

## EDITORIAL

## Support and empower farmers

National Farmers Day or Kisan Diwas is not just a day to celebrate the farmers but also an opportunity to address the pressing issues they face and explore ways to uplift the agricultural sector. As India's population continues to grow, the importance of supporting and empowering farmers becomes ever more critical. This day serves as both a celebration of their vital role in society and a call to action for a sustainable future for agriculture in India. Let us use this day to reflect on the sacrifices made by farmers and to ensure that the government, institutions, and society continue to work towards their well-being and prosperity. India being an agrarian economy, places a lot of emphasis on agricultural policies and structures. The fifth prime minister, Chaudhary Charan Singh is fondly hailed as the "champion of India's peasants". During his tenure, he placed much importance on creating awareness about the contribution of farmers to the economy. Ever since 2001, December 23 is widely regarded as 'Kisan Diwas' after the Union government pledged to honor the day for his contribution towards the upliftment of Indian farmers which consequently resulted in the large-scale development of the agricultural sector. These reforms helped thousands of farmers get relief from moneylenders which consequently reduced the suicide rates among them. Other reforms also introduced uniformity in the farm sector and ensured better management and overall growth. Every farmer, who possesses land, whether or not he has a small or large land area, receives Rs 6,000 annually directly to his bank account from the government in equal three installments. Observing Farmer's Day contributes to raising public awareness of the value of recognizing farmers' contributions to the country's economy. Additionally, it gives farmers a voice to express their requirements and ensure that they are satisfied. Therefore, the purpose of the day is to raise awareness of how important the farming sector is to raising the national quality of life. National Farmer's Day is dedicated to all the farmers in the country who work around the clock and year round to provide food for the nation and ensure that we never run out of food. This day is usually celebrated in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh, the agriculture and farming states of the nation. On this day, programmes are held in several parts of the country to familiarize them with innovations in science and technology to maximize their production. They are also given a stage to talk about their needs and goals.

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## Guardians of nature: Saving the planet

BY  
RAJDEEP PATHAK

*As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, the wisdom of indigenous communities shines as a vital resource for environmental preservation*

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Combating Climate Change: A Legacy of Hope The discourse on climate change dominated discussions at COP 2024, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, 2024. Rising global temperatures, depleting natural resources, and rampant environmental degradation have emphasised the urgency of adopting sustainable practices and advancing conservation efforts. Amid this pressing crisis, the role of indigenous communities in preserving the environment emerges as a beacon of hope. Often referred to as the "guardians of nature," these communities have safeguarded ecosystems for centuries through their traditional knowledge, sustainable practices, and deep connection to the land. One exemplary figure embodying this harmonious relationship with nature was Padma Shri Tulsi Gowda. Known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" and affectionately called the "tree goddess"

by her Halakki Vokkaliga tribe in Karnataka, Tulsi Gowda's life and work illustrate the profound impact of indigenous wisdom on environmental preservation. With an unwavering commitment to nature, she planted 30,000 saplings during her lifetime, nurturing them with meticulous care.

Tulsi Gowda passed away on December 16, 2024, at the age of 86, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of environmental stewardship. Growing up in poverty, Tulsi Gowda's love for plants and forests remained unparalleled. From an early age, she worked in plant nurseries, demonstrating extraordinary skill in nurturing saplings. Her unique ability to identify the "mother tree" of any species exemplified her deep ecological understanding.

Tulsi Gowda herself believed, "It's not important how many plants you have planted; what matters is how much care you've taken of those saplings." The contribution of indigenous communities to environmental conservation extends far beyond India. Globally, these communities represent less than 5 per cent of the world's population but protect 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity, according to the United Nations. Their traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations, serves as a crucial tool for sustainable resource management.

For instance, the Kayapo tribe in Brazil has success-

fully defended the Amazon rainforest from logging, mining, and industrial agriculture, preserving a vital carbon sink. Brazilian environmentalist and politician Dr. Marina Silva emphasised, "The Kayapo teach us that protecting forests is not just about climate, but about life itself."

