

CLONE OF 'VIVEKANANDA TREE' PLANTED IN ALMORA, UTTARAKHAND

ARPITA CHAKRABARTY

Two clones of a peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) under which Swami Vivekananda meditated while on his sojourn in the Kumaon Himalaya in the early part of the 20th century, were planted recently at exactly the same spot in Kakrighat near Almora, where the original tree once stood before it died in June 2014.

The tree is believed to be at least 200 years old. A team of scientists from the Central Agro Forestry Research Institute, Jhansi; GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar; and Vivekananda Parvatiya Krishi Anusandhan Sansthan, Almora, took up the job of rejuvenating the tree.

The project was undertaken by the team under the guidance of senior scientist Dr. S. Ayappan, ex-Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). After inspecting the tree in October, 2013 the scientists found that the tree had become quite old and the living stem was only around 10% of the total spread. Although the rejuvenation process failed, ten clonal plants from the original tree were successfully raised at Agroforestry Centre, GBPUAT, Pantnagar.

Two of the cloned trees were planted in Kakrighat by Swami Balabhadrananda, Assistant General Secretary of

Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur Math, in the presence of among others, Mr. Savin Bansal, the district magistrate of Almora.

Recounting the entire exercise, Dr. Salil Tewari, Professor at G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, who was involved in the cloning process, said, "Since 90% of the tree had already died, we disinfected whatever branches we got. A few cuttings were regenerated and put in a glass house under controlled conditions. At the end of the process, only 10 saplings could survive. Since March this year, the cuttings were put in open conditions so that they were able to survive in extreme weather during winter."

According to the book, '*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*', Vol I, Vivekananda spent one night at Kakrighat along with his brother disciple Swami Akhandananda while he was on the way to Almora from Nainital in 1890. He meditated under the peepal tree at the confluence of rivers Koshi and Suial. The book recounts Vivekananda as saying after the completion of the meditation, "I have just passed through one of the greatest moments of my life. Here under this peepal tree, one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved. I have found oneness of the macrocosm with the microcosm. In this microcosm of the body everything that is there (in the macrocosm), exists. I have seen the whole universe within an atom." This realization at Kakrighat was later expressed in his lectures on macrocosm and microcosm in New York (U.S.A.) delivered on the 19th and 26th of January, 1896.

Rare 'Marbled Map' butterfly sighted in the Eastern Ghats

When a group of green enthusiasts were exploring around the thick forest of Eastern Ghats, near P. M. Kota village of Maredumilli mandal in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, some days ago, they were hoping to sight some interesting flora and fauna.

Little did they realise they would stumble upon a butterfly species never before sighted in the south India.

N. Chandramohan Reddy, an Indian Forest Service officer, currently working as the managing director of A. P. Urban Greening and Beautification Corporation Ltd., was on a "green walk" with his friends, when he chanced upon the 'Marbled Map', a rare butterfly species usually found in the north-east.

"It immediately struck me, I was looking at something special and unique. I am familiar with butterflies but this one I never saw before. Without any hesitation I took out my camera Nikon D7100 to shoot," says an excited Mr. Reddy.

He shared the snaps with his team of S. Raghupathy of

CII-Green Business, and his understudy Venkat Raju. On his return to the capital, the official immediately referred to published material on butterfly habitats and realised their find belonged to the 'Marbled Map' species.

According to the *Book of Indian Butterflies* by Issac Kehimkar and published by Oxford University Press, Marbled Map or *Cyrestis cocles* is listed as a "rare" butterfly species confined to forested hills in the region between Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bhutan and Myanmar.

It is found to be pale green with faint vertical lines and rounded wings. Wings span is between 50-60 mm.

Mr. Reddy then contacted Mr. Kehimkar, a Deputy Director at Bombay Natural History Society, an expert in this field, to share his finding. The avid naturalist too confirmed the species. "It's a new find and good news because the species was found up to West Bengal and Orissa besides north-east. It shows that there is lot of work to be done in the Eastern Ghats where little research has gone into unlike the Western Ghats," he said.

India is home to 1,318 recorded butterfly species, while the figure is about 1,500 in the entire sub-continent.