



Woman spends 28 years creating a lush forest that solved her village's water woes!

09 June 2020

As soon as I got on a call with Jayasree, she asked me, "Is this about my trees, in that case, it's better that I step out into the yard because to be very honest, I keep forgetting what all varieties I have!" Soon, I found myself completely immersed in what she considers the 'simple' story of how she created a forest in 56 cents of land in a span of 28 years.

Jayasree's 'simple' forest or as she calls it 'Project Happiness', is now home to more than 50 varieties of [trees](#) which have helped curb the water scarcity issue in her hometown, Mavelikkara, Kerala!

The forest grew out of Jayasree's sadness. And the more she planted. The more comfort she gleaned from her green 'friends'. Loss of husband, heartbreak at her son's condition propelled her to siphon off as much strength as she could from the sturdy teaks and mahoganies she planted.

Leaving Home and Finding her Way Back

Jayasree M B, 54, was just 18 years old when she got married and moved to her husband's home.

"I was pursuing a B.Com degree, but my family got me married, and I had to quit college. After getting married, my husband, Vishwambaran, and I moved to Qatar as he got a job at the international airport as an airline mechanic. Around eight years later, we returned to Kerala," Jayasree explains.

After her life in Qatar, she was glad to come back to Kerala and its greenery. However, she began noticing that the land surrounding their home in Mavelikkara was barren.

"That's when I went ahead and got a teak sapling from a nearby nursery and planted it," she adds. But she did not know her choice of plants would bring on a barrage of protests.

Many of Jayasree's relatives criticised her idea of planting tree saplings and asked her to plant crops like tapioca instead to help bring in an income. Also, it was not common to plant trees in their area. But Jayasree didn't budge and went on to create a forest by adding more saplings to the 56 cent plot.

"My elder son Vishnu was diagnosed with autism at a very young age, and he had difficulty with speech and communication. Despite taking him for several sessions, he was finding it difficult to speak to us. At this point, I had lost hope, but the forest became my happiness project during those stressful times," she shares.

Sadly in 2008, Jayasree's husband passed away at the age of 55 as a result of his long time liver disease. This left Jayasree heartbroken.

“I had no one to turn to then. Both my sons Vishnu and Vishak were young, and I was torn emotionally. This is when I completely invested my time in building the forest. It became a source of positivity and helped me feel alive again,” she explains.

Jayasree’s ‘happiness project’ is now home to tall trees such as teak, mahogany, mango, banyans, and wild jackfruit, among others. Besides trees, she also took the time to plant medicinal plants in her plot.

Conquering sadness with happiness project

Jayasree’s sons are grown up now and help their mother whenever they can. Her elder son is currently preparing for PSC exams, and Vishakh is a Ph.D. scholar.

Also, the protesting friends and neighbours are all praise now.

“Although many of the villagers and relatives weren’t fond of the idea of my forest, it has now benefitted my family and the neighbourhood to a great extent,” she explains. Jayasree’s village Kunnam which had faced water scarcity about 20 years back, has no water shortage today, all thanks to the humanmade forest.

“I still remember back in 2000 when we had to dig a well 16 rings deep to source water. At one point in time, when the scarcity became severe, we had to add more rings to the well. But today, even during the summers, we don’t have to worry about water at all. The neighbours are also receiving enough water because of the water retention capacity of the forest,” she explains. The trees have helped recharge the underground water table in the village.

When asked about the effort that goes into the maintenance of the forest, Jayasree explains how the dry leaves that fall off the trees are reused along with manure and how the forest is now a self-sustaining system.

“I ask my neighbours who have cows for dung to create manure for the trees. Besides this, I don’t have to put in much effort for the forest because all the trees are fully grown,” she explains.

Source: <https://www.thebetterindia.com/229546/kerala-woman-man-made-natural-forest-grow-how-to-water-scarcity-environment-heroes-inspiring-ser106/>