

Childbirth claims lives in absence of proper facilities

SUPRIYA KHANDEKAR

Bangalore—Gollahalli village has no proper facilities for pregnant women and for their deliveries. Despite the fact that the percentage of women dying during childbirth has increased from 83 deaths per 100 thousand to 94 deaths in Karnataka. World Health Organization states that globally there were 5,36,000 deaths during childbirth out of which 1,17,000 were from India.

Institute for Research in Medical Statistics Indian Council for Medical Research and the report of the Task Force states, Mandya and villages nearby (100km) have the highest number of childbirth related deaths. It also states the poor living conditions and lack of proper facilities like sanitation and drainage are a reason for this, the main reason being that most of the deliveries are done at home without any medical guidance.

Shivamma, a midwife in Gollahalli said that she does not have any training and has learnt through experience. She also said that she doesn't know about any kind of medicines that are supposed to be given. She said that the Public Health Center (PHC)

has only one doctor and two nurses. They do not look after deliveries thus people often perform it at home, she added. All those who go to the doctors have to either go to Rajarajeshwari Hospital or to any private hospital in Kengeri, she said.

She remembered last year a lady died during childbirth as she could not get the vehicle on time and by the time she was brought to her house, she was in bad shape.

Gurushithappa, another villager said that there are no government vans in the village to make people aware of vegetables or nutritious food that a pregnant lady has to take. Nor has any government initiative seen to make people aware of the injections, medicines or any other medical help, he added. He said that many a times women die also because there is no proper care.

Shobha, a Local Health Visitor at the government PHC in Gollahalli said, " We go to house every Thursday and pregnant women are given the TT boosters regularly. The PHC (Gollahalli) takes care of

all the deliveries in all the 75 villages that come under it."

This one PHC takes care of 75 villages with one doctor and four nurses said Rekha, Junior Health Assistant. She said that there are no death records with them of women who die during pregnancy and she has not encountered any.

"Last year a lady died during childbirth as she could not get the vehicle on time and by the time she was brought to her house, she was in bad shape," says Shivamma, a midwife.

Both these health visitors left the PHC at 10:30am. Also contrary to the health visitor's statements the PHC was found empty. There was no doctor or nurse present. The patients said that he is supposed to come at 10 a.m but till 11a.m there was no clue of anybody.

Shivkumar, Sr. Health Visitor

who was present at the PHC was not ready to speak and only said that they perform all the deliveries in the hospital itself. The doctor and nurses are always present to help the villagers, he added.

Damodaran.J whose wife is nine months pregnant said that they only got a general check-up from the PHC and later the doctor told them to go to Vani Vilas Hospital. He admitted that going to Vani Vilas every time is very difficult and he is very worried how what will how do if any emergency occurs.

He doesn't even have a personal vehicle and getting a bus is also very difficult. The PHC has no facilities for deliveries and they do not perform it here, he said. They don't even admit the patients in emergency and there is no ambulance as well. Damodar lives very close to the PHC.

He also said that there is no emergency staff and no doctor at night. The doctor and nurses who are there on duty the whole day leave 3pm and do not return. The official timings are 6p.m.

Pushpalatha, Damodar's wife said that she did not get even one medicine from the PHC. She said

that she has got two injections and nothing more. She had not got the folic acid and iron tablets (which are supposed to be provided free of cost at all PHCs) also. She had to purchase them from Vani Vilas.

Pushpa, another lady from the village said that the PHC never gives anything for free the doctor charges money from the villagers. When they refuse they are being shooed away and does not give anything, she added. She also said that even for a glucose bottle drip the doctor charges Rs 100 from the villagers. Pregnant women are not given any guidance from the PHC, she said.

Some other ladies admitted that women are not given any guidance on proper diet and nor are they given any medicinal supplements. Whatever they give they take money for it said one for the ladies. Pushpa also said that never has any government vehicle come to the village to make people aware of the reasons for death of women in childbirth. Many women die if they perform deliveries at home or cannot reach the hospital on time.

The PHC seemed content about the whole situation there.

Agara Lake left in the lurch

GEETHA JAYARAMAN

Bangalore—Besides fish, Agara Lake is home to garbage, plastics, and the remains of idols from immersion. No authority seems ready to take the onus of maintaining the lake.

Many people come to Agara Lake on a daily basis. The poor maintenance shows in the garbage dumped by locals and plastics thrown by visitors. The recent immersions of idols during the festival of Dussehra have left their unruly remains in the lake too. Besides this, during the rains, water from the drains gets mixed with the lake water. The lake area also lacks proper fencing.

