

Published: February 11, 2014 16:47 IST | Updated: February 11, 2014 18:59 IST

## Tree cheers to Bangalore

BHUMIKA K



WOOD IS GOOD A display a Neralu PHOTO: V. SREENIVASA MURTHY



HUG A TREE Give it some love PHOTO: V. SREENIVASA MURTHY



TREES THROUGH THE EYES OF CHILDREN Posters made by school children for Neralu PHOTO: BHUMIKA K.



*Bangalore's first ever tree festival, Neralu, brought under its shade people, stories, histories. Bhumika K. spends a Saturday darting from one riveting activity to another*

Excited students of Drishya Kalika Kendra were immersed in drawing and colouring trees and birds, sorting out mixed seeds and beans, while other animated classmates watched on. They flitted from one activity to another, lost in that little bubble world of their own.

Most of these children come from slums around Yelahanka. Their enthusiastic teachers had brought the children to Bangalore's first ever crowd-funded tree festival, Neralu, at Bal Bhavan in Cubbon Park.

Watching the children who had come to the festival, and the range of things they got to do, I would think the idea of Neralu was a grand success — it had young ones hooked to the natural world around them; it had adults reminisce and reconnect to that same world. Children sponge-painted leaf designs with stencils, got to see nests of various birds from people's gardens, what the shikakai pod looks like, and held a twig for a toothbrush perhaps for the first time in their life.

Young teens hugged trees awkwardly or hung from them in filmi style, and even if the purpose was to Facebook the photograph, at least a tree was in their picture and on their mind. It wasn't like everyone was there with a lofty purpose and a grand idea to save the world. And that was the beauty of Neralu.

They made you pay attention to trees that were always around, which you never noticed. They made you look at the Badraksha fruit, at your feet that you could have easily stepped on. They showed you in pictures, the story of the 400-year-old tamarind grove in Devanahalli, which has stood the onslaught of development, thanks to its status as a Devarakadu and the protection they receive from the villagers of Nellur.

"A conversation with trees" is not something you would bother to have, really! You would be embarrassed just standing and staring at a tree, wouldn't you? But the audio-walk drew ear-phoned Bangaloreans into an intimate, sometimes dramatic, very reciprocal exchange about eight trees around the Venkatappa Art Gallery. I hadn't noticed

the silk cotton tree there, leave alone gawked at how tall it was. If I hadn't gone close enough, I wouldn't have seen the menacing thorns that line its trunk either! The trees, through their chatter, subtly hinted at how climate change has affected their flowering seasons and patterns in Bangalore.

Ornithologist M.B. Krishna made a case for why Bangalore needs its trees by the roadside. Cutting trees by the roadside is like cutting off corridors for birds that pass through. "There are 340 species of trees recorded in Bangalore," he started off his talk. Everyone talks of wanting to bring back sparrows into their backyards but no one has shrubs for them, he pointed out, or the husk of grains cleaned in the backyard. "In Nature, diversity begets diversity — you need a diverse vegetation for diverse inhabitants." S.G. Neginhal, a retired IFS officer who pioneered urban planting in India in the 80s, recollected how he set up 25 nurseries with thousands of saplings to be given away free, how cheap tree guards were put up to allow the trees to thrive, how people in Bangalore chose the trees they wanted to grow...He and his team are credited with planting 1.5 million saplings between 1982 to 1987.

Children listened to stories, tried their hand at tree journaling, adults heard ecologists speak, Rumale's vibrant paintings showed everyone what Bangalore was in its days of blooming glory. At the end of the day, in that space spanning sunlight and tree shade, there was, I believe some vibe people felt with those trees reaching out with their ever-loving branches.

Keywords: [Bangalore tree festival](#), [Neralu](#), [Bal Bhavan-Cubbon Park](#)

 **Search** Search for your favourite learning/education products on Amazon.in

Go

Printable version | Jul 29, 2014 2:54:05 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/events/tree-cheers-to-bangalore/article5676799.ece>

© The Hindu