

save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 1

AUGUST 1986

NILGIRIS

THE LOST HUMAN-NATURE BALANCE

M S S PANDIAN

Todas lived in an ecologically proper way, Badagas were the first to distort the man-nature harmony, British degraded the ecology most and post-independence developments made it worse, says the author who is a research worker in the Madras Institute of Development Studies.

Last year on September 27, eleven construction workers – six men, four women and one boy – were buried alive in a landslide at the Wellington Military Cantonment in the Nilgiris district. The Chief Minister, M G Ramachandran, who is known for his never dwindling populism, immediately granted a paltry sum of Rs.1,000 to each of the bereaved families from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Landslips, Soil erosions

What happened on September 27 last year was not unique, but the latest of the recurring landslips in the region over the past many years. Apart from landslips, the Nilgiris suffers from intense soil erosion also. The problem has taken such acute proportion that the government itself, which normally turns a blind eye to such unpalatable facts, accepts it. The Working Plan for the Nilgiris South Forest Division (1974-75 1983-84) observes, "The muddy waters of the streams that drain the slopes bear witness to the enormous erosion that is taking place. What had once been noted as a country of aesthetic splendour is now bereft of vegetation and beauty, and the countryside now looks bleak and bare." The same documents further notes, "The onslaught of the southwest monsoon, breaking out with its heavy downpours, accompanied by fierce winds, cannot be easily withstood by the exposed and vulnerable soil. The result is widespread soil erosion of all types and intensities from the insidious surface and finger erosion to the spectacular landslips. Large landslips blocking the Mettupalayam – Ootacamund hill railway as well as the main roadways for some days are a common feature every year ..."

History of degradation

The ecological degradation of the Nilgiris hills has a long history. Over the years, very often due to official policies, the cultivation practices in the hills have evolved in such a way as to be in sharp conflict with its ecology. The repeated landslides and the marked erosion of soil are the clearly visible manifestation of this conflict.

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The original inhabitants of the Nilgiri hill are the tribes known as the Todas. The mode of livelihood evolved by the Todas was in harmony with the ecological niche of the hills which was characterised by long stretches of grassland interspersed with small patches of woodlands locally known as shoals. Exclusive pastoralism was and still is their mode of survival in the hills. To a small extent, they collect edible roots and fruits from the forests to supplement their food. About the Todas, it was noted, "They have never known to have a practised cultivation. They never do any work except tending their buffaloes and making butter and ghee from milk... the only demand they make on the forests is the facility of grazing..."

Over the years, the Todas have perfected their pastoralist mode of survival. Every year, during the dry season of February and March, they burn the grasslands so that the first monsoon showers will bring a fresh crop of tender grass for their buffaloes. On the utility of this practice, the above-cited working plan confesses as follows : " ... arrears which are not subject to periodic fires carry mostly tall and coarse grasses which are not palatable and not relished by cattle while those grasslands which are subject to annual fires carry shorter and palatable grasses of different species." Moreover, the Todas practised annual rotational migratory grazing, by which they move their herds of buffaloes from one place to another in a systematic way. During the various seasons in a year, the buffalo herds are moved from areas where the availability of grass is scarce to where it is plentiful. This practice keeps the possibility of any one tract being overgrazed under check. Interestingly, in consonance with their material culture, the Toda rituals also centre around buffaloes. They worship bronze and iron representations of buffaloes and ritually sacrifice the at funerals.

The pastoralism of the Todas and its well-defined principles of grazing, thus, utilised the abounding grasslands in an ecologically proper way. At the same time, the sholas in the hills were retained intact as they were not clearing land for agriculture. Thus, the earliest form of the production organisation in the Nilgiri hills existed in conformity with the local ecology.

Enter Badagas

However, the situation began to change about 400 years back with a large number of Badagas from the neighbourhood of the Nilgiris (the present Karnataka state) migrating to and settling down in the Nilgiri hills. The migrant Badagas were agriculturists. To begin with, they practised shifting cultivation and subsequently switched over to settled agriculture. The Badagas in their experience, found the sholas once cleared of the trees to be the best suited land for cultivation.

The axes of Badagas, who are presently the most numerous group in the district controlling large tracts of land under potato cultivation, slowly ravaged the sholas and converted them into cultivation terraces.

As early as 1890, the district collector of Nilgiris noted, "They (the Badagas) have systematically destroyed every tree in the neighbourhood of their village and for miles around, leaving nothing standing for the requirements, but stunted shrubs... This has brought its own punishment, for the Badagas have to travel miles to obtain timber and fuel." Thus the mode of survival practised by the Badagas distorted the harmony between men and nature and deforestation was the result.

British assault

The arrival of the British in the hills during the late 18th century heralded the next and the most important phase on the ecological degradation of the region. From the 1820s onwards, there was sustained effort by the British to

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develop a full-fledged township in the Nilgiris plateau. Soon Ooty was converted into the seat of administration of the Madras Presidency for six months in a year and a military cantonment was developed. The developed township attracted people from the plains and the population in the hills swelled over the years, increasing the demand for firewood and timber.

More importantly, the British introduced coffee and tea in the Nilgiri hills, the commercial cultivation of which began by the middle of the century. Under the Waste Lands Rules of 1863, The land in the hills was to planters at throwaway prices. Taxes on the plantations were given a tax-holiday for the first five years following planting so as to extend the area under plantation crops in the Nilgiris district. According to W Francis, the author of the gazetteer of Nilgiris, at the turn of the present century, there were 26,000 acres of land under coffee and 8,000 acres under tea in the Nilgiris district. The area under the plantation crops increased over the years. In 1974-75, the tea garden in the district occupied 58,000 acres and the coffee plantations, 21,900 acres. Thus, substantial areas in the hills were deprived of their natural vegetation and brought under money-spinning commercial crops.

Plantation threat

The plantations, given their production organisation, required a large number of settled labourers to work in the fields and the factories. This labour demand was met by the migrants from the plains. The already reduced sholas became the source of firewood and timber for the ever-increasing population in the district. Further, the processing of tea requires large quantities of firewood. Though some of the factories are presently switching over to oil as fuel, the present firewood requirement of the tea factories in the Nilgiris district is estimated to be around a lakh tons per year. Thus, tea processing gobbled up tracts of woodlands in the past and still continues to do so.

Development Woes

The post-independence period brought its own ill-effects on the ecology of the hills, apart from carrying over the effects of the past. The construction of the hydroelectric reservoirs at Pykara, Moyar and Kundah, brought in a number of workers who stayed in the hills for years till each of the projects was completed. They encroached the sholas for fuel and timber. In recent times, the increased population in the district and the growing city of Coimbatore at the foothill of the Nilgiris are straining the existing forests for fuelwood.

While the denuded Nilgiris is facing soil erosions and landslips, the state government is not much concerned about the problem. The afforestation schemes of the government have failed to bring in any perceptible change in the deplorable situation. But, on the other hand, The forest department is concentrating its maximum effort on the bluegum and wattle plantations which supply raw material to the South India Viscose factory at Sirumugai and Tan India Wattle Extract Company at Mettupalayam. The Department's concern is transparent in its following statement which was made as a response to the public claim that bluegum plantations affect the water table adversely: "Neither thundering letters to the Editors of the dailies nor even fasillades at District Development Council Meetings have so far ruffled it {the Forest Department} or deflected it from the fulfillment of bluegum plantation targets. At the most, sentiment was appeased by leaving a belt of old Cypress or other trees standing unfelled on the roadside, but that was all; peer through the belt... and there is bluegum reigning as the monarch...' Of course when monarch gets all the attention the workers will continue to die in landslides.

-Point Counter Point

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S N C APPEAL TO RV
ONE GREAT HUMAN TRAGEDY COMPOUNDING ANOTHER

The following appeal was presented to His Excellency the
Vice-President of India Shri R Venkataraman towards the end
of May, 1986 at New Delhi.

Respected Sir,

Permit us to bring to your kind attention a serious situation fast unfolding in the Nilgiris.

The mounting threat to the beauty, environment and ecology of the Nilgiris over the years appears to have reached a stage of deep concern. It is no exaggeration to say that the unique hills are steadily being pushed towards disaster.

The causes are many. But two stand out. One is the migration explosion and the other rampant commercialisation.

Migration explosion

Nilgiris has been increasingly attracting migrants from the turn of the present century. But since the 60s there has been a quantum jump in the number of migrants, thanks primarily to the resettlement of the bulk of repatriates from Sri Lanka.

Officially there are about one lakh odd repatriates in the district. However, unconfirmed but reliable estimates put their number at double the official figure. In other words, these repatriates have become the single largest group accounting for nearly one fourth of the total population. It is learnt over 50% of the repatriates settled in other districts and States have migrated to the Nilgiris where they find the climate and people most hospitable. There appears to be little doubt that most of the future repatriates would also make a beeline to the Nilgiris.

Majority of the repatriates have no assets or skill and are left to eke out a living through menial jobs, if they can find them. In the circumstances, it is only a matter of time before they are forced to follow others in clandestine cutting and felling of trees for fuel and livelihood.

Indeed in the Nilgiris one great human tragedy is compounding into another.

Ironically, the unparalleled migration has taken place during a period when the native population recorded one of the best performances in the country in family planning. A recent study says, "Government statistics over the past few years have persistently shown that acceptance of family planning was considerably high in the Nilgiris as compared to all other districts in Tamil Nadu."

Rapid Commercialism

The virulent pace of commercialisation is the other formidable force rapidly changing the face of Nilgiris. The most disturbing fall-out of this is the high level of speculation in real estates both in the rural and urban areas. Consequently, rentals and land prices have shot up to incredible levels.

Overpopulation and commercial greed have not only imposed a heavy social and economic cost on the hapless local people; they have had serious ecological consequences as well.

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To give just one example, a recent report of the Geological Survey of India says that about 80% of the original forest land ("sholas"), which protect the spring water sources to the towns and villages, have been lost to cultivation and construction. With the result, the district (excepting a few pockets) has been in the grip of acute water shortage for the past several years. This year has been one of the worst, especially for the Ootacamund town.

Sir, your link with Nilgiris is old and intimate. You can, therefore appreciate our concern at the environmental degradation of the Nilgiris. We request you, Sir, to use your good offices to urge upon the Government of India and Government of Tamil Nadu the imperative need for preserving the Nilgiris. We do not decry industrialisation or commercialisation of the district which, in the context of the limited availability of agricultural land, provide the much needed employment. But what we wish to impress on the Government is that they should ensure that such acts of economic development cause the least damage to the natural beauty and ecology of the district.

In connection we wish to make the following suggestions for the immediate consideration of the Central and State Governments:

1 Meaningful and adequate rehabilitation schemes must be immediately instituted for the repatriates settled in the district. Those who cannot be absorbed within the district should be resettled elsewhere. Inflow of repatriates originally settled elsewhere into the district should be discouraged. And in the event of arrival of fresh repatriates, Nilgiris, which has already taken more than its due share, should be spared. Last but not the least, there should be an intensive family planning drive among the repatriates in the

PRIVATE SECRETARY
TO THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

May 31, 1986

Dear Shri Venugopal,

Kindly refer to the appeal to the Vice-President of India from the Save Nilgiris Campaign. The Vice-President is taking up the matter with the Minister concerned in the Tamil Nadu Government.

With Kind regards,

Yours sincerely
Sd/- (K H RAMANATHAN)

district.

On the eve of the recent conference of State Ministers in charge of rehabilitation in New Delhi, it was reported in the press that the Centre was unhappy over resettlement (of Sri Lanka repatriates) performance of the Southern States and was considering the possibility of taking future repatriates families to the northern region.

The Centre would do well to consider this favourably with regard to not only new repatriates but those unsettled in the Nilgiris also.

2. The Government should consider legislation to severely restrict, if not ban, acquisition of real estate interest in the district by outsiders which can only slow down the commercialization (and speculation) in the district.

3. The should declare a

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moratorium on all construction of a commercial nature till civic amenities including water supply and drainage can be augmented adequately.

4. The land-use pattern of the district must be reviewed and lands for forests, agriculture and other purposes should be clearly and realistically demarcated and any encroachments between them should be severely deterred.

With deep respects
I remain
Yours truly
Sd/ (D. Venugopal).

**TEA IS NOT AN UNMIXED BLESSING
S N C SEMINAR**

A shift in cultivation from potato to tea in Nilgiris was favoured on economic and ecological grounds at a recent seminar at Ooty. However, it was warned, soil loss would be tremendous in the initial years of raising tea plants if proper soil conservation measures are not adopted. Destruction of natural forests for plating tea was also cautioned against.

The seminar was organised by Save Nilgiris Campaign and Rural Development Organisation, Coonoor. The decline of the potato crop was traced to the outbreak of two deadly diseases, the late blight and the golden nematode, in the sixties lowered the yield. On the other hand, costly plant protection and sharply fluctuating market prices have made potato growing highly risky.

Dr. P Samraj, a soil scientist, added, "the largescale cultivation of potato on the steep slopes, especially in the widely prevalent "up and down" method of cultivation, has resulted in enormous loss of top soil leading to loss of nutrients, siltation of dams and landslides." He cited a recent Geological Survey of India study which showed that 36% of landslides in Nilgiris occurred in agricultural lands.

On the comparative advantages of switching over to tea, it was explained the net profit from tea was Rs. 12,000 per hectare per year from the fifth year

ENVIRONMENT CONTROL DEPARTMENT
FORT ST. GEORGE
MADRAS – 600 009

Thiru N Krishnamurthy. I.A.S. ,
Commissioner and Secretary to Govt.

Sir,

I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your letter cited and to state that copies of the report on the Seminar together with the recommendations have been forwarded to Agriculture, Forest, and Fisheries, Public and Planning and Development for necessary action.

Yours faithfully,
Sd/ - for Commissioner and Secretary to Government.

of planting as against Rs. 7000 for potato. Besides regular income there was also capital appreciation. Tea was labour intensive and was less susceptible to erratic rains.

Dr. Samraj, however, warned "tremendous soil loss will be observed from the newly cleared areas unless proper soil conserva

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-tion measures are adopted.” Experiments had shown that the soil loss in newly cleared areas exceed that of potato cultivation even under the “up and down” method.

Dr. M Halayya, Economist, cautioned against the destruction of “Sholas” (natural forests) for planting tea in the name of resettling repatriates from Sri Lanka. Mrs. Piljain, leader of the Todas remained a pastoral people and all the agriculture based benefit schemes aimed at helping them were bound to fail. She suggested dairy based schemes instead.

Recommendations:

1 The existing “shoal” forest and natural grasslands which are now found as remnants should be protected and preserved for the general maintenance of perennial waterflow. In addition, to enhance and to protect the perennial

“OPERATION GREEN CROSS
BY OOTY APEX CLUB
Apex club of Ooty, a social service group affiliated to the National Association of Apex Clubs of India, is to launch a social forestry project in town. Under the Scheme named “Operation Green Cross”, the club will also seek to educate the public and young children about the need for trees and forests.
The Young group is led by an energetic young dentist, Dr. Senthilnathan Siva and functions from 93 Alms House Road, Ooty.

water resources, the forum urged planting of mixed trees.

2 Lands having above 33% slope should be brought under perennial vegetation. In slopes ranging from 0 to 10% with adequate irrigation facilities any annual crops can be raised with soil conservation measures, and in slopes ranging from 10 to 33%, permanent vegetative ground cover should be established by planting any perennial crop viz, tea, coffee, cardamom, etc.

3 In the small tea growing areas primitive type of manual weeding should be banned as it accelerates soil erosion to a considerable extent. Besides, farmers should be educated on the use of herbicides for weed control.

4 Minimum price for tea and potato should be fixed as a solution to the sharply fluctuating prices of both.

Nature Worship When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and the most interminable, and to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place –a Sanctum Sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature. - Thoreau
Woods are lovely ... The woods were made for the hunter of dreams. The brooks for fishes of songs. - Sam Walter Foss
Dire Consequence Forest precede man and Deserts succeed them. -Chateaubriand

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Dear Reader,

This Newsletter has been started with a view to highlighting the environmental & related problems of the Nilgiris. News and views are welcome from all interested in the welfare of the Nilgiris. Environmental groups in the district can share their experiences through this Newsletter which is being sent to the authorities from the district to the national level as also to the press. We take it we have your active cooperation.

PLEASE DONATE

The first two issues of the Newsletter have been financed by the Development Promotion Group, Madras. For subsequent issues we depend on donations from all like-minded persons and organizations. Kindly treat this as a personal appeal and donate your mite. Correspondence and donations may kindly be sent to D. Venugopal, Co-ordinator, Save Nilgiris Campaign, 22-C, Tirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 036

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

DEVELOPMENT PROMOTION GROUP

A Voluntary Agency engaged in rural development.

The group also undertakes studies in planning, monitoring and evaluation of rural projects.

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Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator , Save Nilgiris Campaign,22-C, Tirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 036 & printed at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21

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NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 2

SEPTEMBER 1986

SRI LANKA REPATRAITES IN KOTAGIRI

FRANK HEIDMANN *

“The Nilgiris district accommodates more families from Sri Lanka than any other districts in Tamil Nadu, while under the British rule labourers for plantation work in Sri Lanka were recruited mainly from plains of Tamil Nadu. Hence the term “repatriation” must be questioned.”

The Nilgiris district became the second home of thousands of families who left Sri Lanka during the last two decades. Still larger number are pouring into the hills district in the west of Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiris hills have always been a melting pot of cultures when people came there from the plains of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karantaka, Andhra Pradesh and other places as traders, money lenders, craftsmen, labourers etc. The population growth rate from 1971 to 1981 is 27.17% for the district and 26.30% for the rural areas in this district, while the average for Tamil Nadu is 17.23% and 12.68% in the rural areas.

The most significant in migration is the “repatriation” of plantation workers from Sri Lanka who find working conditions and climate similar to their native place. Nilgiri district accommodates more families from Sri Lanka than any other district in Tamil Nadu, while under the British rule labourers for plantation work in Sri Lanka were recruited mainly from the plains of Tamil Nadu. Hence the term “repatriation” must be questioned. Repatriation means the organised migration of a population back to their native place, but the majority of the “repatriates” are not settled in their ancestral home.

They were again uprooted and are migrated to areas unknown to them. More than 2300 families found employment in the State Plantation Corporation in the Nilgiris district, but a larger number came to the hills after their struggle for existence in the plains – the repatriation - had failed. After the expatriation from the country where they were born, they went to their forefather’s lands and finally came to an area showing similar features of Sri Lanka, where tea is grown and where they hope to utilize their skills. While throughout their life they have been called ‘Indian Tamils’ they are now known in India as ‘Ceylon People’ a name, that distinguishes them from others, that makes them a separate group. It is a tool that discriminates rather than explains the destiny of more than 4 lakhs of people.

* A Social Anthropologist from Gottingen University, West Germany

“The high decennial increase is mainly caused by the immigration of repatriation of repatriates. They come either directly from the island or after futile attempts to get settled in the plains.”

Kotagiri

Kotagiri is one of the four towns in the Nilgiri District, situated in an area where, at an elevation of 6500 to 7000 feet, tea of high quality is grown. Coffee and vegetables are minor cash crops in that region. Most of the tea small holdings belongs to the Badagas, who fled after a Muslim invasion from Mysore area in the 17th century? to the Nilgiri hills, settled down and established contacts with tribal population. They are Hindus and speak their own language, Badaga. Under the colonial rule they contributed to build up plantations and are now the main land-owning community in Kotagiri.

Before the advent of the Sri Lanka expatriates, labourers from various districts migrated to these hills looking for employment. Badagas who originally cultivated their lands on their own, started to employ job seekers from the plains. The labourers settled down permanently close to Badagas villages. Often their jobs were inherited by their descendents. Being educated in a traditional Hindu culture they accepted the Badagas as a superior community and behaved like labourers as they were traditionally supposed to. They accepted the working conditions and wages with a fatalistic attitude, which even lasted during the first years of immigration of the Sri Lanka Plantation workers. Today (1981) out of the total population of 628,231 people in the district 32,943 live in Kotagiri urban agglomeration.

The decennial growth rate (1971-1981) in the Kotagiri urban agglomeration is 30.76% higher than the average of Tamil Nadu. The high decennial increase is mainly caused by the immigration of ‘repatriates’. They come either directly from the island or after futile attempts to get settled in the plains. The 481 workers and their families in the Kotagiri division of the Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation came straight from Sri Lanka and found permanent employment in the tea plantation.

A small number of them had relatives in that area while the majority struggled for existence and acceptance in various parts of Tamil Nadu. Having lived an isolated life from other communities in the hill country of Sri Lanka, in India many became victims of cheaters or were exploited in their forefathers’ village.

The frustrating experience in India caused many psychological changes which ranged from sinking into despair and passivity to an active fight for what they consider to be their rights; both attitudes were often misunderstood by their neighbours in Kotagiri.

In the first years of immigration ‘repatriates’ found easy work in the smallholdings and no open conflicts occurred between Badagas and ‘repatriates’. Then slowly the number of ‘repatriates’ increased. They found more backing in their own community and started to demand higher wages and better working conditions. The tension reached climax in 1980/81 when a Badaga killed a ‘repatriate’. Later the brother of the murdered killed a Badaga in retaliation. The incidents caused tension all over Kotagiri area. Both communities state that after negotia-

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-tions the tension declined and since then no major incidents are reported.

'Repatriates' now feel that they find more acceptance among Badagas, especially when they compare their contemporary situation with the time after their arrival, when Badagas demanded from them to get up in the buses when they entered. Badagas deny that they have forced them to get up, but consider it as an expression of politeness when their employees offer seats to them. Harijans from plains seem to have practised such gestures.

Badagas feel that after the two killings the 'repatriates' have realized that they cannot behave as they like to and pay now more respect to them. But still prejudices remain on both sides. Some land owners complain that 'repatriates' are not willing to work hard, while the latter claim higher wages. If Badagas give more responsibilities and freedom to 'repatriates' and the latter exploit the situation, it is again a proof for them that certain prejudices are true.

Prejudices and rumours play a major role in the developments of ethnic or communal tension and have to be analysed. One key prejudice, which is expressed by Badagas, other communities; and even Harijans is, that 'repatriates' are demanding and shouting, always appear in a crowd to stress their wishes etc. Other prejudices derive from key prejudice and are not found as frequently.

The approach of 'repatriates' to solve their problems or to get their demands fulfilled is apparently strange to Badagas and other Tamil workers. The History of this approach has therefore to be analysed as an example for the cultural change which has taken place in more than a century of plantation life.

Historical Aspects

After labourers had been recruited from the villages in Tamil Nadu, they were exposed to an entirely new natural and social environment. Many lives were sacrificed until the labourers got accustomed to the cold climate in the hills.

In many respects the new society was different from their native villages. In the tea plantation many of the social interactions took place among people with equal hierarchical position.

All were labourers working for the same wages, all lived in similar line rooms. As the labourers had been uprooted from a strongly hierarchical structured society, the position of the kangany, was outstanding. **Theoretically** everyone could become a kangany. While in India everyone was fixed in a hierarchy by birth, the labourers in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka were in many respect equal. Moreover theoretically a man could be promoted, climb up in the hierarchy or lose his high social status due to mismanagement. The philosophy of life was changed, in theory life became manageable.

Trade unions found a lot of clients in the plantation area and developed activities in that region. Until today they could not change the bad living conditions of the labours significantly, but they have created awareness among people, which has made them so different from the rural population in South India.

Badagas had a personal relationship to their employees and dealt with the labourers directly. In Sri Lanka there were middle men to coordinate the work and a plantation worker hardly got in contact with the superintendent of a plantation. Worker articulated their demands, conveyed them through trade unions and developed consciousness that employer and employee had contradictory interests. They experienced that they can only succeed if they are united and put pressure on the management. In India they are now exposed to a society which has more feudal elements than the industrialized tea plantation. Labourers are not united,

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“Without doubt more repatriates will come to the Nilgiris even if the influx from Sri Lanka is stopped. Experience has shown that families who were repatriated some years ago to settle in the plains will come to the hills after some time”

interacting daily with their employer and are completely dependent on them. While on a plantation the amount of work was shared equally even if there was slack season, ‘repatriates’ face the problem of under employment and unemployment and learn that people find work more easily if they adapt themselves to the existing hierarchy. This is contradictory to their experience in Sri Lanka where – if at all – only an organized strike can lead to a better working conditions and higher wages.

After coming to India and practicing the only approach they know to ‘employer-employee problems’, obviously the image they produce in the traditional society, is not a positive one. Going to the employer’s house in a crowd, being demanding and united, they are considered by the Badagas and even the Harijans as uncivilized and barbaric. It would be wrong to conclude that the majority of Sri Lanka expatriates are like this. As already mentioned the life in India has changed the ex-plantation workers again. While some emphasize the ‘fighting for their rights’ attitude, they foster prejudices for the whole community. Misunderstanding between the Badagas and ‘repatriates’ also arose from language problems. The use of the honourable form of address in Tamil differs from Sri Lanka and India. Consequently Sri Lanka emigrants felt treated badly when they were addressed like inferiors. Moreover some Badagas have only an instructive knowledge of Tamil which easily can sound harsh and impolite.

A good number of ‘repatriates’ who have settled in Kotagiri for many years could establish good relationship with their neighbours. But the fact that frequently new families arrive who have to undergo the process of adaptation and, therefore, naturally often quarrel with their neighbours, hindered a smooth relationship in many cases.

Example of good neighbourhood

Also example of good neighbourhood can be found in Kotagiri area. For instance there are six families from Sri Lanka living in thirty minutes walking distance from the next bus stop and market centre. The people of this village had traditionally good relations with their workers. While Chettiars had been working for the Badagas before the ‘repatriates’ arrived. Now predominantly the latter do so. There are about sixty households in that village, most own land and work in their own fields for themselves. About twenty families employ outside labour for tea plucking. Six families from Sri Lanka live in houses owned by Badagas. These houses, however, were not constructed as labour or servant quarters. Badagas had been living in these houses before.

The Geographical isolation of that village and the proximity of the ‘repatriates’ contributed to a good mutual understanding. Employers and employees work together in the fields, they have the same working hours and the same off-days. That developed a good relationship and the newcomers soon picked up the Badaga language.

Badaga and ‘repatriates’ celebrate the same festivals. The latter take part in preparations, contribute practically as well as financially and are welcomed

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as participants. For marriage or death celebrations each group invites the other and both respond to the invitations. Hierarchy is expressed in acceptance or avoidance of food, a symbolic behaviour which is familiar with Sri Lanka plantation people.

Unfortunately such socio-cultural constellations are not found everywhere. 'Repatriates' are attracted by their own people, especially after unfortunate experiences in other parts of Tamil Nadu. Like other human beings they are only willing to accept uncertainties up to a certain extent. A 'repatriate' – settlement gives them a psychological base to bear other setbacks. Still settlements mushroom in the Nilgiris. If 'repatriates' find land close to water spot and work is available in that region, they start to build their mud huts. A good number of settlers have applied for land rights, some have succeeded, others have to vacate their new homes. In most cases it is still uncertain whether they will be allowed to stay or not.

Without doubt more 'repatriates' will come to the Nilgiris even if the influx from Sri Lanka is Stopped. Experience has shown that families, who were repatriated some years ago and try to settle in the plains will come to the hills after some time.

From the Report of the Survey of Repatriates from Sri Lanka by Centre for Research on New International Economic Order.

“A recent study indicates that 50% of the people (repatriates) who have settled in the Nilgiris district have migrated from other districts of Tamil Nadu. In conforming this, in November 1984 at the Mandapam camp, the Deputy Tahsildar told the writer that 18 out of 20 passport holders who have been given business loan have been going to Nilgiris.”

“The current scene in the rehabilitation of Repatriates shows that over 30% of the repatriates families have not received any assistance from the Government. Others who had failed to make good under their respective schemes of Rehabilitation have flocked to the Nilgiris in the hope of finding employment, number more than 50,000 families.”
- The Exodus

NILGIRIS CAN BEAR NO MORE

**“Invaders from the plains have
cut forests and formed roads to Bandimet
The elephants have lost their forests
With no place to stay, they roam on the highways, what a pity?”**

- from the Song of Pazhiyars of Palani Hills as translated by Somalay

The Todas have been in the Nilgiris from time immemorial. So have, more or less, the tribes of Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas etc. But they together numbered only a few thousands then fewer thousands now. Todas were strictly pastoral and the others, jungle based. Hence the hills barely felt their burden.

The Badagas came into the hills between the 12th and 16th centuries. They were agriculturists and, as land was plentiful, even their wasteful primitive farming practices in the beginning left no perma-

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-nent scars on the hills. Moreover they were not a proliferating community. It took nearly 800 years for them to reach a population of about 1 lakh in 1971. Since then their growth has been even slower, thanks to their remarkable response to family planning, which is some sort of a national record. Their present number should be under 1,75,000.

The British opened up the Nilgiris in the 1820s and from about that time the plainsmen started arriving on the hills.

They came to work in the coffee and tea plantation, they came to lay railroads and roads; they came for dolling business, they came for trade and later they came for working in offices and factories. At the time of 1971 census, they were about 3 lakhs. Presently they would have increased to about 4 lakhs. Though they have no conflict of interest with the early settlers and were able to integrate in to the social and economic life in the hills in due course, there was, in later years, visible signs of strain on the land, water, forest and other natural resources of this tiny district.

The case of the Sri Lanka repatriates is unlike that of the earlier immigrants. The influx of repatriates has been too rapid – 2 lakhs in just 20 years. And they are still coming. Of course only half of them were officially sent there for being rehabilitated. The others have come there after having been disappointed with their rehabilitation elsewhere.

They are there now, a huge group of 2 lakhs, the majority of them without job, without income, without skill (save for their plantation experience), cursing their fate, wondering what is to become of them. Add to this their ‘unionised’ culture which conflicts sharply with the ‘personalised’ culture of the locals, the picture of the plight of the repatriates will be complete.

The issue now is what to do with these hapless people. Unlike the earlier settlers they are not able to take care of themselves. They have to be helped. Their continued neglect will without doubt be ruinous not only to them but also to the Nilgiris. Unless they are provided with alternative means of livelihood, they would continue to live off the forests which are already threatened. And if the younger repatriates remain idle for long, they are bound to take to undesirable ways which will be disastrous to the fragile social fabric of the Nilgiris.

It is therefore, imperative that the rehabilitation of repatriates in the Nilgiris is given all priority. The children must be compulsorily sent to schools. The youth must be trained for self-employment so that they need not depend on plantation or forests for work. The old should be put to some sort of welfare. As their numbers compound their misery, limiting their population through an intensive family planning drive would help them as much as it would the district.

More importantly, the continued influx of repatriates into the district should be immediately stopped. Let this not be taken to mean that the people of Nilgiris are insensitive to human problems. The repatriates themselves would vouch for the most considerate attitude of the locals towards them. The people of Nilgiris have not only been providing work and shelter to the repatriates there is absolutely no social discrimination against the repatriates. In fact it is this tolerance and helpfulness of the people of the Nilgiris which has encouraged the repatriates to flock there.

Nilgiris is a tiny district, over half of which is forest land. Cultivation, commercialisation habitation have already far extended the limits leading to very serious ecological consequences. Nilgiris can bear no more.

Divine verdict

“Eriesichton, son of Triopas, king of Thessaly for cutting down an oak tree in a forest sacred to Ceres was condemned by the Goddess to endure a hunger which he could never satisfy. He ended eating up his own body.”

NILGIRS TOPS IN BIRTH CONTROL

A recent study by M E Khan and R E Gupta of the Operations Research Group, Baroda has shown that Family Planning practices in the Nilgiris is one of the highest in Tamil Nadu which leads the country in achievements in family Planning.

The available Government statistics over the past few years persistently shown that the acceptance of family planning was considerably high in the Nilgiris as compared to all the other districts in Tamil Nadu. In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the reasons for the higher acceptance rate in Nilgiris. For the present study, Quasi-experimental control design has been used. Salem, an adjoining district of the Nilgiris, was selected as the control area.

The study brings out the fact that the statistics published by the Government agencies were, by and large, correct and that the Nilgiris did have a much larger number of family planning acceptance than Salem. At the time of the survey, 54 per cent of the respondents in the Nilgiris as compared to 32 per cent in Salem were currently practising family planning. Of these acceptors in the two districts, the Nilgiris had 38 per cent users of modern methods and 16 per cent users of traditional methods.

The use of pattern of family planning methods indicate that although the acceptance of contraceptives in the two districts did not differ much among younger women (15-24 aged women) with the proportion of acceptors varying between 5-6 per cent, the acceptance among the middle aged (25-39) was much higher in the Nilgiris (40 per cent) than in Salem (20 per cent). As the method adopted by the couples was mainly sterilization in both the districts, and because the average duration of family planning use in the age group (25-39) was significantly higher in the Nilgiris than in Salem.

We may infer that the birth averted in the Nilgiris were more than in Salem. Perhaps these averted birth were primarily responsible for narrowing the gap in the fertility levels of the two districts.

In the total sample, 26 per cent in the Nilgiris and 40 per cent in Salem expressed a desire for additional children. Couples who expressed a desire for additional children had not yet completed their family size; on an average, they had 2.3 to 2.6 living children. The couples who had no desire for any additional children had, on an average, 2.9 living children in both the districts. It was observed that, out of the total number of couples not desiring any additional child, 72 per cent in the Nilgiris and 45 per cent in Salem were currently practising family planning to avoid unwanted pregnancies. This indicated that the couples in the Nilgiris were much more serious about the decision not to increase their present family size than the couples in Salem.

A comparison of the findings of the two districts reveals that community support of family planning was more extensive and widespread in the Nilgiris than in Salem. It was also observed that a much larger proportion of the respondents in Salem than in the Nilgiris were of the opinion that all modern contraceptives were injurious to health.

An analysis of the utilization of health services that these were more extensively utilized in the Nilgiris than in Salem. A majority (64 per cent) of the deliveries in the Nilgiris were conducted in hospitals. State medical help was equally available, and used in both rural and urban Nilgiris.

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Family planning work was poor in both the districts. Seventy-seven per cent in the Nilgiris reported that they had never been visited by any family planning workers.

In the Nilgiris, extension work by the FPAI in collaboration with UPASI was considerable. Thirty-five per cent of the couples who were visited by one or the other extension worker reported that the workers belonged to the FPAI. However, in view of the volume of the work carried out by the FPAI in promoting small family size norm and the services rendered by them, this figure seems to be an under-estimate. The qualitative data collected during the study following in-depth interviews with the Government officials, opinion leaders and the community at large indicated that the efforts put by the FPAI, together with those of UPASI, were very valuable and had contributed significantly to the promotion family planning in the district.

The incidence of complications after sterilization was less frequent in the Nilgiris (21 per cent) than in Salem (31 per cent). In both the districts, a majority of the couples, who had suffered from post-operation complications, were provided with follow-up services. However the reported percentage of acceptors, who were provided with follow-up services, was higher in the Nilgiris than in Salem. The percentage of acceptors who were satisfied with the medical services rendered to them during their post-operation complications was again

higher in the Nilgiris (73 per cent) than in Salem (50 per cent). Integrating all the findings we find that the accessibility to health and family planning services was more satisfactory in the Nilgiris than in Salem. The provision of follow-up services was also better organised in the Nilgiris, and special attention was given to rural areas. Rural urban disparities in the accessibility and utilization of health and family welfare services in the Nilgiris were almost non-existent.

As for the main issue as to what has caused this high acceptance of family planning in the Nilgiris, the findings of the present study indicate that the “success story” of the family planning programme in the district may be attributed to the individual and the mutually reinforcing effects of the following four broad factors:

- 1) A relatively more equitable distribution of the benefits of socio-economic development in rural and urban population.
- 2) A better organised health and family welfare programme.
- 3) Extensive efforts put in by the voluntary organisations in promoting MCH care, including family planning in the district.
- 4) The status of women in the Nilgiris was relatively better than in Salem.

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

DEVELOPMENT PROMOTION GROUP

A Voluntary Agency engaged in rural development.

The group also undertakes studies in planning, monitoring and evaluation of rural projects.

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Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator , Save Nilgiris Campaign,22-C, Tirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 018 & printed at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 3

OCTOBER 1986

A VITAL REPORT FOR NILGIRS

During 1978 and 1979 a number of devastating landslides occurred in the Nilgiris causing loss of life and severe damage to property. Realising the urgent and imperative need for taking appropriate steps to control them and prevent fresh landslides, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu in collaboration with the Geological Survey of India launched a detailed study. The report of the study was published in 1982. The findings and recommendations of the study are a matter of life and death to the Nilgiris and its people. Excerpts from the Report.

History of landslides

Landslides might have occurred in the Nilgiris range since time immemorial. But they have been recorded only from the beginning of the last century. A huge landslide near the spot where the Sispara Ghat road passes over Kundah hills, sliced part of Kudikadu hill in 1824, after heavy rains lashed the area for eight days. It was popularly known as Avalanche landslide. The scar was a well-known landmark which was later concealed by forest growth. It was visible from as far as Ootacamund. A sprout of spring was reported to have issued from the debris.

The Kotagiri- Mettupalayam road was damaged by a heavy rain storm in 1881. In the same year landslips smothered the Coonoor Ghat road at many places. Ten years later, a record rainfall of 74 cm. within a few days, at Kotagiri brought traffic to a standstill for three weeks due to many landslips on the Kotagiri-Mettupalayam road. A rainfall of 129 cm. was recorded in a short period causing disastrous floods during the year 1891. In December 1902, 53 cm. of rain in Kotagiri including 22 cm. on a single day, brought havoc. In October 1905, 17 cm. of rain brought in its wake 'death and damage' in Coonoor through landslips.

The perpetual weak spot near Katteri Railway Station was identified in the 1920's when the locality was affected by debris falling over the railway track and the road straggling its side.

Boulders disturbing the railway movement between Adderley and Runneymede railway stations were quite frequent since then. Suggested steps included tying up of loose boulders overhanging the railway the railway track and keeping vigil during heavy rains. Stone retaining walls were also suggested where there was soil or decomposed rock, or loose blocks along the railway line.

A large landslide was reported in a peat laden area on the left flank of Emerald Valley. Rock slides were reported in November 1958 and July 1952 in Penstock anchor pad No. 9 of Kundah Hydro-electric Project. The large pre-existing landslide on the right abutment of Porthimund Dam was examined in 1961. Remedial

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measures were suggested to obviate or minimise the effect of landslides.

Floods

Floods are a concomitant phenomenon, after heavy rains. The deep ravines in the Northern and Western parts of the district are capable of draining the storm water. But the regions where natural topographic features, such as gentle slope, thick soil development and ,meandering streams are present, promote flood conditions after heavy precipitation.

OOTY LANDSLIDES

1 “The St. Mary Colony in Ooty, from Bishop Aruldas Silver Jubilee Hall to the railway track below, has a slope of 20° towards the South east over which no proper drainage exists. At the top of the slope there is a concentration of well-built tenements. In other words the head of the slope has been unduly weighted. Towards the right of this disturbed area which is about 30 to 40 m wide, incipient cracks are noticed in a number of houses. This area is part of Ooty town and efforts have to be made to preserve its stability.

Removing load from the head is not feasible but on the other hand, the toe can be weighted and drainage, both surface and sub-surface, which appear to be absent, can be provided.”

2 “A slide occurred during the 1978 rains on the steep northern slope of a hill South of the Govt. Cinchona Office. It ripped open parts of a building and uprooted trees and fence situated 400m below the crown and directly in the path of the slide. Future slide in this area may damage the buildings situated at the lower levels. Measures suggested include (a) evacuation of people living at lower levels during heavy rains (b) afforestation of the slopes and (c) longitudinal drains at the top diverting the water from the slopes.”

3 “The top region of the Elk Hill facing Ooty is studded with a number of old slide scars. A few of them, especially at the northern eastern extremity of the peak, have been reactivated in recent times.

Further Civil construction must be discouraged west of this scar of landslide as this adds to the head weight and may cause slip circle failures. Houses to the left of this scar are in danger of collapse if a huge slide takes place. Development of surface cracks and cracks in the walls of the houses should be watched for subsidence. The scar is likely to extend towards the house in course of time. To prevent damage to the well developed colony located to the west of the scar, buttresses at 3 or 4 levels may be constructed with provision of wide terms acting as toe support. Afforestation of the old scar should be taken up on priority. Only a shrubby vegetation is found at present. The malady of landslides has been accentuated in this area of deforestation. The foot of Elk hill slope has been encroached upon for vegetable cultivation and development of houses. Adequate waterway is not present. Unless proper drainage is provided, the area is liable to be flooded.”

Causes of the slides

In the Nilgiri hills, it has been found that steep as well as gentle slopes have been failed. A study of steepness of slope vis-à-vis the number of landslides seems to indicate that the slides in 1973 occurred on comparatively steeper slopes (25° to 30°) than those of 1979. The 1978 slides occurred due to heavy precipitation in a short period, when there

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were flash floods and water spreading and consequent soaking on the slopes resulting in mass movement of materials over relatively steeper slopes. On the contrary, during the 1979 monsoon the longer duration of rainy period permitted greater infiltration of water into the soil and consequently triggering of landslides in areas as gentle as 10% slope.

The landslides are spread out in all the lands utilised for different types of cultivation. However, their frequency varies from one land use to another. The concentration of landslides is more in the areas of vegetable and crop cultivation than in others. On an average every square kilometre of vegetable/crop land bears three landslide scars. Tea Plantations have two landslides scars per square kilometre. The other land uses in the decreasing order of landslide-density, are shrub R.F. (Reserve Forest), eucalyptus plantation outcrop area, mixed cultivation, residential area and wattle plantation. In the case of R.F. areas, the sholas and the undisturbed R.F. areas experienced less landslides than the shrub R.F. Soil erosion is more in the tea plantations, vegetable farms and shrub R.F. areas.

The study of the landslide pattern in the Ootacamund-Coonoor belt reveals that already a major-portion, about 70% of the original Forest land has been deforested and put into cultivation for growing vegetables and crops, tea and other plantations and about 10% for residential purposes. The majority of the landslides scars are found only in these categories of areas, indicating that deforestation has accentuated the landslides. An analysis of land uses vis-à-vis landslides reveals that land use for vegetable-crops, tea plantations and residential purposes has certainly promoted the incidence of landslides. The undisturbed natural forests with trees and undergrowth have really prevented many possible slides even though favourable slope and other conditions for landslides exist. Such forests protect not only the surface run-off and percolation of rain water but also soil erosion through the roots of the trees and undergrowth. About 36% of landslides have occurred in the agricultural lands.

Though the tea plants have deeper roots than the vegetable crops there have been a greater number of landslide occurrences in the tea plantations than in the forest lands. Besides the shorter roots, as compared to the forest trees, the soil thickness contributed to the landslides in these areas. About 29% of the landslides have occurred in tea plantations.

WHY LANDSLIDES OCCURRED

1 "Increase of water supply brought about by blocking of natural outlets, by more infiltration than drainage, by rise of water table, by capillary flow, and by seepage from artificial source. Water entering the ground fills the interspaces or pores or voids between the grains in the soil and cumulatively develops pore water pressure. This has caused many landslides in the Nilgiri district."

2 " In an undulating country or on the banks of a stream the toe of a natural slope is removed by erosional processes. This introduces instability of the slopes. Beyond a critical point the slopes fail due to lack of toe support. Cultural activities of man, such as canal, road or rail cutting, terracing for agricultural or constructional work, all inevitably involve toe removal and promote slope failures."

3 "Construction of a housing colony or other modes of load accumulation at the head of a slope strain the slope and it is relieved by landslides."

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“It is thus established that deforestation and conversion of the land for agriculture, tea plantation and residential purposes is one of the main causes for landslides”.

About 5% of the landslides occurred in the residential areas, with an average of one landslide for every square kilometre. Barren land slope, paleoscars and soil or excavation are the causes for landslides in the residential areas.

It is established thus that deforestation and conversion of land for agriculture, tea plantation and residential purposes is one of the main causes for landslides, and have aggravated the problem of landslides.

However, there are many landslides in the forest plantations too. There are about 70% of landslides, approximately one landslides for every square kilometre, in the eucalyptus plantation.

In the Doddabetta region most of the landslides are fresh and paleoscars are scarce. This may indicate that landslides have occurred only after this region was put to use for eucalyptus plantations, after deforestation. The frequent felling or harvesting of plantations, every four years or so, expose the land directly to the vagaries of the sun and rain. Similar is the case of Government Cinchona plantation and the wattle plantation. The landslides are less in number in the R.F. with jungle or with closely spaced mixed trees with thick undergrowth than in the R.F. with shrub alone. About 10% of the landslides are found in such R.F. areas.

Recommendations

The land use practices in the Nilgiris district have considerably changed over the years. The frequency of landslides in the last few years may be partially attributed to the interference of man with the geo-environment factors of the region. Parallel cases of landslides by frequent changes in land use practices have been established elsewhere in the world.

There has been large scale elimination of natural, forest in this district. They were replaced by forest plantation and tea gardens. This drastically alters the hydrological conditions of the slopes. The conversion of grass lands to vegetable plots also alters the sub-surface water conditions in addition to promoting landslides, erosion and silting at lower level. Excessive grazing leads to denudations of the vegetative cover.

The authors feel that in the interest of the slope stability and hence in the interest of the district, further conversion of forests into plantations, governmental, quasi-governmental or private, should be banned forthwith by the Government.

Frequent changes in agricultural practices should be avoided.

Towns

In the urban areas of the Nilgiris district there is lack of a regular drainage system. In most of the places, residential development goes with septic sewerage system. In a hill town, it is generally considered that the drainage problems are minimal, as existing natural slopes and the mantle of soil over them dissipate the drainage water. Apparently the drainage water is disposed off. In reality the problem is aggravated. The quantum of drainage water getting into the soil by this means is substantial. This introduces changes in the sub-surface water conditions detrimental to the slope stability ultimately. This has also a cumulative effect with time. As a long term measure, drainage system for the urban areas to start with must be included as priority items in developmental plans.

In the growth of Ooty town lands are assigned for one reason or the other to the people in hazardous places. One such example is the Ambedkar colony in Kodappamund. The slope is steep. Removal of trees and unscientific terracing in the area, have induced the formation of rills and streams bringing down debris. The area is unstable and will

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“The stage of preventing environmental degradation in Nilgiris district has been crossed over. The harm has been done. The present stage is one of repairing the damage. It is fundamental that the cost of repair or cure is always more than the cost of prevention”.

become barren soon. The slope would have been relatively stable if the colony had not been allowed to come up.

Coonoor

The hills which make up the Coonoor town especially the one straggling the Coonoor river on its northern bank are piled to the top with buildings, shops and others. The Coonoor town seems to have grown of its own accord without any control over the years. In addition to the weight of the man made structures, the influence of the septic sewerage water and toe cutting by number of streams, steep cuts of the roads and embankments, contribute for the instability of the town.

Massive corrective measures after detailed planning and evaluation of the negative factors, are necessary if the town is to be saved from devastation by landslide in the coming years.

Government Flats

A number of two storied flats by the Tamil Nadu Housing Board is perched on the ridges and slopes of the small hillock east of the race course near Ettines road. The weight of the buildings has definitely increased the stress in the slope. The slope cuts behind the houses are steep and impose threat to the buildings. The drainage system leaves much to be desired.

Better planning in designing the cuts in the slope and reduction of weight of buildings are needed.

As a general suggestion for new buildings especially in the urban areas in the district, light weight building material may be used in preference to heavy construction materials.

Reservoirs

The construction of reservoirs in the past two decades has changed the hydrological conditions in the hill slopes by interfering with the earlier directions of ground water movement. Sudden fluctuations in the reservoir levels re conducive for landslide movement due to release of pore water pressure. This has to be borne in mind while operating the hydroelectric power stations in the district with Hundred percent load factor.

The Government should restrict construction of buildings of any sort or colonisation or any other venture involving financial investment in zones, pronounced, unsafe. No other considerations should be outweigh environmental aspects.

The stage of preventing environmental degradation in Nilgiri district has been crossed over. The harm has been done. The present stage is one of repairing the damage. It is fundamental that the cost of repair or cure is always more than the cost of prevention. We hope the magnitude of the problems in Nilgiri district is realised fully and immediately.

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CONTROL OF SOME VILLAGE SLIDES	
Area/Slides 1 Manjanakoral	Recommendations Removal of head weight, diversion of surface flow and pinning of jointed rocks on the flanks.
2 Bend at 3/7 on the Ootacamund Iduhatti road	Removal of boulders from slide areas, cessation of geranium cultivation, afforestation, resettlement of colony.
3 Tuneri	Removal of boulders from the slide area and afforestation.
4 Anaikorai	Surface drainage on top and proper maintenance of the aquaduct.
5 Selas	Provision of masonry wall in fresh main scarp and steep flank.
6 Manjakombai	Diversion of surface run-off and provision of sub-surface drainage.
7 Chamraj Estate	Provision of sub-surface drainage.

WARNINGS UNHEEDED

Two vital messages of study were :

1 Construction activities in the towns, particularly on slopes, should be strictly monitored and regulated. And if construction on slopes is unavoidable, the structures should be made light.

2 Frequent changes in the land use pattern should be discouraged, especially it is going to result in substantial soil loss.

Both appear to be unheeded. Construction activities in the towns have been booming since the landslides of 1978-79. Slope or no slope, urban land prices have been skyrocketing.

Most of the slopes, regardless of the steepness, have been built up. The rest are being constructed apace. What is worse, the structures are not only heavy; there is an increasing craze for multi-storeyed buildings. Here the blame is shared equally by commercial interests and the government and some educational and religious institutions who should know better.

Similarly, when consolidation of land-use to check soil erosion is most needed, there is a concerted move to switch over from vegetable to tea cultivation. Experts' warning that during the transition period (till the tea crop comes up) the soil loss would be worst, appears not to be heard. Moreover, the perilous conversion of forests to tea plantations appears not to have halted.

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LET THE BADAGAS SING AND DANCE AGAIN :

On with the dance ! Let joy be
Unconfin'd;
No sleep till morn, when
Youth and Pleasure meet.
-Byron

God sent his Singers upon
earth
With songs of sadness and of
mirth,
That they might touch the
hearts of men,
And bring them back to
heaven again.

-Longfellow

The Badagas have no script. Their rich folklore has been passed on from generation to generation through songs, mostly in the form of Ballads. Thus, there are songs about their adventures immigrating into the Nilgiris, founding of the various villages and the inter-relationship between the different sects. There are songs about their life under the Muslim rulers and later under the British. There are songs about their struggle in the wild against the Kurumba (a local tribe) sorcery. There are songs based on mythology and epics. There are, of course songs of romance, sorrow, valour, reform, sacrifice and so on. There are also the lyrical and moving 'bhajan' songs and Badagas are second to none in singing the praise of God.

Badaga melodies are haunting. The native beat is compulsive. And the way the unique Badaga notes (lah-lay, lee-lo, lie-lo etc) are effortlessly blended to produce the tunes has to be heard to be enjoyed. The drum and harmonium are usually the only accompaniments. The soulful Badaga songs often resemble 'the blue' of Negroes. For the Badagas, as with the Negroes. The 'sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought'.

If most Badagas can sing, almost every Badaga can dance which is as much a part of their lives as their morning tall coffee. Like their songs, their dances too are unique. The dances are combinations of graceful steps, gentle jerks and quaint turns of body, hands, wrists and palms. On festival and other joyous occasions it is a treat to see the young and old and men and women matching steps with each other.

However, of late, there is a noticeable decline in the quantity and quality of Badaga songs and dances. For one thing, the youth are gradually moving out of the villages to the towns and outside the district for studies or employment. Secondly, the general prosperity of the villages now is far from what it was, say 10 or 20 years ago. Over dependence on potato and tea cultivation, without proper marketing arrangements, has made a lot of farming Badagas worse and worse over the years. Of course there are some pockets of prosperity.

What is more regrettable is the tendency of the part of some of the Badagas to look on their folk dance and music as something out of place with modern

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times and advancement. The popular village plays (“Drumma”!) are now limited to occasions. Moreover, accomplished singers and dancers have become fewer over the years. Badaga songs are increasingly being set to the tunes of popular cinema songs. Much worse, there are now Badaga songs by non-Badaga “professionals” to the accompaniment of all sorts of musical instruments. Similarly, some are also corrupting the dance with violent jerks and turns and adding motions of twist, rock, roll and swing.

Badaga folk music and dance, like all folk arts must be preserved by reviving popular interest in them and by nurturing native talent. We suggest the Badaga Association should conduct an annual competition in Badaga folk songs and folk dances in which all the villages should participate. They can have Regional competitions first in the four ‘bettas’ and later have a ‘Nakku Betta’ finals at Ooty.

A Cold Island In A Warm Sea

“What has given the Nilgiris as a human region its distinctive character throughout is the highly unusual natural environment. Its physical and biotic attributes are summarised in the chapter by Von Lengerke and Blasco. The Nilgiri massif thrust high above the plains, cloaked on its sides dense growing on steep slopes, surmounted by the hilly plateau of grassland, woodland, savanna. The climate of the plateau is very different from that of the adjacent plains, above all, it is much cooler. It is like, in these authors’ words, “a cold tropical island rising above the warm tropical sea of South India”. The plateau, roughly a triangle some thirty by fifteen miles supports a diversity of indigenous plants “found nowhere else in the world” and a large number of endemic animal species as well. For the six species of nonhuman primates, as Poirier relates, it was an “incredibly rich habitat”. Plants and animals introduced from distant parts of the world have flourished in the equable climate, ample rainfall and productive soils of the Nilgiris. Each of the peoples of the Nilgiris, during every period, has made its own particular use of their common, benign environment”. – DAVID G MANDELBAUM

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

A M M CHARITIES TRUST

“TIAM HOUSE” 28, Rajaji Road, Madras 600 001

Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator, Save Nilgiris Campaign, 22-C, Tirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 018

Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 4 & 5

NOV – DEC 1986

On SNC's Invitation

SUNDERLAL BAHUGUNA VISITS NILGIRIS

Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chipko Leader and Guardian Angel of Forests, was on a 3 day visit to the Nilgiris from the 27th of to 29th November at the invitation of the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

Accompanied by SNC leaders M/s B J Krishnan, D Venugopal, N Mohanraj and N Ramesh Babu, Shri Bahuguna made an extensive tour of the Nilgiris visiting places of environmental damage and meeting various people concerned. At the end of the tour he observed that the damage of the environment and ecology of the Nilgiris was quite serious.

The visit of Shri Bahuguna was greeted by the local people with spontaneous enthusiasm. Unfortunately many, who had eagerly awaited his visit, had to go disappointed without meeting or listening to him as the visit was rather sudden and too short. The message of his visit, however, appears to have reached the people at large. By Shri Bahuguna's visit they have realised that the environmental problems facing them are real and formidable. A people's movement to combat the environmental degradation of the Nilgiris should not be long in coming.

ADDRESS TO ROTARY:

On the evening of the November, soon after the arrival at Ooty, Shri Bahuguna addressed the Rotary Club of Ooty, at the request of its present Dr. S Ramakrishnan. In the course of his speech Shri Bahuguna said that the major problems facing mankind are war, pollution and poverty. These are the result of a wrong concept of development pursued by the developed as well as developing nations since industrial revolution, he added. "The present notion of development based on materialistic goals is not true development because it cannot be sustained. Competition for the limited resources is bound to lead, as it is happening now, to war between and within nations" he explained.

For true sustainable development we have to go back to the Gandhian economy based on austerity, self sufficiency and decentralised production, Mr Bahuguna said.

He spoke in general on the environment problems facing the country and the world. Focussing on the problem of massive deforestation and the consequent loss of top soil he said, it is suicidal because forests are the source of soil, water and oxygen which are the basis of life".

At the end of the talk, Shri Bahuguna a slide show on deforestation in the Himalayas and how the Chipko movement was born to combat it. The slides covered the spread of the movement in the country and abroad.

Earlier, introducing the chief guest, Mr. B J Krishnan, SNC President, said

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that protection of forests was only one of the missions of Shri Bahuguna. Shri Bahuguna is basically a Gandhian engaged in constructive work for which he was presented the Jamnalal Bajaj award recently, he said.

Dr. S Ramakrishna, President of the club welcomed the chief guest and Mr Moolchand proposed a vote of thanks.

67 MILLION YEAR OLD HERITAGE IN DANGER IN GUDALUR

On the 28th, Shri Bahuguna accompanied by SNC leaders, District Forest Officials and Mr M J Cherian, A local lawyer and social activist made an extensive tour of the Gudalur taluk. Visiting interior areas, Shri Bhuguna saw for himself the colossal damage being done to the virgin forests by the encroachment of the settlers from the neighbouring Kerala State and repatriates from Sri Lanka on the one hand and big tea Plantations owned by major industrial houses on the other. It was explained to Shri Bahuguna that the encroachments were going on despite a Supreme Court stay order and that over 20,000 acres of virgin forests are under immediate threat.

On the uniqueness of these forests it is said, “The forests of Ouchterlony valley (the area of major damage) in Nilgiris and the adjoining silent valley in Kerala and the Mudumalai forests have a continuity of at least 67 million years – a proud heritage and a veritably rich gene bank”.

Later addressing Newsmen Shri Bahuguna said the forests are being “butchered” in the Gudalur area. Only an active movement by the local people can halt the trend, he added.

NILGIRI HILLS TOO FRAGILE TO SUPPORT REPATRIATES

Asked about the over population of the Nilgiris consequent of the influx of nearly 3 lakh Sri Lanka repatriates (though only a fraction of them was originally sent to the Nilgiris for rehabilitation), Shri Bahuguna said that the hills are too fragile to support more of them “it is a humanitarian problem and the Centre should help the State Government to resettle them in the plains”, he added.

BAHUGUNA IN KOTAGIRI

On the 29th morning, Shri Bahuguna visited the Badaga village of Kannerimukku in Kotagiri. Kannerimukku (formerly called Dimhutti) was where Sir John Sullivan, the founder of Ooty, founded the first British settlement. Staying there only he built the Stonehouse in Ooty, in the Nilgiris.)

After visiting Badaga Houses and talking to some of them, particularly, Mr. C Ajjan (82), the oldest in the village, shri Bahuguna addressed a gathering.

He observed that the villagers seem to be addicted to liquor as their lands are addicted to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. “Neither is good”, he cautioned and appealed to them to desist from the use of both. He narrated how women activist of Chipko movement had offered “dharna” before arrack shops leading to their closure. “Your responsibilities do not end with looking after the farm and the family. You have to see that menfolk do not fall victim to drinking which will ultimately ruin the family”, shri Bahuguna advised women.

VISIT TO NEW DAIRY COMPLEX

At the end of the tour, Shri Bahuguna visited the New Dairy Complex of the Nilgiri District Milk Producers Union, which played host to him in many ways, and addressed a select public gathering.

He said forests of Nilgiris are the “oxygen Bank” on which not only the local people but also the millions living in the plains depend for pure air, water and soil. If Nilgiris are denuded, the plains around it will turn into deserts, he warned.

MONCULTURE DECRIED

Decrying the growing monoculture of

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Forests in the Nilgiris, Shri Bahuguna called a halt to the cultivation of eucalyptus, pines and wattle. He advised the people to grow more nut or fruit bearing trees or those giving fodder, fertiliser and fiber. "A forest should be society of trees", he said.

POLLUTION THREAT FROM TOURISM

Mr Bahuguna said that Nilgiris faced a bigger threat of pollution from tourism than many realised. The kind of tourism being encouraged now tended to consider the local people and their culture as "commodities" to be bought and sold. "The choice is clear. Should Nilgiri be developed as a tourist resort for the pleasure of the affluent few or should the ecology of the Nilgiris, on which millions in the hills and the plains depend for oxygen, water and soil, be preserved", he said.

Objecting to the construction of five star hotels in hill stations, Mr Bahuguna said that the Government should extend loans and subsidies to local people for putting up additional rooms in their houses for accommodating tourists.

"Tourists should share the food, clothing and shelter of the local people and imbibe their culture", he said.

Mr Bahuguna objected to remote and interior areas of hill stations being opened up by motorable roads, "Tourists in such places should be encouraged to trek", he said.

NWLEA and SNC organise

FIRST ECO-CAMP FOR RURAL STUDENTS IN NILGIRIS

It was unlike the usual eco-camps. There were no jean-clad boys or girls. They carried no sleeping bags. Nor were they "dressed" for the wild. There was no mention of words like Fun, Thrill or Experience. In fact the boys who attended the camp did not understand these words. They were all from village schools. They had no special clothing with them but their enthusiasm was hardly dampened by the weather – intermittent rains accompanied by icy winds and mist broken by sudden flashes of sunshine. "This weather is typical of the area" said Mr Mangalraj Johnson, Wildlife Warden, Mudumalai. Thus began the first Environmental Awareness Camp for students of rural schools in the Nilgiris.

The 3 day camp held on 7, 8 and 9th of November in a secluded trekkers' but besides an abandoned road in the idyllic Upper Bhavani catchment area, 50 km from Ooty, was organised jointly by the Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association (NWLEA) and Save Nilgiris Campaign. It was sponsored by the Development Promotion Group, Madras.

Four students in the age group of 10-15 and one teacher each from five schools around the camp site participated.

"The rationale behind organizing camps on an area basis is that the participants will have a sense of belonging in their immediate environs. They understand better and it is easier to take follow up action. It is inexpensive too" explained Mr R Radcliffe, Vice-President of NWLEA.

The camp inaugurated informally by Mr K S Sripathy, District Collector and President of NWLEA, who also spent an evening with the boys, consisted of long walks in the day and film shows slide shows and lectures in the evenings.

Taken to a nearby Nilgiri Thar Sanctuary (Mukurti Sanctuary) bordering the Silent Valley in Kerala, the boys were exposed to the pristine glory of the Nilgiris – lofty mountain ranges towering over gracefully undulating grass lands interspersed with spring-fed streams and thick "Shola" forests. And as they trekked the boys learned. "At one time the whole of Nilgiris, including your

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villages, were like this. This forest, grasslands and streams are all interdependent. One feeding and in turn fed by the other. Over the years the original forests have been destroyed making way for cultivation and residential needs. The man-made forests raised as replacement were mostly monoculture like eucalyptus, wattle or pine. 'Shola' forests were protecting the water sources and with their disappearance the streams too have gone dry. The lands have become unstable leading to frequent landslides. And without natural nutrients the lands have become less fertile" Mr N Mohanraj, NWLEA member taught the boys who, familiar with the problems in their own villages, nodded in realisation.

There was lot of game watching along the trek. "This is Nilgiri Thar (ibex) country. Silence is essential. Move on. Hold it. See there among the thickets. There is a pack of Sambars. Pass the binoculars. Adjust the lens. Keep silence. Move on. There is a barking deer a wild dog a fox..... a mountain goat.... See here are the excreta of some big cat – a panther probably. See the undigested fur and the bones. The elephant dung there is fresh. It must be somewhere around here. See its footprints. So huge....." Mr Valaguruvan, Forest Range Officer, kept the boys busy and the trek lively.

Films shows on wildlife, slide shows on environmental problems and lectures made up the evening programme.

Mr Pandurang Hegde, Leader of the Appiko Movement, Karnataka and a close associate of Mr Sunderlal Bahuguna narrated the origin, spread and message of the Chipko movement through slides. "Vanishing forest cover has left Mother Earth bleeding" he said showing pictures of massive soil erosion. "Remember 'Five Fs' when planting trees – Food (fruit) giving, Fodder giving, Fuel giving, Fibre (clothing) giving and Fertiliser giving" he concluded.

Mr Mangalraj Johnson told the boys. "Tamils were one of the earliest to appreciate the environment. Their country was divided into five regions based on environmental and ecological characteristics. One, the mountain and mountainous regions (Kurunji). Two, the plains and farm lands (Marutham). Three, water and hinterland (Neidal). Four, forest (Mullai). And five, desert region (Palai). If Kurunji, Marutham, Neidal and Mullai are degraded (Kurunji). Two, the plains and farm lands (Marutham). Three, water and hinterland (Neidal). Four, forests (Mullai). And five, desert region (Palai). If Kurunji, Mautham are degraded what follows will be Palai".

