

# CHHATTISGARH: TRIBAL 'GREEN WARRIOR' MOTIVATES COMMUNITY TO GROW FOREST ON 400 ACRE LAND

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With a community-based approach to conservation, a 74-year-old tribal farmer in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district has turned 400 acres of land in his village into a sprawling forest. Image for Representation. | Photo Credit: Reuters

With a community-based approach to conservation, a 74-year-old tribal farmer in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district has turned 400 acres of land in his village into a sprawling [forest](#).

A senior forest department official lauded the initiative of tribal farmer Damodar Kashyap and said his efforts not only led to afforestation in the Sangh Karmari village, but also had a positive impact on neighbouring villages.

For Kashyap, the forest in his village Sangh Karmari in Bakawand block is a sanctuary, which he has developed with decades of sustained efforts by involving the entire community.

Talking to PTI, Kashyap said, "When I returned to the village after completing Class 12 from Jagdalpur in 1970, I was shocked to see that about 300 acres of forest near our house was significantly damaged."

What was once a lush green forest was reduced to a few trees, he said.

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Pained by the state of affairs, Kashyap decided to revive the forest and restore the green cover in the village, he said.

"In the beginning, it was hard to convince villagers to stop cutting trees, as they depended on them in their day-to-day life. People gradually started understanding the importance of the forest," he said.

After being elected as the village sarpanch in 1977, Kashyap put in all efforts to revive the forest.

During his tenure, Kashyap framed strict rules and even imposed fines for destruction of forest,

his son Tilak Ram said.

"The panchayat introduced the 'Thenga Pali' system, under which any three people from the village were deployed to patrol and guard the forest every day to stop illegal felling of trees," he said.

Apart from this, Kashyap also used local beliefs and practices to protect the forest, he said.

The 'laat' (sceptre) of the village god was moved around in the village and forest to make people believe that these were sacred spaces that needed to be protected, Tilak Ram said.

"Apart from the 300 acre forest near our house, my father with the help of villagers also grew a forest on a 100 acre land in Maolikot area by planting saplings year after year," he said.

Kashyap received the Paul K Feyerabend Foundation Award in 2014 for bringing crucial and lasting change for community solidarity under difficult circumstances.

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The septuagenarian's work in the field of conservation also earned him a chapter in the Class 9 social sciences textbook of the Chhattisgarh Board.

"Currently, my father is using 10 acres of land to set up a nursery to grow saplings of different varieties," Tilak Ram said.

Local resident Paritosh Mandal said it was due to Kashyap's effort that people in Karmari village were motivated to save the forest.

"We feel so much at peace in the forest. The green cover has kept the climate here cool even during the current peak summer time," he said.

Bastar Chief Conservator of Forest Shahid Khan said when he was the divisional forest officer (DFO) of Bastar, he heard about the forest conservation efforts undertaken by Karmari village residents.

"I went to see the forest and was happy to witness the afforestation done by the villagers under the leadership of Damodar Kashyap," he said.

"They collectively created a lush green forest covering 400 acres of land. The afforestation work carried out by the villagers in Karmari had a very positive effect on the neighbouring villages as well. I was thrilled to see the beautiful forest," Khan said.

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