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# A biodiversity haven: From parched land to one bursting with life

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M R Hari in the 'forest' created by him at Puliarakonam

**By Aathira Haridas**

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: It used to be a dry, rocky, and gnarled hillock. Now, this parched land is bursting with a healthy, green foliage. There is riotous leafage, with butterflies and bees zipping through the foliage in playful abandon. A potpourri of vegetation exists here. 350 plant varieties rub shoulders in three-cents of land. A forest is in the making here.

“Once this turns into a forest, one will not be able to enter here,” says M R Hari as he guides you into this dense patch of greenery, which has grown into six-foot height within a span of six months. The earth is different here, like a sponge, soft and squishy. “The land is readied by removing rocks up to four feet from the surface and a mixture of coir pith, dried cow dung and hull (of paddy) was laid. The roots get to glide through the earth in a free motion,” Hari explains the difference in the texture of the land. With a host of indigenous trees and medicinal plants, the dense foliage packed in the small area holds a huge promise of being a giant green lung in future.

“In three years, this will turn into a natural forest. And in 10 years it will become a forest as good as a 100-year-old one,” says Hari, one of the managing directors of Invis Multimedia. Even the surrounding area of 2 acres, which he owns, wears a luxurious look with myriad lifeforms and varieties of flora. But it was never an easy breezy affair.

Ten years ago when Hari bought the land at Puliyarakonam, it was an arid dry patch. After a plethora of experimentations and wolfing down different theories on creating a vegetation, marooned in the middle of the plantations of rubber and acacia, there now exists a glorious stretch of greenery. It was an uphill struggle, to change the physical geography and make it into a fertile land. A portion of the land he owns was also left untouched for nature to rediscover what was lost. Over the years, the tuft of land turned into a ravishing spot of medicinal plants and several indigenous trees.

But it is the three-cent space in the midst of all this where a revolution is brewing. With creepers, climbers, shrubs, sub-trees, and trees that can grow into colossal heights, the land now has a luxuriant canopy of green. Nothing could cut a strong contrast than the deafening noise of the nearby quarry punctuating the stillness of this wilderness in the making. It has turned into a wild beauty in a short span of planting the saplings. This is a one-man's effort to transform the rugged landscape into a forest.

Hari is following the Akira Miyawaki method of afforestation, of transforming

barren lands into lush forests. “You can replicate this anywhere. The backyard of your plot can be developed into such a forest. Imagine if we could turn such arid plots across the state into forests,” he adds wistfully. Having tried several methods to develop vegetation for over the past few years, it was only in the recent past that Hari chanced upon the Miyawaki method, after two of his friends, who were aware of his penchant to create forests, introduced it. “It was perfect. I intend to extend this to 30 cents of this plot. That will be 4,800 trees in 30 cents. Imagine how this can act as a carbon sink,” he adds excitedly.

“I grew up in the midst of greenery. In the next 25 years, there will be a significant shortage of oxygen in the air. These forests can replenish the oxygen and act as the much-needed carbon sinks. In a state like ours where a highly consumerist population dwells, it's imperative that the green cover is increased,” he adds.

It is all an effort to turn the land into a natural forest, integrating cultivation into it. In the distance, sheds are being readied for the indigenous breeds of cows. An area has been dedicated solely to growing medicinal herbs and plants. “The indigenous varieties are being lost to oblivion. We have lost a significant percentage of our medicinal plants. Efforts must be on to conserve them,” he adds.

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