

Chipko Message

CHIPKO INFORMATION CENTRE

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Tehri-Garhwal (U.P.)

Chipko-Hug to the tree people

R. St. Barbe Baker

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John XV. 13

Amrita Devi was leader of the first Chipko-Hug to the Tree-people. She lived in a village tucked away in the desert area of Rajasthan, in the domain of the Maharajah of Jodhpur. The whole area was covered with trees of khejadi—a tree which grows in the desert.

As a child Amrita had been taught to love and protect their trees because protection of trees and wild life was one of the 29 tenets of Vishnoi faith. Were not the trees her elder brothers and sisters? They guarded the village from the attack of sand storm. From the trees came the air we breathe, the water we drink and without the guardian trees they would not be able to grow their food. The forest itself gave fodder to the cattle and food to men.

Amrita knew all these things, for they had been taught to her by her mother, and her heart overflowed with love for her brother and sister trees. Each morning she would salute her trees and then choose a special one, and placing her beautiful hands firmly on the trunk, would talk to the tree. Tree, you are tall and beautiful, set there by the Creator. How could we live without you? You guard us, you feed us, you give us the breath of life. Tree, give me your strength to protect you! Thank you, tree!

Other girls and boys of the village would visit their special trees, and talk to them, thanking them for being trees and for being just there. Sometimes they would break into song,

praising the trees for all the gave. Among the trees were deer and other creatures who would stop their browsing to listen to their songs. They had no fear of the villagers who never hunted them or killed them for food. When Amrita was young she was married a young Vishnoi of Khejadli village, who too was a tree-lover.

One day the calm was broken. Into the forest came an army of men with axes. They had been sent by the Maharajah of Jodhpur, to fell trees for lime burning, for His Highness was about to build a new palace. The men paused to sharpen their axes. The Minister (Diwan) ordered his men to fell all the trees in sight. Each man chose a tree. Amrita, who was churning the milk, saw the men sharpening their axes. She asked them not to chop the trees as it was against their faith. The axeman said, if you want to protect the faith pay a fine !" She replied, 'if I pay a fine it is an insult to faith. But if I can save the tree even at the cost of my head, that is cheaper."

"Stand back", shouted the axeman. "Chop me first", pleaded Amrita. "This is my brother sister tree, our village protectors. They are the breath of life, the water we drink, and our food. Chop me first." The axeman tore her away and threw her on the ground. Amrita was quickly up again and hugging her tree. The axeman cut through her ankles. Amrita fell to the ground and hugged her tree at ground level. Her body was chopped through before the axeman could strike the trunk. She was followed by her three daughters. Vishnois from the neighbouring villages came. Another and another jumped to protect the tree of Amrita, but were all over-powered by the axeman, and met their fate. The axeman had to cut their way through the bodies of the Chipko people and returned with but a third of the timber for which they had been sent.

The Maharaja's Diwan was angry. The lime burners had long waited for the wood, and when at long last it came it was not negligible. "Where have you been all this time ?" demanded the Maharajah. "I sent you to the forest to fetch wood and you return days later empty handed." The foreman

knelt before the Maharajah to explained "Sire, when we came to the forest to fell Your Highness's trees we were hindered by the men and women of the village—the Vishnois—and whenever we selected a tree it was being hugged by a woman or man who said, "Chop us first". "These trees are to us the breath of life, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Without them we die. Take us first". The men of your Highness had to chop through the bodies of 363 villagers—Vishnois.

"Are you telling me that you were forced to kill 363 of my people ? Why did you not go somewhere else ?"

"Sirs, wherever we went found these Vishnois hugging their trees."

The Maharajah gave orders to his supervisor to stop the work on the new palace, and the next day he set out with many attendants to visit the villages of the Vishnois. Runners went ahead to reassure the villagers and let them know of the Maharajah's concern for the village. The village leaders prepared gift of herbs and fruit and went out to welcome the Overlord who graciously accepted the gifts. On entering the village. His highness found the air fragrant with sandalwood; incense was burning while the villagers were saying prayers for their Chipko people, those who had given themselves to save the lives of their brother sister trees. They had not been able to save their favourite trees; they had been over-powered by the Maharajah's men. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But what kind of love is this ? We learn about the love of God to man, the love of man to God, and we know the great sacrifices often made for each other. The love for trees grows from the realization of our dependence upon them. Trees can survive without man But man cannot survive without trees.

The Maharajah was a cultured and thoughtful man, and was impressed that there had been no complaints. To the contrary; the village was in a festive mood. As never before in his long experience, His Highness was deeply moved and wanted to make amends. After a while he declared that from this

day no tithes would be collected; that the villages where there were Vishnois would never again be called upon to provide timber, and there would be no hunting of the creatures.

The Maharajah was true to his word, and today the first Chipko villages are still guarded by their khejdi and beech—a green mantle of trees guarding the desert. There have been no sanddunes, and villagers are living a healthy life on the land by the grace of the trees saved by Amrita Devi and her brave followers. It remains a sanctuary, with its wild-life—an oasis in a desolate desert.

The 250th anniversary of that fateful day was commemorated by the Chipko people in India, and their sympathisers, in the spirit of rededication to a great cause, for they, like Amrita Devi will be prepared to make the supreme sacrifice to save the natural trees and their mother earth. In 1973, 243 years later, a similar movement was started by the women of the Himalayan region to stop commercial felling of trees in the hills.

This deeply moving story was told to me by a man who himself had gone on *a fast to death* to save forests in the Himalayan region. Although he and I had corresponded for some time it was not until 1977 that I had the privilege of getting to know Sunderlal Bahuguna in person. I am indebted to him for my first introduction to the Chipko people, when he took me to their country. Another Highlander, the Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals had asked my advice. As the result of my report to the Prime Minister, efforts were being made to put a moratorium on all fellings for ten years. The Centre was in favour but the States who were getting the royalties did not fall into line, and continued to fell. It was then that my good friend, Sunderlal, went on a prayerful fast to death, starting on 9th January 1979, and continuing after his arrest in a forest lot on the 13th day. He continued his fast at Tehri and Dehra Dun jail up to 1st February. On the 24th day of his fast the government relented, and an immediate stay order was issued by them. This was in effect for sometime, but they again started felling trees, and Chipko continues. It is my earnest prayer that the courage and sacrifice of Sunderlal

Bahuguna may lead to the forests of the Himalayas being declared Protection Forests, that the flooding of valleys for dams be stopped and the beautiful trees of the Silent Valley—the last best oxygen bank in India be saved.

Sunderlal Bahuguna left his Ashram in the mountains to meet me soon after my arrival in Bombay. He was so kind as to say that it was MY LIFE-MY TREES the companion of his fast, that gave him the inspiration he needed in the ordeal. He is now accepted and his dedication to an ideal has brought its rewards, but he feels that his struggle is but beginning. It is a race between education and disaster. Forestry has been prostituted to short-term economics. The most hopeful sign is a mass movement among the villagers, inspired by the Chipko people. Sunderlal Bahuguna has very justly earned his leadership of them.

Last August, 1980 he took me to the villages of the brave Chipko people in the Himalayas. They marched to meet us on a mountain road with a band; they greeted us with one of their haunting songs :

What do the forests bear ?
Soil, Water and pure Air,
Soil, water and pure air,
These are the basis of LIFE.

Back here at Mt Cook in the Southern Alps, I can still hear their songs echoing through the heights, and my prayer is that The Men of the Trees and my very dear Baha'i friends the world over will give them a well-backed moral support.

[Richard St. Barbe Baker breathed his last on June 9, 1982. He worked for the protection and plantation till the last moment.]

"The Forest are Sacred"

—Shree Padre

The atmosphere around that secluded village house in a remote corner of Sirsi Taluk, surrounded by dense forests on all sides, was serene. It was 9 p.m. Sunderlal Bahuguna the 'rishi'—like old man whose only tapas is Chipko, was resting after a 15 k.m. padayatra in the rugged North Kanara forests. Despite the hard day he had spent he was cheerful, and quipped. 'I don't consider myself old' and humbly explained that 'I am only a messenger of Chipko. Here are excerpts from a recent interview.

