

Shanthisthal in Chengannur: A garbage dump that metamorphosed into a lush mini-forest

PREMIUM

Green oasis on 15 cents is now home to 176 trees and plants of 116 species, including several rare, endangered and threatened ones

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College campus at Chengannur in Alappuzha district, it is hard to imagine that the place was once a stinking garbage dumping ground.

Today, it resembles a teeming forest ecosystem with trees, plants, small mammals, snakes and chirping birds. Its transformation, which began almost a decade ago, is a source of pride for Biji Abraham, an assistant professor of Economics at Christian College, and the institution's biodiversity club.

The mini-forest on 15 cents of land is home to 176 trees and plants of 116 species, including several rare, endangered and threatened ones.

“It had become a dead plot after several feet of earth was removed during the construction of the college ground. The people from outside dumped legacy waste there for several years. The dump was close to the women's hostel and the stench became unbearable. We decided to transform it into a biodiversity grove in 2013 under the Biodiversity Conservation Project of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board,” says Mr. Abraham, in-charge of

A view of the mini-forest on the campus of Christian College at Chengannur. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Christian College Biodiversity Club.

Truckloads of waste were removed with the help of Chengannur municipality. Later, the land was prepared using earth movers. In the initial year, 74 plants with medicinal values were planted. “The following year, we planted trees associated with the 27 ‘nakshatras’ as



developing the green patch.

An ardent nature lover, Mr. Abraham lives close to the college campus and this helped him maintain Shanthisthal by regularly watering the plants and applying fertilisers until they attained a certain growth.

Apart from students of Christian College, the place is frequented by students and researchers from other colleges and universities. “We are glad that Shanthisthal has become a microhabitat. Researchers arrive here to collect specimens. Students also come to study about fungi, tumours and various diseases that affect plants. Last year, a group of students from Mahatma Gandhi University (MGU) visited the garden to separate alkaloids with anti-cancerous properties from *Desmodium longipes*,” he says.

Assistant professor Biji Abraham with visiting students at the mini-forest on the campus of Christian College at Chengannur. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

After the setting up of the mini-forest, the college campus recorded about 30 bird

species and several butterfly, ant and spider species.

Apart from Shanthisthal, the biodiversity club last year set up a ‘vidyavanam’ based on the Miyawaki concept on 5 cents of land. It houses 448 trees and 149 species of plants.



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