

9th June 2011.

A Report on Gurram Cheruvu: Opportunities to Rejuvenate

1. Field Experience

I visited Gurram Cheruvu (*Cheruvu is a Telugu word for Lake*) with Ms. Aisha Rubani on the 9th of June 2011. Ms. Aisha Rubani is the local Co-apted GHMC (*Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation*) member of the ward where Gurram cheruvu is located. Ms. Aisha is very keen to develop the Gerrum Cheruvu during her tenure as the representative of the ward. I had the opportunity to study the proposed Ward Development Plan of GHMC) for the Barkas area. The WDP is prepared under the guidance ASCI (*Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad*).

I did my homework of studying the Barkas area and the Cheruvu prior to my visit. Apparently, last month some ongoing land issues linked to the Gurram Cheruvu area created social unrest in the area. The tension was apparent while driving through the neighbourhood to reach Gurram cheruvu. Lake beds have always been vulnerable resources for multiple land use developments and therefore are reasons for conflicts in the interest of the uses and the users (figure 1). It will be interesting to identify the actual historical area and the current available area of the lake bed. The revenue map area is considered as the final plot area of the lake. This information on revenue map is available with the Revenue Department of the respective Collector Office.



Figure 1: Multiple land use developments around Gurram cheruvu: private, religious, solid waste dump.

Gurram Cheruvu is located at the Barkas area. Barkas is the Military Barracks for Yemenese during the Nizam's time. It is a unique historical place known as the mini Arab of Hyderabad. Today, the Barkas area is a typical multi-cultural and multi-functional urban development area. Gurram Cheruvu is a typical case of the status of Indian lakes, where on one hand it reflects the inherent beautiful natural landscape and on the other hand reflects the urbanelly generated landscape of apathy (figure 2).



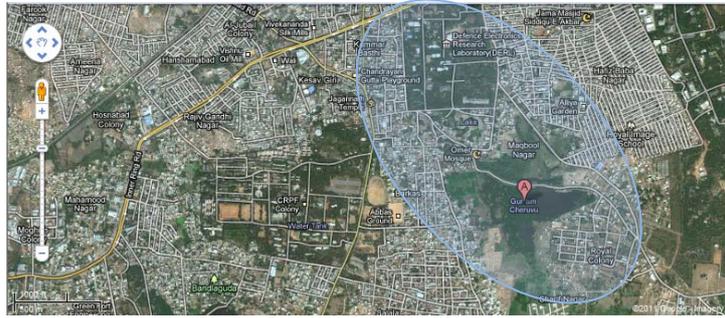


Figure 2: The natural and development landscape around Gurrum cheruvu.

Looking at the larger picture of the Gurrum cheruvu environs, the outflow of the Gurrum Cheruvu can be traced in the form of channel (which probably may be a choked nala) up to the Musi river: passing somewhere through the Maqbool Nagar, DERL, Gulshan E iqbal Colony, Bhagavath Sivajinagar, Saibaba nagar, Sivaji colony, Vinayak nagar, Jai Khanna colony, Fatehshah Colony, Zohra Bee colony, Yesrab nagar, Yakutpura, Bommanvadi colony, Dabeerpura, Malakpet, Musi nagar, Dhobi galli to the Musi River (figure 2).

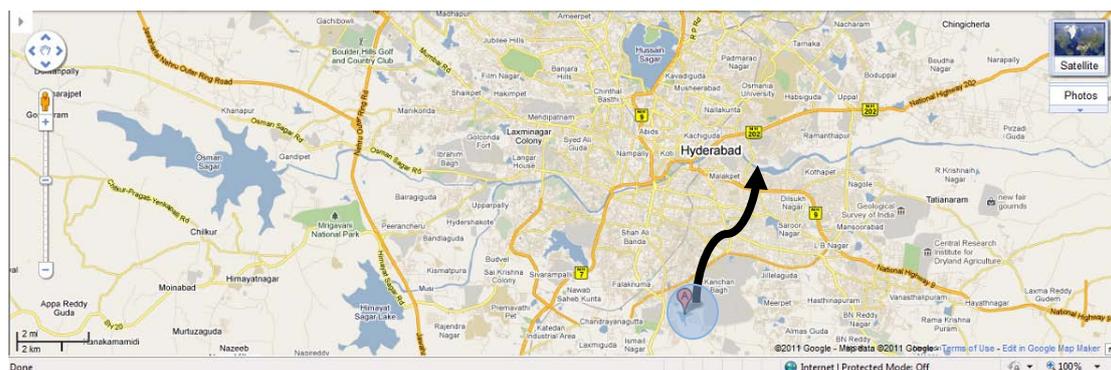


Figure 3: Outlet Tracing of Gurrum Cheruvu.