S.P. What was it that promoted you to spearhead the Chipko movement?

S.B. I left politics in 1956 and were we living with the poor people after establishing an ashram with my wife. I tried to find out what were the causes of poverty of these people. It was due to the soil erosion, drying up of water sources and this was due to deforestation. The village women came forward in our movement. In our area, women are the backbone of our social and economic life. Because of soil erosion, the menfolk had to come down (to the plain) for their livelihood and women were left behind. The whole burden of managing the family fell on their shoulders. They had to collect fodder, firewood, everything. Prior to this, we had launched a prohibition movement. It helped us in the mobilisation of women.

S.P. Through women could you succeed in roping in men too?

S.B. Yes. If you involve women in some movement, then they influence the whole family. In a movement of ahimsa.

only these persons can lead who can sacrifice. If you see family life, it is women of our mothers who sacrifice more. They wake up early in the morning at 4 and go to bed at 10 or 11. Sacrifice is the first qualification for a soldier of the non-violent movement.

S.P. : Does the Chipko movement have any history or did the idea originate with you ?

S.B. : It was in 1930 that people in our area revolted against the commercialisation of the forests. To suppress that rebellion, on 30th May 1930 the army was sent by the rulers of the State. As many as 17 persons were shot dead, about 80 arrested. Though the movement was then suppressed, we got inspiration from them. We established a memorial to those martyrs. In 1969, we repeated a pledge in front of their memorial. This became the background of Chipko. It later so happened that the UP government sanctioned felling of 50 ashwood trees in a village in Chamoli district in Mandal village where people were refused even a single tree for making agricultural implements. They decided that they wouldn't allow anybody to fell the trees. There was the impact of Sarvodaya ideas on them because we were working in that area. Prior to this to teach a lesson to the government, people used to destroy the forests. But this time, they said, we'll hug the trees. So the idea came, they demonstrated and the company people ran away from there. People went from village to village with this idea. In Indian history, in 1730, as many as 363 men and women offered themselves to the axe, in a village near Jodhpur in Kedaldi village and they were Bishnoi people. The tradition among Bishnois is that they won't allow anybody to fell trees and kill wild animals. That was history and we didn't know about it.

S.P. : Can you recall the kind of reaction of those against this movement ?

S.B. They came with the police force and sometimes threatened us through goondas. They made attempts on our lives too, but couldn't succeed. It once happened that when I was

[fasting in a forest, I was in a sleeping bag in a small thatched hut. And that was set on fire. But people were very alert. Sometimes there were 100 armed policemen and the women hugged the trees, the policemen said to the contractors, 'go and fell trees.' But the labourers were not ready, Women raised the slogan 'we have no quarrel with the police, policemen are our brothers, we simply want to save our trees.'

S.P. : How far has the Chipko movement spread ?

S.B. : A number of people have visited our ashram and Chipko area mostly from Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, France, England, USA.. from so many countries. Richard St. Barbe Baker, the man of trees was going round the world preaching for the protection of and planting of trees. He came to India in 1977 and as soon as he heard about the Chipko movement, he met me in Delhi, and come to our hills. When he heard the story of the sacrifice of 363 men and women, he wrote that down and spread it to 108 countries of the world. Like this, many people have taken the messages and are now working on it. For example, when Ewo and Birgitta went to Sweden, they protested against the spraying of pesticides in the forests. One gentleman from Switzerland came and met me recently. He said that they are faced with acid rain problem, this is due to the excessive use of fuel vehicles. They are now trying to popularise cycles and tell people that they should leave vehicles which run on petrol and diesel to save our forests and nature. I have attended two International Conferences, the first one, World Energy Conference at Nairobi in August '81 which I joined with a big bundle of Himalayan firewood on my back. In '82 I was invited by the UN environment programme to attend a public hearing on environment. Thereafter I was invited by friends interested in the Green movement in France, Germany Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria. Everywhere, I spoke in Universities and groups which are working for the protection of nature. They have also written books on this movement in different languages. There are books in French, Dutch, German, much in Swedish about Chipko. In this way, more and more people understand the essence.

S.P. : Have your foreign trips made you richer in the knowledge of the environment ?

S.B.: Not much, because their problems are somewhat different. In Sweden, I saw an exhibition with the name 'Alternatives.' On the gate of that exhibition, there was a hotel, but all cooking was being done with the help of solar energy. There were chapathis, fresh vegetables etc. In Western countries, they use tinned food. They said, this is our revolt against tin-food ; we want fresh food like Indian chapathis. Inside the exhibition, there were demonstrations of spinning by thakli, pedal and charka, loom and all these things. Outside, there was an open theatre in which folk singers and dancers were performing. They said this is our alternative to cinema and TV which has polluted the minds of people and mechanised everything. The system which Gandhiji had advocated—people are thinking that it is the only way out for survival. It strengthened my ideas. Unfortunately we are aping those societies which are destroying nature and peace all over the world. Our great teachers like Buddha and others have said that development is a stage in which you achieve peace, happiness and prosperity. And ultimately, it takes you towards satisfaction. But under material civilisation, development means affluence, that is material prosperity which is temporary, and in order to get that we are today sacrificing peace and prosperity and we are getting dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction...

S.P. I learn that you have refused the Padmashree award given to you, What were the reasons ?

S.B. I welcomed it first, because they had recognised the illiterate village women's movement. But I said, I don't deserve it till the flow of flesh and blood of mother earth, that is the fertile top soil of India ceases. I wrote back to Rashtrapathiji and humbly refused it.

S.P. Apart from Chipko songs, what other methods do you employ to spread the movement ?

S.B. It was mostly through Bhagawatkatha. People in this country are highly religious. Religion is not simply dogma in

our country but it was through religion that they tried to impart education in old times also. Take for example the pipal tree which is considered sacred in our country. Now scientists have proved that a pipal tree having a canopy of 162 sq. metres can give 1,712 kg. of oxygen in an hour and absorb 2,252 kg. of Carbon Dioxide. Through Bhagwadkhathas, we tried to educate people and tell them that we should see God in every living being including trees and animals. We have tried to combine science with spirituality. Today there is science, but no spirituality. So science has become destructive. Though there have been discoveries in science, they have always been unmindful of the interest of common people. Apart from all these padyatras the old method employed by Shankaracharya, has been one of the effective means.

S.P. : Coming to padyatras, do you think you can activate people meeting them only for a few minutes ? Don't you think that it needs repeated effort ?

S.B. : In padyatras, when you personally came into contact with somebody, you touch their hearts and make some impression on them. It also helps to identify, educate and train the volunteers who'll eventually follow up the work. It works as a chain reaction.

S.P. Could you please give us some statistics about our forests ?

S.B. : On paper, our forest area is 22.7 per cent in India. But recently, I have learnt that according to satellite measurements, it's only 14 per cent and I don't know what density there is. All over the world, tropical forests are vanishing at the rate of 32 hectares per minute.

Mostly, they are felled to meet the increasing demand of industries. A study was made by the International Union of Nature Conservationists which says, the requirement of tropical hardwoods of three major industrial nations of the world, U.S.A., Japan and Europe was 4.2 million cubic metres in 1950. By 1980 it went up to 66 million cubic metres—an increase of

1500 per cent within 30 years: There can be no system in nature where 1500 per cent regeneration can take place.

S.P. : Is there enough awareness in your place to carry on the movement even in your absence ?

S.B. : In most of the villages, they have appointed their own guards to look after the forest. For example, in Silyara village where our ashrama is, there are about 100 families. Each family contributes Rs. 20 a year, they have appointed a lady forest guard. You can check forest destruction only if you make people aware of the importance of forests. You have to give the management of forests to people and the forest department should act only as technical advisers. In forests, you have to plant trees giving food, fodder, fuel, fertilisers & fibre. This is our 5 F formula. People are aware in the sense, they know the need of forests, what type forest they want they also plant trees.

