

ANDHRA PRADESH

Lack of clean water haunts tribals at Amaravathi



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Yanadi people fetch water from a pool in Krishna close to sewage disposal point

Near the point where Amaravathi spills sewage into the Krishna river, Ganga Raju squats on a rock and dips a 20-litre can in a stagnant pool frothing with detergents and covered with hyacinth.

“I collect drinking water from here every day. God has been protecting me from diseases,” says Mr. Raju, a ragpicker from the Yanadi tribe.

As the sun sets, 11 other members accompanying him saunter back to their settlement, where 78 families of the tribe are dependant on several such pools that punctuate the riverbed. Ever since the water level in the river along Amaravathi began receding after the completion of the Pulichintala project upstream, says Mr. Raju, many have been forced to traverse longer stretches in search of clean water. In fact, four families have camped along the ghat to avoid cold and be closer to the river, their source of water.

After picking recyclable items from garbage heaps around the town and making ₹200-300 a day, Ramnamma, another Yanadi, collects water from the river.

“The government’s water tanker comes to our area only once a week. Collection of water is often marred by conflicts among people as the quantity supplied is not sufficient to meet needs of the families,” she says.

'Water a human right'

However, an Amaravathi panchayat official says a 4,000-litre tanker supplies water to the Yanadi colony on the Chiru Poramboke (wetland), 2 km from the city on the Vijayawada road, every day.

“Construction on wetlands is prohibited and therefore we can't lay water pipelines there. Even so, we have provided electricity supply to all camps there,” he said. Other tribes in the mandal face the same predicament. Amareswar Galla, Chief Curator of the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum, says, “Water is a cultural and human right. The three tribal communities, Chenchu, Yerukala and Yanadi, struggle for access to water and a decent livelihood. Anybody drinking putrid water is a shame on all of us.”

Though the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 prohibit encroachment or construction on them, State governments can use the 'wise use' principle in the rules to permit activities that are in public interest there.

Congress breaks ties with TDP, to go it alone in Andhra Pradesh

Pradesh Congress Committee president N. Raghuveera Reddy said the CWC in a unanimous resolution left the