

Parisara Sanmrakshana Kendra

Report for October, November and December' 1986.

Walking from Kerala to Kodagu:

KERALA : A small village in payyanur taluk in Cannanore district organised a meet of common people, activists from various fields to discuss on the issue of "development". They invited P.S.K. (Parisara Sanmrakshana Kendra, Sirsi) to share the experiences. It was a surprising scene to see about hundred participants sitting informally under the shade of trees, discussing the serious issue of development. The present trend of development in Kerala has created more complicated problems in recent years. The problems like deforestation, eroding of human values due to economic mania has resulted in dissolusenment among many people. Such people got together to discuss the need for alternative development strategy. The people are more involved in analysing the ideology of work, it is more theory than any kind of action.

Walk along the border of Kerala and Karnataka :-

Two activists of P.S.K. walked from Thayani (in Kerala, Pyanoor) to Talacauvery (in Karnataka), the origin of Cauvery river, the Ganga of South India. The deforestation has taken the toll of natural forests in Kerala. As we could see, the steep hills were stripped of its tree cover and the people cultivated rubber plantations. This artificial plantations have led to drying up of water sources, and have depleted the soil.

However, in Karnataka, the natural forests are intact. People cultivate Cardamom under the shade of big trees. This kind of cultivation of cardamom seems to be more sustainable than the rubber plantations of Kerala. The situation of labourers in Cardamom estate is precarious as they are paid low wages and the basic facilities like housing and drinking water are not hygenic.

We also walked in the thick forests of Changarakana. We saw that the plywood companies have damaged this forest extensively. We saw that the forest rule of felling two trees per acre was followed in breach. In midst of this forest a large number of extensive roads are constructed, damaging the nature of forests. This large scale defforestation has opened up the canopy and the fragile tropical soil is exposed to sun, wind and rain.

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In Talacauvery, origin of cauvery the natural shola forests (grasslands) is being converted into acacia plantations. We discovered that the plantations are raised with extensive use of chemical fertilizers. It is fatal that the use of fertilizers in the catchment area of Cauvery is going to affect the people using the water in downstreams.

In all the activists walked about 50 kilometers in this border area to study the extent of defforestation, and the damage caused to ecosystem.

Appiko Movement in Kodagu :-

The activists of P.S.K. established contacts with local groups in Kodagu, who launched Appiko Movement in January' 1986. The local group in south Kodagu organised village people to protest against felling of trees in Udumbe forest, adjacent to Kerala border. The state forest department had given permission to fell trees to plywood factory. The destruction of forest affected the "Male Kudias", the tribals who earned their living through these forests. These tribals and other people from villagers protested against defforestation.

As the local group was not aware as how to lead the movement without any political colour, the vested political parties jumped into the tray. They tried to capitalise on this movement. Every leader, of different political party started speaking of saving Udumbe forest. The matter was raised in the assembly and council. The Chief Minister appointed a committee consisting of local politicians to look into the matter. However, these politicians showed that they were more interested in making political capital out of the movement. They did not have any regard to save forests.

The politicians gave a different picture of ordinary peoples movement. This politicisation brought down the tempo of movement in Kodagu. The organisers, local group realised this only at later stages, when damage had been done to the image.

The activists of P.S.K. met local people and shared their experiences of leading a non political movement. The assurance was given to support the Kodagu group in future struggles.

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We also met some groups who are actively involved in saving, and bringing back greenery in barren land especially in Devarakadu area (sacred Groves).

Kodagu district is dependent on a balanced ecosystem to get the yield of coffee, Cardamom and pepper. The deforestation is gradually affecting the atmosphere, disrupting ecological balance. The forests of Kodagu represents the catchment area of Cauvery river. So it is very important to save the remaining green cover for posterity.

Save Eastern Ghats :-

Eastern Ghats - hilly range extending from Orissa to Tamil Nadu along eastern coast of India represents a region of depleted hills. Most of the forest areas are destroyed due to increase in population and extension of forest based industries. This has resulted in the recurring drought and floods in Southern States like Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

A group of young people in Chengam (North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu) have launched Save Eastern Ghat organisation. A members of P.S.K. visited Chengam with two more workers from Madras. A three day visit involved campaigning in villages, and an extensive walk among the eastern ghat range in Javadi hills.

