

Haranada village. It consists of some 20 houses of traditional cattle-grazers. Almost all the young children here suffer from boils, ulcers and wounds on their faces and limbs.

50-year-old Jharnabai says the water in the river has become poisonous.

JHARNABAI: "The water in the river is so poisonous that our cattle have died from drinking it. I had some 50 buffaloes. All of them died. Now my family works as farm labourers. We told government officials about our problem, but they did not listen to us. The water is causing diseases but no one is taking any action. We want safe drinking water and compensation for the loss of cattle."

PRASAD: The residents say neither the government officials nor the local politicians are responding to their pleas. What's more, the management of the paper mill refuses to acknowledge it is polluting the river. I attempted to contact the management for comment but the security guards at the entrance refused to let me in. When I tried to reach them over telephone, I was asked to send an email with questions I wanted to ask.

Later, the executive director of the company replied to the email stating that the effluent discharged from the factory conforms to the stipulated standards and that the water is suitable for both irrigation and agricultural purposes.

However, B. Ramaiah of the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board says the Paper Mill is still in the process of installing the treatment plant.

The apathy of the government and the paper mill management has forced the residents to launch a protest to protect the river and the environment. Activists of the Kali Bachchao Andolan or the Save Kali Movement have staged demonstrations not only in Dandeli town, but also in the state capital Bangalore.

Panduranga Hegde is the leader of the Kali Bachchao Andolan.

HEGDE: "We staged a demonstration in front of the paper mill to highlight the pollution that it is causing. Then we held a demonstration in Bangalore. We sent petitions to the Chief Minister of Karnataka and the federal environment minister. We have succeeded in raising awareness and managed to stop excavation of sand from the riverbed. We are demanding that the people should get safe drinking water and that they stop polluting the river. Some 300,000 people are dependent on the Kali."

PRASAD: At last, the activists appear to have had some measure of success in attracting the attention of the government. It has announced that it will reconsider the decision to construct a new dam over the river. But, there is no word on the issue of pollution.

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