

The Green Dussehra campaign, 2007

The Safe Festivals Campaign

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Team : Manisha Gutman, (Kalpavriksh) Tasneem Balasinorwala and Anchal Sondhi (on behalf of Pune Tree Watch), Manasi and Ketaki (on behalf of Oikos)

With the support of Swati Arjunwadkar and Ruhaan Joshi at the KV Pune office.

And guidance of the Safe Festivals support group – Milind Wani, Tasneem Balasinorwala, Ashish Kothari and Saili Palande

Focus:



The focus of the Green Dussehra campaign was the tradition of exchanging leaves of the Apta tree and the worship of the Shami tree. The first ritual causes widespread damage to the already rare Apta trees, as well as to the Kanchan trees that are mistaken for Apta. The campaign encouraged people to offer saplings as gifts in place of offering leaves. The medicinal properties of the two trees were highlighted as well as their contribution to the ecosystems where they occur.

Education and Awareness raising activities



Educational tools were developed and compiled for the education and awareness raising activities for the Eco Ganesh campaign. These include :

- Posters in English
- Slides for theaters in English and Marathi

These tools were distributed free of charge to groups or citizens that requested for them.

School sessions



Sessions in schools were conducted to speak to them about the importance of the two trees and to explore ways in which the children could take up their own campaigns around Dussehra. At Revachand Bhojwani the response from the children was very positive. One girl called Hetal said she would approach a nearby builder who was already doing plantation to also plant Shami and Apta.

All sessions were offered voluntarily. Saplings were offered as a donation from Vinod Jain of Pune Tree Watch. The students of Revachand said they wanted to sell the saplings and offer the money they collected back as a donation to PTW.

The schools covered were:

- o Rewachand Bhojwani, Camp
- St-John school, Camp
- Vidyanchal school

Research on and promotion of saplings



A list of sources that could provide saplings of Apta and Shami was put together by Manisha. This list was distributed to the press but did not get enough coverage. The saplings are rare and not to be found easily and the campaign would remain incomplete if people could not find the saplings. Oikos sourced saplings from as far away as Khopoli and Dhapoli yet, some of the Apta saplings were not healthy enough to be distributed. eCoexist prepared gift packs for the occasion which carried the names of Oikos and eCoexist only.

Media outreach

A press releases were done on the subjects. This was carried by
'Campaign pitches for traditional varieties of trees', Indian Express, 17 Oct 2007
Plant 'apta' trees on Dassera, urge environmental groups, Times of India, 18th Oct 2007
Save Apta Trees, appeals Kalpavriksha, Maharashtra Herald, 19th Oct, 2007

Slides in movie theatres



The slides prepared for movie theatres were distributed to the following theatres.

- Esquare
- City Pride
- Inox
- Adlabs

Links with other groups

Pune Tree Watch: PTW carried out several educational sessions in schools around the subject. Vinod Jain, member of PTW, donated towards the distribution of saplings in schools and plantations by PTW. The posters and slides carried the PTW website url on them.

Oikos : provided most of the images used for the slides and the education posters. They also verified information about the two trees. Oikos sourced the saplings that were then distributed as part of the campaign. They also provided the saplings to eCoexist which marketed them.

Expenses to KV Safe festivals campaign

Production of slides: Rs 2000

Printing of posters: 1669

Press release Xeroxing cost and Press release distribution cost:

Total cost to KV: **Rs 3669** +

Initiatives by other groups



BHHAS : The Beyond Horizons, Health and Social Circle is a group of Ayurvedic doctors who are keen on conserving medicinal plants. They organised a small programme at the Tathavde Park in Karve nagar, where they inaugurated boards explaining the medicinal qualities of the various trees in the park, did a small pooja of the apta and kanchan trees and took an oath to protect and

conserve nature. Officials from the PMC included Mr Jagjap from the Garden Dept who had also provided them with Apta and Kanchan saplings. Mangesh Tendulkar spoke eloquently about the need to understand the roots of religious traditions and to protect and conserve nature, even those species that were not apparently 'useful' to humanity, simply because they existed.

BHHAS is keen on linking up with the Safe Festivals campaign to protect other plants such as the Bel during Shivaratri, the 32 species that are important during Ganesh Chaturthi and the Neem for Gudi Padva. They are also keen on speaking about issues such as the need to use natural materials in their capacity as doctors.

Manisha sent out an email on behalf of the group to help them publicise their event.

PMC : The PMC has made a list of those plants that are sacred and worshipped during festivals and will be supplying saplings of these plants free of charge during the festivals. It would be a good idea to link up the Safe Festivals campaign to this initiative to give it more visibility.

NEST : Dilip Dhakwe of the ngo NEST organised a plantation drive at the Taljai forest in Parvati Panchgaon area. Volunteers also distributed 30000 pamphlets asking people to protect the Apta and Kanchan. They also stood at locations to protect these trees from people who wanted to pull down the leaves.

Lessons for next year

1. Saplings need to be sourced well in advance and taken care of in Pune by Oikos to ensure health and availability.
2. Poster to be translated into Marathi.
3. The tradition of offering Apta is a primarily Maharashtrian tradition and therefore more work needs to be done in those areas of Pune where there are more Maharashtrians.
4. Childrens story needs to be published in advance.
5. Campaign needs to network with Maharashtrian NGOs to spread the message among them.