

# Retired but not tired: Brajabandhu grows a forest

*Athagarh's Brajabandhu Lenka spent all his savings and sold his properties to plant 500 varieties of trees on a barren hillock in his village. He speaks to Arabinda Panda about his green initiative*



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By Arabinda Panda

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**CUTTACK:** A comfortable post-retirement life in an urban setting is everyone's desire. But Brajabandhu Lenka, a retired officer, is an exception. The 87-year-old spent all his savings, sold his house and landed properties in the Capital city of Bhubaneswar to fulfill his childhood dream of bringing greenery to a barren hillock in his native Dhurusia in Athagarh block of Cuttack.



Brajabandhu Lenka

Over the last two decades, he has planted nearly 500 varieties of trees on Landa hillock in his village. And with contributions from his friends, he has also built a Hanuman temple with subsidiary shrines on the hillock. “It was my dream to see this hillock replete with plants and it has come true towards the fag end of my life,” said Lenka with a smile. Not only did he plant the trees but is also watering and fertilising them every day, all by himself.

It all began in 1999 when he retired as the assistant director of Odisha Small Scale Industries Corporation. An electrical engineer by profession, Lenka joined as an overseer at the government testing lab under the Directorate of Export Promotion and Marketing in 1963. Unmarried, he worked in different government laboratories across the state.

During his service period, Lenka built a house at Shailashree Vihar and also purchased some landed property in Aiginia. After he retired in 1999, Lenka returned to his roots with the aim of doing something for his village. “I had grown up seeing the Landa hill barren and I wanted to grow some fruit bearing trees there and construct a temple for Lord Hanuman,” he said. With a retirement benefit of Rs 4 lakh, he began planting saplings of several fruit and flower bearing trees besides medicinal trees on the hillock. Construction of the temple also started but soon after, funds became a constraint.

Lenka then sold his house at Sailashree Vihar and two decimals of land at Aiginia at Rs 7 lakh in 2003 and used the money to plant more trees and construct the 50-ft high temple. “Some of my well-wishers and friends also contributed in completing the temple complex which also has smaller temples of Lord Shiva and Ganesh, a jagyan mandap and a bhajan mandap,” he said.

The entire temple complex has also been landscaped with sitting arrangements for villagers. Lenka spent an amount of Rs 18 lakh to see his dream come true. “Today, the forest that has grown on the hillock is home to several birds and animals. Besides,

villagers come to the temple every day and spend time in the serene surroundings. All the weddings in the village are also solemnised at the Shiva temple in the temple complex,” he said.

### **More about the drive**

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He used his retirement benefit of Rs 4 lakh and Rs 7 lakh generated from sale of his house and land in Bhubaneswar to plant trees and construct temple

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