

The lake that was

Chandana Chakrabarti Dec 8, 2012, 07:19AM IST

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The Hyderabad of my childhood was so uneventful that a trip to Husainsagar was the highest form of [entertainment](#), a memory one ruminated on for months. In the sixties, the raw beauty of a much larger lake enticed one and all. Tankbund road was narrow, pavements non-existent, and traffic so thin that a snail crossing the road would not run the risk of being run over. The lower tank bund road was a narrow dirt track lining a green expanse of paddy fields. Hotel Marriott stands where a Coca Cola bottling plant, a regular target for school excursions, stood. Connecting the upper and lower Tankbund roads were narrow stone steps on the wall of the bund. We used these steps to go Bharat Sevashram Sangha on the lower road for a community meal at [Kali](#) puja on Diwali.

For the non-adventurous, the lake was approachable from the Secunderabad Sailing Club or the Hyderabad Boat Club on the opposite end. A bus ride on the top deck of a doubledecker bus through Tankbund was enticing. Racing records were broken and set on Tankbund road.

A small kebab-and-paratha shop opposite the lakeside and a restaurant at the level of water on the Tankbund road which had an open shelter as a roof-top, were favourite haunts. Bongs had their fill of fish from the closeby stall of the fisheries department. In the late seventies, water hyacinth aggressively claimed the lake, making it look like a vast green expanse. The battle against it was not easy and became almost a full-time research obsession with RRLabs.

Every Durga puja, on Dashami, Durga was bid farewell in the lake by half-a-dozen Bengali clubs who used Hyderabad Boat Club premises for immersion. More than faith, it was our only chance to get on an open lorry, shout, sing, dance and be boisterous. The unique sight of the army puja's amphibian truck, which moved on land and water attracted crowds and made us feel proud. Ganesh festival till the end of seventies was virtually unknown in Hyderabad. Since then with every passing year Ganesh immersion has only grown larger and more aggressive, contributing to the lead, mercury and cadmium levels of the lake, besides the silt. Bongs are, perhaps, to be blamed for showing the way.

Through the eighties and nineties, dramatic changes swept the lake's environs. Tankbund road got broadened, beautified and statufied! The Buddha Purnima Project got underway, the Necklace road came up, and the monolith Buddha was transported prostrate on a huge vehicle with over a hundred wheels, only to fall in the lake on its way to the rock of Gibraltar, killing several people.

But there were other ugly things happening along with the beautification. Patancheru industrial estate's effluents and the city's sewage began to get free access to the lake. The clear water of the lake went so turbid that Buddha's rescue was a nightmare. Stench around the lake became insufferable. Governor Kumudben Joshi as also Governor Kishan Kant would lament in personal conversation about how the stench obliterated the joy of an enticing view from their residence. Then came a time when eating the lake's fish could endanger one's health. Although Husainsagar's beautification has enraptured everyone, the lake has been dying a slow death. Moreover, the banks of Husainsagar has become the best destination for the last [journey](#) of our politicians. And who knows, the fate of Masab tank might befall Husainsagar in a few decades, and then the transition from a park to a mall will be only a matter of [real estate](#) strategy!

Time and again, independent organisations have run extensive experiments to study the water quality of the Hussainsagar. The results, each time, have thrown up startling facts about the deteriorating condition of the city's most important water body. Excerpts from some of those studies:

National Environmental Engineering Research Institute: 1997-98

This water quality assessment was conducted by NEERI on the request of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board. The study revealed a very low, and in some locations zero, presence of dissolved oxygen (DO) in the Hussainsagar thereby indicating the fragile lake water quality and the effect of organic pollution. The study concluded that the lake was in an advanced stage of 'Eutrophication', which means that there was an increased plant growth in the water body. According to experts this accelerated growth is either due to natural fertilizing agents washed from the soil or dumping of chemical fertilizers. Eutrophication may also occur due to drainage of sewage, industrial wastes or detergents into a body of water.

Ecology & Environment Group, National Geophysical Research Institute: 2007-08

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Bhaskar (Hyderabad, India)

09 Dec, 2012 10:31 AM

The fate of Hussainsagar is not very different from that of many lakes all over the world, at least as far as water quality is concerned. The basic issue of why Water Hyacinth and Blue Green Algae grows in polluted lakes, instead of something more useful is not being discussed.



Mohammed Jaleel Khan (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh)

08 Dec, 2012 01:29 PM

What about use or rather abuse of the lake in the name of religion? Year long it will take to complete the cleaning campaign and it will take only one day to pollute the lake for years to come. All concerned citizens and sensible people should come forward to break this unhealthy tradition.

kvenkataramam (Hyderabad)

08 Dec, 2012 09:26 AM

Hussain sagar lake in 1960 to 1970 's with clean with unpolluted water ---- a jewel in the midst of Hyderabad city . There was the power plant beside mint compound and secretariat . Dhobi ghat near DBR mills where clothes were washed and ironed by Dhobis . Also the wonderful APSRTC double bus rides on tank bund on route nos 7 (Secunderabad station to Charminar via Nampally) and route no 8 (Secunderabad station to Charmimar via abids). Also the bus rides on APSRTC route no 139 (RTC X roads to Vijayanagar colony) along the tankbund and Secretariat . Also the beauty of the lake was seen from Kala Pahad (Now Birla Mandir) and Naubath Pahad (now Birla planetorium) . Also We enjoyed the aircraft takeoffs and landings at Begumpet airport from the then Kala Pahad and partially from Tank bund. Hyderabad .. a mini India ----with people from all over India lived gracefully with no feelings of religion/region/caste barriers . Now Hussain sagar is now a cesspool of filth and highly contaminated water .Hyderabad city had lost its beauty o exist with encroachments of its 500 lakes , gardens ,open spaces etc. Very sad and sorrowful situation today.

C Kali Prasad (Goa)

08 Dec, 2012 08:16 AM

Oh lovely reminiscing that, yes, in the 60's the Tank Bund was the place to be apart from of course, the public gardens. Isn't it a shame that both these landmarks are in the doldrums...the waters of the Hussainsagar have been polluted beyond redemption and truly, as the writer suggested, its fate appears to be similar to Masab Tank...the Public Gardens have become a haven for people shunned by society and through the day one can find them sleeping it off on the lawns in a drunken stupor. An added attraction in the Public Gardens, in those years, was the zoo...which later shifted to its present location as the Nehru Zoological Park on NH7 to Bengaluru...since that event, the slow demise of the gardens began speeded up by the frequent noise and light pollution from the events conducted in the open grounds. The archaeological museum and the Bal Bhavan were super attractions for the kids as much as 'Taj' ice cream and spun sugar candy in all its bright pink shade!!! Those were the days when eating street food was healthy enough with kiosks being hygeinically maintained. Yes, the population growth and the exponential growth of industries in the twin cities have put paid to all these fun things for todays children. Unfortunately we the elders are to blame for allowing the situation to come to this conclusion...this is the kind of legacy we are leaving for our younger generations!!!