

HCLFoundation

Reinstating Rudraksha

Power of grassroots action



HCLFoundation

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He who plants a tree,
plants a hope.

~Lucy Larcom



Vision
"To conserve, restore and enhance indigenous environmental systems and respond to climate change in a sustainable manner through community engagement."

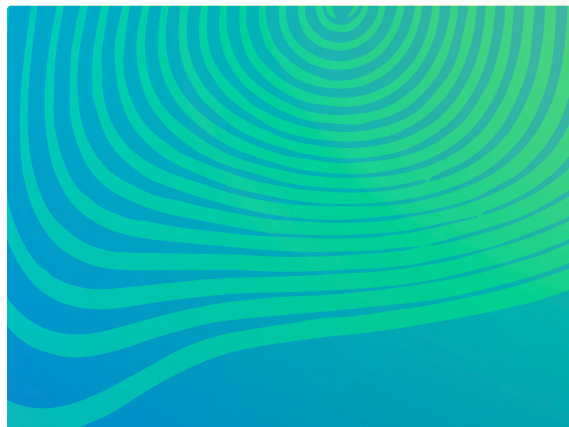
Aligning with the UN's 'Decade of Ecosystem Restoration', HCL Harit conserves, restores and enhances indigenous environmental systems.

With participation and stewardship of local communities, it is implementing sustainable measures to combat climate change.

Spread across nine states and embracing ecosystems from mountains to sea, HCL Harit is working with urgency to mitigate the impact of environment degradation.



Thematics



Follow the extraordinary efforts of a dedicated community as they come together with the **HCL Foundation** to plant Rudraksha trees along the Ganga catchment in the mid-Himalayan region.

Learn about the immense significance of the Rudraksha tree in Hindu mythology and spirituality, as well as its environmental benefits in promoting biodiversity and preserving the delicate ecosystem.



Plantation of Rudraksha in middle Himalayas

The Himalayas have always been a hotspot of biodiversity, in addition to being the origin of many rivers that drain the Indian mainland and thus, sustain culture, economy, and nature.

The Himalayan landscape has played a significant role in various processes and phenomena that shape the integrity and health of India and its people.

Since the past few decades, the Himalayas are facing severe degradation, along with large-scale loss of native biodiversity. This, paired with a number of anthropological and induced threats has led to a degradation in the health of the Himalayan rivers and consequently affects the sustenance of our environment and us, who are an inseparable part of it.

Rudraksha is a type of seed found mainly in the Himalayan region and is considered very important in Hinduism. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva meditated for several years in the Himalayas, and when he opened his eyes, tears fell on the ground and created the Rudraksha tree.

Rudraksha is considered a powerful and sacred seed and it is believed that wearing a Rudraksha *mala* (rudraksha bead necklace) will bring you more benefits. These benefits include greater focus, concentration and spiritual growth, as well as the ability to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

In the Himalayan region, Rudraksha is highly revered and the seeds grown in this region are considered to be particularly powerful. There are different types of Rudraksha beads, each with a different face or '*Mukhi*' and each of them is said to have its own properties and benefits. Many Himalayan people wear Rudraksha beads as a symbol of their devotion to Shiva and as a way to enhance their spiritual practices. They also use Rudraksha in various rituals and ceremonies such as puja (worship) and meditation.





Picture depicting silt deposition in the foot hills


Accelerated erosion has a number of negative effects. Increased chances of flooding and river overflowing its banks result from excessive silt deposition, which lowers rivers' ability to carry water.

The morphology of the riverbed is also changed, which has an impact on the habitat of various species.

According to an Assessment Report by IUCN in 2019, 69.4 % of Uttarakhand is facing functional degradation with 21% of Uttarakhand's geographical area under a high level of degradation. About 8.8 % of the region is under very high levels of degradation.

A number of native species have practically disappeared or are on the brink of becoming critically endangered.

Rudraksha (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*) is a large evergreen broad-leaved tree with a cylindrical trunk, which was a native species in the region and existed as an associated species of Oak, locally known as *Baanj*. Rudraksha has always been an integral part of local communities owing to its economic, ecological, medicinal as well as cultural values.



The Himalayan forests, first faced the brunt of extensive deforestation and the introduction of alien species, in the 19th century, when the British were keen on expanding the railway network and carrying out development in form of infrastructure and required tools or machinery. The British blindly cleared the Himalayan forests.

Oak, being one of the principal timber species, was the first choice, followed by its associated species including Rudraksha, and were replaced by the commercially viable Pine.

