

## Unique plantation done along Ganga in Uttar Pradesh

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LUCKNOW: Bhagirathi Van along the Ganga river could be a perfect spot to hit for those on a spiritual sojourn. Vidur and Vyas 'kutirs' along the Ganga, in the thick of the forest, promise a connect with the nature. It's one of the attractions of this man-made forest which state government plans to develop as an ecotourism spot in future.

Bhagirathi Van, spread over a vast area in Kasganj district, witnessed plantation of over 25.8 crore saplings on July 5. The area is unique in many ways.



To begin with, this forest has been raised over 316 hectare of land (about 4,500 bigha), which has been reclaimed by the state government from encroachment. A total of 3.5 lakh trees of more than 250 species have been planted here.

DFO, Kasganj, Diwaker Kumar Vashisht, said, "We had been convincing and meeting villagers since October last year, telling them that the land they are tilling is not their's, it belongs to the government. After villagers agreed to vacate the land, we formed a local 'samiti' of villagers. It was all done without any public agitation."

This forest, which has its base in ancient scriptures, is at Datlana Khaam, a village declared as a Ganga 'gram', in Soron block of Kasganj.

"It has Soronji 'teerth', and people from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and other states come to perform the last rites of their family members to this 'teerthsthan'," said the DFO.

The entire reclaimed land was divided into three parts. The forest raised at the spot has trees planted in specific formations to create 'vatikas' (gardens) mentioned in the religious scriptures.

"We planted more than 2 lakh trees in Mahavan forest, which is one of the three parts and has species naturally found along Ganga like Sheesham, Khair," said the official.

The other part is Shreevan, which has connect with 'Arth Ganga' under Namami Gange project. "It has species which will be economically beneficial to farmers. We had promised farmers we would help them increase their income through this plantation," he said.

The third one is Tapovan which has 51,000 trees and Vyas and Vidur 'kutirs'. At present, the forest is being managed by the forest department but later, the local samiti of villagers may get to look after it.

Dhanvantari Vatika is one of the gardens at the spot. It has 75 types of medicinal plants and herbs. Nakshatra Vatika is another. It has 27 tree species, planted in set positions, representing 27 'nakshatras'.

Navgrah Vatika which is planted to placate planetary influences is also a part of it.

Harishankari, which is 'peepal, pakad and bargad' planted together, the three tree varieties representing the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, is another attraction at the spot.

Panchvati, the garden of five tree varieties mentioned in the Ramayana has also found place here.

The plantation site has been geo-tagged with latitudinal and longitudinal positions defined.

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