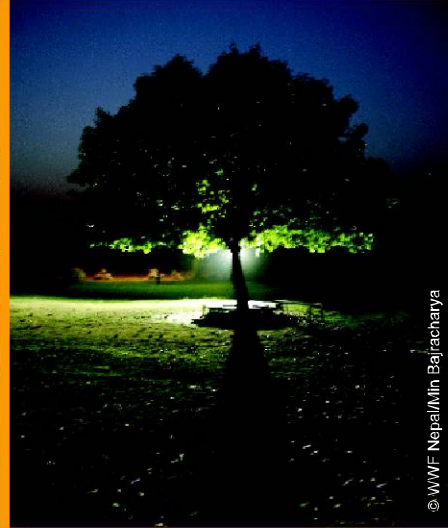


Lumbini: The Soul of the Terai Arc



Lumbini: The Soul of the Terai Arc

As prayer flags flutter in the breeze under the giant Bodhi tree and the chanting of Buddhist hymns envelop the atmosphere, one feels at peace in the gardens of Lumbini.

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the four Buddhist pilgrimage sites based on major events in the life of Lord Buddha; the other three sites are in India: Bodhi Gaya (enlightenment), Sarnath (first discourse), and Kushinagar (death). Interestingly, all of these events occurred under trees.

Lumbini is located in of Rupandehi district in Nepal. It lies at the base of the Churia range of the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) and is an important carbon sink for building greater adaptive capacity to the effects of climate change in Nepal. Spread over an area of three square miles, Lumbini houses a large garden with a grove of trees and shrubs of numerous species. The garden is also home to numerous species of wildlife including the Sarus Crane and Blue Bull.

Lumbini is referred to as the 'Soul of the Terai Arc' given the striking congruence between Buddhist philosophy and WWF's conservation principles in TAL - interdependence and interconnectedness - where the key objective of the TAL program is to build connectivity across the landscape to facilitate wildlife movement while promoting harmony between humans, wildlife and nature.

Promoting Participatory Nature Conservation in Lumbini

WWF Nepal joined hands with Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) in September 2010 as part of WWF's global efforts to work with faith groups to further the cause of nature conservation. This partnership is aimed at promoting responsible tourism and responsible environmental practices in the sacred site of Lumbini.

Over the project period, WWF Nepal and Lumbini Development Trust will establish and manage a Peace Garden; promote environmental, cultural and religious values; conserve Sarus Crane and other wildlife species and their habitats; raise conservation awareness among visitors and local people living in and around Lumbini; mobilize and generate resources to implement innovative and integrated conservation and development initiatives aimed at building ecological integrity and promoting agricultural productivity; and strengthen and build local capacity to achieve the project objectives.

Given the significance of trees in Buddhist philosophy and their inherent importance in biodiversity conservation, three key projects are being led by WWF Nepal and LDT. This includes the Peace Garden project with a target of planting one million trees within ten years, the 'My Tree' project and the tissue culture project to help in the propagation of native tree species of Lumbini.



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10 Years : 1 Million Trees

In order to promote the ecological integrity of the region as a means to combat climate change impacts and revive the greenery of Lumbini, one million trees will be planted in Lumbini Master Plan and its surrounding areas over a period of ten years. The project was kicked off on the occasion of WWF's Earth Hour in March 2011. 108,000 trees have already been planted in 2011 through the active participation of people from different walks of life including the private sector and community-based organisations. Trees which were considered to have existed in Lord Buddha's era such as Ashoka, Sal, Neem, Pipal, Kadma, Arjuna and Seemal will be planted in an effort to conserve the original ambience of the site.

'My Tree' in Lumbini

Trees signify life and are therefore an integral part of the 'Soul of the Terai Arc. The 'My Tree' project was initiated in 2011 to encourage individuals and organizations, both nationally and internationally, to 'own' a tree in Lumbini. An area of about 3 hectares for 5,000 trees has been allocated near the Peace Pagoda for the project which aims to promote participatory conservation for improving environmental integrity. Interested participants can choose from a selection of trees and, upon payment, will have the tree(s) planted in their or a loved one's name. The ownership fee covers the cost of the tree sapling and all costs associated with maintaining the tree over its entire life span.

Tissue Culture to Promote the Lumbini Experience

Lumbini was rediscovered in 1895, when a German archaeologist came upon Ashoka's Pillar, identified by its inscription. Records made by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian were also used in the process of identifying this religiously acclaimed site. With the objective of recreating the original Lumbini by reviving the native tree species that existed during Lord Buddha's era, tissue culture of these select tree species has been planned as a separate project. The tissue culture is expected to lead to the propagation of the native trees; marketing of the tree saplings as a *living souvenir from the sacred soil of Lord Buddha* will also be explored at both national and international levels.

"For the sake of future generations, nature should not be destroyed in the name of development. The solution to climate change lies in forest protection. Every human being is responsible for the protection of wildlife and for combatting the impact of climate change."

- His Holiness the Sakya Trizin



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