

## Man of the forests who made Bangalore green

Rohith BR, TNN | Feb 17, 2014, 03:28AM IST

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Sitting in the balcony of his two-storey house in Basaveshwaranagar, west Bangalore, SG Neginhal, 85, is busy preparing notes. Whenever he raises his head, he takes a sharp look at the tree-lined avenue ahead of him. And soon his smile breaks into words. "I'm writing a book for children on the richness of flora around them, and the science of tree planting. There's no future if we don't revive in youngsters the interest and importance of tree conservation," he says.

The octogenarian brings to his books his rich experience as a forest officer. Starting with *Your Bangalore, Your Trees* (1994), till his latest work, *Golden Trees, Green Spaces and Urban Forestry* (2006), Neginhal has penned six books on tree diversity of southern India.

In fact, Neginhal has always been watering green dreams. Much before retiring and penning books, he was instrumental in ensuring the Garden City never lost its green cover to rapacious growth. Today, if you feel areas like Malleswaram, Koramangala, Basavanagudi and Hebbal still retain their green cover, the credit goes to Neginhal.

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Between 1982 and 1987 when Neginhal was posted in Bangalore, as many as 15 lakh saplings were planted in different parts of the city. Thanks to him and his team's efforts, the survival rate was almost 100%. Some of these trees have ceded ground to road widening, flyovers and Metro work but most still stand tall. Incidentally, the city hasn't witnessed a tree-planting drive of such a scale since.

Neginhal, from Belgaum district, followed in his father's footsteps and joined the forest department in 1951. When Project Tiger was initiated in 1971, he was posted in Bandipur, and he ensured the sanctuary became a tiger reserve.

In 1982, then CM R Gundu Rao tasked him with the job of greening Bangalore. Used to working in deep forests, Neginhal, then 52, was reluctant. He relented only on the condition that he'll be allowed to return to the wild in three years.

"I knew the urban forestry drive won't be a success without people's involvement. We went to each locality and asked people what kind of trees they wanted on their roadside. While some wanted flowering trees, some were keen on the fragrant ones," he says.

Neginhal set up several nurseries each with lakhs of saplings. On realizing the saplings were being nibbled away by stray cattle, he came up with low-cost tree guards. "The drive was a success and I wasn't allowed to leave Bangalore," he says.

The former forest officer still guides youngsters on the science of tree planting and maintenance. An avid bird watcher and wildlife photographer, he and his camera escapes into the woods of Bandipur or Dandeli whenever time permits.

### HE CAME WHEN IT MATTERED

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It was during the 1980s that Bangalore first woke up to the consequences of its unbridled growth. The sleepy city that had a population of 16 lakh in 1971 clocked a near cent percent growth, recording a population of 30-plus lakh in 1981.

"Many areas in Bangalore looked barren to me. The city was expanding and there was a huge influx of people. While core areas like Chamarajpet and Basavanagudi had shade, new localities like Jayanagar, Hebbal and Vijayanagar were veritable concrete jungles," Neginhal says recalling how the city looked back in 1982.

The success story of Bangalore's urban forestry, under Neginhal's able guidance, became a point of reference for other cities. The drive not only received national awards but also made the Centre include urban tree planting in its five-year plans.

"But tree cover started deteriorating after the planting task was handed over to the local administration. Official lethargy, the timber lobby, lack of trained men and political pressure led to the gradual death of trees," rues Neginhal.

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### Reader's opinions



Senthil K (Unknown)  
10 Followers

Gold: 8.6K



Location: Plant along the road or on any private land but with local support. Avoid places below electric cables except for bushes. Ensure that a grown tree will not obstruct traffic. Covered places are unsuitable for trees, bushes, smaller plants or climbers. Time: The most suitable time is monsoon between June – September as the land is moist and rain waters plants. Moderate temperature and good rainfall are favourable for saplings to grow as they need time to root and acclimatise before summer's heat and dryness or winter's freezing temperatures.



