



## **Its spring season for tree protection**

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“Are you serious? Is felling of tree even real news?” “Huge scams are unearthing, elections are here and here she is writing about trees being cut.” “Don’t you have a real beat to cover?” This was six years back. Being the object of scorn, often deemed amateurish for writing on a subject that was not regarded “newsworthy”, right at the beginning of journalistic stint.

Things changed as fast as the climate did. The same tree-felling news started dominating global headlines. It found a place in the front page of every newspaper, big or small, national or regional. Environment and climate change had become the new hot topic of mainstream media. Increased and visible climate catastrophes helped changed public opinion.

One big change happened this year. While the increasing awareness and resistance against felling of trees was distinct, what gave birth to a green battle in this city was the announcement of the inter-modal station at Ajni, a prestigious project of policy-makers which was putting lives of thousands of age-old trees at stake.

Even before the details could come out in public domain, an army of citizens – environmentalists, youngsters, senior citizens, doctors, architects, engineers, railway employees and many more was ready.

The fight was not against city’s development but protecting the green heritage which the city can never get back.

Need to confess something here. In the very beginning, while writing about the greens’ concerns, a prevailing thought would be that the loud voices drowned in the promises of development and a bright future given by policy-makers. It seemed impractical that a project this reputable would go off the cards only because some activists were worried about trees, which according to authorities were “easily replaceable”.

Sometimes, it is so relieving to be wrong. Just when the media thought that the campaign is fading away, ‘Ajni Vann’ came alive. In no time, it was all over social media. Never did a local campaign was celebrated nationally, or even globally, the way Ajni Vann was.

For months and months, its torch-bearers took genuine efforts to not let it die, to not let the news shelved.

And what not did they go through? From criticism to alarming threats, financial crunches to internal disputes – but they kept it going. It was never written how they managed to keep political parties wanting to get mileage away, how they spent hundreds of days just gathering data through Right to Information and running behind administrative officials, how they ensured that every argument of theirs is backed up by science and logic.

A big breather to the campaign came when the state amended existing Tree Act, tightening rules for large-scale felling and giving status of heritage trees. This happened at a time when Ajni Vann needed it the most.

It's been more than a year since TOI first published about trees at Ajni facing axe from the project. For now, the age-old irreplaceable trees are standing strong. And the fight goes on.

So yes, felling of trees is real news; they give us life. It's high time to really grasp what was taught in school.

Well, for me, just glad on not letting the mockery and self-doubts change my beat.

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