Rashmi, a resident of Agara, passes by the lake everyday to go to her work place. She said that the lake is very dirty and people throw bottles and plastic covers when they come to the lake. Due to lack of proper seating facilities, people sit on the grass. They throw bottles and plastic covers when they come to the lake.

Umesh, Assistant Executive Officer of LDA, said, "It is a public utility service. We can't stop them (people). They should realize their responsibility and keep the lake clean. About the drain water mixing with the lake water, the pipelines are different and there is no mixing of water. But during the rainy season, the rainwater mixes with the drain water. Nearly one-third of the drainage of the city comes into Agara and that's the cause of the pollution. The nearby slums don't even have an

Underground Drainage System (UDS). So that also affects the lake a lot", he added.

Siva, an employee of the Indian Statistical Institute and a regular visitor, said, "I have seen people coming to the lake and throwing garbage into the lake. Many a times I have seen people burning some things near the lake-maybe some kind of rituals. Many migratory birds used to come here. I come here daily for jogging as this is the best anyone can get near his residence in Bangalore."

Sivam, the fishing contractor of Agara Lake said that the lake water is clean though there is garbage dumped at the sides. He added that his duty was only fishing and it was not his responsibility to stop people from throwing garbage or immersing idols in the lake. "The immersion of idols and rituals are something we cannot stop", said Umesh. "It is the people's own responsibility to stop themselves from polluting the lake and save their own bread and butter. The healthier the fish, the better for them."

The Lake Development Authority (LDA) has transferred the responsibility of maintaining Agara Lake to a private company based in Hyderabad four months ago. Till date, however, Biota Natural Pvt. Ltd has not even set up shop in Bangalore, let alone start maintenance. The Assistant Executive Officer of LDA hopes the company will do all the necessary work in the lake within the next two month.

Magic fountain disappears

ANUYA ULPE

Bangalore—The Acid wash fountain at St. John's Hospital to absorb atmospheric pollutants is now in remnants. The fountain was named magic fountain. The first of its kind was installed with the help of Tata BP solar at St. John's medical College Hospital for short time study," said Professor Dr. T. Venkatesh - Department of Biochemistry & Biophysics, St. John's Medical College. Tata BP had donated the solar panel for this project.

The acid wash fountain has a basic solution called sodium hydroxide that is mixed with the water (H₂O). Some amount of phenolphthalein (HIn) is also added that turns pink in basic solutions. The colour tends to change from purple to bright orange depending on the concentration level. The lower the acid-basic level, the darker the colour.

Phenolphthalein which is pink in colour, dissolves in alcohols but not in water. When a base like sodium hydroxide, what is commonly known as caustic soda, is added to the phenolphthalein it forms a strong alkaline solution with water. Sodium hydroxide is a 'deliquescent' salt meaning it absorbs moisture from the atmosphere and also carbon (carbon dioxide) and sulphur pollutants.

This solution of water and sodium hydroxide absorbs carbon and sulphur pollutants from the atmosphere and the water turns pink indicating contamination of

water with the pollutants. Over time the water pipes get corroded and therefore plastic has to be used which also expands with time and needs to repeatedly replaced.

The benefits of this concept include reduction in the environmental pollution and also "long-term economic benefit on unwanted health care expenses", explained Dr. Venkatesh. Although the response to Dr. Venkatesh's



Phenolphthalein used for pink colour
- Pic courtesy Google images

device, the first of its kind, to lessen the pollution to some extent drew overwhelming response from his colleagues, the fountain has not yet been put forth to the government to widen its scope.

Another professor at St. John's Biochemistry Department believed that these days not many people are not fond of water fountains any more, therefore it is not easy to create another such acid wash fountain. "The only fountains you see are in recreational centers like Brindavan Gardens etc.", he said.

What happens to the water that is contaminated with atmospheric

carbon-dioxide, sulphur pollutants and phenolphthalein? Dr. Venkatesh explained that the water gets recharged with alkali (the sodium hydroxide) and colouring agent (the phenolphthalein), the sediment is then used as a good manure.

The question arises that how many such fountains would be required to reduce the level of sulphur and carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere to a considerable level. To that, Dr. Venkatesh said, "There is no need to replicate. Every fountain is a new one and will work like any other fountain. Depending on the density of pollution and congestion we can have larger fountain with mist like water spray however the kind of fountain could be decided depending upon the area and surroundings attached to several social aspects".

Due to maintenance problem and construction the fountain has been removed. And though it does not have a shelf life, it depends on the individual as to how long they want to use it. "It all needs good maintenance to avoid blocking and clogging. And it does not require specialized training or the technologies to maintain. Even for a household person", said Dr. Venkatesh.

This methodology is quite economical, simple and non-invasive and can be adopted in a place that has high industrial and vehicular pollution.

This technology is on its way to get adopted further!