

## **Draupadi Murmu's vision once led to plantation of 50 lakh trees in Odisha! Can she inspire a greener future for India?**

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Former President Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was one such spark who gave wings to the fire among millions of Indians. As one of the first ambassadors for a greener future, he took an oath, "I will plant and nurture ten trees and will ensure that my family and neighbours also plant ten trees each!". His vision was "Billion Trees for Billion People".

The primary duty of an Indian president is to protect and defend the constitution. But they also serve another critical role in being an inspiration to the entire country through their actions and words.

On Thursday, India elected Smt Droupadi Murmu as the country's first tribal woman president. Born in Uparbeda village of Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, she has been a champion for environmental causes throughout her shrewd political career.

"Environment cannot be protected by only depending on the government or the forest committees, but a collective effort is needed to protect it," she had said a few years ago when she was serving as the Governor of Jharkhand. In fact, the social organisation Grow-Trees.com's project 'Trees for Tiger', which has planted over 50 lakh trees in Odisha, was a brainchild of Draupadi Murmu.

"I had met Draupadiji at the Raj Bhavan during her tenure as the Governor of Jharkhand, and she proposed planting trees around Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district and other sanctuaries in Odisha. She has close ties with the Santhal community in Mayurbhanj and suggested we include tribal areas in our 'Trees for Tiger' plantation drive. We did so, and during the pandemic, the project helped to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for prominent tribes like Bhumij, Santhal, Gond, Mankidia, and Kolha," recounts Bikrant Tiwary, CEO of Grow-Trees.com!

Similipal National Park, covering 2,750 square kilometres, is one of India's oldest tiger reserves and has been part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009. It hosts a rich biodiversity zone and serves as the habitat for Asiatic elephants and the melanistic black tigers as well.

"The purpose of this project was to help repair wildlife habitats, restore biodiversity and support local communities. We have planted 50 lakh trees on the foothills of the National park, including in the gram panchayats of Asana, Kendua, Kuchilaghati, Gundihudi, and Rangamatia. Grow-Trees.com has also been coordinating with the local tribal groups and forest departments to plant a mix of around 20 tree species," explains Bikrant. These trees will also help control soil erosion, enhance the water table and help mitigate floods, droughts, and forest fires, says Bikrant.

He concludes, "we are glad to have acted on the suggestion of Draupadi ji and are happy that the expanded forest cover in the buffer zones is not only providing a natural shelter for tigers but is also helping to control human-animal conflict and enhancing biodiversity on which so many lives and livelihoods depend."

Despite stringent regulations, India is losing lakhs of hectares of forests every year due to land use change, deforestation and illegal tree-cutting. As per the Global Forest Watch, India lost 1.27 lakh hectares of natural forest in 2021 alone, equivalent to 64.6 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. While plantation forests may not amend such large-scale destruction of fragile ecosystems, afforestation and reforestation can entail numerous socio-economic and environmental benefits in the long term. As passionate environmental champions like Droupadi Murmu ascend to the highest office in the country, we can only hope that she will inspire millions of people to commit to a greener future for India.

Source: <https://weather.com/en-IN/india/news/news/2022-07-21-draupadi-murmu-plantation-of-50-lakh-trees-in-odisha-greener-india>