

**THE ABSURDITY OF RETROSPECTIVE STP & DUAL-PIPING**

A recent conversation with an elderly gentleman who lives in an apartment in Malleshwaram, which was constructed in the 1980s and has 165 apartment units, ended up as follows:

Me : Your apartment has to install an STP & dual-piping system as the lakes are getting polluted.

Him : We let our sewage into the underground drain (UGD) provided by BWSSB and not the lakes.

Me : But the sewage water from the UGD is entering lakes untreated. You have to do something.

Him : What can I do? Isn't BWSSB responsible for the UGD? Even if I implement an STP, I will have to let out bulk of the treated water into the UGD which will anyway mix with the untreated sewage? And BWSSB is supposed to treat UGD sewage in its own STPs, so what's the point?

Me : I agree! Experts too have said it does not make sense! But, BWSSB still wants you to do it!

Him : And if BWSSB has to treat sewage before it enters lakes, why are the lakes getting polluted?

Me : As per experts, a large percentage of the STPs in Bangalore, including BWSSB's own STPs have been dysfunctional for a variety of reasons, including faulty design & implementation. Monitoring & enforcing compliance of thousands of STPs has also been extremely difficult.

Him : If that is the case, wouldn't implementing thousands of retrospective STPs more across the city, compound the problem further and cause an environmental disaster? Wouldn't it be more efficient for BWSSB to implement larger STPs centrally at the outlet points of the UGD?

Me : Yes, it would be more efficient for BWSSB to provide UGD access to every household, treat the sewage centrally and safely dispose the same. BWSSB Act also states the same. But, they have completely failed in doing it and are under pressure to do something on lake pollution.

Him : Is BWSSB the agency that enforces measures to prevent lake pollution?

Me : No, that is the role of the enforcement authorities (CPCB, KSPCB & Ministry of Environment).

Him : Have any of them asked BWSSB to pass this rule on apartments with retrospective effect?

Me : No, all of them talk about STP implementation by apartments with 50 units and more, on a prospective basis. The more important point is that they have mandated BWSSB to provide UGD to all parts of Bangalore and treat sewage in central STPs before letting out into lakes.

Him : Then why is BWSSB not doing its job and passing retrospective rules when nobody has asked it to do so?

Me : I guess it is easier to ask the citizens to do BWSSB's job instead of they themselves doing it.

Him : But, my apartment does not have the space to install an STP! Where do we put it up???

Me : That is not BWSSB's problem! They want you to find solutions since they themselves cannot!

Him : Even if I find the space to implement the STP, is it safe? My building is over 30 years old!

Me : It involves digging of the ground near your foundation pillars, new construction, breaking of walls for dual-piping etc. Nobody can say for sure if it is safe for your building!

Him : *{Look of shock}* And what about the cost that I have to incur?

Me : A good STP & dual-piping system will cost about Rs. 1.25 cr for a 150-apartment complex. Individually, you invest just Rs. 80,000 upfront. The running cost will be Rs. 800 per month.

Him : I am 70 years old and am a pensioner. I invested my life savings to buy this apartment. Many people in my apartment complex are elderly people including pensioners, widows etc., as you can see, given that we all bought our apartment about 30 years back. Also, I am yet to recover from the 300% water tariff hike that BWSSB imposed on me 3 years back, calling me a bulk consumer. I pay through my nose to the garbage mafia to collect my segregated garbage, since BBMP refuses to take my garbage even after collecting SWM cess. Now, I have to invest Rs. 80,000 upfront plus Rs. 800 per month. Where will I get money for all this?

Me : BWSSB says that all apartment residents are rich people, so you should be able to afford it.

Him : And in the improbable scenario that I am able to do all this, will our problems be solved?

Me : Absolutely not! Bulk of the problem is because of untreated sewage from the UGD entering the lakes. Even if we get the existing thousands of old apartments which are already connected to the UGD to implement STPs retrospectively, the treated water will get mixed with untreated sewage and will not make any difference whatsoever. Unless BWSSB gets its house in order, this problem is not going to be solved, which is what the experts have opined, the enforcement agencies have mandated & logic also tells us very clearly. Your retrospective STP & dual-piping implementation is not going to make any difference to the lake pollution issue! BWSSB can engage with experts & public to find solutions that make sense, but I guess that would be way too much effort & work. Passing absurd & illogical notifications are a lot easier and must be a lot of fun too!

Him : *{Look of disbelief}* In summary, you are telling me that I have to find space where none exists, find huge amounts of money which I don't have, put my building to risk which is the only asset that I have & implement STPs which have had a high failure rate so far, for something that is not going to make any difference to the lake pollution issue?????

Me : Yes!

Him : *{Faints}*

**(THIS IS THE REALITY TODAY FOR APARTMENT RESIDENTS, WHO FACE CONTINUOUS HARASSMENT FROM CIVIC AGENCIES ON A RANGE OF MATTERS)**