Mr. B J Krishnan, Secretary, NWLEA, giving a Gandhian perspective to the concept of environment said "Environment is the entity on which everything subsists. Ecology is the study of life from the point of view of environment. Eco-system is the structural study of ecology. Biosphere is the study of the sphere in which living organisms – Plant, animal and man –coexist. The inter-dependence between them is the unity of life which is ruled by cosmic discipline. Man has been upsetting the balance".

Mr Radcliffe the grand old man of the Nilgiris and a living authority on Western Ghats. Speaking in Kannada had some home truths to tell the boys.

"What was the yield of potato you were students", he asked the teachers "One is to twenty". "what is it now", The students were asked. "One is to four or five". The reason is obvious. The land has lost its fertility because of heavy soil erosion which in turn was because of large scale destruction of forests".

On the second day evening Mr Radcliffe's driver Palani went down to the reservoir and caught two Rainbow Trouts, A Nilgiri specialty and normally a difficult catch. "There are two types of Trouts. One, the Brown Trout and the other

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Rainbow Trout. See the colours of the rainbow stretching along the sides. The Trout is an exotic fish. It was brought from Canada. It can survive only in clean and running water. Brown Trout does not survive in Nilgiris as it needs much colder water. Apart from Nilgiris, trout is available only in Simla in India". Mr Radcliffe explained to the boys and showed them the special baits used for trout fishing and how to go about it. Mr. N Ramesh Babu, NWLEA member, presented a slide show depicting the various threats to the forests cover in the Nilgiris. He also explained the raising of nurseries to the boys. The feedback from the participants was encouraging. For the boys, the camp was a practical lesson supplementing what they have learned in the classrooms. Speaking on behalf of the teachers, a senior teacher said, "The camp has been much as education to us as to the students. We plan to form Eco-clubs in our schools and take up tree planting in and around our village".

ECO CAMP PARTICIPANTS :

Nanjanad Govt. Higher Secondary School : K Halan (Master), R Rajan, K Balan, R Sivasubramani, J Sivakumar, G K Sojan
Manjoor Govt. Higher Secondary School : M K Raman (Master), K Vinodkumar, E Murugan, R Jayakumar, D Nagarajan, K Prabhudev
Mullimalai Govt. Higher Secondary School : N Bhojan (Master), N K Shakthivandan, M C Gunaseelan, S Karuppusamy.
Chamraj Estate High School : K K Chandran (Master), R Mohan Kumar, C Ravi, N Madhavan, N Ravichandran, J Jaya-kumar

The Eco camp was sponsored by

DEVELOPMENT PROMOTION GROUP. A voluntary Agency engaged in rural upliftment. Secretary 14-B Kumarappa Mudali Street Nungambakkam Madras 600 034

VICE PRESIDENT RESPONDS TO SNC APPEAL

Responding to SNC's appeal, the Vice President of India, Shri R Venkatraman has asked the State Government to look into the ecological problems being faced in the Nilgiris. The Letter reads:

"I enclose an appeal from Shri D Venugopal, Co-ordinator, Save Nilgiris Campaign, 22 C Venus Colony, Alwarpet, Madras 600 018

He has suggested that, with a view to preserving the beauty and ecology of Nilgiris, the following steps be taken: -

- 1 Government should consider legislation to restrict acquisition of real estate in the district by outsiders.
 - 2 A moratorium be declared on all construction of a commercial nature till civic amenities are adequately Augmented; and
 - 3 Land use pattern in the District be reviewed and land for forests, agriculture etc. be clearly demarcated and encroachments dealt with suitably.
- I shall be glad, if you could kindly have the matter looked into."

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**Sports Stadium in Ooty Breeks Ground
SHOULD WE PLAY WITH LUNGS?**

Breeks ground is a famous landmark of Ooty though it no longer receives the loving care it did under the European Principals of the Breeks School., especially the last of them – the irrepressible Mr Fox. It has a historical significance too. The first bazaar (market) in the Nilgiris was established there around 1825 by the British. Until then the locals (mainly Badagas) were going down all the way to Mettupalayam, Karamadai or Gundalpet. The bazaars which were a weekly functioned on Mondays and Tuesdays.

The Government proposes to build a Sports Stadium in the ground now. May be 10 or 20 years ago when sports and games were regular features and the town had several open spaces left, the proposal would have been welcomed by the local people. How do they feel about it now when sports and games event in Ooty have become rare as the Kurunji flower and the town is virtually choking with constructions? Mr M B Nanjan has raised the first voice of protest as published below. What about others? Are you for or against a stadium at the Breeks ground? Please write.

After hearing your views we shall present a common representation to the Govt. of Tamil Nadu.

CENTRAL SECRETARY WISHES SNC SUCCESS

Secretary

Ministry of Environment and Forests
Government of India NEW DELHI 110 011

Dear Shri Venugopal

Thank you very much for your letter of 30th October 1986 and the enclosure.

I am indeed happy to know that you are spearheading a campaign to save the Nilgiris.

I wish you success in your endeavour.

With kind regards

Yours Sincerely

T N Seshan

The proposed huge concrete structure in the name of a sports stadium at the entrance of the Botanical Garden viz. the Breeks Anglo Indian School Play Ground by the Nilgiris Sports Council will not be an eyesore; it will be an environment hazard as well.

The Breeks Ground, which was assigned to the school almost sixty years back has been serving the students as their playground. Breeks school which was founded in memory of the first Commissioner of Nilgiris, Mr J W BREEKS is a popular public school imparting education to thousands of day-scholars of Ooty and outside. At present, government of Tamilnadu, through a board of Mangement, control the school.

The school ground, an expanse of about nine acres of lovely lush green lawn, soothing the eyes of the tourist and the locals alike is the only two lungs left in the town, the other being the famous race course. Carnivals and summer festivals are being held in this open ground when the school is closed. The Tourist love to walk along the ground before getting into the Botanical garden.

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It is a pity that the authorities and the public of Nilgiris have failed to terribly in arresting the denudation of forests leading to ecological problems to the district as a whole and Ootacamund town in particular. Now the beautiful Breeks ground is to be buried under a clumsy stadium. The Stadium would not only mar the beauty of this hill resort but also would deprive the Breeks students of their sports ground, The authorities would do well to rethink the proposal or look for a different location for this mammoth structure.

OOTY THROUGH THE EYES OF MACAULAY

In 1834 Lord William Bentinck, Governor General of India spent the summer at Ootacamund. He sent for Thomas Babington Macaulay to join him there at attend the Supreme Council of India as fourth legislative member. Macaulay took the oath of office on June 27th, 1834. Interestingly, he was carried all the way from Madras to Ooty, via Bangalore, in a palanquin by twelve bearers who changed every fifteen miles. Two Police Officers with swords and badges ran by the side. Excerpts from Lord Macaulay's letters written from Ooty to friends and relatives in England.

“...At last at about ten O'clock dwellings began to appear and very soon Ootacamund was before me ...Do you know the history of this place? It was discovered about fifteen years ago that the climate in these hills is as fine as that of any country in the temperate zone. Accordingly invalids have frequently resorted hither and the place has gone on increasing. It has now very much the look of a rising English watering place. There are many scattered dwellings, a few with porticoes and other architectural decorations, but most of them pretty cottages of one storey only, white and roofed with neat red tiling or thatched. The hills form a sort of basin with a small lake in the middle. A Gothic church has been built here and one or two shops have been set up. Altogether the coolness, the greenness of the grass, the character of the houses both without and within, is quite English.”

“It lies at the height of 7000 feet above the level of the sea amidst the mountains which separate Mysore from Malabar. While London is a perfect gridiron, here am I at 13” North from the equator by a blazing wood-fire, with my windows closed. My bed is heaped with blankets.”

The country is decidedly colder, though this is midsummer, than Scotland in April or September. I burn fires in my bed-room and sitting-room, dress pretty warmly, and have already had a slight cold in my head since my arrival. The thermometer over the chimney-piece is at 65. It was 95 in the shade at Madras. Is it not strange that we should be able to pass in a few hours from the climate of India through all the intermediate stages to that of Russia. You may select the temperature which you like best in these hills – Italy, France Devonshire or Scotland. The founders of Ootacamund chose the coldest of all”.

OOTY THROUGH THE EYES OF RECENT VISITORS

“Ooty is a dying city, choking under the onslaught of traffic and tourist. The rolling grasslands with clumps of natural evergreen forest (Sholas) are almost indistinguishable today and the ubiquitous eucalyptus has been planted everywhere. One argument is that this has contributed to the water crisis of the hills The summer tourists were unknowingly drinking sewage-contaminated water. The contaminated water was being supplied stealthily from the Ooty

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lake till the police found out and put a stop to it....

“At Coonoor, summer temperatures now touch almost 30C and one sweats profusely after a short walk. Refrigerators are being increasingly used in homes and the time is not far off when ceiling fans will be seen too”.

“The kids were boasting to their friends that they were going to Ooty. Frankly, now on their return, they would have nothing to say about the trip. Things were much better when we came last which trip we remember even now. These days there are better maintained parks than here even in cities”.....

“What is appalling is the change in the face of Ooty itself. The affluent are setting up more and more hotels whenever they can and the rich, especially the film stars, are buying land at any cost and constructing huge mansions which are locked up except for a couple a months during the year. This is one of the reasons for the land value shooting up enormously making life extremely difficult for the local people.”

“Ooty today is as commercial as you can get, complete with all the trappings of urban living-music bearing from loud speakers, departmental stores lined up with arty objects which could easily be procured in Bombay.....

With or without the dead body, (a floating corpse is not an infrequent sight in the lake) boating in the Ooty lake is an unpleasant experience. One end of the lake is reserved only for garbage. And you have to put up with the smell of faeces, decaying vegetables and other filth wafting towards you. Ooty, the queen of Hill Stations, is a queen shorn of all her beauty, splendour and glory. Rather like one of our decadent royal families, royal in name only”.

-Excerpts from articles and letters in Newspapers and journals.

VAYUDOOT SERVICE TO OOTY

The government has proposed to extend Vayudoot sir link to Ooty. The District Administration has been asked to find a suitable location for an airstrip. In all fairness the Govt. should have ascertained the views of the local people before taking a decision in this regard. It did not. It is not too late now.

Half the charm of going to Ooty is in traveling up the mountains by road or, better still, by the unique railway enjoying the breadth taking views of the steep hills and the picturesque valleys. What, then, is the need for whisking away the tourists over the hills to Ooty by plane ? Secondly, is Ooty industrially or commercially so advanced as to need a regular air service? One should think not. More importantly, where is the land in or around Ooty for the airstrip without causing further damage to forest or grazing land ? Please write your views. Based on your views a common representation will be made to the Government.

This issue of Newsletter is financed by some concerned
CO-OPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS OF NILGIRIS

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Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

(VOL I No 4 & 5/P8)

save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No. 6

JANUARY 1987

VISCOSE AT WHAT COST ?

Messrs South India Viscose propose to increase production three fold. For raw material more forest land in the Nilgiris and the Palanis are likely to be converted into Eucalyptus/Wattle/Pine plantations. The Palanis Hills conservation Council has sent a representation to the Department of Company Affairs to stop this harmful move. The representation, no less crucial to the Nilgiris, is reproduced below.

We write this letter with reference to Notice Form IA under sub-section (1) of Section 21 of the MRTP Act, 1969, published by Messrs South India Viscose in the newspapers.

According to this notice, Messrs South India Viscose propose to increase their production capacity of viscose staple fibre from their existing, 11,000 MT/annum to 33,000 Mt/annum. Our understanding is that the raw material for this is Eucalyptus/Wattle/Pine plantations raise on the forest land in the Palanis and Nilgiri hill ranges in Tamil Nadu.

These plantations have been raised by converting grasslands and other primary vegetation in the hills to commercial forestry, and already a very large extent of grasslands have been so converted. The grasslands represent one of the two types of ecological climax vegetation of these hills. Their existence is essential for ecological reasons, especially as the existence of many forms of wildlife depends on these grasslands. The grasslands are also essential to meet the fodder requirements of the local hill people.

Moreover, the Palani Hills are the main watershed for large drought stricken areas of Tamil Nadu – in Madurai, Anna and Coimbatore districts. The grasslands have a vital role to play in sound watershed management, and their conversion to monoculture of eucalyptus/wattle/pine will be disastrous. This is for the simple reason that water run-off and soil erosion, takes place in these plantations due to the absence of tree cover, not to speak of the havoc caused when these plantations are clear felled and harvested periodically. Moreover, the water holding capacity of these plantations compares most unfavourably with a natural forest. Commercial forestry in these hills is, therefore, the antithesis of sound watershed management.

The Palani Hills Conservation Council is vitally interested in preserving the ecosystem of these hills, and has been emphasizing the necessity to phase out commercial forestry in these ecologically sensitive hill

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regions; in the interest of sound land use in these hills, the emphasis should be on re-establishing permanent indigenous forest cover.

If the proposed expansion involves any increase in the area under commercial forestry in these hills, or even implies perpetuation of the existing area under commercial forests indefinitely, we are firmly opposed to this expansion. M/S. South India Viscose should find alternative sources of pulpwood, preferably raised on wastelands on the plains. There is no justification for the Government to spare ecologically vulnerable forest land in the hills for the benefit of private industry over-looking the interest of the common man.

We do hope we will be given an opportunity to make further detailed representation before any decision is taken on the expansion proposal of M/S. South India Viscose.

Yours sincerely
Sd/-M.S. VIRARAGHAVAN I.A.S. (Retd.)
President

SHUT UP SNC, WE WANT VAYUDOOT

Dear Sir,

The proposed Vayudoot Air-Link to Ooty would be a blessing to our Hill-Station. As for your views that the Government should have consulted the local people, I feel you have not fully understood the semi-socialistic Democratic functioning of our Government. As in the case of a democratic set up, like India, representatives are elected by the people to the Legislatures, not because the people want them to inaugurate school buildings or attend Government functions, but because people feel they are men who can represent their views and do what is best for the people.

If the Government is to ask the people for their views on every development project, our country's progress will be almost at a standstill.

You claim the charm of going to Ooty is by road. In my opinion going to Ooty by road is like driving through a gas chamber, with the number of lorries and buses polluting the air. And what better view can one get of the hills "Than from the Air".

The fact that you feel Ooty is nor commercially or industrially developed and therefore does not need an air-strip, only goes to prove, how misinformed you are about air travel.

In India and abroad, airlines cater more to tourists than to businessmen. Countries like Switzerland have separate alpine airline systems which cater to their mountain regions and that has helped to boost their tourism.

If Vayudoot comes to Ooty, it will give an enormous boost to tourism in our district. I request you to leave our elected representative to make any representation on our behalf. We the people of the Nilgiris would be happy if we are saved from such self appointed Saviours.

Yours sincerely
Sd. DAYAN KRISHNAN (S/O. Mr. K.V. KRISHNAN, ADVOCATE)

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Dear Dayan,

We understand your feelings. For most school going kids like you, aeroplanes are indeed more exciting. As you mature, we hope, you will see things differently.

The object of SNC is not to usurp the role of Legislators and we are certainly not “self-appointed Saviours” of Nilgiris. We are a humble lot of campaigners. And campaigners can only be self appointed as Campaigning is a purely voluntary service; like when you say you want Vayudoot service to Ooty; you are a campaigner for it. Don’t you agree?

Campaigning is not opposing the government. It is only individual or groups of citizens thinking aloud on public matters which is very useful in a democracy. It helps make government decisions easier and better.

EDITOR

A 1908 HUNTING PARTY IN NILGIRIS

Towards the end of 1907 Dr. Arthur Benson, a Dublin ophthalmologist and his wife Ethel visited Madras where his brother, Sir Ralph Benson was a judge of the Madras High Court. During their stay they went on a hunting expedition to the Nilgiris. Excerpts from their letters written about Nilgiris to their relatives in Ireland. The letters have been taken from “The Benson Letters” , edited by Shri N.S. Ramaswami.

Nilgiris – I

New Year’s Day 1908 Nilgiri camp

We left Madras on Friday 20th at 6.30 O’C. After 2 hrs. in the train we turned out at Arconam junction for dinner & then back to the train again to make ourselves comfortable for the night as we didn’t reach Metapollayam till 9 the next morning.

After Metapollayom we changed into the Nilgiris narrow guage Railway & had a most glorious journey up the Ghats. The scenery was gorgeous & as we had to rise over 6000 ft to Coonoor you can imagine the lovely views we got to the valley below. Part of the way was very misty, but the clouds only added to the beauty of it all. Great mountain crags appeared out of the soft clouds.

The Railway at present doesn’t go beyond Coonoor. But a line the entire way to Ooty is under construction & they say will be open for traffic next May. However we had to do the last 9 miles by tonga. All the luggage & servants were stowed into bullock carts.

We had a lot of mounting to do & poor horses got over the steep road by galloping as hard as they could go. They couldn’t go far at that pace, so 3 times on the journey we changed horses & the confusion & noise at those changing places was a joy to me! This road was again lovely & the hills round Ooty with the evening lights on them past description.

I have now in my life had two Railway journeys to be remembered always. These were the Ooty & the Engadine valley going up to Aleima last Xmas, I couldn’t say which one was the beautiful. There is n comparison, they being such different subjects. The one dazzling white & the other every shade of green imagination with waterfalls every here and there thro’ the jungle bits.

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In Ooty we stayed at Longwood, a boarding house kept by Mrs. Scott a friend of Fay's. She, poor lady was left with 3 children utterly unprovided for, her husband dying in 1 day of cholera. So she pluckily started this work & has got on so well that already 2 of the girls are at home in England being educated.

Sunday 22nd. Ralph, Arthur & I walked to the top of Club Hill to get an idea of the country. It is a splendid spot for "a ha" porth of look-about". Ralph could point out to us our camp route in the mtns & all the places we knew so well by name from their letters. After breakfast we took a long drive round the Connemara Rd seeing lovely scenery most of the time. We left the carriage & walked up to a Toda mund. "Mund" is the word the Todas use for village. The Todas were all outside their huts sunning themselves & they did look weird wild race. Coal black sleek hair with a big wave in it, worn about 4 inches long & just flying anywhere the wind catches it & their one garment of covering a big cotton blanket wrapped round them, men & women alike. They are very big & powerfully built. They live entirely on their buffaloes, the milk & the butter & occasionally killing one. But they never till an acre of ground anywhere, they just sit in the sun & watch the buffaloes feed. I hear they have a nasty smell which comes from their habit of rubbing their bodies with buttermilk.

Sunday afternoon we went up to see Baikie, The pretty house the Doveton family were in last year. What I liked best about it was a beautiful thick hedge of heliotrope in full flower right across the front of the house. There are several such lodges in Ooty. From Baikie we walked over to Cluny Hill & Mena's old home. We didn't go up to the house but had a very nice walk thro' the grounds & the fine drive that Will had made.

Monday morning after early tea Arthur & I wandered off to a Toda mund near Longwood & got some photos that should be good of their milking etc. Fay spent a busy morning wrestling with the things to take into camp & we took another long drive round the Grant Duff Road tat afternoon, so in 2 days we have seen a great deal of Ooty & like it well.

Tuesday 24th. We started for our 1st camp. How I wish you could all have seen it. Description is so feeble. There are 12 pack ponies (that is the proper name for them) to carry out kit with 7 pony coolies to look after them, - 2 extra ponies to carry food for the coolies, that is, 14 in all. These are tiny red ponies no fatter than a hair trunk, with not a scrap of harness on them, not even a halter. A kind of rope saddle is strapped on & then their load put panier fashion on to this. They say each wee tat can carry 160 lbs on each side! But I must go on with the list of our party.

The two horses from Doveton, "Sunny Jim" & "Brown Bess"; their 2 horses keepers; the Doveton mattie; two shikaris; 2 coolies to carry tent poles as they are awkward on the ponies; 1 coolie to carry our tiffin box on his head. In case Fay is tired there is a carrying chair with 4 coolies to carry that. When we got to Ooty Ralph got a shock & disappointment. First when he & Arthur procured their shooting licenses, they found that the game restrictions are heavy this year. No Sambhur to be shot with horns less than 30" last year it was 26" & that they ridiculously high. So Ralph fears we will no see a shootable sambhur at all, & no Ibex to be shot except old "sadd-

le-back". Second shock was that a Mr & Mrs Sharp (on their weddingtour) had been over exactly the same ground that we wanted to. However our head shikari, chuppani by name (a splendid chap) conformed Ralph saying he didn't think much of the Sharps as shikaris, that they went everywhere on ponies, & instead of shooting frightened all the game before them, & on making further enquiries he found that they had only shot 2 stags very much under size & 1 brown buck (that is an Ibex who hadn't yet grown his saddle) & that they wd be fined for all these 3 kills! They can fine up to **Pound** 3 a head on all such undersized game.

The 1st March was a lovely one to all the party, & doubly so to Arthur & me, everything so new to us. We had intended going to what is generally Ralph's 1st camp Kroormund, but Chupanni had got news of a big stag sambhur a couple of miles from that, & he thought it was worth turning from the known track, when we wd be likely to meet so few big enough for shooting. So after following the mountain road to Kroormund for a few miles (Charlie will know this) we turned away across the country to a new camp Thamokmund, that not even Ralph had been to before. It was a delicious ride, & we stopped ½ way to have lunch in a lovely shola (for the uninitiated, a shola is a crease in the hill side, generally with a stream running down to it & filled in with trees & shrubs).

We took an hour's rest after lunch. At 30°C the ponies were again saddled, the chair-coolies collected, & we started on our way again, arriving at our camp in about an hour's time. We first caught sight of it from a high hill & the little tent did look comfy nestling in the valley with a shola on each side stretching down to them. Ralph & Fay's tent with a double flap stretching out in front under which stands our dinning table and four chairs, beside it Arthur's & mine a little behind the tent for maty and cook, & I believe they take in the two shikaris at night. Another pack & at a little distance under the trees, as much sheltered as possible, a spot is cleared for the 2 horses, & the horsekeepers have a wee tent to themselves, with a big bonfire burning outside it.

The little pack ponies are just turned out on to the mountain to look after themselves & the only protection they are given is a small bell round each of their necks to keep tigers from attacking them since in a former expedition Ralph did they had a pony killed one night by a tiger.

Our Shikari, Chuppani, has dreadful scars all over his body from a mauling he once got. Bearing no goodwill to the breed, he was awfully keen we should come across one, but we were disappointed in this too. Twice we came across the tracks on them, & at our 2nd camp across the pack ponies were in the night scattered down the valley, they said by a tiger. So every night after that they were tied near the camp fires to pegs driven into the ground. These camp fires are a great feature at night. The 2 horsekeepers have one to themselves & do all their own cooking. Then the pony coolies have a huge one round which they sit almost the entire night & all their food is done in this fire. Then near the cook's tent he has a fire just for keeping them warm & near it has the fire in which he cooks our food.

Directly the sun went down at about 6 O'C it got very cold & by 7 O'C it was real better. We did look funny sights "dressed for dinner". Fay got into her sealskin coat with a rug round her knees. Arthur added to his shooting clothes a cardigan,

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a scarf round his head under his hat (this is to keep his ears warm) & a warm wooly gloves. I forgot to dwell on his feet. Added to the putties & long stockings he wore a pair of wooly socks we had for Switzerland & his wool line leather slippers. My Swiss outfit proved very useful. A warm jersey under my fur coat – Rumper Chuddah round my head & putties & wooly gloves made me very happy. Ralph snuggled into his warm dressing gown & said very little after the cold came on. Dinner over we used all to creep into Fay's tent covered up with rugs & she wd read a story till bed-time which usually came a few minutes after 9O'C. Xmas morning they decided I might go with them in their search for Chuppani's big stag. So we got up at 5.30., scrambled into all our warm things again (oh, Moses, it was cold) had chota hazri by lantern light & just as day light came we started having to leave all our wraps behind as it wd soon be too hot to carry them with us. It was a weird walk up hill at first, then along the side of another hill, all done in absolute silence & quickly as possible, Chuppani leading the way & we following Indian File as quietly as we could slip along. The frosty grass making our foot & legs very wet, & we still perishingly cold. Just before the sun rose we got on to the face of a hill over-looking the Emerald Valley with beautiful sholas all round & sat down to take a good "look-sea" all around us.

Presently out of a shola below us & a little to the left came a hind sambhur & kid & behind them what to me looked a beautiful stag, but Ralph said his horns weren't more than 24 inches so no use from the rifle's point of view. On another hill 2 hinds shewed & then another stag followed the 1st one. These 2 seemed none too pleased to see one another, & went for each other! It was awfully pretty to see their horns interlocked, & they shoving one another as hard as they could go. However hunger must have overcome their anger, because they presently disentangled their horns & turned to grazing & utterly ignored one another & then we realized we had been so busy looking at these creatures thro' our glasses that we had missed the sun rise & that he was already drying our feet & legs & putting some warmth into our poor bones.

We saw several more hinds on our walk home & on a hill a good bit the other side of the camp there were many sambhur, but too far away to make out what they were.

Coming home thro' the shola near our camp we disturbed some monkeys & they did give us a tongue sashing, especially one big black chap that we followed to get a good look at. Arthur was awfully tempted to shoot him, but desisted, it seemed rather cold-blooded to do it when the creature was so harmless.

So at 4 O'C we set out for the far hills we had seen the sambhur in the morning. We first caught sight 3 jungle sheep, but the wind was wrong for getting at them, & they quickly moved into a shola. After that we saw several hind sambhur slipping out of different sholas to feed, & 1 stag with good horns that Ralph says last year wd have been considered a fine head, but with this 30" regulation we daren't touch him. As it was getting dusk we were slipping round the side of a hill and a splendid stag with 26" horns faced us not 70 yards away. He was a gorgeous shot in the sky line, & Arthur declares but for Chuppani he would have had at him & stood the fine afterwards!.

It was cruel hard to have to leave him!.

Walking back when nearly dark we put up a hare, so saw a variety of game. Our 1st day of stalking. Jungle fowl are in the shola by the horses (a

coolie discovered 4 eggs) but having only rifles we can't get them, Ralph doesn't bring a shot gun on these occasions fearing it might just disturb bigger game.

Thursday 26th Dec had a fresh experience for us – camp moving. We didn't get up till after 7 O'C. There is no need to hurry on marching morning, as must wait for the sun to dry the tents before packing them up. The hoar frost was so thick on them that morning that we scraped it off with sticks to try & hurry matters.

We got off about 10 O'C, the ponies going 1 way to avoid hills, & we with Fay's chair, the 2 horses & tiffin coolie & Muniam, shikari no 2 to guide, slanted across a flat grassy valley which was very hot indeed. We saw several kinds of hawks, very big brutes mostly browne & duff colour, & a couple of big white eagles on a higher hill & a black eagle. Mounting another hill, we saw in the very far distance a herd of Ibex, on a stony face mountain, but they were too far away to do more than count them seven. We couldn't even see if there were bucks amongst them.

1 O'C. We halted for tiffin, Muniam making a fire which provided us with tea & hot toast. We lazed & slept the afternoon away. Then Ralph & Fay started for the shortest route to camp & Arthur & I with the shikari took a great walk by the side of two very high hills, hoping to get sight of something. We didn't see any thing living, but got a very fine view of Mukurti Peak & on the other side the rolling clouds coming up from the Nellampur valley. It was a very long walk & we didn't reach our camp at the foot of Mukurti till quite dark (in fact a lantern was sent out to meet us & help us to cross two crevices nearby) & when we did arrive we found R & F had just got in too, the latter very tired, as their route had turned out very rough & much longer than originally calculated. We had no reading that night but went straight to beds that consist of about a foot of dried bracken, a waterproof sheet over that & for covering as many blankets, coats & rugs as you can lay on.

This was intensely cold place, much colder then Thawkomund. In the morning we found ice ¼ of an inch in the basin & even a layer in the waterbottles that had been left on the dinning table. The horses felt the cold too very much & it was discovered that they had kicked themselves free & gone off taking their heel ropes with them. Fortunately they didn't go far & were overtaken a couples of miles from camp.

This brings us to Dec 27th & that morning we started about 9 O'C for a long walk to see the Nellampur valley before the mists rise to block the view. By the time we got the steep cliffs that go sheer down many hundred feet to the valley below it was getting a bit misty, & we sat there for over half an hour until the whole valley gradually got filled up with thick white cloud. Fay didn't want to come farther than this, sat down to sketch, & we 3 went down to a bit of wild Ibex ground. Sitting on the slope of a hill gazing thro' glasses Ralph & Arthur simultaneously spotted an old saddle back Ibex. Chuppani & Muniam had gone round the hill a bit, bit came creeping back & they held a council of war

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as to the best way to approach him. He was near a big rock & a valley & a little river with a shola on each side between, but unfortunately 2 hinds and a young buck were also between us & him, so it was likely they would give him the alarm. It was eventually decided they must chance the danger & approach him along the side of the shola. I was to stay where I was, in full view of the whole proceedings.

Chuppani kicked off his boots in preparation for the stalk, & the others left us all the heavy clothing or unnecessaries & they could spare. The knife-coolie (a Mahomedan) was left to care [for] me & he was as keen as mustard on the sport.

While these preparations were being made we saw the Ibex lie down in the shelter of the rock. Away they went crawling down the hill, a kind of wriggle on their backs. When they had gone about a quarter of an hour, coolie and I saw the old beggar stand up again from under his rock, & thinking the shooters could not be half way there, I gave up all hope of their getting a shot. However for nearly 5 minutes I kept my glass on him, as he stood motionless, & then suddenly he seemed to give a side jump & fall flat down & immediately I heard the crack of the rifle. Arthur had taken the shot & got him! He staggered to his feet again, & then tried to gallop up hill, but dragging his hind part rather. The rifle again cracked & and gave a few more struggles & then fell, never moving again. Looking in, we thought the last shot (from Ralph) had finished him, but on examining him found it hadn't touched him, but the 1st bullet had gone into his chest. Knife coolie & I then took to our heels, & fairly ran down the valley, staggering over everything in our path, & got there just as Chuppani severed the splendid head-horns 151/2. "The best head sent in this season to the taxidermist" wrote Ralph.

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

CONSOLIDATED ANCILLARIES
3, East Street, Kilpauk Garden Colony, Madras 600 010
and
Aruna Medicals
M.S. Lane Ootcamund, The Nilgiris.

Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator , Save Nilgiris Campaign, 22-C, Tirupathy
Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 018
Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

(VOL I No. 6/P8)

save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 7 & 8

MARCH 1987

Reproduced below are some of the appeals by individual citizens or groups of citizens of Nilgiris made to the District Collector to reconsider the decision to build a sports stadium at the Breeks Grounds. The Collector, it appears, has assured one of the groups that there will not be any further damage to Ooty's environment because of the stadium. In the circumstances, we would request the District Administration to kindly clarify the assurance with convincing facts.

“LET THE BONES REST IN PEACE”

Dear Sir,

We are informed that arrangements are in hand to construct a stadium in the Breeks School play ground. This has caused us all in the culture group of Ooty amazement and shock, specially when so much talk is on of saving the Nilgiris.

The Breeks School playground is one of the very few open grounds left in Ooty and acts as a lung to this overcrowded hill station. It helps the children of the largest school here to have their games and sports, and also serves as a parking place for cars during the season and Flower Show. It almost adjoins the Government Botanical Garden, which is Ooty's show-piece. A stadium will involve erecting a heavy concrete structure next to these Gardens with rows of shops in the ground floor, as is the case with most stadiums. This will convert this area into a market place, full of shops and crowds and completely spoil the peaceful atmosphere of the Gardens.

If a stadium is a must for Ooty, it should be built about five miles away from the centre of the town. Alternatively the historical Botanical Gardens should be moved away from the bazaars.

Ooty has one large market which is in a disgraceful state of filth and congestion. Why should there be the need for another similar one?

The queen of the Hills died sometime ago – let her bones rest in peace. Even at this late hour, we hope and pray that wiser counsels will prevail and the stadium if at all needed will be built somewhere else.

Sd.. N N VAJIFDAR
SECRETARY
THE CUKTURE CLUB

(VOL I No 7 & 8/P1)

“GIVE PRIORITY TO WATER SUPPLY”

Dear Sir,

We the citizens of Nilgiris want to bring to your notice the fact that the “Hill Area Development Programme for the Nilgiris”; is causing the depletion of the resources of our district, and urgent priority requirements are not being provided for.

In particular we are against the construction of a sports stadium, or any other building, on the Breeks School ground at Ooty (one of the last two spaces in the town), at a stupendous cost of Rs. 75 lakhs. While Ooty, Coonoor, Kotagiri and Gudalur, have more than their fair share of hideous buildings, our main objection to a stadium on Breeks School ground, is not purely on aesthetic grounds:

Ooty town is caught in the throes of an unprecedented water shortage – especially in the past five to six years. Parts of Fingerpost area of Ooty, have not received Municipal water supply for the past eight years. Other areas in Ooty have not got water for more than a week, even though it is now off-season. For the first time in its history, Coonoor town faced an unprecedented water shortage in 1986, and Raliah Dam, its main source of water supply, became bone dry. In the summer of 1986, in Nanjanad, the largest village in Nilgiris, women had to trek over four kilometres of hilly tract and had to wait two to three hours at night, to collect a single pot of water from the remaining few springs. The situation in many other villages is much more severe, though it does not get reported.

The situation has very serious implications, as the Nilgiris is a vital catchment area of Tamil Nadu, supporting 40 % of our State’s hydro-electricity. Innumerable springs in the upper catchment areas of Nilgiris have dried up, due to destructive land use, and the drinking water situation is very precarious all over the district. This situation is worsened by the massive floating population of tourists.

Breeks School ground has the largest swamp left in Ooty (about one and half to two acres in size). This is the best available WATER SOURCE can be tapped in the town, and there can be no administrative problems since land belongs to the Government now. The “Lawley Institute”, a private club adjoining this swamp has recently dug a big well, since it is futile to depend on Municipal water supplies in Ooty.

The swamp on Breeks School ground has a very good growth of the reed *Scirpus Articulatus*, which is of utility population and due to large scale destruction of the Nilgiris swamps, this special is fast vanishing.

The Preliminary work on this ground, has led to the destruction of this SWAMP, by dumping large quantities of MUD on it, thereby stifling indigenous plant growth, and depriving some species of the birds, the use of a diminishing habitat.

LAKE WILL SILT FASTER

The two streams that form the boundaries of Breeks School ground merge, and after traversing a distance of about two miles, flow into Ooty lake. This stream is primarily responsible for the silting of Ooty lake. We have been informed that both these streams will be fully covered by mud, for building the proposed stadium. Without doubt, a lot of the mud dumped on Breeks School ground will end up as silt in Ooty lake.

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Ooty lake is a man made reservoir full of silt, and an expert committee of Government has estimated that the lake will be fully silted-up and will vanish by 2047 A.D.

The Hill Area Development Programme has provided a sum of Rs. 50 lakhs for DE-SILTING the lake.

We are of the view that Rs. 125 lakhs (Rs. 75 lakhs for the proposed stadium and Rs. 50 lakhs for Desilting of Ooty lake) is being sanctioned for two projects which are basically working against each other as the mud dumped on Brecks School grounds will end up as silt in Ooty lake.

Building of a sports stadium on Brecks School ground is definitely a non-priority area for Nilgiris. Traditionally football tournaments have been held in the Shanti Vijaya grounds, and the inner circle of the Race Course at Ooty. Recently a football tournament at Ooty at the Brecks School ground, and vast crowd witnessed this event. Perhaps note that this ground can accommodate huge crowds without any modification. So why modify one of the last two expanses of lush green grass at Ooty?

If the intention is to attract more bigger crowds of tourists, by hosting national and state-level events at the proposed stadium, we hasten to being to the notice of the administration, the sad fact that Ooty cannot support any more floating population, when the residents of Ooty have to buy water for survival!

The swampy area of Brecks School ground must be fenced, and wells must be dug to supply the residents of Ooty with drinking water. Since this ground is located almost in the heart of the town, it is an ideal place for tapping and distributing water.

The much publicised Parsons Valley Scheme, for supplying Ooty with water, can only be an ad hoc measure at best, for the level of this reservoir are dangerously low during summer, and fluctuate according to the vagaries of the monsoon. This reservoir was originally intended to feed the hydro-electric stations, and is just a matter of time before the Electricity Board authorities register their protest to increased diversion of their water for domestic uses– to feed an expanding district and a ever growing floating population.

It is not possible to indefinitely ignore the power requirements of industry by diversion of water from hydro-electric scheme reservoirs for domestic purposes.

We appeal to the Collector to take action to prevent destruction of our water sources (the few that remain) by the construction of a stadium on the Brecks Grounds.

Sd. Dr. M HALAYYA & OTHER CITIZENS OF NILGIRIS

“WHY MORE BUILDINGS THAN BUSINESS”

Dear Sir,

On my return to Ootacamund, on Friday 30th January, I noticed the hedge along the Breek’s School play field has been cut down. On enquiry I have been informed that a stadium with shops is to be erected on this lovely open space, at great expense.

I would like to bring to your notice, my views on this building, on one of the two open spaces left in this town. Being an old resident of this

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once beautiful and peaceful hill station, I have noticed how in the past 10 years the deterioration that has taken place, and none of the authorities, has considered the natural God given beauty that once abounded, making this a holiday resort, for people from the cities and abroad. Ootacamund, once known as the “Queen of Hill Stations”, is now nothing but a slum.

The Botanical Gardens, once a free park for relaxation, after a days work, for families and children, are now charging a fee for entry, so a number of people are using the Breek’s School field for free outings. The school children enjoy the freedom of the field, and appreciate the expanse of grass and open space, now to be deprived of their pleasure.

It is a noted fact that the President of India, during his last visit stressed that there were too many ugly construction in this beautiful hill station and stopped worked on a hedious structure coming up at the entrance to the gardens.

You, as the Collector and senior citizen have the authority to stop further damage and desecration of the once beautiful hill station, where visitors came for peace, country walks and admire the flora and fauna God had abundantly bestowed on this hill. There are more than enough shops in Ooty today, to cater for the needs of everyone who resides or visits. Business is not booming, so why do we need more shops. Ooty has already lost a great deal of its charm and attraction. Many visitors from various parts of India and abroad who have come to revisit Ooty after 10 or 15 years are shattered with the way this town has changed for the worse and have said they would never come back again or recommend it to their friends. This id not the sort of reputation Ooty has enjoyed until recently.

I sincerely hope and earnestly request you as our Collector, to act and restore some peace and beauty to this once glorious part of India.

Sd. MRS. N P COOPER

SNC APPEAL

A couple of years ago a shopping complex was allowed to sneak up the very entrance of the famous Ooty Botanical gardens, thereby shattering once and for all, the serene atmosphere maintained since its opening in 1847. Though the damage realised rather too late the administration did intervene to stop further construction and to redeem the situation as best as it could. But even then as the lovers of Ooty were recovering from this rude shock, the Administration announced the construction of a sports stadium cum shopping complex at the equally famous Breeks grounds just across the Botanical Gardens. The incalculable damage this complex would so to the Garden and its surroundings need hardly be emphasized. The Garden road skirting the Breeks grounds is one of few remaining ‘walks’ in the Ooty town, especially for the aged who can’t make it to the outskirts for obvious reasons. More importantly, the Breeks grounds are only open space left besides the race course at the other end of the town. The damage from the shopping complex will far outweigh the benefits of the stadium. At a benefits of the stadium. At a time when the authorities from the Prime Minister down are professing the cause of Environmental preservation it is deplorable that Ooty, the premier hill station of South

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is being systematically buried alive.

Despite several appeals by senior citizens of Ooty to reconsider the decisions, the administration appears to be going ahead with the preliminary work on the stadium.

On behalf of the Save Nilgiris Campaign I beseech the Administration to reconsider the decision for which not only the present citizens of Ooty but posterity too will be beholden to it.

Sd. D VENUGOPAL CO-ORDINATOR

CITIZENS FORUM ASSURED

Copy of letter to SNC

Dear Sir,

Regarding the construction of a stadium at Breeks School, initially the Citizen's Forum had its own reservations against the construction. Subsequently the Collector of Nilgiris called the members to an open discussion. During the discussion, the Collector impressed upon us that this is the only opportunity for Nilgiris to get a stadium under Hill Area Development Programme for developing sports facilities in the district. The Collector has promised that the stadium architecture will not any way spoil the atmosphere and upset the eco-balance; no shopping complex will be proposed; the free flow of traffic and parking lot will be taken care of; enough trees and greeneries will be created all around the stadium and the streams and rivulets flowing on either side of the stadium will be taken care of with revetments, etc. Further the rights and privileges of using the auditorium by the children of Breeks School will be taken care of and they will not be deprived of the facilities for their sports and games. The same assurances was further ascertained by the Commissioner and secretary, **Government** of Tamil Nadu when we met him in this connection.

Therefore, the Citizens' Forum felt that let us not object to anything for the sake of objecting, but to welcome the new facility which will not in any way spoil or upset the eco balance, but to the welfare and improvement of the sports in Nilgiris.

This is for your kind information.

Sd. President
Citizens' Forum of Ootacamund

Anil Agarwal Visits Nilgiris

During his recent visit to Nilgiris, Anil Agarwal was shocked at the general environmental deterioration of the district. The shola forests, he felt, should never have been converted to monocultures of Blue Gum. The resulting ecological imbalance together with pressures generated by the growing tourist numbers today threatens the Nilgiris' ecosystem in a big way. Shortage of water is one of the major results of these environmentally destructive policies.

There is in his view a very urgent need to review existing land use policies in this vital catchment area in Tamil Nadu.

Since the primary reason of Anil Agarwal's visit was to see the work of the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research & Training Institute at Ooty, he was sad to see large plantations of Blue Gum in the Upper Catchment areas of Nilgiris. The CSWCRTI has now conclusively proved that plantations of Blue Gum reduce water yield as compared to natural Shola forests.

He was dismayed to note that a stadium at a stupendous cost of Rs. 75 lakhs is to be built on Breeks School ground in Ooty. He could not understand

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why such a project was being financed by the Hill Area Development Programme. “Surely the best thing to do would be to sink a few wells in the swampy area of this field (One and half acres – the largest swamp left in Ooty) to supply water to the waterstarved residents, instead of destroying this swamp,” he said.

“It is not clear why this stadium is being built. If it is to increase the number of tourists then the State authorities must carefully review their current policies to ensure that the basic needs of the local population and that of the existing numbers of tourists are first met. The stupendous sum of money allocated for the stadium could be used for environmental improvement in the region” he added.

What, he asked, are the residents of Nilgiris doing about this district, which was once the Queen of Hill Stations? When are the residents of the Nilgiris going to organise themselves in an attempt to save this hill region from further destruction? Mr. Agarwal asked.

A REPORT BY N RAMESH BABU

FORESTS IN NILGIRIS

Sir, This has reference to the item (**Economic Times Feb. 26**) regarding the extents of forests in the Nilgiris over which the Union environment minister and Mrs. Vijayanthimala Bali, M.P., had a dispute in the Lok Sabha. The minister, reportedly, said 50 percent while Mrs Bali corrected it to 60 percent. Either figure is bloated. According to the Geological Survey of India’s report of Nilgiris only 33.7 percent of land is forested. Even this is misleading as only 14.2 percent of land is under original reserved forest comprising sholas, shrub forests and mixed tree forests. The rest 19.5 percent is under monoculture forest plantations like eucalyptus, wattle and pine which do as much harm as good.

D VENUGOPAL
CO-ORDINATOR

A SIGNIFICANT JUDGEMENT

SC STAYS TRANSFER OF LAND TO BIRLA COMPANY

In significant development in the battle between the Birla-owned Harihar Polyfibre Ltd. And environmentalists in Karnataka, the Supreme Court has now stayed the transfer of land to the joint sector venture by the state Government and this company. This is in response to a public interest litigation filed in December last year on behalf of five lakh villagers of the districts of Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Dharwad and Belgaum, who stand to lose from the transfer of some 77,000 acres of wasteland as well as forest land.

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The petitioners contended that by leasing this land to Karnataka Plywood Ltd. Which is a joint sector company for growing eucalyptus plantations for industrial use, the State Government is taking away lands vested with the village communities, and used for meeting their basic needs such as fuel, fodder and small timber.

This case has implications far beyond the issues immediately at stake because it is a test case in the growing controversy over the wisdom of leasing revenue wasteland to industries to raise raw material for their needs are pending with the Wastelands Development Board.

In the Karnataka case that is now before the Supreme Court, the lands identified by the State Government for transfer to the plywood company includes reserved forests.

PARADISE LOST

Sixteen years ago, on a bright summer morning, I drove up the Mettupalayam-Kotagiri Road, with my brand new husband. I saw the lovely, lush green forests, the bedewed and water flecked bare rocks, the trickling rivulets of water by the sides of the road, the little water falls, the small streams hurrying down the hills, the purple Jacaranda, the lofty Blue Gums, the golden Wattle- and I fell in love with the place. Kotagiri itself was like a paradise – so quiet and serene –no loud horns, no crowded streets, no houses jostling each other for space and no hustle and bustle. What houses there were, nestling among trees and gardens. The whole town-village really was the green of the trees and lawn and the blue of the sky- and I thanked God with all my heart for having brought me to this lovely spot in His earth.

Today, I took on the same scene with sadness and I am filled with longing for its lost beauty. The rolling hills stand bare and naked with wide stretches of barren, brown earth. The trees are gone – to be replaced by tea bushes or just left infertile and useless. The mud roads are dust bowls – and the dust which is the precious soil of Nilgiris – is scattered with the wind eroding the land. There are no more majestic groves of Blue Gum – They have all long gone to that insatiable monster that devours wood and spews out viscose – The South India Viscose Factory and they have not been replaced. There are no trickles of water flowing on either side of the road. The bare rocks are stark and bone dry without a vestige of moisture on them. The water falls are mere skeletons of what they used to be – a sad trickle about a finger wide. Some water falls have disappeared altogether leaving only their imprint on the rocks – perhaps we could call it, “Water-Fell!”. And a Jacaranda tree in full, purple splendour is a rare sight indeed. After each rain we can see parts of the Nilgiris roaring down in the river- its muddiness, a mute testimony of the amount of Nilgiris soil that is being carried away to the plains.

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and even this has become a rare sight- for even the rains seem to have forsaken us – another result of the poor preservation of the environment.

Shops crowd each other on either side of the road, spilling on to the road itself, people mill around them, sir horns blast one's ear drums and buses and lorries stir up clouds of dust.

Where had all the beauty gone? Where had we gone wrong? Have we traded the beauty of the Nilgiris to so called "Progress"? Was our mistake in sending thousands of lorry loads of good Eucalyptus timber to the viscose factory, or Wattle bark to the tannery? Was it the hundreds of head loads of wood which we see even now-being carried away from the couple of forests that still survive? How much longer will these exist if this denudation continues? Was it in the indiscriminate cutting down of trees to plant tea, to make a quick buck? Are we not squandering our inheritance? Should we not stop it at least now? Are we leaving a barren, inhospitable land for our children? When even drinking water is scarce, what kind of future will our children have in this place which was once so green and pleasant? To save the Nilgiris, indiscriminate cutting of trees MUST stop. It is upto the forest department to see that licenses for cutting trees are given only in the most valid cases. Even then they must see to it that at least two saplings are planted for every tree cut–so that at least one of them would survive to replace the tree that is cut. Lorries carrying unauthorized timber should be severely punished as a deterrent to others. The Panchayat and Municipality should not cut down to make way for buildings – may be they make money but it is a very short sighted policy to gamble away our inheritance for immediate gain. An awareness must be instilled in the people to teach them the value of preserving the environment. Schools could play a vital role in this area. This would stop the wanton and indiscriminate destruction of wooded areas. Each Individual can contribute his/her mite by planting as many trees as possible in their own property.

If steps are not taken NOW, then in the year 2000 AD, we might find ourselves living in a hilly, barren, rocky, waterless desert.

N THILAK
KOTAGIRI

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

SHRI N KRISHNAN
ADVOCATE
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KOTAGIRI

Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator , Save Nilgiris Campaign,22-C, Tirupathy
Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 018

Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No 9,10 & 11

APRIL-JUNE 1987

SNC's MOMENTOUS MEET MOOTS

NILGIRIS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The "Eco-focus on Nilgiris" organised by SNC on April 18, 1987 at Madras succeeded not only in bringing the environmental problems facing the Nilgiris into sharp focus. The suggestions, proposals and recommendations (see page. 2) , made in the meet were far greater importance to the Nilgiris and its people.

The most important of the proposals was the one urging the Government of Tamil Nadu to set up a Nilgiris Development Authority (NDA) on the lines of the Madras Metropolitan Development Authority. The Authority should be a multi-disciplinary body with sufficient statutory powers to co-ordinate and supervise the development efforts of the governmental and non-governmental agencies in Nilgiris. No development work should be undertaken without the clearance of NDA. It was generally conceded that presently, government agencies in the district often work at cross-purposes, their priorities pulling in different directions. The NDA which should have overriding powers would harmonise the various interests through a common set of priorities.

The role of NDA would be two-fold. One, monitoring. The NDA would constantly monitor the man-nature interface and assess the human impact on the environment in the district such as overgrazing, damage to natural forests, abuse of watersheds and son on. This would also mean regular evaluation on the impact of the various eco-developmental projects/programmes in the Nilgiris with a view to avoiding waste and duplication.

The other role of NDA would be more challenging. It would involve the preparation and implementation of a Master Plan for the preservation of the Nilgiris.

The success of the meeting was largely due to the five eminent speakers who brought to bear on the subject their keen interest, wide experience, deep foresight and bold thinking. Indeed the people of Nilgiris owe a debt of gratitude to Shri V Karthikeyan, I A S, Former Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, Dr. B B Sundaresan, Vice-Chancellor of Madras University, Shri B Vijayaraghavan, I A S, Chairman of TNEB, Shri S Kondas, IPS, Former Chief Conservator of Forests and Shri R Radcliffe, the doyen among conservationists in the Nilgiris.

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were Shri M S Appa Rao, Former Chairman of Hindustan Photo Films, Prof J Ramachandran, Former Vice- Chancellor of Madurai-Kamaraj University, Prof. T N V Rao, Retd. Professor of History, Presidency College, Dr. K N George, Director of Madras School of Social Work, Prof D Kamala Kannan, former Dy. Director of Collegiate Education, Prof. A Mahadevan, Director, CAS in Botany, University of Madras , Shri E R C Davidar, renowned Wildlife photographer, Shri V J Rajan, Hon Secy., Madras Naturalists Society, Mrs Tara Murali, Architect, Shri K Padmanabhan, Jt Secretary, MCCI and Shri H Nanjundan, Secretary Badaga Association of Madras.

The Meet's success owes in no small measure to the cooperation of the media, particularly the press, which gave nationwide coverage.

The Meet was sponsored by Development Promotion Group, Madras, which was represented at the meeting by its Hon. Consultant Shri R Bhakthar Solomon.

Shri. B J Krishnan, SNC President in his welcome address presented the major problems of Nilgiris. Shri. D Venugopal, SNC Secretary proposed a vote of thanks.

“RECOMMENDATIONS OF ECO-FOCUS ON NILGIRIS”

Apart from the proposal to set up a Nilgiris Development Authority, the “Eco-focus on Nilgiris” made comprehensive recommendations on several specific problems of Nilgiris. They were :

FOREST PROTECTION

- 1 There should be a total ban on clear felling of natural forest.
- 2 Degraded forests, particularly in catchment areas, should be immediately brought under afforestation.
- 3 In the interest of slope stability, further conversion of forest into plantations should be banned forthwith.
- 4 The current policy regarding extension of monoculture in tree plantations should be thoroughly reviewed keeping in view the spreading water famine in the district.
- 5 Social forestry programmes should give top priority to the fuel needs of rural, households.
- 6 There should be a reappraisal of policy regarding forest based industries depending on Nilgiris for raw material.
- 7 The grazing of goats in forest areas, particularly sanctuaries should be prohibited.
- 8 There should be greater restriction on the number of cattle allowed to graze in Reserved Forest areas.
- 9 Wider sale of firewood to be made at numerous centres at regulated rates by government agencies from wood made available from forest plantations specifically allocated for this purpose.
- 10 Alternate source of fuel to be arranged for areas in and around Ooty, particularly to the lower income groups.

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CENTRAL SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

Govt. of India

Ministry of Environment and Forest

March 23, 1987

Dear Shri Venugopal,

Thank you very much for your letter of 23rd March, 1987 regarding "Eco-focus on Nilgiris" – one day Meet at Madras on April 18, 1987 addressed to Shri T N Seshan, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi. I am directed to say that Shri Seshan will not be able to participate due to prior commitments and parliament work. Inconvenience caused is deeply regretted. However, Shri Seshan wishes the Meet Success.

With

regards

Yours sincerely

Sd/- (R.D. Sharma)

PS to Secretary

LAND USE

- 1 Frequent change in agricultural practices should be avoided.
- 2 Vegetable cultivation in catchment areas should be banned. If necessary, government should acquire such lands.
- 3 All idle revenue lands and surplus lands with quasi-governmental agencies should be transferred to Forest department for afforestation.
- 4 Agricultural Universities should study, evolve and advise a new, more suitable pattern of agricultural practices for the Nilgiris with particular reference to pasture improvement.
- 5 Consideration to be given to a re-classification of Forest and Revenue lands in sensitive areas.
- 6 Hill areas which are not to be planted with any crop, trees or farm to be demarcated and protected.
- 7 There should be stricter enforcement of the Revenue code where all water sources – streams, catchment areas, reservoirs – are situated.
- 8 There should be strict enforcement of the Tamil Nadu Hill Area (Preservation of Trees) Act.

TOURISM PROMOTION

Water and forest resources of Nilgiris have been over exploited and hence they must be allowed to regenerate themselves. Therefore there should be moratorium of ten years on tourism promotional activities. Whatever promotional measures are taken must be with a qualitative difference. Commercial interests and creature comforts should have low premium in tourism promotion. Fairs should be confined to vegetables and flowers. Trade fairs should be banned.

INFLUX OF POPULATION

- 1 Nilgiris is already over-populated. Anymore influx of people would endanger its fragile eco-system.
- 2 A survey must be undertaken to enumerate the Sri Lankan repatriates settled in the Nilgiris to assess their economic conditions including their encroachment of

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Forest and revenue lands. Adequate rehabilitation scheme must be instituted for them. Those who cannot be absorbed in the district should be resettled elsewhere. Influx of repatriates originally settled elsewhere into the district should be stopped at all cost. There should be an intensive family planning drive among the repatriates in the district.

URBAN AREAS

- 1 The lack of regular drainage system in urban areas of Nilgiris can have serious consequences. As a long term measure, drainage system for urban areas must be included as a priority item in development plans.
- 2 Coonoor town which appears to have “grown on its own accord without any control” needs massive corrective measures if the town is to be saved from landslides in future.
- 3 An Act to be passed so that planning permission is required for the construction of any building on any land whether government or private.
- 4 Regarding construction on slopes, better planning in designing the cuts in the slope and reduction of weight of buildings are needed. As a general suggestion for new buildings, light weight building material may be used in preference to heavy construction materials.
- 5 The government should restrict construction of buildings of any sort or colonisation in zones pronounced unsafe. No other considerations should outweigh environmental aspect.
- 6 Pending a development plan for urban areas, government should declare a moratorium on all construction of a commercial nature till civic amenities including water supply and drainage can be augmented adequately.
- 7 Govt. should consider legislation to severely restrict, if not ban, acquisition of real estate interests in the district by outsiders which alone can slow down commercialisation and speculation in the district.

SECOND SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

D K OZA, IAS

Govt. of Tamil Nadu
Second Secretary to Govt.
14.4.87

Dear Shri Venugopal

Many Thanks to your kind invitation to the Seminar on 18th of April. I regret I will not be able to come as I have some other engagements. It seems to me that two most important issues before India are Checking the growth of population and conservation of nature. Both these issues ought to be regarded as non-political. I greatly value and admire your efforts in trying to save Nilgiris for posterity.

Best Wishes

Yours sincerely
Sd/-
(D K OZA)

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OOTY LAKE

Construction and cultivating activities in the catchment areas of Ooty lake should be regulated to prevent siltation of the lake.

EDUCATION

- 1 School camps with teacher participation to be organised in forest areas where environment education will be given by forest staff.
- 2 Weekly periods of instruction to be given in all government schools on environmental and wildlife matters.
- 3 The forest department should make available nature films and slides for showing in all schools and colleges.

GENERAL

- 1 There should be a reappraisal of the existing legislations regarding eco-development, so that statutory loopholes can be plugged. There should be a comprehensive legislation for Nilgiris.
- 2 Re-introduction of the Wenlock Downs Committee or a similar body with wider power to advise on the development of urban areas and villages, in addition to the care of the aesthetic state of the Nilgiris.
- 3 Treks and walks to be encouraged to involve people in the country-side. Routes and tracks to be clearly marked and signposted along the way. Pamphlets to be available in the Tourist Office describing each route and the duration of the walk.
- 4 Camping sites to be set up on permanent basis at Mukurti Dam, Upper Bhavani and Parson's Valley for Youth Hostel parties and college students to serve as centres from which treks can be done as well as providing a rural holiday.
- 5 Rest areas can be made at roadsides in suitable places so that the public can relax and enjoy the countryside.
- 6 All areas with government buildings on them should have plans for tree planting and landscaping future buildings should be drawn up.
- 7 Corridor of movement for wildlife should be marked and preserved.
- 8 A safari park may be made for tourists at the Mudumalai sanctuary.

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ATTENTION READERS

YOUR CONSIDERED VIEWS PLEASE !

A separate Nilgiris Development authority, as recommended (See Page1) at the "Eco-focus on Nilgiris" is very likely to be set up. The Hon'ble Minister of Finance Shri V R Nedunchezian made a similar suggestion for a development authority for Ooty during his recent visit to Ooty in May.

When a delegation under SNC met the Governor of Tamil Nadu Shri S L Khurana, His Excellency too made a positive reference to a development authority for the Nilgiris.

Setting up a development Authority and preparation of a Master Plan are no mean tasks. However the tasks can be made more easier and meaningful

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if knowledgeable and public service minded local people put their heads together with the government. Hence we request you to do some serious thinking and send us your views/suggestions to be forwarded to the government. A Development plan or a Master Plan would cover the whole gamut of activities – agriculture, industry, commerce, forestry, tourism, construction, infrastructure and amenities, recreation, etc., etc. So your suggestions can be specific or general regarding one or more of these numerous activities. Your suggestions can be area-specific or subject-specific.

SNC PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS AT THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

World Environment Day was celebrated on June 5, 1987 at Ooty in a fitting manner. About thousand school children took out a procession through the main thoroughfare of the town carrying banners and placards with messages of conservation. At the end of the march the children were addressed by the District Collector, President of SNC Forest Officials, NSS officials etc.

Regretting that the children were generally unaware of the unique characteristics of Nilgiris, Mr. B J Krishnan, SNC President, pointed out that many natural features of Nilgiris were considered as natural wonders. He called upon the children to protect the natural heritage of Nilgiris.

Mr. Krishnan also indicated that SNC might undertake a major study to assess the condition of drinking water sources in Nilgiris.

STADIUM AT BREEKS GROUNDS, SNC DELEGATION MEETS GOVERNOR

A delegation under SNC met the Governor of Tamil Nadu Shri S L Khurana at Ooty on May 9 1987 and presented a memorandum requesting the Govt. of Tamil Nadu to reconsider the decision to construct a Sports Stadium at the Breeks ground.

Expressing the view that development projects in the Nilgiris should give priority in the Nilgiris should give priority to preservation, Shri Khurana suggested that the locals could suggest alternative location for stadium for consideration by government.

Readers are welcome to suggest alternative location for the stadium through this Newsletter.

The delegation included, apart from Shri D Venugopal, SNC Secretary Shri N N Vajifdar, Secretary, the Culture Club, Dr. M Halayya & Shri N Ramesh Basu of NHCAO, Shri G Ravindran of Breeks old Boys Assn. and Shri N Mohanraj, SNC Vice President.

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

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Edited & Published by D Venugopal, Co-ordinator , Save Nilgiris Campaign,22-C, Tirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Madras 600 018 Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No. 12

OCTOBER 1987

SNC GREETES NEW PRESIDENT FRIEND OF NILGIRIS IN RASHTRAPATHI BHAVAN

We record with great pleasure our hearty greetings to the new President of India, Shri. R Venkataraman who has had an abiding love for the Nilgiris and has keenly been interested in its development and welfare. Indeed the people of Nilgiris owe a big debt of gratitude to Shri Venkataraman.

It was Shri Venkataraman who organised the plantation workers in the Nilgiris on trade union lines way back in 1948. It was, again, Shri Venkataraman who, as the Industries Minister of the then Madras State, conceived the idea of bringing the small tea growers of Nilgiris within the ambit of the co-operative sector in the sixties. Thanks to his foresight and initiative, Nilgiris today can boast of being the only tea growing area in the country where small growers co-exist, in equal strength, with the plantations. He also played a notable role in the 80-crore Kundah Hydroelectric project in the Nilgiris.

Shri Venkataraman's interest in preserving the unique eco-system of Nilgiris is no less. Last year when SNC appealed to him that the Nilgiris was being over-exploited in the name of development, leading to serious ecological problems, he promptly responded by taking up the matter with the State Govt.

We are confident, Nilgiris would continue to enjoy his love and patronage and we hope the campaign to preserve the beauty, ecology and environment of these unique hills will make great strides during his tenure.

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CASE FOR STADIUM IN BREEKS GROUNDS

In the name of "Save Nilgiris Campaign" few are beating their drums against the construction of an open air stadium in Udhagai and putting up hurdles in the speedy construction of stadium. Do these people understand the need of Sportsmen of this reputed Hill District. With a lot of natural talents available in the district, we are not able to bring out their hidden talents due to lack of the basic need, a proper playground.

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We are amazed and bewildered by these stupid protests, which are made at the age when the whole world is striving to encourage and develop sports as an antidote to the falling health of the current generation. The government of India under the dynamic leadership of our young and energetic Prime Minister Sri Rajiv Gandhi, has taken up to develop sports in the country on war footing.

Likewise it is also the 'policy of our Hon'ble Chief Minister Sri M.G. Ramachandran, that every district headquarters should have an open air stadium. Thanks to their benevolent policy, many a district in the state is having a stadium. To implement this policy of our Hon'ble Chief Minister, the Collector of the Nilgiris has taken up much pains to construct a stadium and as such I request that hurdles in this process are to be stopped. Every nation in this universe is doing so much to develop sports but few of our stalwarts are beating their drums against such a scheme, which is totally not understandable.

They say, if a stadium is constructed a huge and massive construction comes up and spoils the beauty. How is it? In contrast a neatly laid down structure with clean look comes up instead of the existing ugly look. It is not going to be a huge "Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium" of Madras. It is going to be a compact structure covering the ground with modern amenities. Alas by this act of theirs, they want to deprive of these amenities to the starving sportsmen of the Nilgiris and the children of the Breeks Memorial School. When I mean children of Breeks Memorial School, they must understand that provision is made for the unreserved use of the ground by the children. We are also as much and even more interested in the development of the children as you do. It is an open air stadium and hence it will remain a lung of the town. But we do not understand the misuse of such a beautiful play ground as a car park. Dr. Halayya and others mention that the dumping of earth at the Breeks School ground is adding to the silt of the lake. This reasoning as no bearing. As in every developing work, once the surface work is completed it is going to be a lush green grass carpet where we can find no dent at all and no soil erosion. Dr. Halayya and others must understand that the silt is from soil erosion from Koddapamund due to cultivation there. Can they stop it? Some blabber "do we need a stadium in the Nilgiris?" We cannot understand what age they are living in?

