

NEWS

Benga Maa of Odisha: How One Woman Fought Coastal Erosion and Planted a 50,000-Tree

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • April 9, 2025 • 3 min read

By *Brajabandhu Mahanta* | **Tag:** Benga Maa

In an era where climate change looms large and governments struggle to respond, **one woman in coastal Odisha stood up—alone at first—to rewrite the story of her village’s survival.** Her name is **Bengalata Rout**, affectionately known as ‘**Benga Maa**’, and her mission is nothing short of revolutionary.

From the small village of **Tandahar in Astaranga block, Puri district**, Benga Maa has shown what **real environmental leadership** looks like—**unfunded, unwavering, and unstoppable.**

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After the Cyclone, a Green Crusade Begins

The catastrophic **1999 Super Cyclone** that ravaged Odisha's coast left deep scars—**destroyed homes, lost crops, shattered livelihoods**. But it also gave birth to a quiet storm of determination in one woman.

"I started planting trees after the 1999 super cyclone that destroyed lives and livelihoods here. People who depended on paddy farming, betel vines, and fishing were devastated. I wanted to do something to protect our village from such disasters," said Benga Maa in a conversation with OTV.

She picked up a sapling and a digging tool—and **never looked back**.

Two Forests, 50,000 Trees, and Zero Excuses

Fast forward 25 years, and **Bengalata Rout has planted over 50,000 trees**, including two flourishing coastal forests filled with **casuarina (jhaun) and other native species**. These forests are **not just green cover—they are life shields**, protecting **Tandahar, Katakana, and Kalamkani villages** from **saline winds, tidal surges, and coastal erosion**.

Her forests are living proof that **coastal afforestation is the first line of defense** in climate-vulnerable regions like Odisha.

A Woman Alone No More: Turning Mission into Movement

Benga Maa's journey began solo—but her impact inspired many. Today, she **leads a brigade of local women**, all united under a single purpose: **saving their land with their own hands**. They plant, nurture, and protect the trees—**not for profit, not for applause, but for survival**.

This grassroots movement has not gone unnoticed. **Environmental NGOs and the Forest Department have stepped in to support her work**, amplifying the reach and strength of her green legacy.

Experts and Officials Applaud Her Impact

According to **Sudarshan Dehuri**, Forest Officer of the Konark Range, *“Her efforts have been instrumental in reducing the impact of coastal erosion and salt-laden winds.”*

Subrata Swain, a local volunteer and environmentalist, adds, *“She didn’t wait for government schemes but acted on her own to make a change. That’s what makes her extraordinary.”*

And that’s exactly what sets Benga Maa apart: **courage over complacency, action over apathy.**

Why Her Story Must Be Told—and Replicated

In a world reeling under the weight of ecological destruction, **Bengalata Rout’s story stands as a loud, clear reminder: You don’t need a policy to make a difference—you need purpose.**

Her forests may not yet make global headlines, but they **shield homes, protect farms, and empower women**—and that’s the kind of impact no award can measure.

Conclusion: The Forest is Her Voice. Let’s Listen.

From bare, eroding shores to lush green belts, from a lone woman with a shovel to a community on a mission—**this is what environmental revolution looks like in Odisha.**

Benga Maa isn’t just a symbol of resilience; she is the embodiment of Odisha’s undying spirit.

Let her story echo across coastlines and corridors of power alike—because **if one woman can do this much with so little, imagine what we all could do if we simply followed her lead.**

Category: News, Opinion

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