S.P. : In what parts of India has the awakening taken place?

S.B. : There are very few places. I am in search of workers who can take up this work. It is only this aim which brought me here when I heard that young people under the leadership of our friend Pandurang Hegde are doing some such work here. I am trying to go everywhere, meet young people and inspire them.

S.P. : You have seen the forests here in North Kanara. What are your impressions about the state of local forests ?

S.B. : We have to preserve natural forests first. Wherever clear felling has been done, they should re-stock it with the indigenous species. Otherwise they will plant those areas with Eucalyptus or teak and the area will be turned into a timber mine. A forest is something else. It's a community of living things in which big trees, small ones, bushes, birds, insects, wild animals etc. are present. Unfortunately, by turning forests into timber mines, the balance is being lost. People say that the rainfall has been very erratic. They are not getting leafy fertilisers on which their crop depended. The importance of forests is not only for the coastal region, but for the whole of



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South India because your rivers, unlike Himalayan ones, aren't snow-fed. Whatever water you get in your river is from dense forests. Forests are the mothers of rivers. They are also oxygen banks and factories of fertile soil. For oxygen, soil and water, you have to maintain the forests.

S.P. : What sort of afforestation programme do you suggest from Karnataka ?

S.B. : Food is our first problem. Naturally first priority goes to it. Among food, I give first place to nuts. Fortunately, you can grow nuts here. Today you have to find out ways and means by which human beings and trees can co-exist. It's the greed of the former which has slaughtered the latter till now. Now the latest scientific research says that with the increasing population pressure and decreasing per capita land, the only way out is to take up tree farming. Trees can give more in less land. If you use one acre of land to grow meat—for example, if you manage that land for fodder to beef animals, then you will get only 100 kg. of beef in a year. If you grow cereals, you'll get 1 to 1.5 tonnes. Apples you get 7 tonnes. Walnuts : 10-15 tonnes. I have no statistics about coconuts, but it should be near about that. Legumes pods and beans you can grow 15-20 tonnes. Second priority goes to fodder trees. Trees giving fuel comes next. The demand for firewood is higher than the rate of regeneration of firewood trees. We have to find out some alternative sources like biogas solar energy etc. The town people can be supplied with cooking gas. Even then you need firewood. I recommended small bushes which can be trimmed every year. The priorities of 5 'F' formula can be altered according to local needs.

S.P. : Can't fast growing trees help our timber requirements ?

S.B. : No. These fast growing trees, most of them are like children born in *Moola Nakshtra*. Such children eat up their parents, especially Eucalyptus. They are very disastrous for the health of soil and water-table.

S.P. : In some places, they conduct sacred thread ceremony and marriage for pipal tree. Some pockets of trees are maintain-

ed as divine forests. Do you think these are suitable plans of our ancestors to conserve trees.

S.B. : Yes. They were highly scientific people. In *Shanthi-parva* in Mahabharatha, they have written, 'this tree, it drinks water, it feels thirsty, it is ill' etc. Now in the book. *Secret life of plants* written by two scientists of Canada, they repeat all these things. I have already told you about the pipal tree. They have said, one who goes round the pipal tree 108 times will live for 100 years. That means that he'll get more and more pure air and won't be affected by pollution. In our philosophy it is said, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the whole earth is your family. They have not limited the family to human beings. In the puranas, they have described a tree as equal to ten sons.

S.P. : What are your future plans ?

S.B. : I am trying to bring three types of people together all over the country. The social activities, the humanitarian scientist—I say so because most of the scientists are doing cruel work these days, work that is anti-people, like growing eucalyptus—third, compassionate literary men and journalists. I myself am a freelancer—I feel that journalists have a sensitive heart and if they understand a thing well, they can project it. Today, I feel, the biggest ideal before journalists is to re-establish the harmonious relationship between man and nature. Where I go, I try to bring these three categories of people together, and I am sure, if they work together, they can bring a chance.

S.P. : What is the response from the media for your movement ?

S.B. : It was through the press-publicity that the movement was known nationwide. Otherwise it would have been lost in the dark of Himalayas. This is the important social work that we should do in India today. Because soil, water and oxygen are our prime basic essentials which we need for our survival. Again there is the monster of pollution which is coming before us everywhere. People aren't serious about this. There is much talk on environment in big towns, cities and universities

and there are big scientists and big people. But this is simply a fashion. It's only the people who are in the struggle of life as I have seen here in Sirsi area, they feel, we need forests for our survival. It's only the common people who can do something real.

S.P. : Doesn't your old age come in the way of your mission ?

S.B. : (Laughs) I don't consider myself as old. I think myself as fresh as a boy of 13 when I first entered public life. When you are working for a big cause, you don't feel you are old. Vinobaji used to say in Hindi. "After *pachpan* (55), *bachpan* (childhood) begins." I am 56 now.

S.P. ; Before concluding, a couple of personal questions. Do you find time for your family amidst your heavy schedule and big ideals ?

S.B. : My family has become so great that everywhere I find my family. I establish family relations with all those people whom I come into contact with. For example, when I heard about Pandurang's work here, I felt that he is a family member and I should come and work with him.

S.P. : Well, at the same time, your family members should be longing for your company.

S.B. : I don't think so. Now they are accustomed so this. It is my wife who has been a source of encouragement for me. Instead of pulling me back, she has always been encouraging me to take up all this work. When I was arrested during the Chipko movement, she took up the leadership. As far as my sons are concerned they are grown up and are joining me in these programmes wherever possible.

(Courtesy—*Deccan Herald*, Bangalore)

Why have the Himalays, of which Lord Krishna once said, "Among the steadfast—I am Himalaya", become so fragile ? one of the mountain villagers told me, "Our condition is like an unfortunate child whose father instead of rearing him up is pelting stones on him. For generations we have been living in this holy land. Himalaya has given us strength and courage, but now our very survival is threatened".

—Sunderlal Bahuguna in *Earthwatch*, 1984

A Week in Chipko (Appiko) Villages in South

—Sunderlal Bahuguna

As our bus from Bangalore after a overnight journey of about 400 kms. reached Sirsi, the taluka town of Uttara Kannada District of Karnataka on Manglore-Bombay highway, Pandurang Hegde was there to receive me. We have been knowing each other since 1979, when he came to my Ashram in Himalayas to get practical experience in social work as a post-graduate student of the Delhi School of Social Work, Delhi University. At that time he was a simple young man looking for a bright career after passing his M.A. (Social Work) examination. In Himalaya he came in contact with Chipko activists, visited the areas of the movement and met a large number of villagers, who had participated in the famous Chipko movement and had saved their forests from contractors' axes even after facing the armed police. I never visualised that the bleeding Himalayas would touch this youngman's sensitive heart and make him restless about the similar conditions in his native districts on the Western Ghats. It took three years when Pandurang finally decided to give up his job in Damoh District of Madhya Pradesh and dedicated his life for the service of suffering people and Mother Earth in his native place. He had seen there in his boyhood dense forests, full of evergreen trees and bushier harbouring tigers, deers, wild pigs, wild buffaloes, a number of birds and bees; but during the last twenty years every thing had disappeared. After walking for about a fortnight with Kashmir-Kohima Chipko foot marchers in Bhutan, he came back to Sirsi and undertook a long padyatra along the banks of the Kali river. His heart was filled with anguish to see the scars on the face of Mother Earth created due to clear

felling of trees and mining. He talked to the people and filled them with a new hope that they can still save the remaining trees. He went on spreading the seeds of Chipko movement.

And it was on September 8th 1983 that the first seed sprouted; 160 men and women mostly youth from Salkani village of Sirsi Taluka marched to the forest, where trees were being felled by the contractors' axe man under order from the Forest Department. They succeeded in stopping trees felling. Every day 20 to 30 volunteers went to the forest to keep a vigil on the axeman till they finally left the place after about a month.

