

Lake Stories: Spatial Reconfiguration of Keres

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The lakes of Bangalore or *keres* as they are known in the vernacular, have morphed spatially over the centuries. This has been a result of human interventions and natural processes. The aim of this photo essay is to focus on these changes with special reference to one particular lake at Rachenahalli, located in North Bangalore. Through this photo essay, the spatial transformations and the factors that drive them will be explored.

Rachenahalli *kere*, which is located in the Hebbal valley, is part of the Yele Mallappa Chetty lake series (Yele Mallappa Chetty being a noted city businessman and philanthropist). Like many other lakes in Bangalore, this lake was also man-made and designed to be part of a cascading series of lakes built on a gradient, catering to irrigation and household needs. Like all man-made lakes, this lake had a bund or embankment built to dam the flow of water and bring the lake to life.

I have photographically captured this *kere* 2009 onwards. This includes its former state in 2009, with markers from an older system such as sluice mechanisms, overflow and *rajakaluve* or connecting canals. A *rajakaluve* or a main canal carried the overflow of water from the lake downstream to the next lake in the series.



1. Rachenahalli Lake Bund - May 2009

As Bangalore urbanises, many of these lakes, including the Rachenahalli lake, do not serve irrigation functions anymore. This is primarily due to the transformation of livelihood practices around the lakes. This in turn has spurred further human interventions in this lake to cater to new needs and sensibilities. In the last 15 years, Rachenahalli *kere* has transformed from a spatial identity linked to the older system of irrigation and water supply to a newer one characterised by a stated urban need for recreation and urban ecology. This would entail a redesign of the structure of the lake itself from a cascading one to a more contained 'water bowl'.



2. Rachenahalli Rajakaluve - May 2009

The engineering interventions that the Bangalore Development Authority undertook in 2009 -10 offered opportunities to document this process as well as provide last glimpses of markers of the older system such as sluice mechanisms.

Rachenahalli Kere Reengineering - December 2009

The wetlands (*gadde jameen*) or moist land were located downstream of the lake into which lake water was released in a controlled manner through sluice mechanisms in the lake bund and where agriculture was practised.

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3. Rachenahalli Wetlands - May 2009

The lake in 2009 as is visible from the notice near the lake.



4. BDA Notice - 2009

The work then commenced in December 2009 with the breaching of the bund to empty the lake.



5. Rachenahalli Lake Bund Breach - December 2009

The newly designed space in 2014

By 2014, the reengineering of the space was over and it presented a new form and shape completing its transition into a newer system and catering to different needs driven by ideas of urban recreation and ecology that took the shape of walking trails, jogging paths and spaces such as bird islands. This also meant exclusion of some communities, based on the new form and purported function that involved draining all the water from the lakebed.

6. Rachenahalli lakebed view - December 2009

This provided me a chance to enter the lakebed and take photos of the sluice mechanisms in the bund from the lake side.



7. Rachenahalli lake sluice mechanism, view from lakebed - December 2009

After draining the lake, the engineering work commenced. This included building a ring bund all around the lake compared to the linear bund which existed on one side of the lake 'containing' the lake and transforming it from a cascading system to a 'water bowl' one.



8. Rachenahalli lake ring bund granite reinforcement - April 2010

The bund was reworked removing markers of the older system such as the two sluice mechanisms.





9. Rachenahalli reworking of bund - April 2010

Other engineering work included the creation of artificial islands in the lakebed.



10. Artificial island creation in Rachenahalli lake - April 2010

This engineering work was completed in the year 2010.



11. Rachenahalli lake ring bund - April 2014

I paid a visit to the lake four years later in 2014 to capture the look of the lake in its transformed 'water bowl' avatar. The ring bunding and fencing of the lake was complete. The lake was now neatly fenced in from all sides completing the containment.



12. Rachenahalli eastern fence and path - April 2014

And the multistorey buildings moved closer to the wetlands, now suitably dried out as the sluice mechanisms have been removed and the lake water tightly bound by the ring bund.



13. Rachenahalli lake downstream wetlands - April 2014

Related references

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