

## The Seer and His Seeds

Anupama Mili | 25th July 2015 | THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS



When the floods in Neel Dhara along the Ganga river downstream from Hardwar destroyed lakhs of trees in June 2013, it made a Kerala-based priest who lives in the Himalayas decide to restoring the lost flora. Swami Samvidanandan, who is originally from Kochi, moved to Rishikesh to study Sanskrit in 1996. While in the holy city, he was drawn to the Abhedha Ganga Maiya Trust that works for the integral development of humanity and is dedicated to those who are suffering from diseases and other miseries. It was formed in Hardwar in 1984. Samvidanandan then started a campaign to plant and conserve trees.

“The high-velocity cyclone Phailin that hit Odisha (in October 2013) destroyed around 26 lakh trees in the state. The uprooted trees included species such as eucalyptus, gulmohar, debdaru, radhachura, banyan, peepal, rain, neem and several fruit-bearing trees such as jackfruit,

mango, banana, coconut and cashew. How many years will it take to restore the lost forests? This thought made me venture into restoring the woods,” says Samvidanandan, who was in Kerala for his Tree Trip from June 5 to July 24.

Through Tree Trip, he aims to plant saplings specially grown in the nurseries of Green Vein, an NGO started by Samvidanand in 2013 in Uttarakhand. There are seven nurseries in Kerala: Kazhakkootam, Mavelikkara, Idukki, Thiruvilvamala, Kechery, Attappadi, Thammanam and Kannur. Green Vein has branches in Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. More than six lakh trees have been planted and are maintained by the NGO.

The Billion Trees project initiated by Green Vein plans to take up extensive afforestation programmes throughout India. It will be implemented through a multi-stake holder yet

community-led partnership effort. Trees, which fit into the geography, habitat and culture will be selected and planted locally.

Afforestation in degraded forest lands, urban and rural habitats, farm lands, wetlands and other degraded lands will also come under the purview of the project. In the long run, the project plans to include institutional and corporate entities who believe in greening and afforestation to gain Carbon Credits.

The project will cover 30 states and one billion saplings. Under the project, nurseries will be set up in each state that will provide saplings for afforestation programmes. Active community participation is the key objective, in partnership with the government.

“Nurseries on government and private land across the country, producing necessary saplings based on needs of the region and nurseries at strategic locations pertaining to altitude are some of the challenges before us. To plant trees, strategic forest locations need to be identified, forest land is to be acquired from the Forest Department through long term lease and invite community members, children and self-motivated volunteers to come forward for tree plantation,” says Swami.

The programme will also try to create wildlife cover for animals by ensuring sufficient forest space, provision of water facilities, and fruit orchards for fauna like monkeys.

Source:

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