Due to its slow growth rate and an erratic pattern of seed generation, Rudraksha was never able to regenerate its numbers to the extent that its beads, which are revered and considered sacred by Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs, are currently being imported from Nepal, Indonesia, and other south-east Asian countries.



In the Himalayan villages, mules are frequently used for the transportation of people and goods over the challenging high-altitude terrain.

Rudraksha, apart from having a much renowned cultural and spiritual value, provides a myriad of services, including but not limited to ecology and economy.

Rudraksha, in the middle Himalayas, has always played an important role in the augmentation and treatment of the catchment area of Ganga and its tributaries, by enhancing the quality and quantity of water seeping into the ground through its role as a nutrient filter.

Moreover, Rudraksha is quite effective in preventing soil erosion, enhancing climate resilience, conserving water, and providing food and habitat to a number of avifaunal and mammal species. And with its extensive root system, the tree binds the soil of the mountainous slopes which the soil absorbs water for a slow release later thus contributing to river flow in the lean season.





Picture of the determined women who took part in planting the Rudraksha saplings to help preserve the Himalayan slopes.

Due to the demanding living conditions, women who live in the harsh Himalayan terrain frequently develop physical resilience and endurance. They are used to navigating difficult terrain, including areas at high altitudes and with steep slopes.

Rudraksha saplings being raised in the nursery for plantation.

It is important to note that Rudraksha trees have a slow growth rate and can take several years to reach maturity and produce seeds. Patience, dedication, and consistent care are crucial in successfully raising rudraksha saplings into healthy and thriving trees.

The timber of Rudraksha is quite extensively used in making furniture and considered to be durable, which increases its demand in the market. The leaves of the tree are a preferred food for cattle as well as other herbivorous animals.

Not to mention the beads, especially the '*ekamukhi*' Rudraksha, which is considered the most sacred form and quite expensive due to its rarity. All these aspects of Rudraksha offer a sustainable way to supplement the income of the local communities without causing degradation.

A lesser-known fact about Rudraksha is its medicinal properties and prevalence in Ayurveda. The leaves are anti-bacterial and used for treating wounds. In the Ayurveda texts, the leaves are also mentioned as a treatment for headaches, migraine, epilepsy, and other mental disorders. Different parts of the Rudraksha tree are known to be helpful in treating stress, anxiety, depression, palpitation, nerve pain, hypertension, asthma, and liver ailments. The berry, too, is considered to be an effective solution for nausea, vomiting, and indigestion.



Understanding the holistic potential of the programme, **HCL Foundation**, in collaboration with NMCG (National Mission for Clean Ganga) and partner organisation INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), has planted more than 11,000 Rudraksha trees mixed with other native trees spread across 30 acres of land and plans for more in Gopeshwar and surrounding regions.

Rudraksha is associated with Lord Shiva, and Gopeshwar is located in the lap of *Panch Kedars*, this plantation project is an offering as well as a gesture to mark the combined effort by local communities, administration, and our organizations to conserve this magnificent tree, and ultimately fulfil our share of responsibility towards the Himalayas and the Ganga.





The local community actively participated in the planting of Rudraksha saplings on March 21, celebrating the International Day of Forests.

The Rudraksha's importance to the natives was highlighted by the Divisional Forest Officer of Kedarnath Van Mandal, who also initiated this celebration. He emphasized the need to protect the Rudraksha in its natural habitat and the benefits that reinstating Rudraksha can have on the local economy.

In consultation with the local community regarding HCL Foundation's Rudraksha plantation initiative.

An elderly lady informed, "There used to be patches of Rudraksha in the area but due to deforestation and forest fires, they got vanished. However, the afforestation programme can bring back the old local floral composition in the area."

Women in the Himalayas often have a strong connection to nature and a deep sense of responsibility toward preserving their surroundings. They recognise the importance of maintaining a healthy ecosystem for their communities' well-being and future generations.





The power of grassroots action

The reinstatement of Rudraksha in the mid-Himalayan region has been an ongoing effort laid down by the **HCL Foundation** that received an active engagement from local communities.

One such community engagement story is that of the village of Gopeshwar, located in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, India. Gopeshwar is a small village located in the mid-Himalayan region, and for many years, the villagers relied on agriculture and livestock rearing for their livelihood.

However, due to deforestation and other environmental factors, the natural habitat in the region had been severely degraded, leading to soil erosion, water scarcity, and other problems.





In 2019, **HCL Foundation** and INTACH together conducted a workshop on the benefits of Rudraksha cultivation. They explained how planting Rudraksha trees could help in restoring the natural habitat, preventing soil erosion, and improving the overall ecological health of the region.

The villagers were initially hesitant, but the team continued to engage with them, providing them with information on the benefits of Rudraksha cultivation and the traditional knowledge associated with it.