The news spread like wild fire in the whole Taluka. Following the example of Salkani Youth went to their neighbouring forests to halt tree felling. From Sirsi the movement spread in the neighbouring Siddapur Taluka.

It was a new surprising event to all, specially to the political parties, who are always in search of opportunities to make political capital out of people's movements. It brought Pandurang into the scene. He explained to the Yuwak Mandalies, spearheading the movement, the philosophy of the Chipko movement. He had with him his knowledge of scientific social work in which he had specialised and practical experience of Chipko movement in Himalayas. He said : "Our objective is to protect our forests, which we need for our survival and the survival of all living beings. We need co-operation of all but monopoly of none. We want a basic change in the policies of the Government—forestry in support of agriculture, which is the main stay of a vast majority in this country. This made him the friend, philosopher and guide of the Chipko (Appiko) movement in the south.

So on November 18th, I was with Pandurang the pioneer of non-violent ecological movement, which has filled the farmers with a new hope. He took me to the back house of an agricultural implements and cattle feed store. This is his headquarter, where he has moved from his village Kalgundikoppa in order to keep contact and move quickly to the area of move-

ment. His sole property is a small bag with a spare pair of clothes, a writing pad and a pencil. He sleeps on the floor over a bedding provided by the owner of the shop, Hulemalgi Bros., who is a sympathiser of the movement and a family friend of Pandurang's family. After taking his lunch, he is not sure whether he will get his dinner. He was waiting for news from the fields of action before deciding his day's programme.

After lunch a sympathiser's jeep dropped us about six kilometers away in forest. Trees has been clear felled in this area apparently to meet the firewood demand of Sirsi, but really to plant fastgrowing commercial species like Eucalyptus and Teak. The Forest Department explanation for this is that at present firewood is being supplied in this districts at the rate of Rs. 80/- per ton on fifty percent subsidy. But the Appiko movements/ solution to this problem is that only dead and dry wood should be removed from the forest. The clear felling has affected 4000 acres of forest to get 4000 Cum. of firewood. The total area of Sirsi Forest Division is 5,00,000 hectares and the firewood demand is only 15000 Cmt. Why should the Government grudge giving subsidy to the poor firewood consumers, when they have been supplying selective trees to plywood industry on nominal rate ?

The axeman had left the forest; through their huts, and the contractor's guard to look after the fallen trees were there.

After walking a little distance we reached a small village Kabbe. Within a few minutes young people who were working in the fields assembled in a house. Their spokesman Mohan Hegde said "All people in this village are illiterate. They used to complain that agricultural yield has decreased by fifty percent within 10 years due to deforestation. Crops are attacked by pests, which can not be controlled without pesticides. Nothing grows without using chemical fertilisers. Our economic condition has deteriorated to the extent that we could not pay back crop loan taken for one year to the Co-operative Society even in 3-4 years. There was a 900 acres mixed forest in this village. 300 to 400 acres have been planted with teak and eucalyptus after clear felling of the area. Water sources have dried up and

the land has become dry. Whenever there were no rains for eight days, there were tears in every-body's eyes. We all kept quiet. Two or three months ago Pandurang Hegde organised (Environmental Protection Centre) Parispara Samrakshan Kendra, and told we can save our forests through this. So we launched direct action to save our remaining forest. The Deputy Conservator of Forests visited our village after that and said: "At present the Governmet has entered into a contract with the Contractor, so allow him to fell the trees. We shall stop tree felling next year." But how can we wait for next year, as due to eucalyptus and teak plantatations the air has become hot, the land dry, the springs without water, no fodder to the cattle in eucalyptus plantations" was our reply.

When we suggested to meet the firewood demand with dead trees, the Deputy Conservator of Forests' reply was "The dry and dead trees are scattered and it is costlier to collect these. If you continue such a government, it is against law". He threatened us. After this the contractors man came to ask what was the next step of our movement? And we said, "we shall continue it". For some days the contractors felled trees during the night, but later, on our persuasion the labourers who were paid Rs. 20/- to Rs. 25/- a day left the areas. 31 acres of forest has been clear felled and acres still remains. Due to this there has been scarcity of firewood for us since last five years, There has been leaf fertiliser famine, because eucalyptus and teak has been planted near the village, whose leaves are not good for green manuring. Previously we used Matti, Nandi, Hunalu, Mangalu, Keela Tari, leaves as fertiliser."

80 years old Darsia Gowda added to this that when there was heavy rain in Ashrani, Bharani nakshtra () in April and no rains for a fortnight after that, there was always bumper crops free from diseases. Due to deforestation now there is no rain in that nakshatra (). We have to do sowing according to the rains, so there is no good harvest. There were continuous rains for six months 25 years ago, but now the rainy season ends in three months. Cattle are the precious wealth of farmers, as we get manure from these, but now there is scarcity of fodder, because the clear felled areas have been covered with

eupetorium weed. The 150 acres minor forest plot has been distributed to the landless and the rest 900 acres reserved forest is being turned into mono culture forest of commercial species. We will not get wood from these for our agricultural implements.

"I used to dispense herbal medicines to human beings and animals". He mentioned the local treatment of several ailments including bone-damage, but now these herbs have disappeared.

"Every family used to collect honey at least four times a year from bee-hives on Maddale, Madal, Hebbalasu, Benate, Neerati and Goli trees. A single Maddale tree in Karemane forest of Kabbe housed 150 bee-hives. which of late was felled by Karnataka State Forest Industries Corporation to grow eucalyptus. We used honey for medicine and food and sold a part of it.

"There were a number of wild fruits for cattle feed and like Kangalu, Seuney, Basare, Kaulo, Upgare and jack fruits, mangoes etc. for human beings. There were wild elephants, wild-buffaloes, wild pigs, deers and tigers. But now all are extinct, except wild pigs, which destroy our crops".

It was late in the night when we reached Sirsi and we did not think it proper to disturb our sympathisers to arrange our dinner, so we purchased 3 jowar chapaties for three rupees. This along with gur and groundnuts, which friends from Dattapur (Wardha) had kept in my bag was our dinner. I went to bed, but Pandurang was disposing his mails till late at night.

Next day I along with two youth leaders travelled by bus to Nadyud and Nazgadde villages of Siddapur Taluka. There the villagers had driven away the axeman of a plywood factory from Kalgengeddi forest recently. Out of 89 trees marked for felling, they had already felled 51 trees, but damaged 547 trees—1000 per cent more ! People counted the damaged trees.

M.S. Hegde, a young farmer, said the destruction of forest has affected areca nut production: Our fertile topsoil is being washed away due to heavy erratic rains. Even small nullahs

like Wazgadda are in spate. Though the coastal area farmers are benefitted with floods. They collect the fertile top soil taken down by the rivers to grow coconut in lower ghat areas.

He said "Wild animals were the God given gift to the people of this area. Now they have no shelter to live and no wild fruits and grasses to eat. Due to the destruction of wild animals, destruction of crops by undesirable wild animals has increased. Wild pigs, which were controlled by tigers have increased. We learnt valour and courage from the wild animals and it had an impact on human behaviour. These wild animals were also the source of enjoyment to the children.

"Contractor are trying to win over the backward Naiks, and instigating them to behave arrogantly. The other day the Range Officer went to a Naik village with a political leader of their community to persuade them to oppose the movement; but the poor fellows were rebuked by the villagers. They said more than arcica nut farmers, we depend upon forests for our survival. We have no tile roofed house, we get all building material from the forests."

