

Paradise regained at dumping ground



It's springtime again: Amla Ruia, who converted a dumpyard into a nature trail with water harvesting technique. — Kamlesh Pednekar/DNA

Amla Ruia has converted an illicit liquor den into a garden; throws it open to schools, social causes

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For ears gone numb with honking and other forms of pollution, Shantivan is a welcome relief. Birds and butterflies wind their way through to over 600 species of ornamental and herbal greens. Reflexology paths and waterfalls lend a healing touch. It is hard to believe this paradise near Simla House, Napean Sea Road was once an illicit liquor den and a dumping ground.

For Amla Ruia, it all started at her friend Reema Seth's insistence.

"Reema's father, Gosalia, bought it on lease from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) as he was unhappy with its condition. After his death, Reema wanted me to look after it." Slowly and steadily, they collected

funds from family and friends. Amla herself toiled with labourers and incorporated concepts of water management and harvesting in the gardens.

A check dam with a 'jali' was built to collect waste water and purify it from nearby Water Works colony. The water flows through two waterfalls, which in turn lead to the storage well. The well collects about 15,000 litres of water that satisfies the garden's need for water.

There is also a natural amphitheatre with a stage in the center.

"The values that our generation has learnt are all wrong. We only know to exploit and destroy for our selfishness," says Amla.

Amla has opened Shantivan to schools for nature trails and other social workshops to help them learn to be nice to nature. Hiral Mehta, teacher, Sun flower Nursery is excited about the nature trail.

"I have never seen a Signature Spider spinning a web anywhere in this city. The kids are so excited by the touch-me-nots and catching earth-

worms in vermiculture pits and snails. We also teach the kids leaf and bark painting."

Vaishnavi Gosalia, whose Ritambara Vishwa Vidyapeeth, recently held a self defence camp for women at Shantivan, has recommended it to the Birla school. She says, "The atmosphere is so conducive to meditation."

Amla charges a nominal fee for these trails so as to help the garden to be self-sustainable. Even the gardener Anand and watchman Chandrakant have developed a passion for nature. They can recount names of birds sighted in English.

"Fork tailed drongo, owl, kites, common mynah, tailor bird, woodpecker, kingfisher, dragon fly catcher...peacock also comes from the tower of silence," they say.

Her home at Ruia house too has a soak pit and water pit to soak excess water or used water.

"Two things are a must - rain water harvesting and soak pits. This is ensure the 28/7 deluge doesn't happen again," she says.