I would like to draw their attention to the recent national games held at Mangalore in which a boy from the Nilgiris, Mr. Solaimuthu, has won the 1500 meter race with flying colours. Given proper facilities there are many more like him who will bring laurels to our district. By having a proper size ground with modern amenities we have, apart from our sportsmen getting good training, sportsmen from abroad who visit our country under cultural exchange, the sportsmen in our country will have the benefit of high altitude training which is a part of high efficiency training in sports of modern days. To put it in a nut shell, it is clear by their expression, all these people who are speaking against the construction of a stadium have little knowledge on the subject, but are victims of instigation.

These people are shouting so much against the construction of stadium today, where did they go all these days when all the parking lots around

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the main market and the beautiful hills around the town with full of trees were shaven and were turned into buildings for commercial purposes.

So I very humbly request them to lay down their drums and bingles, to allow the showpiece to come up fast adding beauty to beauty, to the Botanical Garden as well as to our district "THE NILGIRIS".

**-K.S. PADMARAJ
HON.SECY NILGIRIS DISTRICT
FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

The point of contention is not whether there should be a modern sports ground at the Breeks grounds. If a ground similar to, say, the MRC ground (with a well laid football ground in the middle and an athletics track around it) at Wellington is proposed, preferably with a natural hedge & trees around it, there may not have been any objection.

The present plan, as we are given to understand, is to have a monstrous concrete stadium with provision for shops around it. What damage this would do to the Breeks ground and its surroundings is obvious. This is what has been objected to, as it should be. Sports is important. So is environment. Let public money be well spent in the promotion of both – and not on one at the cost the other.

EDITOR

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NILGIRIS THE GLORY THAT IT WAS

The first record of Europeans having visited the Nilgiris occurs in a narrative written by a priest of the Christians of St. Thomas in 1602. A few years previously a report had reached the West coast that certain village "in a country called Todamal" were inhabited by people who had once been members of this Syrian Church, but then had nothing of Christianity but the name"; and in the above year Francis Roy, First Roman Catholic Bishop of the Syrian Church in Malabar, dispatched a priest and deacon of that community to verify the rumour. They reached "Todamala"; but their report not being considered full enough, the Reverend Ferreira was sent on a second mission. According to his narrative, he "proceeded via Manarecate (Manarghat)" accompanied by a native convert, "nephew of the Samur (Zamorin?) Rajah." Their route "led them over steep and rugged mountains infested with elephants and tigers." On the third day they "reached a Badaga village Meleuntao (Melkundah?)." Here they met the "chief of the Todas, but he gave no information to support the supposition" that either they or their ancestors ever had any-thing to do with any form of Christianity." So apparently the worthy priest (who does not explain how he contrived to converse with the Toda "chieftain") returned after a fruitless mission, no wiser than when he came. Then comes a hiatus of two hundred years before we get another record of European having penetrated these mountains' fastness. After the fall of Seringapatnam in 1799, the Marquis of Welleley thought that an economic survey of the country annexed by the British was desirable; and for this purpose Dr. Buchanan started from Seringapatanam on May 10th, 1800. On October 24th he had reached Danaya-

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kankota, a fort on the Bhavani a little below its junction with Moyar, and apparently the headquarters of the Revenue Division to which the unknown Nilgiris then appertained.

On the following day he “took a long and fatiguing walk to the top of the Western hills”, the spot he reached being probably Arakod, below Rangaswami’s Pillar. Dr. Buchanan does not seem to have carried his exploration of the hills further.

In 1812 Mr. Garrow, then collector of Coimbatore, sent a European surveyor named William Keys up to the Nilgiris. Six years later two sportsmen ascended the hills as far as Kotagiri “for shikar”. The glowing report they took back,

”particularly of the coldness of the climate”, induced a party to repeat the excursion in Jan, 1819. Mr. Garrow as Collector of Coimbatore, was member of this party; and his visit marks an epoch in the history of the Nilgiris, for he was so enraptured by the climate and scenery that he spared no effort to make the glories of the plateau known and to effect its colonisation. A long and interesting account appeared in the Government Gazette of January 30th, 1819. Mr. Sullivan was back in May of that year, accompanied by the naturalist Leschnault de la Tour. This visit resulted in a survey of the old Srimyagai Pass. Within a year, more than twenty Europeans had climbed the hills, including a lady: unfortunately the name of this lady has not survived; but as it is on record that “she gave her bearers very little trouble,” we may conclude that she was as charming as she was bold.

In March, 1821, a letter appeared in the Madras Gazette, giving a narrative of a journey to the “Mukurti belt, “in which occurs the first mention of Ootacamund, under the guise of “wotakymund.” If he was a sportsman, what wondrous sights this earliest visitor to the Kundahs must have seen! Next year a report by Assistant Surgeon Orton was published, in the course of which he writes, ‘in the Torder village of Wuttacamund I was informed that no death had happened for three years,” an early testimony to the salubrity of the climate. Meanwhile, in 1820, Mr. Sullivan has purchased from the Todas a site on the western slope of the Doddabetta, and there he built the first house, Stone house,” now the offices of the government. The house was close to the Toda village of Wottacamund and from this association the settlement took its name.

In 1823 a survey of the hills was carried out by captain Ward; and in this year Mr. Sullivan induced the Government to finish the road running across the hills to Wynaad by Gudalar, “thus completing the communication between the eastern and western coasts.” This, the old Ghat, is scarcely a triumph of engineering skill, being in places almost as steep as the wall of house; but it served a useful purpose till the Ghat was made, and is still the road used by foot passengers.

In or about 1828 the hills were transferred to the Malabar District. In 1943 Lord Tweeddale ordered the re-transfer of the eastern portion of the plateau to Coimbatore, leaving the tract west of the Pykara river to Malabar. In 1858 this latter tract and the Kundahs were brought under the jurisdiction of the Small Cause Court which had been established at Ootacamund. In 1863 the anomaly of dividing the hills between two Districts was annexed to the Coimbatore Collectorate. Five years later the importance of the Nilgiris was recognized, and they were formed into a separate District, Mr. Breeks being appointed the first

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Commissioner. In 1873 the Oucterlony Valley was added to the Nilgiris, and finally the Cherankod, Naebalakod and Munnana portions of South-eastern Wynand were transferred thus constituting the Nilgiris District as it stands today.

Writing on these early days, the shikari naturally draws a mental picture of what the hills must then have been. Verily the 'Old Forest Ranger' 'Hawlayee' 'rifles' and all the life of sportsmen who trod the hill in days of yore, must have walked in the Elysian Fields. Time and again old residents have told me how in those far-off days 'Ooty' was an earthly paradise, with snug bungalows half hidden in lovely sholas when folks walked or rode, and a carriage was unknown. The sambur roamed over every hill and harboured in every shola. Ibex were not far to seek, and the cherry crow of the junglecock from every thicket marked the opening and closing of the day. Elephants and Bison were found on the Kundahs; while tigers, panthers and bears were common all over the hills. But alas! The old order has changed; the dulce has given way to the utile; and Ootacamund, from a sportsman's standpoint has been shorn of its old time glories. The grand indigenous sholas have been cleared to make way for interminable forests of ugly eucalyptus and wattle, and before the advent of civilization the game has retreated to fastnesses among the distant western hills. Peafowl and bears are extinct on the plateau, while, where in former years Ibex and sambur roamed in herds, now you will not find one. The man who looks for sport in these degenerate days must wander far from the haunts of man, away up amongst the towering crags of the Kundahs. There atleast Dame Nature still reigns; and that her sway may continue undisturbed must be the prayer of every man who, like myself, loves the Blue Hills. But over the portals of modern Ootacamund, with its railway and its railway and its motor cars and all the other things that proclaim the march of progress, let there be written.

Sic transit Gloria (Ootaca) mundi.

-F.W.F. FLETCHER

“SAVE WESTERN GHATS” MARCH

It has been proposed to undertake a padayatra across the length of the western ghats to focus attention on the increasing damage being done to the ecology of the ghats. Leading ecologists of the country are expected to join the march which is coordinated by Shri. Kalanand Mani of Peaceful Society and Mr. Mohankumar of Kerala. The march, in two groups, will start from either end of the western ghats simultaneously on Nov. 1, 1987. One group will start from Kanyakumari and the other will start from Nawapur in Maharashtra. Both the groups will meet at Goa on Feb. 10, 1988.

The marchers, numbering about 30, are scheduled to reach Nilgiris on Dec.5, 1987. They will reach Gudalur on that day via Nilambur and Vashikkadavu and leave the next day via Nulpuzha and S. Battery. During their stay at Gudalur, they will address a public meeting.

Volunteers are welcome to join the marchers on the Nilgiri stretch of the padayatra as a gesture of solidarity.

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DIESEL FISH

As one of the deeply concerned natives of Nilgiris, I would like to identify certain areas where the greatest damage has been done in recent times to its ecology.

Nilgiris has been described as the “oxygen bank of Tamil Nadu”.

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The reputation is no longer there. The main reason for this is the loss of forests. The demolition of forests by Govt. departments for hydel scheme & others, poaching by private parties have resulted in drying up of natural water sources which in turn affecting the plant and animal life in the area. While power generation has its own importance, the water required for it is joint not there, the rains having disappeared with the forests. The Ooty lake, the tourists, delight, is another casualty. Substantial sums have been spent on cleaning the lake but with no success. Affluent from the surrounding workshops have caused considerable damage to the lake. This has also affected to fish in the lake. Local people complain that the fish sold to them by fisheries department small of kerosene and diesel.

The silt formation in the lake is so heavy that in a few years the Ooty lake may well turn into a football ground! (**Writes Shri. I. R. Loganathan, Madras**)

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BADAGA ASSOCIATION'S PLEA

The Badaga Association, Madras, in its General Body meeting on 6th Sept. has resolved to present a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu urging the Government among others, to

- a) Find a permanent solution to the water scarcity in the district
- b) Impose restriction on the influx of population from outside.
- c) Work out Comprehensive plans for preserving the ecological balance of the district
- d) set up a T.V. Relay station in the Nilgiris.

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FARMERS PLEA FOR LOCAL TREES

Members of the Farmers' Forum, Freedom Fighters Colony, Thittukkal, Ootacamund have represented to the district administration to cut down the existing eucalyptus trees and refrain from planting fresh ones in their area. They have claimed that eucalyptus trees have steadily lowered the water table in the area, besides eroding the soil. They have also pleaded for planting of native species instead. "We cannot even take shelter under a eucalyptus tree, as we do with a local tree, when it rains, was one of their laments.

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

HOTEL NATARAJ

OOTACAMUND

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Printed by G L N Bapeshwor at B S combine 274 T H Road Madras 21 Phone 55 37 74

(VOL I No. 12/P6)

save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No. 13

DECEMBER 1987

GUDALUR JANMAM FORESTS FOR PLANTATION PLANTERS' PLEA NOT NILGIRIS' CUP OF TEA

The Planters Association of Tamil Nadu wants about 30,000 acres (12,000 hectares) of virgin forest land in Gudalur, forming an integral part of the Western Ghats, to be converted into tea plantations. The matter has been under litigation for the past 18 years. SNC examines the various facets-historical, ecological, legal and moral- of the issue which could be a landmark in the environmental movement in the country and conclude its case for protecting these forests with a simple but incontrovertible fact. There are substitutes for tea. There is none for forests.

BACK DROP

We begin at the beginning. Gudalur is a picturesque taluk situated in the western part of the Nilgiris. It shares boundaries with Kerala (on the western and southern sides) and Karnataka (on the northern side). Gudalur covers an area of 1,78,431 acres comprising 12 revenue villages.

For our purpose here we can classify the lands in Gudalur as Janmam lands and non-Janmam lands. Non-Janmam lands are free hold patta lands. These lands do not concern us much here.

JANMAM SET UP

The Janmam lands were originally held by a few zamindari families of Kerala. These zamindars, who were members of a princely family, were called Janmies in Malayalam and their lands, Janmam Estate. The zamindari families were also collectively called the Nilambur Kovilagam.

The Nilambur Kovilagam owned 80,088 acres of land in the Gudalur taluk. The Janmies were mostly absentee landlords and therefore these lands were mostly possessed and cultivated by the lessees and encroachers under the Malabar Tenancy Act.

The Janmam lands were mostly rich rain forests of the classification "Sholas". The Janmam forests, which are an integral part of the Western Ghats, were so rich that a small sleepy town called Devala situated in their midst used to get the highest rainfall in the South, earning for itself the appellation "Chirapunji of South India".

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NILGIRIS' UNIQUE SHOLAS

The tropical montane environment (or the Sholas) in the Nilgiris should be recognised as a unique ecosystem. The Sholas, if once disturbed, can never stage a return to the forest physiognomy because of the inimical eco-climatic factors that prevail in the degraded open areas. For these very reasons, Vishnu-Mittre and Singh (1971) have termed the existing relics of the Nilgiris Sholas as "living fossil" forests. Their progressive disappearance means a gradual loss of genetic resource and reduction of biological diversity.

-V.M. MEHER - HOMJI

JANMAM ABOLITION

The Janmam set up was abolished in 1969 when the Tamil Nadu Government passed the Gudalur Janmam Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act. By virtue of this Act, which was actually an Act of agrarian reforms, the Government of Tamil Nadu (1) acquired the rights of the Jannies in the Janmam Estates and (2) introduced Ryotwari settlements in such estates. Under this Act all Janmam lands vested with the Government and the Govt. became the absolute owners of the Janmam lands. This Act provided for assignment of land to Jannies, lessees and encroachers who were in actual possession and cultivation of the Janmam lands.

The Assistant Settlement Officers appointed under the Act went into the various claims of the Jannies, lessees and encroachers and granted nearly 26,000 acres of land in favour of those who proved their personal possession and cultivation during the period stipulated in the Act.

The Act rightly barred the assignment of Forests in favour of anybody. An area of 12,427 acres was classified as Forests and handed over to the Forest and handed over to the Forest Department under the Act.

ENCROACHERS' PROBLEM

The problem of Forest encroachment in Gudalur taluk has few parallels. It all started at the time of Independence when the Government of then composite Madras State invited people to grow more food on the plains and slopes of Gudalur under the Grow More Food Campaign. The campaign was meant only for a year. But the encroachers stuck for good. Most the encroachers are from the neighbouring Kerala because of the geographical proximity. The encroachers destroyed the rich natural forests, reclaimed the lands and raised permanent crops there. Such encroachers were booked under the outdated Tamil Nadu Land Encroachment Act.

LAND ASSIGNMENT

The encroachments were both in Janmam and Non- Janmam lands. The encroachments in Government revenue lands were regularized in three stages under different schemes in 1964-65, 1971-74 and in 1977. An area of about 5,900 acres of revenue land had been regularised in favour of about 5,580 encroachers. All encroachments which existed prior to 30.6.1971 were regularised in pursuance of G.O. Ms.No.2405, Revenue Dept., Dt. 1.9.1971.

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Under the Janmam set up, encroachers and lessees have been assigned lands over an extent of 26,000 acres. Among the assignees 98% are from neighbouring Kerala.

JANMAM FORESTS

The encroachments in Janmam forests were not regularised in view of the statutory bar under the Gudalur Janmam Estate Abolition Act. However encroachers encroached into an extent of about 3,320 acres of forest land in both Janmam and Non-Janmam lands.

The Tamil Nadu Government determined to protect these forest lands under encroachment. Finding that the Land Encoachment Act was not effective enough to contain and clear the encroachments, the State Govt. amended the Tamil Nadu Forest Act of 1882 and enacted the Forest Amendment Act 41/1981. The act provides for summary eviction of encroachers from forest lands. Armed with this Act encroachments over an extent of 1,500 acres out of a total extent of 3,320 acres encroached was cleared during 1981. On Sept. 23, 1981, the Supreme Court stayed all further eviction in Gudalur taluk acting on a writ petition filed by Mr. M. J. Cherian and others in W.P. 7035/1981. This was followed by two more writ petitions in W.P. 5543/1982 and 5612/1982. All the writ petitions are pending final disposal. The hearing is on.

PLANTATION LEASES

The original Janmies had leased out an extent of 41,768 acres of land for the purpose of raising plantations on a long term basis. The bulk of the land covered by the plantation leases is situated in the Ouchterlony valley or O'valley

OH ! VALLEY !!

On the 28th Nov. 1986, Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chipko Leader, accompanied by SNC leaders, District Forest Officials and Mr. M.J. Cherian, a local lawyer and social activist made an extensive tour of the Gudalur taluk. visiting interior areas, Shri Bahuguna saw for himself the colossal damage being done to virgin forests by the encroachment of settlers from the neighbouring Keral State and repatriates from Sri Lanka on the one hand and big tea plantations owned by major industrial houses on the other. On the uniqueness of these forests, it is said, "The forest of Ouchterlony valley (the area of Mudumalai forests have a continuity of at least 67 million years – a proud heritage and a veritably rich gene bank". Later addressing Newsmen, Shri Bahuguna said the forests were being "butchered" in the Gudalur area.

Till the time of the Janmam abolition, the plantation lessees had converted about 11,000 acres of rich rain forests into plantations. The rest of the leased out area of about 30,000 acres of virgin forests is still intact. It is this chunk of virgin Shola forest which would become the bone of contention between the plantation lessees and the Govt.

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It is these rain forests that the planters now want for expansion of their plantations! And the proposed expansion is sought under the guise of earning more foreign exchange for the country and generating more employment opportunity for the rural poor.

LEGAL BATTLE

From the moment the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act was enacted in 1969, it has been challenged by vested interests in different courts in different forms. The Act was challenged both by the small encroachers as well as by the big plantation lessees.

M/s. Belmadies Estate, a plantation lessee, challenged the constitutional validity of the Act in the Supreme Court. But the Supreme Court, in its enlightened judgment (AIR 1973, Supreme Court, Page 2734) upheld the constitutional validity of the Act. However the Supreme Court struck down the vesting of the forest lands with the Government on the ground that such an act did not amount to an act of agrarian reforms.

In the subsequent year (1974) the Govt. of India by its 34th Constitutional Amendment included the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution of India. The Act was, thus, protected from any legal or constitutional attack by the aggrieved. It went beyond the scrutiny of any of the courts of the land. The Act having been given protection in the 9th Schedule, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu notified the Act of the 27th Nov. 1974.

COSTLY SLIP

Then, as a quirk of fate would have it, a slip on the part of the State Govt. opened up, as it were, the Pandora's box. Even as the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act was being given protection in the 9th Schedule, The Govt. of Tamil Nadu had issued notices to interested persons in these Janmam lands under the Land Reforms Act either innocently or ignorantly. The plantation lessees grabbed the opportunity with both hands and filled writ petitions in the Madras High Court contending that the Govt. should apply only the Land Reforms Act and not the

TEN LEGAL ACTS TO COUNTERACT ONE HUMAN ACT

Legal action to protect the Janmam forests have involved the following ten national and State Acts.

The Tamil Nadu Forest Act 1882.

The land Encroachment Act.

The Madras Tenancy Act 1929.

The Tamil Nadu preservation of Private Forest Act 1949.

The Tamil Nadu Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act 1955.

The Tamil Nadu Private Forest (Assumption of Management) Act 1961.

The Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari Act 1969.

The Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

The Forest Conservation Act 1980.

The Tamil Nadu Forest (Amendment) Act 1981.

Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act to the lands under their lease.

The High Court, however, rejected the contention of the plantation lessees and held that the Govt. of Tamil Nadu was perfectly within its right to invoke the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act in respect of Janmam lands.

The plantation lessees appealed to the Supreme Court and the appeals have been pending for the last 10 years. Thus a routine slip on the part of the bureaucracy led to a series of protracted legal battles between the Tamil Nadu Govt. and the plantation lessees.

ENTER PAT

With the Supreme Court likely to take up the final hearing of the appeals of the planters any time now, the Planters Association of Tamil Nadu (PAT) have, curiously, entered the picture. On the occasion of the 34th annual conference of PAT on Sept. 28, 1987, the Chairman of PAT urged the Govt. to review its land policy which barred the clear felling of forests land for purpose of expansion of plantations and to release more lands for the expansion of tea plantations.

The PAT submitted that the land for expansion of tea plantations in Tamil Nadu was available from two sources :

1. About 4000 acres (1700 hectares) of, what according to PAT, “uncultivated” land been allowed by the Land Board to retain with them for future expansion under the Land Reforms Act, but which could not be used for planting so far because of the refusal of the Forest Dept. to grant permission for clear felling under the Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act and the Preservation of Private Forests Act. (See box for SNC’s stand on this)

2. Nearly 30.000 acres (12,000 hectares) covered under the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act which has been under protracted litigation for the last 18 years as mentioned earlier. According to PAT, its members who were involved in this litigation were prepared to come to a mutually satisfactory settlement with the Govt., if they could be assured of security of tenure by granting of pattas in respect of the planted area and ancillary lands.

SNC SPEAKS OUT

As a movement which has been fighting for the ecological balance of Western Ghats in general and Nilgiris in particular, SNC considers it its duty to speak out on the crucial environmental issues arising out of the planters’ plea to the Govt. We are asked what has the ecological balance of western ghats and Nilgiris got to do with the Janmam lands of Gudalur. The answer is simple. The Janmam lands, especially the virgin Shola forests situated there-in, are an inseparable segment of the Western Ghats. And Western Ghats are the “overhead water tanks” of the country. Hence our protest.

SNC understands that the Govt. of Tamil Nadu had been trying to expedite the final hearing of the appeals of the planters in the Supreme Court with little success. Various factors have contributed to this delay.

LAW IS CLEAR

The Law would appear to be quite clear on the request of the planters to convert the remaining 30,000 acres of Janmam forests into tea plantations. Under the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act, nobody can touch these forests. As mentioned earlier, the Act enjoys constitutional protection in the 9th Schedule. Moreover these forests cannot be

converted into plantations in view of the statutory bar of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.

GOVERNMENT OPTIONS

Further, under the Gudalur Janmam Estates Abolition Act, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu in public interest, is within its rights to terminate the lease-hold rights of the plantation lessees and take over the planted areas. As the Act stands at present, the plantation lessees cannot be conferred with the assignment right in respect of the planted area. Of course, the Govt. has also the option to either renew the lease on the same terms and conditions or on fresh terms.

SNC's APPEAL

Taking a holistic view, there are two real issues in this case. One, the need for increasing tea production. This is the planters' plea. True, we need more tea. It is the poor man's drink, nay, food. We also need the valuable foreign exchange it has been earning the country. But can we afford to have

ALL FORESTS MUST BE SAVED

According to PAT, 1700 hectares of "undeveloped" lands in the state allowed to them under the Land reforms Act could not be converted into tea plantations because of the refusal of the Forests Dept. to grant permission for clear felling under the Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act and Preservation of Private Forests Act. Why is the Forest Dept. refusing permission?

The Forest Dept. is refusing permission for the simple reason that the area sought by the planters is forests, though the planters conveniently choose to call it as "undeveloped" land. Otherwise why would the planters seek permission under two enactments relating to forests. Moreover, the planters have applied for clear felling. Clear felling of what? Obviously the trees. What trees? Obviously natural forests. Or why would they seek clear felling?

The plain truth is that the planters are seeking to convert 1700 hectares of natural forests into tea plantations. Natural forests especially the "Shola" forests of Nilgiris are fast vanishing. Do the planters want to accelerate the destruction? Conversion of these forests into tea plantations would mean converting natural forests of rich genetic diversity into that of a monoculture. Scientifically it is an established fact that all monocultures – whether it be tea or eucalyptus or something else – should be within their specified limits. And tea has taken its toll in Nilgiris.

In any case, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu, it would appear, cannot accede to the request of the planters in view of the Govt. of India's Forest Conservation Act of 1980. This Act, which SNC considers as the greatest contribution of the late Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi to the country, prohibits the conversion of forest for non-forestry purposes. This Act holds good for private forests also. SNC hails the Tamil Nadu Govt. for its stand. Natural Forests in the state cannot and should not be converted into tea or any other plantations.

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more tea and foreign exchange at the cost of forests which are necessary for our very survival? Especially, in a sensitive place like Nilgiris which is a crucial link in the Western Ghats? Today we are not only aware the consequences of deforestation we actually face them. That being so, is it not suicidal to want to destroy 30,000 acres of natural forests? Let us, for argument's sake, grant that the effects of deforestation on rainfall is not conclusively established and we turn the forests into tea plantations. Can we have the forests back if at a later date it is conclusively established that without forests there is no rain nor life? Ignorance has already cost the country millions of acres of valuable forests. Satellite pictures show that the forest cover in the country is barely 11% as against a minimum requirement of 30%. Can't we take a lesson from the unprecedented drought stalking the country right now? Remember "Forests precede man and Deserts succeed them".

LIFE GIVER

Listen to what the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI), Ooty have to say. "There is need (in the Nilgiris) for protection and preservation of native Shola forests, which are now found in remnants, that can provide crystal clear, unpolluted, perennial water supply to the towns and villages, and also can fight atmospheric pollution". Should we turn these precious, life-giving Sholas into tea plantations?

SOIL LOSS

The CSWCRTI have also clearly established that "tremendous soil loss will be observed from the newly cleared areas (for raising tea)". Experiments have shown that soil loss in newly cleared areas exceed that of potato even under the "up and down" method which is the worst soil eroder in the Nilgiris. When soil erosion in the Nilgiris has reached critical proportions, would not asking more areas for tea tantamount to asking the anaemic to donate blood?

THE VERDICT

Here is the final verdict. The Geological Survey of India which made a thorough study of the Nilgiris' ecology after the disastrous floods of 1978 categorically concluded "The authors feel that in the interest of slope stability and hence in the interest of the district, further conversion of forests into plantations, governmental, quasi-governmental or private, should be barred forthwith by the government". Surely, the GSI did not say this in jest?

GENE BANKS

Moreover the forests of Gudalur have been aptly called "gene banks". The genetic diversity of these forests which have evolved over millions of years, is a common heritage of the country. Who knows what treasures these forests hold in the field of medicine and other sciences that research can unlock in future?

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

The other issue that may be involved here is economic. Will the planters be affected if their plea is turned down? Evidently, not. Unlike in the rest of the district, the plantations in Gudalur are owned by big business and industrial houses. They would hardly be affected if they are not able to bring a few more thousands of acres under their

estates. On the other hand, they have a moral responsibility to protect and preserve Nilgiris which has been earning crores of rupees for them and millions of foreign exchange for the country.

PRESTIGE?

Often in our country cases are fought indefinitely for the sake of prestige. We hope it is not the case here. If the planters win, people will have more tea. If they give up or lose people will have more water, soil and pure air. The planters should know which would enhance their prestige more.

NO BENEFIT

Another argument may be that more plantations would mean more employment and more benefit to the Nilgiris. More employment, Yes. More benefits. No. Traditionally plantations in Nilgiris have attracted only migrant workers whose number has reached alarming proportions with worrisome implications to the district. This is one of the major problems concerning the people and the Government now. This being so, more plantations would only mean more migrants and more trouble for this tiny, fragile district.

Last but not the least, the problem of the encroachers. Encroachment into the Gudalur forest cannot be justified just because the encroachers happen to be poor. What id every poor does that? The encroachments here are doubly objectionable as the encroachments are from the neighbouring state. No doubt, the forest lands have to be taken back from the encroachers. If the encroachers indeed have no other source of livelihood, it should not be difficult for the Centre or the State Governments involved to help them find alternative employment on humanitarian grounds.

We conclude our appeal reminding a simple but incontrovertible fact. For tea (planters's case) and employment (encroachers' case) there are substitutes. But for forests, on which the survival of all depends, there are none.

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This issue of the Newsletter is financed by

DEVEOPMENT PROMOTION GROUP

MADRAS

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(VOL I No. 13/P8)

save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL I No. 15

JULY 1988

OVERWHELMING RESPONSE TO

SAVE NILGIRIS RUN

They were all there. Men and women, young and aged, rich and poor. About 1500 of them. Most of them had come in groups- Anglo Indian Association, Magalir Mandram, Bank staff, village youth clubs, public schools, Government schools, industrial schools, college students, sports clubs, chamber of commerce, hoteliers association and even cine stars fan clubs. Each group carried its own banner of placard with the "Save Nilgiris" message. They had come from all parts of the Nilgiris. A strong contingent of 50 boys and girls had also come from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

They were all there at the Hindustan Photo Films (HPF) gate on the morning of May 18, 1988 to take part in the SAVE NILGIRIS RUN.

SNC organised the Run to rouse public opinion to the deplorable environmental conditions in the Nilgiris. The Run was timed to coincide with the peak summer season when lakhs of tourists and locals throng the streets of Ooty.

The Run was well advertised. Nearly one thousand posters in English and Tamil were displayed all over the district. Slides were shown in cinemas. Banners were put in busy areas. About 10,000 hand bills were distributed. Moreover, leading dailies carried announcements about the Run.

To add colour to the Run, SNC provided 500 white T-shirts to the runners. A sponsor provided another 400 T-shirts. Both had "SAVE NILGIRIS" written in bold on both sides.

Around 11.30 a.m. SNC president Shri. B. J. Krishnan welcomed the participants. Rt. Rev. William Moses, Bishop in Coimbatore, who was good enough to provide the 400 T-shirts, blessed the Run. Shri P.R.S. Rao, Chairman and Managing Director of HPF inaugurated the Run. Shri. K. S. Sripathy, Collector of Nilgiris, flagged off the Run.

The runners, then, surged through the main road from HPF to the Brecks grounds (near the Botanical Garden) where the Run culminated. The runners passed through idyllic suburbs and busy thoroughfare of Ootacamund. Whenever they stopped to regroup, their enthusiastic shouts of "Save, Save Nilgiris" rent the air.

Shortly before 1 p.m. the runners entered the Brecks ground where a big crowd including a group of Todas awaited them. Traditional Kota music greeted the runners. At 1 p.m. sharp, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, His Excellency Dr. P.C. Alexander arrived to a rousing welcome with the Kota band playing its haunting music, the Todas and Badagas greeting with their traditional shouts of welcome and the crowd roaring "Save, Save Nilgiris". The shouting reached a crescendo,

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when one of the runners accompanied by an elderly Toda walked up to the Governor and presented the appeal, printed in a satin and velvet scroll.

Shri.K.S. Sripathy, Collector of Nilgiris, presided over the meeting. Shri. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, then, read out the following appeal presented to the Governor:

“TIME RUNNING OUT FOR NILGIRIS”

1. “The magnificent Western Ghats and its inseparable mountain country Nilgiris are considered to be natural wonders by scientists and naturalists. Nilgiris is one of the oldest land masses of our mother planet. The Himalayas are much younger than the Nilgiris. The flora and fauna are varied and unique. It has a unique eco-system. Five of the major rivers of our State Kundah, Pykara, Bhavani, Moyar and Punnampuzha have their origin here. Its rivers produce 40% of the hydel power of the State. Therefore it is described as the Oxygen Bank and the overhead water tank of the State.

2. In the name of development, both economic and industrial, the Nilgiris have been systematically destroyed in the last 25 years. The Government, the Industrialist as well as the people have contributed to this destruction. Government of Tamil Nadu have brought the major portion of the grasslands under eucalyptus plantation with the sole object of feeding a few wood based commercial industries. The planters have destroyed priceless shola forests to raise tea. Encroachers and land grabbers took the remaining forests to raise cash crops. The Nilgiris have lost about 90% of its original natural green cover. This has resulted in erratic rain pattern, water run off, soil erosion, flash floods and silting up of the dams.

3. The Government of India prescribes that hill areas like Nilgiris should have 60 to 65% forest cover. The State Government’s statistics would show that about 60% of the land in Nilgiris is having green cover. These statistics include mono-cultures of tea and eucalyptus. Any mono-culture is bad for the soil. Further the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research Institute at Ootacamund had scientifically established that the eucalyptus plantation drained the water table. The powerful Planters’ Association is threatening to destroy the remaining Janmam forest of Gudalur to raise tea.

4. The alarming increase in population had considerably contributed to the degradation of the Nilgiris. The local people have successfully adopted family planning to keep their family small but yet the population of Nilgiris had doubled in the last 15 years. This is due to the rootless migrants settling down in the hills. And these unfortunate humans have settled down in ecologically sensitive areas. Their encroachment was not stopped by the Government.

5. Ootacamund, once the Queen of Hill Stations, is a shanty town now. Unplanned urban development is directly traceable to the non-implementation of the inadequate Municipal Laws. People have built regular buildings on the Municipal roads and Highways. One can build any building anywhere in the town and still get the Municipal sanction. In a town, where one should get water in abundance, water scarcity has become a way of life. People live with it. In the much talked about Parson’s Valley Schemes we have everything but water. Insensitive Government of the past, greedy industrialists and ignorant masses have contributed to the present state of affairs of Nilgiris.

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6. Your Excellency, we are children of the mountain. We could not be a silent spectator to the mindless destruction of the gift of God. In 1986, a few concerned citizens among us formed a small group to arouse environmental awareness about the ecological disaster. Sri. R. Venkataraman, who was the Vice-President of India that time blessed such a campaign. In the last two years the campaign has become a people's movement now. The citizens who have assembled here are a proof to the concerned campaign of the SNC. The Save Nilgiris Campaign is at present the Central Convener of the Save Western Ghats Movements.

7. Your Excellency, we have a few suggestions to save Nilgiris from the imminent threat. We submit the following for the Government's immediate consideration :

i) The Government of Tamil Nadu should constitute a Hill Area Development Authority to coordinate all the ongoing developmental activities in these Hills. The approach of the Hill Area Development Project is adhoc and piece-meal. The Hill Area Development Authority should be a Statutory Authority and its Chairman should be in the rank of a Chief Secretary . The noble concept of "conservation is development" should be the spirit behind the Authority.

ii) There should be a total ban on felling of natural trees, wherever they are found- forest or revenue, private or public. We consider the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 as the greatest contribution of our late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi to the cause of conservation. A similar Act can be enacted by the Government of Tamil Nadu banning the felling of all natural trees in these hills.

iii) There should be an immediate ban on encroachments and subsequent assignment of Government lands in catchment and forest areas. The water catchment areas of Nilgiris should be identified and declared as protected area. A legislation may be necessary in this regard. Government should make drastic changes in the out-dated Land Encroachment Act, if the remaining areas are to be protected.

iv) The Government should ban any kind of cultivation on hill tops and steep slopes. These areas should be reserved for raising native trees.

v) There should be a master plan for Ootacamund town. Town Planning Rules should be made more stringent and they should be followed strictly. There should be a ban on multistoried buildings. The Geological Survey of India have identified ecologically sensitive areas in the town. In these locations construction activities should be banned totally. These suggestions are only illustrative. Your Excellency, time is running out for Nilgiris. We request you to save our Nilgiris.

"NILGIRIS WOULD BE SAVED" : GOVERNOR

Replying to the appeal, the Governor, Dr. P.C. Alexander expressed his happiness at the "original, innovative and enterprising" manner in which the Run had been organised to draw public attention to the environmental problems of Nilgiris.

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Dr. Alexander pointed out that people world over were seeking to draw public attention to the various causes through events like the Save Nilgiris Run. He mentioned particularly the campaign for famine relief in Ethiopia and the worldwide campaign against nuclear weapons in this context. Congratulating SNC for organizing the Run, the Governor said that he readily accepted to participate in the Run because he truly wanted to lend his support to the cause of Nilgiris.

Recalling his many visits to the Nilgiris during his college days, the Governor regretted how much the place had changed over the years. He was pained, he said to see the bare mountains and cultivations and encroachments on steep slopes.

The Governor said that unchecked population was the root cause of the various problems afflicting the country. It was this pressure of population which forced people to migrate to places like Nilgiris and encroach

Indiscriminately on ecologically sensitive areas with its attendant consequences, he explained.

While conceding that the damage to the Nilgiris' environment and ecology was of a serious nature the Governor felt that the Nilgiris could still be saved. Though he might not be able to do all that SNC had asked in the appeal, he assured that he would attempt to do some of them during his tenure. The Governor sought the co-operation of the public and SNC in this regard. He wanted SNC to create awareness not only in the Nilgiris but outside also, so that tourist too could appreciate the need to preserve Nilgiris.

Dr. Alexander concluded his ten minute address with an expression of confidence that "Nilgiris" should be saved and Nilgiris will be saved."

Bahugunaji Commends Run

In a message released on the eve of the Run, Shri. Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chipco leader. Who was undergoing treatment at Coimbatore, commended SNC and the Save Nilgiris Run. He stated in the course of the message, "Nilgiris is the source of economic prosperity of the plains of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. I hope the hill people living in the Nilgiris will become a source of inspiration to all those who are striving to re-establish the long lost harmonious relationship between man and nature.... I am sure that the hill people as those in Himalayas will revolt against all attempts to destroy the forests and the scenic beauty of Nilgiris."

Video Cassette of Run

The Run was widely covered in the press – national and local. The Madras Doordarshan was also good enough to cover the Run in their Newsreel. Our thanks to them all.

We have made a Video Cassette of the Run. It runs for little more than an hour and includes the speeches made at the HPF gate as well as at the Brecks grounds. The cassette, produced by Shri. Das (M/s Wilson Studio), also presents the natural glory of Nilgiris and the degradation it has suffered in recent times.

Copies of the cassette can be had from us @ Rs. 300/- per copy for institutions and Rs. 200/- per copy for individuals.

SAVINGS WESTERN GHATS... FROM A MARCH TO A MOVEMENT

The one hundred-day long Save Western Ghats March covering a distance of 3000 Km across the six States which the Western Ghats system abuts concluded at Ponda, Goa on 29th February 1988. At the end of the march, nearly 500 concerned citizens consisting of the marchers, social-activists, environmentalist and journalists converged at Ponda for a 2 day camp-conference to share their experience and agony. About 150 Voluntary Organisations participated in the March and the subsequent conference. A seven member delegation attended the conference on behalf of the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

There was an honest and sincere attempt at the conference to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the march. On the positive side, perhaps, for the first time the eco-focus was on the Western Ghats of the peninsular India. Hitherto the emphasis was exclusively on the – Himalayas; and that too long at that. Secondly about 500 concerned citizens with different ideologies and drawn from different spectra of society joined together for a common cause namely to Save the Great Ghats. This coming together in itself is an achievement. And more important, the march has drawn the attention of the nation to the fast deteriorating eco-systems of the Western Ghats.

Creating environmental awareness was important; but equally important was the follow-up action after the march. It was one of the objectives of the march to bring together all the Voluntary Organisations working in the Western Ghats region formulate common long term environmental action programmes. For effectual co-operation among these Voluntary Organisations and for initiating follow-up action, it was broadly agreed in the conference that the Save Western Ghats Movement- perhaps as a sister-movement in the South to the Chipko of the north.

THE MOVEMENT

After the birth of the Save Western Ghats Movement a new Central Coordination Committee (CCC) was formed. This was in addition to the existing Central Organisation Committee (COC) of the Western Ghats March.

The conference passed, among others, three resolutions condemning (a) Conversion of 30,000 acres of Jannam forest land into tea Plantations in Gudalur Taluk (b) Setting up of an electroplating unit at Masinagudi and (c) the large scale growing of eucalyptus in Nilgiris and Palani hills for the use of wood based industries.

The COC and CCC met at Bangalore during the first week of April 1988 as scheduled. Following the successful completion of the SWG march, the central Organising Committee ceased to exist after the Bangalore meet. The CCC of the SWGM constituted six working groups to look after (1) policy matters (2) revegetation (3) Water conservation and management

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(4) environmental awareness (5) people's action for environmental protection and (6) legal protection of environment, by way of follow up action. Dr. Kailash Chandra Malhotra (Calcutta), Mr. Anant Hegde (Karnataka), Mr. Kumar Kalanand Mani (Goa), Mr. Arun Vinayak (Maharashtra) Mr. Dinanath Manohar (Maharashtra) and Mr. B.J. Krishnan (Tamil Nadu) were appointed Conveners of these working groups.

CCC MEET AT OOTY

The Save Nilgiris Campaign will host the next Central Coordination Committee Meeting of SWGM at Ootacamund, Nilgiris during the first week of September 1988. SNC president Mr. B.J. Krishnan will be its Central Convener till September 1988. The Central Convener and Central Coordination Committee are only interim arrangements; and elected body is expected to replace this arrangement in about nine months time.

The Save Nilgiris Campaign is engaged at present in bringing all the Voluntary environmental Organisations of Tamil Nadu under one umbrella namely the Save Western Ghats Movement. All such environmental groups of Tamil Nadu are requested to contact the SNC president for further details at the following address for the said purpose. B.J. KRISHNAN, PRESIDENT, SAVE NILGIRIS CAMPAIGN, NAHAR BUILDINGS, CHARRING CROSS, OOTACAMUND, NILGIRIS.

Worldwide Support to SNC Cause

Thanks largely to the recent article "Nilgiris – A Living Fossil" in the Illustrated Weekly of India by Claude Alvares, our campaign against the conversion of 30,000 acres of janmam forest land in Gudalur taluk into tea plantation has attracted the attention of environmentalists and other concerned people in and outside the country. We have received over 50 letters so far from different parts of the country and from UK expressing solidarity and support to our cause. We thank them all and reproduce below two representative letters:

Respected Sir,

My name is Peeyush Sekhsaria. I am 13 ½ years.

I was shocked when I read the article "A LIVING FOSSIL" in the Illustrated Weekly. At the same time I also came to know about "Save Nilgiris Campaign". I would like to take active part in it and also receive your monthly newsletter. I request you to send me the membership form and details about the campaign.

Peeyush Sekhsaria
Pune

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to protest about the destruction of virgin forest in the Western Ghats by the actions of the powerful tea plantations associations.

There are very few places left in the world that have completely unspoilt forest. India is lucky to have such a forest as this, where animal and plant species are allowed to live undisturbed. This is a priceless environment.

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It is no surprise to hear of the greed of the big business attacking the poor and natural resources in India or anywhere else. Greed is responsible for most of the ills of the planet, ignorance is responsible for most of the rest. In this instance greed and ignorance play the major roles together in an orgy of destruction and lust of money.

The Indian government must intervene to immediately halt the destruction of this forest. It must not sit by and wait for the revenue. It must not imagine that the rest of the world does not know who is behind the rape of Indian heritage. The world is changing. No longer will the citizens of the world allow themselves to be abused and exploited. We know now the value of the world's natural resources and we know which governments are the main culprits in the destruction of the earth.

This world does not belong to mankind, particularly 20th century man, we are just the present caretakers. Our children, yours and my children and grandchildren, will inherit what this generation leaves, if it leaves anything but dust.

The Indian government must set an example for other governments to follow. Stop this destruction now. I am ashamed of what Britain has done to the world, a world which belongs to us all. Are you ashamed of India's record?

Yours sincerely
M.T. Barker
Cheter, UK.

(Letter addressed to the Indian Embassy at London)

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New Book on Nilgiris

John Sullivan and After. June 15th was the bicentenary of the birth of John Sullivan in London. While there is no memorial to him in the Nilgiris, his memorial is in a sense everywhere, for it was he who founded Ooty, introduced tea, potatoes and several other important crops, spurred the building of ghat roads, and indeed did much else besides. His impact was wide-spread and permanent.

A full account of Sullivan's work in the Nilgiris forms just one small part of new book to appear later this year from Oxford University Press (New Delhi). It is titled Blue Mountains the Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region (Paul Hockings, ed), and is in fact the first general book to appear on the Nilgiris since the District Gazetteer of 1908.

The book is made up of fifteen chapters by a dozen of the leading scholars to have worked in the Nilgiris over the past Half century. Among these authorities, both Indian and foreign, are such well known names as David G. Mandelbaum And M.B. Emeneau. In each case they have written new chapters on their research specially of this book, which will cover each of the main local communities (Badagas, Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irullas, Mullukurumbas); surveys of the each of the main surveys of the geography and botany, archaeology and linguistics, primatology and cultural ecology; and estimate of the impact of the British on Nilgiri institution.

We hope that a later issue of this Newsletter will be able to carry a review of the book.

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“Counsel from the Ancients”

By Paul Hockings

This book published by Mount de Gruyer (Berlin, West Germany) in May 1988, presents the first textual analysis and translation of material from the Badaga language. The book contains a list of over 1700 proverbs (Hethappa Mathu) of the Badagas. The book also contains a non-technical account of the Badaga community and their oral literature.

A full review of the book will be carried in the next issue of the Newsletter. Those who would like to but copies of the book may please write to us.

Seminar on “Conservation and Ecological Management of the Western Ghats Through Land Use Planning”

The above Seminar, held on March 4-6, 1988 at Kodaikanal, was organised by the Palani Hills Conservation Council (PHCC). About eighty persons including most of the noted environmentalists in the country participated.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, President, participated on behalf of SNC. He presented a comprehensive “Situation Report” on Nilgiris titled “A popular movement to save Nilgiris”. He also spoke in the Technical Session on “Urban development and Tourism” with reference to Nilgiris.

The success of the elaborately arranged seminar was largely due to the tireless work put in by Mrs. & Mr. M.S. Viraraghavan, the PHCC president.

A privileged pat for SNC

I am a great admirer of your devoted efforts to “Save the Nilgiris”. I know how difficult it is to carry on such campaigns, to awaken and arouse the people for an important cause to run a magazine, and often, despite public apathy, continue. I hope you will continue.

*Shri D.K. OZA, IAS
MADRAS*

This issue was financed by Messrs. B.J. Lakshmi and Vani Raman

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL II No. 1

JANUARY 1988

SNC's ECO-FOCUS ON NILGIRIS II

“ENDANGERED WATER SOURCES”

The one day Workshop for People's Representatives sponsored by the **Department of Environment (Govt. of India)** was held on 16-12-87 at Thamizhagam Ooty.

The object of the Workshop was to focus people's attention on a central environmental problem facing the Nilgiris – drying up water sources.

Invitations were sent to 150 elected representatives comprising of MLAs, Municipal Chairmen and Councillors, Panchayat Union Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen and Panchayat Presidents and Vice Presidents. Out of 150 invited, 94 attended despite heavy rains and landslides resulting in road communication in the district being totally cut off for two days. The commencement of the workshop was delayed by an hour and a half.

Apart from the participants, about thirty invitees comprising District Officials, representatives of Social organisations and Leading citizens attended.

Prominent among the invitees who attended were Shri K. Chidambaram, DFO(North), Shri. S.Ramanathan, DFO(South), Shri K.S. Neelkantan, Wild life Warden, Dr. N. Basuvaiah, Senior citizen and past Chairman of Ooty Municipality, Shri. C.R Venkatasubban, Dr. S. RamaKrishnan, Past President of Rotary Club and Citizen's Forum, Shri B. Palaniappan, Hon. Wildlife Warden, Dr. M Halayya, and Shri Nandi.

The Hindustan Photo Films (public sector undertaking), Ooty sponsored five of its employees to attend the Workshop on special leave.

Shri. B.Gurudev Singh, Research Officer, attended on behalf of the Forest College Coimbatore.

The Workshop began with the welcome address by Shri. B.J. Krishnan, President of the SNC. Mr. Krishnan traced the rapid growth of SNC within the short span of two years of its inception and sought the cooperation of the people's representatives in the mammoth task of making the people aware of the serious environmental threats facing the Nilgiris. Rapidly worsening water situation, he pointed out, was a central problem.

The Collector of the Nilgiris Shri. K.S. Sripathy declared the Workshop open. Mr. Sripathy's participation was a pleasant surprise. In the last moment he cancelled his scheduled visit outside the district and attended the Workshop. Hence the omission

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of his name in the invitation.

Mr. Sripathy said it was high time the people woke up to the many environmental ills afflicting them. He further sought a balance between development and ecological preservation.

In his presidential address, the Conservator of Forests, Nilgiris Circle, Shri V.R. Chitrapu listed the various steps being taken by the forest department to protect the Nilgiris' forests which, he said, was much better preserved than in most other places. He explained the many conflicts between individual and social interests in protecting the forests and trees. While defending the rapid growth of monoculture of eucalyptus plantations in the Nilgiris, both by the Government and the people he added that a beginning has been made in diversifying into a multi-culture plantations of native species.

Shri. B.Vijayaraghavan, Chairman, Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, who has been(as he himself acknowledged) closely associated with SNC for the last two years inaugurated the Workshop.

Voluntary bodies are necessary for the "emotional" awakening of the people to the environmental problems, he said.

He called on the environmentalists to be practical and said that a great deal more of research was needed to understand the nuances of ecological protection.

Mr. Vijayaraghavan made a particular mention of the protection of wetlands.

Mr. Vijayaraghavan said that one of the major hurdles in the way of environmental protection was that the various Government departments and agencies engaged in development often work at cross purposes. The good work that was done by one department was easily offset by the activities of another department. "It is the occupational malaise of even senior government servants that they are loyal only to the chair on which they sit for the time being even if their gains inflict severe losses to the total system", he said.

Mr. Vijayaraghavan repeated his suggestion for setting up a Hill Area Development Authority for which he had initiated steps at the governmental level. He wanted sufficient statutory powers for such an Authority for an integrated approach to the protection of Hill areas in general and the Nilgiris in particular.

The role of the proposed Authority would be two-fold, according to Mr.Vijayaraghavan. One, monitoring. It would constantly monitor the man-nature interface and assess the human impact on the environment in the district such as damage to natural forests, abuse of watersheds, etc. Two, it would prepare and implement a master plan for the Eco-development of the Nilgiris.

After the inauguration, Mr. R. Radcliffe, Vice-President of the Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association delivered his special address. Speaking from his own long experience in the Nilgiris and with statistics, he said that the amount of rainfall in the Nilgiris on the whole has not changed over the years though the average number of rainy days has significantly come down. Thus the new phenomenon of fewer rainy days but heavier rains. This coupled with the faulty land use in the district had greatly aggravated soil erosion and sedimentation of

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reservoirs, Mr. R. Radcliffe said. Faulty land use more than deforestation was according to him, the major problem in the Nilgiris.

Mr. Radcliffe wanted surplus waters from electricity board reservoirs to be supplied to the nearby villages which have lost their traditional water sources.

With Mr. Radcliffe's address, the forenoon session came to a close.

After lunch, Mr. B. Raghunath, Senior Technical Officer, Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI) delivered the Thematic Address. The CSWCRTI paper prepared specially with a popular appeal in mind was received with all appreciation by the participants. For the benefit of those who could not follow English, a Tamil translation, prepared with no less diligence, was provided. The CSWCRTI paper, intended as a primer for all those interested in the ecological protection of the Nilgiris, listed the problems specifically and comprehensively and suggested specific solutions based on its own long research in the field.

The Thematic Address was followed by Area report in which ten selected representatives of the people reported on the specific problems in their respective areas. Given below are the gist of the speeches made by senior representatives:

SHRI HUTCHI GOWDER, MLA, GUDALUR CONSTITUENCY

He said that the very fact that a campaign to save Nilgiris has been launched underscores the seriousness of the environmental problems on the district. Speaking from his own experience he said that eucalyptus dried up water sources like springs. Much of the environmental degradation could be avoided by the government officials if only they were more vigilant, he said referring to the alleged massive felling of government forest trees for illicit distillation of arrack.

Shri. K. Kallan, MLA, OOTY CONSTITUENCY

Mr. K. Kallan regretted that repeated appeals to the Government on the environmental problems of Nilgiris have had little effect. Even the social forestry scheme in the district had not had the desired effect, he added. He also drew attention to the allegation that lorry loads of illegally felled trees were being transported out of the district every day. Mr. Kallan quoted from conclusions of scientific meetings in Kerala and Karnataka and said that there was clear evidence that eucalyptus was a big drain on the dwindling water sources of Nilgiris.

Shri. B. Sundararajan, CHAIRMAN, OOTY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Mr. Sundararajan regretted that there was neither co-ordination nor co-operation between the various departments in the district. As an instance he pointed to the difficulties in clearing the encroachers in revenue lands as other departments unwittingly come to their (encroachers') support by issuing ration cards, electricity supply, bank credit, etc. He also referred to the loopholes in the various Laws and wanted special laws to be enacted for hill areas like the Nilgiris.

SHRI Y B.JOGHEE GOWDER, CHAIRMAN, COONOOR PANCHAYAT UNION

Exhorting the people to grow more trees, Mr. Joghee Gowder said that even if we could plant one tree per head per year, we could maintain

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the required tree cover. He also concurred with the general view that eucalyptus was harmful to water sources and asked the people and the government to plant water conservating native trees like the "Baige" (Salix).

He regretted that the people of Nilgiris were destroying themselves by letting their forests be used by the industries for the production of viscose, rayon, etc. in the plains.

Mr. Joghee Gowder said that the stone walls constructed for soil conservation in agricultural lands were not strong enough.

He concluded saying that trees were more dependable than children as an insurance against old age and retirement.

SHRI. J.HUTCHI GOWDER CHAIRMAN, KOTAGIRI PANCHAYAT UNION

Mr. Hutchi Gowder referred to the enormous increase in population in the Kotagiri taluk consequent to the influx of migrants and said that this posed a major threat.

SMT. PILJAIN, TODA LEADER

Complementing the forest department on the relatively better maintenance of Reserved Forests, Mrs. Piljain said that the revenue forests, on the other hand, were neglected. Stating that lorry loads of felled trees were being routinely taken out of the district, she wondered what the citizens could do to prevent it. She pleaded that encroachments on revenue lands should not be encouraged for political reasons. Among the other important points made was the one by a group of panchayat leaders from Gudalur which said that forest lands in Gudalur taluk should not be converted into tea gardens or plantations.

After the Area Report Mr. Chidambaram, District Forest Officer offered explanations to some of the specific complaints made against the Forest department.

Finally Shri. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, summed up the proceedings of the afternoon session with the following two clarifications sought by the participants. One, the citizens have a right to prevent illegal cutting of trees as enjoined on them by the Fundamental Duties of Citizens in regard to nature and environment as described under 51A (g) of the Constitution of India which reads:

"It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living things."

Two, in answer to a query as to whom to call "Save Nilgiris" was addressed to, Mr. Krishnan said it was addressed to:

- (a) the Government which is yet to act decisively in protecting the Nilgiris,
- (b) the rich business houses which are turning the Nilgiris into a backyard for growing tea, eucalyptus and other monocultures for their industries outside the district.
- (c) the helpless poor who, ill advisedly, are fast encroaching into forest and revenue lands for cultivation and house building and
- (d) the elected representatives of the people and every citizen of Nilgiris who have a need, necessity, duty, obligation and responsibility to save the Nilgiris.

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RESOLUTIONS

- 1 The Government should immediately constitute a Hill Area Development Authority with necessary statutory authority to arrest the environmental degradation of Hill stations in general and Nilgiris in particular. The Authority should provide for active participation of Non Governmental organisations and people's movements in the implementation of its objectives.
- 2 Forest lands should not be converted into tea gardens in Gudalur taluk which has already suffered the worst deforestation in the district.
- 3 Improper land use is a much bigger problem than deforestation in Nilgiris. It is imperative to bring the land use on the lines recommended by the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute at Ooty.
- 4 The remaining pockets of wetlands and swamps in Nilgiris should be protected at all cost. A census of remaining springs and swamps should be undertaken immediately.
5. All the forests in the revenue lands and those in the lands in the possession of the various departments should be handed over to the forest department.
6. All forms of encroachments in forests especially in the catchment areas should be prevented. The encroachers should not be given any Government benefits such as electricity connection, ration cards and issue of "B" memo which can be used as evidence of possession and subsequently used to regularize the same.
7. There should be a total ban on planting Eucalyptus in catchment areas or areas of water sources. Planting of Eucalyptus should be confined to waste lands.
8. There should be a total ban on felling of all natural trees in the Nilgiris.
9. Government should take steps to arrest all forms of migration into these hills at once. All forms of tourism except Nature tourism should be discouraged. Specifically luxury hotels and such resorts should be banned forthwith.
10. Massive illicit felling of trees belonging to Government by illicit arrack distillers should be immediately stopped.
11. Local species like "Baige (Salix)" which conserve water should be propagated by the people and the forest department.

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SAVE WESTEREN GHATS' MARCH IN NILGIRIS

CONCERN OVER GUDALUR FORESTS

Members of "Save Western Ghats March" were given a warm welcome at Gudalur when they reached the Nilgiris district border by the members of "Save Nilgiris Campaign" on Dec. 6, 1987. Thirty two members including three women, participated in the march.

They were joined by 15 members from Hindustan Photo Films Factory, Udthagamandalam, at Nilambur. Later addressing a meeting organised by Save Nilgiris Campaign, B.J. Krishnan, president of the campaign

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said remaining virgin forests in Nilgiris were in danger of being exploited by encroachers, planters and government. He said "Tamil Nadu Planters Association was demanding nearly 30,000 acres Janmam forests in Gudalur for expansion of tea plantation.

He appealed to the Save the Western Ghats marchers and the local people to pressurize the government to prevent planters from clearing these forests.

K. Venkatachalam and Thiruganam, state co-ordinators, assured the "Save Nilgiris Campaign" and people of Gudalur that they would take up environmental problems of Nilgiris at the Goa conclave in February at the conclusion of their march.

- INDIAN EXPRESS

A REJOINDER

The president of the Save Nilgiris Campaign is reported to have said that virgin forests in the Nilgiris are in danger of being exploited by the encroachers, the planters and the Government. Bracketing of the planters and the Government with the encroachers was unfortunate.

It is true that the Planters Association of Tamil Nadu has requested the Government to make available more land for expansion of plantations in context of the exhortation of the Central Government to the tea industry to double tea production from 650 to 1300 million kgs by the year 2000. Such an ambitious target cannot be met unless more land is brought under tea. The Centre is currently engaged in identifying land suitable for expansion of tea and States, especially Assam and W. Bengal, are embarking on a vast expansion programme.

In the context we approached the State Government pointing out that 30,000 acres of land suitable for tea cultivation are available in Gudalur taluk. This land is in the possession of the existing plantations. These are not reserve forests. Mish of the land does not have forest cover, though in Government records the land is categorized as private forests. We had asked for a portion of these mostly degraded forest lands to be permitted to be retained by these plantations for extension of tea cultivation while the rest which has forest cover could be taken over by the Government under an overall arrangement for an out-of-court settlement of a protracted litigation which has been pending in the Supreme Court concerning Janmam lands in Gudalur. These lands are now being encroached upon by land-hungry settlers, mostly from outside the state.

Development of the degraded wasteland and grass land will be in the interest of the State. Plantations with high density of tea and coffee bushes and thick canopy of shade trees provide an efficient and effective secondary forest cover. Extension of the plantations will also generate large employment in this backward area. Planters are not armchair environmentalists but practical conservationists who value ecological balance in their own enlightened self interests.

C. Sankaranarayanan, (Secretary Planters; Association of Tamil Nadu, Coonoor).

-INDIAN EXPRESS

A REPLY TO REJOINDER

-Re. the letter of C. Sankaranarayanan (IE, Dec.15). In the 19th century the Company as well as colonial rulers began helping plantation on the mountainous belt and inaugurated

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the era of infiltration and disturbance of mountain forests. Tea plantations in the north, cardamom plantation in the middle- and rubber plantations in the south of Tamil Nadu border of Western Ghats got steady expansion and paved the way for continuous felling of valuable trees.

‘Since Independence, steady increase of private planters for lucrative economic adventurism geared up expansion of plantation crop areas, extensive encroachments and expansion in mountain settlements. These had totally disturbed environmental balance and affected rain in Tamil Nadu from 1963 (with the exception of 1977).

By our misdirected economic adventurism we should not dig the grave of the coming generations by inviting a semi-arid climateogeographical situation in Tamil Nadu by criminal damage to the “green house layer”. Tea business can be more concentrated in Assam and West Bengal. There are vast fallow lands on the plains for agro-forestry plantation, estates for oilpalm, pongan castor and margosa for diverting attention to plain oil-production industry in Tamil Nadu. Soyabean cultivation for oil industry, proteinised food industrialization will be a prospective industrial game on the low land plains. Why climb to the hills when vast plain areas are languishing for cultivation?

The expansion of Plantation, widening of encroachments and steady growth of colonisation on the mountain belt will certainly disturb the “green house layer” and environmental balance. The department of Forestry has to gear up action to revive mountain forests in the degenerated and grassland belts of mountainous regions to discourage intrusion and interference of man on mountain forest belt.

V.T. CHELLAM
President
TN Society for Environmental
Balance and Water management.

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CHROME PLATING IN BIOSPHERE?

Surprising? Shocking? But this will become true unless Govt. of Tamil Nadu reconsiders its order.

M/s. Needle Industries Private Limited have been permitted to set up a chrome plating unit within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and right outside the famous Mudumalai Sanctuary which forms the core area of the Reserve.

That an industrial unit has been allowed to come up in the biosphere reserve itself is odd and objectionable enough. It makes little difference whether it is a polluting unit or not. However it may be noted here that the Small Industries Service Institute, Government of India

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has, after a techno-economic survey of Nilgiris, identified 48 industries as having scope for development in the district. Chrome plating does not find a place in this list.

We understand that in the past a number of requests to set up industrial units in that area have been rejected when objections were raised by organisations like the Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association. In fact, we further understand, the request of M/s. Needle Industries for the setting up this plant itself was turned down more than once in the past. We believe there is a government order prohibiting industrial activities within a certain radius of the Sanctuary and the new unit is said to be within that radius. If that is the case, we wonder how sanction was accorded for the unit. Especially, when the area has been declared as part of the first Biosphere Reserve in the country.

In fact there are certain broader issues involved in this case.

WATER CRISIS

One of the major reasons for locating the unit there is said to be the availability of required water. The parent unit has decided to locate the new unit nearly 30 kms away, that too in a jungle area. In addition, a treatment plant is to be set up at a huge cost of over Rs. 10 lakhs to treat the effluent. The fact that the factory has taken all these troubles at such a huge cost underscores the crisis proportions that the water scarcity has assumed in the Nilgiris. The point is, what if others also do the same? The traditional water sources of several villages have gone dry. What if they also move near or into the Sanctuary as many encroachers, indeed, do now?

IS NILGIRIS INDUSTRIALLY BACKWARD?

Secondly, the TNEB has, against its own standing orders, permitted the unit the use of water from its reservoirs because in its view a “ban on drawal of water by new industries may affect adversely the industrial growth of this backward district”. We fail to understand this notion of industrial backwardness of Nilgiris.

Industrialization is not an answer to the development of hill areas like Nilgiris. It has been established that “industrialization in the hills has had an impact which is far from the positive and thus hampers overall regional development. Such industrialization seems hardly contributing to the eradication of poverty and unemployment”. Industrialization of hill areas must be carefully qualified. Therefore, describing hill areas like Nilgiris as industrially backward is describing cities like Bombay and Calcutta as agriculturally backward!

In any case Nilgiris is not recognised as an industrially backward district by the Govt. of India or its agencies. The Govt. of Tamil Nadu has declared only Coonoor taluk as industrially backward.

In fact Nilgiris has already had more than its share of industrialization. Few hill districts in the country can compare with the industrial growth of Nilgiris. The table on the following page make it abundantly clear:

It will be clear from the table that whatever parameter is used, Nilgiris is far ahead of other major hill districts in industrial growth.

DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY NEEDED

Thirdly, the manner in which the unit has been permitted highlights

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INDUSTRIAL GROWTH OF NILGIRIS COMPARED TO OTHER LEADING HILL DISTRICTS – 1982

	Nilgiris	Simla	Darjeeling	Dehradun	Kullu
Area ('000 sq.km)	3	5	3	3	6
Population (Lakhs)	6	5	10	8	2
Labour for Non-agriculture	91	30	64	64	18
Average daily employment in factories (Lakhs persons)	1627	351	856	896	275
Per capita bank credit to Industry (Rs.)	373	82	131	175	29
Major manufacturing units- No. –	9	Nil	5	5	Nil
Sales (Rs. Cr.)	80	Nil	12	54	Nil
CMIE* Index of level of Economic Development (All India = 100)	234	122	102	128	63

* CENTRE FOR MONITORING INDIAN ECONOMY

A major drawback in the administration of hill areas like the Nilgiris. Evidently, departments that have cleared the unit in question have done so in pursuance of their own general objectives. However, it is well known that the objectives of the different departments are often conflicting. For example, while the national policy is not to encourage forest based industries in hill areas, the report of the District Industries Centre says that there is enormous scope for forest based industries in Nilgiris just because nearly 60% of the land is forests!

