

**Of forest protection, trees and the environment vs development tussle**  
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PANJIM: Goa will see mega-development works in the next two to three years. Will this lead to a major assault on land and the environment? Major projects are in the offing in Goa with highways being built and new infrastructure projects being taken up. The constitution of the Mormugao Ports Authority will also have serious implications for Goa since the MPA will be able to carry out development work without adhering to state authorities and environmental regulations. To aggravate matters, the forest department is found wanting and perceived to be on the side of tree fellers. In this context where do we stand? Will citizens have to fight it out in courts to save the environment?

Environmentalism Rajendra Kerkar said the future looks bleak if you allow deforestation. From 1960 to 1980, Kerkar said Sattari lost 8814 hectares of tree cover and Sanguem lost 9933 hectares of tree cover. This was before the Forest Conservation Act came into force. Even after that large chunks of forest have been lost. If this continues where will we get water? "Water is there due to the forests. Tree cover helps to recharge groundwater. If the tree cover goes, we will also have landslides. There were landslides in Satrem, Ambeachem Gaval, in Karmali Budru, and in Zharme," Kerkar pointed out. "This is because Karnataka allowed deforestation and the silt came down and caused loss (to people on the Goa side of the border)."

This year there have been heavy rains and Satrem hill, which may have caused landslides. But in the Karmali area how can you say there were landslides? Harishchandra Gawas of Sattari Bhumiputra Sanghatna questioned. He said no one has gone into the thick forest cover for over 40 years. So how can you claim there are landslides there? he questioned. The rainwater actually traversed from the bottom of the mountain, he claimed.

"In the city landscape and in urban environment, unscientific pruning of trees ahead of the monsoons is affecting a lot of trees. In fact, some trees are dying and are already dead," Mohan Kumar of Living Heritage Foundation remarked. He said those who are pruning trees are doing a bad job. There is no supervision, no proper application of mind while doing it. "There are no guidelines. We (Living Heritage Foundation) want to take it to court. We might do a proper study and see what's needed," Kumar said. Government should appoint a proper committee to study it and solve the problems.

Director of Goa Foundation Claude Alvares opined that the decision-making with regard to the felling of trees should be handed to the next generation. He said, "The present generation has lost the capacity to be able to deal with the protection of forests and wildlife. They will compromise at the drop of a hat. In the future, if forests are to be protected and the country has to survive, decision-making has to go in some way to the next generation."

"Older generation has no interest in the future. Even if you destroy every tree they will be happy, as long as they can make some money. The older generation is a washout and should not be involved in taking these decisions. Large-scale cutting of trees will have a serious impact on climate and ecology. Only the younger generation who are below 20 to 30 years old should be entitled to take a decision on cutting trees, since they will have to bear the consequences of climate change," Alvares said.

Talking about the man-animal conflict in Sattari, Harishchandra Gawas said that animals are coming into the villages and attacking cattle and destroying fields. He said there was a morcha in Sattari demanding that such animals should be declared as vermin and they should be killed. Sattari Bhumiputra Sanghatana worked to save the animals, Harishchandra claimed.

Harishchandra also highlighted the issue of monoculture and aforestation which is affecting the forests. We hold the forest department responsible for this. They are planting unwanted trees in the forest such as Acacia. The dept has destroyed the forest and the vegetation which the animals ate. Don't plant acacia, plant fruit-bearing trees instead, he suggested.

Looking at the way forward, Mohan Kumar said, "To save ecology and the environment, everyone has to don the role of activists. Everybody has to realise that it is everyone's fight, especially the younger generation. They should come forward and create awareness and educate. We need to keep fighting."

Rajendra Kerkar said, "We have been telling the government for nearly two decades to stop monoculture in afforestation. We have to look at the geography and the climatic conditions of the area while planting trees. Fruit-bearing trees too will create a lot of problems. Whatever trees are needed in the area should be planted."

"Unless and until we protect the forest, it will be very difficult to get water. The priority should be the protection of forests. And not all rights should be handed to the next generation because even the next generation also wants to cut trees and destroy the forest," Rajendra Kerkar opined.

Source: <https://www.heraldgoa.in/Goa/Of-forest-protection-trees-and-the-environment-vs-development-tussle/189110>