



# Miracle Rescue Of A Fallen Giant

Saikat Ray & Subhro Niyogi | Feb 9, 2016, 11.56 PM IST

Kolkata: In an operation spanning 24 hours, a mammoth tree stump weighing over 14 tonne was transplanted from Panditya Road near Hazra to an urban forest in Alipore 5 km away at dawn on Tuesday. What makes the Herculean project even more significant is that the initiative evolved on a public domain barely five days ago.

The 150-year-old, 50-ft tall peepal tree was axed 10 days ago and reduced to just 6ft by contractors employed by Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) to widen a portion of Panditya Road so that a 42-storied tower can be constructed at the adjoining project site. About a month-and-a-half ago, several other trees, including red silk cotton, kadam and mahogany, had been axed as well.

While these trees were chopped from the base and disappeared without trace, the sheer size of the peepal tree with the girth measuring nearly 40ft forced labourers to leave the stump behind. An attempt was then made a week ago to uproot this portion using a backhoe lifter but providence saved the tree. The machine accidentally struck a 11KV CESC power cable, triggering a flash that tripped supply to the entire locality. Shaken by the close call, those engaged to dispose off the remaining part fled the site.

"This was the perfect opportunity to save the tree that should really have been listed as a heritage given its age and its size. A WhatsApp group that had been created only days earlier swung into action. A strategy evolved online and individuals and groups stepped forward to provide material and manpower support," said Pradeep Kakkar of Public who had created the WhatsApp group.

Nature Mates, which has transplanted trees before, readily agreed to take up the challenging job. Green activist Mudar Patherya secured a crane from Quippo and a tractor trailer from Orissa Transport Logistics Co. Individuals like Sanchita Das also joined the initiative.

After two days of hectic planning and coordination, labourers began work at 6am on Sunday, digging the earth around the tree trunk and remove a concrete anchorage around it. "Fifteen labourers were employed to remove bricks and mortar that clung to the roots. It took them six painstaking hours to clear the concrete and debris and cut off the roots at a depth of 4 ft so that the 10-ft section could be lifted for transplantation," said Arjan Basu Roy of Nature Mates.

The attempt to lift the tree began around 9pm but it proved impossible. "One crane wasn't enough. We needed another. With time running out, we decided to hire a second crane instead of

wait to contact some other company to offer one's service for free," said Debsena Roy Chowdhury of Nature Mates.

Though the tree had been uprooted, it could not be transported to the transplantation site till restrictions on movement of trucks was relaxed after 10pm. The tree was loaded on the trailer and the journey began around 3am. It took an hour to cover the 5km. Thereafter, the tree was treated with anti-fungal and anti-bacterial chemicals as well as root development hormone. Between 2pm and 9pm, the labourers worked at a clearing, which belongs to Kolkata Port Trust, to dig a 4ft pit, over 13ft in diameter, removing nearly 100 cubic feet of earth. The stump was finally lowered and put in place at 5.30am.

Bonani Kakkar, who had been instrumental in planning and executing the project, was tired and elated by the time the operation concluded. "In the final hours, it was raining and we were soaked to the skin. But seeing the tree replanted was a sight to behold," she remarked.

Nurturing the tree to ensure that it survives is the next challenge. Roy and his team will be required to ensure regular watering, be on the lookout for fungal infection and make sure that new leaves that sprout from the severed trunk does not become fodder. There are also concerns that residents of a nearby slum may hack the tree for firewood.

Ramkrishna Roy, a retired professional and a resident of Alipore Avenue, looked awe-stricken to think about such an initiative to save such a large tree by a group of green activists. Roy, however, expressed concern over the safety of the tree given the fact that 'some people' in the locality often hack trees for collecting wood. "We must be vigilant. We should not let the great job go in vain," he said.

# আমাকে এখানে হত্যা করা হয়েছিল...

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সারা রাত্রি কাজ করে এরা আমার বিরাট গুড়টিকে উঠিয়ে নিল



রাত্রির অগোচরে এরা আমাকে বয়ে নিয়ে গেল এক স্বপ্নরাজ্যে



এটাই আমার আশ্রয় এখন। জানিনা আমি আর কতদিন বেঁচে থাকতে পারবো