One department is determined to convert the whole district into a huge tea plantation. Another wants to turn the district into a plantation of eucalyptus, wattle and pines. Yet another wants to “develop” the district into an industrial complex like Tuticorn, Metur or Manali. And a fourth wants to preserve it as the premier health resort of the State. We will be the last to blame the Government for this sad state of affairs. It is the inherited system that has to be blamed and changed.

This problem was highlighted in the last two conferences of SNC and a comprehensive recommendation was made to setting up a Hill Area Development Authority with sufficient statutory powers to a co-ordinated and balanced approach to the development of hill areas. The proposal is now under consideration by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The Government would do well to constitute the Authority without delay.

The western and south –western parts of the district are the only vestige of the glory that Nilgiris was. Thankfully, most of these areas have been brought under the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. But now it appears that the Biosphere Reserve will

end up a farce by letting chrome plating be done in its midst.

M/s. Needle industries have grown with the Nilgiris. We are sure, they appreciate the need to preserve Nilgiris as much as any one else.

So whatever be the pressing reasons for setting up the chrome plating unit near Mudumalai sanctuary, we appeal to them to drop the proposal in the larger interest of the district. After all, electroplating can be done anywhere.

o o o o o o o o

SNC CONSERVATION AWARD

Several individuals and institutions are engaged in the noble task of conservation of Nilgiris & its ecology. It is proper that such people and institutions are recognised and honoured.

With this in view, SNC proposes to institute an annual Award from this year for outstanding contribution in the field of conservation with reference to Nilgiris. The selection will be made by a panel of competent judges.

Readers are, therefore, requested to send in eligible nominations to the selection panel. The letters may be addressed to SNC.

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

The SNC Newsletter has been made Bi-monthly from 1988. However special issues will be brought out as and when necessary.

We will again remind readers that only limited copies of the newsletter are printed. So please try to circulate it among as many readers as possible.

OOTY STADIUM

The construction of a sports stadium at the Ooty Brecks grounds had generated much controversy leading to its stoppage temporarily. There was also much criticism that SNC had raised unreasonable objections and was responsible for the stoppage of work. It is true that earlier SNC objected to the stadium under the impression that a monstrous concrete structure was being put up right outside the Botanical Gardens. Later, we came to know that what was being planned was only a grandstand cum pavilion with a row of shops. SNC, then welcomed the plan and confined its objection to the shops.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has reconsidered the plan and cleared the Grandstand but the provision for shops has been, rightly deleted. We hail the decision and thank the government for its concern for Nilgiris' environment.

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save nilgiris campaign

for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL 2 No. 3

December 1988

TO ALL CONCERNED

SAVE NILGIRIS MARCH

The Save Nilgiris Campaign is organizing Save Nilgiris March (a padyatra) covering all parts of the district from Dec. 9, 1988. It is sponsored by the Department of Environment, Government of India as part of the National Environmental Awareness Campaign 1988.

The object of the March is two-fold. One, to create awareness among people in the towns and villages regarding various environmental problems, particularly the worsening water shortage. And two, to assess the extent of the problem in the different parts of the district.

The Core Marchers will pass through all the major villages and towns distributing handbills, stopping by, when necessary, to explain to the people and noting down the problems. In the villages where the Marchers halt for the night, there will be cultural programmes to spread the message of conservation.

The March is intended to mobilize a strong public opinion which alone can guard against further degradation of our unique hills. The March, thus, concerns every citizen of Nilgiris.

We invite all concerned individuals and groups to join us in making the March a success. Those interested can accompany the Marchers as far as they can and take part in the public meetings to be held in selected villages and towns. Social and cultural groups are welcome to join us in organizing the public meetings. Those interested can contact our President. Chipko leader Shri SUNDARLAL BAHUGUNA will address on final day.

NILGIRIS Vs EUCALYPTUS

Even as the world wide controversy over eucalyptus rages on, the matter has acquired an urgency in the Nilgiris. Not only because the eucalyptus-related problems there have become critical but also because there seems to be fresh threats ahead.

In the circumstances, a timely seminar on "Nilgiris Vs Eucalyptus" was organised on Oct. 18, 1988 at Coonoor by the **Rural Development Organisation and the Rotary Club of Coonoor**. Scientist, Environmentalist, Social Workers and concerned citizens took part in the discussions.

The participants, in general, were highly critical about the promotion of eucalyptus in the Nilgiris. They were unanimous that eucalyptus had done enormous damage to the ecology of Nilgiris, particularly to the water sources leading to serious water scarcity.

The Seminar adopted a resolution that on no account eucalyptus should be raised in catchment areas in future and that the existing plantations there should be gradually replaced by native species.

The Seminar viewed with serious concern the attempts by private industries to extend the cultivation of eucalyptus in the Nilgiris. In specific, it deplored and condemned the proposal of M/s South India Viscose (P) Ltd. To encourage private people to plant eucalyptus.

However, there was broad agreement that eucalyptus has an unavoidable but useful role to play in the Nilgiris.

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As a source of fuel, it was noted, there was no immediate substitute for eucalyptus. It was recommended that eucalyptus could be continued to be grown in degraded and waste lands and it should be supplied as fuel wood to the weaker sections of the people at a subsidized rate. The seminar was categorical that eucalyptus should not be grown as an industrial raw material in Nilgiris anymore. The existing demand should be gradually phased out with the available supply.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, President, Save Nilgiris Campaign, who chaired the Business Session, traced the history of eucalyptus in the country in general and in particular in Nilgiris. He said that there were about 500 varieties of eucalyptus and among them, what was called the Blue Gum or Mysore Gum, was the popular variety. The spread and growth of eucalyptus in the country was essentially government sponsored, he added.

The case for eucalyptus, Mr. Krishnan said, lay in its fast growth, its use as fuel and fibre, its employment potential and its commercial value. On the other hand, the case against it was it drains water, it lacks social benefits, it is a monoculture, its leaves are toxic and it does not enrich the soil.

Ironically, Mr. Krishnan pointed out, eucalyptus which was originally introduced to protect the ecology of Nilgiris had become its prime destroyer. In 1856 eucalyptus was introduced in the Nilgiris in a big way to provide alternative fuel to the local people so that what was remaining of the natural forests could be saved. Exactly a century later, in 1956, natural forests and grass lands were begun to be cleared for making way for eucalyptus plantations in order to provide raw material to a few industries in the plains. Mr. Krishnan concluded that the time had come for restoring the original priority.

Among the speakers were Dr. P. Samraj and Shri. B. Rangunath of CSWCRTI, Former MPs Shri. M.K. Nanja Gowder and Shri. Surendararam, INTACH members Shri. S Krishnan & Shri. Ravi Mathews, Shri. K.R. Andu Gowder and Shri. N. Ramesh Babu of NHCAO.

Shri. Raman Menon, President Rotary club of Coonoor chaired the inaugural session. Shri. N.K. Perumal, Director, RDO proposed a vote of thanks.

EXCERPTS FROM DISCUSSIONS

“The results of the studies conducted at the Centre (**Central Soil and Water Conservation Research & Training Centre, Ooty**) indicate that caution may have to be exercised, while large scale conversion of natural grasslands of the Nilgiris into eucalyptus and wattle plantations. The reasonable alternative to this calamitous course in Ecology and Environment would be to encourage growth of jungle-wood trees, in the places of Eucalyptus as the former has a natural tendency to retain and sustain the moisture in the clouds thereby assuring the natural flow of rainfall when periodically due during the regular monsoons. Yet another effect of eucalyptus cultivation is the total extinction of valuable medicinal plants.”

“Way back in the first decade of this century, the British observed “the blue gum should not be planted near springs as it absorbs immense quantities of subsoil moisture.”

“In 1985 a worldwide study of the Eucalyptus species clearly concluded that extensive Eucalyptus plantations in deforested catchments substantially decrease the water yield. It states further that removing of eucalyptus plantations will increase the water yield of the affected catchment.”

“In August 1983, thousands of small farmers of Karnataka uprooted about ten million eucalyptus plants from the Forest Department nurseries and sowed local seed in their places. Many of them were arrested and put behind bars. The case of the protesting small farmers was: “The rich farmers, who live in the cities and manage their farms through labourers, found it profitable to grow eucalyptus to get rid of the farm labourers. Eucalyptus could give them more money, but with the spread of eucalyptus roots our small holdings in their neighbourhood have become barren and we have been devoid of ragi, which we used to grow for our subsistence from these fields”. In spite of the massive propaganda by the Government machinery in favour of eucalyptus plantation, the bitter truth could not be hidden. The protest against eucalyptus continued in other states. In Chamba, H.P., Chipko activists launched a campaign to uproot eucalyptus as well as poplars and pine trees from the Forest Department nurseries.” (**says Sundarlal Bahuguna**)”

“A big paper factory representative proclaimed that he was trying to rent/buy a lot hectares of land in our immediate environment right through our drinking water reservoir. That means a prospect of drying up. As eucalyptus grows, the ground water level goes down further year after year. Eucalyptus roots do not keep the water together and also do not store it, like the leaved trees can do with their wide-branched root system. An adult eucalyptus trees needs/dries up to 500 litres of water a day. Many mountain rivers in nearby valleys and other places, which are still painted in old maps as waterlines, today have not a drop of water”. (**Lament of a group of young activists in Potugal**)

BIASED TV PROGRAMME

Dear Sir,

The "Vayalum Vazhvum" programme telecast on 11.11.88 on the alleged virtues of the eucalyptus plantations of M/s. South India Viscose in the Nilgiris was outrageously one-sided, to say the least. It was shocking to witness the blatant misuse of a popular programme for the benefit of a private business venture which got half an hour of free (and misleading) publicity at public cost.

This impropriety apart, the programme contained the following gross misrepresentation of facts:

1. The interviewee stated that the harmful effects of eucalyptus is yet to be scientifically proved. This is a sheer falsehood. The Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI) at Ooty set up in 1956 has categorically concluded after a 20 year experiment that eucalyptus dries up water sources and the findings have been widely publicized. Moreover there are several International studies which have established this fact scientifically. The local people who had long suspected this have almost given up fresh planting of eucalyptus in the wake of the serious water scarcity gripping the Nilgiris.
2. It was also stated by the interviewee that World Bank is aiding the plantation of eucalyptus. This again, is wrong. The World Bank has given up a massive programme to encourage eucalyptus in developing countries like India after strong objections from environmentalists world over.
3. The planting of eucalyptus in a massive scale for supplying them as raw material to M/s. South India Viscose and a few other units was mainly a government scheme started in the 50s. Now the State government has stopped further planting of eucalyptus even under social forestry programmes following widespread objections. The ecological disadvantages of eucalyptus are too well documented and widely known to warrant repetition here.

We would therefore, request your goodself to-

- a) read this letter(or excerpts from it) in your weekly viewers forum (Ethioli)
- b) ask your representatives to make a balanced programme on the subject after talking to scientists, voluntary agencies, environmentalists, govt. officials etc.

We are confident your Kendra would consider our request at the earliest.

To
The Director
Madras Doordarshan

D.VENUGOPAL

SNC NEWS

PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, President, addressed a seminar on Leadership Training for NSS students of Bharathiar University organised by the NSS Programmes Coordinator Mr. N. Markandan at Coimbatore. Mr. Krishnan addressed the students on the third and final day of the seminar on the theme "Protection of Environment".

SWG M REVIEW MEETING

SNC played host to the first meeting of the Central Coordination Committee of the Save Western Ghats Movement on September 3-4 1988 at Ooty. The participants included Shri. Anant Hegde and Shri. Ranjan Rao Yerdoor of SPS Karnataka, Shri. K. Venkatachalam of the Save Eastern Ghats Organisation, Tamil Nadu, and Shri. B.J. Krishnan, who chaired the meeting and Shri. D.Venugopal of Save Nilgiris Campaign.

Shri. M.S. Viraraghavan, President, Palani Hills Conservation Council was a special invitee.

The Meeting reviewed the activities of the various groups and chalked out common programmes for the future.

KISAN MELA

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, addressed a Kisan Mela at Tiruchigadi, a Kota Village near Ooty on Nov. 7, 1988. The function was organised by the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute under their Lab to Land programme.

HADP IN NILGIRIS

Hill Area Development Programme is a centrally sponsored Scheme introduced in 1975-76. Its objective is "Development with Conservation" for the hill areas. Nilgiris is the only district covered under the scheme in the whole of South India. The annual outlay has increased from about Rs. 1 crore in 1975-76 to nearly Rs. 8 crores in 1987-88. So far about Rs. 56 crores have been spent under the scheme in the Nilgiris.

SNC's SUGGESTION FOR EIGHTH PLAN

VOLUNTARISM

It has been recognised by the planners of the country that for any scheme, seeking to bring about fundamental changes the grass root level, to succeed it is essential to involve the voluntary agencies and the local people.

The Seventh Five Year Plan categorically states "**in all area programmes, particularly in watershed management, the active involvement of people, of their own local organisation and of voluntary agencies is crucial**".

BENEFITS

Awareness among the people regarding their environment and the need to protect it is a necessary precondition of HADP to make an impact. This cannot be imparted through formal education alone. It would require all forms of non-formal education to drive home the point to the various sections of the people. Here the voluntary agencies can play a leading role as they have done elsewhere in the country.

Secondly, implementing HADP through the governmental agencies alone is bound to be a costly exercise. Voluntary agencies are far the least costly implementation or administrative available in the country. Therefore to the extent such agencies are involved in the implementation, funds can be released for development work. Moreover, in the context of the inherent red-tapism in the governmental machinery, routing development works through voluntary agencies can be greatly cut down the delay in implementation.

CAUTION

Voluntary agencies are not a cure at all. They too have their limitations and even black sheeps. Nevertheless they are now, by and large an entity capable of contributing significantly to the developmental efforts. Therefore careful selection and involvement of voluntary agencies in the implementation of HADP is eminently worthy of a trial in the coming Eight Five Year Plan.

INTEGRATED APPROACH

An integrated approach does not merely mean an integration of financial outlay. Integration should manifest itself in suitable administrative control and legislative support also. For example, unless the large scale encroachments in the hills are stopped, no amount of soil conservation measures can help. Unless all the complimentary measures are simultaneously initiated, the efforts will continue to be adhoc, piecemeal and ineffective. In this context the government of Tamil Nadu would do well to set up the **Hill Area Development Authority** (which has been under consideration for the past two years) with suitable statutory powers at the earliest.

HORTICULTURE

The focus has been on this sector from the inception which is understandable considering the suitability and the traditional importance of horticulture crops in the district. However, of late, there has been a growing emphasis on extension of tea at the expense of vegetables. This emphasis would appear to be misplaced for the following reasons:

-Beyond a certain level, it is a scientific fact that, any monoculture including tea is harmful for hill areas like Nilgiris whatever be their economic benefit. The cultivation of tea in the district, accounting for over 60% of cropped area, has clearly exceeded its limits. A similar mistake was committed in 50s and 60s when eucalyptus was indiscriminately propagated all over the district. The harmful effects are felt now and the reversal of the situation has become extremely difficult. The same mistake should not be repeated with tea now.

“Our experience of development planning during the last three decades has increasingly underlined the fact that unless adequate programmes are evolved for the conservation and proper utilization of the resources of the hill areas, not only the problem of these remain unsolved, but the economy of the plains may also be adversely affected”

VI Five Year Plan

- The Geological Survey of India has strictly warned against changes in the agricultural pattern, especially to the tea cultivation, in the interest of slope stability and soil conservation. Moreover, it is a known fact the small tea owners, who account for a substantial share of the cultivation, take little efforts at soil conservation.

- Tea cultivation in Nilgiris is almost wholly dependent on migrant labour. More acreage under tea would mean more migration into the district which is already burdened with one of the highest rates of net migration in the country. On the other hand, the life supporting system in the Nilgiris is hardly adequate to take care of the existing population. Therefore indiscriminate extension of tea in the Nilgiris is bound to have serious sociological as well as ecological consequences.

- Nilgiris holds almost a monopoly in the kind of vegetables and fruits it grows in the state. Therefore there is absolutely no question of it ever losing its market for them. If, however, vegetable cultivators are now readily giving up vegetables for tea, it is mainly because of the low prices they are able to get. In other words, poor marketing is at the root of the vegetable growers' ills and if that is set right vegetable growing can be profitable and reliable as tea. Besides, the whole State would stand to lose if Nilgiris ceases to be a main vegetable producing area. In the circumstances, HADP should consider moderating its emphasis on extension of tea. At the same time due importance should be given to the cultivation of vegetables and fruits. The focus should be on soil conservation, well irrigation, storage and marketing. If these are effectively delivered, which is not impossible, vegetable and fruit cultivation in the Nilgiris can be as much a paying proposition as any other.

ROADS

The emphasis on roads has, admittedly, been not conducive for the eco-development of Nilgiris. Nevertheless, sizeable outlay needs to be continuously allotted under roads, if only to maintain the extensive network of roads that has been laid. One major side effect of the extensive road laying is the enormous traffic in the towns, particularly Ooty and Coonoor, which has overburdened the roads there. Therefore, there should be a special emphasis on the maintenance of roads in Ooty and Coonoor townships.

FORESTRY

Though forestry has been third in importance in terms of percentage share, the absolute outlay set aside for it has been hardly in keeping with the importance it deserves in any plan of eco-restoration in the Nilgiris. There can be no two opinions that a much higher emphasis needs to be put on forestry in future. Afforestation assumes added importance because it is imperative not only for greening the widely degraded hills but also because afforestation is only effective check against encroachments which have been going on an unprecedented scale in the last few years. Some suggestions:

(1) Afforestation on the scale needed in the district cannot be undertaken by the Forest department alone. Moreover, unless people have a stake in raising trees, no meaningful afforestation is possible. Therefore, Scheme similar to that of Wasteland Development Board can be instituted whereby voluntary agencies can be vested with the responsibility of raising nurseries and planting them in public and private wastelands with native species. The scheme should pay special attention to eco-restoration of degraded sources of water supply – whether in public lands or in patta lands.

(2) Water sources should be declared as protected areas, fenced properly and no form of interference should be allowed in them.

DAIRYING

Dairying should continue to have priority as it can be a supplementary source of income for the vegetable growers. However, dairying has been facing a growing threat in the form of unabated encroachments into the village grazing and common lands. Drastic measures have to be taken to put an immediate end to such encroachments. Another suggestion here is to be set up village councils and vest them with powers to keep vigil over such lands.

TOURISM

The tourist population in the Nilgiris in recent years is largely a floating population – people who come in the morning and leave in the evening. Their numbers are increasing by leaps and bounds every year. These Tourists

have also become a major source of pollution. HADP should consider construction of public facilities at the outskirts where such tourists can wash, cook, etc. In any case, the towns of Ooty and Coonoor cannot withstand such a massive inflow of tourist transport. The traffic needs to be regulated through hefty entrance charges to be collected at the various points of entry.

Alongside, there should be a massive campaign (with the help of students and volunteers) particularly during the summer months, in the towns of Ooty and Coonoor educating the tourists not to pollute the environs. Such awareness campaigns should also be held in the major centres in the plains from where the bulk of tourists arrive in the Nilgiris.

SPORTS

Nilgiris has always been a very sports-loving district. However, in the last few years, sports activities have almost ground to a halt due to insufficient facilities and encouragement. This has been one of the major reasons for the growing incidence of drinking and gambling (particularly horse racing) in the district. HADP should take the lead in reviving the interest in sports activities by providing the necessary infrastructure and encouragement.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

HADP cannot make headway unless the necessary emotional awakening is created in the people regarding their unique environment and the threats to it. And, all things considered, the task of awareness creation is best left to the voluntary agencies. We suggest:

(1) HADP should declare a Nilgiris Environmental Awareness Month similar to the National Environmental Awareness Month by the Dept. of Environment, Govt. of India. During that month awareness campaigns should be organised throughout the district. Projects involving people's participation in eco-restoration should be encouraged during that time. The month of May can be considered for such a scheme as it can also cover a large number of tourists.

(2) HADP should arrange regular environmental education to all the schools in the district. For this purpose, a District Environmental Education Centre can be set up. The Centre can be run by a voluntary agency and can train Volunteers, teachers and others in environmental education besides conducting regular classes for school and college students.

(3) In areas where the environmental degradation is serious, an intensive awareness campaign can be mounted over a longer period. A project proposal can be over a longer period. A project proposal for such a scheme by the Save Nilgiris Campaign is under consideration by HADP.

POPULATION

No plan should lose sight of the fact that Nilgiris is heading for a population explosion, rather, "migration explosion". The local population, which has showed a remarkable response to family planning, has regulated its growth admirably. It is the immigration stock which is of concern. HADP should, on the one hand, decline support to all activities that could encourage further migration into the district and, on the other, undertake a massive family planning programme among the migrant population.

CONCLUSION

The art of planning in a democratic set up lies in balancing the popular demand with the real development needs. As it is the HADP scales are sharply tilted against the latter. The Eighth Plan should seek to set the scales in balance.

<p>This issue is financed by Shri N.K. PERUMAL DIRECTOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION ARUVANGADU, NILGIRIS</p>

(VOL 2 No. 3/P6)

SAVE NILGIRIS MARCH
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
SPONSORED BY
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT
GOVT.OF INDIA
From 9-12-88 to 24-12-88
WHY SAVE THE NILGIRIS MARCH ?

Would you believe that in about ten year's time we may have to leave the district because of water shortage? You probably would not. But, you also did not believe 10 years ago that water will become such an acute problem in Nilgiris. But it has happened. If we had believed and acted then, the problem would not be as bad as it is now. Likewise, if we do not realise even now and act, who knows, we may, indeed, be forced to leave Nilgiris!!

Why is there scarcity of water in Nilgiris now? Is it because we are getting less rains now? No. we are getting we are getting the same amount of rain as ever before.

Then, what is the reason? In a mountainous place like ours, streams are the main source of water supply. These streams originate in numerous springs all over the district.

Where so these springs get the water? The whole of Nilgiris was originally nothing but vast stretches of grasslands with patches of forests or what we call, "sholas", which are a unique creation of Nature. When it rains, these sholas and grasslands absorb the water like a sponge. The water thus stored underground is steadily released through the springs which feed the streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs etc. Thus these sholas and grasslands act as our water tanks.

But over the years we have been steadily destroying these grasslands and sholas for purposes of cultivation, raising plantations, building dams, roads and industries, constructing houses etc. No doubt this has been going on for centuries, but in the last thirty years or so, the destruction has been rapid and widespread as a result of the enormous increase in population and commercial activities.

In a hilly place like ours, the land for cultivation is very limited. In fact in Nilgiris only about one fifth of the land is cultivable and these were brought under cultivation long ago. But because of the population increase and the consequent pressure of land, people have encroached into forest lands and grass lands, even on steep slopes and catchments areas, for cultivation and residence. This has had two serious consequences.

1. As the forests and grass lands declined, the capacity of the land to store the rain water also declined, and
2. As more and more slopes and catchment areas were brought under cultivation, it led to more and more soil erosion which gradually silted up the streams, rivers, dams and reservoirs.

As combined result of these two factors our district's capacity to store the rain water has steadily declined. On the other hand, the demand for water has steadily increased. Not only because of the unchecked growth in population. There was another equally disturbing reason - the growth in eucalyptus.

Eucalyptus was originally introduced in the Nilgiris by the British in 1856 to save the sholas – that is, to supply fuel wood to the local population who were using the wood from the sholas as fuel. Exactly hundred years later, in 1956, when eucalyptus was planted on a huge scale it led to the destruction of the very sholas and grass lands which it was supposed to save. The Government brought thousands and thousands of acres under eucalyptus to supply raw material to a few industries in the plains. Private farmers, lured by the commercial benefit, also planted eucalyptus in their lands. These trees which require enormous amount of water to grow, took away most of what little water that could be stored under the ground.

If these problems continue you can easily imagine what will happen in the coming years.

So what to do? Solutions to our water problems are complex, difficult and will take a long time to succeed. The Government and the people have to cooperate and work together to achieve this. But three things are needed immediately.

1. We have to protect the existing sholas and grass lands at all cost.
2. Degraded sholas and grass lands should be regreened wherever possible.
3. Indiscriminate growing of eucalyptus should be stopped. There should be a total ban on such cultivations in catchment areas and near water courses. The purpose of this March is to highlight these.

-SAVE NILGIRIS CAMPAIGN

(VOL 2 No. 3/P7)

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Graphics – Madras 600034. Phone : 864290. Printed at Canara Traders – Madras -2 Phone:
566532

(VOL 2 No. 3/P8)

save nilgiris campaign
for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL 3 No. 1

January 1989

WATER SCARCITY IN NILGIRIS

CRISIS MAY TURN CATASTROPHIC

Report of the Save Nilgiris March sponsored by the Department of Environment, Government of India and organised by SNC between Dec.9 and 25, 1988.

“The stage of preventing environmental degradation in Nilgiris has been crossed over. The harm has been done. The present stage is one of repairing damage” concluded a Geological Survey (GSI) study after the disastrous floods of 1978.

The Save Nilgiris March organised by the Save Nilgiris Campaign exactly a decade and a month later found little evidence of the people of the Government having heeded the warnings and recommendations of the GSI. As if in defiance of the major finding that “deforestation and conversion of the land for agriculture, tea plantation and residential purposes” were the main causes of degradation and residential purposes’ were the main causes of degradation, these very same activities were seen to be taking place at an alarming rate all over the district. No land appears to be too remote or too steep for cultivation or construction. Whether these activities are lawful or not makes no difference to the consequences.

Sponsored by the Department of Environment, Govt. of India as part of the National Environmental Awareness Campaign, the March covered nearly 200 villages in the four taluks of the district. The foot marchers numbering about thirty young men and women went around the villages and towns from December 9 to December 25th spreading the message of environmental protection and assessing the intensity of the problem by talking to people, holding public meetings and distributing literature.

“It was heartening” said Mr. B.J.Krishnan, SNC President, at the end of the March, “to find in all the villages that we visited, the people were aware of the Save Nilgiris Campaign and appreciated of the need for it”. The focus of the March was on the deepening water scarcity which has been the cumulative result of the environmental degradation in the district. Mr. K. Shanmugam, who led the foot marchers said that all parts of the district were found to have been affected alike and the situation had generally turned acute in the last 15 years or so.

The rapid disappearance of the original shola forests and grass lands which are the natural sources of supply had been chiefly responsible for the growing water shortage. The insatiable demand for land for cultivation has pushed these sholas and grass lands to the extreme boundaries of the Nilgiri hills. The remaining patches in the central areas are so few as to need fencing to protect them. Almost at every village the people complained of springs and streams having gone dry in the recent past. Indeed, the water problems in the Nilgiris is literally on the brink of a crisis. Only an estimated 10% of the original forests remain now. If they were also to disappear, as indeed being feared, the water crisis in the Nilgiris may well become a catastrophe.

Moreover, the increasing cultivation of steep slopes and catchments areas have aggravated the problem of soil erosion which, in turn, has greatly contributed to the silting up of most streams, rivers and reservoirs. The Central Soil and water conservation Training and Research Institute (CSWCRTI), Ooty have recommended that all cultivation should be restricted to lands with less than 30% slope. The cultivators, it was found during the March, were either unaware or indifferent to these recommendations. With most of the old water sources dried up or silted, the villages are now being supplied water through pipelines from increasingly far off streams and reservoirs. In summer time the worst affected villages are supplied water in tankers. Last year even Hanikore, meaning a village situated on a Swamp, was supplied water in that way.

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The worsening water shortage has been compounded by the widespread and indiscriminate planting of eucalyptus. Apart from the global evidence, the adverse effects of eucalyptus on the ecology, particularly its enormous demands on water, has been well established by research at the CSWCRTI, Ooty. Dr. P. Sahraj, Officer-in-charge CSWCRTI warns, "caution may have to be exercised while planting large scale conversions of grasslands into plantations of fast growing species particularly Eucalyptus in the catchment of the Nilgiri reservoirs".

Mr. B.J.Krishnan, who addressed the public at various places explained that eucalyptus was originally introduced in the Nilgiris by the British in 1856 to save the shola trees which were being used up as fuel by the local people. However the British had clearly observed then, "the blue gum (eucalyptus) should not be planted near springs as it absorbs immense quantities of subsoil moisture". Ironically, Mr. Krishnan added, a century later, in 1956, these valuable sholas and grass lands were destroyed to make way for large scale plantation of eucalyptus by the Government for supplying raw material to a few industries in the plains. Even grazing lands, village commons and catchment areas were not spared. Individual farmers were also lured by the commercial benefit.

In none of the villages the people were in any doubt that eucalyptus has been a major reason for water scarcity in their area. No farmer had gone in for fresh plantation of eucalyptus in recent years ever though its commercial value is now much higher. They have also no hesitation to cut down the trees in their fields if the required cutting permits are forthcoming. However there was a widespread feeling of helplessness at the ubiquitous government plantations.

In some of the villages the Marchers came across a scheme being promoted by a certain private sector unit whereby the farmers are offered cash incentives and buy back promises for taking up eucalyptus plantation. It was shocking to find such a scheme in existence when the Government of Tamil Nadu itself has stopped further plantation of eucalyptus under any of its programme.

Summing up the eucalyptus controversy, Mr. Krishnan said eucalyptus cannot be altogether banned as there was no immediate substitute for it as the major source of fuel in the Nilgiris. It could be continued to be grown in degraded and wastelands. What was objectionable, according to Mr. Krishnan was the large scale plantation of eucalyptus for industrial use. The Government's commitment to such industries phased out. In any case, Mr. Krishnan was emphatic that eucalyptus planted around water sources should be uprooted forthwith regardless of whether they are owned by the Government or private individuals.

Alongside declining supply, the demand for water has also gone up manifold in recent years thanks to the enormous rise in population, especially the migrant population. Fresh settlements were seen all over the district. Besides, it was evident that there was a clear nexus between the unchecked immigration into the district and the large scale encroachments on forest and revenue lands for cultivation and settlement. The news settlers appear to have been greatly aided by outdated Land Encroachment laws and the availability of pucca roads and bus transport to every nook and corner of the district. Unless effective changes are made to the land encroachment acts and cultivation on slopes are totally banned there appears to be little hope of checking the menace of encroachments.

Another matter of serious concern noted by the Marcher was the hurry of switching over from cultivation of vegetables to tea. Though the move has been largely dictated by the failing yield and uncertain market for vegetable, particularly potato, it appears to be ill advised in the long interest of the district. The CSWCRTI has observed, "though the canopy of the tea bushes when fully developed can prevent soil erosion to a considerable extent, there is tremendous soil loss totaling about 120 tonnes/hectare till the end of four years after planting tea without proper soil conservation measures. Most of the plantations, owned by the small farmers do not have the tea canopy closed even after 10 years due to bad management and inadequate inputs". During the March several instances of ill managed or abandoned tea gardens were witnessed.

Mr. Krishnan said that tea cultivation has exceeded 60% of the cultivated area within the last few years despite the GSI's warning against "changes in the agricultural pattern, especially to that of tea cultivation, in the interest of slope stability and soil conservation". He also cautioned that a similar mistake was committed thirty years ago when the monoculture of eucalyptus was propagated indiscriminately. Mr. Krishnan wanted the government to moderate its emphasis on extension of tea and instead encourage vegetable cultivation through provisions of irrigation, storage, marketing and soil conservation measures which, he said, could make vegetable and fruit cultivation as much attractive as that of tea.

The urban scene in Nilgiris is in chaos. Ooty, at one time the Queen of Hill stations, is now not much different from any market town in the surrounding plains.

The Coonoor town, as the Geological Survey of India (GSI) had aptly put it, seems to have grown of its own accord without any control over the years". Gudalur and Kotagiri are fast going the way Ooty and Coonoor, overburdened by the influx of migrant population and encroachers.

Civic amenities have become woefully inadequate. Drinking water has become perennially scarce. Sewerage system has broken down and roads have become intolerable. During summer season the situation becomes worse as lakhs of tourists arrive.

The most disturbing aspect is the high level of speculation in real estate which has sent rentals and land prices to incredible heights. No slope is too steep for construction, notwithstanding the warnings of GSI to avoid the sensitive slopes. Again, against the advice of GSI, most of the structure there are multistoried and heavy. In short, the urban setting can be described as ugly and unsafe.

The urban decay in the Nilgiris is largely the result of over population, excessive commercialization and the near absence of town planning. The surge in recent years in investments in Nilgiris by outsiders is another contributing factor.

Less than 3% of the area is available for non-agricultural use in Nilgiris against an average of about 13% for the entire state. This is all the more reason that the limited area available has to be properly planned so as to meet the various urban requirements and to retain the popular charm.

Addressing a public rally at the end of a procession on the concluding day, Mr. Sundarlal Bahuguna, the Chipko leader, said that the water scarcity in Nilgiris would equally affect the surrounding districts in the plains as the major rivers draining those areas were originating in the Nilgiris.

Mr. Bahuguna regretted that despite the best efforts of the people and the government, thousands of more than hundred year old trees were continued to be felled in the Nilgiris. He wanted the state government to enact a new law totally banning the felling of natural forests.

A strategy of sustainable developments of Nilgiris should, Mr. Bahuguna said “consist of conservation of the remaining natural forests and conversion of monoculture forests into mixed forests of food, fodder and fibre species. Suitable fruit and nut trees species to replace tea and potatoes over slopes above 15 should be identified. Tree species giving raw material for home village industries should be the next choice”.

Mr. K.S. Sripathy, Collector of Nilgiris who presided over the final day meeting cautioned that anything, however beneficial it may be, will turn harmful if a balance is not observed. He hoped that the case of Nilgiris would not end up as that of the goose that laid the Golden eggs.

PROTECTING NILGIRI FORESTS

CALL FOR STRONG PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

Chipko Leader Shri. Sundarlal Bahuguna's address at the Public rally at Ooty on Christmas day 1988at the end of the Save Nilgiris March.
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I express my feelings of gratitude to the organizers and participants of “Save Nilgiris” for giving me an opportunity to be blessed by them on Christmas- the most auspicious day. The conclusion of the padayatra on Christmas day has connection with that great event, when the servant of Humankind-the son of God-came in this world to spread the light of truth, and carve the path of love and compassion. Jesus was the emblem of Humanity and when in our times a Great Soul – Mahatma Gandhi – appeared on the earth, he too used to remember Almighty as the “Emperor of Humility”. Padayatra is the best expression of Humility. When you go with a noble message as a humble man, as Jesus went from village to village, you reach to the hearts of the people. The modern man equipped with immense knowledge and physical powers to rule or Nature, lacks humility. He has a big head – too much knowledge, feeble hands and no heart. It is why we are confronted with the triple hands and no heart. It is why we are confronted with the triple problems of war, pollution and hunger. The very survival of all life due to these threats is at stake. I feel the solution of these problems lies in the combination of knowledge (Gyan), Devotion (Bhakti) and Action (Karma). The padayatris in their humble way tried to practice these. I wish that padayatra may be the beginning of the great task of healing the wounded mother Earth, bringing her back to good health and ushering an era of peace, happiness and fulfillment to her children.

I have come from the high Himalayas – the Great Mountain, which has been the source of varied inspirations to Humankind. Its lofty peaks convey us the great of rivers and streams, which ultimately are the source of material prosperity. I feel Himalaya is the representative of all hills and mountains. It is why Lord Krishna in Gita said “Among steadfast I am Himalaya”.

The importance of Nilgiri Hills is no less than Himalaya in this sense. Nilgiris are the abode Gods. Our ancestors built temples on the highest peaks. This was done to keep in us the feeling of detachment, penance and austerity alive. To see life in all creation and to have a worshipful attitude towards Nature.

But the modern man in a vain attempt to satisfy his never ending desires, has become the butcher of Nature. For him Nature is a commodity, which can be marketed. This outlook is responsible for the destruction of forests, which clothed hill slopes. In spite of the great suffering due to droughts, floods, water scarcity and soil-erosion, which are Nature's punishments for the butchery of forests, I am pained to listen that felling of hundred years old trees from shola forests in Nilgiris continues. It is not only the greed of a few unscrupulous timber traders, but the apathy of us all which has allowed these heinous crimes to be committed. Fifteen years ago when, we in Himalaya, became conscious of this, people there, specially the ladies and children, launched a unique movement – the Chipko movement. They challenged the traditional slogan of forest management.

“what do the forest bear? Resin, timber and foreign exchange”, with a new scientific slogan:

“What do the forest bear? Soil, water and pure air.

Soil, water and pure air are the basis of life”. This is the mantra for the survival of our dying planet. I have come here with this message from all those who are revolting against the human atrocities towards Nature. This is the religion of our times. We should come out of narrow boundaries created by petty communal interests and adopt a code of conduct which helps us in harmonizing our relationship with Nature. This is Vedanta. Protection of trees is the most sacred religious duty, because tree is God. Compassion personified. It gives us life giving oxygen without which we live more than five minutes. Forests are the mothers of rivers and factories of soil-manufacture. They provide us food, fodder, fibre, medicine and shade. These all are the living products of the trees. When the tree dies, it gives us timber and firewood.

The tragedy of modern materialistic civilization is that it kills a living tree for taking its dead products. We should fight against this untruth. Wherever and whoever is axing a green tree, we should go and hug the tree and save it. Our country has the glorious tradition of saving trees by offering oneself to be axed. I hope you all know the story of Amrita Devi of Khejadhi, Rajasthan. This brave Vishnoi Lady offered herself to be axed 258 years ago, saying it is cheaper to save a tree even at the cost of head. 362 men and women followed her.

I am happy to inform you that people in Karnataka in Sirsi and Kodagu, launched the similar movement by the name of Appiko and they succeeded to drive away the axemen. Similarly Wayanadu prakid Samrakshan Samiti successfully saved the hill forests. These all are neighboring districts. Why should Nilgiris and Tamil Nadu lag behind? Sometimes the law comes in the way of tree protectors. Such laws which in the name of private property help chopping the trees do injustice in the name of justice and have become out of date. The government should come forward to scrap such laws. In democracy the basis of all legislation is strong public opinion. So my humble request to you is without losing time you should launch a strong movement to stop all tree felling. This will compel the government to come forward with a legislation.

It is not only Ooty or the villages in Nilgiris, which are facing water scarcity, the whole country is heading towards water crisis. On the one hand the demand of water for agriculture, industry and the household needs is increasing; and on the other hand the availability of water is decreasing. The green revolution had made our agriculture more water intensive. Sugar, cotton, paddy all need too much water. When surface water is not enough, we have started mining underground water. The level of tube wells has gone down several meters. Similarly the chemical industries, specially the fertilizer industry's demand of water is too high. Industries and even modern agriculture pollutes water with effluents. With rapid growth of urbanization, the household demand for water is rapidly increasing. An urban family uses ten to fifteen times more water than a rural family. Water consumed by scarcity hit Gujarat Fertiliser Factory and other two chemical industries near at Baroda would suffice the needs of 17 lakhs 10 thousand families! So far as availability of water is concerned it will be only 14 percent per capita in 2001 AD as compared to 1901. The only way to overcome this crisis is to adopt austerity in the use of water and conserve our water resources.

We should be clear in our minds that natural forests, and not man made plantations, specially those of eucalyptus and pines, are the mother of the rivers. Now there are enough evidence from the experience of people that eucalyptus depletes water table. So in no case eucalyptus plantation should be allowed to exist. The farmers in western UP have already started uprooting eucalyptus from their fields. Besides ecological disaster, eucalyptus plantations on the borders of farms had disastrous effects on the production of sugarcane and wheat. Similar is the experience of paddy farmers in Thailand.

We cannot solve the environmental problem in isolation. These are closely connected with development strategies. When affluence is regarded as the objective of development and economics becomes religion, human behaviour becomes more uneconomic. We are creating problems in the hills by encouraging disastrous land use, like cereals and tea cultivation over the slopes, forest based industries and tourism. The worst enemy of human beings has been the plough-shear. Flesh and blood of the hills can be seen flowing down during the rains. One can see the deep scars on the body of mother Earth in newly raised tea plantations. Similarly the graveyards of the trees in the form of saw mills are visible. Tourism in no way is a soft industry. It drains the limited resources and in order to provide more facilities to the tourists the hill man offers everything for sale, excluding his simplicity. Compare the multi-storied buildings, which are a new development in Ooty with the simple Toda huts. The hill landscape cannot bear the burden of these massive structures.

A strategy of sustainable development of Nilgiris should consist conservation of the remaining natural forest and conversion of monoculture forests into mixed forests of food, fodder and fibre species. Suitable fruit and nut tree species to replace tea and potatoes over slopes above 15 should be identified. Tree species giving raw material for home village industries should be next choice.

I hope this padayatra marks the beginning of several local and inter-state padayatras, specially from Nilgiris to Brahmagiri and Thal Cauvery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

An event like the Save Nilgiris March, naturally not have been organised without the help of hundreds of well wishers of SNC and concerned citizens of Nilgiris. People helped us with food, shelter, transport, arrangements for public meetings etc. We convey our grateful thanks to them all.

Several panchayat leaders and senior citizens joined us in addressing the public at various places. To all of them our grateful thanks.

Some public, private and service organisations too came forward to help us. Canara Bank sponsored a good deal of publicity for the March through posters, pamphlets etc. We acknowledge their help with grateful thanks. We are also grateful to the Rural Development Organisation, Aravankadu, Lions Club of Kotagiri and Jaycees of Coonoor.

SNC IN KOTAGIRI

Till now SNC has been operating from Ooty and Madras. In future a unit of SNC will operate from Kotagiri. Shri. I Doraiswamy, Advocate and Senior will be the Coordinator.

FOOT MARCHERS

The selection of foot marchers for the Save Nilgiris March was done keeping in mind the need to motivate the youth, particularly the rural youth, to take up environmental protection work. Thus boys and girls in the age group of 20 and 25 only were considered. However the youngest marcher was aged 14. Excepting a couple of them, the marchers were all from rural Nilgiris. There were students employed and unemployed.

The leader of the group was Mr. K. Shanmugan of Kotagiri. Field workers of the Rural Development Organisation, Arunkadu joined the March in Coonoor and Gudalur.

Mr. Saravanan of the Save Eastern Ghats organisation also participated in the March.

This News letter is sponsored by
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GOVT. OF INDIA
As part of the Save Nilgiris Marc

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Designed and typeset By Compset Graphics – Madras 600034. Phone : 864290. Printed at Canara Traders – Madras Phone: 566532

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NEWSLETTER

VOL 3 No. 2

June 1989

SNC's RENEWED APPEAL TO PRESIDENT OF INDIA

On April 19, 1989 SNC president Mr. B.J. Krishnan accompanied by Mr. R. Radcliffe, Vice-President, NWLEA and Mr. H.Y. Cassim Sait, a senior citizen of Ooty met His Excellency Shri. R. Venkatraman, President of India, at Ooty and had an extended discussion on the pressing environmental problems of Nilgiris. Shri. Venkatraman, whose links with the Nilgiris is old and intimate, gave a patient and sympathetic hearing. The appeal:

Nilgiris, an inseparable part of Western Ghats, is considered to be a natural wonder by scientists. Nilgiris is one of the oldest land masses of our mother planet. The Himalayas are much younger than Nilgiris. The flora and fauna are varied and unique. The shola forests of Nilgiris are as old as the Himalayas are. Five of the major rivers of Tamil Nadu and Kerala namely Bhavani, Kundah, Pykara, Moyar and Punampugha originate in Nilgiris. Hence Nilgiris is described as a Living Fossil, Oxygen Bank of the South and Overhead Tank of Tamil Nadu. These rivers produce nearly 40% of the hydel power of Tamil Nadu.

In the name of development – both economic and industrial – the natural environment of Nilgiris has been systematically destroyed in the last 25 years. The government, the industrialists as well as the people have contributed to this destruction. Government of Tamil Nadu have brought the major portion of the grass-lands under eucalyptus plantation with the sole purpose of feeding a few wood-based commercial Industries, which are located outside the district. The Planters have destroyed priceless shola – forests to raise tea. Encroachers and land grabbers took the remaining forests to raise cash crops. The Nilgiris have lost about 90% of its original natural green-cover. This has resulted in erratic rain pattern, water run-off, soil erosion, land slide and silting-up of the dams.

The Government of India prescribes that a hill areas like Nilgiris should have about 60% to 65% forest cover. The State Government's statistics will show that about 60% of the land in Nilgiris is under green-cover. These statistics include the mono-culture of tea and eucalyptus. Any mono-culture is bad for the soil. Further the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research & Training Institute at Ootacamund had scientifically established that the eucalyptus plantation drained the water table.

The alarming increase in population had considerably contributed to the degradation of the Nilgiris. The local people have successfully adopted family planning to keep their family small. But yet the population of Nilgiris has doubled in the last 15 years. This is due to the rootless migrants from the plains settling down in the hills. And these unfortunate humans have settled down in ecologically sensitive areas. Their encroachment was not stopped by the Government.

Ootacamund, once the Queen of Hill Stations is a shanty town now. Unplanned urban development is directly traceable to the non-enforcement of the inadequate Municipal Laws. People have built up regular buildings on the Municipal roads and Highways. One can build any building any where in the town and still get the Municipal sanction. In a town, where one should get water in abundance, water scarcity has become a way of life. In the much talked about Persons Valley Scheme we have everything but water.

Almost all the Towns and Village of Nilgiris are facing unprecedented water scarcity at present. Villagers trek long distances to fetch drinking water.

Insensitive Government of the past, greedy industrialists and ignorant masses have contributed to the present state of affairs of Nilgiris.

Your Excellency, We have a few suggestions to save Nilgiris from the imminent threat. We submit the following for the Government's both Central and State, immediate consideration.

1) There should be a total ban on felling of natural trees in Nilgiris wherever they are found, Forest or Revenue, Private or Public land for a period of 20 years. The Government of Tamil Nadu should enact the necessary legislation in this regard, at least at this late stage.

2) There should be an immediate ban on all encroachment and subsequent assignment of Government lands in catchment and forest areas. The water catchment areas of Nilgiris should be identified and declared as protected areas. A legislation may be necessary in this regard. The state government should make drastic changes in the outdated Land Encroachment Act, if the remaining areas are to be protected.

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- 3) The Government should ban all kind of cultivation on hill tops and steep slopes. These areas should be reserved for raising native trees.
- 4) There should be a master-plan for Ootacamund Town. Town Planning Rules should be made more stringent and they should be followed strictly. There should be a ban on multistoried buildings. The Geological Survey of India have identified ecologically sensitive areas in the Town. In these locations construction activities should be banned totally.
- 5) By the Gudalur Janmam Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act 1969, the Government of Tamil Nadu rightly abolished the outdated Janmam set up and took over the priceless forests of Gudalur. But the matter has been under litigation in the last 20 years, thanks to the luke warm attitude of the Government of Tamil Nadu. And during the interregnum the planters continue to destroy the forests with impunity and are converting the forest into plantation. These forests are the last patches of the Southern Montane Cover Green Shola forests. Once lost, humankind would have lost these for ever. The Government both Central and State, should take immediate and suitable measures to protect these Janmam forests of Gudalur.
- 6) The Government should ban setting up of Industries which pollute the environment in Nilgiris. The four major industries in the district, The Cordite Factory, The Hindustan Photo Films, the Needles Industries Private Ltd. and the Protein Products of India are discharging enough industrial effluents into the rivers of Nilgiris; Nilgiris cannot bear any more of these effluents. But the Governments, both Central and State are favourably considering a proposal by Messrs Needle Industries Private Ltd. to set up an Electro Plating Industries right inside the Mudumalai Sanctuary. We understand. The effluents that will be discharged by this unit will be highly toxic. In the name of employment and development an entire biosphere is being poisoned. If this industry is cleared by the Government, the life of the tribals, living on the fringe of the sanctuary (and that of society) will be in serious jeopardy.
- 7) Considering the ecological importance of the region, the Government of India has declared Nilgiris as the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, the first of its kind in the country. But no follow up action has been taken to protect the Reserve. Various Government agencies, including the centrally sponsored Hill Area Development Project are pulling in different and mutually contradicting directions destroying the natural environments of Nilgiris. There is no coordination between the different departments of Government. A high level coordinating administrative agency with the necessary statutory powers is very essential under these circumstances. It is high time the Government of Tamil Nadu constituted a Nilgiris Biosphere Development Authority with its Chairman in the rank of a Chief Secretary. The headquarters of such an Authority should be located in Ootacamund. And the object of the Authority should be "Conservation is Development". We submit that our appeal requires immediate attention of the Governments. For, time is running out for Nilgiris.

SNC DELEGATION MEETS GOVERNOR

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan and Secretary Mr. D. Venugopal met the Governor of Tamil Nadu, HE Dr. P.C. Alexander on May 16,1989 at Raj Bhavan, Ooty and impressed on His Excellency the urgency in stemming the environmental degradation in Nilgiris. Text of the discussion paper prepared by Mr. R. Radcliffe, Vice-President, NWLEA, who could not join the discussion for unavoidable reasons.

The present position of unrestricted cultivation and occupation of vacant Revenue lands, regardless of suitability, has resulted in ruin of the top-soil and fertility, great damage to the water retention potential, silting up all rivers and streams, destruction of essential ground-cover and severe damage to good land. The explanation for such occupation must be clearly understood. The compelling cause is a too-large population flooding into the Nilgiris, desperate for something to do, cultivating land and building dwellings wherever and however it can. The present approach of administration of "Laissez faire" must be rejected along with the acceptance of the haphazard making of villages and the almost utter disregard of any real long-term future planning.

Unless this is fully comprehended. It will not be possible to produce ameliorative and corrective measures to counter destruction of the land and to substitute a sound alternative cultivation and living policy. A practical and far-seeing Land Use Policy has to be evolved.

The Nilgiris is of the greatest importance to the well-being and economy of the Tamil Nadu State. Approximately 40 percent of the hydel power supply to the State depends on the hydro-electric schemes in the Nilgiris and associated areas. The two big rivers flowing from the Hills, the Moyar and the Bhavani, irrigate a vast area which is vital to food production while the whole plateau from 4000 to 8000 elevation provides a great sponge from which water is gradually released to the springs and streams of the adjacent plains. Is this to be prejudiced?

Today, due solely to injurious cultivation of very steep grass hills and small-forest covered land, the Moyar and the Bhavani silt-up at an – alarming rate. The hydro-electric storage dams have now a greatly reduced capacity, particularly at Avalanche, Emerald and Kundah, right down to three dams based on the Pegumhalla complex ending at Pillur. In addition, pump-sets are operated and streams tapped without any regard for the ability of the area to sustain such extraction.

The very heavy inflow of people from the plains, increased by the settlement of expatriates from Sri Lanka, is without check. The flow is not exactly encouraged by Government, except in the case of the expatriates, but it is not hindered in any way and made attractive by the acceptance of the occupation of vacant Revenue

lands without question and allowing it to be cultivated in outright violation of the Hill Area Preservation of Trees Act.

On the fringes of the Mudumalai Sanctuary an electro-plating factory with a high pollution risk is being erected at Masinagudi; Tourist expansion schemes are unrestricted, commercial development is being encouraged with a thriving business in the collection and export out of the State of Cattle dung from the Reserve Forests, thus destroying the fertility of the Forest. The Hindustan Photo Film Factory reaches out each year and has now taken over 90 acres of good blue-gum forest land for an additional factory.

Industrial activity can be accepted in some measures in order to reduce the pressure on the land and give employment to the locals but this should be confined to non-polluting, small-scale, cottage type industries with, wherever possible, an accent on agricultural activity.

It may be thought the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve will take care of the conservation of the Nilgiris. This is a myth – a paper myth. The Biosphere Reserve Authority has not consulted the Head of the District, the Collector in any detail. The oldest conservation Association in the Nilgiris, the Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association now some 113 years old, which has a vast fund of local knowledge has not been consulted and replies are not given to letters sent requesting consultation. The choosing of the Core Areas has omitted in any detail the essential need to protect fully all water sources; streams; rivulets and water catchments areas. Demarcation of these vital areas can only be made with local knowledge.

The Nilgiris is a unique and peculiar ecological area, an area so very different from the rest of Tamil Nadu State that it demands some special individual attention. Senior Administrative Officer in the Forest Department, the Revenue, the PWD, the H.A.D.P. are posted for periods of two or three years and just when they are beginning to understand the peculiarities of the District, they are transferred and replaced by an Officer from the plains with no practical knowledge of the very different conditions of a rain forest; an area subject to two monsoons, a climate totally different from the plains. The present administration of the District in the hands of the H.A.D.P. the Revenue, the Forest Department and the Horticultural Development all go their separate ways, often conflicting in their aims and intentions and more often than not, duplicating effort and wasting money and energy.

What is required is a special Administrative Policy designed for the peculiarities of the Nilgiris. An introduction of a Hill Area Authority headed by a senior Government Administrative Officer with a staff that will remain undisturbed for many years at a time. An Authority that will co-ordinate work of all the various administrative departments involved. That will monitor progress and implement faithfully a Land Use Policy designed and financed for a sound Hills Development which ensures, not just the well-being of a local area, but the far reaching well-being of adjacent areas in the Plains that depend on the environment of the Nilgiris for flourishing. Continuity and control are essential elements for any successful outcome. Such an authority should be a statutory body with its secretariat situated at Ootacamund.

In evolving a Policy, thought must be given to the desirability of some inter-change of the use, care and control of lands classified 100 years or more ago as "Forest" and "Revenue". This classification was made when there was a small population, approximately 200 million in India, with virtually no Industry and when the Nilgiris was very sparsely populated indeed; When there was not today's unrelenting pressure on land use. A classification which has lost much of its relationship to the needs of 1989. There are so many instances to be seen where encroached land would have been made better use of under Forest cover. In return for relinquishment of control by the Revenue, some so-called Forest land which is mostly bare or sparsely scrub covered, could be given to revenue control, so that houses can be built and land cultivated in areas where the least damage can occur.

Such radical thinking is required. The bullock-cart age has passed into history. Full cognizance must be given to present needs, the overwhelming needs of the large and rapidly increasing population and its call on and use of the limited natural resources of this Earth.

WORKSHOP FOR RURAL YOUTH

SNC in collaboration with the Centre for Environment Education ,regional Cell (Southern Zone0, organised a three day environmental education workshop for rural youth at Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Nilgiris from 21st to 23rd April, 1989.

The workshop in which 30 boys from different parts of Nilgiris participated, covered subjects like principles of ecology and environment, environmental issues specific to Western Ghats, issues relating to Nilgiris and a plan for eco-development of the areas from where the participants hailed. Puppetry , folk songs, group discussions, nature walk and a visit to the Central Soil and Water conservation research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI). Ooty formed part of the workshop.

Mr. R. Radcliffe, Vice-President, NWLEA, Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC chief, Mrs. Shyamala Krishna, Scientist, CEE, Dr. Jayakumar of Indian Institute of Science, Mr. Rangunath, Scientist, CSWCRTI, Mr. B.V. Devaraj, Environmentalist activist and Mr. A. Arimapagan of Punducherry Iyarkai Kazhagam were among the resource persons.

We are thankful to the Centre for Environment Education and its Director Shri Kartikeya V.Sarabhai for sponsoring the workshop.

(VOL 3 No. 2/P3)

BOOK REVIEW

MONUMENTAL WORK ON BADAGA LORE

Prof. Paul Hockings, who has done extensive research on the Badagas, has just published his third major book on the Badagas – “COUNSEL FROM THE ANCIENTS – A study of Badaga proverbs, prayers, omens and curses (with an outline of Badaga language by Christine Pilot – Raichoor)”. The book has been published by the prestigious MOUNTON DE GRUYTHER of Berlin who have kindly sent a copy to SNC Newsletter for review at the request of the author. Mr. C.S.G. Prasad, Senior Correspondent, INDIA TODAY was kind enough to review the book for us.

This is a substantial work which draws on the author’s quarter century of research into the mores of Badaga life. He takes the study of Badaga forward from where the Rev. J.M. Buhler left them nearly a century and half ago. It is difficult to understand this long hiatus between Buhler’s pioneering studies and Hockings’ present work. Nonetheless, the student of tribal lore in general and Badaga lore in particular should be grateful to Dr. Hockings for his monumental work which has now been published under the prestigious Mouton imprint.

The book is divided into ten parts (there are in addition three appendices, a bibliography, a glossary and concordance and a detailed index). The second part – an outline of the Badaga language – has been written with admirable clarity by Christiane Pilot-Raichor. The remaining nine parts look at various aspects of Badaga life ranging from their conceptions of space and matter to their moral and religious values.

The book, it can be thus seen, covers a huge canvas. It is not possible, within the confines of a brief review, to do much more than hint at the broad contours of the author’s arguments. One conclusion can, however, be stated simply and firmly. Hockings follows the modern anthropological practice of not being prescriptive. His aim is not to locate the Badagas on some hypothetical continuum of civilisational values ranging from the primitive to the civilized. Rather his aim is descriptive. He describes accurately what emerges from a study of Badaga proverbs, prayers, etc. This method has the advantage that the reader is left to form his own conclusions as to the wholesomeness of the Badaga civilization rather than being imposed upon by one authority or the other. In recent years, many western scholars have reached against this approach to cultural relativism arguing that it does not lead to any consensus about which cultures are superior and which one is inferior. We have to be thankful to Hockings for having resisted the temptations inherent in this argument.

Hockings’ study shows Badagas in a new light. To the non-Badaga, Badaga customs and social mores have occasionally appeared incomprehensible. The present study removes this particular lacuna and places the Badagas firmly within their own universe through a study of their oral traditions. For instance, a whole series of proverbs in part IX of the book show that the Badagas placed a great deal of emphasis on cooperative labour and on the avoidance of ostentation. Example: 952a “Hagalu habbada mane, iru kumbuvada mane; and 948c “Tingu bisiluno kode hididana” etc. At the same time, the Badagas come through as a very practical and world-wise people e.g. 1061b “atta kottigata hallu, avada kottiga halo” etc.

The point is that the Badagas are among the few tribes that have modernized themselves without losing their cultural moorings. They occupy today high positions in society but have at the same time preserved their heritage. In this they are similar to the Gomantaks of Goa. How this difficult task was achieved with minimum social disruption is a fascinating study. And Hockings’ book throws valuable light on the Badaga weltanschauung which explains why the Badagas were successful where several other tribes have not been successful.

One of the fascinating parts of the present book is the first appendix which presents a facsimile of the Buhler manuscript. Buhler as a Christian missionary of the nineteenth century, was probably torn apart by the twin motives of being a detached scholar and a pastor who was keen on converting the pagans. This conflict can be read between the lines of the

“Counsel from the Ancients” is a costly book. It has been published by one of the prestigious publishers in the world. The book is mainly intended for researchers in Anthropology and Sociology. However some Badaga and other individuals and Associations in the Nilgiris and outside may like to own copies. The book costs \$ 100 (roughly Rs. 1700-). However the publishers have kindly agreed to consider a discount if a bulk order is placed. If sufficient number of interested readers write to us we shall take up the matter with the publishers. If anybody wants to write to the publishers directly, their address is : Mouton de Gruyter, Genthiner Strasse 13, D-1000 BERLIN 30, FRG

proverbs that Buhler collected. While on the one hand he tries to be fair in presenting the Badaga worldview fairly, he is also impelled by his mission in life to show the dark side of the Badaga cosmos so that they can be convinced of the need to see the light in their own interest. The contrast between Buhler’s selective compilation and Hockings’ more comprehensive one is the difference between the missionary world view and the scholar’s world view. Anthropological research has indeed come a long way in the course of just one century! Finally a few words about the production quality of the book. In a word, it is outstanding. Moutons have long been known for their dedication to the art of good book production. This dedication shines forth from every single page of this magnificent volume.

It should be an important acquisition for every academic library, especially those that cater to anthropologists and sociologists. In sum, Hockings’ work is a consummation of a quarter century of dedication to an obscure but important area of human knowledge and is a substantial contribution to our understanding of tribal societies – their world views, development and modernization.

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BADAGAS AND CONSERVATION

Badaga culture, Prof. Hocklings says in the “Counsel from the Ancients”, encompasses over 400 discreet values as reflected in their proverbs, prayers, omens and curses. A good many of these values concern the protection of the environment, forests, water, soil, etc. Excerpts:

On Sound Cultivation

“A field on the flat land has three crops’ A field on the slope has only one crop (per year)”
(That is, flat land can be three times as fertile as a slope.” “even if it is washed away by flash streams, Cultivate the flat land; Marry a fair skinned girl even if she is a thief.”
(That is, certain things are so desirable that you should size them even with all their drawbacks.)
“Watch the proper state of the soil; Watch for the proper seed to sow”
(That is, while cultivating terraces, the farmers should watch for the soil to be in the correct degree of dampness, just after the rains, before they ploughed it and the seed, too, should be suitably dry and not mouldy.)
“Don’t pick up a dry cowpat, Don’t plough up the cow shed.”
(That is, an old cowpat will have flattened and be useless as manure and likewise the soil around a cow-shed is trampled hard and hence not worth cultivating.)
“If you intensely cultivate a field even if it were only the extent of a palm, the yield will be equal to a forearm length of ghee.”
“Better farm a field you know, even a fragment, Rather than some field you know nothing about.”
“The sower has ruined the efforts of the ploughman.”
(That is, if the sowing is not done properly the yield will be affected.)
“If there is too much seed, the field will spoil; If there is too much talk, the house will be spoiled.”
“The crop in the field is three cubits high’ The weeds are six cubits high.” (That is because of neglect the land has been lost to weeds.)
“If a pig eats one measure of the produce. The birds will eat ten measures.” (That is, birds can do more damage to standing crops than animals like pigs.)
“The man who doesn’t ask for the loan he has given is finished; The man who doesn’t visit the field he has sown is ruined.”
“he who slept at the time sowing Is dry at harvest time.”
“Should we work the field after sunset? Should we be sleeping after dawn?”
“In difficulty, hurry and grow; In famine, resist and grow.” (That is, one should try hard during some difficulty but in a famine it is best to think out one’s plans first or else one may make things worse.)
“Even if you die, preserve the seed.” (That is, one should die of starvation rather than eat the seed grain which will support the next generation.)

On Protection of Forests

“If asked, “Who planted this Bastard Saul tree?”, he will say, ‘My father’s younger brother, not my father.” (That is, no one will claim credit for planting a useless tree.)
“The man who has begotten by a boy and The man who had planted a coconut tree won’t spoil.”
“The forest offers a relationship; Cactus is just a boundary.” (That is, the forest can be used in many ways just as relatives whereas cactus is useful only as a hedge.)
“When eating in a countryside, The forest will yield food stuffs.” (That is, in a forest even the destitute do not have to go without food.)
“Believing there is bamboo on the hillside, Don’t pull off the bamboo which is in place.” (That is, don’t be too confident that you will find more of what you are destroying.)
“Don’t destroy the forests, Don’t malign the village.”

BADAGA TOPONYM

Out of the about 362 hamlets of the Badagas, nearly half of them were named after the quality of land or soil, nature of vegetation and plant species.

Example:

De: nella – Je: nu + hola= Honey + field

Hullada – Hullu + ha : da = Grass + flat ground

Banahutti – Bana + Hatti = Forest + garden + hamlet

Kadeso;la – Kade + so:le = last forest

Billikombe –Billi + kombe = Nilgiri Rhododendron + hamlet

Imbimorhatti – Imbi + mora + hatti = sweet lime + tree + hamlet

Kannerimukku – kanneri + mukku = Type of mountain black plum + corner

Mullimala – bramble + head village

Tumbi mala – Nestle + mountain

On Water Conservation

“He is philanthropist who rebuilds a broken dam. He is a sinner who breaks a dam when built.”
“Both the man who is abusing you behind your back, And the man who breaks down the dam are alike.”
“If you work, there! It’s a field! If you gather, there! it’s a hearth!!
If you excavate, there! It’s a well!!!

