

Bangalore, Friday, 29 Jul 2016



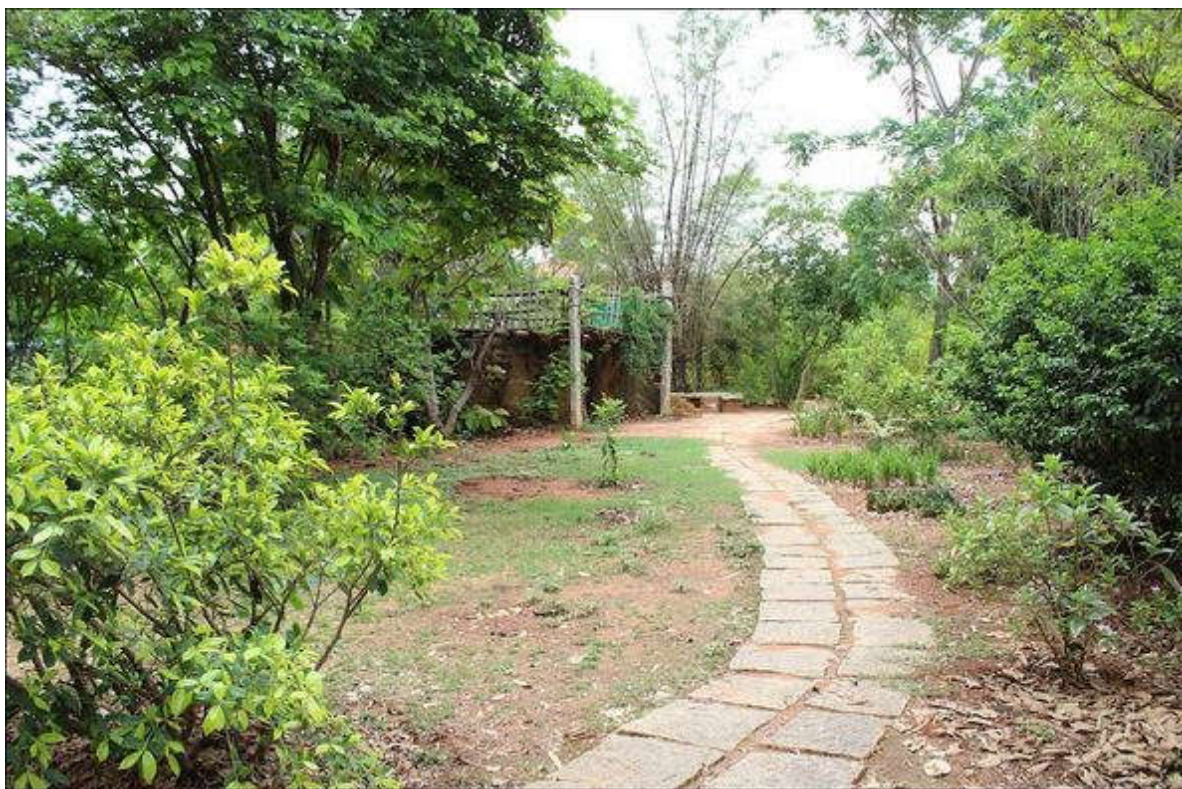
What happens when you keep the promise made to the land

What happens when you plant a lot of trees and nurture them? Nature takes over. The story of a school that was established in a barren land 16 years ago.

Seetha Ravi , 21 Jun 2016

Recently I read about the Indian Institute of Science Campus which is said to be 2 to 2.5 degrees C cooler than the rest of Bangalore City - a great boon in these times of ever warmer summers. While the IISc. Campus is huge with over 112 species of trees, there is a story worth telling here.

In the 1980s a team at IISc. led by Dr. T.V. Ramachandra had planted about 500 saplings of 49 species of trees from the Western Ghats in two hectares of degraded land. What is remarkable about this is that this area has become wild and lush like a rainforest, certainly nourishing to the soul and spirit, more than the rest of the 400 acre campus which is looks more orderly and manmade.



This news item has prompted me to tell our little Prakriya-Bhoomi story, the story of our campus and the trees that give it life. We began with degraded land and very little water too. We too were keen on indigenous species, although a few trees like spethodias and Jacaranda have come into the campus. And today, many people who visit us tell us that our campus is cooler than its surrounding area too. But it wasn't so a couple of decades ago.



When we first got the land for the Prakriya - Bhoomi campus in 1998, there was some parched land, seven acres of Eucalyptus trees which had to be removed and precisely five young Honge trees. There were no butterflies or birds that I could see, although sometimes a few crows would stop by inquisitively, to see if we were giving them any leftovers. The first promise to the land that I made was that we will plant at least 108 species of trees and that no building would be taller than a tree nearby. And we made the Honge our mascot-tree, the school tree which has pride of place on the stage of our open air theatre.



As you enter the school, we have the Panchavati to the right, with the five sacred trees - Banyan, Bilwa, common Fig, Pipal and Amla. Other interesting trees here are Krishna's Buttercup (*Ficus Krishnae*) and the Frangipani tree. Various other species, mostly indigenous are sprinkled all over the campus; the

bamboo, *Ficus benjamina*, with its pretty red berries, the cassia javanica, the ball badminton tree and many other pretty trees are around the pond, a favourite haunt of the children.



We wanted a mini forest and at least a bit of wilderness. So in the south-east corner is a small *Devara Kadu*, named after the sacred groves found all over India, a space which should remain a forest. Arjuna, neem, jamuns, jack fruit, basavanapada and many other species are found here. Nearby is a large rainwater collection pit which is now overgrown with wild grass, bamboo and shrubs.



Around the games field are many trees including the trees that symbolise the five 'houses' that children belong to. The Kadamba tree of the Prithvi house, the Rain tree of the Jal house, the Flame of the forest of

the Agni house, the Neem of the Vayu house and the Aakaash mallige of the Aakash house.

A school campus needs many buildings... but the medicinal garden, Dhanwantari and a small fruit orchard had to be fitted in. There are of course the trees with fun names, like the Mad tree whose leaves can be widely different - saying, oh, don't you dare be different! And the Devils tree - *Alstonia scholaris*: what's it saying? Studying too much is a bit devilish?



Today, we have more than 108 species of trees and an uncounted number of herbs, shrubs and medicinal plants. Since we tried to plant two or more saplings of each species (they need company of their own kind!), we have more than 250 trees on campus. And now we find that Mother Nature has blessed us by inviting in over 80 species of birds and over 60 species of butterflies!

Seetha Ravi
21 Jun 2016

URL for this article

<http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/prakriya-green-wisdom-school-tree-garden-story>

Copyright © 2007-2016 Oorvani Media Pvt Ltd., All Rights Reserved