

GREEN THUMB

Kerala techie goes the Miyawaki way to grow micro forests

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Not all are born with a prominent green thumb, but Mother Nature had reserved a wonderful serendipity for MR Hari, Managing Director of Thiruvananthapuram-based Invis Multimedia.

Hari is now engaged in a massive effort to popularise Miyawaki Afforestation, a planting method developed by legendary Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki to grow micro forests even in urban areas.

Meets with legend

Hari realised his dream when he travelled to Japan recently and was granted an audience with the wheelchair-bound 92-year-old Miyawaki himself.

The latter generously praised Hari for his efforts and his only advice was 'grow more, plant more.'

Miyawaki has not heard about Kerala, but he sounded very particular that only native trees of the area should be selected for this project.

"He doesn't approve the idea of planting fruit trees within the forest," Hari told *BusinessLine*, referring to his proposed plan for growing them within a local context to make it remunerative for homesteads.

Micro ecosystem

Miyawaki suggested that they may be planted on the periphery without disturbing the forest. The Miyawaki method allows saplings to grow ten times faster, Hari explains.

The emerging 'forest' would be 30 times denser than a natural one. The saplings are planted close to each other to prevent sunlight from reaching the ground and keeping the soil moist.

The plants grow vertically instead of horizontally. Hari has since demonstrated that they can grow 15 feet or more in height in as quickly as one and half years.

The micro forests create their own ecosystem comprising several birds, butterflies, and insects, as shown by Hari already in several of his projects.

Convinced, the Kerala Tourism Department invited Nature's Green Guardians Foundation (NGGF), an NGO, to grow a sample forest in the sprawling Kanakakkunnu Palace Grounds in the State capital.

Invis Multimedia was only too willing to implement it as a CSR project. Hari went on to plant around 500 saplings of 60 plant species on five cents of land here, and each is in a race to outgrow the other.

Taking to masses

Employees of Invis Multimedia were the first to accept the Miyawaki concept, recalls Hari. "So far, we have developed 15 micro forests and more than 10 of them involved people connected to Invis."

The Miyawaki method might be slightly capital-intensive in the first three years, but takes care of itself later. It will take a couple of years before the trees grow dense and self-sufficient.

Invis Multimedia plans to propagate it among masses. The NGGF, headed by noted environmentalist and energy consultant VK Damodaran, looks after the research and methodology.

"This could be the best solution to the challenges of deforestation, land degradation and moisture stress and could also help us earn precious carbon footprints in the international market," says Hari.

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