

Bhalopahar: A Place Where the Ecosystem Is Rebuilt



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As a student of environmental science, I was always curious about people who not only preached about the need to conserve our environment but followed it themselves and implemented everything they taught and Kamal Chakraborty was my go to person.

Bhalopahar a beautiful place located in Kuchia, Purulia district in West Bengal is a society built across two remote villages in Purulia-Kuchia and Dangarjuri. Once upon a time in the past the area within these villages was hot, dry, and barren with no vegetation and the local people were struck by hunger and poverty. The area is inhabited by tribal communities of **Santhals, Sabars, and Mundas**.

As I roamed around the beautiful serene place, I got to know more about the history of that place. In 1996, Kamal Chakraborty with the other 5 writers exhausted all their savings to rebuild the green cover on the Purulia's laterite soil. In the Arid-3 region aggravated by unrestricted brick-kilning and cutting of trees, Bhalopahar has promoted afforestation and over the years, Kamal Chakraborty kept on buying more land to expand the area and converting them into a man-made forest, which is now known as **Raska, the forest of "JOY."** Lush greenery now carpets the once-barren landscape, teeming with life and vibrant colors. If someone had told me that a single person had converted the barren land into luscious green cover, I would have never believed in it. But, seeing it through my own eyes, I was nothing short of mesmerized.

It is a dream of every environmentalist and for people who love their environment to actually do

something for the natural shelter and Kamal Chakraborty did it. He lived his dream by giving birth to a new forest. Raska was his vision which he had achieved over the years and he has relived his life through it. He planted trees on more than a hundred bighas of land with almost 10-12 lakhs of trees that have restored "life" in the lifeless barren land.

Like he said, the initial stages of afforestation in the rocky and uncultivable land was difficult and he did not have much hope out of it but the trees fought their way through the striking heat and those barren land and survived those rough conditions.

When asked about the ecosystem of the forest, he said that the dense forests of Raska feed the birds, insects, and small animals. It has become a home to various animals like foxes, wild boars,



Source: bhalopahar.org

rabbits, different types of snakes, and mongoose. 65 species of birds including rare ones like Paradise Fly Catcher started flocking in the areas. The birds would eat fruits, and drop seeds and the earth nurtured them, and sprouted saplings of thousands of native and exotic plant species. The ground got overgrown with a vast cover of weeds and shrubs like bontulsi, and chorkanta. They have even created ponds and cut water bodies for the animals to help them survive and reproduce.

Kamal sir believes that his vision could have never become a reality if the nature itself did not help him. There was no soil pre-existing in the land but the rotten leaves, fruits, and animal droppings were converted into compost naturally which got incorporated into the soil by the activities of the worms. The once uncultivable land now becomes fertile enough to cultivate 22 types of paddy including rare black rice. Apart from that various

kinds of vegetables like cabbage, onion, cauliflower, strawberry, and raspberry are grown.

He does not believe in using artificial pesticides and uses tobacco leaves and diluted cow urine on seasonal flowering plants like dianthus, rose, petunia, and dahlia. The local flowering plants like Bakul, Gandharaj, Kadamba, or Simul do not need any pesticides.

He has even worked on restoring the groundwater level by practising rain water harvesting. He dug waterbodies and the undergrowth of the forest cover helped improve the water retention capacity of the soil. The ground water level which was at around 150 ft deep in the past has been restored up to 15-20 ft.

Not only was the nature happy with Kamal sir's efforts, the local marginalized community were grateful to him as well. He has worked hard to make their lives better by building health centres for the local people and schools for the local tribal children. He has even helped them understand the ways of income and how they can utilise their education for becoming financially independent.

He is more like a God-figure in that area and I could see the respect in everybody's eyes. It felt that even the forest bows down to him when he walks through it. The experience of learning the evolution of nature and what a man can achieve with determination was life-changing for me. His message to every fellow citizen is –

“Come back to nature. How much longer will you eat, drink and breathe poison?”



Source: bhalopahar.org