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SINS AGAINST NATURE

At the funeral of a Badaga, the elders assembled there seek absolution for a long list of sins on behalf of the dead man. Several of these sins are those committed against nature.

If he has felled trees in the forests – a sin If he has pulled a young plant and left it in the sun – a sin If he has pruned a young plant before it was ready – a sin

If a nutty-bair tree was pulled up – a sin If he ripped things out of a forests – a sin If he broke down a dam that had been built up – a sin

If he let the water of the overflowing pond run out – a sin If he spat into the river that was flowing – a sin If he ran easily across a stream without doing the gesture of obeisance – a sin If after catching a fledging bird, he gave it to a cat – a sin If a barren cow was milked – a sin If an overly young buffalo was made to plough – a sin

If he has killed a snake or a crow – a sin If he has killed a gecko – a sin If he has killed a crocodile – a sin If he has killed a iguana – a sin If a milch buffalo was covered – a sin If he milked a parturient cow – a sin If he offered only a little food to a black buffalo – a sin If he threw out dirty water towards the rising sun – a sin

If he poured urine on a burning fire – a sin If his buttocks was exposed towards the sun – a sin If he broke a bridge – a sin

OH ! SUCH A FIELD ! !

On the Nilgiri Hills, sin and evil deeds are unknown.

Enjoying what he has obtained from the ground – such a field!

Enjoying what he has obtained from the lustrous field with no village – such a field!

He has given alms to those who came to the threshing ground – such a field!

He has given meals to those who came in rags – such a field!

He has given fire to those who came shivering – such a field!

He has given clothes to those without clothes _ such a field!

He has offered charity to the hungry – such a field!

People with such a pride do not crawl.

Even if they sowed on top of a flat rock, it would sprout

Such charity he has been doing!

- From a Badaga Ballad.

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan addressed a “Farm Science Seminar on Water Management & Crop production “organised by the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI), Ooty and Central Potato Research Station, Ooty on March 18, 1989. Mr. Krishnan, speaking on the theme “environmental protection” said there should be immediate and total ban on further extension of eucalyptus plantations. He further said that social benefits of eucalyptus were nil and indiscriminate growing of eucalyptus should be stopped. There should be a total ban on such cultivations in catchment areas and near water sources.

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Also available against prepayment by DD/MO.

Pahar -2: Report on the Himalayan Environment by People’s Association for Himalayan Area.

Research (Pahar)

Hardback – Hindi

Suggesting that there should be a ban on felling of natural trees, Mr. Krishnan said that existing sholas and grass lands should be protected at all costs and degraded sholas and grass lands should be regreened wherever possible. Stating that the intense propaganda by the Horticulture Department to switch over to tea cultivation from annual crops was not a good sign, the SNC chief opined that the traditional potato, vegetable cultivation should not be upset. He stated that while the main object of the centrally sponsored Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) was development with conservation, the opposite was being done by the various implementing agencies.

The chief guest at the meet was Dr. E.G. Silas, Vice-Chancellor of the Kerala Agricultural University.

SNC activists Mr. K. Shanmugam and Mr. B. Nandagopal attended a Leadership programme on Nature Conservation from 8th to 12th March, 1989 organised by the Anglade Institute of Natural History, Shenbagnur, Kodaikanal headed by Rev. Fr. K.M. Mathew SJ.

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan addressed the people of Kolli Malai, A tribal village in the Nilgiris on the occasion of the Kambattarayam festival.

Swedish environmental activists Maud Johansson and Goran Eklof visited SNC and interviewed MR. B.J. Krishnan on behalf of

ENDANGERED NILGIRIS AN EXHIBITION

In the last few years SNC and like minded individuals and association have been working ceaselessly to spread awareness among the people regarding the environmental problems facing the Nilgiris and to impress on the Government the imperative need to institute action to atleast slow down, if not arrest, the pace of degradation.

Though the Government have, by and large, agreed with the standpoint of the environmentalists very little has been done by way of action. In the meanwhile, the problems have grown many times and consequences – especially water scarcity – have been severe.

In order to draw the serious attention of the Government of Tamil Nadu we propose to hold a week long exhibition at Madras around the first week of December 1989.

The exhibition would highlight the special features of Nilgiris, its glorious past, its contribution to the State and the country as also its continued neglect and the degradation it has suffered over the years.

The central piece of the exhibition will be a photographic show on the theme “Nilgiris then and now”.

Also on show will be the various products of Nilgiris such as Tea, Vegetables, natural oils, handicrafts, eatables, etc. to highlight Nilgiris’ contribution to the state and the country.

We invite all interested individuals and organisations to join us in making the Exhibition a success. You can display your photographs of Nilgiris. If you have paintings of Nilgiris you can display them too. If there is any nominal cost to be borne we will be glad to do so.

You can also exhibit any product of Nilgiris – agricultural, industrial and commercial. We will charge only a nominal fee if the purpose is only exhibition. If the products are for sale we will charge the cost of stall, publicity and other incidental charges.

We are in the process of finalizing the arrangements and will be able to tell the exact cost shortly.

This is an opportunity for all those concerned about Nilgiris to effectively put forth their case to the Govt. of Tamil Nadu and Govt. of India. Besides top Central and State officials, eminent environmentalists are likely to participate in the Seminar to be held as part of the Exhibition.

For further enquiries please write to D. Venugopal, 22C, Venus Colony, Alwarpet, Madras.

MEMORIAL FOR SULLIVAN

June 15, 1989 marked the close of the 200th birth centenary of John Sullivan the District Collector who established Ooty as a premier hill station in the country.

We hope the people of Nilgiris, who have benefited so much from his endeavour, are in agreement with us that Tamil Nadu Government should set up a fitting memorial for the great man in Ooty or elsewhere if there is a public demand.

We, therefore, request individuals and institutions to write to the Chief Minister and the Government urging them to consider a memorial for Sullivan at the earliest.

MEET ON ENVIRONMENT AND RELIGION

SNC will be organizing a 3-day Meet on Environment and Religion jointly with the Inter-Faith Dialogue Committee, Nilgiris from August 18 to 20th. The Meet is being sponsored by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India.

The Meet, which will include a Seminar for the public, a workshop for the FDC members, and a public rally, will focus on the role of religious institutions in, the protection of environment. Eminent environmentalists, heads of religious and spiritual institutions and top local officials will be participating.

*****SQUARE TREES*****

ONE reason that the world’s supply of trees is falling rapidly is people’s insatiable appetite for timber. Another is the inconvenient shape of trees. When a round log is turned into rectangular planks, only about 50-60% of the wood is converted into timber. The rest ends up as wood chips, which are usually sent to pulp mills to make cheap stuff like paper.

One way to increase the yield from a single tree is simple and absurd: change the shape of the trunk. A square trunk would yield much more timber and far fewer shavings. Although naturally square trees are something of a rarity, Mr. Robert Falls, a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, says he can make squarish stems from round saplings grow.

Tree growth involves the activity of cells near the surface called cambium cells. Cambium cells on the outside of the cambium layer form bark. On the inside they form wood. In the case of softwoods such as spruce, fir or cedar, the best quality wood is the wood that is laid down last- i.e, the wood closest to the outside of the trunk, which is lost when logs are turned into timber.

To solve the twin problems of inefficiency and the loss of the best wood during milling Mr. Falls drew on a simple observation. It is evident that trees can be made to grow in an eccentric fashion. For example, some trees grow thicker trunks in response to strong winds. Somehow, the physical force of the wind can increase the rate at which the cambium layer makes wood.

Mr. Falls discovered a similar way to make cambium cells do their stuff inside the stem of a sapling. By applying some sort of stimulus to four “corners” of the stem of a standing tree, he can get a 150% increase in the rate of wood production. (Mr. Falls is still waiting for his patent, so he will not say exactly what the stimulus is.) The speeded-up growth rate should last for up to seven years, even after one year, a treated tree stem has a distinctly square cross-section. Once squareness has been established, the tree should continue to grow square, even when the rate of cambium-cell division in the four corners has returned to normal.

In theory, the procedure should work on any tree with a cambium layer. Mr. Falls claims that it takes only about five minutes to treat a small tree, and that the process could be easily be done by a machine. So far it has been tested on cedar, poplar and spruce, and after two years, Mr. Falls says, the experimental trees are clearly square. The wood cells at the corners of the square trunk are approximately the same size, shape and composition as normal wood cells. This suggests that the procedure does not lead to wood of lower quality or strength. Wood made by accelerated differentiation of the cambium layer is extra wood that would not have otherwise been made.

Making trees square could one day be as routine as pruning. Countries most likely to benefit from the idea are those that farms trees to produce timber: they will be able to incorporate the process into standard plantation management. Square forests may look unattractive to conservative eyes, but they look better than no forests at all.

(The Economist)

WORLD WATCH REPORT

“The best way to combat poverty, hunger, illiteracy and ecological destruction in India and other Asian countries would be to forge “partnerships between grassroot level organisations and the government”, says the World Watch Institute. The Institute goes on to say, “India’s self-help movement has a prized place in society, tracing its root to Mahatma Gandhi’s pioneering village development work 60 years ago. Gandhi aimed to build a just and humane society from the bottom, starting with self-reliant villages based on renewable resources”.

(Financial Express)

SOIL LOSS

“The arable land in the country is losing every year more than 16 tonnes of soil per hectare because of erosion, according to a scientific study. The soil loss in the hilly slopes, foothill, blacksoils and area under shifting cultivation is much higher.” (Economics Times)

ANCIENT FORESTS

“Hatfield Forests in Essex is one of the oldest Royal forests in England, little changed since 1100. It was raised not for the enjoyment of the royalty. “It was a reservoir for deer, timber (for large construction works) and wood (for smaller buildings, crafts and fuel). Each of the 18 little woods at Hatfield was felled in rotation every 18 years and the resultant coppice stools were protected by fencing for the next nine years. When young trees had sprung up from the stools, deer and other animals were allowed in to graze the underwood and scrub; in the open plains trees were pollarded at a higher point and animals grazed freely around them. Professional hunting kept the animal population steady. It worked beautifully. A complex bureaucracy attached to the management of the forest.” (from a review of the book *The Last Forest* by Oliver Rackham)

ECO PHILOSOPHY

“A scientific ecologist mainly studies the relationship between the flora (plants), the fauna (animals) and the non-living environment - all material relations and perspective involving innumerable data. The other ecologist, the environmentalists – concerns himself with the protection and conservation of nature through need-based practical applications in the interests of humanity. But, all of them, conditioned by their western style of education are not able to appreciate the mental atmosphere – the mental pollution that leads to environmental pollution, destruction and allied problems that confront mankind. There is thus an urgent and ever-growing need for “eco-philosophers”, or “ecosophists”, who can perceive nature in all its manifestations as one interpenetrating, integral, corporate and cooperating wholeness. Nothing can be done without affecting other things in some way. We cannot harm nature without harming ourselves. Such ‘holistic’ thinking leads to a ‘holistic’ approach necessary for very survival” – observed Mr. Rudi Jarisma, thirty-nine year old ecologist-turned-philosopher from Netherlands (now on his third tour of the sub-continent), in the course of his hour-long lecture at the Adyar Lodge of the Theosophical Society, Madras-20, recently.” (Indian Express)

ECO MOVEMENT

“The emergence of the Indian environmental movement can perhaps be dated to 1973, the year the Chipko movement began. Given its relatively brief history, it has enjoyed considerable success. The movement has forced the state to acknowledge the inseparable links between economic wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Perhaps the greatest failure has been the lack of response from political parties.

Yet there is little room for complacency. Take for instance three of movement’s most trumpeted successes – Chipko, Bedthi and Silent Valley. A closer look reveals that these victories were all made possible only through a unique combination of factors. Chipko notwithstanding, commercial forestry continues its march of destruction else-where in the subcontinent, while the reveres in Silent Valley and Bedthi have scarcely deterred the unholy trinity of engineers, contractors and civil servants from realizing their dream of turning India into the most dammed country on earth.

The celebration of small victories should not, therefore, blind us to the larger defeats. Assuredly, things can only get worse before they begin to get better. There are three solid reasons why economic growth in India will continue to use resources both wastefully and unsustainably; fuelled by narrow criteria of profitability, it is completely insensitive to the questions of relative factor endowments and ecological stability. Ideologically, this wasteful and destructive economic system is buttressed by the seductive hold of modernization theory on the minds of our elite. Our present political system is hardly equipped to serve environmental ends either. Five years (the time horizons of our most enlightened politicians) is too short a period for ecological reconstruction. Moreover, the links between big business and the state, and the centralizing tendencies in the present constitutional set-up, further shrink the space for dissent and debate.

In the circumstances, the environmental opposition must simultaneously operate on three flanks. In the sphere of the economy, it must strengthen the work of the Appropriate Technologists in presenting before the public a set of resources conserving and socially liberating technical alternatives. In the realm of ideas, it must draw upon the compelling arguments of the Gandhians in highlighting the cultural and spiritual costs of much of what today passes for economic ‘development’.”

(excerpts from “Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism” by Ramachandra Guha in EPW)

POTATO PROSPECTS

“In conclusion, the outlook for potato production for this year (1988-89) is very bright. The country is set to harvest a record 16.5 million tones of potatoes from a record areas of over one million hectares and a record yield of more than 16t/ha. If this trend continues, the country will attain and even exceed in some respect the targets set by the National Commission of Agriculture (1976) for area, production and yield. Since, this is being attained without any special promotion drive or support from the Government, it shows that raising potatoes is still a very remunerative proposition to the farmers, and also that it is becoming increasingly popular as a food crop with the masses.

Anticipating overproduction, the Uttar Pradesh Government has launched a market intervention price scheme in 30 districts of the State.

Under this, the State will purchase 60,000 tonnes of potatoes at the Rs. 75 per quintal for white varieties and Rs. 65 per quintal for red varieties. The State had also made arrangements with the railway authorities for adequate availability of wagons for exporting potatoes from the main producing centres. West Bengal is also expecting surplus production. Normally, most of its surplus is exported to Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. But due to late harvest, the ruling prices were still quite high in the market at the time of our survey.

Though, the Uttar Pradesh Government has undertaken market intervention price scheme and the price offered may just break even, the total quantity of potatoes to be purchased by the State (60,000 tonnes) is very meager – only about one percent of the State’s production.

Similar market intervention schemes should be undertaken in other states also to cover about 10 percent of the production.” From an article by H.C. Sharma and others in Financial Express)

This issue of Newsletter is financed by : HOTEL NILGIRIS - OOTY

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Designed and typeset By Compset Graphics – Madras 600034. Phone : 864290. Printed at Canara Traders – Madras Phone: 566532

ONE DAY SEMINAR ON

ECO-PROTECTION ON NILGIRIS

As part of the National Environmental Awareness campaign 1989-90, sponsored by the Department of Environment, Government of India, SNC organised a one day seminar at Ootacamund (Ooty) on 24-2-90 on the theme "Environmental Protection of Nilgiris". The chief guest of the occasion was Shri S. Ramakrishnan, Commissioner and Secretary, Department of Environment and Forests, Government of Tamilnadu, who was on his first visit to the Nilgiris after taking charge of the new appointment. The meeting was presided by Shri G.A. Rajkumar, collector of Nilgiris who had also taken charge three days before.

Welcoming the gathering, Shri B.J. Krishnan, President, SNC, placed before the Secretary and the Collector the following specific problems of the district which merited immediate attention.

1. As per the policy of the Government, reiterated by G.O. 346 – R – dt. 1.3.87, atleast 2/3 of the area should be under green cover in hill areas. In pursuit of this policy, (Nilgiris is short of the norm) an extent of 4600 acres of wooded revenue land near Masinagudi area was transferred to the Forest Department on 15-12-88 and the same was notified on 26-4-1989.

Under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 once a land was declared as forest, it can not be used for any non-forestry purposes.

While this was so. Taking advantage of some bureaucratic loophole, the Hindustan Photo Films (HPF) and one of the Rotary Clubs of Nilgiris (incidentally both HPF and the Rotary Club in question are both headed by the same person) set about establishing a, what was called, Indu-Rotary Village, with the ostensible purpose of helping the local tribals. Over 10 acres of wooded area, within the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve was bulldozed to prepare the land for cultivation. When the Forest Department objected to the move and sought to stop further bulldozing, interested members of the HPF set up a tribal citizen to move the Madras High Court for staying any move of the Forest Department to stop the bulldozing. This is a classic case of environmental damage in the name of development. Even forty years later, the Todas (comparatively the most advanced of the Tribals of Nilgiris) could not be motivated or persuaded to take up cultivation despite granting considerable extent of lands to them. Outsiders who have taken these lands on unauthorized lease (often on exploitative terms) for cultivation have been playing havoc with the land use. This being so to clear lands inside a sanctuary in the name of developing the tribals can only be a mischievous action, to say the least.

2. The final clearance for the Pykara Ultimate Stage Hydel Project is yet to come. However preliminary work of providing quarters etc. for the project staffs and workers has already started in a sensitive area within the biosphere reserve. About 5000 workers are likely to be employed there and the project, going by the experience of such projects in the country, may take almost a decade for completion.

During this period, there will be enormous pressure in the surrounding forests to meet the housing, food, fodder, etc. needs of staff and workers. This has been the sad experience of all the hydel projects in the district including the Kundah and the Pykara schemes. Moreover, as in the case of earlier projects, the workers are most likely to settle down in the project vicinity once the project is over. The state Government should consider these aspects with due care before commencing work.

The Union Minister of State for Environment and Forest, Smt. Maneka Gandhi, in her reply to Dr. Chabra, Ooty, on the subject, has said that the project proposal, submitted in 1982, did not disclose the likely impact of the project on the nearby forest area. The Minister had written to the State Government seeking clarification on this respect.

3. An extent of 500 acres of virgin forest land at Nadugani in the Gudalur taluk is under immediate threat. These forests come within the area demarcated by the State Forest Department for their Gene Pool Programme to conserve the genetic diversity of the Nilgiris.

These lands, forming part of the erstwhile Janman forest, have been classified as non-forestry land by the Assistant Settlement Officer constituted under the Janman Abolition Act of 1969.

Vested interests are now claiming patta for these lands. Considering that these forests are not only ancient but also contain within them valuable trees like rosewood,

the whole affairs appears to be pre-planned. The Government should institute a thorough enquiry in to this matter and stop this move one way or the other.

4. The problem of industrial effluents in the district, particularly from the major industries including the Cordite Factory, Needle Industries, HPF and PPI, is assuming serious proportions with adverse effects crop production. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board should take immediate remedial action in this regard.

5. The Eucalyptus controversy is yet to be resolved in the district. The purpose of growing eucalyptus in the district appears to be to supply raw material to M/s. South India Viscose and a few other industries in the nearby plains. The social relevance of eucalyptus has been completely lost. The Government should reorder its priorities for the use of eucalyptus in the Nilgiris so that the growing of eucalyptus in the district, at a great environmental cost, becomes socially relevant.

6. It is common knowledge that lack of co-ordination among the various governmental authorities has done immense damage to the district. There are three major authorities in the district now – the Collectorate, the Hill Area Development Programme and the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. Unless the activities of these authorities are co-ordinated towards a common programme for the protection of the district they will continue to work at cross purposes- each one undoing what has been done by the other.

The Commissioner and Secretary, Department of Environment and Forests, Government of Tamilnadu, Mr. S. Ramakrishnan, inaugurating the seminar said that environmental issues invariably involved compromises for resolving them. However, he added, the efficacy of a compromise depended on whether it had been done within a certain limit. The Secretary cited several instances where, he said, compromises were inevitable.

Lauding SNC, he called upon the environmentalists to relentlessly pursue their goal without complacency. They should, like the Garden Mynah, make constant noise even though few may like it.

Mr. Ramakrishnan announced that the proposal to put up an electroplating industry at Masinagudy by a private unit had been dropped. This, he said, was a signal victory to the people who had brought the harmful effects of the unit to the notice of the Government. (See pg.3)

Regarding the controversy over the eucalyptus plantation. Mr. Ramakrishnan said that but for it, the pressure on the Shola forests for fuel would have been much more severe. The safe limit for eucalyptus in Nilgiris should be determined, he added. Stating that the population growth rate in the Nilgiris was 1% more compared to the rest of the state, Mr. Ramakrishnan said immigration had accounted for this unprecedented growth.

Referring to the differences of opinion over the proposed Pykara ultimate stage project, he said that the impact of the project on the nearby forests would not be significant as most of work would be done underground. As the project was technologically very advanced, it would use minimum labour, the number of labourers might be about 500 and not 5000 as it was feared, he added.

HILL AREA CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Mr. S. Ramakrishnan, Environmentalist Commissioner and Secretary, inaugurating the one day seminar, said that the present Hill Area Development Programme would be replaced by a Hill Area Conservation Authority. The proposal was at an advanced stage and would be announced shortly. The Authority would control, monitor and supervise all developmental activities in the Nilgiris with a special emphasis on preservation of its ecology with a special emphasis on preservation of its ecology. It would take into account the carrying capacity of the district, especially the sensitive areas while deciding future projects.

Readers of this Nesletter would recall that the reconstruction of the Hill Area Development Programme (HADP), which had come in for criticism in recent years had been one of our long pending demands. We had mooted, at one of our earliest seminars, the setting up of a Nilgiris Development Authority for the proper growth of the district.

The idea conceived by Shri B. Vijayaraghavan, one of the senior most and respected IAS officials of the State and a committed conservationist, has already been given shape by Shri S. Ramakrishnan, the chief guest of the meet, and is awaiting final clearance by the government. The reconstitution of HADP, we hope, is the first step towards setting up of that Authority.

We are indeed very happy that thankful to the State Government for having responded to our representation in time.

The modification of the time plan for the stadium at the Breeks ground, the refusal to permit an electroplating unit at Masinagudy, the constitution of a Hill Area Conservation Authority, the shifting of the site for the proposed three state hotel from within the Mudumalai Sanctuary to Gudalur are some of the major issues in which SNC had got into a dialogue with the State Government and resolved them amicably. We do hope the Government will continue to be sympathetic to our cause.

Presiding over the function, Mr. G.A. Rajkumar, the new Collector of Nilgiris said it was regrettable that the Queen of Hills had now become a slum of slums as some would say. He added that he shared the concern of the local people for preserving the beauty of the district and promised to do his best in this direction.

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Seminar

The paramount need to preserve the unique Nilgiri Hills described as one of the unparalleled ecosystem in the world was stressed by several speakers who participated in the seminar.

Mr. K.K. Somsundaram, Conservator of Forests, said that the Forest Department was identifying the surveying water sources in the Nilgiris biosphere reserve. The department would demarcate the core and buffer areas. However Mr. Somsundaram assured that the tribal pockets within the biosphere would be preserved. He warned that no encroachments would be allowed at any cost.

The Conservator said that a gene pool was being established at Nadugani in Gudalur taluk at an estimated cost of Rs. 50 lakhs. The idea behind the gene pool, which would be divided into 12 zones, was to preserve endangered species. The Botanical Survey of India had identified 35 endangered species and the Department would try to establish a separate zone for them. He said that chain link fences erected by the Department to preserve natural forests near human habitations since 1987 had proved to be a success.

Regretting that about 20 acres of land in Mavanhullah area adjoining the Mudumalai wild life sanctuary had been allowed to be cleared by some parties, he said that when the Forest Department wanted to take action against them they had moved the court as a pre-emptory measure.

Dr. Nanjan, Professor and Head, Horticultural Research Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said that research findings of the station revealed that effluents of some of the major industries here contained excess of lead and chromium which had adversely affected agriculture in certain areas.

Dr. M. Govinda Rao, District Forest Officer, Nilgiris north division, said that 10 percent of the forest land had

NILGIRIS_ THEN AND NOW AN EXHIBITION

SNC will conduct a 10-day photographic exhibition on the theme. "Nilgiris – Then and Now" during May, 1990 at Ooty. The purpose of the show is to (a) make the present generation of the local people to realise the glorious past of their district (b) make the visitors appreciate the natural significance of Nilgiris.

Although we have commissioned professional photographers to shoot the pictures for the show, we thought we should also invite outstanding entries from others too (in and outside Nilgiris) which would make the event more effective. We, therefore, invite entries on the following subjects :

1. Natives of Nilgiris (Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Badagas, Irulas and Panniyas etc.) and the mounting population pressure on the hills.

2. Nilgiris that was – old photographs of Ooty and other towns and other landmarks of Nilgiris.

3. Nilgiris – its uniqueness : Grass lands, Shola Forests, other plant life (ferns, flowers etc), birds, animals and others, landscapes of the hills and valleys, Mountain Railways etc.

4. Degradation – unscientific/unplanned cultivation/water management practices, industrial pollution, land encroachments etc.

5. consequences : Water scarcity, landslides/slips, urban decay (open drainage, garbage, overcrowded roads, bad roads, heavy traffic, unplanned and haphazard constructions, etc.

6. Any other aspect of Nilgiris which will go with the theme of the exhibition. He photos need not be freshly taken ones.

Since there is very little time left, interested persons are requested to send post card size copies of their entries to 22C, Thirupathy Apartments, Venus Colony, Alwarpet, Madras-18 IMMEDIATELY. If accepted, we may require the negative for enlarging the prints. If the entrants could do the enlargements for us, it will be well and good. Contributions will be duly acknowledged.

now been permitted to meet the fuel needs of the people. However, he requested landed people to grow their own fuelwood so that the poor and needy could benefit from the Forest Department's concessions.

Mr. Rao said that as water from springs and rivulets were being unauthorisedly diverted from agriculture operations several villages were deprived of drinking water. He felt that when drawing up long-term environmental programme voluntary agencies should be consulted.

Mrs. Evone Piljain Weidamann, Toda leader and social worker, regretted that lands allotted to the Todas under the Toda Patta Scheme were being misused by outsiders. Stating that the Todas were being treated as exhibition pieces by tourists, Mrs. Weidamann, said such an attitude should be given up and there should be a ban on film shooting in Toda hamlets. She said that tribals were being exploited by forest poachers and if the tribals were employed by the Forest Department, poaching could be reduced to a great extent.

Prof. Mrs. Krishnaraj, Head of the English Department, Government Arts College, stressed the need to educate the youth about the importance of environmental protection. Mrs. Indu K.Mullah, Journalist, said that the population of the district was increasing without any control because outsiders were being given land for commercial purpose.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, who presided, said that once an area was declared as forest land it cannot be converted for non-forest purposes under the Forest Conservation Act. He added that such conversion required the sanction of the Union Government.

Dr. Kanikkaraj, Chairman, Red Cross Society, Ooty, Mr. Bhuvanendra, Chartered Accountant, Mrs. Cooper, Senior Citizen participated in the discussions.

As part of the project, SNC volunteers staged plays on the theme of protecting the environment in their villages.

NEEDLE'S PROPOSAL DROPPED SUCCESS, NOT A VICTORY!!

M/s. Needle Industries, Ketti, proposed to set up an electroplating unit in their site at Masinagudi near Mudumalai Sanctuary. Anticipating no objection from the people or the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, work went on apace, since 1988, for the construction of the shed, and, as we understand now, installation of some equipments.

Some Ooty based individuals and environmental groups objected to the setting up of the unit on the ground that the lethal effluents of the unit would poison the Moyar river which is the main source of water for the wild animals of Mudumalai Sanctuary and that a human habitat there would upset the migration of the elephants. When the matter was brought under to our notice, we made an objective study of the issue and registered our protest mainly on the following counts.

(a) The unit was set up within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and hence violated the basic condition of such reserves that no industries – polluting or not- should be allowed within the reserves.

(b) Some years back the State Wildlife Board has resolved, when the unit in question had made the same proposal, that the Collector of Nilgiri should notify that no industries could be set up within 5 km. of the sanctuary. But since the same was never notified, for whatever reasons, the unit went ahead with the construction of the shed etc. taking advantage of this lacuna. This, we felt, was ethically wrong.

(c) The Government had approved the proposal on the ground that Gudalur was an industrially backward district and that setting up a unit there would provide employment for the locals. Some individuals also touted for the unit saying it will employ local tribals. On examination, these arguments were found to be hollow. Nilgiri district, as we establish, was far ahead of other hill stations of the country in the matter of industrialization and the process had already started becoming counter-productive. Moreover, we argued, classifying Gudalur district, where the major portion of the land is under forest, (that too, part of as sanctuary) would be as absurd as classifying Madras or Bombay or Delhi as agriculturally backward!

(d) The argument that the unit would employ the local tribals also was untenable. In the first place, making the tribals take up regular employment in industrial or commercial establishments has been a frustrating experience all over the country. Secondly, it has been our policy that tribals should be rehabilitated in their own traditional vocations.

We first met the Chairman of Tamilnadu electricity Board, which had agreed to supply water to the unit from one of its reserves and explained to him the harmful consequence of the proposed units. The then Chairman Shri B. Vijayaraghavan, assured that the final agreement for supplying the water would not be signed before considering the environmental impact of the unit.

In April, 1988, SNC delegation met the Governor of Tamilnadu (the state was then under President's rule) Dr. P.C. Alexander and registered its strong objection to the unit coming up there and pleaded with him to stop further work pending the environmental clearance from the Government. Subsequently, we understood, the work was stopped, though, according to some local accounts, it did not cease altogether.

A year later, in April 1989, our delegation met the President of India, Shri R. Venkatraman during his visit to Ooty and appraised him of the matter. The President, a long time friend of the Nilgiris and a sympathizer of SNC's cause, expressed his deep concern and indicated that such a proposal would not be allowed.

We also met the Governor, he was also camping there, and reiterated our objection to the unit. Meanwhile, other concerned individuals and organisations like the Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association and the Worldwide Fund for nature, Tamilnadu Chapter, also kept up the campaign against the unit. Subsequently, the Chairman of the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board, Mr. P.M. Belliappa visited Ooty for a day-long discussion with SNC members. The meeting ended with assurance that the unit will not be cleared if it would be harmful to the sanctuary.

It was at this juncture that we got the pleasant news (The Hindu dt. 27.2.90) that the promoters had, on reconsideration of the project, decided to wind it up in deference to the feelings of the people of Nilgiris.

It is indeed a major success for the people of Nilgiris and SNC. But, success in what sense, should be properly understood. It is a success for the various individuals and organisations who could mobilize public opinion sustain it for two years, and strengthen it enough to make the Government and the promoters to reconsider the project. It is equally a success for the promoters themselves for having respected public opinion and dropped the proposal.

That is why, we say it was a success and not a victory. There are no winners and losers here. From the beginning, during our talk with the representatives of the unit, we have made it clear that our objection was in the long term interest of Nilgiris and their own one too. When it was revealed to us that the setting up of the unit at Masinagudi had been necessitated by the acute shortage of water at Ketti, we pointed out that such a course of action would set a wrong trend. Water scarcity is severe and widespread in the district but migration – whether it is people, cattle or industry – is not the solution. Water scarcity is central to the environmental problems of the district. It is not that rains are any less now than in the past. It is simply a question of not being able to store and distribute the rain water properly. This can be set right only if all of us can get together and put

SNC TRIBUTE TO DALAI LAMA

SNC, jointly with the Inter-Faith Dialogue Committee, Ooty and the Tibetan Refugees Welfare Association, Ooty organised a function in honour of His Holiness the Dalai Lama who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize for 1989. Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC chief, speaking on the occasion said that the prize was not just in recognizing of Dalai Lama's Non-violent struggle for liberation of Tibet but also in recognition of his advocating the conservation of culture at the global level.

Rev. Father Abraham Joseph, Secretary IFDC, Ooty, Dr. B.A.Kanikkaraj, Chairman, Indian Red Cross Society, Nilgiris, Tibetan representatives and others also spoke. Earlier a colourful procession was taken through the main streets of the town.

SNC HOSTS CONSERVATION RALLYISTS

SNC played host to the 30 members of the "The Environmental Conservation Cycle Rally", organised by the "Link Society", Sivaganga. from Kanyakumari to Ooty.

A valedictory function was got up at Ooty to mark the completion of the rally. SNC President, Mr. B.J. Krishnan, presided over the function and lauded the effort of the rally members as a noble one. Such events helped in creating the necessary awareness among the people without whose co-operation no Government scheme for conservation could be implemented successfully, Mr. Krishnan said.

Mr. K.K. Somasundaram, Conservator of Forests said that the Forest Department would extend all co-operation to environmental groups like SNC and the link society.

Dr. Govinda Rao, DFO (North), Mr. S. Varadharajulu, (DFO) South, Dr. Jeevanantham, Conservationist, Mr. V.S. Sreedhar of the Link Society also spoke on the occasion.

SNC arranged for boarding and lodging for the rally members during their stay in Ooty.

up a combined fight. It is as much in their own self-interest as that of the public that the industrial and commercial interests and commercial interests in the district should join hands with concerned individuals and organisations to solve the water problem.

M/s. Needle Industries have, by their courageous decision, set an example as to the duty and responsibility of the industries – in the protection of its environment.

We do hope that the unit will be able to make good the cost incurred in the project and we wish them all prosperity in the years to come so that they could continue to play a leading role in the industrial development of the district in harmony with its environment.

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WATER, TREES AND DOWRIES

Paul Hockings*

For quite a few years now the newspapers, indeed sundry articles in this Newsletter too, have bemoaned the shortage of clean water in Ooty and throughout the Nilgiris. Everyone knows how much Ooty has grown, but how is it that even small Badaga villages are now having problems with their water supplies? Most residents must sense what a far cry conditions are today as compared with Capt. Henry Harkness's description a century and half ago.

“Nor is the scene less beautiful on a nearer approach ; for you then find the green bespangled with a variety of the most beautiful wild flowers, of every diversity of colour; the trees, among which appears the crimson rhododendron (sic) and the white camellia, varying in shade and richness of foliage; and some covered with moss, assuming all the hoary appearance of winter; while the banks of the rills and streamlets that meander at their base, lined with the dogrose and Jessamine (sic); and all around are seen the strawberry, and numerous other wild fruits, flourishing in spontaneous luxuriance.”

With this idyllic scene painted, Harkness goes on:

“Several of the little streams here mentioned, meeting, at one point, fall into a natural basin, which confined at its south-western extremity by a strong mound of earth, forms an expansive and delightful lake, of five or six miles circuit. This beautiful piece of water, which, in some parts, spreads out a considerable width, and in others winds in a serpentine course among hills, gently rising from its banks. And clothed with a softest verdure, has now a public carriage road surrounding it, affording one of the most scenic, healthful and agreeable drives of which India, or perhaps any part of the world, can boast.” He is actually describing the Ooty lake in 1832. Today the most usual adjective applied to it is “unsanitary”.

It is possible the Nilgiris climate is changing as a result of the increased amount of carbon dioxide mankind is sending into the atmosphere, which in turn are prompting global warming, the so-called “green house effect”. But water problems in the Nilgiris are by no means just a result of such remotely atmospheric and seemingly uncontrollable aberrations in climate. There are two other reasons for water shortage in the Nilgiris which many people must have heard about, yet have never put together as being parts of the same problem. I refer to deforestation and the demand of dowry.

Let's take deforestation first. As more and more trees of any sort are cut down, whether in sholas, bamboo clumps, or eucalyptus plantations, the loss of these largest of Nilgiri plants causes the soil to retain much less water. When it does rain on treeless land the water runs off quickly towards the plains, causing erosion of the topsoil in some places, but in any event not being retained in the soil and plants to anything like the extent that it used to be some decades back, when the Nilgiri vegetation was rather more dense and large trees more common. Growing trees absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen, which we need to breathe. Burning trees give off carbon dioxide, thus causing more atmospheric problems.

EUCALYPTUS – A MISTAKE

Sufficient research has been done now to demonstrate that it was a mistake to plant huge tracts of grassland with eucalyptus. That species poisons the soil chemically, its bark and dead leaves kill off all the grass and shrubs growing under the trees, and so buffalo grazing land is destroyed. If extensive reforestation is to occur, and no doubt it should, useful indigenous Nilgiri tree species, of which there are dozens, should be planted instead. Many of them may not grow so quickly, and thus give such rapid profits as eucalyptus does, but they will benefit rather than damage the soils, and they will provide a diversity of occupational uses to future generations of Nilgiri residents. Among various possible specializations, for example, the Nilgiris could have a furniture industry employing many hundreds of people if only more useful tree species than eucalyptus were being cultivated.

POPULATION EXPLOSION

Earlier I suggested that dowry also had something to do with the water scarcity. Let me explain this seemingly far-fetched connection. So long as families demand dowries big or small before they will deign to marry their sons off, the environment will ultimately suffer from their self-serving and even greed-provoking custom. Most people are less than perfect, and many are willing to take a bit of a gamble without thinking through its consequences. In Indian marriage matters this all too common attitude has already had disastrous consequences which can be put in two words: Population explosion. A husband who has produced a son wants another one- just incase something happens to the first. A husband who has produced a daughter expects her to cost him a pretty penny in dowry later: he needs to try for some sons now to balance the dowry

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account. Perhaps this is a crude way of expressing the matter, but the attitude is too recognizable and damaging today to be brushed aside. Of course, many years ago one out of three children was likely to die in its first five years of the life, because of the uncertainties of public health factors. Now they are much more likely to survive to adulthood and so one prime reason for having large families has disappeared. A second major reason, the need for agricultural workers in the family, is also fast disappearing as farms switch to tea or become somewhat more mechanized, and as larger sectors of Nilgiri population move into the middle-class, basically urban jobs away from the farms. In short, family planning is essential, and nowadays the ideal family should contain just one boy and one girl. Dowry demands are of course antithetical to such an aim, for they prompt the less-than-perfect parent to try repeatedly for just one more son.

But how does this concern bear on the shortage of water? Very simply, vastly greater numbers on the Nilgiris today are drinking, washing in, cooking and occasionally irrigating with the water supply than before; and the needs of cattle never decrease either. There is no more water available to the vastly greater population of Badaga Villagers and immigrant labourers today than was in 1889. Even if there is slightly more farm and plantation land today it has been at the expense of decreasing woodland. Plantations aside, the Badaga farms now are six times more fragmented than they were a century back. Neither God nor government can create new land for the expanding labourers. So far their only salvation has been the expansion of middle-class professions which have taken some of the population surplus off the land and into the towns.

What can be done? Certainly the need for birth control and the abandoning of dowry demands are as essential today as when they were first broached in India many years ago. Dowry, which is usually identified as an evil, is by no means a necessity. It was generally given up in Europe a century ago by those sectors which had the practice, with no disastrous demographic or economic results: quite the opposite, in fact.

IT'S NOW OR NEVER FOR OOTY

Calling Ooty as the Queen of the Hill Stations has become a joke now. It is, indeed an insult to the Hill Stations today. One look at the main stretch of the town from the Boat House to the Botanical Garden would confirm this. Perennial shortage of water, open drainage, uncleaned garbage, over crowded streets and over flowing traffic, a rash of ugly constructions, incredibly horrible roads, encroachments everywhere – Ooty unmistakably is CHOKING < GASPING, DYING.

The putrefaction has already started. Overpowering stench of drainage and garbage hangs over the main thoroughfares. Even Charing Cross, once the centre piece on the Queen's Crown, has not been spared.

Time is running out for Ooty. If immediate steps are not taken to check this rot, Ooty may be lost for ever. It is Now or Never for Ooty.

There are. Of course, no soft options open to the administration. It has to necessarily take some tough decisions. We hope the proposed Hill Area Conservation Authority will provide adequate financial & statutory support to the administration to carry out a massive cleaning up operation. Some suggestions:

1. Declare a moratorium of five years on all constructions for commercial purposes, especially hotels.
2. Restrict the number of tourists buses that enter Ooty every day through hefty entry fees, traffic restrictions inside the town etc.
3. Evict the encroachers on pavements and do not allow them to return. Keep them out for a year and the tendency will weaken.
4. A master plan should be drawn up to augment and maintain the various public amenities – water, drainage, roads, etc. – of the town to meet the demands of its over lakh residents and the thousands of visitors every day.
5. Earmark a portion of the HADP funds for the special needs of Ooty.
6. In view of the ecological significance of Nilgiris, the administration should explore the possibility of securing grants from international bodies like the World Bank for its proper upkeep.

A Suggestion

I have one concrete proposal to offer here concerning reforestation. This is certainly not just a government concern and a job for the Forestry Department. Already in some mountainous zones of India and Nepal the villagers have seen this and taken over the business of growing saplings in nurseries, then planting and protecting them on the hillsides. We need to see more of this sort of endeavour everywhere in the Nilgiris.

I would suggest one place to begin would be at the temple. Hundreds of people go to temple to give thanks for a favour granted, and if it was something important like the birth of a child gifts to the deity are commonly made. This is of course traditional and no doubt appropriate. But the actual gifts made are often so inappropriate that they scarcely do any honour to the deity. Does He (or She) really need yet another small dress or a silver mark? Does He need 101 coconuts (trucked up into the hills by a fuming diesel lorry?) Why not take an oath that one will repay a blessing by planting seven trees, or 101 trees, indeed any numbers of trees?

This does just as much as honour to the deity, is profoundly and permanently useful to all, and does no ecological damage. Ideally one should try to plant Nilgiri species; and if for example, one lives near Imbimorahatti, a village name meaning "sweet-lime hamlet", one should make a point of planting the sweet-lime tree in its vicinity. Because without a doubt that is where it will grow best. And everyone will be pleased.

#There has been a general complaint that it is very difficult to obtain tree saplings in the Nilgiris. The Forest Department, we understand, is able to help only to a certain extent. If readers desirous of planting could write to us, we would be happy to suggest the species to be planted and the source of sapling.

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DON'T ENCOURAGE EUCALYPTUS

SNC's PLEA TO NABARD

Copy of the letter sent to the General Manager of National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD)

Dear Sir,

Permit us to say a few words by way of a preamble. The TIME magazine dedicated its first issue of 1989 to "the looming ecological crisis". In its agenda for urgent action it said, "Make environmental review an integral part of lending procedures within nations so that local banks are prevented from providing funds for projects that destroy habitats".

The World Bank and the international commercial banks have made environmental review a must in the light of the growing resistance from people and environmental activists, the world over.

Nearer home, you must be well aware of the high priority that is given to environmental questions by the Government, besides the growing awareness among the people.

The number of litigations arising out of the environmental disputes is also on the increase. In particular, you must be aware of the Karnataka Pulpwood Ltd. case, pending in the Supreme Court, questioning the large scale use of common lands to raise eucalyptus for a private firm. If you do not have already, kindly try to get a copy of the book "Whither common lands?" brought out by the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, a highly respected environmental group in Karnataka.

Though RBI has not yet stipulated specific norms for environmental review in the lending policies, such a review is implied in the various policies in force.

Coming to the present issue, the Palani Hills Conservation Council have already registered their objection to your proposal to assist growing of eucalyptus in the Palanis, Nilgiris, etc. for the benefit of M/s. South India Viscose. No doubt, the eucalyptus controversy is still raging. However, you will agree that there is now more evidence to prove its harmful effects than its benefits. The long term harm done by eucalyptus far outweighs its short term benefits.

The Central Soil and Water Conservation research and Training Institute at Ooty has proved, after a 20 years experiment, that large scale growing of eucalyptus substantially lowers the water table.

Therefore you will appreciate that in a place like Nilgiris which is already suffering from acute water supply, encouraging eucalyptus will be contradictory and counter-productive. Indiscriminate growing of eucalyptus is bound to affect the cultivation of various horticultural crops grown in Nilgiris. Ironically, those crops are also supported by NABARD and the commercial banks.

The point is, Nilgiris and the Palanis cannot be treated by a few industries as their backyard for producing their raw materials. They have a larger purpose to serve for the benefit of the entire people of Tamil Nadu as the major source of soil, water and clean air.

These hills have already grown enough eucalyptus for these industries. Any more planting will not only be harmful to these hills but to the entire state too. For, as you know, these hills are the main catchment areas for the major rivers of Tamil Nadu. We are confident, NABARD would reconsider its support to the captioned project and decline any support to it.

Yours sincerely
(Sd) D. Venugopal

Following the appeal, the Deputy General Manager of NABARD at Madras called our co-ordinator for a detailed discussion at the end of which it was assured that our objections would be duly considered before the proposal was sanctioned.

Editor

This issue of the Newsletter is financed by DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GOVT. OF INDIA

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Designed and typeset By Compset Graphics – Madras 600034. Phone : 864290. Printed at Canara Traders – Madras Phone: 566532

save nilgiris campaign
for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL 4 No. 2

July 1990

SNC's PHOTO EXHIBITION

NILGIRIS – THEN AND NOW

First, it was the **SAVE NILGIRIS RUN** in which thousands of people, young and old, took part enthusiastically and ran a stretch of 10 kms. across the Ooty town shouting **SAVE! SAVE!! NILGIRIS!!!** Dr, P.C. Alexander, Governor of Tamilnadu, which was then under President's rule, addressed the participants at the end of the run.

Next, it was the **SAVE NILGIRIS MARCH** when dedicated members of SNC and other voluntary organisations walked across the villages of the district spreading the message of conservation. The last stretch of the March was led by the Guardian Angel of Forests, beloved Sundarlal Bahugunaji!

This year, the mass awareness programme took the form of a photographic exhibition on the theme, **NILGIRIS-THEN AND NOW**. For one week, from May 16 to May 22, 1990, the show entertained and educated thousands of local people as well as tourists who had thronged the town for the summer season. The exhibition was held at the centrally located Brecks Memorial School, though a good deal of effort and money had to be spent for renovating a couple of class rooms which were converted into the exhibition hall.

SPONSORS

The exhibition was sponsored by the ENVIRONMENT LIASON CENTRE, Narobi (ELC) and was supported by Parrys Confectionery Ltd., Nippon Enterprises South, Sakthi Sugars Ltd. and Rural Development Organisation.

A BIG THANKS to ELC for readily accepting the sponsorship. Our thanks to the other supporters is no less.

EXHIBITS

The exhibition, with over 100 photographs was thematically arranged in five sections.

NILGIRIS THAT WAS showed pictures 30, 50 and even 100 and more years old of the townships and the outskirts of Nilgiris bringing back nostalgic memories of the enchanting and peaceful place that Nilgiris was! The highlight was a 1875 panoramic view of the Ooty town compared with similar view shots in 1980.

DEVELOPMENT AND DEGRADATION depicted the various developments over the years in agriculture, industrialization and commercialisation and their degrading consequences.

RARE FLORA AND FAUNA showed the unique animal and plant life of Nilgiris and the mounting threats to them.

SAVE NILGIRIS contained a wide range of Nilgiris landscapes, particularly the remaining Shola forests and water sources, reminding the people that saving Nilgiris is not only a matter of life and death but much more than that.

PEOPLE'S ACTION was the final section showing the various activities of the Save Nilgiris Campaign with a message that Nilgiris can still be saved through people's action.

INAUGURATION

The exhibition was inaugurated by the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Dr. P.C. Alexander accompanied by his wife Mrs. Ackamma Alexander. Addressing the gathering, the Governor listed the cause of environmental degradation in India as over population, unplanned urbanization and ignorance and indifference among the people.

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While congratulating SNC for its sustained work to create environmental awareness in the Nilgiris, the Governor cautioned that such groups should not decry all developments.

The ideal option, he added was the concept of sustainable development according to which economic development should be commensurate with the availability of natural resources to sustain it over a considerably long period of time.

RARE HONOUR

The Governor of Tamil Nadu Dr. P.C. Alexander while inaugurating the photo exhibition announced a donation of Rs. 3000/- from Governor's Discretionary Grant to SNC "in appreciation of the good work being done by it." This is a rare honour which we shall certainly cherish for ever. Two days later while inaugurating the annual Flower Show, the Governor again complimented SNC and said "only natives can save Nilgiris."

Dr. Alexander has been sympathetic to our cause from the beginning and has been showing a keen interest in our activities ever since he participated in the Save Nilgiris Run at the end which he declared "Nilgiris can be saved and will be saved."

As Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, said in his welcome address, we shall always remember Dr. Alexander with gratitude wherever he is and whatever he is (Dr. Alexander relinquished office soon after the inauguration of the exhibition) and constantly strive to live up to the trust he had shown in our campaign.

Shri. G.A. Rajkumar, the most popular and loved collector of Nilgiris in recent years, presiding over the function, lamented the sad state to which Nilgiris had been reduced by mindless acts of man. Drawing attention to the serious threat faced by all the major rivers of the district, he warned that no society can survive if the rivers are allowed to die. Mr. Rajkumar assured that environmental issues would be given due priority as long as he continued as the head of the district administration.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, in his welcome address reiterated that considerable damage had been done to the ecology of the Nilgiris in the name of development and called for a halt to the further industrialization and commercialisation of the hills.

RESPONSE

The Exhibition was visited by over 5000 local people and tourists during the seven days it was kept open. The response evoked by the exhibition is best gauged by the following excerpts from the Visitors' Book.

"The Nilgiris have been exquisitely photographed, collected and displayed in a splendid manner... With sincere co-operation of the visitors and inhabitants of this town, the beauty of this very fine health resort could be maintained well and preserved for ever."

"Congratulations to the organizers for staging this excellent exhibition. This, to my mind, should arouse the thoughts of the people of this hill station to realise the hazards of concrete jungles."

"So attractive and useful."

"Nilgiris must be saved!"

"Good display ... if possible it should be displayed in the Botanical gardens, where more people can view."

"Thanks for opening our eyes."

"Good attempt to expose the deteriorating situation."

"Thanks for showing me the beauty of my Ooty when I was a child."

"Being a native of Ooty, it has touched my heart."

"I enjoyed all the views of Nilgiris without paying a single paisa! Thanks to the organizers."

"Enlightening and thought provoking."

"Let the concerned authorities like the Town planning officials be informed."

"A rare collection of photos."

"Wish the awareness of eco-preservation is brought home to larger & larger segments of our people by this exhibition."

"Good, expect a much better show next year."

"Old Nilgiris! Please come back!!"

"Very nice photographs displayed in good faith to save Nilgiris."

"A powerful photographic exhibition touching sensitive elements and any thinking human being ... Wish & pray the voice of Save Nilgiris Campaign is heard loud by all."

"Thanks to you I am now aware of the calamity my district is facing."

"It (Nilgiris) is good then, sad now."

"The exhibition has successfully encapsulated the Nilgiris of a 100 years. It is also a timely reminder to all

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those who have the power and the will to save the magnificent hills.”
 “More photos of the damage to Nilgiris around the town should be displayed to create a general awareness.”
 “Very useful for the tourists and for the younger generation of the local people.”
 “There could not be a better time than now for holding the exhibition when the people have to realise the brute force used by them against nature.”
 “May all the labour of love for the preservation of the Blue Mountains be a ceaseless mission.”
 “Beautiful pictures and brief explanations understandable for all ages.”
 “The exhibition should become a permanent part of the Government museum.”
 “This should be done every year.”
 “Gives a glimpse of the glorious past of Nilgiris and leaves us with a passionate desire to do our mite to save it from further deterioration.”
 “How beautiful nature is! How selfish humans are!!”
 “The display enabled me to remember the good old beautiful Nilgiris which I enjoyed and which now appears a ‘wasteland’.”
 “Commendable service rendered to the tourists.”

BOOKS RECEIVED

1. Richard St. Barbe Baker
 Man of the Trees
 A centenary Tribute
 Published by INTACH, New Delhi & Chipko Information Centre, Silyara, UP
2. The Fight for Survival
 Edited by Anil Agarwal, Darl D'monte, Ujwala Samarth, published by Centre for Science & Environment, New Delhi.
3. a) SIDA Evaluation Report, Forestry India 1987-88.
 b) Soil and Water Protection, Water Harvesting Manual (Tamil).
 c) Social Forestry Project – 2, Tamilnadu Received from SIDA Forestry Co-ordination Programme, Madras.
4. Towards Green Villages – A strategy for Environmentally sound and participatory Rural Development. By Anil Agarwal & Sunita Narain. Published by Centre for Science & Environment, New Delhi.

THANKS

The exhibition owes its success to a long list of individuals and institutions which are unable to publish in full 38 for want of space. We are beholden to them all. However the following do deserve mention.

Shri M.S. APPA RAO, Photographer and former Chairman of Hindustan Photo Films, for helping us raise additional financial support and for providing a good collection of old Nilgiris Photographs.

Shri E.R.C. DAVIDAR, renowned wildlife photographer, for giving us a collection of rare Nilgiris Wildlife Photographs.

Shri B.V. DEVARAJ, nature photographer & environmental activists, who spent several days in remote parts of Nilgiris shooting pictures on behalf of SNC.

Dr. H.J. VON LENGERKE, University of Hindelberg, Germany and Prof. PAUL HOCKINGS, University of Illinois, USA for sending us the picture of Nilgiris from space (Courtesy: NASA, USA)

M/s. Autograph Studio and M/s. Wilson Studio for the Vintage photographs of Nilgiris Then.

Shri R. RADCLIFFE, Vice President, NWLEA and Shri T.S. GOPALAKRISHNAN, Retd. Thasildar, Coimbatore for their pictures.

M/s. Modern Decorators and Furnishers, Madras and Mr. M.P. MANOHAR for designing attractive display boards for the exhibition.

The Breeks Memorial School and its Principal Mr. Xavier for letting us use the School premises for holding the exhibition.

Centre for Environmental Education, Regional Office, Bangalore and Smt. Shyamala Krishna for sending us a set of informative posters on environmental education for display at the venue.

Shri M. RAMALINGAM, Artist, for preparing the posters, collage etc., displayed at the exhibition venue.

A REVIEW ESSAY

A TREK THROUGH THE TREASURE-HILL

This is a review of Dr. Paul Hocking's latest book on the Nilgiris, *Blue Mountains – The Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region* (Pages 412 + Plates 22). Published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi (Price Rs. 350). The review is by Rev. Philip K Mulley, Coonoor, Nilgiris.

W. Francis, the British officer who compiled gazetteers of various districts in the erstwhile Madras presidency, observed, at the turn of the century (1908) : “The Nilgiri district may almost be said to be one of those happy countries which have no history”. Much water have flowed down Kundah and Paikara and Moyar and Bhavani since that time. Now thanks to the remarkable efforts of Dr. Paul Hockings, Professor of Anthropology, University of Illinois (U.S.A.), we possess in 1990, a scholarly account of the District with far more panoramic perspectives than W. Francis would have envisaged, and a multi-disciplinary history. Fourteen scholars (two of them Indian) have contributed to this volume on the ethnography and biogeography of the Nilgiris, titled “BLUE MOUNTAINS” and published by the Oxford University Press, Delhi. Social scientists and multifarious catalysts of progress connected with the Nilgiris should owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Hockings, who is also personally involved in anthropological research relating to the district for the past quarter of a century.

SOCIOLOGY

The first chapter of the volume by the late Dr. David Mandelbaum deals with the unique features of the Nilgiris as a sociological and anthropological region. These features, according to the author, clarify our understanding of various cultural entities in the context of Indian civilization and basic tenets of cohesion in the Indian ethos. Late Dr. Mandelbaum had also authored the sixth chapter dealing with the social setting of the Kotas and their catching up with the demands of a progressive environment. While Dr. Mandelbaum's accounts are certainly based on extensive work, lack of careful assessment at certain places generates only a wary reception. For instance, in the first chapter, Dr. Mandelbaum's attempt to condense the Christian Toda ethos is far from astute (*pp13-14*); this is also applicable to his statement on Christian Badagas (*p.173*). And then in Chapter Six, the epoch-making career of late H.B. Ari Gowder is reduced to the mythical and mere level of the Municipal Commissioner of Ootacamund! (*p-170*). This “faux pas” is followed by a not very objective view of the ethno-hierarchical issues of involved in the stoppage of Kota music at Badaga funerals. In the same chapter, in the concluding paragraphs (*p.184*) it is noted! “The bitterness which Kotas have towards Badaga and the menace which Badagas so often see in Kotas can be found in many other milieu in India ...” It should be reported that the Badagas with a population of about 2.50 lakhs in a district bulging with nearly 8.50 lakhs of population, have far more crucial issues at stake in their socio-economic struggles than quarrelling with Kotas numbering around 1500! Reading, especially the chapter on Kotas one feels it is high time that the recording of the revitalization process of Nilgiri society from a nativistic stance emerged.

CLIMATE

The second chapter of the Nilgiri Environment contains a competent analysis of the climatic environment of the district. Extremely well researched materials with nine maps suitable diagrams on the bio-climatic history constitute the chapter. These matters along with the Soils, Flora and Vegetation of the district have been treated with thoroughness by Hans J. Von Lengerke and Francois Blasco. The illustrations on the profile of a shola and shrub savanna (*pp 56-7*) are very lively. The botanical identifications of 200 Nilgiri plants found in the chapter only with English and Tamil names might well undergo a revision, if it were to be cross-checked with native/tribal names. The plant species that are only found on the Nilgiri plateau and nowhere else in the world have also been recorded. Along with their Badaga names, in spite of the highly technical nature of the subject, the style and substance of the chapter makes lucid reading.

PRIMATES

The third chapter describing the Non-Human Primates of the Nilgiris is equally a fine account of the rich nature of the habitat of six different non-human primate species. Frank E. Poireier provides a good overview of the studies undertaken on these primates and pleads for strong and imaginative manner of conservation practices. He makes interesting references to the two, not much investigated species, tree-shrew and loris. I have always wondered at the occurrences of reference to a tree-shrew like creature in a Badaga legend with its locale in the northern slopes of the Nilgiris. Again a study of the place – name of Devala near Gudalur seems to suggest the possibility of the presence of Joris in the jungles around Devala. Wildlife specialists may have a lot more to say on the subject.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The fourth chapter investigates the archaeological remains in the district, a survey of which was earlier on made by Breeks in 1873. Dr. William Noble, the present

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investigator, very well brings out the “state of infancy” in Nilgiri archeology. He observes that there is no evidence for people having lived on the upper Nilgiris in B.C. times (p.128). But the ‘terminus a quo’ of some of the Nilgiri archaeological remains according to late Prof. T. Balakrishnan Nayar, extended back to 700 B.C. This documented suggestion (1957&1977) seems to have been completely overlooked by Dr. Noble. Additionally, if Dr. Mandelbaum’s view (p. 5) that periodic burning of Toda grasslands is an ancient practice going back to about 3,000 years ago, were to be taken for granted, then the question of people living on the upper Nilgiris in B.C. times becomes more plausible.

Then there is also the important factor of rock-shelter art. Dr. Noble suggests a Neolithic date for the Doddalle cave near Konakore. While 2000 B.C. date is reasonable, more rock shelter art, discovered, of late, by Prof. M. Basavalingam of Ooty at Koovatti (Seegur), Iduhatti and Vellarikombe (Kotagiri) may add yet more knowledge to the subject. The “preposterous” similarities of some of the rock-art features with many a site in many other parts of the world are to be looked into, like the Doddalle ‘monster’ looking very much like the ‘monster’ in Kunnura, Australia.

Referring to the number of sculpted dolmens found closer to some Badaga villages, Dr. Noble connects them with Badaga women who became ‘satis’. But unless the “social archaeology” dimensions in several of the Badaga delineated, no verdict can be pronounced. And then surely there are few funerary circles and mounds yet to be discovered; This is also true of many other ancient remains, in the Thengumarahada – Gajalahatti valley. It must also be added that the proximity of some Kerala paleolithic sites in the South-Western dip of the Nilgiris with access through Kinnakorai is a matter not of minor archeological importance.

Dr. Noble calls for archaeological excavation in a Kota settlement, suggests comprehensive survey and detailed mapping of pre-historic sites and discovery of the time-span of carefully selected Badaga, Kota, Kurumba and Toda sites. All these would indeed go a long way in establishing new depths in the future work.

LINGUISTICS

Dr. M.B. Emeneau, in the fifth chapter analyses for the first time, the various points of close relationships extant among the native languages of Nilgiris. As the doyen of Dravidian linguistics, he treats the subject in his customarily indubitable manner. Following the lead given by Dr. K.V. Zvelebil, Dr. Emeneau calls for a more detailed study of the areal linguistics, which in turn could provide rewarding insights into the ethno-cultural matrix of the whole of South India. The paucity of materials of Badaga linguistics and also Kurumba clusters of speech need to be made good; the extension of Paniya even into Kodagu region cannot be ruled out. Special Nilgiri lexical items such as the word employed for “water fall” (p. 141) seems to have very interesting linkages. In Badaga (it is not ‘Ole’ as mentioned) and Irula it is “Uli”; the equivalent forms in Kurumba, Kota, etc. seem to stem from a similar sounding root; Malayalam (DEDR 966) and Kannada (Kittel 1894 : 316) have some connection with it. Of wider interest is the link between this item and Pali etyma (Rhys Davids and William Stede 1925/1975 : 170), thus confirming Dr. Zvelebil’s thesis of vestiges of some pre-Dravidian tongues in Nilgiri linguistic features.

TODAS

The seventh chapter dedicated to Toda society is an up-to-date account. Anthony R. Walker, in a concise and excellent manner brings into focus the poise for progress of the Todas, as well as a kind of identity – summation they seek in the larger Indian context. Dr. Walker clinches the issues concerned in an intellectual way. The transformation of Toda pastures whatever form they may take in future, is something that no social scientist can sidetrack. The dynamics of Toda success or otherwise is worth watching.

BADAGAS

The Chapter on Badagas is contributed by Dr. Hockings himself. Though he being the sole acknowledged authority on Badaga sociology, it is surprising to note that his account on Badagas has not been updated. Subjects like conceptualization of the time and the Badaga calendar dealt with in this Chapter can but have only a marginal relevance, though a fundamental research into their value would no doubt enhance our knowledge. For instance, Badaga calendar need not be studied only as a system posterior to Tamil or Kannada ones; Badaga Calendar, in fact, has many Proto Tamil-Kannada features.

The Chapter contains a first-time analysis of the Hette legend. The various aspects of the story receive elaborate treatment and there is still room for the vigorous ritual-mythological past to have its say. Dr. Hockings ascribes a “grander dimension” (p. 227) to the story by referring to its “template” in Bhavishyottara Purana.

Deliberate introduction of a Sanskritization-model (hence ‘grander’?) into the Hette-factor appears arguable. Dr. Hockings concludes by observing “Hette’s legend accounts for the legitimacy of people who consider themselves to be Badagas”. If this were to be so the time-depth involved in the process of coalescence of Badaga society would exceed far earlier than the 16th century A.D. limit of the dispersion of the Vijayanagar empire (p. 207) and the supposedly resultant immigration of Badaga groups into Nilgiris. Dr. Hocking’s view that Tuneri in Todanad is the first village to be settled (p. 220) also needs revision, because the hegemony to Tuneri village in Badaga government has an altogether different version of origin.

BRITISH

Dr. Hockings has also written two other Chapters in the book. One of them, Chapter 14 is an absorbing account of the British Society in the Nilgiris in the Company,

Crown and Congress Eras. A well chronological account, the chapter also contains items of English poetry originated in the Nilgiris. This pioneering account is sure to provide good sources of methodology to yet many more future researchers

KURUMBAS

Three chapters (9,10 & 12) deal with three different Kurumba tribes. Dr. Dieter B. Kapp along with Dr. Hockings, Dr. Nurit Bird-David and Dr. Rajalakshmi Misra have added useful and some new materials to the existing literature on Kurumbas. The ethnographic myth dealing with the “identity-crisis” among various groups of tribes-carelessly called by the common name “Kurumbas” is dealt with; but this could have been treated in a specifically single chapter. Several past mistakes in methodology continue to haunt the Kurumba question. Present day attempts are yet to yield satisfactory answers. Conventional names, as Dr. Rajalakshmi Misra points out (*p. 317*) sometimes even indicate (albeit incorrectly) demeaning etymology and resultant hypotheses. Even in this very case, her “Mullu Kurumba” is actually Mulla Kurumba (Meaning ‘those who hunt with nets’, vide DEDR 4823). People-groups such as these (including several similar ones in the neighbouring regions also) still seem to be the victims of an omnipresent ethno-mythic configuration and emancipation appears to be elusive. No doubt, even ethnographers and anthropologists have had their mishaps in this jungle!