The state of East Ghat is precarious as the forest has disappeared leading to soil erosion. The biotic interference of man and cattle population is the main cause for destroying forests. The Tamil Nadu Government has put a ban on felling of trees for commercial purposes. This protective action has helped the forest with much required rest and the regeneration of indigenous species is visible. The government has also put an halt to bring more areas under mono culture plantations of teak and eucalyptus.

Save Eastern Ghat Organisation has launched a public awareness drive among villagers in Chengam area.

Save Nilgiris Campaign :-

Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu is part of Western Ghat belt. The hill range has a special feature due to an elevation of 5000 to 8000 feet. The Europeans introduced tea and eucalyptus during 18th century. They converted this land into a England in India. They introduced all the kinds of tree species & fish. The introduction of commercial cultivation resulted in destroying of grassland in Nilgiris.

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The destruction of the environment was accelerated after independence. The British Tea Companies were taken over by Indian Companies and Indian owners. The formation of tea board led to increase in the area of tea gardens. But this increase was at the cost of destroying the fragile shola forests of Nilgiris.

In addition to this the enormous increase in the population in recent years has put great pressure on the ecosystem. Big tea companies are bent upon converting more forest area into tea plantations. All the present trend is towards destruction of remaining forests. It is important to preserve this diminishing forests because the hydel dams in Nilgiris provides major power to Tamil Nadu. Infact Nilgiris is the catchment area of all rivers in Tamil Nadu.

Save Nilgiris campaign is attempting to protect the environment through creating awareness among local people. The P.S.K. activists attended a three day nature camp in the interior area of Upper Bhavani, the camp participants were the young students from schools. The camp was inaugurated by Shri. Sripati, the District collector of Nilgiris. P.S.K. Activist Pandurang Hegde participated in this camp and gave a slide show and talk on Appiko Movement.

Dam evacters :-

The dark days of people who gave light to others:

The construction of Supa Hydro -electric Dam in Uttara Kannada, Karnataka (1983) submerged 47 villages. A total population of 10,000 people were uprooted from their ancestral home. They were rehabilitated in Ramanagar, adjacent to Pandari river, one of the catchment areas of Kali river across which Supa Dam is built.

The people were given defforested land to cultivate. However, on visiting these areas, the P.S.K. found that the people are not in a position to cultivate land as the defforestation and heavy rainfall has led to soil erosion. Thus only impoverished soil is left, on which cultivation of any crop is not possible. P.S.K. suggested to the people to resort to tree crops, especially fruit trees in the plot allotted to them. The inadequate compensations and the inappropriate rehabilitation facilities ~~has~~ have pushed the uprooted people to migrate in search of work to Goa.

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Forest and Fisheries :-

P.S.K. activists visited coastal areas of Honnavar in Uttara Kannada to understand the increasing casualities of fishing boats in Sharavati delta. In all five fishing boats met with accident in a span of one month. One person, a fisherman was killed. The change in the course of mouth of river Sharavati due to silting is the major cause for boat accidents. The rainfall failure, floods in rainy season is affecting the fish catch. The Sharavati river, flowing through dense forest areas brought dry matter to sea coast, which provided food to fishes and this acted as a breeding ground for prawns. But the defforestation in the catchment areas has affected the fish catch in coastal area, in some years by about fifty percent.

Chipko Movement in Kerala :-

Village youth of Mukkoottuthara in Kottayam district, Kerala launched a movement to save the forest of Mookampetti. The state forest department allowed the logging operations in natural forest. Though it was selective felling of trees, a large area was clear-felled. The village people succeeded to get short stay over felling operations. However, the High Court gave permission to carry on selective felling. As the village was far away from forest area, the movement could not organise itself to prevent the onslaught.

This movement attracted many people including literacy men and women, common activists. The event got a wide press coverage. In second week of December' 1986, a work-shop of environmental activist was held at Mookoottuthara. Sunderlal Bahuguna of Chipko Movement, Pandurang Hegde from P.S.K. attended this meeting. We also addressed public meeting in villages.

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