When we returned back in the night Pandurang had planned our next day's programme. News of the movement had reached far in the South and a young free lance journalist Shree Padre from Kerala wanted to join us. Next day we set out for a new—Bengaon forest, This was an adivasi village, whose ancestors had come from Maharastra to settle here. The village with its paddy field was in a small valley surrounded by forests. Two years back the plywood factory had felled trees from this forest and this year again 500 trees were marked for, what the forest department calls "Improvement felling". The trees were felled on steep slopes and eupetorium has started coming up in this area. We were shocked to see the area denuded for constructing a motor road in the midst of dense forest by the plywood factory for the the transport of logs. After felling of trees for plywood, they left the twings, stumps and other illegally felled trees, which were later burnt. There was a big tree lying near by. When after launehing the movement, the forest officer came here, he was asked about this

rape of forest. The poor fellow could not utter a single word in reply, whereas his boss from Bangalore had come out with a two column express statement to defend the scientific management of the forests. Alas ! the decision makers and policy framers at Bangalore and New Delhi, who are surrounded by files prepared by beaured by beaurocracy could see this forests which a few years back looked like a temple, but was now now presenting the scenes of a deserted battle field.

We could see a number of tender trees out and were told that a Forest Department employee had cut five to six thousand poles from this area. Later, when detected by the agitators, a false crime report was made in the name of a local farmer alleging that he had cut these for fencing. Fine was realised, whereas the poles were actually sold some where else to earn money.

Mattigadda Co-operative Society, 40 Kms. from Sirsi connected by fair weather Kuchna road, is the centre of a number of scattered habitats in the midst of dense forests. The area was deserted by the villagers who survived an epidemic in the beginning of this century. Now some people have settled here. They had come to listen to the Chipko message. We stayed for the night in a solitary tile-roofed house in the midst of the forest. The flat land was covered with areca nut, coconut trees and paddy fields.

On November 21st morning we climbed up through a path passing through dense natural forests of big trees and cane bushes. The canopy was so dense even in the day time, that it was dark all around. We enjoyed the music of the birds and the sweet sound of a stream flowing in this wilderness. The commercial exploiters had not so far reached here. Kangale trees, whose leaves are a very nutritious fodder intact in this forest. Suddenly we met a small river Beerchods (The White River) flowing over a rock at Arvalgadda. It joins Pattan Halle and finally Gangavati which ultimately falls into the Arabian Sea between Ankola and Karwar. We all sat for a while musing over Chipko movement and the following ideas came.

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DEVIOD

COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

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Koramangala

Bangalore-560034

India

"We can do without plywood, but we can not live without water. Anybody who has to make any decision about the management of hill forests, I request him to come out of the air-conditioned offices of Bangalore and New Delhi, sit quietly at this spot and then decide. You can not imagine elsewhere what are the real gifts of the forest? There you can think only about timber and raw materials for the industries. but here you see that the real products of the forests are Oxygen, water and soil, which are the basis of life. We should fix our priorities of forest mangement on this basis. Unfortunately after the advent of Industrial Revolution, this important aspect has been totally ignored. As a result of this mankind is faced with the triple problems of hunger, disease and pollution. The solution of these problems does not lie in opening relief camps. hospitals and adopting remedial measures, but in the re-establishment of harmonious relationship between Men and Nature. Big minds have become so tiny that can not think beyond the immediate economic profits, which had brought Mankind at the brink of disaster. Happily the small people have started thinking about permanent prosperity. They know this eternal truth that we have inherited this Earth from our forefathers and this is a sacred trust with us for the posterity. Chipko movement is the manifestation of common people's efforts to materialise the high ideals, for the survival of mankind. We call upon the toiling masses to continue their struggle for the bright future of mankind. I know we are swimming against the tide. We are a minority, which will save mankind from disaster and usher a new era of peace, happiness and prosperity."

Mr. K.M. Hegde of Salkani who was walking with us told there was a 200 ft. high Maddale tree in Donne forest housing 800 bee-hives. We are afraid that some day the Match factory people will take it away. The villagers from five villages assemble under this tree on a particular day in a fair to extract honey. They worship the tree and offer coconuts before extracting honey and pray for better yield in the next year.

We reached an Adivasi village with mud huts, a part of Salkani. This was the birth place of Chipko movement in

South. After walking a few yards we saw deserted huts of the forests labourers surrounded by trees felled by them. I asked K.M. Hegde, how the idea of starting the movement had come to them and he replied, "We had read your statement in a Kannada paper and then the Yuvak Mandali decided to launch the movement. We informed the Forest Officer and the Forest Range Officer came to convince us saying that "We fell trees according to the prescriptions of Working Plan. We do not plunder the forest, as you accuse, we fell only two trees in a hectare. We shall, however, do not fell trees till November and shall talk to you before starting the lumbering operations." But immediately the axeman reached here and they occupied the village school building. On September 8th we, 100 men and 60 women, reached here walking five miles from Salkani. We hugged the trees. The axemen were moved. They stopped axing the trees and swearing by Helanmma Goddess not to fell trees till the agitators allowed.

On September 22nd the Forest Officer came with a team of scientists and influential public leaders to our village and threatened us with the consequences of our action, but we insisted that they should first visit the spot and then talk. The whole team walked to the forest, the officer had the first experience to cross the knee deep nullah and travel without a jeep. The scientist after some days submitted a report after making a sample survey of one hectare, endorsing our allegations.

"11 trees had been marked for cutting, Out of these 11, 8 had been felled. In the process of felling these 8 trees, as many as five trees had been damaged. We also noted that in another part of the coupe one tree belonging to *Terminalis Paniculata* number 461 of about 12 M. height had been felled in such a fashion as the damage 4 other well grown trees. Of these two were rosewood trees which are completely protected. The tree was felled uphill against requisitions. Further there was much space on the down hill side to fell this tree without damaging any other tree. There was thus an evident prima facie case of deliberate damage of other trees in the course of felling.

"We thus agree that both the contentions of the Yuvak Mandali, namely, excessive damage in the course of felling and excessive concentration of trees marked for felling were in fact true. The Yuvak Mandali should be complimented for having brought this to the notice of authorities. It is obviously in the broader interests to seek their continued co-operation in ensuring proper protection of forests." Even after this report felling was resumed on Sept. 28th which the villagers stopped by hugging on Sept. 29th. We addressed a crowded meeting attended by school boys, men and women from the neighbouring villages in Salkani High school. All were filled with enthusiasm and pledged to save their trees. We felt that sufficient number of ladies could not attend the meeting due to their being busy in the household work. So a slide show depicting the Women's movement in Uttarakhand was arranged for them. At the conclusion of this an elderly lady stood and declared that now the ladies will be on the forefront and we will keep sarvodaya patra a pot to put handful of rice each day to support the movement. This was the revival of fifty year old practice, when people of this area had launched 'Jungle Satyagraha' against the British regimes forest policy as a part of Gandhiji's Swarajya movement.

The Department of Environment Government of India, has assigned 'Western Ghats Research Project to Karnataka University. Researchers of this project had visited Salkani, when the movement was in progress. They were full of appreciation for the work of Yuvak Mandali. We could see their comments in the Visitor's book of the Mandali, saying "Forest working plan should be changed".

On November 22nd we walked upto Banhalla High School and addressed a meeting. While going to Mandamanne village, the Head Master showed us the trees marked for felling for plywood factory. The villagers were expecting the contractor's axemen and were ready to keep them off the forest. The contractor had approached the Head Master that he should dissuade the youths and in lieu he will give free timber for school, but the self respecting Head Master rebuked him saying "We have

enough money to purchase timber for the school, but we can not cooperate in the sinful act of stripping Mother Earth". Nearly 500 trees have been marked in this area for felling. We could see a tari tree marked for felling near Mandanne that it will certainly damage other trees, if felled. But who can question this? This was scientific management of forests!

69 year old Venktaramana of Mandimanne had a sad story of this scientific management to tell. In the beginning the Forest Department said "we are felling trees to plant better species." They planted teak and eucalyptus saplings. After that since ten years past (bambu huda) has increased. It eats up the half ripe paddy.

