

Preserving Heritage Trees Across the Globe Is Dr Harsh's Mission

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The Forest Research Institute's senior scientist Dr NSK Harsh is a man with a mission.

His nature of work that involves preserving the heritage trees both in India and abroad makes him a no-ordinary scientist. These trees are no ordinary trees but are some of the most revered ones, which involve faith of millions across globe.

Popularly known as NSK, Dr Nirmal Sudhir Kumar Harsh is Scientist-G, at the Forest Pathology Division of the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun, and also Group Coordinator (Research) at the institute apart from being a Dean (Research), FRI Deemed University, Dehradun, but he is known for his works than just academic excellence.

Harsh has been instrumental in conserving some of the most revered trees, which involves faith of millions. Dr Harsh came forward to save the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya in Bihar when the holy tree was in distress and called for immediate pathological intervention.

Taking up the challenge and exhibiting some excellent skills, Dr Harsh managed to revive the holy tree even while safeguarding the sentiments of the Buddhist community linked to the tree.

The Bodhi tree today is a healthy tree and is revered by millions of Buddhists worldwide as it was beneath this tree that Lord Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment.

Not only Bodhi tree, Dr Harsh worked to conserve the Vatvriksha at Kurukshetra in Haryana. The tree holds a special significance for Hindus and it was under this tree that Lord Krishna delivered the Gita to Arjuna. The tree that had been under distress for long was fast limping back to normalcy after the FRI's intervention.

Then at Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi, Maharashtra, the holy neem tree was revived solely due to efforts of NSK Harsh. The Rudraksh tree at Shantikunj in the neighbouring Haridwar and Lyre tree at Wood Stock School in Mussoorie were also saved due to his timely intervention.

Harsh's long tree conservation crusade does not end here. It did a yeoman's service by conserving more than 100 trees at Ta Prohm Temple, Cambodia, as part of the Union Ministry of External Affairs project.

One of the marvels, Ta Prohm is a temple at Angkor, Cambodia, having combination of trees growing out of the temple ruins. The Cambodian authorities have been working to save both temple and trees. These huge trees are blended into the walls with their roots hugging the rocks. Leading a team of Forest Research Institute scientists, Dr NSK Harsh managed in preserving these trees, a major achievement in his career. Dr Harsh has been giving advisory services for tree health to the New Delhi Municipal Council, the Delhi Development Authority, the Archaeological Survey of India and the Central Public Works Department.

Talking to the Tribune, Dr Harsh asserts that though conserving holy trees has been a challenging a task, all of these projects have been highly successful.

He said it was highly appreciable that all suggestions, given by the FRI for conservation of these holy trees, were accepted in totality by the temple and trust authorities. Harsh also credits the FRI for the success in conservation of holy trees asserting that the FRI today stands as most important institution in forestry research not only in India but entire Asia.

An Uttarakhandi to the core, Dr NSK Harsh has done MSc (1978) and PhD (1982) in botany from Kumaon University, Nainital. He is a Fellow of the Indian Phytopathological Society of India and has nearly 38 years of research experience.

He is a reviewer for Inter-governmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the IUCN. He has 172 research papers published in national and international journals, authored eight books.

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