

Discussion with Conservator of Forests, Shri Yellappa Reddy of Camara Circle on 31 March 1984.

Pandurang Hegde met the Conservator at his official residence and discussed issues relating to Appiko movement.

PH. Sir, I would like to discuss some issues and the first issue is related to Plywood felling. The movement has again started in Vannalli area. This area is very sensitive as it is the catchment of Bedthi river. And felling was done about five years back. The extraction of trees will harm not only the catchment but the whole forest itself. Can you please do something about it ?

C. The government has already agreed to give certain trees for the plywood factory. We can hardly do anything in this matter. It is all political decision. We myself and Shyam Sunder had suggested about ten years back that no new licences should be given for opening new plywood factories. But they do not bother the advice of Conservators or the foresters. Today there are 17 plywood factories in Karnataka. Really with the existing growth of timber stock we can not supply the raw materials for even five industries. So at present we are supplying only twenty to thirty percent of the raw material requirement of these plywood industries.

PH. I fully agree with you that it is a political decision and that you have to work under undue political pressure. But can you stop the felling in Vannalli area where the plywood felling is stopped by Appiko ?

C. The plywood factory is given certain areas to work with and no one can stop them. They are already suffering from the shortage of raw material and now they are even importing it from Africa and Burma.

The Forest Minister under the pressure of CM has telephoned me to ask whether they can get some raw material from the forests of North canara for the plywood factory of Mafatlals which is closed. There is also pressure from the industries minister. I have clearly told them that not a single tree is available from the forests of North Canara.

From next year onwards we are restricting the felling of trees for the raw materials for these industries only to those

areas which is to be submerged under the Kali Hydel project stage II.

PH Do you mean there will be no felling of green trees in the forests of north kanara circle in the coming years? Even the departmental logging will not be carried in the coming years ?

C. No. The need for the people will be met by extracting the timber and the fuelwood from the submergence areas. We will give rest to the forests of this circle for about three to four years. I have already submitted the file requesting the department to consent for this arrangement.

PH It is really encouraging to know that your vision is very clear and I appreciate that we have a forest officer like you.

C See there are many forest officers who are real conservators But the political hand plays the main role.

PH Another point that I wanted to discuss with you is related to the difficulties faced by villagers in getting the wood required by them to build their house or for necessary repairs.

Even the dead and fallen trees near the village is not allowed to be used by the villagers. They are taken by the forest officials to the timber depts. It becomes very difficult for the village people to get wood for their basic requirements. The privileges is taken away and people are put to more difficulties. And this is done to turn the people against the appiko.

C. (Becomes very emotional and talks or in better words fires out his emotionally charged words for about an hour).

Why should we give you trees? You have cut down all the trees and now you ask for privileges. Have you ever planted trees to ask for privileges ? The land given to you is barren and you lop them for a meagere green manure. At this time when you get lot of fertilizers you chop the trees. Here you destroy the trees and there you do not want to give trees for the plywood factory ?

What do you thik you are Mr Hegde? I damn care for the Appiko or to the people. That day in front of the forest minister you asked whethe thex trees were cut in the slopes and that

this was wrong according to the working plans. I ~~was~~ say what do you know about the forestry? Do you know that I have put in twenty years of service as the forester and that I draw a salary of rupees four thousand per month. I was very much pained when you questioned this base of our service. What do you know of forestry? You are simply doing all this for publicity.

Ph. Yes sir, I admit that I do not know anything about the forestry and that I am a layman. I apologise for my misbehaviour on that day when I questioned you.

C. Do you know how many times I have gone against the wishes of ~~the~~ politicians to fight the cause? I have risked my life to save forest.

Your people do not want to grow trees and now if the plywood factory comes to take few trees to utilise it properly you raise hue and cry. What is this Hegde? Is not the land given for privileges to the people a catchment area? Then why do you cut the trees there?

Your people have been felling trees in the forest to cultivate and you burn thousand of trees. At least the plywood factory manufactures items which is useful and which brings the money. What do you do? Simply burn them. What have you done regarding this?

Why should you be given privileges at all? Why wood at a cheaper rate for you? Have you ever grown trees? How many trees have you, Appiko people grown?

Attempts by Pandurang Hegde to explain that we also have a tree planting programme is not given attention by the conservator. The meetings ends with the officer pouring out his anger against Appiko.

Pandurang Hegde
April 1, 1984.