He remembered the forest movement of 1930-34 when the British Government had imposed certain restrictions on the use of forests by the villagers. The people as a protest went in groups to cut the sandal wood trees. The demands were: (1) There should be grazing lands for cows and the grazing tax of two annas (12 paise, per cattle) be abolished. 2. Free timber and wood for house construction and agricultural implements. 3. Right to take tree leaves for green manuring of arieca nut gardens. The Government conceded these demands and these are known as Kanara Privileges enjoyed by the farmers of North Kanara District. Nine acres of forest land called 'Betta Land' for one acre of arieca nut garden was allotted to the farmers. "We get green manure from this 'betta' land. When the green leaves do not suffice, we collect dried leaves from the reserved forest. Now for the last 15 years there is scarcity of these leaves since Doddanna and Co., a forest contractor had felled in an area of 2000 acres in Vakkal. New saplings were planted in this area, which did not survive. The Forest Department had planted teak and eucalyptus, but instead of these eupatorium thrived. In Uendadi block of Mensi-Gureubaldii area, which was covered with hard wood tree species like Mattt, Nandi and Gudmau and soft wood trees, trees were felled first for railway sleepers and later on for plywood factory. There were Jamba trees, which is a very good hardwood specie. Good trees were felled leaving behind only the weak trees, which could regenerate only a few trees.

Venkataramana continued, "This year the forest department auctioned upase fruits. Its seeds contain edible oil, specially, used in roasting fish. The contractor instead of plucking the fruits, felled down the trees. He showed us a tree near the village, whose branches had been mercilessly lopped.

When we reached back to Chipko headquarters at Sirsi on the night of 22nd Nov. we met the Assistant Commissioner and acquainted him with our experiences and the people's determination to save the remaining forests. An invitation from the Botany Department of Karnaka University, Dharawad to visit on November 24th was already waiting us.

On November 23, all the activists had assembled at Sirsi to discuss the future strategy. They approved a pledge for Chipko activists, declaring their faith in non-violence, affiliation with no political party and their objective as protection and regeneration of natural forests making forestry in support of agriculture. Pandurang explained in detail to a meeting to a meeting of citizens of Sirsi the progress and the plans of the movement. He was flooded with questions from all sides, which he calmly and firmly replied. Everybody, returned fully satisfied.

Our task in Karnataka University was easy and every body had read about Chipko movement and some of the researchers had personally visited the scene of the movement in Salkani. They were eager to see the movement spreading in the whole western ghats.

My pilgrimage to the birth place of Chipko (Appiko) in South ended on 25th November at Bangalore. Our last programme was to meet the press. A group of young journalists filled with idealism greeted Pandurang, who gave a detailed report of the movement and replied their querries. Sri Narain Swamy of Gandhi Peace Foundation. Dr. B.V. Krishnamurthy, the renowned economist and J. Bandopadhyaya, the young scientist from the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore along with a group of sympathisers extended their support and cooperation. We believe that the success of ecological movements depends on the team work of humanitarian scientists,

social activists and idealist Journalists. Fortunately these three forces are uniting in the South. Prominent papers are giving wide publicity to this movement. Some have come out with forceful leading articles praising the movement and demanding an immediate stoppage of the plunder of forest wealth.

Some of the sympathisers had kindly come to the Bangalore Railway station to see me off. My last work was to write a letter to The Chief Minister Sri Ramkrishna Hegde congratulating him for being the leader of the Government of a State, where a movement to save western ghats had born. The objective of the movement was not to oppose anybody, but to enhance the prestige of all, who realize the need of the hour and help in bringing a change in age-old exploitative policies. To the activists in the field, who may have to confront the police with whose help the Forest Officer has ordered resumption of felling operations, I sent copies of Gandhiji's prayer and devotional songs booklet as their companion to face the forces of violence with non-violence. The strength of the soldier of Ahimsa (non-violence lies in his soul. Prayers and devotional songs add to the inner strength, which is the only power to bring a social change specially when the four known powers—State, Wealth, Arms and Intellect—have miserably failed to solve the problems facing mankind. To my dear friends Pandurang, who by starting this movement has made me 30 years younger than my age (as he is 27 and I am completing 57), I gave the parting message, "I shall be always with you when you are in action", and he blessed me by saying "I shall always be active, working for your mission."

(Like a migrating bird, the idea of embracing trees flow South to Sirsi in North Karnataka, and Appjko movement took wing—*Claude Alvares in Indian Express, Sept. 9, 1984.*)

Appiko Padayatra

—Pandurang Hegde

We started on our Appiko Padyatra (Footmarch) from the Marikamba Temple in Sirsi, Uttara Kannada District, on the 10th of April, 1984. As, step by step, we covered about 650 kms. our footmarch become a learning process.

The main objective of the Appiko Movement is the three-fold : to save remaining forests; to grow trees on barren land; and to propagate idea of proper utilisation of forest wealth by people. Started in September 1983, the movement spent its first few months, till April 1984, in actually hugging trees and thus preventing their felling. This procedure to save the forests has practised in about ten places of Sirsi, Siddapur and Yellapur talukas. By this time, almost everyone in the countryside and cities of Karnataka had become aware of the Appiko Movement. They knew that the prime objective of the movement was to save forests. But in the countryside and its villages, people were not fully conversant with the other aims of the movement, viz., the drive to give more trees and proper utilization of forest produce. It was to share these ideas with people in remote villages that we undertook the footmarch. At the same time, we wanted to know the people's reaction to our objectives, which touched their lives so crucially.

Another equally important reason for undertaking the march was to see for ourselves the state of forests in those areas. Thus, the footmarch became a march of discovery and learning both for us and the villagers we met and activated for protecting their forest wealth.

In all, we were able to visit 300 remote villages in three talukas—Sirsi, Siddapur and Yellapur. We also covered a part

of Sorab taluka in Shimoga district. Our walk took us to areas under plain deciduous forest, to almost inaccessible hill slopes covered by Evergreen forests and to semi-evergreen zones in the Western Ghats. By the time we returned to Sirsi on 29th April 1984, we had ranged over an area of 650 kms comprising different types of forests, varied soil conditions, and differing agricultural patterns.

Observation

During our walk in the area of Husri, Malanji and Andagi in Sirsi Range we were struck of the difficulties of the local people in acquiring the minimum needs of woods to build a house or thatched hut for themselves. In one case a landless labourer said ' The Forest Ranger came and took away the poles that I had collected from the forest. It was taken away to the town. And he has fined me Rs. 300/-.' Showing us his shanty like thatched hut he added "They told us that the Appiko people were responsible for this. The monsoon is approaching fast and we will be deprived of a safe roof."

These villagers were supporters of Appiko and the forest officials had resorted to this kind of harassment to create a feeling against Appiko supporters. At present the Forest Department has taken back all the concessions and privileges that they were allowed to the local people. In addition to this they are not allowing the people to fetch even a small pole from the forest. This denial of the basic needs has affected the lowest class of people in the village. Throughout our twenty day walk we came across a number of cases where the local people were harassed and totally denied any kind of wood from the forest. Ironically, all this being done in the name of Law. The jungle Law. Indeed this kind of barbarious law has succeeded in breeding and generating much more distrust among the people against the Forest Department.

Appiko has been the first to demand and Stress that the needs of the local population should come first and that they should be allowed to enjoy their privileges.

The Monster of Mono culture

In the area of deciduous forest the mixed forest wealth was clearfelled totally to be planted with teak and eucalyptus. This has been done regardless of the suitability of these species to those particular areas. For example in Siddapur Kange an area of 100 acres is being clear felled adjacent to a small riverlet, Wajgudde. This is being done on steep slopes and today the twenty year teak plantation has been invaded by a weed known as eupatorium. In Yellapur forest division the teak plantations have done great damage to the soil condition as the topsoil in these teak plantation areas have been washed off and the laterisation process has set in. One wonders what will happen once this teak is harvested in a time span of seventy years. All these areas will be deserts.

