

News letter of 
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GREEN BANGALORE

Around 1800, many travelers including Lord Valentia described the plateau around Bangalore as “barren” or “naked” country. The greening of Bangalore city, as we know it today took place after that.

Bangalore, variously known as the Fashion Capital of India, the Biotech City, the Infotech City, the Silicon Valley of India, Botanical and Horticultural Capital of India, has, however, been best known as the Garden City of India. The city, made up of lakes, parks, wooded bungalows, tree-lined avenues (both indigenous and exotic) and traffic islands with trees and flowers, together with its equable climate made for the appellation of Garden City and thus also Pensioners’ Paradise right upto the 1970s.

The first major greened areas around Bangalore were Devarakadus and Gundutopus, - sacred groves and village woodlots respectively.

The earliest trees in the settlements around Bangalore, obviously indigenous trees, were planted around the old lakes and the Arkavati river. However these were largely found in habitations around Bangalore rather than in Bangalore city itself. We know there was and still is one of the great Acacia forests in India in Savanadurga. There were also patches of green in the Devarakadus/ Gundutopus, like at Nallur Amaroy Topu near present day Devanahalli airport. This Topu survives today as a 45 acre monoculture of 500 to 800 year old Tamarind trees. Interestingly, the Topu and the areas around have over the last 1000 years been held by the Gangas, Cholas, Hoysalas and Wodiyars of Mysore.

We have an excellent example of a Gundotopu at Shivagange, where in an area of over 20 acres there is one of the finest collection of Ippe (Mahua or Madhuka longifolia) trees.



A 500 - 800 year old Tamarind tree at Nallur Amaroitopu



The same tree shown with the trunk split by lightning



The ippe (mahua) Gundutopu at Shivagange



A Painting of Lalbagh Garden 1760

The gardens which greened Bangalore began with Hyder Ali. The Sultan, being a Muslim, as an act of piety and thanksgiving, after gaining control of Mysore State and expanding it, set up three gardens, one of which was in Bangalore one mile east of the Fort, which was located within the family fiefdom. This garden, first known as the Rose & Cypress garden later became known as Lalbagh, Lalbagh was a layered garden; it began at 1760 as a Royal Pleasure garden and, after Tipu's death in 1799, it went on to become a Botanical/Horticultural garden and a Public Park. There was also a zoo in Lalbagh which was moved to Mysore in 1932.

Plants came in from all over the world. Hyder Ali got his plants from Islamic gardens in Lahore, Multan, Delhi and Arcot, where plants had come in from elsewhere. Tipu, his son, was a greater plant buff, bringing in plants from Madagascar and Mauritius, Turkey and Persia, Tenerife and Canary Islands and 'Oaks and Pines' from Cape Town. Most of these plants came from French & Muslim

territories with whom Hyder and Tipu had excellent relations.

The British involvement in Lalbagh began after Hyder Ali and Tipu and resulted in Bangalore having the greatest diversity of trees of any city in India.

The British and Europeans had been mounting plant collecting expeditions worldwide. These plants were often initially planted in Kew Gardens (near London) and then found their way into the major botanical gardens in India, but mainly into Lalbagh. This later resulted in Bangalore having avenues of Tabebuias, Mahogany, Rain Trees, Spathodeas, among others.

The many Tabebuias species come from a two million square kilometer area south of the Amazon, known as the "Cerrado". The Cerrado is a grassland or prairie with patches of trees in which the Tabebuias are found.

Parks and gardens in Bangalore were planted with exotics such as Araucaria cookii (commonly called Christmas Trees) brought from over 10,000 miles away in New Caledonia. We should note that the Silver Oak (from Australia), the Bougainvillea (from South America), the Plumeria or Frangipani (from South America) and the Jacaranda are all exotics introduced to India. So also is the Gul Mohur, which comes from Madagascar.

This mix of trees from all over the world and our own very special indigenous trees, is one of the key features of our Garden City.

Going out from Bangalore City, on every highway, we have many grand old species of India: the Ficus



A typical Banyan on a highway going out of the city

species [Banyans, Peepuls (Aralimara), Ficus Mysorensis (Gonimara)] Tamarinds, the Jarul (Pride of India) and the Neem, among others. These indigenous trees were planted on the highways in the days when there was movement of people and material by horse carts and bullock carts. These trees provided necessary shade and shelter on the roadsides.

Among the exotics, some sixty percent of the vegetables and fruits we eat today in Bangalore, come from outside India. The potato, the tomato, the chow chow, the avacado, the sapota/chickoo, the green chilly, the lettuce, etc. were all brought into Bangalore, adapted and then disseminated from Lalbagh. What is noteworthy is that till the 1960s there were over 300 acres under apple cultivation in Bangalore and prior to the 1950s there were over 350 acres of vineyards in Bangalore which have now disappeared without trace.

All the trees and vegetables/fruits mentioned above found their way into homes and kitchen garden, public institutions and gardens across the city.

After Independence the new extensions in Bangalore city such as Indiranagar and Koramangala were planted with a number of exotic and indigenous trees by the Forest Department with considerable care taken in the selection of trees species.

Adding to the greenery in Bangalore, since 1800, there is over 8000 acres in the heart of Bangalore in the Cantonment which belongs to Defence Institutions, 480 acres in the Roerich Tatguni Estate, besides other areas like the Valley School, IISc and Palace Grounds (over 100 acres each), which constitute a major part of the greening within the Bangalore city.

METRORAIL CONTRIBUTING TO BANGALORE'S ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Four years ago at the start of Bangalore Metrorail's construction, Dr. Yellappa Reddy was invited to head a team of environmental experts to advise them on ways and means to build the Metro without hurting the environment in the city. For 2 years these experts and the engineers worked as a team, implementing the suggestions given by the former.

In the subsequent 2 years not a single meeting of the experts was convened by Metrorail nor were they asked for any suggestions. The construction of the Metro has gone ahead in total disregard of its impact on the environment in the city. A typical example of this disdain for the suggestions given by the panel of experts of their own volition, is the decision to build a station in front of the Vidhan Soudha even though the experts feel that

- there are 2 stations within about 400 metres coming up at a college nearby and next to the cricket stadium. The experts feel there is no need for this 3rd station and there could be a skywalk between the Vidhan Soudha and either of the other 2 stations,

- there is no need to cut about 100 to 150 old and exotic rare trees around the Vidhan Soudha, of which about 40 will be cut just to give space to the contractor to do some work there. Most of this work could be done elsewhere and the completed sections transported to this site.
- there is danger of damage to heritage buildings around the Vidhan Soudha due to the blasting that will be needed to make the foundations for the station,

Our Vidhan Soudha and the Court building area is one of the beautiful, open and clean spots in Bangalore, which should not be messed up with a Metro station.

Dr. Yellappa Reddy felt that he and his team of experts were totally sidelined and were not able to perform the functions for which they were originally appointed. He therefore submitted his resignation, leaving the fate of Bangalore's environment in the hands of Metrorail who do not consider environmental issues in the construction of the Metro to be of any importance. Engineering is all that matters.



An Araucaria cookii (New Caledonian Pine) brought into Lalbagh from 10,000 miles away from New Caledonia - half way through from Australia to Fiji Islands. This tree thrives in Lalbagh which is at 3,000 ft. and there is no salt air to which the tree is used to. The tree is around 165 ft. in height.

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