

Bangalore and its Lakes

Reclaiming our urban
lakes and engaging with
our natural ecosystem

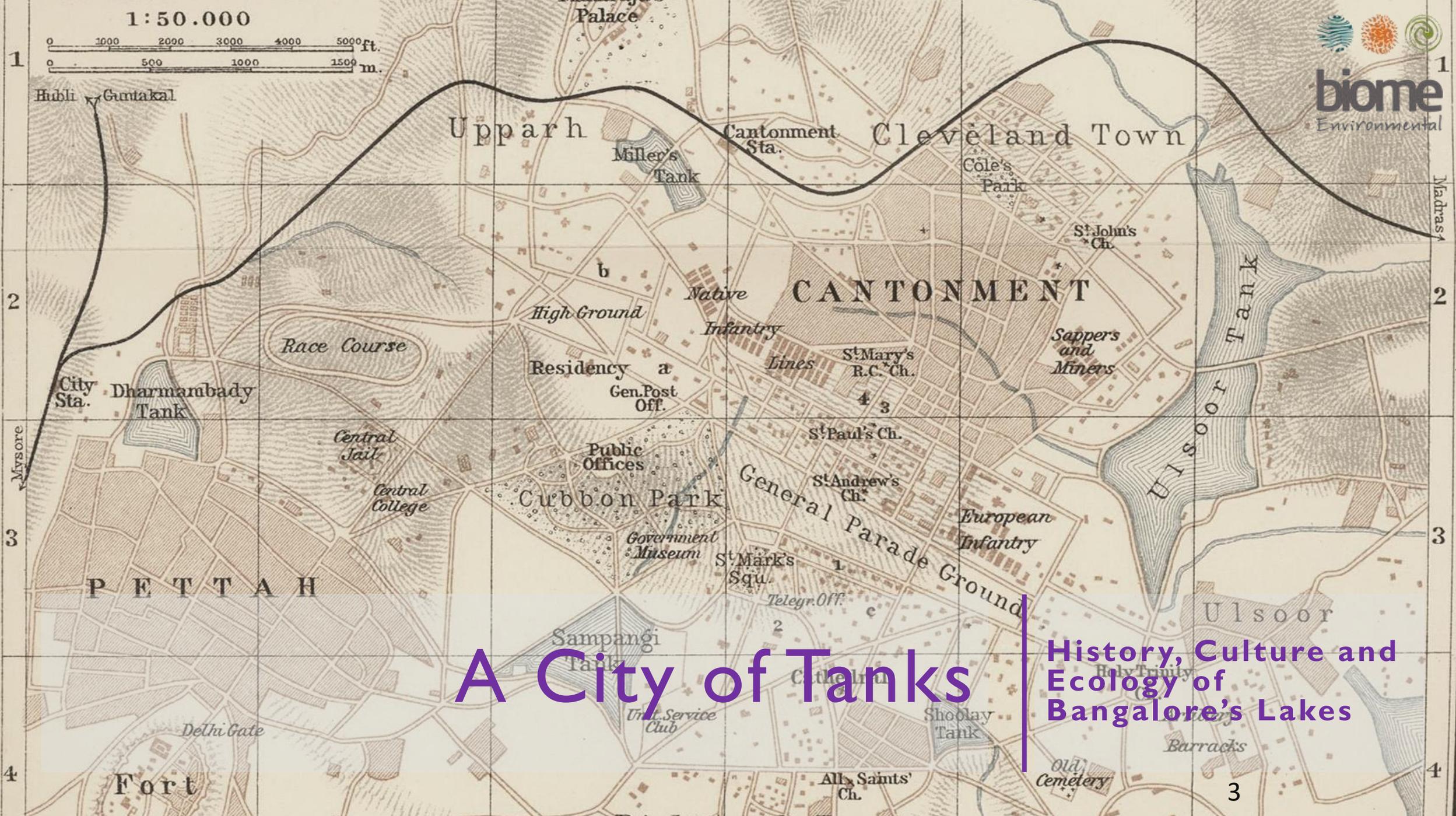
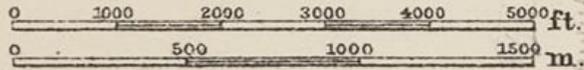
This document has been made to be used as a community resource and is meant to evolve with the contributions and experiences of everyone working to protect lakes. Please write to us with your contributions.

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1:50,000



A City of Tanks

History, Culture and Ecology of Bangalore's Lakes

Bangalore's Natural Water Resources

Bangalore is located at an altitude of 920 msl due to which the natural flow of water is *away from the city* and *into the valleys surrounding*.

Each valley at the ridge top gives birth to small streams which cascade down to form major stream systems.