Eucalyptus has also taken its toll in destroying the mixed forest areas. We saw that it was being tried in midst of thick evergreen forest in North Kanara district. The evergreen forests were gradually degraded to semi evergreen, then to deciduous forest and eventually to shrub forests.

Selective logging—A big FRAUD

In forest and environment terminology the term 'selective logging' means least disturbance to the nature of forests. However our observations point out that the evergreen forest near Yana in Kumta taluka and on the steep slopes of the ghat ranges has turned to semi evergreen and to deciduous in its nature. Some species of trees are felled by WIMCO for softwood and in addition to this the demand of plywood has gobbled a lot of these natural forests. There is a national highway in these thick evergreen forests. The selective logging never takes into account the trees felled for constructing these forest roads. The shocking factor is that, these areas should have been the Protected Forest areas which maintain the ecological balance and support the life styles of thousands of people. This out of greed, of man is ready to dig his own graveyard for financial gains.

Destruction of the life supporting systems

Large scale felling of virgin mixed forests has had direct

effects on lives of people. The Gudnapur tank near Sirsi Banavasi road has silted up to such an extent that it is dry in summer. In the same way the rivers of Aghanashini and Bedthi showed the signs of sickness. In almost all villages the traditional irrigational base was tanks, which are now silted up. They are of least help to the villages. In many villages the perennial water sources have dried up and they have to depend on wells.

A very great danger is posed due to the shortage of grass for cattle. The availability of fodder has decreased due to the monoculture plantations and the epitorium weed.

The farmers said "This year we have received rains in every fortnight. This has affected the whole cropping pattern". Thus the sowing season is postponed affecting the yield. During the period of 1983-84 the erratic rainfall has affected the kharif crop and the yield has come down by 20 to 40 percent. As a farmer from Deavas village said "Rains every fortnight have taken back the moisture from the land and we are facing water shortage in the wells and the ponds". This year's uncalled rainfall has also destroyed the groundnut crop in Madaralli and many other village.

Minor Forest Produce

Through Uttara Kannada is not a land of honey, its high forests attracted lots of bee hives and the people collected honey in tins. But this is now a part of history. As we were walking in the teak plantation, near Sampgod village, Putta Gowda said "This was once thick forest known as KARE GUDDE KANU. There was a Neeratii tree, a honey tree which sheltered 600 to 700 bee hives a year. I clearly remember that during my childhood days the tree sheltered 2000 be-hives. But this was only once in five years, that is during the flowering of a wild weed known as Gurige". This tree was felled to plant teak. There was some resistance from the people but they could not save it.

In Hebbare village there is a very special person called Jeanu Anna. (Honey Brother). This is a pet name given to

him as he is an expert in climbing the honey tree. He said "In my life I have seen a honey tree which sheltered 1200 beehives every year. The tree was near Karasulli. I was able to fetch honey only from twentyfive bee hives. About 15 years back this tree was felled by the Plywood factory".

These are just two instances which came to our notice. Even after denudation of forest cover we were lucky enough to see the honey trees which sheltered honey upto sixty bee hives in a single tree. We do not know exactly how many honey trees were sacrificed for meeting the need of plywood industry.

Ram Patre is a kind of jungle fruit which has commercial value. We saw that while extracting this fruit from the forest, the people have cut down the branches and in some cases the tree itself has been felled. The regeneration of this particular species is very hard. Another forest produce which is in great demand is Uppage—a fruit which can be called "Ghee tree". The Forest department has given tenders to extract this from the forest and during extraction the tender holders have cut down branches and a number of trees. In village, Jagdigadde, the villagers reported this to the Forest officials, but no action was taken.

If we do not take care of these precious trees, there is every danger that these species will become extinct.

Narayan Gowda, a Kari Vokkaliga showed us Kanabe beru—a kind of root in the midst of forest. Kanabe beru is used as local soap in the villages. A part of the root is taken and after mashing it, the root is mixed with water when washing cloth it gives lots of foam. Gowda showed it to us and using this local soap he washed our towel in the stream. It cleaned the cloth as effectively as any other soap, may be even better than man made soap. But even the people who were using root have been gradually shifting to soaps purchased from town.

Cane Smuggling

The Forest Department has given permission to extract 20,000 canes from Sampkhand Range during the year 1984.

Our enquiries revealed that by the end of April 84 about 600,000 canes were smuggled out of the place. In the forests the canes were extracted in such massive number that local people will not get the canes in coming years. We conveyed this fact to the Higher officials in the Forest Dept. But they are keeping quiet and till now the smuggling goes on. The local people are paid a daily wage of Rs. 40 to 50 per day.

Thus they are coopted to do the cane extraction. There is hardly any opposition from these people. Some people who supported us were threatened and their thatched huts were pulled down by Forest officials. This clearly shows the link between smugglers and the Forest dept.

Legalised smuggling

In the high forests of Yan we were surprised to see roads. We discovered later that plywood extraction took place in previous year. But they could not take away the trees on schedules. So they were allowed to take felled wood this year. But now they have cut down more trees in addition to those felled last year. They apply black manganese soil to the newly felled trees and they become "old" trees. This cunning game has been going on for years and the forest officials are aware of it. This is legalised smuggling.

People are also to be blamed

We were shocked to see that the greed for land has taken people to thickly forested areas. There they have felled trees and burnt them in the middle of the forest. This has been done with utter disregard of the fact that it is a hill slope or a dry patch of land. Removal of the tree cover and burning them leads to loosening of the soil and the heavy rains wash away the top soil leaving only the brick hard laterite cover. In one place after crossing Yana, in a place called Gumbliagadde about twenty five acres of evergreen forest has been clear felled to make way for cultivation. This will in coming years change the total forest near by.

Wherever there are human settlements, a large tract of forest

is cleared for growing grass. Unless this is halted immediately the nature of the forests cannot be kept intact.

To secure green manure a patch of evergreen forest has been cleared near the road side in Mattighatta. This is clearly visible from the comparison of these two areas.

The Forest Policy in Practice

The forest policy in practice does not allow the people to take wood for constructing a thatched hut or a house. In North Kanara the privileges of the local people to get wood at concessional rates have been withdrawn by a government circular. Now they have to buy wood to construct their houses from the town in competition with wealthy people. The villager who resides near the forest can watch a dead and fallen tree but cannot use it for his needs. We came across Timma Naik, a marginal farmer from Andagi village in Sirsi taluka whose thatched hut is awaiting repair. He cut a few poles for his house, 'Later on', he narrated the Range Officer came with the truck and took away the poles. He has also fined me for this. Now tell me, where should we go to get the poles? The Officer is not bothered if rich people smuggle out truck loads of wood'. These kinds of incidents were very common and we could see that the supporters of Appiko were deliberately harassed by the Forest officials.

With this kind of rigid policy the forest department has lost peoples' cooperation. Villagers now are not bothered if a dead tree catches fire putting the whole forest at risk. What is the use if they are not getting any kind of benefit? Unless the local people are taken into confidence the task of preserving forest wealth will just remain on paper.

Another problem faced by the villagers in Nilkund and Sonda area is the destruction of the crop by wild pigs and killing of cattle by tigers. The forest department prohibits people from shooting these and there seems to be no solution to the problem.

Ray of Hope

During our footmarch we came across some patches of greenery which were the results of peoples' efforts. In Hari-

she, Goranmane, and Hunsekoppa in Siddapur taluka some plots of land have been looked after so carefully that they have been able to raise local species. In the same way many people have tried to develop barren land into green field.

The School Plantation programme in Bhartnalli village in Yellapur taluk is one of the best. However the forest department has given only *Acacia* seedlings.

Conveying the Message of Appiko

In all we visited 300 villages and talked to many individuals on the road. The main part of our discussion took place during the slide show at night. The slides showed the importance of the forests, depletion of forest wealth due to the policies of the forest department, with people contributing to it by their deliberate mismanagement etc. People hotly debated the lopping pattern and burning of open areas to get fresh grass. We were able to convince them of the merit of this kind of practices.

