

Mumbai: City's first-ever heritage tree survey to be conducted

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The first-ever list of heritage trees in Mumbai will be prepared by the garden department of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) by conducting a survey among the 30 lakh trees of the city. According to last year's amendments to the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act of 1975, a tree with an estimated age of 50 years or more has been defined as a heritage tree. This amendment makes it difficult to cut down heritage trees but does not completely prevent it, however, the heritage tree survey will give a push to the protection and nourishment of these trees.

BMC's Garden Department in-charge, Jitendra Pardesi, said, "We are going to conduct a heritage tree survey in the coming 2-3 months, which will give a clear picture about the number of such trees and their exact location. Mumbai has around 30 lakh trees, we have the list and according to their age, they will be verified and segregated. This will not only help in protecting the trees but also in taking care of them in a special way. We will conduct research and according to their type, they will be provided with soil, water, and fertilizers. We have also collected the primary data required to begin this survey."

Regarding heritage trees, environmental activist Zoru Bhathena, "Most of the trees in the city side of Mumbai, like Churchgate, Colaba, and others are more than 50 years old, just by looking at their size and beauty we can tell that it is a heritage tree. If the BMC is going to conduct a survey for these trees then it should be done with the right intention which is adding an additional layer of protection for these trees. This work should be done genuinely and diligently by the BMC."

"According to the amendment of the tree act, if someone wants to cut down a heritage tree, special permission is required and the number of samplings to be planted have to match the age of that tree, if it's a 70-year-old tree then 70 saplings have to be planted. This surely makes it difficult to cut the tree but does not completely prevent it," added Bhathena.

Sanjiv Valsan, a member of Pedlagao Pedbachao NGO, said, "Currently, the first threat to any tree in Mumbai is its existence and survival, but the heritage trees amendment law does not give these trees any protection, it only places stricter rules for the compensatory plantation once a heritage tree has been cut down, so it doesn't exactly save the tree, it just makes it more expensive and inconvenient to cut it. Even if people are pro-development or anti-development, I don't think there is anybody in the city who would want to cut down a tree that is 50 years and above. If the tree has to be removed then it should be relocated."

"However, it is certainly a positive thing that there is a legal definition for a heritage tree now, it is valued more because it's older and it cannot be replaced by a new sapling, and this also sets a base for a future amendment through which these trees will be protected from cutting down at all. Also, since these trees are being defined as heritage trees, their health maintenance will also be defined and there will be special care and attention given to them," added Valsan.

Source: <https://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/mumbai-citys-first-ever-heritage-tree-survey-to-be-conducted>