

Arun Sawant
President
National Society of Friends of Trees

On the role that trees play in Mumbai:

They give us beauty and greenery, but more importantly they do phytoremediation. Trees are good decomposers, they catch dust, they keep the climate pleasant, they act as noise filters and serve as a canopy for birds. It is because of the trees that we have beautiful birds in Mumbai – for example, the peacocks in Malabar Hill, which is very rare in a big city.

On a successful battle to save trees:

My organisation, The Friends of Trees, saved trees on Cadell Road at Dadar and the trees have survived very well. In 1997, the BMC wanted to do road-widening near Catering College. The raintrees were standing in the middle of the road and the plan was to make one lane for traffic on the other side of the trees and take a little of compound ground from a few buildings. Then the BMC decided to cut the trees because some local citizens wanted to protect their grounds

I, along with the students of the Institute of Science, did a chipko andolan and there was a big tamasha and traffic roko. At that time there was no Sea Link so this was an arterial road. We blocked the traffic and a lot of scuffles took place. I personally visited the chief minister and the CM immediately gave a stay. The BMC contractors had already cut a large part of the trees, but the trees survived.

Then we went to the High Court and in 2017 a final order was given by the Bombay High Court saying that these trees need not be cut.

It has been 25 years of survival for these trees and very soon we will have a function to celebrate this and to create sensitivity among citizens to show what you have to do to save trees.

On favourite trees:

My favourite tree are putranjiva, an evergreen tree, then ficus and neem which are very important trees. The raintree has also given a lot of shade and greenery to the city of Mumbai.