

Threats on urban lakes across India

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Water wealth

Lakes are critical for cities

Lakes are vital sponges in the city. They prevent flood and recharge groundwater

Every city gave its land for rain.

Today.....

These holes in the ground are either lucrative real estate for builders, the last resort for slum dwellers, or garbage dumps.

Vanishing lakes in urban areas

- Bangalore, at the beginning of the **1960s** had **262** lakes, now only **10** hold water
- The Ahmedabad collector – on directions from the high court – listed **137** lakes in the city but also said that over **65** had been built over already
- In Delhi, **625** waterbodies were identified – again on court orders – but are not protected.

Urban lakes in courts

Concerned citizens across the country have come together to fight to halt this degradation of urban water bodies. In state after state, citizens and NGOs have filed legal cases for protection of urban lakes.

The lake cases:

- 1. The cases are in response to encroachment or any change of land use pattern by the government***
- 2. The cases are filed in many cases by the citizens in the face of water shortage or community rights***
- 3. The petitioners receive threats from builders or land sharks very frequently***
- 4. There is no clear policy on the allotment of land area for waterbodies***

Churning still water: Few questions about the urban lakes

1. Who owns the waterbody?
2. How many waterbodies are there?
3. Which waterbodies should be protected?
4. What is the no-construction zone around the waterbody?
5. Will the catchment and channels feeding the waterbodies be protected?
6. Who will maintain the waterbody?

Few existing laws and policies to save the lakes

Wetlands (Management and Conservation) Rules, 2010 was issued by **Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF)**, for conservation and management of wetlands.

Guwahati Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Bill 2008

The objective is to preserve wetlands and to re-acquire lands in the periphery of the waterbody for its protection.

East Kolkata Wetland Conservation and Management bill, 2006.

This bill includes provision for penalties – Rs 1 lakh for encroachment.

Andhra government's 'Water, Land, Trees Act', 2002.

The act empowers state agencies to take steps to protect water bodies and to prevent conversion.

National Capital Region (NCR) Plan, 2021.

It is mandatory for NCR towns to reserve 2-5 % area under waterbodies (natural/constructed)

Case studies from urban areas of India

Real estate on water: Case on reclamation of lake bed

Charkop lake in Mumbai, Maharashtra: From 2005 onwards, the builders started reclaiming the lake bed.



2009



2011

United Association for Social, Educational and Public Welfare, Mumbai based NGO filed PIL in 2009.

Current update: The High Court of Bombay gave a verdict which could not stop the builders

Lake assault: Case on encroachment of lake bank

Ousteri lake in Puducherry: Illegal construction started on the banks of the lake from 2006 onwards.



Ousteri Protection Coordination Committee (OPCC) filed a PIL (2006) to stop the construction of medical college on the banks of the lake.

Sewage from the college has been directly connected to the waterbody

Current update: In spite of injunction from the High Court, the construction continued.

Concrete drama: Case on encroachment of Eksar lake

Eksar lake, Mumbai, Maharashtra: Local MLA started filling up the lake from 2008 onwards



In 2009, a PIL was filed. In 2011, an interim order was passed by the High Court to stop any further construction.

Current update: The lake was already concretised.

Drained dry

Sasthamkota, Kollam district, Kerala: Construction and mining activities in the catchment area reduced the water level of the lake



Kollam based NGO Paristhithi-Samrakshana Ekopana Samithi is working actively to restore the lake.

Current update: Mining or any sort of activities that may pollute the lake was banned by the District Collector

Vanishing lake

Badkhal lake, Faridabad, Haryana: Mining activity in the catchment area has made the lake completely dry.



M C Mehta in 1995, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against mining and stone crushing in the Aravallis citing the drying up of these water bodies in the area.

Current update: In response to the PIL, Supreme Court of India banned mining in the nearby Aravalli hills

Watered down

Khurpatal, Uttarakhand: Construction of buildings in the catchment of the lake required mindless extraction of groundwater from the surrounding areas of the lake. The springs downhill remains dry almost through out the year. Livelihood of the farmers has been affected.



