

Historic Prof. d'Almeida park reopens in Bandra

By **Lyncia Creado** - 28, October 2022



Renovated park with accessible, tree lined paths

The 24th of October, 2022 was a red letter day for the residents of Bandra, as the re-opening of the newly renovated Prof. d'Almeida Park was inaugurated, after almost a year of being shut for maintenance. The park, an oasis in the midst of a concrete jungle is a haven from the hustle and bustle of city life. There are separate zones for senior citizens, youth, joggers, and children, tree-lined paths and benches for people of all ages to meet and talk about their day or meditate. While the BMC funded the effort, Municipal Councilor, Mr Asif Zakaria spearheaded the renovation, supported by MLA Baba Siddique.

The brief reopening ceremony saw the unveiling of the busts of Prof d'Almeida and Elfreda d'Almeida and was attended by residents including former billiards national champion Michael Ferreira, former national bicycling champion (1958) Nergish Vachha Bhapoo, civic activist Anandini Thakoor, local school teachers, doctors, and some of Prof d'Almeida's family members. Prof. d'Almeida's daughter, Mrs Bocarro, and eldest great-granddaughter, Dr Thea Creado, spoke nostalgically about the accomplishments of Prof. Raphael and Elfreda d'Almeida and reminisced about their memories of coming to the park. It is hoped that Prof d' Almeida park will continue to be a place where residents of Bandra can make happy memories, and bring their children, grand and great-grandchildren.



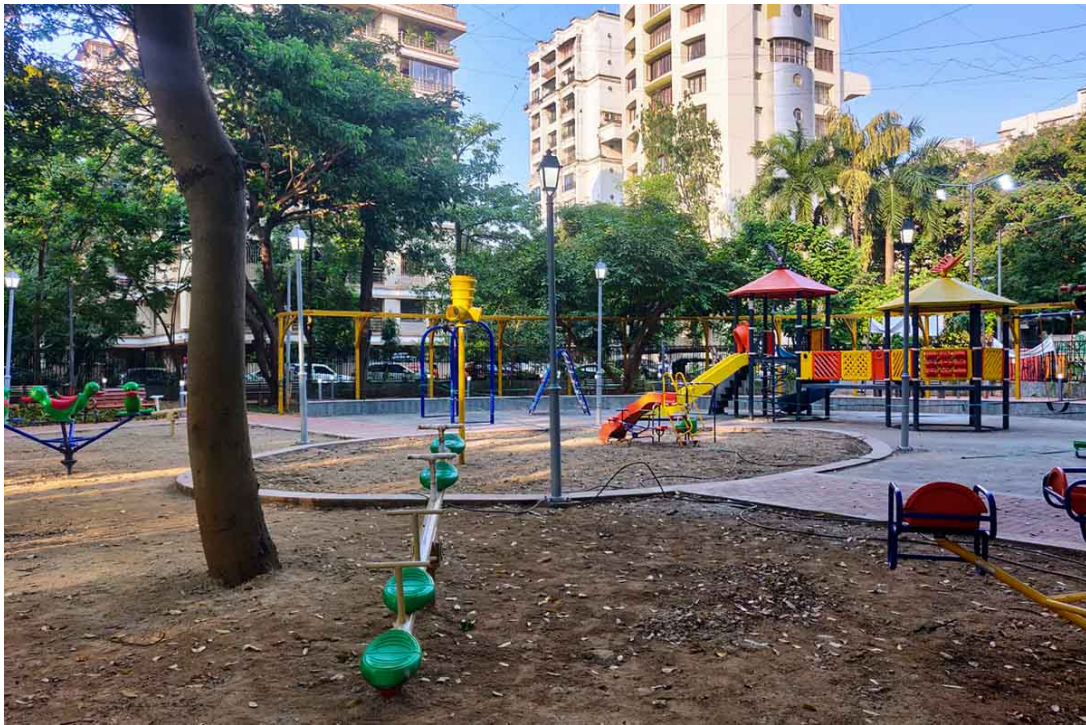
Reopening the Prof. d'Almeida Park, 24 October 2022

On the 12th of September, 2021, the renovation effort was approved and initiated with a traditional ceremony attended by a similar audience of local Bandra residents as well as Prof d'Almeida's grandchildren, Lyncia Creado with her husband Astor, Dr Ashwin Correa, and great-grandchildren Vanya Creado and Kyle Fernandes. The renovations to the park were discussed with architect Rinka D'monte and included making it more accessible for the elderly, installation of benches, improved lighting and landscaping. These will continue this year, even while parts of the park have been reopened for the public to use, where renovations are complete. Prof d' Almeida Park boasts trees aged over 100 years brought from different continents of the world, to celebrate biodiversity, and its namesake, the renowned botanist Prof. Raphael d'Almeida, in whose honour the park was constructed.



New benches at intervals in the renovated park

Prof J. F. Raphael d'Almeida was born in Bandra, a suburb of Bombay, on 24th October 1891, and belonged to a well-known family of Catholics in Kondivita, Andheri East. His father, D. F. d'Almeida, was one of the founders and Vice President of the East Indian Association. Raphael was a Philanthropist and renowned Botanist. The books he wrote on Botany for B.Sc and M.Sc. students, which were later revised by his daughter Dr Nymphia d'Almeida Correa, have benefited students through the generations and can be found in the library of St. Xavier's college to date. He was also a Senator of Bombay University, President of the Bandra Municipality, Chairman of the Standing Committee, Hon. Magistrate and Justice of Peace, who dedicated his life to the betterment of Bandra and the upliftment of youth and the common man. During his short but eventful life, he helped transform Bandra from a laid-back fishing village into a well-laid out town, with electricity replacing kerosene lamps, widened & asphalted roads, proper sanitary, drainage & running water systems, housing societies, the Khar, Pali & Bandra markets and a fire brigade. He introduced the maternity ward at Bhabha hospital and was given the honour of declaring the Charter of Independence in 1947, a little over a year before his untimely demise.



The children's play area is still under renovation

He was survived by his wife Elfreda, and four young daughters, Nymphia, Yucca, Celsia & Norysca, each of whom he named after a flower. Elfreda broke the glass ceiling of her time, as Honorary Presidency Magistrate and Justice of Peace, Chairperson of the women's cell, Vice President of the East Indian Association, an ardent social worker and member of several charitable committees including the Red Cross. She was President of the Bombay Suburban & Relief society managing an ambulance, and also co-authored the East Indian cookbook. Her home at Ascension house was like a Dharamshala where everyone was welcome. As her family grew and expanded, she was a loving grandmother to her nine grandchildren, and later, a doting great-grandmother to her two eldest great-grandchildren, Shane and Thea, whom she had the privilege to see. Possessing the gift of serenity and acceptance, her most urgent plea to her children was "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34). The 3rd of January, 1992 marked the ending of an era of a stalwart, a much loved, a benevolent, matriarch, whose sole aim was to help society with the motto 'Service Before Self'.



Busts of Prof d’ Almeida and his wife Elfreda at the park entrance

The bust of Elfreda, together with that of her husband, Professor J. F. Raphael d’Almeida is erected at the entrance of the renowned d’Almeida park in Bandra, as a reminder of the legacy that the Professor and his wife left behind, and the good work they did to push Bandra forward into being the Queen of the Suburbs as she stands today.

Lyncia Creado