already,” said Soundararajan Rajagopalan, a resident.

As per a biodiversity report of the lake prepared by a citizen group in 2019, the lake hosts 354 trees of 42 species, 43 species of plants and shrubs, 37 butterfly species and 71 bird species, including 11 migratory birds.

Moreover, while the lake has an active citizen group that has been taking care of the water body for the last four years, they alleged that they have not been involved in the process.

“If there is a group of citizens that have already studied the biodiversity of the area and have also documented it, why not involve the locals and use their knowledge? Local knowledge should be respected rather than ignored,” said Raghavendra B Pachapur, a lake activist.

The group has now raised a complaint with the higher authorities saying having just two species of trees on

the bund area of a lake like Doddakallasandra that is teeming with biodiversity is not the right path to choose.

“We have been told that only the selected tree species are suitable for plantation on the bund area of the lake. According to the BBMP’s earlier recommendation, trees cannot be planted in the bund region. Many citizen lake groups in the city have not been permitted to plant trees on the bund as the root system might weaken the soil leading to the bund collapsing. But they are planting on the outer region of the bund area and it is happening at every ten feet,” added Pachapur.

Lake revival unravels

Lake activists complain that their repeated complaints to the BBMP and BWSSB have gone in vain. Allowing the entry of sewage into a rejuvenated lake can be detrimental to determining the overall health of the lake.

Locals alleged that the department is trying to use up the current stock of saplings available in their nurseries.

“Around 80% of the saplings are of Jamun trees. The BBMP is trying to exhaust the old stock. The majority of the saplings have already been planted and no action has been taken so far despite our complaints. The lake has a good peacock population of 20 individuals. Many other birds will require different kinds of fruit trees. Just the Jamun fruit will not suffice,” said Rajagopalan, a resident.

The forest department said that the plantation drive has been put on hold due to the issues raised by the citizens.

“We have decided to plant 2,800 saplings in multiple lakes in the Bommanahalli zone. Around 1,000 saplings have been planted in Doddakallasandra and a few more lakes in the area. We are planning two fruit-bearing plants and three to four flowering and timber species which are essential for birds. The tree species are suitable for bund plantation as well. However, we welcome the caretakers and citizen groups to collaborate with us and work for the betterment of the waterbody,” said the official.

If there is a group of citizens that have already studied the biodiversity of the area and documented it, why not involve the locals and use their knowledge?

—Raghavendra B Pachapur, lake activist

Green spells red flag at lake

Residents near the newly-restored Doddakallasandra Lake are worried as the lake’s water is turning green. They say this indicates the rapid formation of algae, which reduces the oxygen content in the water hampering the survival of the aquatic beings. This comes after the pollution board’s reports indicated sewage is entering the lake again. Activists say this points to the need for BBMP to involve environmentalists, citizens and activists in the process of rejuvenation.

Raghavendra B Pachapur of NGO ActionAid said, “Stone revetment at the lake only prevents solid waste from entering, but does not stop contaminated water. All necessary precautions need to be taken to monitor the lake water quality continuously.”

He said planting a good amount of grass would help absorb some amount of the contaminated water. “It will help improve the water quality of the suspension pond and reduce its nutrient load. The plants will also attract insects which in turn will attract birds to the area,” said Pachapur.

Dr KS Sangunni, a researcher from IISC, said the green colour may not necessarily be a problem. “But we need to see what is happening. If sewage is coming in, we have to find a way to stop that.”

Soundararajan Rajagopalan who lives near the lake said the heavy rain has added to the problem. “Last

week a lot of sewage went into the pond. The water is also turning light greenish. Near the Soudamini Layout, there is a small canal which carries sewage from all the layouts. Whenever it rains heavily, the sewage water overflows into the lake.”

However, a BBMP official said they are regularly monitoring the situation.

- Shreyashi Mukherjee