

Wayanad PRAKRTHI  
Samrakshana Samithi  
P.O. S, Bathery 673592  
Kerala

WAYANAD PRAKRTHI SAMRAKSHANA SAMITHI

S. Battery.  
21-2-1991.

To

Smt. Maneka Gandhi,  
State Minister for Environment,  
N E W D E L H I.

Respected Madam,

This is to invite your kind attention to the grave situation in Wayanad, arising out of the large scale smuggling of sandalwood from adjacent states of Tamil-Nadu and Karnataka.

The Wayanad District is situated in the trijunction of the three states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The Mudumalai (Tamil Nadu), Bandipur, Nagarhole (Karnataka) and Wayanad (Kerala) Wildlife sanctuaries form a continuous stretch of forests in the border of these three states.

Eventhough there is no sandalwood in Wayanad forests, three factories extracting sandalwood oil are working in Wayanad district, just outside the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary. In the entire Kerala State there are very few sandalwood trees, that too only in Marayoor range in Idukky district. Hence these factories in Wayanad are depending solely on sandalwood smuggled out of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu forests by well organised gangs. Eventhough this illegal activities are going on from 1960's for the last 3-4- years, its magnitude has increased enormously. According to our estimates every month about 50 tonnes of sandalwood reach these three factories located in Kallur (in Noolpuzha Panchayat), Mylambadi (Meenangadi) and Kattikkulam (Thirunelli). Tamil Nadu and Karnataka State loose crores of rupees every year on account of the sandalwood smuggling. This sandalwood comes mainly from Moyar, Masinagudi, and Satyamangalam forests in Tamil Nadu, and Hassan, Kollegal, and Saryur forests in Karnataka. The wood is transported to the factories in Wayanad through Mudumala, Bandipur, Wayanad, and Nagarhole wildlife sanctuaries. If you look into the quantity of sandalwood confiscated accidentally by the forest Department during the last few months, which is only a fragment of the quantity actually smuggled, you will realise the enormity of the clandestine operation going on unhindered. Other than confiscating the sandalwood which comes into their notice, the Kerala State forest Department is not charging any cases against the culprits.

Besides destroying invaluable natural wealth and causing great loss to the national exchequer, this illegal trade in sandalwood is creating other serious ecological, economic, and social problems. The gangs comprising 30 to 50 people stay in the wildlife sanctuaries and Reserve Forests for weeks and they cause irrecoverable loss to the forests and wildlife. Often,

Tribal men from Wayanad are engaged for carrying sandalwood. During the last decade more than 50 tribals have died either in shooting by the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu Forest Department Officers or are guards between gang members themselves. A large number of unemployed youths from the Southern districts of Kerala are attracted to this illegal activity. They camp in Village Centres near the factories. Social life in such villages is fast deteriorating. Prostitution, illegal brewing, gambling, theft, poaching, and violent incidents are on the increase. In many areas in Noolpuzha, Kattikulam, and Mylambadi villages where the sandalwood factories are working, women cannot go out even during the day time. The situations in Palakkad, Kannoor and Kasagod districts, where several sandalwood factories function, is ditto.

Like the notorious gangs of Veerappan in Tamil Nadu, well organised mafia groups have come into existence in Wayanad also. They have got their own vehicles and arms. If these gangs are not nipped in the bud, time may not be too far, when the forests of Wayanad will be under the control of Veerappan-like gangsters.

According to our information, only a licence given by the local Panchayat is required for establishing a sandalwood factory. Even to institute a small scale unit using any raw material extracted from the forest clearance from the Forest Department is essential, and that is issued under strict regulations. To start a sandalwood factory using the most valuable wood in our forests require no such licence and the forest Department has no control in the functioning of the sandalwood factories in Kerala.

The smuggling of sandalwood to factories in Kerala is done with the connivance of the State Forest and Police Department Officials. If an enquiry by an independent agency (Other than the concerned Forest and Police Departments) is constituted, startling facts on the clandestine operation can be unearthed. The Wayanad Prakruti Samrakshana Samiti is prepared to give evidence in such an enquiry..

We request you to take the following actions to curb illegal trade in sandalwood and save the tree from extinction

1. 1. Close down all sandalwood factories in the private sector. In future no sandalwood factories should be sanctioned in the private sector. If sandalwood factories are required, they should only be in the public sector.
2. Notify sandalwood as the National Tree and give special protection under the law ( like the protection now given to elephants and other endangered animals).

3. Create a joint force of the three states to deal with offences relating to smuggling, elephant poaching, etc.,

Only by taking urgent and immediate action, we can save our forests as well as peaceful social life in many of our villages. Hope that you will use all the force in your command for saving the fragrance of Nature.

With regards,

Yours respectfully,



(N. BADUSHA)

Secretary

For the Wayanad Prakruthi Sam-  
rakshana Samiti.