Similarly, the Sámi people of Scandinavia maintain ecological balance in Arctic regions through sustainable reindeer herding practices. In New Zealand, the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) promotes a cultural commitment to environmental stewardship, influencing national policies. The Ogiek of Kenya, through sustainable honey harvesting, continue to conserve the Mau Forest, a critical water catchment area. This echoes Wangari Maathai's belief that "The future of our forests lies in the hands of those who understand them best - indigenous communities."

India, too, has a rich tradition of indigenous environmental stewardship. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, one of the earliest champions of conservation, exemplifies this ethos. Their sacrifice during the 1730 Khejarli Massacre, where 363 Bishnois gave their lives to protect sacred Khejri trees, remains a cornerstone of ecological movements. Similarly, the Dongria Kondh tribe of Odisha has valiantly defended the Niyamgiri Hills from destructive mining activities, preserving their sacred land and biodiversity.



The Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh showcases innovative sustainability through wet-rice cultivation and fish farming, while the Soliga tribe of Karnataka safeguards the Biligiriranga Hills using indigenous forest management techniques. Such efforts have inspired broader environmental movements. The Chipko Movement of the 1970s, where villagers in Uttarakhand hugged trees to prevent deforestation, drew inspiration from the Bishnoi's sacrifice. In 2021, a similar initiative saved over 500 sacred oak trees in Jaakhi village, Uttarakhand, near forests dedicated to the local Goddess of Justice.

From the hills of Uttarakhand to the sacred groves of Meghalaya,

these movements highlight India's enduring environmental heritage. Despite their invaluable contributions, indigenous communities face significant challenges, including marginalisation, land dispossession, and exploitation. Empowering indigenous communities to take leadership roles in environmental management has already shown promising results. For example, joint forest management initiatives have demonstrated effective resource management and biodiversity conservation. Combining indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches can create innovative strategies for addressing environmental challenges. Practices like the Zuni tribe's waffle gardens in

New Mexico, which conserve water in arid regions, exemplify the sophistication of indigenous ecological wisdom. In an era of environmental crises, humanity must embrace the profound knowledge of indigenous communities to forge a sustainable future. Their traditions, deeply rooted in respect for nature, hold the key to restoring ecological balance. By integrating their wisdom into global conservation strategies, we can create a world that honors the delicate harmony between humanity and the natural world.

*(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)*

## Integrate geocaching with green

BY  
VIIVECK VERMA

*If leveraged correctly, it can be a powerful prong for environmental conservation and well-being*

In a world where digital interactions are canon, screens capture every minute of our leisure and discovery is now increasingly virtual, the appeal of geocaching stands out as a compelling blend of technology, adventure and personal growth. This real-world treasure hunt, driven by GPS, has transcended its niche origins to become a global phenomenon, attracting millions of participants across countries to seek out hidden 'caches', using geographic coordinates.

But while the game's immediate appeal lies in its thrill of discovery, geocaching's potential reaches far beyond mere entertainment. If leveraged correctly, it could serve as a new age, a powerful prong for environmental conservation and individual well-being.

Raw Adventure At its core, geocaching is an invitation to explore the world in a novel new way. Geocachers, what participants are called, navigate a set of GPS coordinates and attempt to find a con-

tainer hidden at that location. A treasure hunt of sorts, designed for the new generation. These containers vary in size and content, with the larger ones often holding small trinkets that can be exchanged. Each geocache also contains a logbook for finders to sign, and mark off their successful discoveries.

The simplicity of the activity is perhaps its greatest strength. Where typical capitalist leisure is often packaged as a polished, commercial experience, geocaching offers a raw, unscripted form of adventure. There's an element of unpredictability that makes every find feel earned, and no two hunts are ever the same. Whether in urban parks, dense forests or pristine mountaintops, the act of locating a cache taps into the primal human desire for exploration and discovery of something new.

