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## Urban Greening and Tree Preservation at BET



Malleshwaram.

Our city is generally well known as being endowed with several well maintained parks and gardens and a few outstanding City lakes as well. In terms of tree wealth, Bangalore probably ranks along with New Delhi and Chandigarh at the top in this area.

A favourable climate, well planned development trajectory and the past work of outstanding horticulturalists have given Bangalore this reputation. Public focus has of course always been on the large parks Lalbagh and Cubbon Park, but it is only recently that attention is being paid to the fate of our stately avenue trees, many of whose fate hangs in the balance, as projects for the Metro and traffic decongestion get under way. Our avenues contain some of the largest trees found in any world city including the Rain Tree, Jacaranda, African Tulip, Delonix, Indian Mahogany etc while towering over many street shrines are examples of the nationally revered Peepal. In sheer size, majesty and spread, possibly only

London's Plane Trees can rival Bangalore's Rain Trees, especially those along St Mark's Road, C V Raman Road, Cantonment Station Road or at the busy Mayo Hall area.. Thanks to a recent tree planting drive by the BBMP, we can in future decades also expect to see avenues of Neem and the Jamun too, provided they are not cut down in their adolescence by hurriedly and poorly conceived "development" works. The role of trees of every variety in maintaining our environmental parameters within liveable limits is a crucial one and they absorb a lot of vehicle exhaust products, keep road asphalt temperatures low, act as sound barriers, provide shelter and transit for birds and release



Giants of St Marks Road



Concrete channels on widened Road

oxygen to an increasingly crowded city. Their role as icons and environmental guardians of our city inevitably means that at BET, we do plan a lot of our advocacy and action around the growth and preservation of trees in Bangalore. Broadly BET is active in a few areas concerning tree preservation and greening:

### Traffic decongestion projects

Road widening, flyovers, underpasses, rail under and over bridges and Metro build-up would fall under this category. Many such projects need to be planned

much better with tree preservation in mind before rushing into execution. Our photo no. 1 shows the poorly executed pedestrian walkway along Hosur Lashkar Road which is just a concrete box, leaving no scope to plant new trees along this recently widened road. We also hear that after widening Seshadri Road in 2008-09, the traffic circle at K R Circle may revert back to a signalled junction. In such a case, could not coordinated signals at KR Circle, and Maharani's College Junction have been used in 2008 and felling of large numbers of large Rain Trees been avoided on this stretch, which was four lanes wide in any case ?

While some mistakes are not correctable, others are amenable to mitigation measures and BET has been suggesting a few to the authorities.



Hosur Lashkar Road in summer Preserve these open spaces for all time

a. On Hosur Lashkar Road, with the concrete channels laid for utility cables, the situation is not too hopeful, but some of us are engaged with the property owners on this stretch to see whether they can agree to planting avenue species along their boundary walls, on the inside, to mitigate the situation created by the faulty widening plan of the authorities. There is a potential to plant 30-40 trees and restore the looks of this area.

b. BET supports the contention of the Koramangala residents that better design and planning is needed for speeding up traffic along Sarjapur Road and the solution does not just lie in felling avenue trees, taking over parts of verdant properties like the IIA campus and gouging out underpasses. Why not consider an overhead road and if you are mass transport minded, why not instead plan a monorail all along Sarjapur

Road, via NIMHANS upto JC Road and if need be upto a Metro station node on the North-South corridor? This will preserve the enormous rain Trees in the NIMHANS area stretching for a kilometre or more and also help preserve the fine Jacaranda and Tabebuia trees along the wall of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics. At the very least, the review committee constituted by the CM, with IISc experts should be heard out and plans modified accordingly before rushing into execution

c. Along with various environmentally conscious groups, BET will engage with the BBMP Forest cell on the underpass plan on C V Raman Road which can potentially lead to the felling of over 300 trees. Questions in this regard are whether as many as 300 trees really need to be felled and what the details are tree by tree. In a larger sense, whether such a wide road needs an underpass when one already exists at CNR Rao Circle just a kilometre away?

Does the signal-free concept really have to be implemented rigorously even in the heart of the city or should it not be confined to the outer areas where the large radial highways give access to the City? We really cannot afford to do away with traffic signals in the inner city and there is no example of any city in the world with such a concept being executed. We know that both in Seoul and Boston, major flyovers have been brought down to make way for more citizen friendly transit roads and parks. Both for the future of Bangalore's tree wealth and for the safety and convenience of its citizens, the signal free concept needs to be given its geographical limits and an expert group needs to urgently define the specific junctions where this should and should not be applied.



Station Road

Can you have a cooler ride



## Urban Greening Work

a. Recently, we worked with the BBMP in identifying a large open area abutting the head of Seshadri Road, outside the Race Course wall and motivated the Forest Dept to plant ten saplings of large tree species in this prominent location. The staff of the BBMP Forest Dept showed great enthusiasm in arranging for the planting and mounting of tree guards, though we still depend on the monsoon to make a late appearance and ensure their survival.

