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Not just people, drains kill our trees too!

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In 2016, over 10,000 Bengalureans rallied against the steel flyover, which would



(http://epaperarchives.deccanchronicle.com/)

*have cost the city a significant chunk of its green cover. That disaster may have been averted, but over 1,000 trees have been felled in the last two years alone to pave way for drains. However, as trees with deep roots are planted over these drains, which are built with cement, authorities have no choice but to prune them to enable sewage flow. A porous, scientific design could go a long way in preserving the city's green cover so why then are we being forced to choose between our trees and a functional drainage system, asks **Aksheev Thakur***

Most Bengalureans would agree that its shrinking green cover is one of the biggest challenges facing the city today. There is reason for worry as a study by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) warns that 93.26 per cent of the so-called Garden City will be covered by concrete structures by 2020 if things continue the way they are.

As of now there seems little hope as not only is Bengaluru losing trees to projects to widen roads or build flyovers, but also to drains that damage their roots.

Going by a city tree doctor, Vijay Nishanth, over 1,000 trees have been axed over the past two years alone to pave way for drains. "There has been no effort to change the flow of drain water to prevent the need to prune the roots or chop of an entire tree," he regrets.

Sadly, its the rain trees with their deep roots, that are affected although they provide most of Bengaluru's green cover. That is not all. In March this year it was reported that over 17 trees had been poisoned and 13 had their canopies pruned by advertising agencies to make way for their large hoardings.

Unfortunately, while people have of late been coming out on the streets to protect what is left of the city's greenery whenever it is under threat from large projects, they can do little when the trees are cut surreptitiously by those who have a vested interest in removing them.

"In most such cases the timber mafia is involved in cutting the trees as there is a lot of money at stake. We need to do more to save the tree's green cover," stresses Mr Suresh NR, convener of a voluntary group, United Bengaluru.

What worries environmentalists is the BBMP forest cell's failure to consult its scientific wing before cutting trees to make way for its projects. Amazed at the indifferent attitude of the civic authority to the city's declining tree cover, Mr TV Ramachandra of the Indian Institute of Science is disturbed by the poor urban planning, which leads to among other things, building of drains around trees.

"While building drains they pour concrete near the roots of trees, weakening them. Instead they must consult experts and the scientific cell of the BBMP before going ahead with such projects," he suggests.

Sometimes the consequences of such indifferent planning can even prove fatal. A resident of Jayanagar Block 2, Narayan, says he and his family could have been crushed under a tree in last month's downpour had they not moved in the nick of time. "We were in a car and within a minute of us moving away a tree fell at the spot," he recalls with a shudder.

Other people too, who have had similar narrow escapes in September's torrential rain, blame their near death experiences on trees with weakened roots.

"While constructing the drains, the forest department must leave some space for tree roots to grow and prune them properly, as otherwise it could be endangering lives," says Mr Vivek Gupta, a resident of Koramangala.

BBMP should map city's trees, says expert

Despite the city's fast depleting green cover, the BBMP has not bothered to do a tree census that environmentalists have been calling for for years. Had the census, Project Vruksha, been done, people would have had all the data on the number of trees felled or planted in their respective localities, point out the city's eco lover.s.

Urban expert, V Ravichander believes the agency also needs to map the city's trees to help it carry out its projects. "For instance, it is a big challenge to channelise the flow of water inside a drain since it flows from a high to low level. But if the drain network was linked to GIS to know the coordinates, the trees could be accordingly axed," he says.

Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF), Appu Rao, admits that he has received over 10 requests from the South Zone over the last few months to bring down either weak trees, which are a threat to people or trees that are blocking the flow of water in drains.

But ask him if a way can be found to save trees around drains, and he says, "It is not up to me. The root expands and sometimes it even weakens the foundation of houses. Some species of trees, which were planted in 1980, have over time expanded and are now blocking drains."

The DCF claims that over the past two or three years not one tree with gigantic roots has been planted in the city and the civic agency has been opting only for medium sized trees.

Guest Column: Can we afford to have drains take over our lung space?

Vijay Nishanth

tree doctor

If I am right at least a 1,000 trees across the city have suffered in the past two years due to the unplanned drainage system. At many places the BBMP forest cell did not even consult the people before bringing down some of the biggest trees in the city. Being associated with tree projects I have seen roots of trees being severely damaged during construction of drains, reducing not only their life expectancy, but also placing the lives of commuters and the locals at risk. In the midst of all this the forest cell, manned by only 12 officials to monitor the entire city, has zero accountability. Although no scientific mechanism was adopted to protect trees during any kind of construction after 2000, the officials were never questioned. And Project Vruksha, which was aimed at doing a census of trees, was stalled because the forest officials thought it