

EDITIONS

The revolutionary forest: this 77-year-old has grown over 700 trees in Maharashtra as a tribute to martyrs

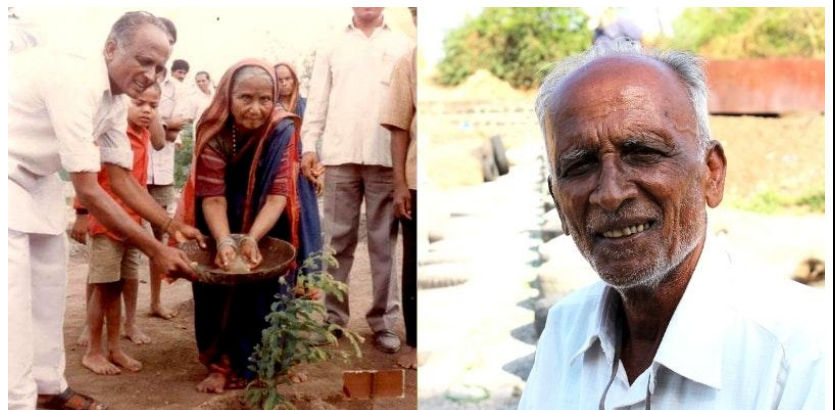
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Sampatrao Pawar has built a green memorial honouring martyrs. He has named each tree after a freedom fighter. Sampatrao sitting in the midst of Kranti Van Sampatrao Pawar stopped for a moment, pointed towards the ground, and said, "Dig deeper into the soil. Do you know why I am asking you to do this?" There was no answer from the student accompanying him. He then put his hand around the shoulder of the student, and said, "The sapling needs to be placed in the pit very carefully. When the pit is deep and wide, the plant will stay stable." The remote village of Balewadi in Maharashtra consists of an entire forest grown in the memory of India's most valiant freedom fighters. Sampatrao, a 77-year-old sugarcane farmer, is the man behind this beautiful tribute. Sampatrao called the massive woodland "Kranti Van", which means 'revolution forest'. Every tree in the forest was named after a martyr who gave up his or her life during India's freedom struggle. "This is my way of paying tribute to all the freedom fighters for their immense contribution. Martyrs live even after their death and Kranti Van reflects just that," Sampatrao told. Why the nation salutes this 25-yr-old-Kargil martyr's mother .From Bisra Munda, who contributed to the liberation of tribals, and Babasaheb Nargundkar, who bravely revolted against the British in Belgavi (now called Belgaum), to the gallant Chandra Shekhar Azad, who led a band of militant youth during colonialism in India, Kranti Van houses trees in all their names.



Roots of freedom

Sampatrao planting saplings with the help of volunteers (left) The year 1992 marked 50 years since the origin of Quit India Movement, which was when Sampatrao came up with the unique idea of honouring the martyrs of the nation. He knew that growing trees on a barren plot of land was not an effortless task. Sampatrao first approached the villagers to seek help. But they mocked



his idea and refused to stand by him. “My neighbours and civilians called me a madman when I told them about creating this forest,” Sampatrao recalls. Later, hundreds of students came forward to help Sampatrao plant trees. “We dug deep into the soil, and after placing the sapling in the pit, we filled it with layers of soil mixed with manure,” he explains. That’s not all. All the schools and colleges in the neighbourhood of Balewadi like ASC College, Mathubhai Hardware College, Adarsh High School, and Pandit Vishnu Digambar High School, came forward to donate funds for the cause. With that, Sampatrao’s aspiration of building an



evergreen memorial for martyrs was fulfilled. He named each of the 1,475 trees after a freedom fighter. He also initiated the construction of an open amphitheatre so as to host school picnics and create awareness among students about India’s struggle for freedom.

A thorny path

Fully-grown trees at Kranti Van In the year 1998, the district administration issued a notice stating that it would take over the land on which Sampatrao had planted the trees since the ownership rested with the government. “I chose a plot of land owned by the government since I expected them to take care of the trees in future. However, I was wrong. Within a year all the trees were cut down for a developmental purpose,” Sampatrao says. Even after this disappointing incident, Sampatrao did not lose hope. Undaunted by the government’s reclamation of land, he thought of using his sugarcane farm for the memorial. His family and friends were against it since his farm was the only source of income. Nevertheless, he went ahead with the plan. “Right after, my son, Vaibhav, and I began planting saplings in and around the sugarcane farm. As we

progressed we saw a need for more and more water for the saplings to grow. So we started digging a well on the land. But, sadly, Vaibhav lost his life in an accident during the course of gouging the earth,” Sampatrao says. Sampatrao is a man of steel. Despite the unforeseen tragedy, he



successfully revived Kranti Van by planting a whopping 700 eucalyptus and tectona trees, again with the help of students, and a few dedicated volunteers in the district of Sangli.

A source of unending motivation

Sampatrao Pawar receiving a token of appreciation for his contribution towards creating an 'evergreen' memorial .It is quite a rare event to come across people like Sampatrao. He placed his livelihood at stake to achieve his mission of creating a memorial for the martyrs of the country. Despite the hurdles that came his way, and the irksome comments from naysayers throughout, he continued on in his journey. However, Sampatrao does not perceive these situations to be difficult. "I didn't feel all this was arduous. In fact, I saw it as my duty. My efforts are nothing compared to the efforts put in by the freedom fighters of the country," Sampatrao says, with a broad smile.

SOURCE:- <https://yourstory.com/2019/02/martyrs-forest-tribute-freedom-fighters>