IRULAS

The Chapter on Irulas has been jointly written by Dr. William Jebadhas and Dr. William Noble. Irula economy and agriculture based on their ethno-botanical elements and Rangasami cult dominate the account – a remythologization in the offing? The Chapter concludes with a “sic-statement” : “Thus they continue basically to be non-Hindus”. What even if they were to become Christians? Actually in the 1960s and 70’s a few of them became Christians. But now they are lost ‘lock, stock and barrel’ both to the parent-community and the Christian fraternity. What matters most is that the animate social struggles of the Irulas and some of their fears (*p. 299*) need far more powerful articulation. But who will provide them a conscientization? Have the agencies working among them made any impact?

GUDALUR

The thirteenth chapter titled “Gudalur – A community at the Crossroads” by Dr. T.Adams provides a socio-linguistic dimension to the newly emerging factors of social cohesion in developing towns. This chapter begins with the assumption of a Tamil-etymology of the place-name and hence a post- British influence. But a Ganga Copper-plate of A.D. 762, describes the place and its environment and the name is deprived from Kannada, ‘Godalu’ (meaning valley or basin-like location) + Ooru (village). The “marginal”, “fringe”, “on the valley” and “heterogeneity” aspects of the crossroads centre is well documented and with data. The author observes, “The potential for unlimited expansion in Gudalur is proving to be as much a myth as it has been shown to be in the American West. Gudalur is “Modern” in many respects and may be illustrative of the direction in which small-town India is heading”. This is as much true as also of future trends in the apolítico-economic and neo-religious manipulations in the Indian arena. If the people like the Paniyas and several other tribes in the Gudalur-basin were to become resurgent what will be the future of the town? Will the resurgence be able to develop multiplex and polytechnic relations to create what the experts call a “Moral Community” where ties and recognition of moral imperatives in the new urban struggles, obligations and reciprocity are assured. Incidentally, a serious omission in the book under review is a presentation of a total perspective of the tribal trends in Wynaad.

ECOLOGY

The final Chapter (15) by Dr. Hockings effectively brings out the cultural and ecological reactions in the strategies for progress in this cognitive region of the Blue Mountains especially during the past one and half of a century and also as influenced by the previous tribal and historical niches. As one goes through this significant Chapter titled “Cultural Ecology of the Nilgiris” one becomes acutely aware of the onslaught of new environmental issues. Dr. Hockings infallibly calls for “drastic adjustments by humans as well as other life forms to the new Nilgiri environment” (*p. 375*). A grim calculation indeed. But how many of us will rise up to our messianic role?

The book ends with extensive bibliographies both on the natural and social sciences relating to the district and biographical sketches of the contributors. 22 plates of photographs including one that of Nilgiris from Space, have unfortunately has only a limited perspective (Kotagiri sector only) and is also not free from spelling or location errors. A really good and visually satisfying map in a prestigious and well produced publication like this, still remains, as they say in Badaga, “a dumb man’s dream”. (Probably this is due to the unimaginative taboos prescribed by the Government regarding Maps).

Amongst the total of more than 3000 books and articles available on the Nilgiris, this conspicuous work will be in a unique way continue to fertilise in the future, yet many more “etic”(from outside the ring) and “emic” (from inside the ring) perceptions (cf. Mandelbaum) of the region. A region – which again in the words of an unknown Badaga bard, is a “treasure-hill”. Dr. Hocking’s stewardship (to use a Biblical analogy) of the treasures in TREND-SETTING.

Thank you, Dr. Hockings.

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HARSUD..... DHAWAD.....OOTY..... JAN VIKAS ANDOLAN

Following the historic Rally Against Destructive Development by environmental activists at Harsud in Bhopal, it was resolved that the Jan Vikas Andolan (JVA) – the group that organised the Rally – should hold meetings in various parts of the country to get the message of the Harsud Meet across to more and more individuals and groups.

The first of such meetings was organised at Dharwad on March 24-25, 1990 by the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya (SPS). The Dharwad Meet was perhaps the first ever national meeting of environmentalists. Shri B.J. Krishnan, our President, represented, SNC at the meeting.

It was felt at the Dharwad Meet that the best way of spreading the message of JVA was through regional meetings. Accordingly, the First Southern Regional Meeting of JVA was held at Ooty on May 10-11, 1990. SNC was requested to host and coordinate the Meet.

The Ooty Meet was attended by about 40 environmentalists and social activists representing various groups in the Southern States. The two-day meeting, among other things, tried to assess the ongoing struggle for the protection of the environment and alternative development and how to sharpen their impact as also to formulate some common action programmes. The meeting also provided for better interaction among activists groups in South.

JVA – Formation and Purpose

The formation of Jan Vikas Andolan, a network of a wide range of movements organization and individuals, has its root in a variety of struggles taking place in the country. The meetings of representatives of these organisations, particularly at Anandwan and Hemalkasa, strengthened the understanding that these issues, seen together, are maladies of the prevalent developmental process. These meetings were also the precursor for the massive demonstration of people's concern and anger about this process at Harsud in September 1989.

In a general sense, Jan Vikas Andolan is a movement against development paradigm being practiced in post-independent India whereby a narrow elite primarily benefits at the cost of a very large population that continues to be marginalized, displaced and pauperized, along with large scale degradation and plundering of our national resource base.

Specifically, the Andolan holds the view that environmental destruction and the rapid depletion and degradation of natural resources, be that forests, land, water or air goes hand in hand with oppression and exploitation of the already deprived weaker sections of the society. The Andolan believes that, environmental problems arise only where some injustice or human exploitation is present – where those who profit from a destructive action are not the same as those who have to pay for it and bear the consequences. Behind man's, exploitation of nature often lies man's exploitation by man.

Any democratic process of sorting out these contending claims is totally steamrolled by the very nature of large developmental projects, since right from the planning of deciding about the fate of large population without their knowledge, understanding and consent as not just a serious human rights issue but also an ethical and moral one.

The depriving of control of people from their subsistence access and use of natural resources as well as restricting their capacity to decide about their own lives must also be seen as the dominance of a particular kind of technological intervention in the developmental process. The acquisition has brutally swamped and negated other contending technologies which have already existed or which could have been developed in relative harmony not only with the local skills and needs but also with nature and natural processes.

It is the view of the Andolan that an alternative approach to development must be given pride of place to ecological restoration. Fundamentally, reporting the development process and giving it a new direction is the historic challenge we face – and ecology is at the heart of it. It is becoming increasingly clear that the ecological perspective shows us the ways to end poverty and achieve a balanced and sustainable development of all our people. Afforestation of all wastelands and degraded forest lands, integrated development of small watersheds, land shaping and soil and water conservation works, rainwater harvesting and small-scale storage, development, development of biomass based and other alternate energy sources, small-scale agro-industries using appropriate technology and vastly enhanced biomass productivity of the land, and a gradual switchover to ecologically sustainable agricultural practices –these are the type of programmes which ought to constitute the core sector of a new strategy of development, while industrialization should be given an important but essentially supportive role in relation to the core sector.

BADAGA EPIC POETRY

Prof. Paul Hockings, who is no stranger to readers of this Newsletter, was in Nilgiris during May-June this year. SNC organised, at his request, a meeting at Ooty where the learned professor delivered a most interesting lecture on "Badaga Epic Poetry". Prof. Hockings' insights into Badaga songs were revealing. After listening to the Professor, any Badaga would have looked at himself with

more respect. And for poetry lovers, in general, it was a rich fare. Some observations of Prof. Hockings: "Taken as a whole the Badaga epics have distinctiveness that places them quiet apart from Tamil epic poetry... So a feature that sets the entire corpus of Badaga epics off from epics elsewhere in India is their secular way of processing. I know of no corpus in any other Indian language which so eschews Gods and miracles as devices for advancing the plot...I would also suggest that the characters of the Badaga heroes are not dramatically developed in their psychological features, as they would be in most European epics.... This opinion becomes firmer if we look at the summary of the characteristics of epic heroes that has been provided us by Jan de Vries (1963). He has listed ten features generally found in the life-cycle of the Indo-European hero; and these features are even found, all ten of them, in the Tamil epics. But when we look at the life of some such Badaga hero as Kadare Gauda we find NONE of these heroic features is present... Clearly then we are dealing with a new and original literature here".

"I don't wish to stress the distinctive, non-Indian character of the Badaga epics too much. During the 1980s a panoply of folk epics from all over the India was studied and published, sufficient to support the tripartite classification of them into: 1. martial, 2. sacrificial and 3. romantic. The Badaga epics fit into all three lots fairly well... In the important matter of structure too, Badaga epics can be seen as falling into an Indian framework".

"We should of course expect the Badaga epics to be different from other corpuses. I say this not just because they are in a distinct language; but because, as Stewart Blackburn has succinctly put it. "Oral epics in India have that special ability to tell a community's own story and thus help create and maintain that community's self-identity".

WARM GESTURE

In a gesture reflecting his warm gesture with the subject of his research, Prof. Hockings carried all the way to Nilgiris 28 copies (about 15 kilos!) of his monumental work "Counsel from the Ancients" for distribution to members of the Badaga Community at an unbelievable discount of 80%!! Prof. Hockings had to persuade the publishers to provide the copies at a mere Rs. 450/- per copy against the original price of Rs 2,000/-

Earlier, Shri. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President, welcomed the gathering. He said Prof. Hockings' contribution to Nilgiris was monumental deserving the eternal gratitude of its people.

Rev. Philip Mulley of All Saints Church, Coonoor, introduced Prof. Hockings to the audience. Rev. Mulley listed and briefly reviewed the various works of Prof. Hockings, who, Rev. Mulley said, has single-handedly helped the 3 lakh strong community of Badagas to rediscover their rich heritage.

At the end of the lecture,, Prof. Hockings answered a wide range of questions covering not only Badaga poetry but also other crucial areas such as their history, present status, etc.

After Mrs. Hockings (introduced by Prof. Hockings) shared a few words with the audience and Dr. Krishnara) thanked the organizers, Shri. D. Venugopal, SNC coordinator, proposed a vote of thanks. _____

A.M. Sundararaj, I.A.S.,

Managing Director

Tamilnadu Tourism Development Corp. Ltd.

Dear Thiru Venugopal,

I am extremely happy to receive the Newsletter of Save Nilgiris Campaign. It was very interesting. I appreciate the yeoman services rendered by the committed preservationists like you, Mr. B.J. Krishnan and others for eco-protection of the Nilgiris.

Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation Limited is also very much interested in the preservation biosphere in Nilgiris. We earn our livelihood from tourists who visit Nilgiris to see the natural beauty, wild life, etc. we run our Hotels and Youth Hostels solely to promote tourism at the same time without spoiling the natural environment.

As a person born and brought up in Nilgiris, I am one with you. You will be happy to know that we have shifted the location of Tamilnadu Tourism Development Corporation's Forest Lodge from Mudumalai to Gudalur in deference to the wishes of the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

We will be pleased to host a tea party to the Save Nilgiris Campaign at our Hotel, Tamilnadu, Ooty during your next function.

Yours sincerely

Sd/- A.M. Sundararaj

This Newsletter is financed by

ENVIRONMENT LIAISON CENTRE (INTERNATIONAL), NAIROBI

As a part of the Sponsorship for The Photo Exhibition "NILGIRIS – THEN AND NOW"

Designed and

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SNC MOOTS

NILGIRIS AS MODEL ENVIRONMENT DISTRICT

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan has suggested that the Nilgiris district, which is unique ecologically, should be declared a model environment district in the country.

Addressing a seminar on Farm science under the lab-to-land programme organised by the Central Soil and Water Conservation research and Training Institute recently, Mr. Krishnan said the proposed national environment policy called for the implementation of an integrated forest development programme for every district in the country. In tune with such a programme, the Nilgiris should be developed into an ideal environment district, Mr. Krishnan said. The model district should be self-sufficient in drinking water and fuel, and the population should stabilize, for uncontrolled human activities could not be allowed in ecologically-sensitive areas. Sustainable utilization of land and water was necessary and so these resources should be frugally used. IN this context, the technology transfer from lab to land was essential. Since a clear land use policy was essential, he said, zoning and classification were necessary in identifying an demarcating agricultural lands, forest, grassland, catchment areas, human settlements, etc. and, if need be, necessary legislation might be enacted in this regard.

Mr. Krishnan said that if the district were to be self-sufficient environmentally, the villages should be self-reliant with regard to biomass needs and the people should have a stake in the productivity of the village common land. The integrated forest development programme which aimed at development three kinds of forests- conservation forests, community forests and commercial forests – could be incorporated in he model environment district, he said.

NILGIRIS FLOODS

LET THE TRAGEDY NOT BE REPEATED

Exactly twelve years after the devastating floods of October 1978, Nilgiris has been visited by a similar disaster. While nothing could have been done about the heavy rains which occur every few years, the damage in terms of human lives, property, soil and land control have been greatly reduced had the warnings of the Geological Survey of India's (GSI) study made after the 1978 floods been heeded.

However, "deforestation and conversion of land for agriculture, tea plantation and residential purposes", which the GSI study enlisted as the main reasons for landslides in the Nilgiris, were not only allowed t proceed at an unprecedented pace since then. Worse still, these activities were allowed to be carried out without even the minimum recommended precaution against soil erosion and landslides.

The damage in the urban areas were mainly due to the "lack of regular drainage system and the growing practice of septic sewerage system," cautioned against by the GSI team.

The save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC) has been ceaselessly campaigning in the last five years for the implementation of the recommendations of the GSI and the Ooty based Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI) which alone can restore the ecological balance in the highly degraded Nilgiri Hills. Delay in doing so will only worsen the subsequent damages and swell the cost of rescue, relief and reconstruction.

It is an irony that after all the destruction, these heavy rains hardly help in relieving the acute drinking water scarcity in the district. Such is the woeful lack of drinking water storage in the reservoirs which have all been silted up or in disuse.

It is hoped that the newly constituted Hill Areas Conservation Authority, which has wide jurisdiction over all aspects of development in the hill areas, will take up the case of Nilgiris on top priority.

CINCHONA Vs TEA – ROUND 1

LET GOVT. AND GREENS MEET

BACKGROUND

Following the recent decision of the Government of Tamilnadu to disband the 125 year old Cinchona department, about 5000 hectares (about 3500 hectares in Anamallais and about 1500 hectares in Nilgiris) of Cinchona plantations are to be destroyed for raising tea.

Several individuals and institutions in Nilgiris and Coimbatore including the Jan Vikas Andolan and the Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association have taken up the matter with the State Government and the Centre. They argue that the decision of the Government would affect the fauna, flora and rainfall in the Anamallais and Nilgiris. Besides, they ask, will it not be shortsighted to destroy a medicinal plant which could be of value in future?

On the other hand, the Environment and Forest Secretary Shri A. Ramakrishnan, in a lengthy discussion with our Co-ordinator Shri. D. Venugopal, avered that the pros and cons of the issue have been duly considered before taking the decision. Before we state our views, we present below the arguments of the two sides. First, the case of the environmentalists:

1. THREAT TO WILDLIFE

These plantations badly need to be preserved because of their locational importance. While the area in the Anamallais border the Eravikulam National Park, most of the area in the Nilgiris is adjoining the Mudumalai Sanctuary.

The Cinchona plantations in the Anamallais provide a major migratory path for the elephants. In the Nilgiris they provide a much needed refuge for fodder and water for the animals during summer when the Mudumalai Sanctuary turns dry. Besides, they serve as a corridor for wildlife movement above the Sanctuary.

Moreover, these plantations are habitats for a wide range of wildlife including the Sambhar, classless otter, striped neck mongoose, brown mongoose, leopard cat and mouse deer besides a variety of birds. It is further said that a certain type of black money, which is feared to be on the verge of extinction, is seen only in the Nilgiris division of the plantations. Destruction of these plantations would, thus, mean a heavy loss of wildlife.

Tea being labour-intensive, plantation of such huge tracts of land would bring a sizable populations to the outskirts of Mudumalai sanctuary and the Eravikulam National Park. The resulting demand for fuel and fodder for this population will further affect these forests.

LOSS OF FLORA

The Nilgiris division contains numerous rare species of jungle trees and plants. Rare varieties of orchids are available here. A carnivorous plant called “*Drosera Deltanta*” grows in abundance during the South-West monsoon along the fire lines of these plantations. Students of Botany are regular visitors of these areas. All this forest wealth would be lost if the present decision to replant these areas with tea stands.

RIVERS IN DANGER

Cinchona plantations record a much higher rainfall compared to surrounding areas and serve as main catchment areas for the major rivers. Pykara and Moyar, two major rivers of Nilgiris, are fed by these plantations whose catchment area spreads over 1000 hectares. Apart from being the source of the Moyar river, these areas feed the Singara- Moyar Hydel Power Station and the Bhavanisagar reservoir on the plains. Similarly the plantation in Anamallais are the main catchment area for the Parambikulam Aliyar Project dams.

Conversions of these plantations to tea would certainly result in a drastic fall in rainfall in these areas posing a serious threat to the rivers fed by them. It has been repeatedly warned by many that any threat to the rivers in the Nilgiris would affect not only the hydel power generation in the state but would also aggravate the water problem in the surrounding plains.

MEDICINAL LOSS

While the concern world over is to preserve whatever is left of the medicinal or herbal plants, it would be a mindless act to destroy Cinchona which could find use in several medicinal applications as research in this field advances. Though cheaper synthesis may have replaced quinine (the medicinal extract from Cinchona) for treatment of Malaria, experts hold that quinine is still the sure remedy for cerebral malaria.

While making a strong plea for retaining the Cinchona plantation despite the shrinking market for its resulting in continuous losses to the Department, **The Hindu**, in its editorial dated 28th May, 1959 said, “It is well-known that quinine has an assured and expanding place in the pharmacopoeia, even if malaria should be totally eradicated here and elsewhere. The many other alkaloids, besides quinine, that the Cinchona bark is known to contain like quinidine, (with its therapeutic value in the treatment of heart disease) cinchonine etc., is likely to retain for it an assured market. Temporary difficulties in marketing or losses in the working of the department do not justify the

neglect of an established line of production of national importance. The Estimates Committee of the Madras Legislature did well to recommend that through the Cinchona department was conceived and run as a commercial undertaking it should be treated really as a welfare department”.

KARNATAKA'S EXAMPLE

The Karnataka forest department has recently decided to abandon the proposed Karnataka tea project at Golibeedu in the Kodagu district since it would adversely affect the ecology of the region, even though more than Rs. 1 cr. Have been spent already on the project.

Why can't the Tamilnadu government take the cue from its neighbour and give up the conversion of the cinchona plantations?
GOVERNMENT'S DEFENCE

The Government's decision to apportion the erstwhile cinchona land between the Forest Department and TANTEA has been taken after a thorough perambulation of the plantations with due thought to environmental considerations. Accordingly, All lands with natural forest cover have been returned to the Forest Department.

Lands with steep slopes are also being handed over to the Forest Department for raising native trees. Animal movements will not be hampered either in the Nilgiris or the Anamallais as those tracts, with forest cover, are being retained as such.

There will not be any threat to the catchment areas also as they too will be left untouched. In the areas to be converted, the cinchona plants are either dead or overgrown with weeds. There is no animal life nor any rare flora.

Experiments for finding alternative uses for the cinchona products have not yielded so far. An area of about 200 ha of cinchona with plants of high quinine content is being preserved to meet the present demand. Tea was chosen as the substitute as it was the best of the available options, the others being eucalyptus and wattle. Moreover tea is already being grown near the areas to be cleared. The fear of soil erosion, till the tea plants grow, also need not be there as TANTEA has a good record of soil protection while developing new plantations. The fuel needs of the fresh labour force will be met by the lops and tops and fallen wood.

The case of Karnataka is entirely different as there, it involved destruction of forest lands while here it is only a matter of clearing unused cinchona land.

SNC'S VIEWS

The government's explanation still leaves many important questions unanswered. We would, therefore, suggest that satisfactory answers should be found for these questions before a final decision is taken to clear the Cinchona plantations. The first set of questions concern the Cinchona itself.

- a) Should Cinchona be dispensed with after all these years?
- b) Does not Cinchona have potential possibilities, in medicine or other areas, that could be exploited in the future? What do the scientists have to say on this?

The point is this. When, the world over, efforts are on to preserve whatever is left of the medicinal or herbal plants, should we go about destroying a plant of known medicinal value just because it does not bring enough immediate economic return?

The second set of questions concern the proposed conversion:

- a) Are the Cinchona areas to be cleared really so dead and devoid of any plant or animal life that they cannot be considered as forests and retained as such?
- b) Can the proposed clearings be done without really affecting animal life in the adjoining sanctuaries or the catchment areas?
- c) Can the huge labour force be really prevented from damaging the nearby forests for fuel and timber.

These and many more questions have truly agitated the environmental groups in the Nilgiris and the Anamallais. Their concern and fears are genuine.

The forest Department, we hope, will feel obliged to clear the misgivings of these environmental groups across the table. In particular there is a lot of confusion over the exact extent and location of the areas to be cleared.

The meeting can be in Madras, Coimbatore or Ooty. Will the Government take the initiative to call the meeting?

Or will one of the groups involved do so?

We do hope the government will not hesitate to modify its proposal fully or partly, depending on the outcome of the discussions.

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GREEN DESERTS

SNC CHIEF'S WARNING

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan was among the main speakers at a function organised in connection with the World Environmental Day at Ooty.

The Nilgiris should be treated as a water manufacturing industry and all other industries which caused various kinds of pollution should not be encouraged, said Mr. Krishnan in his address.

Mr. Krishnan observed that as per the Constitution of India, it was the sacred duty of all the citizens of this country to protect the environment. Stating that in the name of development, all kinds of nonsense had been going in this district, Mr. Krishnan warned that if the five rivers originating in the Nilgiris dried up the neighbouring districts the plain would become deserts. Pointing out that all the State Government should protect the forests, the SNC chief opined that tea should not be considered as the wealth of the country. Stressing the importance of soil conservation, he said that encouraging monoculture like tea and eucalyptus would only end up in making the Nilgiris a green desert.

Stating that forest cover was being depleted at an alarming rate, Mr. Krishnan said that only the people could save the forests and the environment, and the Government, at best, could only supplement the people's efforts. Regretting that the natural forest cover in the Nilgiris had been reduced to five per cent, he reminded the people that forest could exist only on the mountains and they could not be created in places like Mettupalayam in the plains.

Mr. K. Shanmugam, SNC activist alleged that lorry loads of precious natural trees were being removed almost everyday from areas around Kotagiri. He also said that private estate owners had been allowed to encroach upon forest lands. The forthright speech of Mr. Shanmugam with facts at his finger tips was well received and appreciated by the audience.

AN ENDORSEMENT

"Environmentalist B.J. Krishnan is to be immensely thanked for his warning that encouraging tea cultivation would only end up in making Nilgiris a green desert. So far the Nilgiris is concerned, potato raising too is to be equally warned. Quite often we find our newspapers carrying some news on the grave fall in rainfall caused by denudation of forests due to felling of trees. But a voice against the growing acreage under tea/potato cultivation is rarely heard. Potato/tea has perhaps been the greater cause for the decreasing rainfall in the Nilgiris than illicit felling of trees for firewood or commercial purposes. Perhaps the alarming decrease in the rainfall experienced over the present half of this century here may be more due to the phenomenal conversion of forests or of lands potential of being developed into forests into potato farms and tea plantations that went on here during the last forty years. Probably a wrong notion that tea/potato plants offer the same green cover with both possessing leaves – the cooling agents – prevails.

Coolness is the greatest inducement in precipitating the clouds over mountains into rains. Though both have leaves, the coolness offered by trees (forests) is defined far greater in space and content than by tea plants for the following two reasons:

1. The leaves of the trees are spread far above the surface of mountain in contrast to the very low height of tea plant. Evidently this helps maintain atmospheric coolness for a far greater height.
2. The comparatively far deeper and greater spread of roots of trees against the short spread of roots of tea plants facilitates the far greater retention of moisture by the soil. This strikingly enhances the atmospheric coolness over the mountain.

Water-starved Tamil Nadu cannot afford to have any large part of its forests going for delicious tea and sweet potato. TN has to limit the space for them if it owes a burden to assure at least drinking water to its posterity of 21st century" (**Courtesy: letter by Shri. V. Jeyapaul of Rajapalayam in the Indian Express**)

SNC CHIEF IN KOTTAYAM

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan took part in a Four Day Live-in Seminar on Environmental Education organised by the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam between 20th and 23rd September, 1990 and spoke on "My encounters with the Environment" and "Environmental Protection and Water Conservation".

SNC IN Dt. ECO PANEL

SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan has been nominated one of the three non-official members of the newly set up District Environmental Committee.

GOOD WORK BY SNC ACTIVISTS IN KOTAGIRI

Thanks to the intervention of SNC activists, two major issues posing threats to the environment of Kotagiri were resolved with the prompt action taken by the district administration.

Making use of an opportunity to address the District Collector and the forest officials at the World Environment Day celebrations held at Ooty in June last, SNC's Kotagiri Field Coordinator Shanmugam made an impassioned plea to the Collector to halt the illegal falling of trees in the natural forests and the widespread encroachments in village commons, particularly in catchment areas.

Impressed by the sincere and forthright speech (in which he quoted off hand the survey numbers of the encroached lands and the exact location, timing and quantity of illegal fellings) of Shanmugam, the young rural activist, the District Collector passed suitable orders on the spot to the officials concerned, who visited the problem areas in the next few days to verify the facts.

On further orders from the Collector, 17 acres of common land under threat of encroachment in the kannerimukku village of Kotagiri taluk, carrying the Survey No. 930, was planted under the Social Forestry Scheme.

Speaking of the function organised in connection with the planting, the District Collector Shri. G.A. Rajkumar reminded the people that the growing water problem in Kotagiri was due to the destruction of forests. On behalf of SNC, Field coordinator Shanmugam traced all the events leading to the planting and thanked the Collector.

In other incident, about an acre of land under Survey No. 942 in a village near Kotagiri had been illegally planted with tea by an encroacher. As the land was the main catchment area for the surrounding villages, SNC members led by Shanmugam tried to persuade the encroacher to remove the tea plants so that the area can be replanted with trees. When their plea evoked no response, a group of youths from the affected villages moved into the field and uprooted over 4000 plants grown in the encroached land. Efforts are on now to plant the land with tree seedlings.

What these incidents show is that we should not be unnecessarily cynical about the administration's readiness to act in response to public representations. The administration will not hesitate to act on genuine representations from the public. Understanding between the administration and public activists can result in positive joint actions to solve environmental grievances.

We take this opportunity to thank the District Collector Shri G.A. Rajkumar for his prompt action on our plea. We are also thankful to the officials in the Forest and other departments who helped in the above incidents. In particular, we wish to record our appreciation and thanks to Shri Kakkamallan, Health Official, Kotagiri Town Panchayat, who has been taking an active interest in environmental matters in Kotagiri.

HAIL! HACA!

At long last a major step has been taken. The Hill Areas Conservation Authority (HACA) has been constituted with the objective of making the hill areas of Tamil Nadu, "ecologically acceptable and environmentally desirable". The focus of HACA, naturally, will be on Nilgiris which is the most prestigious and the most degraded hill areas of the state. In fact HACA's creation as the saviour of the hills originally in response to SNC's call to "Save Nilgiris" at a seminar in Madras in 1987. Shri B. Vijayaraghavan, a senior IAS officer and a keen environmentalist and presently Chairman of Tuticorin Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd. conceived the idea of a statutory authority to coordinate and guide the process of development in Nilgiris on desirable lines. Later, Shri A. Ramakrishnan, the present Forest and Environment Secretary, gave shape to the idea which was extended to cover all the hill areas of the State and finally it was put in operation by the Planning Secretary and a past District Collector of Nilgiris Shri K. Inbasegaran. The Authority has now been placed in the experienced and able hands of the Vigilance Commissioner Shri P.N. Vedanarayanan. SNC coordinator Shri D. Venugopal met all the four of them, thanked them for creating HACA, and conveyed to them the great expectation it has raised. HACA, it was understood, will start work by taking stock of the situation in the various hill areas. It is likely to visit Nilgiris first. "HACA or no HACA, ultimately it is the local people who can really help save Nilgiris", said Shri Inbasegaran during the discussions. We cannot agree more with him. We, therefore, appeal to all interested individuals and groups to come together, sink their differences (if any), keep aside their egos and work with HACA to save NILGIRIS. As for the Government, we sincerely hope that HACA will be given adequate powers to closely monitor and regulate development activities in the hill areas of Tamil Nadu, particularly Nilgiris.

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“BLUE MOUNTAINS”

- a reply

I am sure that all the dozen authors of **Blue Mountains** will join me in thanking the Revd. Philip Mulley for his thoughtful review essay in the July issue of this Newsletter. Since I have been offered an opportunity to reply to it, I will do so in these few paragraphs.

It is probably not wise to look at a collaborative venture of this sort in terms of its strength and shortcomings. I do not mean by this to imply there are no shortcomings at all, but only to make the rather obvious statement that, although the Nilgiris have been very heavily studied by anthropologists, we were in fact restricted to those who have done primary research there over the past half century. Of these people virtually everyone who was still living (and had a Ph.D.) did make a contribution to the book. (It may however be noted that Dr. Kamil Zvelebil did not write for us, as his particular areas of expertise were very adequately covered by three other authors.)

This statement goes some way towards explaining the few inadequacies in the book's coverage that Revd. Mulley pointed out. As the editor, I would dearly have liked an overview of the Wainad communities, even a separate chapter on such groups as the Wainad Chettis, Mantavadan Chettis, Panias, Bettu Kurmbas, etc. But nobody has studied these people in any detail, and they simply had to be over looked.

Coverage of the Kota tribe raised a somewhat different problem, for they had been studied very adequately by the late Dr. Mandelbaum in the 1930s and 1940s. As it happened, he had written a fine essay on them about thirty years ago which – unfortunately for most would-be readers – appeared in an obscure textbook printed by and specifically for use at the University of Chicago and never republished. He therefore agreed to update this same article only slightly and then let it see the proper light of day. As a result, this article reads as somewhat dated today, a point that Revd. Mulley noted.

All of the other articles in **Blue Mountains** are now presentation written specifically for this book. We have tried to present a rounded view of the anthropology of the District, insofar as resources allowed us to do so.

The matter of how long Todas have been on the Nilgiris has been of interest ever since the books of Breeks and Rivers. With no archeological excavations ever having been done in Toda mounds, and none likely until at least the next century, we have to fall back on analogies. It is true that one inscription of 1117 A.D. mentions Todas on the Nilgiris, but before that date history is silent. Numerous archeologists, from Breeks to Noble, have looked at the evidence that might support or refute an ancient cultural link between the Todas and the megalithic cinerary burials. No such connection has yet been established, though.

On the other hand, Dr. Mandelbaum has talked about the possibility of Todas burning the grass here since B.C. times. Now I can mention a new piece of evidence on the antiquity of the Todas which is stylistic in nature, yet intriguing. During the reign of Asoka, the entrance to the Lomas Rishi cave was formally carved out of the rock: it dates to 3rd.B.C., and is located in the Barabar Hills near Gaya (Illustration 51 in Francis Watson's **Concise History of India**). What is so interesting about this cave entrance is that it is clearly replicating in the hard rock the features of a wooden house or hut of the post-Vedic period – none of which has otherwise survived. And it is closer in shape and design to a traditional Toda hut than any other Indian housing of more recent times has been. The curve of the eaves as they sweep down to the ground is identical with the curve so familiar to us. The horizontal rods supporting the thatch project to the end of the eaves in the usual way. The small, nearly square doorway in centrally placed in the end of the hut. And the finial above the cave doorway, a sort of gumba or pot, is positioned where the Todas now have a flat wooden finial (like a small paddle) which closely replicates the outline of the post-vedic one. This is not to argue that Todas came from the Gangetic Plain during Asoka's time (though it is not an impossibility); but rather, that the Lomas Rishi cave has preserved for us one example of a house design that might have been very widespread in the Indian peninsula during post-Vedic times.

One point made by your reviewer of **Blue Mountains** does call for refutation, because I have heard it from a number of other Badagas this year too. It is the idea that today (1990) the Badagas number something like three lakhs. This seems to me wholly wrong, and misleading, because a mathematical analysis of previous censuses yields a 1990 total in the range of only 145,000-155,000. Without going far back in history, I can repeat that in 1961 the national census counted 85,463 Badagas, and in 1971 104,352. A slight calculation shows that this represents

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an increase of 22% for that decade. What happened in the following decades, though? There is no clear evidence of a massive increase in the birthrate since 1971 (and the Government has published no more recent figures); rather the opposite, in fact, because as family planning practices became a little more accepted from that time onwards, and greater number of young people than before went off for higher education before starting to raise a family, the rate of population increase should have been if anything slightly lower than the rate that prevailed before the 1970s. But even if we accept that the same rate of increase continued to prevail from 1971 to 1990, it would only yield a population of about 155,000 Badagas today. One might of course assert that the previous censuses were all simply under-enumerated, but there is no real evidence for such an assertion. Each decennial total for the Badagas was about what one would expect on the basis of the previous one, and reflects a steady rate of increase up to the time when family planning began to be practiced, roughly in the 1970s. (It is true that this rate of increase has always been higher in the 20th century than the 19th, because of improvements in public health and reduction in infant mortality.) Even West African populations which, with an annual rate of increase over 3% have the highest rate of increase on the world, have been unable to triple their population in 20 years—which is what some people are now claiming for the Badagas! Next year is a census year, and perhaps we will find out about all this—if the government will publish the figures for once. But my guess is that now, after a slight reduction in the rate of increase during the last 20 years, the Badaga population today is around 145,000, perhaps 150,000 by the time of the census.

The reviewer of our book also wished that we had provided a large map showing all villages of all the communities. Well, so do we, but its production would have been major project in itself; not just because of locating a thousand places on a map, but mainly because the Government of India as well as local authorities refuse to make large-scale maps available to researchers, and then have the right to authorise or else suppress any research maps that are nonetheless produced. Only by showing a tiny corner of the Nilgiris in the endpapers as a sample – a corner far away from the railways and dams – was it possible to give some idea of settlement patterns without running afoul of the Survey of India. Until government officers wake up to the fact nothing strategic importance is shown on their outmoded 1-inch survey maps which is not also shown in more up-to-date version on a U.S. Air Force map that anyone in America can buy, those people are going to continue slowing down a great deal of useful research which could ultimately benefit places like the Nilgiris.

My next book on the Nilgiris will be a **Badaga-English Dictionary**, due out from Mouton de Gruyter in 1991 and written in collaboration with the French linguist Christian Pilot-Raichoor. I mention this because it will be much more than the usual school dictionary: In fact it is a general reference handbook on the Nilgiris, even for those who don't know the Badaga language, and thus a useful complement to **Blue Mountains**. Among many features never before to have been published, the book contains a complete list of Badaga names of Toda, Kota, Badaga and Irula villages (whether occupied or abandoned), of all streams, hills, archeological sites, and many other localities besides; also of famous Nilgiri people. With these names, as with those of all flora and fauna, full bibliographic references are given to all the published research in each case. An English-Badaga glossary will work like an index to help the reader who does not know Badaga. And the distinguished Professor M.B. Emeneau, who studied the Toda and Kota languages in the 1930s, has graciously written a Foreword to the dictionary.

Paul Hockings

BLUE MOUNTAINS

- An Acknowledgement

We are extremely grateful to Prof. Paul Hockings for his aforesaid response to eh review of “Blue Mountains”. As usual he has made an able presentation of the research aspects of anthropology contained in “Blue Mountains” – a major contribution to the study of the cultural geography of an Indian region. It is, indeed, very considerate of him to have taken the time and effort to extend the benefit of his reply through the columns of this Newsletter. Now, I may please be permitted to add the following by way of rounding off the discussion.

1. Prof. Paul Hockings' criticism relating to the population figures pertaining to the Badaga is understandable. However, the national census figures need not always be unimpeachable. For instance, the 1981 census estimates seem to have unwarrantedly clubbed Badaga and Kannada language figures together and it is difficult to set right a situation such as this. Many such Instances of lacuna concerning both past and present enumerations (Nilgiri-wise as well as compilation of figures in larger contexts) are aplenty. Hence the national census figures cannot be said to always reflect the exact state of numbers.

So through these columns I wish to suggest that the Badaga Federation and the Badaga Mahajana Sanga

should put their heads together and start counting them! The communication-cum-information net-work at the village, commune and territory levels amongst Badaga is excellent and there are qualified persons and hence it should pose no great difficulty to the above said organisations to undertake a scientific computation of Badaga population figures.

2. Prof. Hockings' suggestion of links regarding post-Vedic caves and Toda huts is quite significant; the links are not altogether tenuous. Logan (quoting a Chinese pilgrim 605 AD) and subsequent investigators of Punnol and Panunda caves in Tellicherry Dt. (West of Nilgiris) have also indicated such similarities. Nilgiris itself, during B.C. times was probably well known. Nilgiris is described as one of the twelve "Princes – among mountains", in Mahabharatha (Asvamedha Parvan : Anugita – Ch.28) and according to Max Muller, the date of this text is to be traced to not later than 400 B.C. A careful study of the text also indicates that the reference is actually to "Our Nilgiris rather than to the Nilgiri in Orissa and surely enough not to the snow-clad peaks of the same name in Annapurna ranges in the Himalayas!

3. The Badaga-English dictionary currently under preparation by Prof. Hockings is likely to prove to be a mine of ethnolinguistic insights. Alongwith Emedeau's Kota and Toda Texts, Zvelebil's Irula lexical compilation and Kapp's Kurumba dictionary, Hockings' work may eventually throw more light on the pre and pronto aspects of Dravidian taxonomy. And it is hoped that it is not going to be merely, "a useful complement to Blue Mountains' But would add stimulus and dynamism to the reconstruction of Nilgiri a real history.

-Philip K. Mulley

EYESORE IN KOTAGIRI

Dear Shri Krishnan,

I introduce myself as a long time citizen of Kotagiri (78). I had, for some years, served as a member of the Kotagiri Panchayat Board. Presently, I am running a small business for Radio sales and services.

I am happy to learn about the campaign led by yourself for protecting the environment and ecology of Nilgiris. Your uplifting services deserve appreciation.

I have still fresh memories of the public meeting at the Kotagiri Maidan fifty years ago, that is in 1935, when the then Governor of the Madras Presidency Lord Erskin, who was addressing the meeting, said to the applause of the crowd, "Kotagiri is considered to be the second best place in the world for climate conditions, the first being Los Angeles in California". The Governor's words bear testimony to the most agreeable climatic conditions of Kotagiri.

While foreigners and our own leaders have proudly acknowledged their association with Kotagiri, a glaring example of how the environment and health of the place is being spoiled is the ruins of the former police quarters in the Bazaar Street.

Built many years ago with five houses, the police line fell into disuse, had the roofs removed and the walls demolished and is standing in ruins as an eyesore for the last 15 years. It has become a permanent open toilet for the public, emanating foul smell and posing an hazard to public health. That it is right opposite to the Government Hospital needs to be mentioned. Besides, all around it there are residential houses.

Despite several representation and personal appeals in this connection, no action has been taken.

Therefore, without minding the trouble, kindly make a visit to the spot and do the needful so that a suitable solution can be found to this disgusting sight.

- M. S. Subramaniam

Bazaar Street, Kotagiri.

We have taken up the matter with the Superintendent of Police, Nilgiris and are awaiting his reply.

This Newsletter is financed by Mr.K. EAPEN JACOB BANDVMI< NILZGIRIS

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NEWSLETTER

VOL 5 No. 1

April 1991

NEAC 1990 ONE –DAY SEMINAR

NILGIRIS FACING PROBLEMS ON ALL FRONTS

Under the National Environment Awareness Campaign 1990, sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, a one day Seminar was organised on 17-4-91 at Madras on the theme “**Hill Areas Conservation Authority (HACA) – priorities for Nilgiris**”. The Seminar was jointly organised with Exnora Club of Madras Central.

Mr. V. Ramachandran, Advisor to the governor, who summed up the seminar, said that though a balance had to be struck between development and conservation of environment, pre-eminence should be given to preservation of ecology in the hill areas than development. In the hill areas, special efforts should be taken for eco-development” viz. the development which preserved the ecology or tried to restore it when it had been lost.

The encroachers in the hill areas were not local people but outsiders who encroached, poached, smuggled goods, made money and still received maximum protection. Laws alone were not enough to tackle these problems but local authorities should play a role in putting an end to them, he said.

Mr. V. Karthikeyan, Advisor to the Governor, who presided, said the HACA had been created by an executive order of the Government and it had only an advisory role. It should be clothed with statutory powers to regulate the development of not only the Nilgiris but also Kodaikanal, Kolli Hills, Shevaroy Hills etc.

However, he cautioned the participants about taking extreme positions between environment at all costs and development at any rate. The merits and demerits of environmental degradation and economic development should be studied and reconciled. If there were built-in safeguards for development projects coming up in the hill areas, damage to environment would be minimal, he said.

Mr. P.N.Veda Narayanan, Chairman, HACA said that the Government Order creating the HACA listed the types of activities allowed in the hill areas, the banned activities, etc. The objectives of the HACA would be to fix the parameters for ecological conservation with the Tamil Nadu Dr. G.D. Naidu Agricultural University, to conduct an integrated study which would indicate the plan of action for the Nilgiris and other hill areas.

Mrs. Jayanthi, Secretary, Information and Tourism Department, said that the Ooty town was awash with tourists, buses churning up the roads and creating traffic snarls. Worse, there was no parking lot for these buses. To battle the pollution of the Ooty lake, the TWAD Board had prepared a plan to be implemented in stages and Rs. 5.7 crores would be spent on this, she added.

Mr. Varada Kutti, President, Exnora Club of Madras Central, wanted the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to check the noise, water and air pollution in Ooty.

Mr. D. Venugopal, Coordinator, Save Nilgiris Campaign, proposed a vote of thanks. **The Welcome speech of Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President and the Situation Report on Nilgiris presented by Shri R. Radcliffe, Vice-president, Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association are reproduced in full.**

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MAKING HACA A STATUTORY BODY

-B.J. Krishnan

In the last 5 years the Nation has been observing the period between 19th Nov and 18th Dec. of every year as the National Environment Awareness Month. Environmental groups are requested to organise Environment awareness programmes as part of the National Environment Awareness Campaign. This Campaign could not be taken during last winter due to certain uncertainties. This Meet is part of that Campaign. The Central Government has involved the SNC right from the beginning of the NEAC.

Nilgiris, an important sub-region of the Western Ghats, in one of the oldest land masses of our planet and is considered to be Natural wonder by the Scientists. The sholas of Nilgiris are as old as the Himalayas. The fauna and flora are varied and unique. It is one of the few catchment areas of the state. Four major River Basins of the region, the Bhavani, Moyar, Kajini and Chaliar have their origin here and these rivers ultimately drain themselves into the Cauvery. (This was highlighted to the Cauvery Tribunal the other day by SNC). By draining these rivers the State Government gets nearly 2 lakhs acres of land in Coimbatore and Periar Districts every year. The high grown Teas and Vegetables of Nilgiris are too well known for their quality.

Yet not realising, the ecological and economical importance of this sensitive region, the hills have been systematically destroyed under the name of development. Both the government and people have contributed their share in this regard. Sholas and grasslands were cleared to raise industrial plantations and to settle immigrants from outside the District. Monoculture replaced the original forests. People in thousands from the plains came in search of land and settled down in ecologically expanded on their own without any regard to town planning and basic amenities. When the destruction reached the peak during the early eighties, a few concerned citizens among us, unable to be silent spectators to the environmental tragedy, raised their voice and that was the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

When the Campaign was first launched our president Shri R. Venkatraman, who was the Vice-President then, expressed his happiness and emphasized the need for such a campaign. Eminent environmentalist Shri Bahaguna guided the campaign during its formative years. Mr. R. Radcliffe, who has spent more than 40 years in the Ghats has been our friend, philosopher and guide. Dr. P.C. Alexnader our former Governor took a keen interest in the Campaign.

To build up environmental awareness SNC has been conducting nature camps for children, workshops for rural youths and local body members. The Save Nilgiris March, the Save Nilgiris Run, Save-Nilgiris Photographic Exhibition "Nilgiris Then and Now" are milestone in the history of environmental Movements in the Country. We are also closely connected with the Save the Western Ghats Movement.

On the side of positive action our achievements are considerable. A private industry dropped its proposal to start an electroplating unit on the banks of the Moyar River, though the state government had granted permission, a proposal for a needless hotel at Madurai was dropped, the plan of a stadium at Ootacamund was modified, the Forest Department evicted some questionable characters who tried to grab about 100 acres of forest land near Mavanhallah under the guise of forming a Indu-Rotary Tribal Farm.

Above all, the recently constituted Hill Area Conservation Authority, the subject of today's meeting, was first mooted in one of our meetings. In a seminar held at Madras on the 18th April 1987 which was presided over by Shri Karthikeyan, Shri B.Vijayaragavan first mooted the idea for a separate Development Authority for the Hill Areas. The result is the H.A.C. Authority.

Coming to the present state of affairs of the Nilgiris. I must mention a few points :

The Original forest cover is vanishing at an alarming speed; mono-culture like blue-gum, wattle and tea is creeping into the original forests with the result that the springs and streams are drying up. And consequently, Ootacamund town and other areas are facing acute water-scarcity.

More and more rootless migrants from the plains are pouring into the hills and most of them have settled down in ecologically sensitive areas, they start cultivating steep hills which results in soil erosion, water run off, flash floods and silting up of dams and reservoirs.

The Ooty town is in utter chaos; people have started building up on the roads; no municipal sanction is necessary for anything. The main drainage across the town is the breeding ground for mosquitoes. The sewerage system has completely collapsed; most of areas do not get water. The town is full of stray dogs, horses and cattle. Jaundice is the latest to invade the town. Coonoor has defiled all town planning rules and the grown on its own. Gudalur is a paradise for land grabbers, Kotagiri, a sleepy town has become a centre of social conflict, thanks to the rootless migrants from the plains.

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The fate of the original jenmam forests of Gudalur is hanging in the air thanks to the prolonged litigation. The four major industries situated around Ootacamund continue to pollute the rivers with impunity, notwithstanding the Pollution Control Board; the tragedy is that the water of these rivers is used for drinking down stream.

The HADP, the centrally sponsored programme for the Hills, is a good scheme but badly managed in the Nilgiris. Its approach is adhoc, piecemeal and unimaginative. It funds one department to do a thing and another department to undo the same – lack of coordination. The HADP is without a head for the last 2 years. Some clerks are managing the department.

We have a few suggestion for the Hill Areas Conservation Authority:

At present it is not fully constituted and is managed by a part time chairman. And it has hardly any say in the planning and matters relating to finance in respect of the hill areas.

The HACA is constituted under a G.O. and that G.O. has been issued under Sec. 44 of the Town Planning Act. At present it is in the nature of an advisory body.

It is time the HACA is fully constituted and brought to its full shape.

Perhaps a full fledged statutory body can do much better. May be a separate legislation is necessary to constitute such a body-something like the Ganga Development Authority. Himachal Pradesh and some of the North East areas have such legislation. Perhaps that is the only way to have a conservation oriented development for the Nilgiris. The Municipal and other local laws should be made subject to such an Authority. It should have all powers in the matters of planning and financing for developmental activities.

Perhaps the centrally sponsored HADP can be brought under the HACA as a first step. The HADP is now part of the Planning and Development Department.

The HACA lacks legal-teeth to book and punish violations.

The HACA G.O. recognizes hill areas as different kind of regions and therefore demands different kind of treatment for them. But Nilgiris is not just different; it is unique and surprisingly, it is still unique! Therefore it deserves a unique statutory treatment. But time is running out; either we take corrective measures to arrest the decay or write it off once and for all. We are here, because we are hopeful; hopeful that you will not let our hills die.

NO HOTELS HERE PLEASE !!

Dear Mr. Krishnan,

I wish to bring to your kind notice that some prospectors are planning to buy the land at the backside of our school called the Church hill area with the intention of building a hotel complex. The Church hill area used to be a lovely wooded area with plenty of old trees and more than half of it has already been destroyed for the construction of housing colonies under the Housing Board programmes and another part for potato cultivation after cutting off all the trees. If now the hotel complex is permitted to come up the whole area would be denuded of all the trees. In addition there is bound to be atmospheric pollution with all the afflux of waste materials from such complexes plus soil erosion, abuse of roads meant for residential area by the heavy vehicular traffic of tourist buses etc. Already the permission granted to the Southern Star to build in a residential area is causing enough havoc to the roads by the heavy traffic operating back and forth from the hotel. If more such hotel complexes are permitted in this area, the whole place would look like a slum ruining the beauty of the place as well as the ecological balances. No hotel complex should be permitted to be built in this area. These wooded areas used to be places for lovely walks for the residents of this area as well as our school children. Now the rate at which these entrepreneurs are wrecking this little town with their monstrous hotel complexes, very soon there will be nothing of the beautiful Ooty left. I am bringing this to your kind attention with the request to do the needful to arrest immediately any more hotel complexes being allowed to come up in this area.

Miss. G. Devadason Sd.....
Principal
St. Hilda's School

STOP THE FLOOD OF MIGRATION

-R. Radcliffe

In preparing my address I have taken it for granted that all present today have a great interest in Conservation of our surroundings and a Care for the Environment and have, certainly, a broad understanding of the peril we are in from a destruction of natural resources which is moving forward in a relentless way, or you would not be here.

Speakers before me have explained and emphasized the need to husband and protect the Environment before so great damage will have been done that our very existence and that our children will be so spoilt that we will have a very degraded pattern of living.

What I shall try and do is to underline and explain the degradation in the Nilgiris, an area of great importance to the State where rivers rise and feed agriculture and the cities of the Plains; where catchment areas of the monsoons supply the hydel reservoirs which contribute nearly 40% of the States energy generation. An area of high cultural and environmental significance.

If I were an artist I would paint an allegorical picture of a fine fruit tree in full bearing damaged and ravaged by a severe hail storm and violent winds to describe the present state of the Nilgiris, now destroyed by unbridled encroachments of land and aggravated by uncoordinated development work and political opportunism.

I will suggest some constructive action that could be taken to correct further decline and also restore, in some measure, the desirable character and position of this vital water catchment and important ecological area. What I will have to say is in many ways applicable and relevant to, not only the State of Tami Nadu but to the Country as a whole. It is mainly in the matter of emphasis and urgency that differences appear in other areas.

I shall take first the gross misuse of land in the Nilgiris, not just agricultural land but Forest land and Urban land.

Agricultural land is destroyed by the clean cultivation of cash crops on unsuitable, steep hill-slopes which is taken right down into the river and stream beds, creating great loss of fertile top soil and silting-up and destroying all flows of water. Very steep water-catchment areas are occupied by thousands of people from the Plains, clean cultivating land which should be undisturbed and under grass and vegetation. The entry of such large numbers of people is a direct result of encouragement by the Revenue by allowing individual occupation of any vacant land and then, after a lapse of few years, making over ownership to the encroacher by a Patta. 6000 pattas have been issued in the last 2 years. Thus, a further influx of people into vital water stream and river catchments is inevitable as people flow in unhindered and even given direct encouragement.

The profligate use of Forest land for Individual purpose.

An outstanding example is the placing under Gums and Wattle plantations of close on 70% of forest to feed industrial factories on the Plains with little consideration being given to the essential need to keep certain areas under natural grass and indigenous tree cover for the preservation of perennial water sources. Even today, grass land being planted up with Gums and Pines. When the responsible Forest Officer is questioned, he replies that if the land is not planted, it will be encroached!

A further example is the project to place under Tea some 1000 acres in the Nilgiris and 500 acres in the Annamallais of what is virtually forest. To cultivate a tea crop correctly it will mean the total removal of all trees, uprooting stumps and maintaining a tea stand over bare, clean ground with a minimum number of small trees subsequently planted. The two areas are in the midst of most vital water-catchment areas in hilly country, receiving copious falls of both the N.E. and S.W. monsoons which provide essential streams and rivers on the Plains and are areas of great environmental importance. The lure of quick money from a cash crop has created an opaque screen through which it is not possible to see or count the cost to the environment, and long-time water conservation. An ecological disaster.

Urban land, or land used for housing, appears not to be subject to the rules and requirements of the Planning and Development Act. Hotels and houses are built with little regard to the suitability of the site, that is the suitability for the Public good. Ootacamund, now the target of high-pressure tourism, is being massacred by a proliferation of hotels and lodges, built with complete disregard of aesthetic or environment needs. Whether the town can absorb such a large inflow of tourists and seasonal occupants and still retain the beauty and contentment is not considered. To meet the demands of the tourists some uncontrolled hundreds of autorickshaws and too-large buses ply the inadequate roads and petty shops spring up over the night occupying open places all over.

Villages rise up over all agricultural land, made by individuals immigrating to the Nilgiris in thousands from far and wide – unplanned – without water – light – and roads. Pure uncontrolled or even encouraged encroachment! So what can be done?

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There is Government machinery in place that can ameliorate the present sad condition of the Nilgiris almost at once and which can prevent further destruction and misuse of the land. I suggest seven actions.

FIRST:

The recently constituted Hill Area Conservation Authority can immediately be fully consulted and go into action. The powers given to the Authority are extensive and all encompassing. The first priority of the Authority should be to review all activity on the land and towns of the Nilgiris and urgent action taken to put a stop to the more destructive activity. An immediate classification should be made of land in the Nilgiris including

'A' Land which must remain inviolate.

'B' Land which can be used for development after Land in Class 'C' has been exhausted.

'C' Land which can be used immediately for development for housing, agriculture and other essential purpose.

In fact a land policy which should be inviolate.

Such a review can be the basis for action in other sensitive areas.

The Authority in its operations must closely involve local knowledge and expertise in defined areas. The present composition is suitable for over all policy making and top-level supervision of projects and large scale development. Provision must be made for the formation of smaller local advisory committees which are essential, if policy implementation is to be effective.

SECOND:

A survey to be made of all rivers, streams, swamps and all important water-catchment areas and place these under the protection of the Forest Department.

The boundaries of all water courses to be marked by forest pillars.

A line of trees and vegetation to be planted, laterally 30 metres either side of water edges thus demarcating the protected area.

All encroachments to be evicted.

Land use in catchment areas to be controlled in such a way that harm is not done to water conservation. The exploitation of all rivers and streams and sinking of bore-wells in river valleys to be subject to strict Government licensing and control.

THIRD:

All land classified in the Nilgiris as Revenue forest to be transferred wherever possible under Sec. 26 of the Forest Act to care of the Forest Department. To make possible such transfer, some reciprocal surrender of land, Forest controlled, could be made to the Revenue for essential housing and development purposes.

FOURTH:

Haphazard individual encroachment on any land to be forbidden.

The needs of the implacable growth of the population to be met by proper planning of living areas where environmentally suitable sites for Villages can be selected and provided with water – light – roads – and amenity buildings.

Employment can be given in forest areas for the raising of productive timber stands for agricultural-building and industrial use.

FIFTH:

All forest areas to be brought under timber and forest produce production to provide employment to those evicted from encroached lands.

Tree species to be planted that are not harmful to soil fertility or water conservation.

SIXTH:

Blue Prints for Urban Development to be made so that town planning and village extension is controlled.

Construction work to be controlled and monitored by the Planning and Development department and supervised by local bodies.

SEVENTH:

Hill areas, in particular the Nilgiris, to have Special Rules governing transfers and appointments of all Government Administrative and Forest Officers. Hill areas are special areas and in the case of the Nilgiris, unique. Present Transfers are made within 1 to 2 years just at a time when the Officer begins to understand the peculiar Environmental and cultural needs of these special areas. They are replaced by Officers from the Plains and from areas of no special, environmental significance. How then can the land be properly administered and cared for?

To conclude, the Nilgiris are blessed with a healthy and pleasant climate, an adequate and consistent rainfall and reasonably good fertile soil. A river finds its way through land by probing and flowing along the least obstructed way. So it is with people in seeking somewhere to live. A river can be controlled.

Is it not possible to control the damaging flood of people into the Nilgiris and their activity?

RETRIEVING EDWARDIAN OOTACAMUND
- Paul Hockings

The first decade of this century, the Edwardian Era, was a fairly short period in modern history. Nonetheless it left its mark on the literature of the Nilgiri Hills, for this brief phase produced four of the basic reference works that have been used by scholars ever since. These are the "Nilgiri Gazetteer" (Francis, 1908), "The Todas"(Rivers, 1906), "Ootacamund, a History"(Price 1980) and "Castes and Tribes of Southern India" (Thurston & Rangachari, 1908). In addition this period saw several other more popular books on Southern India that gave due space to life in the Nilgiris, some of which have the virtue of excellent illustrations:" Roughing it in Southern India" (Mrs. Handley, 1911), and, for those interested in decimation of the megafauna, "Bullet and Shot in Indian Forest, Hill and Plain" (Russell, 1900) and "Spot on the Nilgiris and in Wynaad" (Fletcher, 1911).Beyond these there were any number of journal articles, for example in the "Bulletin" of the Madras Government Museum.

How far so such publications go for a reader today who wants to get some idea of Ooty in Edwardian times, who wants to get some idea of Ooty in Edwardian times, who wants to know what life in Grandfather's youth? Fortunately, the documentation is very thorough indeed, River's account of the Todas has proved to be timeless, and is still read by anthropology students the world over. Franci's Gazetteer has never been superseded. Price's history of Ooty could certainly be updated but it never has. And what is so interesting about most of these books (though not the Gazetteer) is their profusion of photographs.

Recently I obtained (from a dealer in Connecticut, U.S.A.) an Ooty family photo album from the period 1900-1905. It covers only some activities of the local British at that time, but is valuable historical record; it shows fashionable ladies and gents at the Ooty races in 1903, and also the first cars in Ooty. Many of the photos are very large and superbly detailed; at least one was taken by A.T.W. Penn, a professional photographer. I mention all this because I am wondering how many other such albums are living around in people's almirahs, food only for the silverfish? The curious thing about family photos is that they steadily become more interesting and valuable the older they get. Modern copies should certainly be made where possible, so that a permanent pictorial record of past Nilgiri life can be built up and kept perhaps under the auspices of the Save Nilgiris Campaign or the Nilgiri Library. Copying is especially important for those early photographs which have hung on the wall for years, since even if the frame is backed with tinfoil to keep the silverfish out the picture itself will slowly deteriorate due to constant exposure to light. Modern museums often display such rare photos under a cloth which can be removed for just a few minutes while visitors are looking at them. Having a modern copy to hang on the wall may be simpler long-term solution, one that will see these photographs passed on into the 21st century.

BANAGUDISHOLA IN DANGER

The Banagudishola is a natural forest portion of Kotagiri range and part of Kesalada Reserved forests under the forest department of Nilgiris North division. This is a land of many species of wild trees, plants, reptiles, animals and birds. There are also two small swamps in the forest. In the middle of the forest are also ancient stone slabs with sculptures engraved on them. These are said to be of archaeological importance.

This area has been declared to be of national importance under the Ancient Monument and Archeological Sites and Remains Act, 1950 and declared a "Protected area" by the Central government, by a board in the centre of the forest with full details of punishment for trespassers.

But this natural forest is under immediate threat of human encroachments. We request the Save Nilgiris Campaign to impress upon the authorities of the necessity to fence the forest under the Hill Area Development Programme. It will be an important conservation work for the Save Nilgiris Campaign too.

A. Bhoopathy
M. Raju
Sackatha
Nilgiris

'SAVE THE NILGIRIS' : SNC APPEAL TO CAUVERY TRIBUNAL

On the eve of the visit of the Cauvery Waters Dispute Tribunal to the Nilgiris, SNC president B.J. Krishnan released the following appeal;

The Nilgiri hills are the catchment region of Tamil Nadu and the indiscriminate destruction of natural forests and grasslands will result in the dying up of its many perennial

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streams which have been feeding the Cauvery. The Nilgiris' significant contribution to the Cauvery basin through its perennial streams and rivers is not fully appreciated by the planners and administrators. The Cauvery, like most of the east-flowing rivers of the Peninsular India, has its origin in the western ghats and the Nilgiris is an important hydraulic sub region of the western ghats. Nilgiris hills are endowed with numerous micro watersheds, and scientists have identified as many as 1,068 micro watersheds in the Nilgiris. The average area of each micro watershed is 245 hectares and these watersheds or rivulets empty themselves into minor or major watersheds. 23 minor rivers and streams, identified in the hills, like the Upper Bhavani, Kundah, Pegumba halla and Punnampuzha, after covering an average area of about 11,000 hectares, empty themselves into four major rivers of the Nilgiris. These major watersheds – Bhavani, Moyar, Kabini and Challar – after covering a total area of 2,52,000 hectares, ultimately empty into the Cauvery river.

Considering the ecological importance of the hills, the Government of India had constituted the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve comprising the respective western ghats areas of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve is the entire origin and source of the Cauvery but unfortunately the documents did not include all the rivers in its core zone.

The Cauvery water disputes tribunal is engaged in the stupendous task of deciding the riparian rights of the delta farmers and agricultural labourers. It is equally important, though it may not be part of the terms of reference of the tribunal, to suggest ways and means to preserve and protect the sensitive catchment areas of Cauvery, including the Nilgiris hills. The Cauvery dispute is not just a legal problem. It is a survival issue for two natural resources. Natural resources like water will be available to people only if the sources is preserved and the Nilgiris is one such source. The Cauvery dispute is a pure environmental issue and it is hoped that the tribunal perceives the issue as such.

NDEC MEET

STEEP DECLINE OF A HILL RESORT

Expressing serious concern over the insanitary conditions in this hill resort at the first meeting of the **Nilgiris District Environmental Committee** held at the Collectorate. Mr. B.J. Krishnan, SNC president, regretted that the main channel running through the town, had not been cleaned for years together and it had now become a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Mr. Krishnan said that since the municipal administration did not bother about sanitation, the Ooty lake had become a receptacle of sewage water since all the filth of the town was entering the lake via the channel. Most of the new constructions sanctioned by the municipality did not provide for septic tanks and drainage outlets. The drainage water from those buildings located on steep slopes flowed without any hindrance and stagnated in low-level areas.

He said unless the municipality took immediate steps to set right matters, there were chances of an epidemic sooner or later. Mr. Krishnan added that sewage water let into the lake in turn entered Kamaraj Sagar dam which drained into the Pykara River. The Pykara water, down stream, is used for drinking purpose. Stating that aquatic life was almost dead in the Ooty lake. Mr. Krishnan said biological monitoring of the lake had revealed that the Pykara was highly polluted and the water was not fit for drinking. The root-cause was the channel water.

DESTRUCTION OF ENVIRNEMNT AGGRAVATES POVERTY : SNC CHIEF

Addressing the participants of the environmental awareness camp conducted by the Nilgiris district wing of the **All India Women's Conference** at Ooty, SNC president Mr. B.J. Krishnan, said that lack of natural resources of the required quantity and quality had a bearing on the quality of all life on earth. Pointing out that the destruction of environment was one of the main reasons for poverty, Mr. Krishnan regretted that successive Government had under the guise of development destroyed the natural surroundings which aggravated the problem of poverty. As 80 per cent of the diseases was water-borne. Mr. Krishnan said clean water was the basis for good health. He said rich and fertile hill areas like the Nilgiris should be treated carefully as they produced clean air, clean water and good soil. Without the active and committed participation of the people the natural environment in the rural areas could not be protected.

SNC Guide to Nilgiris

The SNC Guide to Nilgiris, a unique publication, was released by Shri V. Karthikeyan, Adviser to the Governor of Tamil Nadu at the Seminar held on the 17th April. The first copy was received by Shri. V. Ramachandran, also Adviser to the Governor of Tamil Nadu.