The interlinking of lakes can be seen in the Gurrum cheruvu environs. In principle, Gurram Cheruvu is fed by Pedda chruvu and Saikam cheruvu. The inlet channels from the Pedda chruvu and Saikam cheruvu are dysfunctional. The status of the two Cheruvu is no indifferent to Gurram Cheruvu (figure 4).

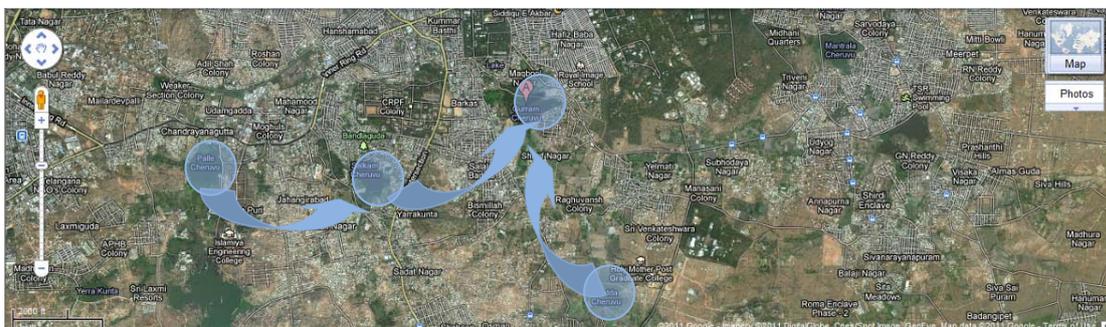


Figure 4: Inlet Channels of Gurram Cheruvu.

The dike area next to the Gurram cheruvu namely the Maqbool nagar is probably the extended lake bed area. The bund road where we drove through has probably divided the lake bed into two in order to provide access to developments such as Royal Nagar and Sharif Nagar and further. Usually, roads have been the starting point of shrinking of the

lakes. Across India, in the urban planning, it is observed that the roads around the water bodies are made on the reclaimed land of the water bodies; indirectly giving an indication that the land adjacent is meant for development. It is not said so, but does that mean that the water body is less precious? It is the ownership factor that plays a role. Land around the water bodies is usually patta lands (privately owned). Therefore, to make public facility such as road, the easier way is to use the public land which is usually reclaimed from the lake bed or the river bed (figure 5).



Figure 5: The divided lake: the dike of Maqbool nagar, the road, the old outlet sluice

From the road level, the lake bed is somewhere around 5-6 metres. This gives an indirect indication of the Full Tank Level (FTL) of the cheruvu. The FTL is generally considered as official reference to earmark revenue area of a lake. The FTL area is the legal entity to protect and conserve the lake's property and functions. The FTL is decided under the purview of the Irrigation Department. The land water interface area is the most crucial part of any lake, which includes the inlet, the outlet and the vast edge of the lake. Interestingly, the interface is also seen as the starting point of the lake rejuvenation (figure 6).



Figure 6: The land water interface embraces many kinds of activities.

Traditionally the source of drinking water, today Gurram Cheruvu is the source of waste water recipient from the nearby developments. At the first instance what is seen is a massive, cohesive and mobile meadow of *Eichhornia crassipes* (water hyacinth) covering most of the lake bed. The first reaction usually is how to get rid of the water hyacinth? However when thought deeply, one realizes that the surrounding area is livable only because the water hyacinth exists in the lake. Water hyacinths are considered as the most suitable natural remedy to absorb the Nitrogen (N) and Phosphorus (P) nutrient from the waste water discharged into the lake (figure 7). The waste water from the entire surrounding development is discharged untreated into the lake. Eradicating the water hyacinth by hundred percent is not practical since, waste water disposal remains the biggest challenge for the city managers. The lakes are seen as potential recipients of the waste water locally. If the waste water discharged into the lake is treated to a secondary treatment level then the content of N and P will be less and water hyacinth production can be reduced. However, this does not seem to be the case at the Gurram cheruvu. Removing water hyacinths manually at certain intervals is necessary, but not sufficient.