Mr M Krishnappa, DCF-North and Mr Muniraju ( DRFO) were instrumental in carrying out this greening job in a prominent city area.

b. In 2010, BET trustees paid several visits to a successful greening project on the fringes of the BNP carried out over 20 years by Swami Vishnumayananda of the

Ramakrishna Mission. His dedication has resulted in a 200 acre area transformed into an evergreen forest with three man-made forest pools. This area supports innumerable birds and small animals, with some leopard and elephant also making their presence felt. On Swamiji's suggestion, and with the Mission's support BET put up proposals with extensive documentation urging the State Govt to permit similar work on adjoining dry tracts on the BNP outskirts over a larger area. This would deliver environmental benefits with the growth of evergreen species and the formation of water bodies all over the project area. It took about two years of







Creating parking space without felling trees-Jayanagar. Bravo

advocacy and persuasion and to the great credit of our Forest Dept, permission for such an initiative has been granted and work has commenced. We expect thousands of native species to come up on this unique urban forest area over the next few decades.

c. Bangalore is following the initiative of most large cities by executing a Metro rail project whose first phase is to be about 40 Kms long. IN 2009, some environmental activist groups took strong objection to the Metro alignment along the Lakshman Rao Boulevard in Jayanagar , rightly fearing the felling of around 230 enormous Rain Trees . BET personnel also joined the protest marches in support. While the alignment could not be modified for operational reasons, today we



Evening under the canopy  
Subburama Chetty Road

find that the trees on this stretch have been felled only at the station sites and around 100 trees remain preserved with some pruning. It may not be far off the mark to conclude that the intense agitation at that time resulted in the Metro authority taking a decision not to fell all the trees along this iconic boulevard , which was certainly one of the nation's finest . Thanks to activism, commuters on the Metro's Green line will get a splendid elevated view of a well planned urban park lined by trees over half a century old, as they travel to Jayanagar.

d. In June 2010, BET also took the initiative to organise a meeting with the Advisor to the CM on Urban Planning and invited members from concerned groups such as Hasiru Usiru, CIVIC, CISTUP etc . The Advisor, Dr Ravindra took note of several suggestions from civil society on the alternatives to road widening that could be considered.

BET pointed out several alternatives in respect of ORR at JP Nagar, Queens Road and Cantt Station Road. On all these roads so far, the status quo remains, with the avenue trees still in place. All members of concerned groups however will have to watch the status , as the widening and signal-free plans unfold.

e. The State does have a Tree preservation act in force. A separate initiative within BET has made detailed studies of similar acts in other States also. While our Act is fairly extensive, BET feels that in a few vital areas the Act needs to be modified to ensure better compliance and effective conservation. A detailed set of recommendations is being prepared for presentation to the Govt shortly.

While some urban greenery gives way to the Metro and maybe a future BRT system , we take note of fine initiatives by the BBMP and State Govt such as planting of around 300000 saplings last year along prominent roads, plans for five major tree parks on the outskirts and putting on hold the monstrous proposal to build a 100 storey tower on the vacated Race Course land. The Judiciary has also delivered timely advice to the Sate to consider a new green area within the old Race Course , in the heart of the city. This, if executed would do a lot towards compensating for the huge number of old and large trees lost along, Seshadri, Palace and Race Course Roads from 2007 onwards.

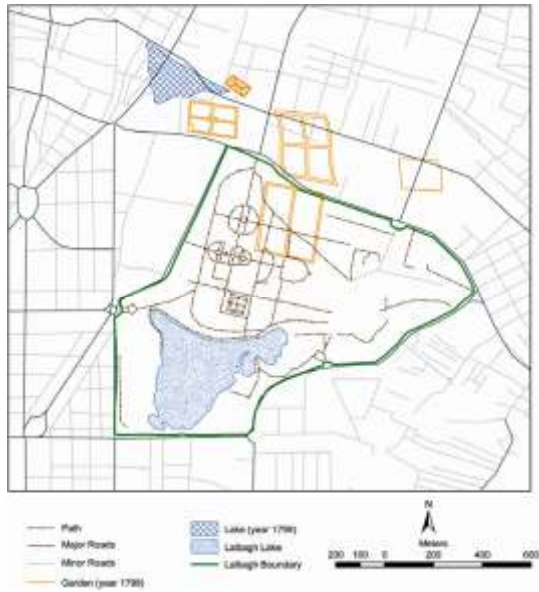
In the long run, at BET there is a strong belief that it needs not just green-conscious groups like ourselves, but a change in the mind-set of politicians and planners in Govt , if such initiatives are to bear fruit. Plans to take over upto 2 acres of Lalbagh for a signal-free corridor should actually be vetoed within our Planning and State Govt bodies themselves . Why does it need protests from green groups in the city for such schemes to be reconsidered ? We need everyone including planners and politicians to consider our tree wealth and tree lined parks and streets as being as precious as Tippu's Palace or the Bull Temple, and as deserving of preservation.

BET's mission will not be complete till such a transformation in our thinking takes place.

## LIST OF TRUSTEES



**Figure 1.** Map showing the presumed original extent and location of Lalbagh in 1760; based on maps published by the Department of Horticulture, Government of Karnataka.



**Figure 2.** Map of the area around modern Lalbagh, also depicting the locations of the five patches of gardens in 1799, and the lake.



**Figure 3.** Oblique view illustrating the spatial and orientation of Lalbagh and its environs in the eighteenth century.



**Figure 4.** Simulated view corresponding to views in the paintings by Home and Colebrooke.

1. Capt. S. Prabhala  
Former CMD, Bharat Electronics Ltd
2. Mohan Bopaiah  
Architect
3. Zafar Futehally  
Environmentalist
4. Urmila Devi Kotda Sangani  
Committee Member,  
International Music & Arts Society
5. G. Govardhan  
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