Our rainfall: Bangalore receives **920mm of rain over 60 rainy days every year**

- Our city sits on two river basins, the **Cauvery** and the **Dakshina Pinakini**
- Our Rivers: The **Arkavathi**, the **Vrishabhavathi**, the **Dakshina Pinakini**
- Our Lakes and Tanks: Over 200!
- Our Openwells : **We are losing them, lets preserve them !**
- Our Private Borewells: too many to count (400,000+)

Bangalore's Tanks (Lakes) – A Historical Perspective

Most of Bangalore's lakes **are actually irrigation tanks**, built over the course of many centuries, starting with the Gangas, the Cholas and the Hoysalas who built tanks with high bunds to store water.

In the 16th Century, Kempegowda built tanks and irrigation wells as well. Traditionally interlinked through a chain or cascade system, this ensured water was not wasted.

The Hoysalas, Vijaynagara, Marathas, Tipu Sultan, Haider Ali, Wodeyars have all been patrons of lakes and tanks.

Earlier Uses, Values and Users

What we call 'lakes' were mostly **man-made irrigation tanks**.

Communities were largely agrarian and communities clustered around lakes.

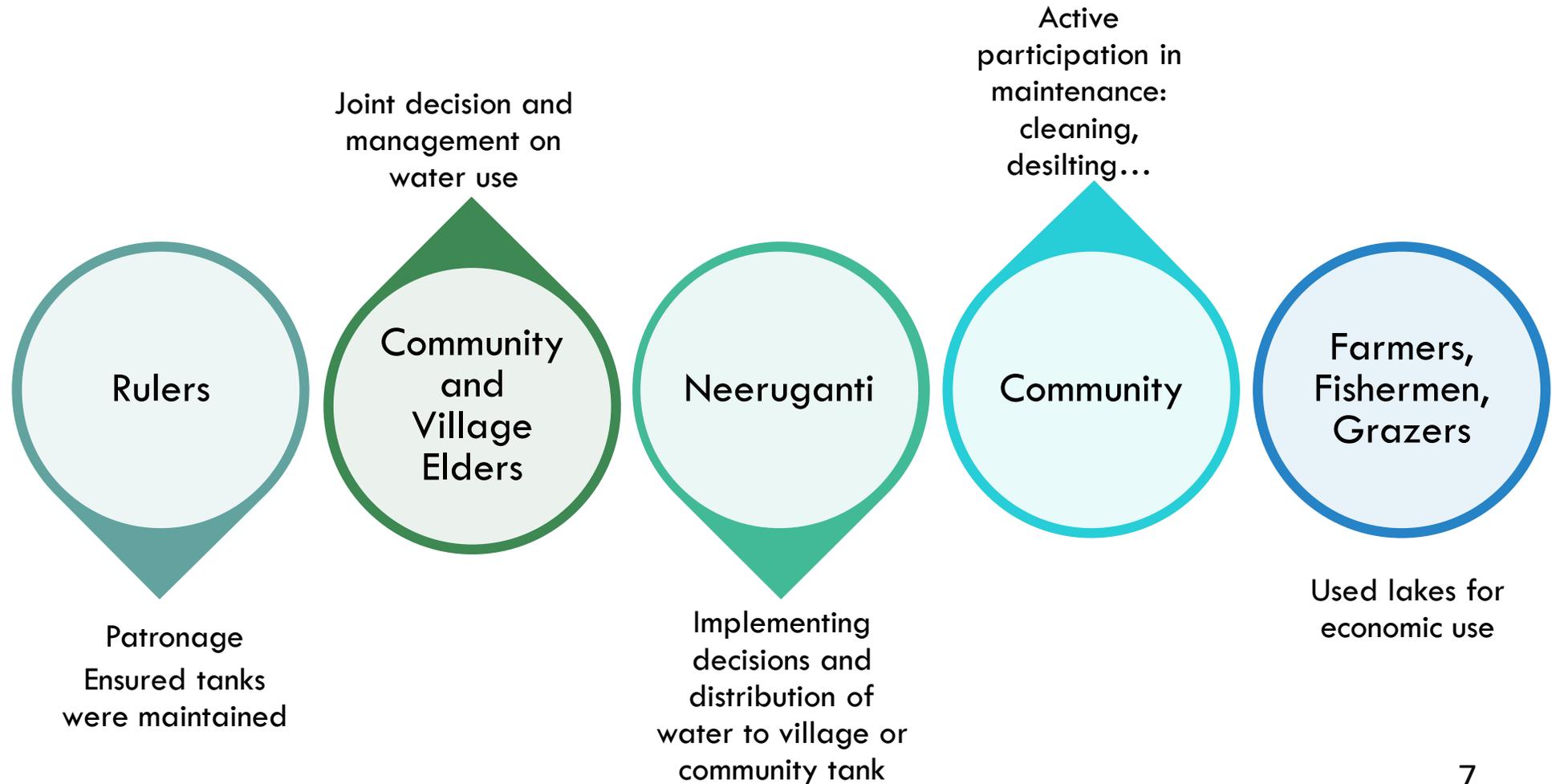
Lakes also had **environmental uses**, they were critical to flood control management, and stored water. They were **not always perennial**.