SNC GUIDE TO NILGIRIS

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This Newsletter is financed by
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS
Govt. of India as part of NEAC 1990

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save nilgiris campaign
for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL 5 No. 2

December 1991

GLOBAL MEET OF NGOs

SNC INVITED TO PARIS CONFERENCE

Saints, sages, prophets and philosophers have always called for a balance between man and nature. They have also warned that nature, though a good friend, can be a bad enemy.

Though he could not really understand the man-nature relationship, early man feared, worshipped and lived at peace with nature.

Modern man changed all that when he set about "conquering" nature. And over the next hundreds of years he slowly but steadily upset the delicate balance between man and nature. Probably because his population was limited and his life style simple, the consequences of his actions were not seriously felt until about the present century.

The man versus nature question assumed an entirely new dimension after the World War II when lifestyles in most parts of the world made a complete break with the pasts. The developments in science and technology that followed were so astounding that it was earnestly believed that man could even replace nature, if necessary.

It is this man-nature conflict that basically underlies the great debate of environment and development which has been raging for the past two decades.

But even, as science and technology were opening up one wondrous door after another by the day, the man-nature balance was being tilted and the consequences began to surface in various forms.

Stockholm Meet

In the wake of the growing apprehensions expressed by the scientific community regarding global warming, desertification, air and water pollution, soil loss and so on, the United Nations Conference on Human Environment was organised in 1972 at Stockholm to take stock of the situation.

The deliberations of the conference, attended by the heads of governments of UN members confirmed that the environmental problems were indeed assuming alarming proportions. It was also realised that the world's stock of non-renewable resources like oil, minerals etc were fast running out. However, though all the nations, regardless of their state of development, acknowledged the gravity of the problems, no meaningful action followed the conference.

In the last twenty years since the Stockholm meet, the world has changed many times over. Lifestyles in the rich countries have reached standards that the poor nations cannot even dream of. Yet the poor nations too, in a pathetically vain bid to catch up with the rich ones, have been recklessly squandering their meagre resources.

The consequences, expectedly, have been severe. Scientific evidence is now clear that environmental problems, particularly, climatic change, global warming, desertification, air/water pollution, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity and deforestation, have reached or nearing crisis proportion.

Earth Summit

In what can be described as a final bid to arrest the global environmental deterioration, the United Nations, have called for a world conference to review the development since the Stockholm meet and to chalk out a plan of action to save the world from a possible environmental catastrophe. Popularly known as the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will be an unprecedented event in many ways. To be hosted by the Government of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro from the 1st to the 12th of June 1992, the conference will be attended, for the first time in history, by all the governments of the world. More importantly, some 100 heads of state and government are expected to be there in person. In fact, nations of the world, individually and in groups have been preparing for the conference for the last two years.

Paris Meet

A path breaking feature of the Earth Summit (also called Brazil '92) is that unlike the Stockholm Meet or any other world conference on environment, it will involve the participation of representatives from all sections of the society- women, youth, religious groups, journalists and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

For the last two years, the NGOs of the world have been meeting in various groups to finalise their case to be presented at the Earth Summit. The last round of meeting to finalise the NGO Response to the Earth Summit is scheduled to be held in Paris from Dec. 17-20. To be hosted by the Government of France, the Global NGO Conference titled "Roots of the Future" will be attended by 850 representatives of NGOs from all over the world besides 150 environmental journalists.

SNC Invited

In recognition of the unique ecology of the Nilgiris and perhaps, the modest efforts taken by its in the last five years to draw attention to the various environmental threats facing the district, SNC has been invited to attend the Paris Meet.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, President of SNC, will attend the meeting and make out a case for the protection of mountain ecology which is so dear and vital to the cause of Nilgiris. After the meeting, Mr. Krishnan is likely to visit the neighbouring countries including United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland to meet with Green Groups and hold discussions with them on topics of mutual interest.

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FILM SHOOTING AND INDUSTRIAL MENACE GREEN BELT TO PROTECT MUDUMALAI SANCTUARY

Nilgiris have been a favourite locale for film shooting from the forties. Many a memorable film has been shot in the picturesque surroundings of this unique hill district. Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada films, which account for the bulk of the films made in the country are mainly shot here. In fact, the popularity of our films in recent times can be attributed to the scenic background provided by the Nilgiri locales to a large extent. However, till about the seventies these shooting were largely confined to a few months in a year (mainly during early winter or summer when sunlight is a plenty) and to a few tourists spots with least disturbance to local life. The occasional shootings were in fact welcome diversion to the local population. In the beginning mainly song sequence were shot in the Nilgiris. Subsequently, almost whole films came to be made here.

Things began to change for the worse in the eighties when cinema became an obsession rather than a mere entertainment. Cinema shooting became a daily event in the Nilgiris with an average of two films being shot per day annually. And ever since then film shooting had been a growing strain on these hills and their people.

Hotels mushroomed in the towns and outskirts without any regard for town planning norms or architectural aesthetics or availability of basic infrastructure. Some hotels were opened for the exclusive use of the shooting crew. Alongside, there was a explosive rise in the number of taxis hoping for business from shooting parties and the charges paid by them became the standard rates for the locals also. Prices of vegetables and other essentials began to stay high round the year, thanks to the demand from the hotels and the shooting parties.

What was more annoying was that just anywhere in the Nilgiris became locales for shooting as long as it suited the convenience of the film makers.

Menace

There can be no dispute that film shooting in Nilgiris has reached menacing proportions affecting the day to day life of the people and adding to the environmental problems. The specious argument advanced by the film makers is that in the last few years the main shooting centres in the North like Kashmir and Darjeeling, have become violence prone and, therefore, they have moved down to Nilgiris to make their films. The latest edition of India Today also carries a story to this effect.

The case of the film makers is both dubious and untenable.

First the issue of violence. It is true that for a variety of reasons many parts of northern India have become prone to violence. But the fact is that normal life still goes on in these places. In any case, there has not been a single incidence where a film shooting was disturbed or disrupted in these centres. In fact, regional films continue to be made there. The appeal of the cinema is apparently too strong for even the so called terrorist!! Moreover, there are several locales (hill stations) dotted throughout the north which are still very peaceful and offer excellent settings. Lastly, for argument's sake let us say that Nilgiris also becomes violence prone in the future, will the film makers, then, give up making films?

So, then, why Nilgiris? The answer is very simple. It is the most convenient and cheapest place in India to shoot song sequences and other outdoor situations. Air, rail and road transport to Nilgiris are very easy. Hotels are aplenty and comparatively cheaper. Sundry labour is also available at cheap rates. Madras where the studio facilities are available is just a night's journey by train or bus. But more than all, they can literally get for a song the most beautiful spots on earth for the song sequences which are the main stay of Indian films.

The price(fee) that the film makers are required to pay for shooting in the priceless locales in Nilgiris is ridiculously low.

Reserve Forest area : Rs. 200 per day.

Sanctuaries : Rs. 200 per day.

Botanical Garden : Rs. 940 per day

Sims Park

Tamizagam guest house : Rs.1500 per day

Other Places : Rs. 500 per day

These rates are shockingly low compared to charges for shooting locations elsewhere. For instance, a house rented out for shooting fetches tens of thousands of rupees per day. Even a two wheeler let out for a day's shooting is supposed to earn more than a thousand! Charges for outdoor shooting in other states should be certainly many times more than in Tamil Nadu. Otherwise why would every film maker in the country always make a bee-line for Nilgiris.

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This is not all. The idea of permitting shooting in Reserve Forests and Sanctuaries itself is questionable, particularly in the present context of the constitution of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. But what is really happening is even worse. Locations are chosen just about anywhere in the sanctuaries and forest areas with scantiest regard for nature and wildlife preservation. Well established international norms to be observed inside sanctuaries are totally disregarded. The shootings with their huge contingents of actors, supporting actors, shooting crew, several cars, lorries and vans are usually noisy jamborees. The sound system blares out songs which can be heard for miles. For fighting and other weird sequences gigantic settings are put up even in deep forests, at times with bombs bursting and chemically produced smokes billowing up! And when everything is over, the mess is simply left behind! Famous picnic spots like the Wenlock Downs are now perennially littered with all kinds of shooting garbage. In short, film shooting in Nilgiris is virtually for free and no questions asked!!!

The case of Mudumalai

Understandably, the strain of film shooting has been particularly high on the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary and its surroundings which have been regular spots for film shooting. And this has considerably added to the commercial and industrial pressures that have been mounting around the sanctuary. First there was the mushroom growth of all kinds of hotels around the sanctuary in the name of tourism promotion. Then there was the cattle menace leading to overgrazing in the sanctuary. Recently there was an attempt to put up a polluting chemical unit just on the outskirts of the sanctuary but, mercifully, the promoters realised their mistake before it was too late and abandoned the project in deference to the wishes of the local environmental groups, particularly SNC.

We have information now that a popular film star from north is planning some sort of a film studio itself in about 60 acres of land in the surroundings of the sanctuary!! The audacity of the promoter is only matched by his ignorance and indifference to conservation of the sanctuary which is a national heritage. The brazen attempt to start a studio without considering the consequences to the sanctuary in particular and Nilgiris in general is highly commendable.

As part of the ultimate studio plan, already some seven cottages have been put up with all facilities to cater to the "Bollywood" visitors. A big hotel complex like the one put up in Bokkapuram (site of the hotel cum studio complex) which is only 500 metres from the Mudumalai sanctuary itself is objectionable considering potential damage to wildlife and forests. There are already 20 lodges/small hotels in and around the sanctuary. In fact the hotel rooms available now are already in excess of the normal demand. It was for this reason that a proposed three star hotel of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation was, at the request of the SNC, shifted to the nearby Gudalur town.

The present hotel complex is right on the elephant migration path and hotel activities (that too Bollywood style) like vehicles plying day and night, generators and motor pumps running round the clock, out-door parties with open fires, loud speakers, music bands are all very detrimental to every aspect of wildlife in the area. The casual workers population that would, naturally, settle down around the complex will also add to the damage.

We would therefore, appeal to the District Administration to ensure that the hotel complex is conducted in a manner that causes the least disturbance to the sanctuary. Failing which, its license should be revoked forthwith. In any case, plans to add studio facilities to the complex should be stopped at all cost.

Green Belt

The government of Tamil Nadu and the district administration have been taking various steps to protect the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and the adjoining lands. As early as 1949, the Government enacted the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act (TNPPF) and notified considerable extents of private forests under this Act.

During 1969, the Government passed necessary orders directing the Collector of Nilgiris to notify certain ecologically sensitive areas around Masinagudi in particular and send proposals to ban all industrial activities in the area. For some reasons the government order was not implemented.

During the late 80's the government of Tamil Nadu again passed necessary orders bringing the revenue forests around Masinagudi, Mavanhalla and Bokkapuram areas under the purview of the TNPPF Act. Around the same time, the Government of India declared the constitution of the first biosphere reserve in the country, namely the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The Mavanhalla and Bokkapuram areas come under the buffer zone and are classified as Manipulation Forestry Zone.

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In spite of the above positive measures of the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu, several environmentally detrimental projects were proposed in the areas adjoining the sanctuary. As mentioned earlier a private industry wanted to put up a polluting unit but scuttled the project half way. The locally based public sector giant, the Hindustan Photo Films jointly with the Rotary Club wanted to bring a huge stretch of forest land under cultivation in the guise of tribal development but luckily the hoax was detected in the early stages, project stopped and the land was taken back by the forest department. Now, the famous film star from the North wants to build a huge hotel complex with provisions for film shooting in the area.

SNC's Intervention

In the circumstances SNC has been pressing the government to notify the area in question and ban all industrial activities there. This was emphasized by the SNC President at a meeting with the Central Secretary for Environment and Forests in October 1991 at Ooty.

Now we understand that the district administration has taken steps to notify the area and to ban all industrial activities in the area. SNC understands that the proposal is at an advanced stage. Once the area is notified, all proposed industrial activities in the area will come to a standstill. Business interests with questionable motives will not venture with any questionable proposals in the area.

Bold decision

Though long overdue, this act of the district administration has come at a very crucial time. SNC wishes to offer its congratulations to the District Collector **Ms. Leena Nair** for this courageous and thoughtful act.

Baseless Fears

Unfortunately, however, the notification of the green belt around the Mudumalai sanctuary has created some unfounded doubts and apprehension among the people in the surrounding areas.

Agriculturists, plantation owners and other sections of the people there have represented to the government not to go ahead with the notification.

The District collector herself has clarified beyond doubt that the notifications will not in any way affect existing activities in the area. Subsequently, the Tamil Nadu Minister for Forests and later the State Secretary for Environment & Forests have also categorically stated that the ban on industries in the notified areas will in no way affect normal activities in the area. In due course, the people in the area are bound to appreciate the correctness of the notification which is a landmark in the struggle for the protection in the Nilgiris.

Regulating film shooting

To call for a ban on film shooting in the Nilgiris will be unrealistic. However when film shooting has become a regular and organised affair in the Nilgiris, it has got to be supervised, regulated and controlled in such a way that it causes the least disturbance to the life of the local people and ecological considerations are respected.

We have the following suggestions in this regard.

1) Large scale film shooting in the Nilgiris imposes a heavy burden on the local people in terms of higher process, congestion and pressure on basic amenities of life. The film makers should therefore, compensate this by paying a reasonable price for shooting in the various locations of Nilgiris. Considering the high cost of film making today and the fact that Nilgiris offers the most convenient and safest place for film shooting, the film producers may not also hesitate to pay substantially higher charges for film shooting. The money so collected can be allowed to be retained with the local bodies (Municipalities/Panchayats) for maintenance of infrastructure like roads and water supply.

The power to permit film shooting can also be vested with local body authorities.

2) The district authorities should draw up a list of places in Nilgiris where film shooting not be permitted. These should include sanctuaries and deep forests areas. The practice of allowing shooting inside sanctuaries not only militates against the sentiments of conservationists but is also harmful to the objectives of forest and wildlife management. Besides, while shooting in areas adjoining forests and sanctuaries, sequences/settings which may be detrimental to flora and fauna of the area should be prohibited.

3) The shooting parties should be strictly asked to clear up the garbage once the shooting is over. Failure to do so should attract stiff fines and even black listing of such parties in the future.

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NATIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY

SNC SUBMITS VIEWS

Before finalizing the National Conservation Strategy (NCS) and a statement on Environment and Development, the Government of India invited representatives of selected Non-Governmental Organisations for a discussion on the draft strategy at New Delhi. A draft statement which was prepared earlier and circulated by the Ministry was the basis of the discussions. SNC was represented by its President, Mr. B.J. Krishnan. The meeting was chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, Shri R. Rajamani.

On behalf of SNC the following views were expressed in the discussions of which were received with appreciation.

1) A new constitutional provision, Article 48-A, was added to the Constitution by the Constitutional 42nd Amendment, Part IV. Article 48A states "The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country."

The Fundamental Duties of Citizens in regard to nature and environment as described under Article 51A(g) of the constitution of India which was included as a new chapter (part IV A) reads:

"It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and have compassion for living things."

These constitutional provisions do not seem to have been reflected in the NCS.

2) There are over 100 enactments – Central and States for the protection of forests but there is none for the protection of water sources. Catchment areas and water sources, as environmentally sensitive regions, have not been taken proper note of. Legal protection of these ecologically sensitive areas is very important but this can only follow if the zoning and classification of catchment areas are recognised as protected areas in the first instance. Similarly, watershed management should be given legal status.

3) The National Forest Policy stipulates that one-third of the land area in the country should be forests. In hill area the forest cover should be two-thirds. These stipulations do not find a place in the NCS.

4) The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve was the first biosphere reserve to be set up in the country. After that six more have been set up. However, there has not been any follow up- legislative or administrative. Nor has there been any decision on financial powers or any management plan. The approach so far has been adhoc.

The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, for instance, falls across three states where the laws and regulations governing forests are not uniform-in fact they are conflicting in some cases. The biosphere remains a publicity statement even after five years.

SNC ATTENDS OOTY MEETING ON NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Secretary, Environment and Forests, Government of India, Shri R. Rajamani was in Ooty in October 1991 to meet representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations regarding the conservation of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The meeting was organised by the CPR Environment Centre, Madras under its Chairman, Dr. Nandita Krishna.

Mr. B.J. Krishnan, who represented SNC, among other things made the following observations at the meeting.

1) Assignments of house pattas in the district are being done indiscriminately. Last year some 6000 pattas were assigned and for the current year, 1991-92, the target is 7000. There is no point in blindly chasing targets and assigning lands anywhere when there is no source of livelihood for the beneficiaries in the assigned areas. Besides, where are they supposed to go for their basic requirements like schooling and hospitals?

2) There should be a ban on felling of natural species in NBR atleast for a period of ten years.

SNC'S DONATION TO QUAKE VICTIMS

The recent earthquake in Uttar Pradesh in the Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal regions have greatly distressed us. Hailing from the mountains, we can understand only too well the gravity of the situation in the affected areas. What is more distressing is the fact that the damage could have been far less had the region not been environmentally abused despite repeated warnings by environmentalists.

Perhaps, it is the divine wish that the people of the region had to suffer this calamity in order that a greater calamity could be avoided in the future. For, the quake is a clear warning that any further acts of environmental degradation like deforestation or construction of giant dams in the region will be an unmistakable invitation to disaster.

In particular, we are very much pained that the Silyara Ashram of our beloved Sunderlal Bahugunaji, the Chipko leader and the Gaurdian Angel of forests in India, has also been destroyed in the quake.

We wish to convey our deepest sympathy to quake affected people of UP in general and Bahugunaji and the inmates of the Silyara Ashram in particular.

In token of our deep concern for the Silyara Ashram, SNC sent a humble contribution of Rs. 10,000 (Ten Thousand only) raised by public contribution towards relief & reconstruction. SNC thanks all those who contributed their mite which ranged from Rs. 10 to Rs. 500. We are sorry that, for want of space, we are not able to mention the names of all those who readily contributed or those kind volunteers who spared their time and energy to collect the donations. Nevertheless, we have to make a mention of Shri N. Krishnan, Advocate, Kotagiri & Dr. (Smt.) Nirmala Ramesh, Govt. Headquarters Hospital, Ooty who donated Rs. 500 each. We also thank M/s. Instant Printers for printing the donation books.

SAVING THE NILGIRI PAST Allen Zagerell Western Michigan University, USA

When one thinks of saving the Nilgiris one naturally thinks of its unique environment and array of peoples. However, a majority aspect of Saving the Nilgiris must also be the saving of its history, the uniqueness of the historical past of a special region. The region has often been thought of as a historical island, rising above the currents of the plains and only erratically touched by storms of pre-British political and social events. Indeed, this largely romantic view of the Nilgiri mountains has its own charm and, if there was no evidence to the contrary would be attractive. However, evidence of a past uniquely intermeshed with the remainder of South India exists. It remains only partially discovered and reported and it is, unfortunately, disappearing at an alarming rate. Let me give a sketch of the specialness of the Nilgiri region, the level of the antiquities of its past, the peculiarity of its historical development and the dangers posed to scholars trying to rediscover that historical background. For some time scholars have known about the megalithic circles (graves) that dot many of the Nilgiri heights. They have speculated and investigated about the builders and dates of these graves, often partially filled by an assortment of vessels and objects necessitating considerable sophistication.

They have wondered at the creators of the hero-stones which dot the hillsides, sometimes revered, sometimes ignored, often depicting figures engaged in military combat, wrapped in armor, mounted on armored horses. Some of these hero-stones are of very fine artistic quality. There have been various attempts to date these and to ascribe them to the various present-day indigenous inhabitants. But a full analysis of the significance of these antiquities requires a determination of regional distributions --- something that is impossible until detailed maps of all existing megalithic sites are produced --- a difficult task considering the Nilgiri landscape --- but being carried out by an assortment of dedicated scholars.

More recently, whole new areas of materials have been discovered. The activities of certain individuals have turned up many examples of rock art of great interest, with scenes varying from religious (Bellare or Vellarikombe) to military (Wananga Pallam or Palayam). The presence of so many was largely unexpected and it is quite possible that many more are yet to be discovered. Similarly, work along the lower Nilgiri slopes & its immediate footlands has produced a totally new picture of Nilgiri history. While non-Nilgiri inscriptions and texts had made mention of the Nilgiris, the Blue mountains were seen to be largely devoid of its own voice, thus indirectly supporting the peripheral nature of state-organised society on Nilgiri life. But new investigations made of late have reported over 20 inscriptions within the Nilgiri district. These texts at present range from circa 6-9th to 18th centuries. They dealt with trade ties, administrative /divisions decisions and irrigation networks. They mention communities presently existing as well as those past into history. Statutory, depicting gods and rulers, some perhaps as early as the 7th century and many new hero-stones, have been discovered along the foothills. Many massive megalithic cemeteries, some containing hundreds of graves, with individual graves approaching 25mm in diameter cover the northern Moyar zone. These sites certainly date to approximately 2500 years ago, based on pottery fragments collected and indicate that populations engaged in agriculture already dotted the foothill region at that time. Similarly indications of Neolithic occupation have been documented. Nevertheless, the majority of the forest areas have yet to be explored intensively. Some areas have never been looked at by scholars. The likelihood of important new discoveries which throw light upon early Nilgiri history are immense.

Unfortunately, the enormous growth in economic activity in the region has endangered further research. The transformation of forest areas into agricultural areas has meant that many sites have been destroyed. While some of this is the result of simple ill-will, much is simply the result of ignorance. For example, ironically, the Forest Department in order to construct the fencing of the Ecological Park in Mavanalla, dug up and broke up a large megalithic cemetery site in its vicinity. In fact, some of the graves and grave remnants can be seen within the confines of the park. Would it not have been advantageous for the park, not only to have preserved the graves, but to have consciously employed them into the concept of the park? The destruction of this cemetery was certainly not a malicious act, but rather a well-intentioned activity rooted in ignorance of archeological monuments. Similarly I know of two inscriptions and several hero-stones which have been destroyed in the last eight years. Incredibly, one appears to have been broken up to make a road, along with several hero-stones! Another was used as a foundation for the mixing of concrete, effectively destroying the inscription. Both of these had been, fortunately, documented but a short time ago, and therefore the information contained within them had been preserved. How many others have been destroyed which were never documented? How much historical information has been lost? Similarly, near Kalhatti. I have observed the wholesale destruction of megalithic sites for stone and broken figurines covering fields, many of which were of museum quality. Near Havvor, I observed the destruction of unique megalithic cemeteries and the breaking up of menhirs, to be replaced by tea plants. Many megalithic graves in the Thengumarada area have been illegally excavated by individuals searching for coins. At other sites people are dismantling the graves slowly, using them for locals needs (ovens for example). Indeed, even the relatively remote rock paintings have not gone untouched. Already some have been defaced by signatures of visitors. Other antiquities, statutory for example lay eroding, exposed to the elements, even where they are protected from vandalism by village inhabitants. However, in the same village of Thengumarada I observed a grinding stone fashioned from a broken hero stone, with only the feet of the figures still discernible. Of course, all this is just the tip of an iceberg of destruction that must be occurring at a tremendous rate. What we are observing is the destruction of a national heritage, and the disappearance of the Nilgiris' regional history. In order to protect this heritage sites must be quickly documented as opposed to the slow pace of past documentation. Documented sites should be protected and individuals should be made unable to make aware of Nilgiri history through an expansion of the regional Museum resources. Regional history should be increasingly incorporated into Nilgiri tourism, providing incentives for protection of those resources by the relevant officials, local, indigenous people should be incorporated to protect those resources which relate to their own early histories. Saving the Nilgiris is a multi-faceted demand, which must include aspects of its past. For, what is a region without its people and what is a people without a past? *We are grateful to Dr. Allen Zagerell for this illuminating piece of write – up on the urgency of preserving our past heritage. He is presently engaged in preliminary archeological investigation in the Nilgiri Foothills in Moyar and Bhavani Valleys. Readers are also referred to the Review Essays on “Blue Mountains” (Newsletter July 1990) and SNC Nilgiri Guide (Section on the History of the Hills) in this connection. On behalf of the Save Nilgiris Campaign we also have already initiated a process of consultations regarding the establishment of a Nilgiri Documentation Centre.*

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SAVING OOTY LAKE

Shri N. Devarajan of Kerappadu Village, Nilgiris has sent a detailed representation to the Union Minister for Environment & Forests on how to improve the quality of Ooty lake which has been rapidly deteriorating in recent years. Excerpts from the representation are presented below.

The once revered Ooty lake today, provides only an unhealthy, anemic picture of the beautiful spot it once was. Negligence has made this monument of beauty a reservoir of excrement!

A main open canal runs through the Ooty town carrying the town's sewage water and empties itself into the lake. Every day hundreds of gallons of sewage water and contaminants are released into the lake. The continuous pollution of the lake water for the past few years has changed the lake into a stinking giant open septic tank and the lake has become an environmental hazard.

The stench from the lake is so nauseating that the Tourism Department had to take the step of temporarily closing the lake last year when the tourists complained. The lake is also plagued with weeds and algae.

There has been a serious threat to aquatic life. Once, fishing was an enjoyable pastime and a profession for many at the Ooty lake. Carp and other varieties of fish were available in abundance. The water which was good for fish culture had now turned pathogenic to the fish population because of the sewage discharge. Many types of fishes have been wiped out and surviving fish are stricken with disease such as Argulus. Many fishermen still fish for their food or livelihood in these murky waters. The health of these fishermen and local consumers has been endangered.

Water Hyacinth

A problem as seen by the District authorities has been the proliferation of water hyacinth on the lake surface which prevents boating. As such, every year as an annual jamboree a heavy sum is spent on cleaning the water hyacinth from the lake surface. This action has been going on every year without actually giving thought to the root of the problem – the sewage pollution.

Nature has its own way of solving problems. The water hyacinth starts growing naturally in a water which is usually polluted and plants have great potential for waste water treatment and reclamation because of their photo synthetic systems. In short, the hyacinth acts as a natural waste water treatment plant. The hyacinth are not left to do their work nor is a mechanical water treatment plant installed to treat the water.

Sewage System

The Ootacamund Municipality has a partial sewage scheme. The sewage is led to a treatment plant located at the south-west of the town through the open canal and via the lake. But the existing treatment plant was established decades ago for a population of 25,000 people. Today, this is grossly inadequate for a population which has multiplied six times. Many slums have cropped up and so many houses do not even have proper sewage lines!

It has been estimated that 80% of the population of the lake is caused by the existing sewage lines discharging their contents into the open drain that empties itself into the lake. The remaining 20% is caused by new colonies that have no sewage system.

Threat to Reservoir

Also the effluent from the age-old treatment plant is polluting the Sandynallah Reservoir. This reservoir about 10 Kms. from Ooty was the first pumped storage scheme in Tamil Nadu. Water stored here is pumped into the Pykara Basin enabling an additional annual generation of 54 million units at Pykara & Moyar power stations. The catchment area covering 17 square miles was once a source of clean water and a famous picnic spot. Today like the Ooty lake, it has also become a receptacle of sewage. Moreover, this area also serves as the only water source for the two industries, the Hindustan Photo Films Mfg. Co. Ltd. and Rallis India Ltd., who at present are oblivious of the quality of water they are drawing for industrial use.

Government Scheme

The Tami Nadu Government came to realise the gravity of the situation four years ago. By its order dated 5th January 1988, an initial sanction was accorded for Rs.50 lakhs under the Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) to begin work for implementing a restricted sewage treatment scheme by the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD). In the meantime, a full fledged proposal was to be submitted to the Government to solve this problem. The Government provided for this proposal another Rs. 40 lakhs under the HADP, vide a G.O. dated 29-3-1989 and asked the TWAD Board to go ahead with the scheme but surprisingly, the work did not begin.

Finally the Government accorded sanction for a revised proposal for Rs. 5.7 crores, vide the G.O. dated 22-10-1990 and the project was to be split into five modules:

- 1) Providing a full scale treatment plant.
- 2) Laying of main and trunk sewers.
- 3) Laying of sewers in Zone I.

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- 4) Laying of sewers in Zone II.
- 5) Providing house service connections upto the property line.

The Tamil Nadu government also admonished the TWAD Board and District authorities by stating in the above Govt. Order, that though the scheme was originally approved as early as January 1988, it was surprising that it is yet to be given a start as a sum of Rs.90 lakhs was already sanctioned for the preliminary work. Further, the Director of TWAD Board was also asked to give special priority to the work and closely monitor the implementation of the scheme. But till today no work has begun on this scheme.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

The sanctioned scheme should be implemented immediately without any delay. Simultaneous work should begin in laying sewers and providing an Effluent Treatment Plant. The recent implementation of a tertiary treatment plant by the Madras Refineries Ltd., at a cost of Rs. 19.5 crores to process 2.5 million gallon/day (mgpd) of Madras city sewage water to obtain 2 mgpd of treated water is an eye-opener. The size of the plant and necessary costs for putting up such a plant at Ooty would be just one-tenth of the above and as such, technology and finance are available.

New housing colonies should have proper sewage systems and there should be strict adherence when sanctioning building plans.

Warning boards should indicate the quality of the lake water and the tourists should be made aware of the environmental conditions of the lake.

The present channel running through the centre of the town was once a fresh water perennial stream and also acted as a natural drain for rainwater. Now most of the fresh water sources have been dammed and the trickle that flows down, gets lost in the sewage which overflows into the channel leading into the lake. There should be a marked bifurcation in the channels for fresh water/rain water and for sewage. The silt brought down with the rain water would then cease to block the drainage system.

COMMENDABLE TRIO

The sad state of the once famous Ooty lake is all too familiar to the people of Nilgiris. Nevertheless, the district administration has been taking efforts to keep it as functional as possible.

Recently the lake was beset with serious problems. One was the excessive growth of water hyacinth which had almost choked the lake. Though the hyacinth menace to the lake has become endemic consequent on the sewage matter being let into the lake, a quick way to rid them of the lake is still evading the district authorities.

This time, when the hyacinth menace struck again, the District Collector, Ms. Leena Nair alongwith Shri Krishna Kumar, DFO (South) and Dr. A. Subramaniam, Managing Director of Nilgiris District Cooperative Milk Producers Union (NDCMPU) swung into action and with the volunteers from NDCMPU cleared the hyacinth in record time. Thanks mainly to their personal efforts, the lake is functional again. The district collector and the two district officials deserve the appreciation of all.

Similarly, a huge tree which had fallen into the lake had been blocking a good part of the lake from being used for boating. Again, the team of Ms. Leena Nair, Mr. Krishnakumar and Dr. Subramaniam got together and with the help of forest department & NDCMPU personnel removed the tree, which had also been posing problems for clearing the hyacinth from the lake. The trio deserve full praise for this also.

This Newsletter is financed by

NILGIRI DISTRICT CO-OPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS UNION

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Designed and Typeset by Instant Printer, – Madras 17. Phone : 825 12 01

save nilgiris campaign
for awareness towards preservation of the unique hills

NEWSLETTER

VOL 6 No. 1

December 1992

ECO THREAT TO NILGIRS

GOVERNMENT SWINGS INTO ACTION

Not many are aware that since the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's visit to Ooty last May, unprecedented steps have been set afoot this unique hill district. Legislative and executive measures which have been mooted for years but never believed would be implemented have been instituted with an incredible swiftness. To describe these developments as "revolutionary" will be no exaggeration.

TOLL

Though Nilgiris has been the only beneficiary in the whole of South India under the centrally sponsored Hill Area Development Programme, for some technical reason or other the funds could not effectively be used for maintaining the various public amenities, especially in the towns. The worst affected were the roads which have been a nightmare for the town folk and tourists for the last nearly ten years.

For long, suggestions were made for collection of a cess or a betterment levy or a toll from the tourists and the locals to supplement the resources of the fund starved local bodies who have been vested with the responsibility of maintaining the public amenities.

At last, the Government, in the face of stiff resistance from vested interests, has started to collect toll from vehicles entering Nilgiris at all entry points. Attempts to put legal hurdles were also thwarted with the Madras High Court upholding the validity of the Government order under Indian Toll Act.

As expected, the toll has proved to be significant earner for the Government which has now been able to take up many of the work pending for want of funds, particularly the repair to roads. Once the roads are properly done and maintained every citizen of Nilgiris, not to mention the tourist, would welcome the toll.

GREEN BELT

Declaration of a proactive "Green Belt" of 7 kms. around the world famous Mudumalai Sanctuary to arrest the rampant growth of commercial activities deleterious to the Sanctuary is another bold but long pending, decision taken despite the protests and agitations by the vested interests.

The people would have realised by now that the measure will in no way affect the normal life of the local population and that the people dependent on it can be protected only by such a definitive action.

HITCH

However there remains a hitch. It is now nearly a year since the Green Belt was declared under the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act empowering the Government to ban activities harmful to the welfare of the Sanctuary. But the follow up notification listing the harmful activities is yet to come. Meanwhile, all sort of activities are merrily going on within the Green Belt in effect nullifying the whole effort.

We earnestly hope the Ministry of environment and Forests, Tamil Nadu, which has been sitting on the second notification, announces

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it without any further delay. Otherwise it would be a classic case of closing the stable after the horses have bolted !!

CONSTRUCTION FREEZE

It has been a long even desperate need. Yet, till the Chief Minister came out with the sudden and swift decision, soon after her visit to Ooty in May last, to freeze all construction activities pending announcement of suitable new rules and regulations, harmonious with the environment of the hills, no one believed that such a drastic but far sighted action was possible. Naturally, there was a big hue and cry from the vested interests who want all out to block the proposed changes. In the event, it indeed redounds to the credit of the Government that depends the ban on construction having lasted now for more than eight months, the general public have hardly raised their voice, thereby giving their approval to the Government's action in the larger interest of the district.

MASTER PLAN

The Tamil Nadu District Municipalities Act 1920 has now been suitably amended to regulate construction activities which have been defying all laws of man as well as nature in recent years. Alongside, a Master plan for the district has been prepared and is about to be announced. Together they can set right to a large extent the chaotic urban scene in the Nilgiris. One may say that they have come in little late in the day. Still, they will go far in protecting and, to some extent, rehabilitating the urban environment in the future.

HITCH

A problem often faced in this district is the lack of co-ordination between the different departments. With the result, sometimes the positive action taken by one department is offset by a conflicting action taken, willy-nilly, by another one.

A problem of this sort appears to have cropped up here also.

As mentioned above, the Tamil Nadu District Municipalities Act has been amended to regulate constructions in the hill areas of the State. And a Master Plan has been drawn up for Nilgiris as in the case of Kodaikanal. But the State Government, perhaps, inadvertently has also extended the Urban Land Tax Act 1966 (and amended Act 1991) to the hill areas including Nilgiris and Kodaikanal.

The objectives of the two Acts are conflicting. Under recently amended District Municipalities Act, the primary aim of which is to contain urbanization, all conversion of such lands for any other purpose including construction requires prior permission. But the Urban Land Tax Act presupposes that all these land are already for urban use. Under the Act all owning more than 11 cents or roughly 2 grounds have to pay a heavy tax. So to avoid the tax, the lands which are mostly gardens and wooded areas are likely to be sub-divided and further divided. This is bound to be detrimental to the preservation of the beauty and ecology of the hill stations.

The Urban Land Tax Act will create further confusion where Master Plans are in existence as in the case of Kodaikanal and Nilgiris.

We, therefore, appeal to the State Government to appreciate the conflict between the recently amended District Municipalities Act and the recently extended Urban Land Tax and withdraw the latter from being operative in the hill areas, particularly Nilgiris and Kodaikanal.

BAN AND LAND ASSIGNMENT

That Nilgiris has been encroachers' paradise in recent years is well known now. Despite the several measures taken in the past, the inflow of rootless migrants into the district still continues. Assignment of agricultural land had long been stopped to discourage these settlers but since house pattas were continued to be given, the migrants were able to encroach on the adjoining or nearby lands one way or the other. In fact, in the last few years, thanks to the liberal grant of house pattas, the problem has been aggravated.

From October 1992, we learn that all assignment of land including house pattas have been banned in the district, especially when seen in its political context. There is no doubt that this step will act as a significant check on rootless migration and encroachments in the district.

These four major steps taken within the last one year are fundamental in nature and far-reaching in their implications. Together they form the contours of a broad and integrated policy to tackle the environmental problems of not only the Nilgiris but also the entire hill areas of the state.

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In fact, other hill areas in the country too can learn a valuable lesson or two from the recent developments in the district.

More importantly, the changes have come not a day soon. In recent times, Nilgiris has come to shoulder an unprecedented burden of tourist traffic following the unfortunate happenings in many parts of the country. The burden could increase in the future. Therefore, the threat to the district's ecology and environment is all the more formidable. In the circumstances, it is only bold and thoughtful decisions like the four discussed above that can protect and preserve the district.

THANKS

Naturally, the persons responsible for these salutary developments deserve the gratitude of the people of Nilgiris. But before coming to that, we (SNC) would like to mention the not too modest role that we have played in these developments.

Ever since we formally launched our campaign in 1986 with the blessings of Shri. R. Venkataraman who was then the Vice-President of India, we have been advocating these and other changes though many thought that these were no more than wishful thinking. We are glad now that our sustained efforts at petitioning, lobbying and publication have not been in vain.

Shri R. Venkataraman, who has long and intimate links with Nilgiris has all along been sympathetic to our cause and has lent his support to the recent changes. We thank him.

If any one person should be given the full credit for the above mentioned bold decisions, it is, of course, the **Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Madam Jayalalitha**. We would like to mention here that after our late, lamented national leader Shri. Kamaraj, it is Madam Jayalalitha who has taken a personal interest in the welfare of the district. Our sincere thanks to the Chief Minister for taking these bold decisions of their unmindful of their popularity

Protection of Nilgiris' environment is largely a matter of how interested and committed the incumbent District Collector is. The district's progress has, indeed, waxed or waned in recent years depending on the Collector's personal interest in the district's welfare.

In this respect we are fortunate to have, since the last year or more, a young, energetic and dedicated District Collector in Miss. Leena Nair. The recent changes would not have been the light of the day had she not taken a personal interest to make out a convincing case for such drastic measures.

Before closing, we hope that the District Administration and State Government in general and Hon'ble Chief Minister Madam Jayalalitha and Miss Leena Nair in particular will continue to show a special interest in the pending matters affecting the ecology and environment of Nilgiris.

SNC RAISES ALARM AS PARTHENIUM LAYS SIEGE TO NILGIRIS

Parthenium, a health hazard, is threatening to rob Ooty of its reputation as tourist resort. It has appeared extensively in the foothills and low-level areas of the two highways linking Nilgiris. It has grown profusely in the Mettupalayam – Ooty and Mysore – Ooty routes. It threatens to engulf the upper plateau as well.

SNC president along with some senior citizens of Nilgiris has drawn the attention of the District Administration to this dangerous weed till recently.

Prof. J. Krishnarajam, Professor of Agronomy, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore adds the following in response to SNC President's call:

"It is a most dangerous weed causing health hazards to human beings. In Poona, recently this weed has caused complicated skin diseases to hundreds of persons and is said to have resulted in the loss of seven human lives. The plant has been classified as one of the seven most dangerous weeds in the world, causing skin diseases. The pollen grains of the weed freely float in the air and are reported to have caused allergic type diseases like dermatitis, fever and asthma.

Now the weed has also spread around Coimbatore, extensively along the roadsides and also in the cultivated fields. The eradication of the weed is a difficult problem as it produces thousands of small seeds which are easily carried by wind. Mechanical methods of weeding, viz., digging it out with the tuberous root and burning may be effective. Application of 2, 4-D and paraquat mixture each at 2 kg. a.i/ha is reported to be very helpful in controlling the weed."

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ASPECTS OF ECOLOGY IN NILGIRI CULTURAL TRADITION

Text of the talk given by **Reverend Philip K. Mulley** at a lecture jointly organised by SNC and British Deputy High Commission, British Council Division, Madras on 28th August 1992 at Madras.

I wish to begin with a native hymn (adapted in to English) extolling the environment and entreating the canopy of the Goddess

Heithe over the environment.
Mother Endearing
Plighted fast unto us
Precious ever
Promises of thee.

When mountains so lofty
Over us loom, and Lo!
Brilliant in the bloom
of flowers so numerous
Wreathed in silver
The smile of thee
Vaulted in the sky
The radiance of moon so benign
Golden is thine shade
And sweet so it turns
Summers so many.

Nilagiri is thine abode
Majestic its walls around
Bestow on us, mighty Mother
Smother us, with boons of life
Beseech we of thee
Blessings of prosperity
Treasure ever thine providence is
Measureless are offerings of thy bounty.

The comprehension of ecology and culture had been around long before it came to be recognised and recorded in the discipline of anthropology. A leading anthropological writer of this century, John Friedl puts it in simple manner when he says ... "The relationship among all the elements of environment including human beings can affect behaviour in our society". Millenniums earlier, we find to our astonishment that the Tamil poets had articulated the grammar and idiom of this ethos and even had explained its variables. But as the vicissitudes of history would have it, the relevance of this cultural ecology in the hyper-exploitation of the environment.

At the turn of the century when the British started exploring the Nilgiri hills they started solely as the harbingers of civilization and culture to the hills. The famous Francis in his Gazetteer of the district (1908) noted in a negative vein that the only inhabitants of the district were "poor graziers and cultivators". So we find that basically a comprehension of culture and ecology was lacking and an advancement of technology was extremely of view represented even as late as in 1988 in a monograph produced by the Tribal Research Centre of the Tamil University. An unsustainable thesis that "the immigration of the Badagas", has been doled out in the said report. So we find no serious or scientific investigation of the aspects of ecology to have seen the light of the day.

Though a lot of information on ecology and culture of the Nilgiri hills have been lost due to the tempest like changes that have occurred in the name of progress, a modest effort is attempted here to look at some dimensions of ecology represented in the cultural traditions of the Nilgiri hills.

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY:

An extremely interesting factor of human geography seemed to have been operational in the Nilgiri hills in the pre-British period. The various groups of people like the Todas, the Kotas, the Badagas, the Kurumbas, the Kasabas and the Irulas were maintaining among themselves as equilibrium determined by

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geographical considerations. I do not touch here any aspect of the interaction between the tribals in the Nilgiri – Wynaad region for their social dynamics is quite exotic to Nilgiris proper region.

In the Nilgiris-proper, while the Todas occupied locations usually above 7000' (MSL), the Kotas and Badagas lived in the 6000' – 7000' belt. The Kurumbas, Kasabas and the Irulas preferred the much lower elevations. Prof. Paul Hockings, the noted authority on the Nilgiris opines that the pastoral, horticultural and tillage requirements of these peoples may have resulted in such a demarcation. But it must be pointed out that an interesting parallel is found in Nepal too. At least three ethnic groups seem to be distributed according to altitude in Nepal and one writer has said ... "I could almost always tell from my altimeter, which group I would next encounter".

The meeting place between the different groups of these people in the Nilgiris also had specific names. Where for some reason or other, these spots had lost the earlier importance, a quasi-religious kind of ritual regularly takes place at such spots. The traditional internal boundaries of the sub-regions in the district along which the present-day administrative boundaries have been drawn, may also have had something to do with the original human geographical factors. The four "naadus" of the Nilgiris history is still faithfully adhered to by the Badagas in their common parlance where they refer to it as "four hills". Though some investigators consider this four-fold division to have emanated from the medieval period revenue administration, it is pertinent to speculate that the medieval period revenue administration itself would have based its network on some yet unidentified social – spatial demarcation. The Badagas seemed to have either borrowed the concept from or shared the same with Kotas as well as Kurumbas.

ECO-INTEGRATION

The eco-oriented indications contained in the place-names in the hills need to be scarcely emphasized. The wealth of topographical and botanical information we could glean from the study of the original place names provide enough insights into the keen faculties of observation cultivated by these people. It may also be pointed out that about 20 varieties of plants that are endemic to Nilgiris alone also have native names. Almost every creek and stream and nook and corner in the hills seem to have been given an identity and name. As Zvelebil, a leading Dravidianist has recorded, nothing of these features is "anonymous". The old wild tracks and paths on to the future generation in ballads and stories. The ritual significance extended, for example, to the old drove of buffaloes in the *Hethe* festival among the Badagas is to be noted here. The umbrella of *Hethe* to this day needs to process along the old browsing tracks of the buffalo-herds. The "Route of the Dead" recounted by the Todas, faithfully even to this day points to the seasonal migration route of their buffaloes. The Mukurti Peak, for example stood as a sentinel to the concept of territory among the Todas. In the olden days, female children were thrown off this peak into the dizzy declivities running along the Kerala-border. The souls of the dead Todas also are supposed to leap from the top of this peak to the next world in the southern crests beyond the home-territory.

A remarkable denominator in the eco-consciousness is found to occur in the marking of topographical and botanical landscapes in the linguistic traditions of the people and Emeneau, the doyen of Dravidian linguistics is still working on the significance of this factor. The semantics, for instance of the famous "strobilanthes" in Nilgiri areal-idiom is employed to indicate reckoning of physical age, periodisation of lineage-level, brilliant and eye-ful view and blossoming into womanhood and all such aspects in a common parlance. The total web of life contained within this ecosystem was called "concept par excellence" (*seeme singara*).

SOCIETAL NORMS:

Much has been said in published literature relating to the Nilgiris, about the exchange of various goods between the people of the traditional Nilgiri society. All of them like milk and milk products, millets and grains and all kinds of forest produce pertain to the husbandry of natural resources available in the hills. The interaction between these groups mainly involved primitive form of technology in the utilisation of the products found in proximity to each group's environment. The trees, branches and sticks and poles associated with each group and even the mud and soil associated with pottery had intimate and almost reverential links with the groups concerned. Special mention can also be made of Toda and Badaga kinship terms based on a pastoral ethos and are to this day used to indicate certain social divisions among themselves. Societal norms originally based on the organisation of herding pursuits is of considerable historical value. The responsibility of the society towards almost an ethical rapport with natural objects – plants, trees, woods, forests etc., is for instance eloquently brought out in the Badaga Litany for the Dead. Several Toda songs as translated by Emeneau also contain nuggets of this truth. The rather rich corpus of folk-tales contained in Kota traditions and ably presented by Emeneau, also testify to the good old value-system embracing nature, ethics and society. When everything proceeded smoothly the various

groups always fraternized each other in their merry-makings and mournings providing mood and music in a fascinating array of protocol and precedence.

RITUAL AND FOLK IDIOM :

The ritual idioms of the people of the Nilgiris provided almost a religious frame-work to the conservation of ecological factors. Religion presented as a philosophical and mythological net-work was unknown to the natives of the Nilgiris. Though the petrification of earlier eco-ritual cycles have considerably planted a pan-indian religious behaviour in the present day, the earlier strands of approach to nature can still be traced in many native folk-observations. The Hegemony of environmental factors over the human pursuits was acknowledged, for instance, in the medical status accorded to the Kurumba tribe by others. Superstitions apart, Kurumba was considered a powerful sorcerer to invoke, cure, heal and manipulate forces of nature. A festival such as fire-walking in honour of the "*Lord of the Matted Hair*"- the matted hair being likened to the forest covers of the earth or the mother-earth celebration, also meant passage from one season to another or propitiation offered to the process of the tillage of land. The cardinal celebration of the mother goddess *Hethe* among the Badagas sought to highlight the purity and tenderness of milk- the product of their buffaloes, very similar to the sacred-dairy ritual of the Todas. Parallel to this conception, the figure of *Hethe* also came to be acknowledged as the most benign and gentle personification of the bio-diversity of the hills providing silvery, golden and floral shades to the environment. The sacred groves, common to many a primitive landscapes also have had their impact in the veneration of such spots by the natives.

The folk-idiom especially of the Badagas and transmitted through a rich corpus of proverbs and old sayings encompass several values concerning the preservation of the environment, forests, water, soil etc. Among the Todas there is current a story how a buffalo and man putting together their heads mourn for the dead and how the head buffalo of the heard itself bids the shift of their pasturage to the man (the Toda) tending them. For them their herd is always something particularistic and unique and their names employed at rituals are adhered to in the most strict manner. More such folk-ideas are related in the stories and legends available among other tribes also. The anthropomorphic dimensions, of these sayings betray the indubitable importance of environmental factors to these cultures.

While the above and briefly mentioned aspects of Nilgiri culture have their own socio-historic importance, the question arises as to the contemporary management of the environment. The old patterns of self-sustaining and symbolic diversity have come to be challenged by a radical cross-cultural phenomenon. Culturally and ecologically placed in a unique situation, the strategy of substitution of old process of socio-cultural environment could only involve a dramatically different world-view. This view would no doubt be a far cry from the one portrayed by the Todas of the bygone era.

We have sat at a place with good view
All the many hutments are seen;
All the many regions are seen.
All our-clan people are seen;

All the other-clan people are seen.
All the hamlets are seen;
All the sacred places are seen.

May the sacred places be still seen in the Nilgiri-environment.

THANKS

We are very thankful to the British Council Division, Madras for organizing the lecture. We are grateful to Mr. Arthur N Sanderson MBE, First Secretary (Cultural Affairs) and Miss. Flo Mariatt, First Secretary (Education) both of whom had kindly attended the lecture. Our special thanks to Mr. Kartar Singh, Senior Project Officer for all his help.

SNC NEWS

The National Environmental Awareness Campaign (NEAC) 1991-92 sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi was organised at Kannerimukku village in Kotagiri in May 1992. Dr. P. Samraj, Officer-in-Charge, CSWCRTI, Shri Sadaippan, District Judge, Dr. A. Subramaniam, Managing Director,

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NDCMPU and Shri B.J. Krishnan, SNC President addressed a large gathering of villagers on matters concerning the Kotagiri area including deforestation and micro dairying.

Shri B.J. Krishnan, SNC President spoke at the NEAC meeting organised by the Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association in March 1992. Among other things, Mr. Krishnan cautioned the Government against the construction of a power house at Parsons Valley without evaluating its environmental implications.

Shri Venugopal, SNC Co-Co-ordinator attended a dinner at the Residence of the Director of the British Council Divisions, South India, Mr. Arthur N Sanderson MBE on September 21, 1992 to meet Robert Arbuthnott, Minister (Cultural Affairs) Delhi and other British Council Division visitors.

Shri D. Venugopal, SNC Co-ordinator attended a dinner at the Madras Club in December 1992 hosted by the Director of the British Council Division, South India Mr. Arthur N Sanderson MBE to meet Mr. Malcolm Whitehead, Director of the Twycross Zoo, London.

Shri. B.J. Krishnan, SNC President addressed the in-service Forest Officers (SFS) at the State Forest Service College, Coimbatore on "processing of forest offenders" in July, 1992.

VISITORS TO SNC

Mr. Claude Alwares, the writer, journalist and Social activist from Goa.

Mr. Lavkumar Kochar, the eminent Naturalist from CEE, Ahmedabad.

A BADAGA-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Paul Hockings (University of Illinois Chicago) and Christine Pilot-Raichoor (C.N.R.S., Paris)

- over 10,000 copies in the Badaga-English section

- full etymologies, with references to the revised Dravidian Etymological Dictionary.

- bibliographic references to over 100 standard handbooks or articles on the history, ethnology and biology of South India.

- notes on Badaga cultural features and settlement patterns.

- a complete list of Badaga communes and over 450 constituent hamlets.

- a full listing of 190 Toda hamlets, including many abandoned ones, with names in both Badaga and Toda languages.

- placements for 358 hills and mountains, 158 streams and rivers- the most detailed listing from any South Asian region

- the only listing of 97 Nilgiri archeological sites.

- Badaga, English and scientific names for nearly all known species of animal and plant life found on the Nilgiri Hills.

- brief explanations of ritual and other cultural practices.

- names of gods and goddesses, festivals and ceremonies.

- variant spellings of all placements, with their locations.

- coverage of word borrowings from English, Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian.

- locations of 42 Irula, 35 Kurumbas and 7 Kota hamlets or camps, with their Badaga names.

- list of Badaga pair-words and echo-words.

- hundreds of personal names.

- variant forms in several dialects, including Christian speech.

- full English-Badaga glossary.

{A review of the Dictionary will appear in our next issue}

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AIR LINK TO NILGIRIS

A CHOPPER SERVICE WILL DO

Following the former Union Civil Aviation Minister Mr. Madhavrao Sindia's assurance during his last visit to Coimbatore and Nilgiris, a two member technical team from the National Airports Authority had visited Ooty to study the feasibility of setting up an airport there. This was reportedly a sequel to the earlier visit of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to the Nilgiris.

However the Chief Minister, who deserves praise for her keen interest in trying to restore the lost charm of Nilgiris, would do well to reconsider the decision to go in for an airport at Ooty.

The Save Nilgiris Campaign has been counseling against such a proposal in the larger interest of this fragile hill station. A place suitable for an airport, however small it may be, in or around Ooty is aggravating the ecological problems of this much harassed hill station. Besides, it is highly improbable that the tourists demand for air service to Nilgiris will be adequate, round the year, to make the project economically viable.

If anything, the proposal would benefit only the film industry which has already turned the Nilgiris into one big open air Studio with all the attendants social, economic and cultural evils.

The ecological and economic costs of the proposal far outweigh any benefit that may accrue to tourism promotion.

However, if the Government feels the necessity for an air link to Ooty for administrative and other reasons, a helicopter service would be the best solution without adding to the environmental woes of the hill station. The needs of the tourists can also be comfortably met by a chopper link.

SNC GUIDE TO NILGIRIS

The First Edition of our publication "SNC Guide to Nilgiris" has been sold out.

The book has received an overwhelming response encouraging us to go for a revised edition which will be more informative and colourful. The new edition will also be supplied at a subsidized price affordable by all classes of local people and tourists.

This Newsletter is financed by
MALT & ALLIED PRODUCTS
COMPANY PRIVATE LIMITED, MADRAS

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NEWSLETTER

VOL 7 No. 1

April 1993

SNC ORGANISES

FIRST ELCI REGIONAL MEETING

Save Nilgiri s Campaign (SNC) had the privilege of organizing the first Regional Meeting of the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) at Ooty, Nilgiris from April 9 to 11, 1993. The meeting was attended by 18 members from region – 7 (South Asia). A report.

The Regional Meeting of ELCI members in Region 7 was attended by 18 delegates from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal with Mr. Bunker Roy, Chairman ELCI, in the Chair. This was the first Regional meeting of ELCI.

The meeting had the following agenda:

1. Regionalisation of ELCI.
2. Constitutional Amendments.
3. Code of Environment Ethics and Conduct.
4. Globalisation of local issues.
5. UN eco-Volunteer Scheme.
6. Environment of Economic development.

Regionalisation of ELCI

In keeping with the proposed decentralization of the monolithic ELCI administrative structure, it was proposed to set up the first Regional Centre at Madras, India for co-ordinating the ELCI work in South Asia (region 7) and the responsibility of running the centre was entrusted to the Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC).

The proposal had the unanimous support of the delegates and the Regional Centre was assigned certain immediate tasks subject to formal sanction. In the meantime, SNC was requested to proceed with the assigned tasks to the extent their resources would permit.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The proposed amendments to the ELCI constitution were discussed, adopted and redrafted by a select committee comprising: Mr. B.J. Krishnan (India), Mr. Ravi Algama (Sri Lanka), Mr. A.P. Gautam (Nepal), Mr. Mozahid Hossain (Bangladesh) and Dr. G.G. Gangadharan (India).

CODE OF ENVIRONMENT ETHICS AND CONDUCT

The draft code of environment ethics and conduct for ELCI members in the North and the South was discussed, adopted and re-drafted. The members were unanimous in their appreciation for the ELCI's pioneering effort to draw up a comprehensive code of ethic and conduct which could serve as a model for other NGOs in the world also. It was agreed to have the redrafted version circulated among the members in the other regions for their reaction. (see page four for details of the code).

GLOBALISATION FOR LOCAL ISSUES

It was proposed that ELCI should help globalize deserving local issues of members for international action subject to the condition of at least 75% of the members in the respective countries approving the issues raised.

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To begin with the following local issues were identified for consideration for globalization by ELCI.

SRI LANKA: "PLENTY CANADA" is promoting exotic soyabean cultivation in the place of paddy when the local species are more suitable. This is considered to have adverse implications on the land use pattern and food and cultural habits of the people. A workshop of Environmental Journalists in the region was proposed to be held at Colombo in due course.

BANGLADESH: With the object of arresting desertification of the Baginad tract in Rajshahi district in the North-Western part of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation has launched a massive programme to install 4000 deep tube wells among other things. It is feared by environmentalists and other related organisations that unless prior geological studies are conducted the programme could worsen the situation by depleting the existing underground water, besides affecting its portability.

NEPAL: Toxic emissions and effluents from a marble factory coming up in the Godavari Region near Kathmandu is threatening the "Holy Ponds" in the area besides affecting the Botanical Gardens situated near by. A "Save Godavari Campaign" has been launched to fight the threat.

INDIA : 1. The Nilgiris, a region of rare ecological significance, is under severe threat of various kinds. Its extensive grasslands, which are ecologically unique, are being indiscriminately and excessively destroyed by such commercial plantations as eucalyptus, wattle and pine with serious impact on water and soil conditions in the region. In the name of tourism promotion, the region, originally promoted as a health resort, is being transformed into an urban slum. The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, the first Biosphere Reserve to be declared in the country seven years ago, still remains a concept on paper.

2. Over 7000 species of native medicinal plants of rare value in the country are under threat of extinction following the liberalized entry of multinationals in the field of pharmaceuticals among other reasons. Efforts should be immediately taken to identify and protect those species under imminent threat.

Appreciating the seriousness and urgency of the matter, it has been proposed to hold a workshop on the subject in September 1993 at Coimbatore.

UN ECO-VOLUNTEER SCHEME

The meeting unanimously hailed the ELCI for having been entrusted with the task of identifying 100 grassroot level workers from 100 countries in both South and the North under the UN Eco-volunteer Scheme. The delegates were asked to identify potential candidates in the Region and forward their projects through the proposed Regional Centre.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMICS

It was agreed that ELCI should endeavour to provide marketing assistance, both in India and abroad, for products manufactured by the weaker sections in the rural and urban areas with a view to minimise the exploitation of such artisans by the middlemen. Regional centres could organise exhibition-cum-sale of the deserving products manufactured/identified by members in potential centres in the Region.

PLAN FOR REVIVAL OF NILGIRIS BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The issue of giving life to the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve would be taken up at the highest international level, according to Mr. Sanjit Bunker Roy, Chairman of the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), Nairobi.

At the conclusion of the three-day south Asian regional meeting of the ELCI, organised here by the Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC), Mr. Bunker Roy regretted that the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve had been, "inactive" ever since it was declared as one seven years ago. The ELCI would bring this to the notice of the environmental wing of the United Nations.

Courtesy: The Hindu

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OIN ELCI !!

Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) is one of the Stockholm twins, the other being the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), born out of the historic UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972.

Both UNEP and ELCI are based in Nairobi. The relationship between the ELCI and UNEP is a complex mix of need for one another, each supporting the other in their common objective of protecting the environment and promoting environmentally-sound development.

The ELCI teamed up with UNEP to annually promote the World Environment Day (WED) on June 5 every year. The ELCI helped UNEP and the IUCN (World Conservation Centre) launch the World Conservation Strategy in March 1980 and contributed to the work of the Brundtland Commission, Our Common Future. ELCI organised the global meet of NGOs, hosted by the French Government at Paris in December 1991, prepared to the Earth Summit.

OBJECTIVES

The Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) aims at strengthening communication and cooperation among NGOs and community groups, linking environmental NGOs and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); strengthening the capacities of Southern NGOs and community groups; and promoting NGO advocacy roles through other organs of the UN system such as FAO, ECOSOC, IFAD etc.

MEMBERSHIP

ELCI has a membership of over 700 NGOs in 90 countries and is in contact with about 10,000 organisations and community groups worldwide.

ELCI is in a unique position to strengthen global efforts to protect the world's ecosystems and promote the sustainable use of its resources through voicing common concerns, sharing information, promoting networking and advocacy for purposes of influencing policy. For this reason the ELCI welcomes new members to this NGO effort to promote sustainable development. As a member, you will influence its policy and determine its future direction. In addition, ELCI members receive:

- * free subscription to ECOFORUM;
- * free copies of other selected ELCI publications; discounts on all ELCI publications;
- * easier access to ELCI's NGO Database;
- * representation at UNEP, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD);
- * assistance during visits to Nairobi, Kenya.

Annual membership fee : US \$ 50 for international organisations and NGOs in industrialized countries;

US \$ 25 for NGOs in the South.

Thanks

We thank the ELCI, in general and Mr. Bunker Roy, Chairman, in particular, for giving us the privilege of organizing the First Regional Meeting of ELCI. We also thank the delegates (from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal) who were able to respond to ELCI's invitation at a short notice. Our thanks are also due to the managements of YWCA (Anandgiri) and Hotel Woodlands for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting, food and stay. Finally, our thanks to the tireless volunteers Sreedevi Sunderaraj, S. Neduchezlian, P.S.V. Kumarasamy, S.K. Jayaram, K. Venkatasubramaniam, Natraj Kumar, Sashidaran, M. Ramdoss and K. Shanmugam.

SNC INVITED TO GLOBAL MEET ON INDEGENOUS PEOPLES

As a follow up of the recommendation of the Earth Summit and to celebrate the United Nations Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Philippines Senate, with other government departments held an international conference from 11-19 April, 1993 at Quezon city. The Global Earthsavers Summit (Global YES) focused on "Indigenous Peoples and Youth Partnership for Sustainable Development." The event was endorsed by UNEP, UNDP, ILO and UNESCO.

SNC was one of the few organisations in India invited to the meeting. SNC deputed Mrs. Piljain Weidemann, a leader of the Todas of the Nilgiris, to attend the meeting on its behalf.

The meeting was attended among others by the Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchu who has promised to visit the Nilgiris in September this year.

CODE OF ENVIRONMENT ETHICS & CONDUCT

It is no doubt a matter of great satisfaction and pride that Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have grown to be a major partner world over in the development process together with the government and their agencies. At the same time, it is also a fact that the growth and spread of the NGOs have been rather indiscriminate. Thus, it has been a long felt need that the NGOs should subject themselves to a voluntary code of ethics and conduct.

The ELCI, as the largest South-based global NGO, has taken the initiative to evolve a comprehensive code of ethics and conducted fro its members. The draft code was discussed at length at the Ooty meeting and was classified and redrafted. Other NGOs, both in the North and South, would do well to follow this moral code.

PREAMBLE:

The code endeavours to enhance the total environment – physical, biological, cultural and spiritual.

The code enables the NGOs to base all their work on the resources available to the people, their expertise, existing indigenous institutions, culture and religion.

The code articulates a broad framework to guide the organizational internal operations and their work with community groups and people’s organisations as well as their relations with the South and North NGOs.

The overriding principle this code seeks to ensure is consultation among NGOs before anyone takes a position that might affect another. A contact person will be chosen in each region or country to facilitate communications and consultation.

CODE OF ETHICS VOLUNTARY

The code of ethics is philosophical in nature and has to be accepted voluntarily. It is not enforceable and accountable.

RESPECT FO LIFE

The code is based on respect for nature, nations’ environment and each others knowledge and skills; and on sanctity and integrity of all life.

TRUSTEESHIP

The code seeks to impose the responsibilities of the concept of Trusteeship which does not destroy self-respect or dignity. It seeks to protect and preserve and not to allow the North to exploit the South or deprive the South of jobs, a clean environment or increase its economic disparities.

ECONOMIC & POLITICAL BALANCE

The code seeks a balance between economic and political goals and promotes processes that allow people to make their own choice.

TRANSPERENCY OR OPERATIONS

The code seeks transparency and openness in the way NGOs act and behave including maintenance of accounts and seeks public participation in their activities.

