

A 'children's forest' at school turns 25

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The Children's Forest at St. Antony's UP School, Kannothe in Kozhikode district now.

Alma mater organises get-together of students who planted the saplings

When St. Antony's UP School at Kannothe near Kodenchery in Kozhikode district launched a year-long celebration to mark the silver jubilee of its 'Children's Forest', it raised a few eyebrows and melted a few hearts.

It was in 1995 that hundreds of saplings were planted on a vacant plot near the school under St. Mary's Church at Kannothe. The activity was undertaken by the south India chapter of OISCA International. Then headmistress Thresyamma and students worked hard to nurture the saplings, bringing manure from homes and watering them during peak summer. Now, 27 years later, a few of them assembled at the school to see how much their 'trees' had grown.

Incidentally, everyone had forgotten about the little forest until a curious new teacher dug up old files. Jaffer Siddique, the Arabic teacher who joined the school just five years ago, was amazed to see the 'mini forest' in the school compound and enquired about it. The forest now consists of around 45 teak and 50 Jack trees, besides a few mango trees and mahoganies. Some of them were chopped for various uses at the school, while some of the remaining ones are as wide as 4 feet.

Even after the original 'planters' left the school, students who joined later took care of the saplings for a few more years. Once they were of a certain size, they did not need nurturing any more and thus were eventually forgotten.

Mr. Siddique got in touch with OISCA as well as the children who planted the saplings, facilitating a get-together recently to mark the silver jubilee of the forest. Since most students are working abroad, only three of them and then headmistress could attend the event organised on World Forest Day on March 21.

"We are planning to set up a sparrow garden, a butterfly garden, and a medicinal garden as part of the year-long celebrations. There will be competitions such as quiz, story writing, and versification. We also plan to set up a seed library for indigenous seeds," Mr. Siddique said, adding that the school was planning to get its students involved in environmental activities.

Source:<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/kozhikode/a-childrens-forest-at-school-turns-25/article65329370.ece>