

Each tree inside the campus of The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, has been witness to many historical events, says **HEMA VIJAY**

Trees that tell a story

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The 400-year-old peepal tree that stands stately inside the campus of The Grove School at The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, has an interesting history.

When this tree was just a sapling, English merchant-adventurers were arriving in India, Emperor Jahangir was the reigning king in Delhi, and Galileo hadn't yet proclaimed to the world that distant planets revolve around the sun, not the earth. Dr. Nanditha Krishna, director of the foundation, says, "Throughout its lifetime, as is the case even now, this peepal tree (botanical name: *Ficus religiosa*) has been accompanied by a neem tree adjacent to it. Whenever the existing neem tree died, a new one would sprout." Today, the sapling has grown into a huge tree with a canopy spread over 2,400 sq.ft. It is revered as a sacred tree and underneath it is placed a statue of Lord Ganesha, that belongs to the Pallava era.

The Grove is home to other special trees too. There is a towering rain tree (botanical name: *Samanea saman*) which is over 85 feet tall. Over 200-years-old, its canopy spreads over 5,000 sq.ft. This tree was planted by Sir. C.P.Ramaswami Iyer on a



BOTANICAL WONDERS
(clockwise from top) the peepal tree, divi divi tree, rain tree, and baobab tree

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patch of land just outside his office building. It was under the shade of the 250-year-old divi-divi tree (botanical

name: *Caesalpinia coriaria*), that leaders of the Indian National Congress gathered to chalk out strategies for the

freedom movement. "Dr. Annie Besant used to edit the New India newspaper sitting under the shade of this tree,"

says Krishna. The tree is indigenous to India and attracts butterflies and bats. "The black juice of this tree's fruits was the original 'Indian ink' used by artists those days. Today, artists use synthetic ink," she says.
The Grove also hosts a 350-plus-year-old cannon ball tree or *Nagalingam* tree (botanical name: *Couroupita guianensis*) and a 300-plus-year-old baobab tree (botanical name: *Adansonia Digitata*).