

Gone with the wind



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Many campuses in Chennai, famous for their copious green cover, now look partially barren, post-Vardah.

Exactly one year after the deluge that submerged the city, Chennai faced Vardah. The cyclone wreaked havoc, crippling normal life and leaving thousands of trees uprooted. Of the many who are anguished over the loss of the green cover, college students and faculty are still in denial that their campuses, once happy homes to marvellous trees and several birds, have now become unrecognisable.

For the hostel students of Women's Christian College (WCC), who woke up everyday to the chirping of birds, the experience of Vardah was devastating. "Even with the scorching heat of Chennai, we have never felt it. Cyclone Vardah took away the beauty of our campus. All I can see are the broken trees and branches in every nook and corner," says Sumayya Rayan, a third-year student of Corporate Economics. Dr. Ridling Margaret Waller, principal and secretary,

WCC, adds her belief that ancient and sturdy trees would stand the test of time was shattered by the cyclone. But she is happy that the book, *The Green Grandeur of WCC*, would live to tell the tale. In the destruction that ensued during the cyclone, many a copper pod, ficus, a banyan, and the lone parkia tree, that was the pride of the college were lost.

IIT-Madras, though, is another story. The scale of loss is clearly evident as the once green campus is now dotted with the yellows and browns of dying trees. “We must have lost at least 40 per cent of the green cover in the hostel zone,” says Aswin, a final-year B.Tech student. Much like IIT, where trees stand tall but barren, giving passers-by a peek of the buildings behind them, Madras Christian College (MCC) too has lost its greens which gave shade for people to walk under. “It is devastating when I see the main block from the gate. It is so surreal,” exclaims Nanditha, a student of MCC. Swetha Padma Nanda, a hostel resident, says that at least 30-odd trees have fallen near the Margret Hall and goes on to explain how most of the places were not recognisable the next day — heartbreaking for most students. She also points out that most places across the campus have now been cleaned up. Loyola College, in the heart of the city, bore the brunt of the cyclone as well. According to the census taken by the Plant Biology Department, over 130 trees were found to be uprooted, while 636 were damaged. Principal Rev. Dr. M. Arockiasamy Xavier said that this Christmas would be about giving back to the environment.

With the amount of timber at their disposal, colleges like WCC plan to put them to use, while Loyola plans a replacement and reforestation drive. Despite the scale of destruction on the campuses across Chennai, students are hopeful that they will get their campuses back to their glory with strategic planning and efforts from their end.

Loyola College plans a replacement and reforestation drive.