NORTH-SOUTH RELATION

As North NGOs get most of their funding from their national governments, they hardly question the policies and activities of their governments in the South. On the contrary, they have become accessories to the hidden agenda of their governments and transnational corporations. In order for Northern NGOs to enforce genuine people-to-people solidarity, they

- (a) should be rooted in issues at home.
- (b) should have some definable constituency/membership.
- (c) should foster justice and equality, alleviate poverty and preserve cultural integrity and identity.
- (d) should avoid being corrupted materially and spiritually.

Northern and Southern NGOs should collaborate on the basis of equitable and genuine partnership.
Southern NGOs and Northern NGOs have the major responsibilities for activities within their own countries.
Northern NGOs should observe a simple and appropriate lifestyle when being in the South.
Northern NGOs should adhere to prevalent legislation when exporting technology.
The basis for collaboration between Northern and Southern NGOs should shift from donation to partnership; from self assertion to integration; from growth to sustainability.
The Northern and Southern NGOs should share information freely. The list and uses of hazardous products should be openly publicized.

QUALITY OF DEVELOPMENT

The quality of a product will be decided depending on whether it is manufactured in an environmentally benign way and it can be used and disposed off without causing any environmental damage. In other words the quality should pass Ethical Product Testing.

The code should respect biological needs – low noise, healthy food, ecologically sound farming etc.
Development perceptions should shift from world as a machine to a world as a living system.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The code of conduct is practical, enforceable and accountable.

DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING

Members should have open democratic working systems, gender parity, consultative problem-solving, non-discriminatory practices.
Members should publish and make available annual reports and financial statements.
Member – organisations should be non-profit, non-party political and preserve cultural integrity and identity.

Member- organisations should have fair wages structure with credible scale between highest and lowest paid worker, preferably in the ratio 1:3.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Member-organisations should facilitate peoples' efforts. They should ensure highest levels of accountability, starting with their own constituencies evaluations involving the participation of the local populations.

CO-OPERATION

Member should share information with each other; set up necessary mechanism together and exchange experiences; and get actively involved in environmental education – awareness building and training.

GLOBILISATION

Should a member in one country think it necessary to globalize a local issue for international action, the group is obliged to consult and receive the endorsement of 75% of the members in that country before sending it to ELCI in Nairobi.

NORTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION

Northern NGOs when working in South must have transparent advisory systems within the country of operation. They should have transparent criteria for selection of working partners.
Southern NGOs should monitor Northern government/corporate activities in the host country.
Southern NGOs with Northern NGOs should develop an effective policy on international issues.

CAMPAIGNS

Members should subscribe to the following global concerns/campaigns.

- (a) Products made of raw materials from rainwood forest wood or involving the killing of endangered species will be phased out.
- (b) Packaging materials declared harmful will be discontinued.
- (c) Ingredients or final products will not be tested on animals.
- (d) It is responsibility of the Company/NGO to recycle waste in an environmentally sound manner in the South.
- (e) Knowledge on the low cost re-use of materials, elimination of toxic energy and water saving measures will be shared with the South.
- (f) Re-cycled paper will be used for all publications, documents, publicity materials for dissemination of information in the South.
- (g) Soya based inks will be used instead of metallic inks.

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ENDANGERED BIO-DIVERSITY OF NILGIRIS

Text of the talk given by Mr. Radcliffe to members of the Indo-British Workshop on Biological Diversity on their visit to the Nilgiris, February 2nd, 1993. The meeting was organised by SNC.

To understand the scale of destruction of the Fauna and Flora of the Nilgiri Plateau, it is necessary to give some idea of what the area was like before the large incursion of People, bent on commercial exploitation of the Land, took place.

I shall try in this short talk to paint a picture of the Fauna and Flora of the Nilgiris as it is today and what it may very well be like in the relatively near future unless strict, enforceable conservation measures are taken.

When the early entry of Humans in any significant number occurred – about the middle of the 16th century – the Plateau was virtually unspoiled, undisturbed, uninhabited – a true ecological wilderness – occupied by a small number of the Toda people who were graziers, using for their buffaloes, the high grass hills which were interspersed with dwarf evergreen forests growing in the fields of the grasslands, protected from the wild winds of the SW monsoon. The early entry was from the North and East, from the Mysore tableland, by a people who were cultivators, raising food crops for subsistence, using the lower valleys which were well watered and fertile, leaving the steep grasslands as the province of the Todas. They were careful people, living in small villages in places of moderate rainfall and raising some cattle. Not commercially-minded Traders, and using the land in a sustainable way, Badagas, by name.

It was about 150 years ago that a significant number of other people started to make their way in from the surrounding Plains, bringing with them a commercial approach to the exploitation of the land. Coffee was first planted and this shortly gave way to Tea plantations which exploited very large areas of grasslands and forests. The Potato was then introduced along with other vegetables and previously untouched, protected steep grasslands were cultivated. This disturbance of soil by clean tillage had a marked effect on water sources, rainfall retention and fertile, topsoil erosion and resulted in eradication over the years of much plant and animal life. The Blue Gum and the Black Wattle were planted, taking over vast stretches of grasslands under Government control, along with some of the evergreen forests in the folds of the hills – Sholas, as they are now called. This exploitation of land gathered pace as more and more people arrived until we see to-day virtually all the old Flora and Fauna of the Plateau, except for a small area in the West and South West, submerged under Tea: commercial forestry (Eucalyptus, Wattle and latterly, Pine) preventing any vegetative undergrowth, all supplemented by an uninhibited clean cultivation of the steepest hills of gradients of 1.3 to as much as 1.2. often with no attempt at terracing the land. Interspersed are a few old Sholas, now being protected as far as possible. The extent of soil erosion is incalculable.

The whole ecology of the plateau has changed and vast numbers of indigenous species of plants have been greatly diminished.

I now come to the Fauna of the Hills, it must follow that once the ecology of the area has been changed so violently, so must there have been a corresponding effect on the animals and birds that dwelt the Hills. 150 years ago Sambar, Tiger, Panther, Muntjac, Bear, Tahr, Wild Boar, moved freely along with other animals and birds. These are wild creatures and the very essence of their ability to thrive is an abundance of food, freedom from human disturbance and a congenial habitat. These three requirements have been grossly eroded, so that today, the Sambhur herds, now greatly reduced in size, are driven each year to the farthest boundaries in the Western escarpment. Tiger and Panther are rare and become rarer each year. Muntjac are seldom seen. Wild Boar survive, but are harassed as they are great destroyers of crops. Bear are virtually absent. Tahr, an animal on the IUCN endangered species list, are no scarce. Bird life sadly reduced, as the Blue Gum, Wattle and open, grassless, treeless, bushless cultivated land is an inhospitable habitat. The indigenous fish, the Mahseer and the once thriving introduced Rainbow Trout are rapidly becoming the memories of older people. There is, however, one unusual and unexpected increase in the Fauna of the hills. In recent years Elephants in increasing numbers are being encountered on the Plateau, no doubt due to disturbance and harassment on the Plains below. They are destructive animals and will have an effect on Shola vegetation species.

So we see in the Hills the relentless spoiling of a unique part of our mismanaged world.

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I have concentrated on the Nilgiri Plateau, for it is this area that most readily comes to mind when the Nilgiris are mentioned, but the Nilgiri District has all along its Northern and Eastern sides of the Plateau, steep forest or scrub-covered slopes going down the land at 1000 metre to 250 metre levels, which in many places are unspoiled and undisturbed where original Fauna and Flora flourish. These areas can be easily protected from unwise exploitation and some parts kept as natural wilderness parks. Some of this area is harsh, has scanty rainfall, is hot and uncongenial with poor, shallow soil fertility. It has a very different Flora and Fauna composition from the high Plateau.

I now come to the Future. It is bleak! Not bleak because of lack of recognition of the need to conserve and protect, but bleak because of lack of policy recommendations, but bleak because of the impact of the relentless high growth of the population and the overwhelming political stresses and conflicts that the growth gives birth to. Some 105 crores or 15 million souls are added each year to the People in India, an increase that can not be lessened within the next 30 years when the age-group composition of the present population is taken into account. Where are these added People to go? Consider a river or stream, it wanders and finds its way through the land where it is most convenient for water to flow, avoiding obstacles and moving through the easier, unobstructed places. So it must be with the flow of People into this well-watered, fertile soil, blessed with a good, healthy climate. Thus the Nilgiri Plateau must come under increasing, inexorable pressure of exploitation.

The People bring pollution along with them in various forms. The Government eager to earn money and Politicians eager to gather votes, commercialize the land at the cost of environmental destruction. A prime example of putting money before environmental and forest conservation needs is the present conversion of approximately 1500 acres of old, uncultivated forest tree covered, Cinchona land to the monoculture of Tea. The land is on steep, SW monsoon vital water-catchment area adjacent to the Mudumalai Sanctuary. The land will be virtually treeless, the soil bare, hard-picked with no vegetative cover under the low canopy of tea bushes. The soil and land damage is augmented by the necessary inflow of some 5000 people who will take up residence as cultivation progresses; who will require firewood; ancillary amenities and communication facilities.

Can indiscretion go further when the National Policy is Afforestation and Conservation? This land could be usefully be placed under an afforestation scheme of tree-planting that would be economically rewarding in the years to come, help wildlife preservation and so avoid what is, in effect, an ecological disaster.

So the conflict continues between misguided development and ecological imperatives.

ELCI MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

The criteria for ELCI membership was discussed in detail at the Ooty meeting and the following amendments were proposed to the constitution in this context.

- There shall be Core and Associate members.
- Membership shall be open to Core and Associate members who subscribe to the Centre's goals, objectives, mandate and vision.
- A member can only be an organisation which works in the field of environment and sustainable development.
- Eligible for membership can be any organisation that is (a) Registered, (b) Non- profit and which works in the service of the social, cultural and ecological movement.
- Members should follow internal democratic principles of functioning.
- Every member should be prepared to actively contribute to the work of the centre and work with other members in the Region.
- Members must be prepared to share information and resources.
- Members should provide institutional support to local groups.
- Members should be prepared to work in partnership with local and regional groups whenever necessary.

FIELD TRIP

The delegates to the ELCI Regional meeting were taken on a field trip around Ooty. They visited the Sigur valley and Windy gap, Sixth mile and the Tenth mile on the Ooty – Gudalur road. They were shown the original grass lands and 'Shola' forests of Nilgiris and how the commercial plantations of eucalyptus and pine have been indiscriminately and excessively planted on these sensitive areas.

The delegates were also taken to a Toda hamlet (Karimandu).

Mr. R. Radcliffe accompanied the visitors and explained the problems to them.

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ANGUISH AT DESTRUCTION OF NILGIRI ENVIRONS

Destruction of the natural environment of the Nilgiris has literally reached its peak in the last two years. Mountains are bulldozed and natural landscapes are disfigured. The paradox is that there is ban on new buildings in Nilgiris, said B.J. Krishnan, president of the Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC).

Speaking to newsmen here on Friday, Krishnan said Chief Minister Jayalalitha announced in May 1992 a blanket freeze on new buildings in the Nilgiris. But in the last 12 months more multi-storeyed commercial complexes had sprung up than at any point of time in the past. Obviously the freeze is not applicable to the “rich and famous” who are behind these concrete monsters. He added that the blanket ban had adversely affected genuine house building activities of the local middle class. Even village panchayats had refused to grant sanction for building houses in rural areas. People are harassed, Krishnan added.

Referring to recent amendments in the District Municipalities Act in this regard, Krishnan, who is a senior advocate himself, said that amendments relate to just three municipalities in the state namely, Udhamandalam, Coonoor and Kodaikanal. It has no application to areas under the jurisdiction of the Panchayat Act. Therefore the executive authorities of the panchayats in the Nilgiris should be instructed by the government to lift the ban on construction of new buildings without any further delay.

Krishnan further said: “When the Chief Minister announced the ban last year it was hailed by the local residents of Nilgiris. Thanks to the administrative lapses and official harassment people are resenting the freeze now.

He appealed to the Chief Minister for a thorough probe into this matter to find out what went wrong.

Referring to the Hill Area Development Programme, Krishnan said the programme funds were meant for conservative-oriented development of the entire Nilgiris. But the bulk of the fund was spent on Ooty town in general and the Ooty lake in particular. “The Ooty lake is an open septic tank and crores of rupees had been dumped in this stinking lake under the guise of tourism development. During the eighties a few lakhs were spent out of the Hill Area Development Programme funds to raise trees around the lake.

Thanks to the efforts of the forest department the trees grew well. Last month the administration felled most of these trees under the guise of laying down a concrete footpath.

Krishnan said “I understand that the Hill Area Development Programme funds were used to destroy these lovely-trees. The administration is planning to spend many crores on the lake”.

He further alleged that the HADP funds were given to a private commercial organisation to raise the nurseries and there were allegations that these funds were used to build revetment walls to private houses. He wanted the Government to order a thorough probe into this ‘misuse’ of the HADP funds.

Courtesy: Indian Express

CHIPKO LEADER VISITS SNC

Chipko leader Shri. Chandi Prasad Bhat has tea meeting with members of SNC during his visit to the Nilgiris in May.

Shri. Bhat spoke about his experiences with the Chipko movement and called on the people of Nilgiris to be prepared for a long struggle to save these beautiful mountains.

Shri. Jagdish Godbole translated Shri. Bhat’s speech. Mr. B.J. Krishnan welcomed and thanked Shri. Bhat.

This Newsletter is financed by:

ENVIRONMENT LIAISON CENTRE INTERNATIONAL, NAIROBI

As part of the

ELCI REGIONAL MEETING FOR SOUTH ASIA

Edited and published by B J Krishnan, Nahar Buildings, Charring Cross, Ootacamund. Address for Correspondence : D Venugopal, Co-ordinator, Save Nilgiris Campaign, 57 Kumarappa Street, Nungambakam, Madras 600 034.

Remembering Landslide Victims

THE NILGIRIS – AN EXHIBITION

As part of its mass awareness campaign SNC organised a 5-day programme “The Nilgiris – An Exhibition” between May 21 and 25, 1994 coinciding with the Annual Flower Show at the Government Botanical Gardens, Ooty.

The central piece of the exhibition was a unique photographic display of what Nilgiri was, how it is being systematically degraded and what is left of it to be saved, not only for the survival of the local population but in the interest of country in general and the surrounding plains in particular also.

The exhibition was dedicated to the faceless victims of the giant landslide which occurred on November 11, 1993 on the Coonoor-Mettupalayam Ghat road. The objective of the exhibition was to warn people and the administration of the dire consequences of the continued mindless exploitation of the fragile environment of the Nilgiris.

Over 50,000 people of all ages from different parts of the country who visited the exhibition evinced keen interest in the exhibits.

Old photographs of the tribals of the Nilgiris – Todas, Kotas, Badagas, Kurumbas and Irulas – as also the lesser known tribes including Paniyas, Sologans, Solenaickens and Manthadan Settys, were a big draw with the local people. So were the nostalgic pictures of what the Nilgiris was. A panoramic view of the Ooty town taken in 1881 displayed along with a comparative picture taken in 1981 was the focus of all attention.

The exclusive colour photographs of Mukurti, Avalanche, Western Catchment and other remaining areas which need to be preserved at all cost thrilled the visitors no end.

An exhibition of the exclusive collection of Toda embroidery, tribal artifacts and rare books on the Nilgiris by Mrs. Piljen Wiedeman added colour to the exhibition.

An exhibition cum sale of books on ecology and environment by M/s. Higginbothoms Ltd. also formed part of the programme.

The Photographs on exhibition were taken by Late Philo Hiruthayanath, Shri. M.S. Appa Rao, Shri B.V. Devaraj and Shri Das. We are thankful to them.

The exhibition was made possible by the assistance and more importantly, the inspiration provided by the District Collector, Shri Sashi Shekar to whom we convey our grateful thanks. As a student of Geology himself, the Collector evidently appreciates the problems of the Nilgiris better and, hopefully, will try and heal its wounds to the best of his abilities.

We are also grateful to the Summer Festival Committee, Simpson & Co. Ltd., and The Nilgiri Woodlands for the financial and other assistances extended to us.

To our Readers

We regret that we have not been able to bring out this Newsletter as regularly as before. This issue covers a period of one year from last June. The major reason is the lack of sponsors. It is so difficult for us to approach persons/institutions personally to seek sponsorship every time. We do hope well-wishers and like-minded persons and institutions will be more forthcoming in sponsoring future issues of the Newsletter so that it can be mad regular.

Landslide Calamity

SNC's INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

After the devastating floods of November 1978, landslides and floods have become annual features in the Nilgiris, the frequency and intensity increasing every year. The magnitude of the recent (Nov. 1993) landslides was unprecedented. More than 350 major and minor landslides occurred on the Mettupalayam – Coonoor and Mettupalayam – Kotagiri ghat sections. The largest landslide which occurred on the steep Coonoor Mettupalayam ghat cut a swath of roughly 1.5 km. in breadth and about 7 km in length from the edge of the Coonoor town on the hills to the Kallar river at the foot hills. The catastrophe had to be seen to be believed.

Independent Assessment:

A scientific analysis of the problem and the possible solutions will have to await the official report. Pending the official enquiry the Save Nilgiris Campaign, made a quick Independent Assessment of the situation. We were fortunate to get the expert advice of leading subject specialists including Dr. V.K.S. Varadhan, Former Director-General of Geological Survey of India, Dr. Seshagiri, Former Director of Geological Survey of India who headed the team which studied the Nilgiri landslides after the 1978 disaster and Dr. P. Samraj, Scientist in-Charge of the Ooty based Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute.

The team visited the affected areas in the Nilgiris between December 1st and 3rd and held discussions with the local people and Non-governmental organisations.

Causes of Landslides:

According to the existing scientific and technical reports including the GSI study report prepared after the 1978 floods, the report of the Technical Audit of the River Valley Project and Hill Area Development Programme Works in Nilgiris 1986, and the report of the Assessment of Eco-degradation in the Nilgiris of Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu region, 1986, made by the Anna University, the primary cause of the landslides in the Nilgiris is the conversion of forest and other lands on steep slopes to tea plantation or potato cultivation, that too without proper soil and water conservation measures.

In the present case also, prima facie, these very factors appear to be the main cause of landslides. There was clear evidence that most of the road side landslides were the result of the extension of tea cultivation to the road margins.

Giant Landslide:

The cause of the giant landslide on the Coonoor – Mettupalayam ghat can be also be attributed to the recent clearance of forest cover and cultivation of tea by the Government owned Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation (TANTEA) on the extremely steep slopes just above and on the sides of the landslide.

Suggestions:

The occurrences of such massive landslides in future is not only likely; the damage to life and property could be even more disastrous.

We have the following suggestions for the Government's consideration in this connection:

1. There should be an on going assessment of slope stability in the Nilgiris besides constant monitoring of the weak spots especially during the rainy seasons. Overloading of slope heads with heavy structures should be avoided. Unfortunately, all the new multistoried hotels in Ooty and Coonoor have been built right on top of hills unmindful of the risk involved.
2. The Government should forthwith stop all conversion of steep lands into tea plantations or any other cultivation. Encroachers and unauthorized conversions should be strictly dealt with.
3. Drainage pattern of the water courses should be restored and maintained properly. Unlawful diversion of streams for private use should be seriously dealt with.
4. The vibrations from the heavy vehicular traffic on the ghat roads have added to the instability of the slopes. It is also inadvisable and dangerous to open new roads or direct traffic through sparsely used village roads which will only make matters worse. What is required is a strict regulations of the vehicular traffic.
5. Quarrying in private lands should be strictly regulated as they are a prime cause for triggering landslides.
6. Landslides cause as much, if not more, damage to life and property as any other pollution related disasters. Under the principal of "Polluter Pays", individuals and companies who directly or indirectly contribute to natural disasters including landslides should be made to pay for the economic loss which includes compensation to victims and restoration costs.

Thanks We are very grateful to Shri. V.K.S. Varadhan, who agreed to visit the affected spots in the Nilgiris and Palani Hills immediately and offer his expert comments at the press conference at Madras. Our thanks are also due to Shri. Seshagiri and Dr. P. Samaraj, for their expert opinion. We are thankful to Shri. Paul Bhaskar, Chairman, Bhagavati Environment and Development Institute, Dindigul for sponsoring the study.

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NILGIRI CONSERVATION AWARD

Remembering, Recognising and Honouring Individuals and Institutions for their outstanding contribution to the environmental protection and preservation of the Nilgiris is among the major objectives of the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

With this in mind, a Nilgiri Conservation Award has been instituted from 1993 to honour individuals/institutions who have rendered outstanding service towards conservation in the Nilgiris.

Mr. Richard Radcliffe, the venerable conservationist, was selected to receive the first award on June 5, 1993 coinciding with the World Environmental Day.

The award was presented by Guru Nithy Chaithanya Yati, the head of the Narayana Gurukulam, Ooty. Shri B. Vijayaraghavan IAS (Retd.), President of the Madras Naturalists' Society presided.

The function, held at Hotel Savoy, was jointly hosted by SNC, Rotary Club of Nilgiris West, Lions Club of Ooty Town and Lions Clubs of Ootacamund.

CITATION

In esteemed recognition of his contributions spanning over three decades to the conservation of the unique natural heritage of the Nilgiris THE NILGIRI CONSERVATION AWARD is conferred on RICHARD RADCLIFFE on this day, the fifth of June, of the year one thousand nine hundred and ninety three, being the World Environment Day.

A keen lover of the rich biodiversity of the Blue Mountains, Mr. Richard Radcliffe has been tirelessly striving for the preservation and promotion of the ecology of these pristine mountains. Among his distinguished contributions to this mission of sustaining the integrity and sanctity of these hills are: the conception and consultation of the Mukurti National Park; initiation of the Green Corridor around the Mudumalai Sanctuary; prevention of the setting up of a polluting industrial enclave on the banks of the River Moyar; retention of a significant extent of the erstwhile Cinchona forests in the district; introduction and propagation of the Poplar fodder trees in Ooty and its environs; creation of a trekking-culture to inspire a whole new generation of nature lovers and his determination to educate all concerned in the care of the land.

A venerable crusader in the cause of eco-concerns, he is a symbol of simplicity and a way of life in tune with nature. His concern unto the last makes him think globally and act locally.

Born in Kent, England and educated in the King's School, Cantenburgh, Mr. Richard Radcliffe came to India as a youth of nineteen in 1933 to join as a pioneer coffee planter with one of the oldest coffee firms in the erstwhile princely state of Mysore. When the Second World War broke out, Mr. Radcliffe joined His Majesty's Forces and was commissioned in 1940. He served the forces until 1946 throughout the Middle East and Italy with the Fifth Battalion Mahratta Light Infantry. He was awarded the Military Cross for his gallant action in the Battle for the Seine River Crossing. He was also mentioned in the Dispatches. After the war, Mr. Radcliffe rejoined coffee planting and had a direct interest in coffee planting in Mysore and Coorg until 1976. He was a member of the Hassan District Board during that time.

Mr. Radcliffe retired to the Nilgiris in 1962. Eversince then he has taken great interest in wildlife and environment preservation in the Nilgiris and the Western Ghats. For many number of years he was a member of the State Wildlife Advisory Board. He was also a member of the Indian Board for Wildlife. He also served as a Hill Member in the Planning Commission of India. Mr. Radcliffe had been an Honorary Wildlife Warden in the Nilgiris. He was the Honorary Superintendent of the Nilgiris Game Association for long and later the Vice-president of the reconstructed Nilgiris Wildlife and Environment Association until 1992.

NILGIRI DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The Nilgiri is "the most intensively studied part of rural Asia east of the Holy Land with a density of over three publications per square mile". However the almost encyclopedic studies thus far carried on is mostly confined to a dedicated body of non-Indian scholars and are mainly available in Europe or USA.

SNC has set up a Nilgiri Documentation Centre with the object of bringing together all the Nilgiri-related materials (originals or copies) available in India and abroad. The centre will function to identify, collect, preserve and make available for evaluation, research and education, the Nilgiri Region's books and publications, objects (including audio-visual ones), artifacts etc., obtained within the country and abroad.

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Ultimately, the Centre will comprise a Reference Library, an Archives and a Heritage Museum. No doubt, this is a very ambitious project. We are exploring various sources for raising the necessary finances to set up the Centre. We would of course welcome any financial contribution from all those who love these hills as we do. We have already made a beginning in building up the Reference Library. Once completed, the Centre will be of immense benefit to the people of Nilgiris and others interested in preserving the culture and environment of the Nilgiris.

Appeal

Needless to say, the success of the venture will largely depend on the co-operation of the public in general and like-minded people in particular.

We, therefore, appeal to all those who are in possession of Nilgiri related materials to kindly donate, them (or copies of them) to the Nilgiri Documentation Centre. The contributors will be duly acknowledged.

We will also be thankful for any information regarding the availability of Nilgiri- related materials in India and abroad.

All correspondence in this connection may kindly be addressed to co-ordinator, SNC, 15 Venus Flats, 12 Maharaja Surya Road, Awarpet, Madras – 600 018.

INDEGENOUS PEOPLE

An exhibition of Photographs

In connection with the International Year of the Indigenous People, SNC jointly with British Council Division (BCD), organised an exhibition of photographs of tribals taken by Late Philo Hiruthayanath between Dec. 20 and 23, 1993. The tribal artifacts collected by late Hiruthayanath were also on display.

The then Chief Secretary to the Government of Tamil Nadu, Shri T.V. Venkataraman who inaugurated the exhibition said that the genius of the tribals should be utilised in the larger interests of the state. He also called for better interaction between the Government and ethnic groups so that the government could formulate development policies in tune with the culture and tradition to the tribal communities.

SNC's President Mr. B.J. Krishnan said that the exhibition was part of SNC's on going efforts to focus attention on the plight of the tribals and added that the photographs would become permanent exhibits at the Nilgiri Documentation Centre, Ooty. Ms. Florence Marriott, First Secretary, (Development and Education), British Council Division (BCD) spoke about BCD's activities in the promotion of tribal culture in South India. SNC co-ordinator D. Venugopal proposed a vote of thanks.

We thank the family of Late Philo Hiruthayanath for kindly donating his entire collection of photographs, negatives, articles, books and artifacts to the Nilgiri Documentation Centre. We plan to make arrangements for the valuable collection of Late Hiruthayanath to be of use to researchers and interested public.

Today Embroidery

As part of the exhibition there was also a display of the exclusive collection of Toda Embroidery by Mrs. Piljen Wiedemann, the noted social worker and Toda leader of the Nilgiris. Mrs. Wiedemann explained that the Todas have successfully demonstrated how the tribals could earn a decent livelihood while preserving their culture and tradition.

Sponsors

The exhibition was co-sponsored by the Union Bank of India, The Hindu and the Parry Agro Industries Limited. We convey our grateful thanks to them. We also thank the British Council Division, particularly Ms. Florence Marriott, First Secretary, and Mrs. Krishnaswamy for all their help and support.

Philo Hiruthayanath

Born in 1916 of Tamil parents in Mysore, Philo Hiruthayanath, a primary school teacher, was a freelance writer focusing on the unique customs and cultures of the various people – groups living in remote corners of the country. Over a period of more than 50 years, he worked silently but with a rare sense of dedication to study and photograph the various tribal communities and other people – groups in South India and elsewhere. He had written about 3000 articles in over 60 magazines in English and Tamil on different tribes. His greatest contribution, perhaps, was in making the public learn something about the various tribes through his articles and photographs in popular journals. Philo Hiruthayanath died in 1992 at the age of 76.

TREE CUTTING IN GUDALUR AREA

We have received the following complaint from Mr. S. Raghuraman of Coimbatore on 7-4-94. We request the Collector to kindly look into the matter.

As a social worker and environmentalist I am giving below a few important particulars after perusal of some lease deeds of Nilambur Kovilagam in favour of Plantation Companies in Gudalur area such as Manjushree Estates, Woodbriar & Sussex Estates, Devarshola Group Estates and also a host of other Ventworth with Ryotwari Patta. Leaseholds lands are called 'Sec 17' lands under Gudalur Jenmam Abolition Act. Logging lobby, namely, timber merchants and coupe contractors are hell-bent on denuding tree cover, leading to depletion of water resources and deficient rainfall. Hence I pray for stoppage of all felling permits for Estate Lands especially in Gudalur area. Nilambur Kovilagam had leased out forest lands for Plantation owners in the beginning of this century, 1900 to 1925, with a specific Lease condition which prevents the Lessees from cutting down trees mainly Rosewood, Teakwood, Aini, etc., and also other species of trees except for the purpose of estate buildings within. But Kovilagam had never permitted the sale and removal of timber from the leasehold lands. I request you to kindly call for the Lease Deeds of 'Sec 17' Land (Estate) owners who are seeking tree-cutting permission under TNPPF Act or TNHAP Act or under any other act or directions. After the introduction of Gudalur Jenmam Abolition Act, Government of Tamil Nadu is the Lessor of Sec 17' Lands and thus the Government is indeed the real owner of All Trees in Gudalur land coming under 'Section 17'.

Thus it is all the more necessary that the District Committee under TNPPF Act or TNHAP Act should flatly refuse and reject tree-cutting applications under any pretext in Nilgiri District. Regarding Ventworth and such other patta lands, I bring to your kind notice that under Tamil Nadu Land Reforms Act, Ventworth Estate have already surrendered to the Government nearly 850 Acres of Undeveloped area as excess lands under Land Ceiling. All these lands have been and are in the custody of Forest Department. Ventworth case for exclusion of 20 or 25 Acres from the purview of the Ceiling Act on the plea of defects in Survey or some other flimsy grounds. But now the company is trying to make money by selling the usufruct in the Excess Lands already surrendered. Usufructs are mainly valuable trees nearly 6000 and also large quantity of bamboos. All these natural wealth have to be exploited only by the Government and not at all by the Estate owners (Ventworth) who have no claim whatsoever for the usufructs (i.e., Timber, Bamboo, etc.,) in the surrendered area.

Medicinal Plants in Nilgiris

PROTECT TRIBAL RIGHTS

The Earth Summit, the Biodiversity Convention and the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade have all turned the focus on the humble medicinal plants which the ordinary poor people, particularly the tribals, have been using for ages to cure themselves. Extraordinary possibilities in biotechnology and globally enforceable patenting laws have put a high premium on exploiting medicinal plants, success in which could mean millions or even billions of dollars. Though tribals' rights have been sought to be protected, existing legal and institutional arrangements are hardly suitable or adequate, giving room for easy exploitation by middlemen.

Naturally, action will be mainly in the 12 mega biodiversity areas of the world including India. A recent case in point was the sudden demand and clandestine trade in the plant "taxus bacata", found in the Himalayan wilderness, believed to have a possible cure for cancer.

In the Nilgiris too there has been a sudden burst of interest in medicinal plants by individuals and institutions. Instances of clandestine trade in medicinal plants have also come to our notice in the recent past. Plants are collected clandestinely from the forests by uneducated/unemployed boys who are given samples of the plants for identification. The plants are then collected by agents which are believed to be exported to western countries.

Unlike most hill areas in the country, the Nilgiris have been inhabited by a number of tribal communities for several centuries. Over generations they have developed an elaborate system of indigenous medicine based on local plants & herbs which are still being practiced.

The knowledge and rights of the tribals of the Nilgiris including the Badagas over native medicine and medicinal plants need to be protected against any kind of exploitation by individuals or institutions.

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Very recently a group of Kurumbas had approached us with the grievance that there have been persistent enquiries about their system of indigenous medicine by outsiders recently.

We appeal to the district administration to take steps to protect the interest of the tribals by educating them about their rights over their system of indigenous medicine. No information should be elicited from them without due legal process.

SNC will offer free legal advice to the tribals of the Nilgiris for protecting their rights over their native system of medicine and local medicinal plants. Please write to Save Nilgiris Campaign, Nahar Buildings, Charring Cross, Ooty- 643001.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR NILGIRIS

Shri N. Krishna Kumar, District Forest Officer (North Division), committed officer and a true friend of the Nilgiris has suggested the following for the sustainable development of Nilgiris.

Stringent environmental regulations and laws to curb expansion of agriculture, for tea and vegetable cropping, which can be detrimental to human life and environment (i.e., no tea in slopes above 33.3%)

Ecologically fragile areas and slopes should necessarily be brought under tree cover.

Encroachment and cultivation of agricultural crops along stream courses should be removed and 50 Metres on either side of the stream courses brought under natural vegetation. Unfortunately to-day natural streams have been converted into nallas and ditches. Unauthorized water drawing by encroachers have resulted in untold havoc to the land.

Prorombokes and panchayat lands should be immediately declared as "Protected Areas" as these areas are being encroached and utilised for unhealthy agricultural practices by vested interests.

A tree tax/green tax is recommended for holdings without tree cover and fodder cover so as to aid quick conversion of fallow lands to tree should be given. This should be backed by hectic eco-awareness campaign.

An environmental court in Nilgiris is suggested for dealing with offences relating to natural resources, as over 50 % of the land in the Nilgiris is under forests.

The Forest Department should be made a 'Nodal Agency' and should be vested with powers to decide on any structural changes to be made to the topography of this district.

This district necessarily needs to be declared as a 'Forest District' and the community should be more dependent on tree based economy than the tea based economy.

Massive afforestation in schools, creation of community woods lots, etc. in areas are essential to improve the visual quality of the environment. Landscaping along main and rural roads to an extent of 20 metres of either side of the road is suggested.

Mining and quarrying operation should not be allowed in this ecologically fragile district. If permitted in a small way it should be accompanied by environmental management plan, reclamation and restoration programmes and should be cleared if need be by an environmental committee.

Introduction of alternative sources of energy like biogas, LPG gas, etc. should be stepped up so as to cover every household thus reducing the pressure on forests.

Twenty percent of every holding, big or small, should be necessarily be under fuel-wood and a further ten percent under fodder to meet their demands.

The numerous private and government shola pockets should be numbered and a local voluntary village protection group constitution to protect them.

All the sacred groves in the district should be protected and more sacred groves promoted through planting of indigenous species around religious institutions.

The native wisdom, traditional knowledge and tribal skills should be protected and conserved.

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ALLIANCE

SNC President, Mr. B.J. Krishnan, attended the National Biodiversity Alliance Meeting convened by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation on December 18-19, 1993 at Madras. Following the recommendations of the meeting, SNC has been asked to prepare a project report on the protection of Protected Areas in the Nilgiri Biosphere Area.

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OOTY REVISITED VANYA ORR*

One hundred and eighty years ago there were men who had a dream – that this place of green hills and clear streams could be a place of refreshment and beauty for people to live in. They spoke of planting the young trees esteemed by the Badagas: - species of Celyera, Gordonia, Salix. Lakes were created for the delight of the people who came here, the Botanical Gardens were not planted for exploiting the countryside and the Cinchona Plantations were set up, not to make a profit, but to supply all India with a cure for fever which the poorest in the land could give their sick children.

There is no reason why Ooty should not still be a place of delight and healing for those who live here as well as those who come here looking for peace. But SOMEWHERE there has to be the WILL to do so.

The American Indian Chief Seattle warned in the last century that as we pollute and damage Mother Earth, we pollute and destroy ourselves; The Vedas speak similarly:

“Pleasant be Thy hills, O Earth, the snow clad Mountains and Thy woods! On Earth – brown, black, ruddy and multicoloured – the firm Earth protected by Indra, on this Earth I stand, unvanquished, unslain and unhurt”.

But, the Vedic Sage says that this statement about the great dignity and happiness of man is only won by each individual upholding Truth, Eternal Order or Justice, simple living, a sense of the sacred, prayer and worship. In the Bible too there are celebrations of her beauty and sacredness. God is in all things – in the trees and hills and streams as well as in each person we meet.

Can we inspire our children again? At the most basic level schools could teach them awareness of littering and spoiling of their immediate vicinity. If they can grow up with wisdom and reverence for the Earth, they can teach us who are older and have forgotten that our happiness comes from honouring the earth around us and the spirit in all things.

We can wash our Mother’s face and body that the springs may flow freely again and the streams run clear and sweet.

It is time to heal the place we live in – and to listen with our hearts so that we leave a blessing and not a curse to our children’s children.

The Nilgiris are a small ecosphere where there could be a chance to do this and be a flagship for the world. It’s not too big.

In Europe, they know that the fumes from cars can destroy the braincells of our children and have introduced strong laws to control them; they are also beginning to do something about untreated sewage which can destroy a tourist industry as effectively as it does the health of the local inhabitants; there is also some understanding developing about houses : that the houses we build can breed criminals if they are without beauty, without space round them and without honouring the place in which they are built.

There will always be exploiters, there will be people who impose great and ugly buildings without any consideration for that place – only for their own gain. These are criminals in society and like the more obvious thief, we let them operate at an increasing cost to the soul of our community, to the soul of Ooty.

In England it has happened that people go into the country for its beauty and tranquility and when they are there, they immediately start turning it into an urban desert; they destroy what they came for. This is happening in Ooty. Most of the buildings with such ugliness and lack of sensitivity are not benefiting people of Ooty, only those from outside; it is turning Ooty into a concrete jungle which will destroy the grace and refreshment which people come hoping to find. The undealt with sewage, the increasing car pollution, the flies and ugliness could ensure that no tourists will ultimately want to come here. Something is starting to be done, but EVERYBODY has a part to play. **This is the place of four generations of my family who loved and cared for the people and the place – it will be good if it can once again be a place where our children may grow up in health and happiness and share the very special magic that is here with those who come needing it.**

* (Grand daughter of Mr. Orr of P.Orr and Sons Ltd., who was in Ooty recently, contributed this article to our Newsletter).

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**SNC CO-ORDINATOR
VISITS LONDON, COSTA RICA**

Mr. D. Venugopal, SNC Co-ordinator, attended the Annual General Body meeting of Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) at San Jose, Costa Rica in June 1993 at the kind invitation of ELCI Board of Directors. The visit provided an opportunity to meet with, ELCI Board of Directors and the Secretariat team at Nairobi. He also met NGO leaders from Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America. SNC thanks the host ARBOFILIA, for all their hospitality.

On the way back, Mr. Venugopal visited London for a week as a Visitor of the British Council Division, Madras. In London he met representatives of international NGOs including Friends of the Earth and Television Trust for Environment. He also made valuable contacts at the Oriental and India Office Library and the British Museum in connection with the Nilgiri Documentation Centre. The response was very encouraging.

SNC thanks the British Council Division profoundly for arranging a visitorship to Mr. D. Venugopal at a very short notice.

GURU'S BLESSING TO SNC

I am pleased, rather excited by the great service rendered by the Save Nilgiris Campaign. The Campaign started when the astounding panorama was beginning to dwindle. The first phase of the Campaign was to generate a conscience in the inhabitants of Nilgiris that this is a God given gift of natural resources and beauty and that the Blue Mountains will not remain blue or mountains for long. This is now properly inculcated in our thoughts.

We need three major steps to be taken to hold our natural heritage intact.

1. Conservation of flora and fauna of Nilgiris.
2. Preservation of our ecological balance.
3. consciously turning every wasteland into a garden of exquisite beauty for which the Kew Garden of England can be our best model. The whole of Nilgiris can be declared as our National Park.

I wish the Save Nilgiris Campaign every success. My sincere prayers for our beautiful Nilgiris.

- Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

BIODIVERSITY CAMP FOR WOMEN

A two-day biodiversity camp for women was organised by SNC at Kotagiri on Jan. 29-30, 1994. The awareness camp (a follow-up of the Biodiversity Conservation Short Programme for Trainers on Community Participation organised by M.S.S. Research Foundation and attended by our Field Coordinator, Shri K. Shanmugam at Coimbatore on Sept. 20, 1993) was attended by 25 women representing schools, village women's forum and the Sri Lanka Repatriates Association. SNC President Mr. B.J. Krishnan, Mr. Hutchi Gowder, Former Panchayat Union President, Mr. Doraisamy, Senior Advocate and Rev. Philip Mulley also participated. After a day of free and frank deliberations on various aspects of biodiversity conservation, the participants were taken to the location of the recent, giant landslide on the Coonoor-Mettupalayam ghat section for an on the spot study.

The programme was sponsored by the The MSS Research Foundation.

NGOs ROLE IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

SNC Co-ordinator, Mr. D. Venugopal, made a presentation on "NGOs Involvement in Biodiversity Conservation in the Nilgiris" at a meeting organised by the British Council Division at Madras on December 16, 1993 on the occasion of the visit of Dr. Robin Pellow, Director of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK.

This issue of Newsletter is financed by a well wisher of SNC

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SNC completes ten years

A DISTINGUISHED DECADE

Concerned and informed individuals have over the years been raising their voice against the undesirable changes in the natural environment of Nilgiris.

Exactly ten years ago, when the mindless degradation of these unique hills had entered a critical stage, a group of such environmentally concerned citizens go together to launch the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

We said, then, that environmental damages were not always by design and that ignorance and indifference were more often the real cause. We declared a sustained and systematic campaign to inform and educate the people and the administration about the ecological significance of the Nilgiris and the dire necessity to protect and preserve what was left.

We have sustained the campaign for 10 long years against heavy odds and stiff resistance from vested interests. We are indeed proud to say that we have been able to carry on our campaign with absolutely no support – financial or otherwise – from anywhere. It was no easy task to carry the frogs and dogs with us.

What has really sustained the campaign is the moral support, inspiration and guidance that we were fortunate to receive from exemplary personalities. In this context we remember today with gratitude the former President of India Shri R. Venkataraman, the Chipko leader Shri Sunderlal Bahugunaji, the philosopher-saint, Guru Nithya Chaitanya Yeti, the present Governor of Maharashtra Dr. P.C. Alexander, the former chairman of TNEB and presently President of the Madras Naturalist Society Shri. B. Vijayraghavan and the respected socialist and former chairman of the Hindustan Photo Films, Shri M.S. Appa Rao and Shri E.R.C. Davidar, the well known wildlife photographer and writer.

At this point we also wish to convey our grateful thanks to the institutions and individuals who have been good enough to sponsor the various awareness programmes organised by us over the last ten years. In particular we express our gratitude to The Hindu, the Murugappa group, British Council Division and Shri A.T. Pannir Selvam, Chairman and Managing Director, Union Bank of India.

Of course, one might wonder how we were able to carry on the past ten years without even the basic administrative infra structure. We must here offer a very special thanks to the Indian Overseas Bank. The campaign for the most part was conceived, coordinated and organised by our Founder Coordinator Shri D. Venugopal who is an Economist with the Indian Overseas Bank at Madras. We wish to place on record our sincere gratitude to the Executive Director and management of the Indian Overseas Bank for having tolerated and given the freedom and encouragement, wherever possible, to Shri Venugopal to carry on the arduous task of co-ordinating our campaign from Madras.

A question that is often put to us is what have we achieved in the last ten years. In a campaign of this nature, ten years is rather too short to expect any concrete or visible results.

Yet, we can state without being immodest, that we have been instrumental in bringing about several fundamental changes towards the environmental welfare of our beloved district.

When we launched the campaign, the topical question was: Was it desirable to shift over wholesale tea from potato which had been rendered unremunerative? We debated the issue and warned that tea was not an unmixed blessing. Later, we highlighted the undesirability of subsidizing tea saplings which encouraged indiscriminate extension of tea cultivation against the advice of water and soil scientists.

We are happy that the government has veered around to our view now and the farmers too have started thinking of alternatives to supplement if not supplant tea. It is, however

unfortunate that the powerful organised tea lobby, which ought to know better, is still ignorant (or feigning ignorance) of the whole issue.

The sensitive areas of Gudalur taluk in general and the Mudumalai sanctuary in particular have had our constant attention. For over a decade we were able to keep a watchful eye and help retain, by and large, intact the vast disputed Janmam forest lands in the possession of corporate tea estates. It will indeed be a tragedy if the officials and others responsible for protecting these priceless natural forests were to slacken their vigil in future.

When the last of the few remaining invaluable rose wood trees in the area were under imminent threat, we raised our voice. The voice was so loud and clear that the state government acted immediately and, for the first time in any part of India, a legislation itself was passed to protect the endangered species.

We successfully persuaded a leading industrialist of Nilgiris to withdraw a polluting industry sought to be established on the outskirts of the Mudumalai sanctuary. We did not deem it a victory but only a success – success in having brought about a change of heart in the promoter, That has indeed deterred any further industrialization in the area. However a mushroom growth of hotels and resorts have unfortunately, cropped up around the sanctuary even as a we succeeded in shifting a proposed state tourism department hotel from the area to a nearby town.

When the towns of Ooty and Coonoor were nearing a breaking point we pleaded for a set of urban development promptly responded to our plea.

At the same time, when the provisions of the new rules were unrealistic and unfair to the normal aspirations of the local people we were the first to object and bring it to the attention of the authorities. If, however, today status quo remains, it is, we are afraid, a reflection of the general indifference of the people who cannot always expect others to fight their battles.

It is a fact that most of the problems of hill areas like the Nilgiris can be traced to the conflicting priorities of the various departments.

In 1986 we presented to the state government a proposal for a Development Authority for Nilgiris which could resolve the conflicts arising out of department priorities. The eventual result was the setting up of the Hill Areas Conservation Authority (HACA) covering all the hill areas of the state. We earnestly hope in due course HACA will be given the necessary statutory and executive powers to co-ordinate the developmental plans of the hill areas including Nilgiris in tune with the needs of conservation.

When the centrally sponsored Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) operating in the district since 1975 was drifting for lack of direction, we prepared, at the request of the state government, an Approach Paper for reorienting its programmes in the 8th Five Year Plan. It is indeed heartening to us that the focus of HADP is back on conserving the natural resources of the district.

Eucalyptus is a stately tree and almost a native of the Nilgiris. It was originally introduced for a laudable purpose. But in the recent decades it was planted in abundance in wrong places and for a very narrow purpose. We therefore campaigned against it and were able to put an end to its further extension in the district.

The rampant encroachment of public lands in the district by rootless migrants from outside was another crucial issue we took up. Though the problem may still be continuing we were able to secure a total ban on any form of allotment of public lands to deter encroachments.

A measure of the credibility and trust that we have been able to create in the last ten years became evident recently when a Rs. 16 crore small hydel project was dropped on geological grounds by the Hon'ble Chief Minister herself within just a week of our appeal. The Chief Minister also categorically stated "no projects or schemes should be undertaken at the cost of and detrimental to the existing eco-systems".

Above all, ever since we launched this campaign, people – from the common man to the highest authority – have ceased to talk about Nilgiris without mentioning its environmental problems. This widespread awareness, we believe, is the lasting contribution of the campaign.

Green Hopes '95 came as a climax to the several mass awareness events we have been organizing over the years. It was an exhibition with a difference. It was, perhaps, for the first time that an NGO was seeking to highlight the contribution of industry and government to environmental protection. What we were trying to convey was that environmental NGOs must be constructive in their approach if meaningful solutions are to be found for environmental problems.

For ten long years we have carried on the campaign under our own steam to drive home a point and we hope we did it.

It is now upto the people of Nilgiris to launch a sustained struggle to secure an environmentally safe future for themselves.

In recent years there has been a mushroom growth of environmental groups in the Nilgiris like the CPR foundation, Exnora, etc. Besides, old ones like the Nilgiri Wildlife Association have been reactivated.

We are confident these groups which are well organised and supported will be able to sustain the awareness campaign.

On its part, the Save Nilgiris Campaign will continue to play its humble role in the environmental, economic, social and cultural welfare of the Nilgiris. However we will, in future, be concentrating more on research and policy interventions.

We hope to eventually set up a Nilgiri Documentation Centre which could generate the necessary information, knowledge, awareness and action to protect and preserve our beloved Nilgiris.

CAMPAIGN'S CHRONICLE

1986 – The First comprehensive appeal to protect Nilgiris, “One great human tragedy compounding another” presented to Shri R. Venkatraman, Vice President of India at Delhi.

IF ONLY R V's LETTER HAD BEEN HEHEDED!!

Responding immediately to our appeal Shri Venkatraman wrote to the State Minister concerned
“I enclose an appeal from D. Venugopal of Save Nilgiris Campaign. He has suggested that, with a view to preserving the beauty and ecology of Nilgiris, the following steps be taken:

- 1. Government should consider legislation to restrict acquisition of real estate in the district by outsiders.*
- 2. A moratorium be declared on all construction of a commercial nature till civic amenities are adequately augmented and*
- 3. Land use pattern in the district be reviewed and land for forests agriculture etc be clearly demarcated and encroachments dealt with suitably. I shall be glad, if you could kindly have a matter looked into”.* If only the state government had acted in time much of the damage (particularly to Ooty and Coonoor towns which seem to have been lost irretrievably) could have been avoided.

- Chipko leader Shri Sunderlal Bahugunaji visited Nilgiris at SNC's invitation. During the 3 day stay, he visited the ecologically sensitive areas in the district and discussed with various sections of the local people.

- SNC organises Seminar on “Implications of a shift in cultivation from potato to tea in the Nilgiris” (Ooty). The seminar's warning that tea is not an unmixed blessing was proved right within a decade.

- SNC organises Eco-camp for Rural Students of Nilgiris at Upper Bhavani. This became a model for such camps since then.

1987 – SNC organises Eco-Focus on Nilgiris at Madras. It was in this meeting that the need for a Master Plan and a Development Authority for Nilgiris was mooted for the first time.

- SNC organises Workshop for People's Representatives on “Endangered Water Sources on Nilgiris” at Ooty. This was perhaps the first time when elected representatives (MLAs, Municipal Chairman & Councilors and Panchayat Presidents and members) sat facing the dais listening to officials and environmentalists about their environmental responsibilities.

- SNC organises reception for members of the Save Western Ghats March at Gudalur.

1988 - Brecks open air stadium plan recast at SNC's suggestion to minimise its adverse environmental impact.

- SNC delegation participates in the meeting at the conclusion of the Save Western Ghats March at Goa.

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- SNC hosts first Central Coordination Committee meeting of Save Western Ghats Movement at Ooty.
 - Save Nilgiris Run (Ooty). The first mass awareness programme organised by SNC in which nearly 5000 men, women and children participated spontaneously. The then Governor of Tamil Nadu Dr. P.C. Alexander addressed the runners.
 - SNC presents Approach Paper for reorienting the priorities of Hill Area Development Programme in the Eighth Five Year Plan.
 - Save Nilgiris March. The 15-day foot march (Padayatra) covered all parts of the district. Chipko leader Shri Sunderlal Bahugunaji addressed the padayatris on the final day.
 - SNC delegation meets President of India. Shri R. Venkatraman at Ooty for an extended discussion.
- 1989 – SNC organises 3-day all-India meet on Religion and Environment jointly with Inter-Faith Dialogue Committee. The meet was first of its kind in the country.
- 1990 – SNC presents case against indiscriminate use of eucalyptus under social forestry to World Bank Mission at New Delhi.
- SNC brings pressure on M/s Needle Industries to withdraw its highly polluting electroplating unit at Masinagudi.
 - SNC thwarts attempts by HPF – Rotary Club of Nilgiris to grab forest land in Masinagudi in the name of tribal development.
 - SNC blocks SIV industries' proposal to finance eucalyptus cultivation in the Nilgiris and the Palanis by NABARD.
 - SNC organises “Nilgiris – Then and Now” – a 10-day photographic exhibition at Ooty. Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Tamil Nadu inaugurated.
 - Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Tamil Nadu announces a donation of Rs. 3000 from the Governor's Discretionary Grant to SNC “In appreciation of the good work being done by it”.
 - SNC organises First Southern Regional Meeting of Jan Vikas Andolan at Ooty.
 - Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation shifts the location of its Forest Lodge from Mudumalai to Gudalur ‘in deference to the wishes of SNC’.
 - SNC organises seminar on “Gandhian Thought and Environment Protection” at Ooty.
 - SNC presents case against conversion of Cinchona plantation into tea plantation.
 - SNC demand for a development authority for Nilgiris materializes in the form of Hill Areas Conservation Authority (HACA) for all hill areas of Tamil Nadu.
- 1991 – SNC organises seminar on HACA at Madras. Both the Advisors to the Governor attend.
- SNC's appeal to Cauvery Waters Disputes Tribunal.
 - “SNC Guide to Nilgiris” released.
 - SNC president Shri B.J. Krishnan, attends NGO conference at Paris in connection with the Earth Summit.
 - SNC exposes the menace of film shooting in the Nilgiris.
 - SNC raises a public donation of Rs. 10,000 for earthquake victims of Uttarkhasi.
- 1992 – SNC organises a talk on “Cultural Ecology of Nilgiris” by Rev. Philip Mulley at British Council Division, Madras.
- 1993 – SNC organises South Asian Regional Meeting of Environmental Liaison Centre International at Ooty.

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- SNC organises interface with members of Indo-British Workshop on Bio-diversity at Ooty.
- SNC organises “Indigenous People – an exhibition” at British Council Division, Madras. The Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Tamil Nadu inaugurated.
- SNC coordinator Shri D. Venugopal visits London under a British Council visitorship. Also attends ELCI general Body Meeting at Costa Rica.
- SNC makes an independent assessment of the causes behind the unprecedented landslide on the Mettupalayam – Coonoor Ghat road.
- SNC institutes Nilgiri Conservation Award to honour individuals/institutions for their contribution towards conservation of the Nilgiris.
- SNC deputes Mrs.Piljain Weidemann to attend Indigenous Peoples meet at Philippines.

1994 – SNC’s intensive campaign results in the total ban of the cutting of reosewood trees in the district.

- SNC organises “The Nilgiris – An Exhibition” at Ooty.

- Second Edition of the handbook on Nilgiris is released.

1995 – The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu withdraws the Kallarpallam Small Hydel project in Nilgiris within a week of SNC’s appeal to drop the project on environmental grounds.

- SNC organises “Green Hopes ’95 – a 15- day All India exhibition in Environment, Conservation, Awareness and Alternatives.

GREEN HOPES ‘95

An Exhibition of Environment, Conservation, Awareness and Alternatives.

The last twenty years have seen unprecedented activities in India by governmental and non-governmental agencies towards environmental awareness.

The concerns and campaigns have covered a wide range – from climate change and alternative life styles at the global level to recycling domestic waste and combating vehicular pollution at the local level.

An environmentally safe world may yet be a dream. But the last twenty years have seen extraordinary progress in slowly but surely moving towards this dream. Growing public awareness, technological break-throughs in environmental protection and conservation and the common need for sustainable development have largely made this possible.

How far have we come in India? What hopes for the future? An Exhibition of what has been achieved so far, will no doubt help reinforce to continue the march.

With a view to highlight some of these positive developments, the Save Nilgiris Campaign organised a unique exhibition – Green Hopes ’95 – from May 15 to 25, 1995 at Ooty.

Perhaps, it was for the first time that a Non –Governmental Organisation had taken initiative to organise such an event.

The Exhibition highlighted the achievements in a wide range of theme-areas which included bio-technology, drip irrigation, horticulture, floriculture, organic farming, alternative energy sources, pollution control, agri – business, commercial forestry, environmental education and oil conservation.

A novel feature of the exhibition was the participation of major nationalized banks which play a critical and catalytic role in the progress towards environmental protection.

As part of the show there was also a “Green Bazaar” which was an exhibition cum sale of products promoted and marketed by non-governmental organisations and women entrepreneurs.

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The exhibition was organised to mark the completion of ten years of service by the Save Nilgiris Campaign.

The Exhibition was inaugurated by Shri K. Subramanian, Executive Director of Indian Overseas Bank. In his address, Shri Subramanian highlighted the potential for industry in environment related investments and assured the assistance of the Bank for such proposals. He also cautioned against lending to environmentally unsafe projects which could harm the banks more than the promoters. He also spoke about the remarkable contribution of the staff of Indian Overseas Bank in creating environmental awareness.

The Commandant of Madras Regimental Centre, Brig M.B. Singh who was the Chief Guest delivered an inspiring speech recounting the strict “dos” and “don’ts” for the army personnel in the protection of the environment.

The Collector of Nilgiris, Shri Sashi Shekar, who presided, called on SNC to prepare an area specific forest policy for Nilgiris. “The Nilgiris is unique in its biodiversity but fragile ecologically and therefore demands a distinct forest policy” he said.

Shri B.J. Krishna, SNC President, in his welcome address said SNC was entering the second phase of constructive work after completing a decade of sustained efforts to spread awareness. He said the focus of the campaign in future will be on “research, legislative and policy interventions”. He said in the last ten years, SNC had made its mark in the environment circles in India and abroad.

Shri Siddhartha Krishnan, SNC member, read out the report “SNC completes ten years”.

Shri D. Venugopal, SNC Co-ordinator in his vote of thanks, thanked the individuals and institutions which helped sustain the campaign for ten long years. He expressed thanks to the management of Indian Overseas Bank for tolerating his active involvement in the campaign from the beginning.

THANKS

SNC wishes to convey its grateful thanks to the following institutions for co-sponsoring the exhibition.

Indian Overseas Bank
Union Bank of India
Vijaya Bank
Sterling Holiday Resorts (P) Ltd
British Council Division
Syndicate Bank

Our grateful thanks are also due to all the participants. We also thank our dedicated band of volunteers who worked tirelessly to make the event a success.

We thank also the Commandant of the MRC for sparing the prestigious MRC band to play at the inauguration.

Kallarpallam Power Project

A LANDMARK DECISION

On February 21, 1995, Indian Express carried a eight column front page story based on SNC’s appeal to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to drop the Kallarpallam Small Hydel project.

On February 26, 1995, The Hindu carried the news. The same day the appeal was sent to the Hon’ble Chief Minister.

On February 27, 1995, the Chief Minister ordered the withdrawal of the project in response to SNC’s appeal to SNC’s appeal (see Box)

Not since the momentous days of the Silent Valleys Hydel Project, a decision of this nature has been taken. The swiftness with which the decision was taken makes this the first of its kind.

Yes, the response of the Chief Minister was partly a reflection of the trust and credibility that SNC has been able to build over the last ten years.

More importantly, we believe, it was the competence with which we went about the job of preparing the appeal that struck the right chord with the Chief Minister.

Environmental enthusiasts generally have rather simplistic view of issues concerning environment and development. Their concern and comprehension seldom go beyond a bird's nesting being dislocated here or an animal's movement being interrupted there or few plant species being displaced.

This is hardly enough to cause a review of a development project, leave alone such a project being shelved on the strength of such objections.

Similarly, Environmental Assessment (EA), which is by far the best tool available to resolve such questions, is also often understood and attempted rather superficially by these enthusiasts.

There are no set lines on which to prepare an EA, although a number of guidelines are available. Essentially, an EA has to be based on as broad and integrated view of the issues involved as possible. More importantly, an EA of development project has to be based on a balanced mix of ECOLOGY, ECONOOMICS and ETICS to yield the most desirable and practical solution.

The EA of Kallarpallam Project was, thus, prepared taking an integrated and broadest possible view of the issues involved in the proposal.

It was indeed a proud moment for us when the Govt. of Tamil Nadu accepted our EA and promptly responded to our recommendation to drop the project, We understand that even the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board which had been preparing the project since 1982 and was about to begin work was convinced of the undesirability of the project after going through the EA.

We wish to thank Dr. D.N. Seshagiri, Director, Geological Survey of India (Retd.) for his valuable technical views and suggestions.

We also thank the Indian Express (Mrs. Rasheeda Bhagat, in particular) and the Hindu for the Coverage of the issue without which success, perhaps, would have eluded us.

PRESS RELEASE

PR No. 121

dt. 27.2.95

The Investigating Wing of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board has been studying the feasibility of establishing new power stations to enhance the power production in the State. One such project investigated was the **Kallarpallam Hydro-Electric Project** with 6 MW capacity at a cost of Rs. 16.74 crores across Kallarpallam River originating from Kotagiri and joining with Bhavani River near Mettupalayam. Since it was only in the investigation stage, objections were called for from the general public. The Office bearers of "**Save Nilgiris Campaign**" meanwhile appealed to the Hon'ble Chief Minister to drop the proposal of Mini Hydro-Electric Power Project at Kallarapallam, as it would be detrimental to evergreen forests of the Nilgiris District. The Hon'ble Chief Minister taking into account of the appeal of the Save Nilgiris Campaign, to-day, went into the various aspects of the power project and ordered to drop the Electric Power Project in the larger interest of the eco-system and environmental conditions in the Nilgiris.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalitha has shown keen interest in the preservation of the eco-system and removal of the ecological imbalance and for taking effective measures to curb the environmental degradation in the Nilgiris hills, Servarayan Hills and Palani Hills.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister also directed Forest officials to take effective measures to preserve the natural Shola forests and the natural habitats without any further degradation. As regards the hill areas the Hon'ble Chief Minister also insisted that no projects or schemes should be undertaken at the cost of and detrimental to the existing ecosystem.

On the above lines of preservation of Eco-Systems and Natural Forests, the Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalitha has ordered to drop the proposal of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board to construct a Mini Hydel Project at Kallarpalam near Kotagiri.

Issued by : The Director of Information & Public Relations Madras – 600 009.

ECO THREAT FROM EURO BEES

A state-wide survey in Tamil Nadu conducted by KEYSTONE, an Eco-Development Group in Kotagiri, Nilgiris, on the status of honey and beekeepers shows that the situation of the Thai Sac Brood Virus (TSBV), a disease which attacks the honey bee at the larval stage, is bad. It had attacked all the 15 hill ranges they visited and destroyed large populations of the Indian Bee (*Apis Cerana*). The cause of the disease and remedy are still unknown.

According to **Keystone**, as an alternative to the Indian Bee, the introduction of *Apis mellifera* (European Bee) in the southern tropical states is proving to be unsuccessful. Since 1880, considerable interest has taken to import *Apis mellifera* into India. For almost 100 years, all attempts have failed, despite consignments of bees from England, Italy, Lebanon, USA, Australia and USSR.

During the 1970s, a fairly large number of colonies were successfully established in the Himalayan region. Bee colonies are now being supplied to other areas of India, to promote beekeeping with the exotic Western bees as in the Nilgiris.

Even though much attention in India is focused on the short term economic gains from *Apis mellifera* beekeeping, **Keystone** feels that a number of other perspective should be seriously considered before widespread introduction is attempted. According to them :

1. In case of *Apis mellifera*, despite an unfavourable environment, proves itself superior to *Apis cerana*, the endemic bee may become extinct and a valuable gene reserve needed in the future will be lost. Transfer of diseases, unknown and harmful to the endemic bee could escalate the loss of genetic reserves.
2. The pollination pattern of *Apis mellifera* is different from that of *Apis cerana*, the Indian bee, which has the ability to enhance Biodiversity through multi-crop pollination. It is able to feed at any strata in the forest floor as well as canopy. The European bee's behaviour does not allow this. It selects the principal crop and pollinates that profusely. This gives encouragement to monoculture. A massive introduction of *Apis mellifera* could cause a decline in floral diversity. Surveillance tool to determine whether this actually happens has yet to be developed.
3. With the introduction of *Apis mellifera* into new areas, serious diseases, unknown and harmful to the endemic bees, can be imported and cause heavy economic losses among already established local beekeepers, dependent on *Apis cerana*.
4. Beekeeping with *Apis mellifera* in India is heavily dependent on use of pesticides in the beehives to control the *Varroa mite*. Residues of most pesticides are accumulated in honey and beeswax, and could cause a health risk in the long run.

SNC HAILS BAN ON ROSEWOOD FELLING

SNC hails the statutory ban on felling of rosewood trees in the Nilgiris district. This government measure should augur well for the ultimate ban on felling of all naturally-grown trees in the district.

SNC, which has been relentlessly campaigning for a moratorium on felling of naturally grown trees thanks the Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalaitha for the bill which could be a forerunner to other states in general and the states of Kerala and Karnataka, through which the Nilgiri Bio-sphere Reserve runs in particular.

Commercial trees like the eucalyptus, wattle, pine and silver oak could be earmarked to fulfill the social needs. This is the way to preserve the Nilgiris as a water catchment for the State.

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Design, Typeset by CAPS DTP, Madras – 2. Printed by : COLOUR POINT, Madras – 2.

(VOL 9 No. 1/P8)