Figure 7: Large surface of Gurram cheruvu is covered with Water hyacinth.

Rejuvenate Gurram Cheruvu? Is Governance the approach?

The lakes in the cities are highly contested public spaces in the current urban developments. Their roles in the current urban developments are crucial. Whether to use the lake for waste water disposal or to have a fresh water lake; and whether to use the lake as a beautiful public space or a garbage dump-yard are technical questions which can be only resolved when the governance of the lakes are well sorted out. Why governance? Governance can bring in insights on some of the inherent issues that underlie the long term maintenance of the lakes and the reasons for the degradation of the lakes, especially in the past five to six decades.

Like most lakes, for the rejuvenation of Gurram cheruvu, following questions should be first looked at:

- Whose baby is Gurram Cheruvu? - The Collector Office, Minor Irrigation, HMDA, GHMC, GHWSSB, Tourism or The Lake Protection Committee.
- Who will decide what and when to do anything for Gurram Cheruvu?
- Who maintains the onus of maintenance of Gurram Cheruvu?
- Who bears the right benefit out of the Gurram Cheruvu development?

One of the fundamental aspects of the lake governance is the roles, rights and responsibilities of the civil society. Are people concerned unless the lake affects them directly or indirectly? If so, are people willing to do (or pay) for the lake or are people willing to agree with (or accept) the current lake conditions. Unless the society itself is conscious about its assets, no governance mechanism can work in the long run.

Maintaining a water quality and quantity balance is technically fundamental to the health of the lake. There are technical solutions to do so. The first and foremost activity needed is to ensure fresh water availability to the lake. Substantive requirement of the water may be fulfilled with the suitably treated waste water.

Usually beautifying the lake edge (interface design such as the Necklace road at Hussain Sagar lake) is the first step towards lake upgradation. Edge developments are usually in the form of greening and cleaning the lake environs. Edge developments are directly beneficial for the people of the surrounding neighbourhoods to experience the micro-environs of the lake and good neighbourhood level recreation facilities. Administratively, it helps to earmark and safeguard the fringe of the lake; and politically it projects a tangible development to realize by the masses. Edge developments are also useful in the long run for people's participation in the lake governance process. Without people's participation, maintenance of the lake in the long run will always remain a challenge.

Following is a discussion on the road map for the Governance of Gurram Cheruvu and generally most urban lakes in Indian cities:

1. A leadership that is willing to initiate the lake development activity and who bears a vision for long term maintenance of the lake. Development 'alone' is short term. Locating the authorized body who can take up the initiative is crucial.
2. Maintenance without people's cooperation and participation is a challenge. People will be involved if they realize a direct and indirect benefit of their involvement. Employment generation from the lake development activity is necessary for involvement.
3. Maintenance can be optimized by understanding the local ecological environs. Cosmetic landscape designs are high maintenance and short termed. Greening with local flora and cleaning with local assistance is necessary.
4. Water hyacinths are there to live. They are part of the bio-diversity. Integrating them with the water balance can optimize the maintenance. Installation of waste water treatment plant is the start point. Regular cleaning of water hyacinth is crucial.
5. A comprehensive plan to integrate the lake environs- the inlet, the lake bed and the outlet is technically fundamental in the long run. Thoughts about the physical and psychological access to water are crucial for the lake protection in the future.
6. A 'state of the environment' report stating the current challenges and the possible opportunities is a must and can be brought to the notice of the Lake protection Committee of Hyderabad, the Ministry of Environment and to the common man and media.



The key to the Sustainability of the lake governance is not a good Development Plan but, a development plan backed by a good Maintenance Plan.



Mansee Bal is currently a visiting scholar at the Workshop in political Theory and Policy Analysis, Bloomington Indiana, USA. She is pursuing her PhD at the Department of Public Administration at Erasmus University, Rotterdam in the Netherland. The experience written is purely the author's viewpoint. It is influenced by the recent field work experience of urban lakes in five Indian cities namely, Jaipur, Bhopal, Udaipur, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad.

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