

# Delhi: How a garbage heap became a green lung

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NEW DELHI: Once barren and neglected, the two-acre municipal land next to a railway line and jhuggi cluster in Keshavpuram has now been transformed into a lush green place with 2,500 saplings of more than 42 tree species planted there. Their numbers are likely to increase this monsoon.

North Delhi Municipal Corporation's horticulture department had started a special drive to identify such neglected sites, especially those in the middle of congested neighbourhoods, to develop them into man-made mini-forests. Unlike parks, only saplings of native trees are being planted in such forests and decorative plants, shrubs, and monoculture are being avoided.

The first such forest was developed on the directions of Delhi high court in 2019 in Rajendra Nagar. "The place is small, around one acre. So far, we have been able to plant 615 saplings of native trees in addition to the amaltas trees growing along the boundary wall. We have arranged for a pipeline of treated water for regular irrigation," said Ashish Priyadarshi, horticulture director, north corporation.

Indigenous trees such as *Ficus virens* (pilkhan), banyan (bargad), *Ficus glomerata* (gular), jamun, *Madhuca longifolia* (mahua), neem, mango, teak (sagwan), etc can be found at this place. Officials appreciated the efforts of the local RWA for survival of 90% of the saplings.

Vikas Vasudeva, general secretary of Rajendra Park RWA said that their long struggle with the authorities and legal battle was

finally bearing results. “The land on Shankar Road near Hotel Siddharth was a municipal park since 1960, but it got destroyed due to lack of maintenance and Ramlila being organised there. In 2016, we were alarmed at the decision of setting up a petrol pump there. The area hardly has any green space. Finally, the high court ruled in our favour,” he added.

“Today, this place is green again and the corporation is developing the area into a mini-forest. A walkway will be made later once the saplings are fully-grown. This green oasis will help reduce air, noise and water pollution and lessen ambient temperature by increasing moisture content. The plan is to plant 1,000 more saplings here,” said Vasudeva.

Converting the triangular land located next to a jhuggi cluster in C2-Block in Keshavpuram into a waste management centre and then a mini-forest was a challenging task. “The plot had become a garbage dump. We first constructed the boundary wall, restricted entry by installing gates and then planted the 2,500 saplings in January,” said Priyadarshi.

To ensure that the saplings survived peak winter, section officer Bablu Narware rented a house near the park. “I got shredded leaves laid around the saplings, which is the best defence against extreme cold,” he said. The civic agency also carried out a campaign on radio to educate the public not to damage the saplings.

On August 17, work is expected to start at a third such plot of two acres in Rohini. The civic body expects these places to become dense forests in the next 3-4 years. “We will plant the same kind of saplings in Rohini and construct walkways between them so that people can enjoy the fresh air,” said an official. Plans are also afoot to develop one such mini-forest in each of the six wards.