In many villages they were not convinced and it may take time for them to see the change and learn accordingly.

The other media through which we conveyed our ideas were Appiko songs and Yakshagana. Yakshagana is local folklore in dance drama form and this medium is very famous. Through these aids we were able to reach the common man in the villages.

Many villagers walked with us from village to village. This is the most important time for us as the affects of deforestation and the present state are visible to all. We held discussions at this point with the villagers.

Women and children are also involved in the educating process. At many places women showed interest in the new type of smokeless chulha which saved fuelwood. This new chula is already famous in many area in Sirsi taluk.

People's Response

In general we got enthusiastic support from people. Many of them have started collecting seeds to be sown on barren land,

Some agreed to experiment with a small plot of land where they will not fire for grass. The most touching response came from the villagers of Ashisar in Sirsi taluka. There men, women and children asked all the padyatris be seated. They then performed "Aarati" and put Tilak on the forehead. They said "You have taken up the task of saving the future of mankind. This is just a beginning. Do not get disheartened with failures. We are with you in this struggle". The ceremony in the early morning hours gave us more strength to fight for the cause of Appiko.

In Conclusion

All through the footmarch we were able to observe the condition of forests. This first hand information gave us in depth knowledge of the actual state of forests. But it also made us feel that we are fighting a battle which is already lost. The condition of the forest is so appalling that we doubt whether true forests cover even 10 percent of the area. It is difficult to believe that the same area once consisted of 80 percent of forest. But the creative minority has shown to us that even in the face of distrust and helplessness we can, if we try, preserve the remaining forest wealth and plant more trees on barren land. These ideas need to be disseminated to larger areas in other parts of our country. Only then can we hope for a better future for mankind.

(Continued from page 3rd cover)

no commercial exploitation must be allowed in the hill areas of the country where density of the forest cover is less than 80 p.c. the minimum requirement for the ecological protection of soil and water resources that are the vital for the national economy.

This appeal is being made with the hope that a unanimous decision will be made by the government as well as the parties in the opposition on this vital issue of saving the hill forests of the nation. It will be a concrete step towards the fulfilment of the promises made to the people by the political parties in their manifestoes for the elections held in 1980. It will also help in creating a favourable atmosphere in the country for the achievement of the goal of development which is ecologically sustained.

Camp, New Delhi Chipko Information Centre, P.O. Silyara,
July 30th, 1984. Pin 249 155, Tehri-Garhwal U.P.

(Appeal submitted to Hon. Prime Minister and to the leaders
of political parties in the Parliament)

Gaps in Forest Policy

FOREST IN SOME of the developed countries die because of pollutants—nitrous oxide in automobile exhaust, hydrocarbons from factories and acid rain. In India, the denudation is mostly the result of the quest for fuel, timber, and space for siting projects and townships. Computations of ecologists indicate that at the going rate of devastation, the woods in the Western Ghats will disappear in five decades. In the north, the Garhwal area has lost most of its green cover irretrievably through the indiscriminate felling of trees and the extension of limestone quarrying. The Himalayan region which is the source of the northern river system is the youngest and the least stable of the fold mountains. When the monsoon beats down its southern slopes, the green cover is the only security against massive soil erosion. Because of this, ecologists say that the forest cover in this region has to be not less than 80 per cent. Satellite studies quoted by Mr. Sunderlal Bahuguna, leader of the Chipko movement, indicate that this density limit is being endangered by the loss of the green cover at the rate of 1.2 lakh hectares per year in the 1957-82 period. This point has constantly been reiterated by ecologists over the last decade and official spokesmen have been holding out the assurance that everything is being done to reverse the trend. Statistically speaking, the hectareage under afforestation schemes is on the rise. In five States—Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh and Assam, the area under forests is close to the targets, but the point is that the overall density of the vegetation in these areas is less impressive than it used to be because of the fringe effects of the devastation of the forests around this belt. In most other States including Kerala, the extent of forests as revealed by official data is higher

by as much as 20 per cent than what the satellite pictures indicate.

The Centre does have under implementation a forest policy for increasing the green cover to the optimal 33 per cent which is deemed necessary to prevent aridity and soil erosion through floods. The States have their forest development units, but there are no signs on the ground of their having tackled the problem of denudation competently. Recognising the intensity of the demand for fuel and timber, social forestry projects have been started to meet these requirements by coordinating felling and replantation of quick growing species. But a peculiar deficiency of this programme is that it has not been correlated with the more fundamental survey and settlement programme. Forest reserves and settlements which are the only means to foster conventional forestry do not get attention they deserve in the race among States in fulfilling their social forestry targets. Added to this, there is the heavier impact of political or populist considerations which permit activities which go against the norms relating to forest reserves and settlements. There are also the deficiencies in the implementation of the forest policy which arise because of the inadequacy of skills as well as personnel. The official in charge at all levels are not unaware of the deficiencies. What is at stake is the climate and soil complex which decides whether the country or any part of it will remain fertile or turn into a desert patch. There is need for a timely action programme which rolls back any possible desertification through effective afforestation policies by reconciling the conflicts triggered by the need to preserve forests in the teeth of the growing pressures from the users.

—*The HINDU, August 1984.*

(Continued from 2nd Cover)

direction. While J and K is absolutely silent about moratorium Himachal Pradesh is still discussing it. The Aravalli in Rajasthan is completely denuded while the Western Ghats are in a critical situation.

The main reason for this dangerous a pathy towards the hill forest is the wrong notion that there are large forest areas in the hills. Unfortunately, the Sattelite imageries give a completely different picture. As for example, according to the interpretation of NRSA Himachal Pradesh possessed 15.08 lakh hectares of forest in 1974-75. Strangely enough, the forest department figures are between 21.69 and 29.37 lakh hectares. However, the forest area in 1980-83 was only 9.13 lakh hectares showing a loss of about 6 lakh hectares that means about 1.2 hectares per year. Forest area with 30 percent cover is only 6.70 lakh hectares in H.P. There are no figures available for UP hills but according to Dr. J.S. Singh and Dr. S.P. Singh of Kumaon University, based on Sattelite imageries, there is only 31 per cent forest area in the 8 hill districts of UP out of which forests with density of more than 60 pc. are only 4.8 p.c.

The forests in the hills perform very significant ecological fuctions that are in the basis of economic activities like production of food and renewal of vital water resources. The hill forests are the store-houses of the water resources of the country and manufacture its fertile soil which supports all agriculture. Forests with less than 80 or 90 p c. density cannot satisfactorily play these important roles. Their destruction accelerated commercial felling or through damaging practices like excessive resin tapping ensures permanent man-made floods and drought in which the nation loses millions of tons of fertile top soil the hundreds of crores of rupees worth of property over and above the great human tragedies. The Flood Commissions has reported that by 1980 within only nine years the flood-prone areas in the country had doubled to 40 million hectares. The drought-prone areas are similarly increasing and are now reported to cover 58 million hectares. These figures represent a catestraphis/ recurring loss to the country.

Keeping in view these great economic and ecological significance of the hill forests the defence to these forests should be treated with the importance and urgency attached to the defence of the country itself. A comprehensive policy should be made according to which the hill forests should be declared as protection forests so that they can perform their ecological roles properly save the nation from serious economic damage. Plan-tation of food, fodder, fertilizer, fuel wood and fibre bearing trees should be taken up to satisfy the local requirements of the people. Based on the available lands at data from which the density of the forests can be measured at once, it is imperative

(Continued on page 36)

Prayer for the Tree

*We thank thee oh God!
For thy trees.
Thou comest very near to us
Through thy trees.
From them we have
Beauty, wisdom, love,
The air we breath,
The water we drink,
The food we eat,
And the strength.
Help us oh God!
To give our beet to life
And leave the world a little more beautiful
And worthy for having lived in it.
Prosper thou our planting
And establish thy Kingdom of Love
And understanding on Earth.
Amen.*

*Richard St. Barbe Baker
(Man of the Trees)*

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