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### **But, the 'forest view' may not last long**

Archana Nathan



Elephant corridor: An abundance of streams and lakes attracted elephants to this wooded area. Photo: Karan Ananth

### ***Not everything green is ready to be turned into money yet on Kanakapura Road***

As the land-sapped city looks at every corner to find new space to move into, a significant amount of green space, once the city's main identity, is sacrificed. Kanakapura Road is on its way to welcome the city to its lonely corner.

“It is the last neighbourhood in the city to be invaded by civilization and urbanisation,” said Jayaram S., principal of the Valley School. He has witnessed the area's recent transition from boondocks to a real estate hub.

Some of the apartment complexes on the road have been constructed on land that was once the Jaraganahalli lake or the Yelchanahalli tank. Meanwhile, other builders are digging up the land skirting the B.M. Kaval State forest and the Turahalli forest promising buyers a ‘forest view’.

### **Silt and debris**

“The school campus is hundred acres of a dense patch of wilderness. We used to have many streams within the campus,” said Jayaram. “But in the past seven years, with construction activity just outside the school, the streams have dried up. Once we even got our students to clear silt from the streams as an awareness activity but the streams dried up again.”

Extensive drilling and clearing of land at the edge of the forest has also scared elephants into running to nearby villages, said residents.

Kanakapura Road is part of the Anekal-Bannerghatta elephant corridor, which is rich in streams, lakes and woods. It was the abundance of water that attracted the elephants in a different era.

The Forest Department is concerned only about ensuring that construction does not physically encroach on forest land. “We are building a wall to demarcate the forest area from private land,” said G.A. Appu Rao, Deputy Conservator of Forests (Bangalore Urban), missing the irony of using a wall to achieve his goal.

### **Not integrated development**

“The projects being integrated townships, they are not likely to integrate very well with the local economy either,” said H.S. Sudhira, a researcher with the Indian Institute of Human Settlements. “When people do have to go outside for work, they would in all probability use a personal automobile, eliminating even any incidental contact with the other.”

“But, then, the original owner did not sell of his land expecting to be integrated. It made sense for him to sell his land when the right price came along and move to the city, where his future is,” Sudhira said.

Recounting the common sentiment of the villagers in the area, Jayaram said that the villagers are more than happy to

give up their land for a good price. “This is mostly true of other areas as well, where the skill sets of the original landowners do not always match the commercial requirements of their buyers,” Sudhira said.

Some of these tracts of land have become farms and resorts, some claiming to be ‘eco-friendly’.

## **Organic growth**

But not everything green is ready to be turned into money yet.

G. Narayana Prasad owns an organic farm on Kanakapura Road where he grows four traditional varieties of local paddy along with turmeric, vegetables like tomato and brinjal, and even mango, chikoo, coconut and tamarind. He sold four of five acres of the farm to a friend but manages all of it now.

“As a development worker, I was always interested in environmental campaigns. Sustainable agriculture fascinated me and I decided to get some personal experience,” he explained.

Kenchegowda, who manages an estate in the area, said, “We grow native crops such as ragi here. The owner of this farm is not willing to give away this land to any builder.”

Prasad felt it was going to be difficult to sustain such farms in the coming days. “It is difficult to find people who will do manual work in a farm. Small farms cannot go towards mechanisation,” he lamented.

While farms promise a greener future for the area, some farmhouses are also becoming primarily weekend getaways. “So close to the city, farms there will only go by what city-dwellers want,” S. Vishwanath, founder of Rainwater Club said. “Because city dwellers wanted exotic vegetables, farms grow that, and also act as homes for them to relax in; tomorrow if they want ragi, these farms could go back to cultivating millets.”

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