



**Advancing Community-Based  
Afforestation in North Bengal:**

*The Success Story of*

**SHRI BENOY DAS**



Shri Benoy Das, fondly known in his community as “Sabuj Benoy” (Green Benoy), is a dedicated environmental conservationist residing in Cooch Behar, North Bengal. Over the past two decades, he has quietly yet consistently transformed the landscape through community-based afforestation, with a firm belief that trees can simultaneously restore ecology, support livelihoods, and nourish the human spirit. Till date, he has single-handedly planted more than 13,500 native trees and developed five vibrant micro-forests, each designed to serve as a living resource for people, birds, and animals alike. What began as urban and peri-urban plantation work has now evolved into a larger and more ambitious vision. He is presently working towards creating continuous green corridors along the riverbanks of North Bengal, envisaging dense, native forests that will act as natural shields against soil erosion, rising temperatures, and the adverse impacts of climate change. His efforts are not limited to mere plantations; he also monitors the careful nurturing and protection, of these saplings to ensure high survival rates. Through this sustained approach, he is steadily converting vulnerable riverine stretches into resilient ecological buffers. A defining element of his work is the concept he describes as the “Economy of Shade”. In this model, a single tree is seen not only as an ecological asset but also as a catalyst for economic and social wellbeing. Large-canopy trees like Banyan and Peepal become natural workplaces and community spaces—offering shelter to a roadside cobbler, a comfortable waiting area for lawyers and clients near the court premises, or a resting place for passers-by and street vendors. By thoughtfully selecting plantation sites in and around public spaces, he ensures that each tree contributes to the dignity, comfort, and productivity of the working class and the urban poor.

Shri Benoy Das has emerged as a remarkable grassroots environmentalist and herbal entrepreneur in Cooch Behar, West Bengal. Through his dedication and personal initiative, he has established three extensive herbal gardens, i.e. Panchabati Herbal Garden, Banalata Batika and Rajbari Herbal



Garden, covering a total area of 36.5 bighas of land and collectively cultivating more than 100 species of medicinal plants. These include Wild Ginger (*Zingiber capitatum*), Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*), Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*), Bahera (*Terminalia bellirica*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Bael (*Aegle marmelos*), Ashoka (*Saraca asoca*), Tejpatta (*Cinnamomum tamala*), Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), Curry Leaf (*Murraya koenigii*), Ghritakumari (*Aloe vera*), Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), Giloy (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Pathor Kuchi (*Kalanchoe pinnata*), Genda/Pot Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*), Hadjod (*Cissus quadrangularis*), Vishalyakarani (*Tridax procumbens*), Basak (*Justicia adhatoda*), Nishindha (*Vitex negundo*), Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*), Ekangi (*Kaempferia galanga*), Ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*), and Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), among many others.

His journey is not merely about cultivation but about conservation, awareness generation, and community inspiration. Starting with limited resources, Shri Benoy Das invested his own savings in procuring saplings, preparing land, and ensuring long-term care of the plants. Over the years, his herbal gardens have become living repositories of traditional medicinal knowledge, promoting sustainable cultivation practices and encouraging local communities to recognize the value of indigenous medicinal flora. His initiatives have also created livelihood opportunities and strengthened environmental consciousness in the region.

In recognition of his unwavering commitment to environmental protection and afforestation, Shri Benoy Das was recently highlighted by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, in the 130<sup>th</sup> episode of Mann Ki Baat. During the broadcast, the Prime Minister lauded Shri Das for his selfless and sustained efforts to make Cooch Behar greener by planting thousands of trees and nurturing roadside greenery, often bearing the expenses of saplings, planting, and maintenance himself.

# 'Green Benoy' in Mann ki Baat

MAIN UDDIN CHISTI

Cooch Behar: Cooch Behar's Green Benoy found mention in the Prime Minister's *Mann Ki Baat* addressed to the nation on Sunday.

Benoy Das, 54, with over two decades of afforestation work behind him, lives in Cooch Behar town.

"...we often think of big plans, large campaigns and major organisations, but often change begins in a very simple way... the effort of Benoy Das from Cooch Behar in West Bengal is one such shining example," said Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Green activist Benoy Das.  
Picture by Main Uddin Chisti

"For several years now, he had been working single-handedly to make his district greener. Benoy Das ji has planted thousands of trees, many times, from purchasing saplings to planting them and taking care of them, he has borne the entire expenses

himself wherever required he collaborated..." Modi added.

Das said he was overwhelmed.

"When the Prime Minister mentions a small-town man like me from Cooch Behar, it is a very big achievement," Das said.

A resident of Hazra Para, Das holds a postgraduate degree in Sanskrit and works with the Archaeological Survey of India at the Cooch Behar Palace, where he has been posted since 2010. Yet his identity has long transcended his professional role.

For over two decades, Das has been planting trees entire-

ly on his own initiative and at his own expense. So far, more than 13,500 saplings planted by him have taken root across the town. Beyond individual trees, he has also helped create five small forests in Cooch Behar by scattering seeds across riverbanks and abandoned land — efforts that together account for nearly 30,000 trees.

His daily routine begins at 5am and continues till 9am, hours he dedicates exclusively to his green mission. Around four months of the year are spent planting saplings, while the remaining eight go into watering, protecting, fencing, and nurturing the trees.

In addition to his plantation initiatives, Shri Benoy Das is known for operating what is regarded as West Bengal's first "Tree Ambulance" - a mobile service for rescuing distressed trees and supporting their transplantation and care. This unique initiative reflects his philosophy of "Sadhana" (disciplined practice). For him, planting a sapling is only the beginning; he considers each tree akin to a child, requiring regular attention, protection, and nurturing until it is strong and self-sustaining.

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This deep sense of responsibility has contributed to exceptionally high survival rates in his plantations. For his tireless efforts, Shri Binoy Das has received the *National Environment Youth Award 2022* for grassroots ecological leadership. He has received recognition by the Forest Department; Government of West Bengal during the Banamahotsav 2024 for the Best Garden in the Afforestation Programme. He was also honoured with the Ram Sharad Kothari Pratibha Samman in 2025. Over the years, Shri Benoy Das has emerged as a respected figure in the field of grassroots environmental stewardship in North Bengal. His work beautifully weaves together afforestation, biodiversity restoration, livelihood support, cultural revival, and spiritual enrichment. His journey stands as an inspiring example of how one individual's sustained effort, sensitivity, and conviction can gradually transform not just landscapes, but also lives and mindsets.



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