KRISHNA KUMAR (BANGALORE)

SG Neginhal, 85, RESPECTED SIR, YOU SHOULD BE AWARDED THE BHARAT RATNA FOR WHATEVER YOU HAVE DONE. I FEEL SORRY THAT YOUR ARE AGED 85, WHEN I SAY RESPECTED SIR - I MEAN TO SAY YOU ARE THE FEW GENTLEMEN IN THE GARDEN CITY WHO HAVE WISHED THE GARDEN CITY TO REMAIN AS THE GARDEN CITY STILL. THE SO CALLED (MONEY HUNGRY) RESIDENTS OF THE CITY ARE BUSY INVITING ESTATE SHARKS & LAND DEVELOPERS, SELLING THEIR BEAUTIFUL PROPERTIES FOR HUGE SUMS OF MONEY TO THESE HORRIBLE VULTURES WHO ARE EAGER TO DESTROY THE CITY OF ITS BEAUTY. MR. S.M. KRISHNA WANTED TO SEE THE SINGAPORE OF BANGALORE & HE DID A LITTLE BIT OF GROUND

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WORK IN HIS REGIME, BUT LATER GOVTS IN THE STATE HAVE GIVEN THESE VULTURES FULL FREEDOM TO BUILD CONCRETE STRUCTURES AS THEY LIKE & DESTROY THE CITY'S BEAUTY . MALLESWARAM ONCE CALLED THE PENSIONERS PARADISE IS TODAY BUZZING WITH PEOPLE ACTIVITY RATHER THAN HAVING TREES. THE WORST IS THAT THE STATE GOVT OF SIDDU & CO HAVE GIVEN FULL FREEDOM TO DESTROY THE CITY OF ITS BEAUTY IN THE NAME OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS. WAY BACK IN THE 1970'S & 80'S THE UTILITY BUILDING ON M.G. ROAD WAS THE ONLY BUILDING WHICH WAS LIKE A EIFFEL TOWER OF BANGALORE, BUT TODAY YOU CANNOT COUNT THE NUMBER CONCRETE MONSTERS LIKE THIS AROUND THE CITY. WITH A MASSIVE POPULATION IN THE CITY , THE CITY IS NOTHING BUT GOING TO BE A CONCRETE JUNGLE & GARBAGE CITY OF INDIA. SHAME ON SIDDU & CO TO LET GO THESE ESTATE VULTURES TO DO AS THEY LIKE .



**Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **Senthil K**  
7 Followers  
Silver: 1.2K



Right pointers Mr Senthil. Local government should consider these suggestions



**shekall2005 (Location)**  
81 Followers  
Gold: 15.8K



Thanks SG Neginhal and sons we need people like u not only in India but around the world and make it green for the future generation.



**Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **KRISHNA KUMAR**  
7 Followers  
Silver: 1.2K



Politics is not alone to be blamed Mr Krishna. We as a society also have to take the blame as we have allowed all this to happen



**bngautam16 ()**  
2 Followers  
Silver: 1.7K



Father son duo r real role models Mother Nature,s worshippers



**Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **shekall2005**  
7 Followers  
Silver: 1.2K



Yes Mr Shekall, all of them deserve all laurels



**arifullakhan (Bangalore)**  
33 Followers  
Silver: 3.8K



Great work Mr. Neginhal



**Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **bngautam16**  
7 Followers  
Silver: 1.2K



Thats very true...contribution of the family should be remembered forever



**bngautam16** replies to **Rohith**  
2 Followers  
Silver: 1.7K



I am from Jammu presently staying in Bangalore & fully enjoying its landscapes & environments



**Rohith** replies to **bngautam16**  
7 Followers  
Silver: 1.2K



Mr Gautam, the credit should go to people like Neginhal



**bkhegde11 (Location)**  
107 Followers



 **arifullakhan**  
Platinum: 14.0K

  

A great man who has made us proud. All we have now is concrete jungle every where.

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **arifullakhan**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

Indeed great work and we should carry it forward

 **girishck2005 (Bangalore)**  
**164 Followers**  
Platinum: 35.3K

  

Mr. Neginhal deserves to be honoured in a big way. Such a zeal at the ripe old age is really worthy of emulation by others.

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **bkhegde11**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

Very true. The enthusiasm of Mr Neginhal should push us to get back greenery for the city

 **vipinvasudevspai (Delhi)**  
**86 Followers**  
Platinum: 42.8K

  

Good one !!! good to know !!!

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **girishck2005**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

He deserves all major titles and government should recognise this

 **Amol (DXB)**  
**35 Followers**  
Gold: 10.4K

  

Sir, if you are reading this comment, please know that you make our nation proud. You have been a true son of our beloved nation and I sincerely pray that we all learn from your experience.

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **vipinvasudevspai**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

Thanks vipin. Me to feel happy to write such stories

 **Udaya Kumar (Bangalore)**

A very well known man at the time. Good article.

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **Amol**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

Great observation Mr Amol. Will convey this to Mr Neginhal.

 **Rohith (Bangalore)** replies to **Udaya Kumar**  
**7 Followers**  
Silver: 1.2K

  

Thanks Udaya. Well known man who did all well

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