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Community

The Greenery and the Glory

📅 September 10, 2018 👤 Chirosee Basu

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Pavel Karmanov, a Russian M.Sc. student of Geology and Geophysics at IIT Kharagpur, says that he wanders around among the campus greenery whenever he has time. He crosses his heart to swear how amazed he is by the verdure surrounding him. Given that Pavel hails from East Siberia, it is perhaps not surprising that he is quite taken in by IIT Kharagpur's lush green surroundings.

But Pavel is not alone. On even the most ordinary of days, it is impossible to be completely oblivious of the thick canopy over your head. If nothing else, you are thankful that it does not let in the sun through. In a more cheerful frame of mind, you may also have noticed the gay abandon with which life springs from the earth here – be it the thick moss between the little cracks in the pavement stones or the huge, gnarled branches of trees that sometimes weave around each other and then come down in tumbles of sprightly projectiles that hang from above in suspended animation.



Banyan tree on campus

Trees of every kind conspire together at IIT Kharagpur to keep the air moist and fragrant. They are all around you — Gulmohar, Radhachura, Neem, Sal, Sirish, Simul, Eucalyptus and Chatim. Then there are the fruit trees such as mango, lichi, jamun and Bael. Trees like Jarul, Bakul, Palash, Bahera, Mahogany and Tamarind sometimes line long stretches of the roads or cluster around particular areas. At the New Technology Guest House, a jamun tree is so generous with its fruits that the ground below turns a dark violet on some days and the mashed jamuns have to be swept away twice a day.

The campus is also home to some rare varieties of trees. Among them are the Nagchampa or the Cannonball tree, the Jagya dumur, a Ficus variety, and Bhojpatra or Betula utilis, a birch whose bark was once commonly used to write manuscripts and is still scraped out for ritual use. In fact, both Nagchampa and Jagya dumur are used for ritual offerings. The IIT Kharagpur campus also has some unusual trees, such as the Gamhar or white teak and Sausage trees.

Mrs Barnali Chakrabarti, wife of the Institute Director, Dr Partha Pratim Chakrabarti, has been on the campus for 27 years and says that the flora has changed over the years. The Ulatkambal or Devil's Cotton and Hadbhanga or Veld Grape are two kinds of plants



they are on the verge of extinction, says Mrs Chakrabarti.

A former student of botany, a tree lover and green enthusiast, Mrs Chakrabarti, with the assistance of the horticulture department of the Institute, has planted close to 3,000 trees on the campus in the last three years. She maintains a detailed dossier on plant life on the campus, with their names and specific locations.



The Director's bungalow has some unusual trees – like two Rudraksh trees and Allspice trees. Mrs Chakrabarti sourced the Rudraksh trees from Uttarakhand. Given that these trees are not native to the soil and grow in different climes (the Rudraksh is from the Himalayas), they required a lot of initial care. The Rudraksh trees bore fruits this year, says Mrs Chakrabarti.

Nagchampa flower

The Horticulture department of the Institute has been making an all-out effort to refurbish the greenery on the campus. It has helped create a Biodiversity Park. It continues to plant and water thousands of trees in the nook and cranny of the campus. It cordons off trees that need special care. Take the ancient Banyan tree close to the Prembazar Gate that needed to be gated in order to stop the encroachments that would have prevented it from growing.

The department has also been planting trees in the halls of residence. In some of the hostels, say the Lala Lajput Rai Hall and the Madan Mohan Malviya Hall, the staff are passionate about taking care of the greenery. In the Mother Teresa Hall and the Sister Nivedita Hall of residence, students have come



White Teak

forward to plant trees and shrubs. There are also two Sandalwood trees in two of the boys' hostels.

There is a fledgling green movement on campus as well. Last year, some students participated in a unique program, "Life under the Canopy", that required them to scour the campus and select 12 trees under which they had to take pictures with their friends. Early this year saw the "Pedal and Plant" rally in which students cycled to a chosen site to plant trees.

On the World Environment Day this year, Vision Probaho, an eco-conservation cum awareness forum created by a section of IIT Kharagpur's research scholars, marked the occasion with a string of events. The day started with a pedal and plant initiative involving a cycle rally, which was followed by a plantation drive. Several students also enacted a street play to highlight issues arising out of the irresponsible use of non-biodegradable products and the way this is accelerating the destruction of the environment. Students of the Institute also showcased the floral diversity of the campus in a photography exhibition.

Rudraksh tree in the Director's bungalow





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