Lakes recharged groundwater.

This was accessed through wells and used for **drinking and domestic purposes** such as washing (both domestic and cattle)

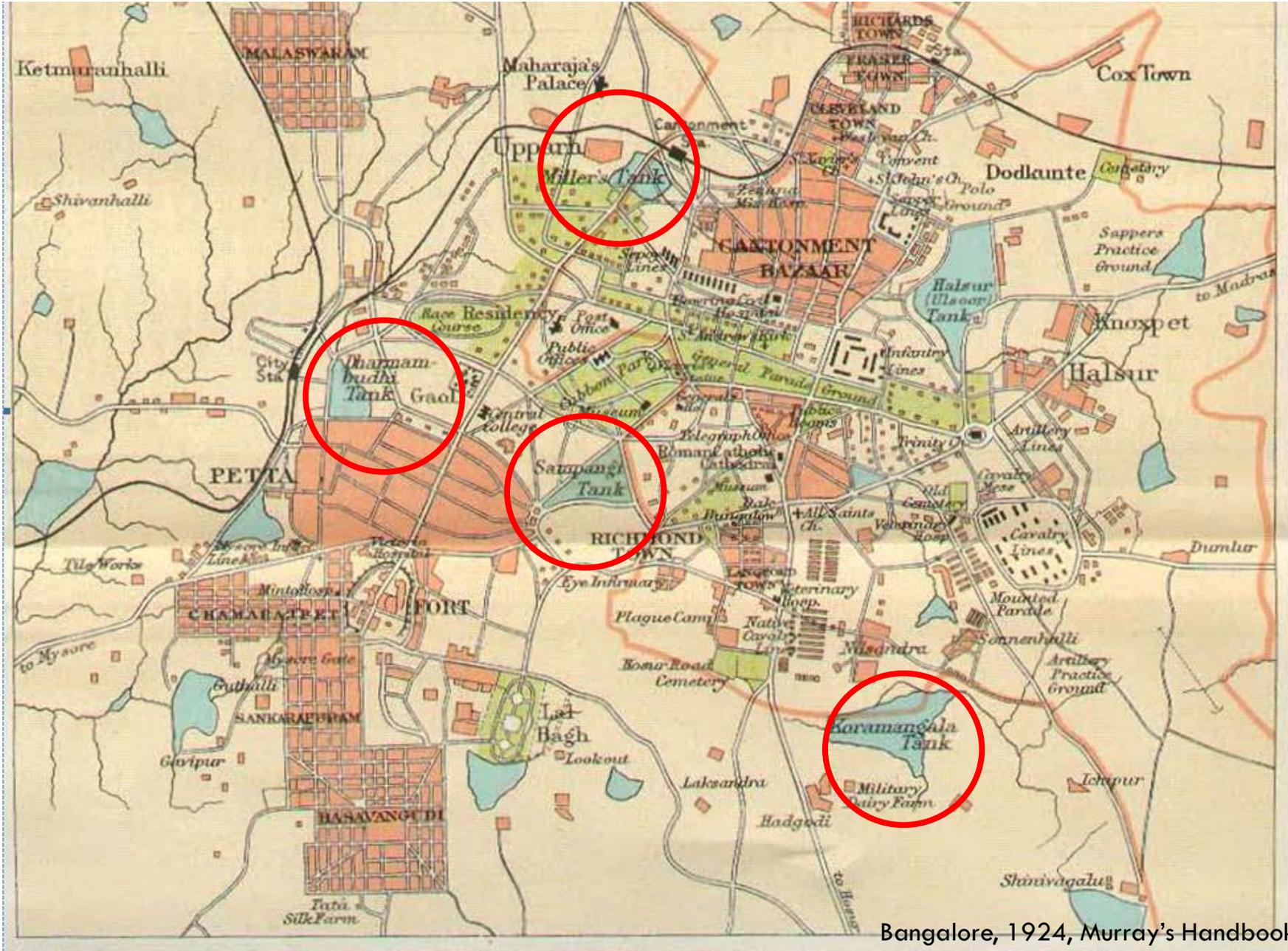
Of course, more importantly, it had economic uses as well, farmers used the water for **irrigation**, the silt as manure, shepherds used the grass for grazing, dhobis washed clothes, fishermen fished in the lakes

Who Managed and Owned These Lakes?