Connect with Natural World

But beyond the thrill of the hunt, geocaching holds profound implications for how individuals interact with their surroundings and each other. Its potential as a force for personal enrichment and environmental stewardship is considerable, though not yet fully realised. When intertwined with environmental conservation efforts, geocaching has the potential to foster a deep, active connection between individuals and the natural world. By placing

caches in nature reserves, parks, and other ecologically significant areas, organisers can encourage participants to visit locations they might not otherwise explore. These hidden spots, often overlooked by casual visitors, could become touchpoints for raising awareness about local ecosystems and biodiversity.

A promising model for this is the 'Cache In, Trash Out' (CITO) initiative, a programme spearheaded by the geocaching community that encourages participants to pick up litter and clean the environment wherever their geocaching adventures take them. This way, CITO aims to ensure that geocaching leaves a positive environmental footprint. However, in my opinion, this initiative could be taken even further. Imagine geocaching not only as an activity that passively appreciates nature but as one that actively contributes to its preservation.

Partnering with environmental organisations, geocaching groups could design challenges around reforestation projects, wildlife monitoring or invasive species removal. Participants might be incentivised to plant trees, clean up beaches or contribute to citizen science initiatives by documenting wildlife during their excursions and apps could be used to track the progress of each activity.

Geocaching could become a powerful grassroots force for

environmental change, driven by something as simple as people's love for adventure. There's potential here for governments, conservation NGOs and geocaching platforms to collaborate more extensively. By integrating conservation missions into the fabric of the geocaching experience, participants can use their hobby to contribute to the protection and restoration of the natural landscapes they explore.

The personal benefits of geocaching should not be underestimated. On an obvious level, it gets people outdoors and encourages physical activity, offering an antidote to the increasingly sedentary lifestyles that modernity fosters. Hiking through forests, scrambling over rocks or navigating urban environments in search of a cache can provide the exercise that many people sorely lack. But geocaching's influence runs a little deeper than that.

There's an undeniable cognitive and emotional benefit that comes from this pursuit. The process of following GPS coordinates, interpreting clues, and solving puzzles to locate hidden caches engages the brain in complex problem-solving. It demands focus, patience and adaptability, all skills that are valuable far beyond the game itself. Moreover, geocaching fosters a sense of achievement and wonder. Every found cache

is a small victory, and each new location, a new find. Whether it's discovering a hidden park in the middle of a bustling city or stumbling upon a scenic vista in the wilderness, geocaching constantly reintroduces the idea that the world is indeed big and full of surprises, contrary to how small digital connectivity makes the world feel.

From a psychological standpoint, geocaching provides a break from the monotony of everyday life. It encourages mindfulness and immersion in the present moment, as players focus intently on their surroundings and the challenge at hand. This can be particularly beneficial in reducing stress and enhancing mental well-being.

The social aspect of geocaching also deserves mention. While it can be a solitary pursuit, many participants enjoy the camaraderie of group hunts or the shared experience of discovering caches left by others. It fosters a sense of global community, with geocachers from different cultures and backgrounds connected by a shared love of exploration.

Future Bright The future of geocaching is bright, but its growth will depend on its ability to adapt and expand. For one, technology will continue to play a crucial role in enhancing the experience. There are slivers of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) usage that add new layers of complexity and immersion

to geocaching, transforming it into a multi-sensory experience. However, technology should not overshadow the activity's foundational appeal: the thrill of real-world discovery. As geocaching continues to evolve, it must retain its essence as an outdoor pursuit that reconnects people with the physical world around them.

More importantly, the integration of geocaching with environmental conservation efforts must be prioritised. Geocaching already encourages exploration of the natural world, but it could become a more intentional tool for promoting ecological responsibility. The treasure hunts of tomorrow could help protect the treasures of the earth, its landscapes, its wildlife and its ecosystems. As someone who has closely observed the trends of outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship, I see geocaching as a symbol of hope in a time of digital overconsumption.

It offers a compelling alternative to the passive consumption of media and encourages us to rediscover the joy of curiosity and the world outside our screens. If harnessed for its full potential, geocaching could be a meaningful bridge between individual fulfilment and collective responsibility.

*(The author is founder & CEO, Upsurge Global, co-founder, Global Carbon Warriors, and Adjunct Professor, EThames College)*