They also helped the villagers secure funding and technical assistance for the project. Over time, the villagers became more engaged in the project, and they formed a community-based organization called the "*Rudraksha Samiti*" to oversee the cultivation and management of Rudraksha trees.

The success of this community-led initiative demonstrates the power of grassroots action and the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in promoting sustainable development in the mid-Himalayan region.

Leading to the denouement

The Ganga catchment and the local biodiversity both greatly benefit from Rudraksha plantations. A crucial ecological region that supports a variety of flora and fauna is the Ganga catchment area. Rudraksha tree planting will aid in ecosystem restoration by boosting biodiversity and tree cover.

Due to their deep roots, Rudraksha trees will aid in stabilizing the soil and reducing erosion. Thus preventing landslides and preserving the integrity of the landscape by tying the soil particles together with their roots. Because of the way that their roots act like natural sponges, they will absorb and hold onto water, reducing runoff and fostering groundwater recharge.

Additionally, the seeds are valuable and in demand across a variety of industries, including jewellery and traditional crafts. Local communities living in the Ganga catchment area may benefit from the cultivation of Rudraksha trees in terms of sustainable livelihood opportunities that will improve their socio-economic standing.

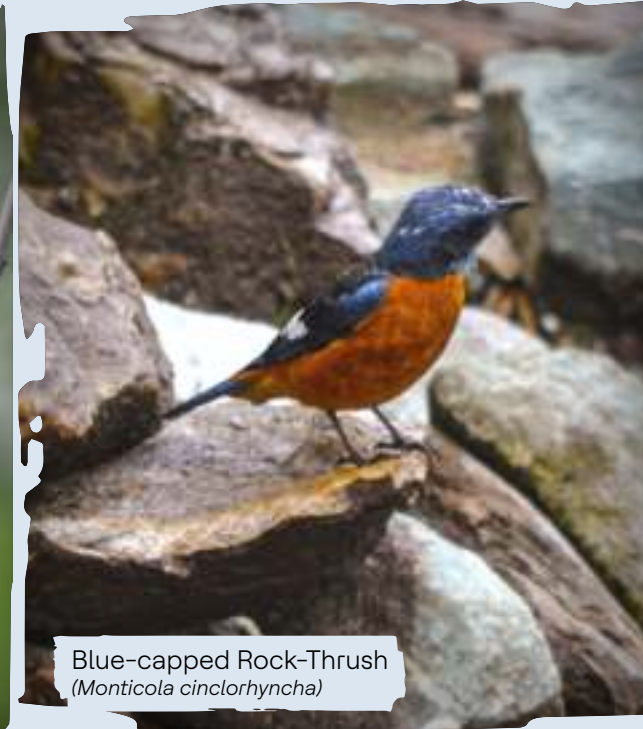
The **HCL Foundation** works to support a strong and thriving ecosystem while honoring the rich cultural and religious heritage connected to it by promoting the Rudraksha plantation in the Ganga catchment area. As a result, this project is a thorough implementation that benefits the local communities, soil health, water resources, biodiversity, and the overall ecological balance of the region.



Grey Treepie
(*Dendrocitta formosae*)



Ashy Drongo
(*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)



Blue-capped Rock-Thrush
(*Monticola cinclorhyncha*)



Common sailor
(*Neptis hylas*)



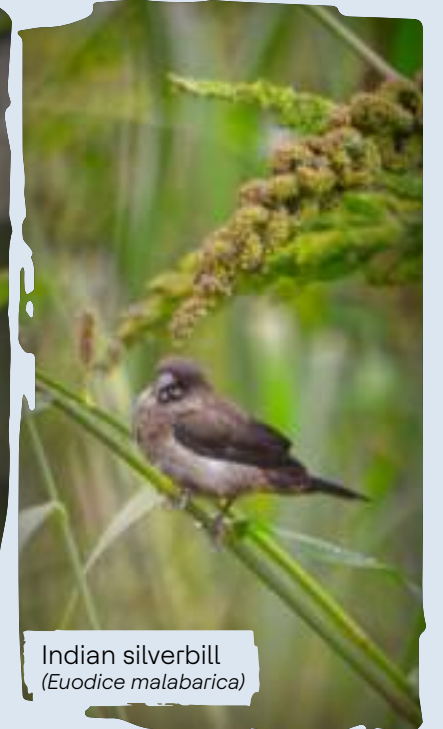
Common banded peacock
(*Papilio crino*)



Common jester
(*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)



Red-vented bulbul
(*Pycnonotus cafer*)



Indian silverbill
(*Euodice malabarica*)



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