



We want to industrialise the process of afforestation: Shubhendu Sharma of Afforestt

23 July 2021

Shubhendu Sharma earned a dream job at Toyota post engineering. However, life had other plans for this sociopreneur and the brain behind Afforestt, an enterprise on a mission to bring back lost forests.

A chance meeting with the Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in 2008 gave birth to the idea of a viable afforestation company in Sharma's mind. "Seeing pictures of forests created by Miyawaki's technology, I knew I could do this for the rest of my life," Sharma admits. His first forest was born in his own backyard.

Moved by the ecosystem he had successfully created, he considered making it a larger scale for both urban and rural spaces. Today, Afforestt has successfully carried out the afforestation process using Miyawaki technology in 16 different countries.

In Sharma's words, the earliest afforestation projects were not meant to be community-based projects. The concept originated from a purely ecological point of interest. "We wanted to establish ourselves as professionals providing forests as a service and industrialise the process of afforestation," said Sharma. The organisation has planted around 450,000 trees in 150 small, fast-growing forests in 50 cities around the world.

Unimpressed by the imported palm trees and other non-local plants, which adorn the gardens and public spaces of the Indian cities, Sharma wanted to promote the idea of planting more sustainable and local flora.

"Cities with water scarcity promote non-sustainable water sprinkler-supported lawn grass culture. To maintain lawn grass, one needs fossil fuel and manpower. We can save a lot of pollution and public resources by converting grassland and municipal corporation into forested areas. By doing this, we utilise vertical space, fill them up with greenery and produce 30% more leaf area meters," Sharma points.

Sharma recognised the service gap, however, there was no ready market for their services. "We wanted to promote services such as 'backyard forest making' and 'forest scaping' instead of landscaping to promote concept," he recalls. These services shifted the way people perceived forests.

However, it was the community-based afforestation, where villages came together to plant few acres of forest to improve soil quality, conserve groundwater, where Sharma's enterprise saw the real social impact.

"Not only did the planted forests improve the natural resources in these villages, but also provided an entrepreneurial opportunity to the youth living close to the forests. These youngsters collected seeds of trees to germinate seedlings and we bought these seedlings from them for large-scale afforestation projects," pointed Sharma.

Explaining the commercial aspect of his business Sharma says, "Depending on a big organisation would negate the very ecological reason for our existence. Our revenue model is seeded in the services, expertise and hours we provide to our clients. This has helped us increase our client base and revenues," says he.

The right knowledge is key in creating these forests. Sharma did not want Miyawaki methodology to become plain hearsay. "As Buddha says, drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good. We have added our methodology to the open sea of information so it is available for everyone's use," says Sharma.

What made Sharma a Face of Vibrant Bharat?

"Over the past 171 years, human activities have raised atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide by 48% above pre-industrial levels found in 1850, according to NASA. Afforestt is doing a commendable job by creating forests that are maintenance and chemical-fertiliser free, wild and native, which sustain and support local biodiversity. That the enterprise does not shy away from sharing their knowledge with everyone is a great way of building sustainable forest culture in the society," said Krishan Arora, Partner, Grant Thornton Bharat.

"Planting trees to support a social cause was not enough for Shubhendhu, he took the road less travelled. By establishing the premise of Afforestt and growing its roots, he has proven that forests are not only the lungs of any society but also hold immense economic value. His decade long work to enchant our society with why forests matter, deserves worthy recognition and respect," said Aman Dhall, Founder of CommsCredible.

Source:<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/zomato-ipo-listing-raised-bar-tech-industry-fueled-dreams-industry-7213811.html>