

The root of the problem

Roshni Udyavar, head of Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture has satellite images of the city coupled with studies carried out by IIT Bombay on spatiotemporal changes in land use.

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The current status of green cover in the city is alarming and self explanatory. According to Avinash Kubal, deputy director, Maharashtra Nature Park Society, "The city of Mumbai lacks the required quality and quantity of green cover compared to the human population."

Roshni Udyavar, head of Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture has satellite images of the city coupled with studies carried out by IIT Bombay on spatiotemporal changes in land use in the city from 1926 through 1992 which show that while the Reserved Forest area has remained the same, barring some encroachments, the open forests in the city have virtually been wiped out. Whatever green cover now exists is primarily plantation along roadsides and in open spaces.

Debi Goenka of Conservation Action Trust puts it simply: greenery is steadily depleting, with brown replacing the green. At present the areas like Aarey Milk Colony, SGNP, Bhavan's College Andheri, Five Gardens Dadar, Malabar Hill, I C Colony, Borivili, Film City, Byculla Zoo, Shivaji Park, Oval and Cross Maidan, Azad Maidan, mangrove forests, the Governor's Bungalow, Colaba Botanical garden, hanging gardens and Trombay hills and Maharashtra Nature Park are the few places that have a significant green cover.

Though today, these are the lungs of the city, but no one is sure how long they will survive. Depending upon the extent of accessibility they are all disturbed from various activities like encroachments, trespassing, development and another other forms of human exploitation. The future is bleak, if the city does not act in time, experts are unanimous.

"No open spaces are left for any activity or for development by either current or future generations, even for essential projects," Kubal says. Lack of green cover has started showing its effects on humans. "People must check encroachments by being proactively involved with their municipal wards," Udyavar says. "There are fine examples of creation of open spaces. Shantivan on Peddar Road — a dilapidated piece of urban garden, mostly used for dumping garbage — is now an exquisite garden," she says. Gote Udyan, Sant Gyaneshwar Udyan, Mancherji Joshi Five Gardens and Maharashtra Nature Park are some examples, where the active support of bureaucrats and people have worked.

In view of the severe threat to green cover in the city, drastic steps are required to save available spaces.

According to Goenka, "Large parts of the island city will be underwater in a few years. If we want to save the green cover, the first thing to be done is to shut down the Tree Authority. Get a central Environment Protection Authority in place for the entire Mumbai metropolitan region which will regulate the protection of the environment."