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Mission Green: Go for a tree, wherever you go

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For a beautiful reason, I would like to take you back to that hot afternoon of May 2021. As I stepped out on the balcony, overlooking grand trees on the road, I was oblivious that the ubiquitous scene of rickshaw-pullers resting under them will evoke my love for trees. Who may have planted them and when, I pondered with my eyes fixed on their shade. But have I ever planted a single tree, was the next thought, leading me to take a resolve and by evening I had my plan ready in the diary. The plan was: Go for a tree, wherever you go.

Excited, the following morning, I began calling professors of Punjab Agricultural University, who besides appreciation rolled out useful tips, from 'choose traditional and medicinal trees' to 'prioritise plantation during rainy months'. By October-end, I had planted nearly 150 saplings, wherever I got the opportunity: Temples, homes, educational institutions, crematoriums, government offices, marriage palaces and even petrol pumps. Thanks to everyone who supported me, especially my uncle Raminderjit, who kept taking me to nurseries to help me make the right choice. I adored the manner in which he introduced me to various plants. Nurseries of the Punjab government were a big help for we could get free saplings.

Like the professors, my uncle admired the plan's rule that a sapling would be planted only where someone is there to take its care and shoulder its responsibility. "Get them adopted as some adopt children," he echoed. My newly bought jeep shuttled frequently to various plant nurseries and after a grand fill of nature's delight, would head straight to their many new homes.

My first opportunity was at a college in Faridkot, where I sowed saplings of five traditional trees, such as neem, ber, kikar, tahli and peepal. It was such a fulfilling experience. With my hands soaked in soil, I told them, "It's your new home and you will be immensely loved." I knew with every plantation, I was forming a special bond with the place, too.

My relatives in the villages gave me the most chances. Get as many as you want, we will get them planted, they would say. Many of them took me to their neighbours, schools and gurdwaras. I loved it when an elderly man, who had just returned from Canada, on hearing my plan commented, "If everyone follows your plan, our Punjab can become British Columbia."

At one government school, the principal invited me to the morning assembly to talk about my initiative. It's encouraging when I receive phone calls and pictures of my plants: "See how beautifully they are growing!" I can imagine the joy when I will visit all those places, especially after many years.

Anyone can follow this idea, which will be an inspiring contribution to the environment, and will surely add meaning to one's life. I am proceeding with my green initiative not only this year but every year to come. These words from a school wall smartly motivate: The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.