2009



2011

Dr. Ajay S. Rawat, Professor of History in Kumaon University filed a PIL against the illegal boring of groundwater in the lake area,

Boring activity near Khurpatal



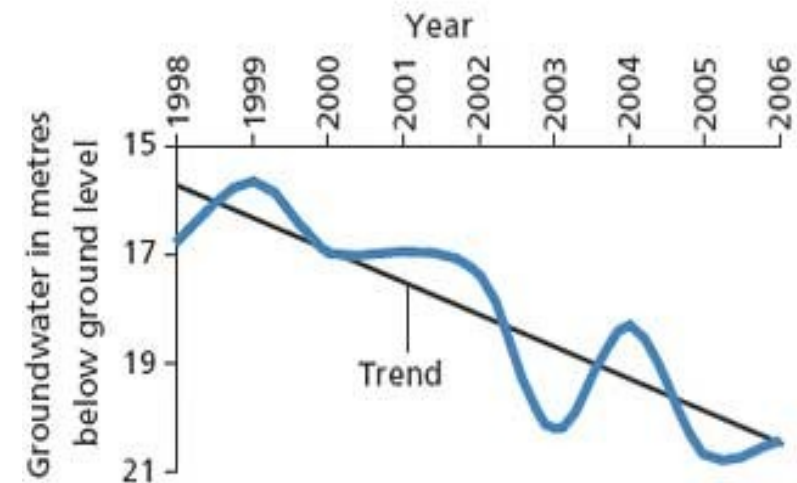
Current status: High Court of Uttarakhand banned any borewell extraction

Waste receptacle

Mayapuri lake, Delhi: Government is planning development work on the bank of the lake. Justifies that it is an artificial pit



Groundwater has dipped sharply in Naraina



Source: Central Groundwater Board, Faridabad

In 2000, Delhi based organisation TAPAS filed a PIL to save the Delhi waterbodies

Current update: The court is yet to decide the fate of the lake

The broken mirror

Deepor beel, Guwahati, Assam: The wetland shrunk by more than 15 % in the last ten years. Illegal construction, dumping of garbage, soil quarring are the direct threats to the lake.



In 2006, Deepor beel Unnayan Samiti filed a PIL against the encroachment of the lake. In the same year, the residents near the lake filed another PIL against solid waste dumping in the lake

Polluted to the brim



Current update: Forest department came forward to preserve the lake

Where do we dump our waste?

Powai lake, Mumbai, Maharashtra: Solid waste dumping, direct entry of sewage from the surrounding, growth of water hyacinth are the major threats



A petition was filed in 2000 by local MLA to save the lake

Current update: The municipal corporation only concentrating on the beautification of the lake in the name of revival

Dal lake, Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir: Pollution and encroachment of the lake are the threats



In 2000, Syed Mujtaba Hussain, a human rights lawyer, and Green Kashmir, a Srinagar based non governmental organisation filed a PIL to save the lake.

Current update: A high level committee has been appointed by the High Court to look after the lake. Lakes Waterways Development Authority, Jammu and Kashmir is taking initiative to clean the lake

Diminishing returns

Kanyakumari tanks: Growth of weeds due to application of manure for lotus cultivation



In 2007, few local environmentalists filed a case to protect the tanks

Current update: 2009, lotus cultivation for commercial purpose has been banned in Kanya Kumari by the court.

Bhimtal lake, Uttarakhand revived after the High Court order



In 2001, Fredrick Smetacek (Jr), Chief co-ordinator of Society of Appeal for Vanishing Environments (SAVE), a Bhimtal based non governmental organisation, filed a PIL in the High Court of Uttaranchal to save the lakes of Naintal area

Healing touch: Nainital lake revived after the High Court judgement



In 1993, Dr. Ajay S. Rawat, Professor of History in Kumaon University filed a PIL in the Supreme Court of India to save the Nainital lake

Protection of lake and catchment is just one side of the coin.....

The main challenge is to work on.....

“NO MORE LOSS”



Thank you