‘The sugarcane and rice crops looked most flourishing in the low wet land under the great tanks, which have all the appearance of natural lakes. Many of these have been most skilfully constructed, giving proof that the natives knew something of engineering, long before English rule and public works were thought of.’ Her observations of what the locals called keres... ‘Lakes, in the right sense of the word[...]have nowhere been observed by me in this country but tanks or water reservoirs with artificial embankments are in great abundance.’

Referring to Bellandur Bund, written in 1868. Excerpt from ‘Deccan Traverses’ by Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur.



Bangalore, 1924, Murray's Handbook 1924

Notes on Bellandur Lake in the 1800s, excerpted from
'Deccan Traverses', by Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur

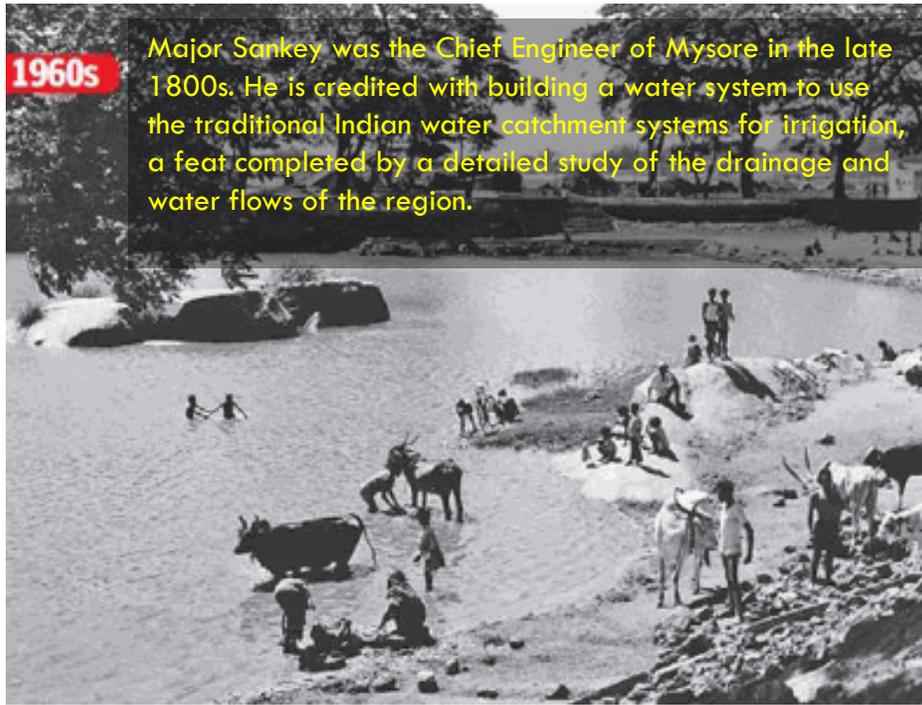
Belandur Bund is an embankment of earth between two high grounds to which it is linked by sluices that facilitate overflows. These overflows, together with the underflow enabled by a plug in the low ground toward the middle of its length, modulates the wetness and dryness of the extended terrains on either side.

Belandur Bund gathers two terrains: the first extends from the Bangalore Pettah, also called the City, and the second from the Bangalore Cantonment that in 1881 became known as the Civil and Military Station. Observers would describe these settlements as vastly different – 'a native town almost exclusively Kanarese in origin' and 'a heterogeneous assemblage of people of various nationalities and speaking several languages'. Belandur Bund, however, united them in the soil that it gathered from these settlements via two series of tanks.



SeaPlane Channel in Bellandoor Tank 1942

603x594 139kb JPEG



1960s

Major Sankey was the Chief Engineer of Mysore in the late 1800s. He is credited with building a water system to use the traditional Indian water catchment systems for irrigation, a feat completed by a detailed study of the drainage and water flows of the region.

Clockwise:
Bellandur lake,
1942 (courtesy HAL
Museum and Citizen
Matters); Sankey
Tank, 1960s (Indian
Express), Madiwala
Lake (The Hindu)
and Dharmambudhi
Lake, now Majestic
(ToI)



A Culture around Lakes

A centre for religious activity with an ecological perspective: idols were made out of silt and clay; their immersion would help desilt tanks, and move silt from smaller to larger ones



From l-r:
Idol immersion in
Yediyur Lake
(courtesy Deccan
Herald) and Sankey
Tank (The Hindu)

Bengaluru, a City of Firsts

The first Indian city to use steam engines to pump water from Hesarghatta reservoir to Bangalore in 1894

The first Indian city to use electricity to pump water in 1904

The first city water utility in India (the BWSSB) was set up in 1964

A rich tradition of tanks and open wells



Get in touch with Biome
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With thanks to
Shri Ramprasad and Friends of Lakes, PNLIT,
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And everyone engaged in
lake rejuvenation in Bangalore

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