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MAIN NEWS

PAU experts perform green miracle Revive 400-year-old dried-up ber trees in Golden Temple Complex

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The historic and sacred 'ber' trees in the Golden Temple complex have returned to life and are bearing fruit heavily this year after a gap of two decades, thanks to the efforts of horticulture experts from Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), here, who have given a new lease of life to these trees that had almost dried up.

The three miracle ber trees, including the 440-year-old Ber Baba Budha Sahib, 400-year-old Dukh Bhanjani Beri and similarly aged 'elaichi ber' in the Golden Temple Complex have borne fruit which would ripen in March. The ber tree is known to live for 100 years but these trees have lived four times more than the recorded life span.

These trees had started drying up in the late 1990s. The branches had decayed and the trees were infested by lac insects. It was then that PAU experts, led by Dr J.S. Bal, a horticulturist and a ber expert, Dr D.R. Sharma, an entomologist and Dr Paramajeet Singh, a pathologist, were put on the job by agricultural university authorities following a request by the management of the Golden Temple complex.

"We went to see the trees for the first time in 1998. These had almost dried up. The culprit was the ghee of the 'karah parshad' as the devotees used to touch these trees with their greasy hands after partaking of the 'parshad.' This clogged the passage of sap of the trees and they started drying up in the absence of nutrition. The dried branches were then attacked by lac insects," said a beaming Dr Bal at their success in bringing the trees to rejuvenation.

The experts adopted a three-pronged strategy to fight the decay that had set in the trees. Dead branches were pruned, trees were sprayed to kill insects and the pathology was studied. With this, the trees started showing signs of improvement and responded to the treatment. "Their health started getting better but we were not very elated all these years since these trees did not bear flowers. We had thought they have surpassed the fruiting age. But we were pleasantly surprised to see the heavy flowering this season. The trees are covered with unripe fruits now," said Dr Bal, adding the Ber Baba Buddha Sahib already had the record of being the oldest Indian ber tree and will live for more years now.



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