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Environmental Degradation:

Shadows of 'Development'

Arun Kotenkar

If all the pronouncements of politicians, scientists, journalists and NGO-activists are any indication, 'environmental degradation' has really come of age! Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers for Environment exert themselves to show how 'green' they are! Rhetoric on environment (sustainable development, ecological harmony etc.) is flourishing, but with very little practical consequences.

From the ecological point of view, the term 'sustainable' would mean a sound and balanced relationship between living beings and their environment and also the capacity to regain the balance in case of disturbance. In this definition it is obviously presumed that the genuine basic needs of living beings are fulfilled. But for many, sustainability has a different meaning. How to sustain the extensive exploitation of existing resources for consumption without caring for their recovery or regeneration? Massive industrialisation is assumed to be the key for 'development'. The more and faster the resources are exploited, the sooner we attain unlimited prosperity. This is the prevailing attitude.

There has to be a drastic restructuring of the destructive industrial system. A change in the elaborate lifestyles of the elite is also called for. Though many realise that something is going wrong with the environment, they still hope to maintain the present

environmental crisis can be solved by technological trouble-shooting measures, defending simultaneously the socially unequal and ecologically incompatible structures.

Many people take the standpoint that the Third World should first concentrate on rapid industrial growth, solve its poverty problems, and worry later about the environment. Environment is seen by many leaders as a barrier to 'development'. But there is now sufficient evidence and experience to demolish this kind of thinking. Ecological destruction is emerging as a major cause of poverty itself. The poor are the main

victims.

When forests are logged by timber companies, thousands of tribal and rural people lose their resources. When big trawlers sweep up the



growth-oriented economic and cultural systems. This dominant ideology is backed up, when necessary, with political means or even police force, when concerned people resist. Often, environmental disasters are considered by these elites as unavoidable side-effects of 'development' which can be controlled by devising new technology or by enacting pollution laws, so that life can go on happily as usual.

These growth-oriented systems of production, consumption and culture are, in the long run, unsustainable. We cannot fool ourselves that the

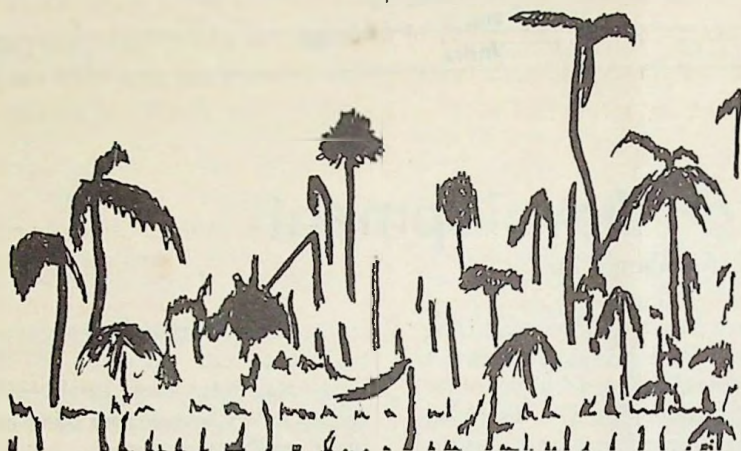
INSIDE

Environment:	
Eco-logical Answer	3
Editorial	3
Declaration: Workshop on Environment and Development:	4
Trees and You (Poem)	6
News from our Arcas	7

R.V.
25/4/91

marine resources, thousands of traditional fisher-folk lose their livelihood. When industries dump their toxic wastes into rivers or on open land, farm lands are destroyed, direct water supply of the poor is contaminated. Thus, dangerous and chronic diseases are becoming common. About 40,000 farmers and

The energy consumption per capita in USA is about 35 times, in Europe about 20 times than that in India (*World Resources 1987: India 8, Europe 165, USA 280 gigajoules*). Within India the relations are similar between the upper and middle class consumers on one side and the poor people on the other side. Industrialised countries



consumers die every year from the use of toxic pesticides.

When western companies find it more profitable and want to avoid protests from their people in the West, they shift their hazardous industries to the Third World. Bhopal is a well-known example. When huge industrial projects come up in the name of 'development' and 'helping the poor', they displace thousands of people from their sources of livelihood. About 5 to 6 lakhs of people are displaced every year in India. According to the World Watch Institute in Washington every year about 10 million people in the Third World become "environmental refugees", victims of 'development' which is increasingly cutting off the access for the poor people to useful water, grassland, agricultural land and forests. The construction of dams on Narmada (with the help of the World Bank) will displace more than 3 lakhs of tribal and rural people.

The issue of ecology must be seen in the context of unequal distribution of resources and wealth worldwide and within a country. There is very little for a majority of people to fulfill their basic needs. The elite will continue to use and destroy world's resources.

account for 5/6 of world's chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) use, adding to the "greenhouse effect". They use 3/4 of fossil fuel. This 'development' must stop at once and possibly reversed.

If we look for the cause of many problems of ecology, it turns out to be the very notion of 'development' which we have internalised. Fulfilling the boundless 'wants' by putting faith in technology is the present understanding of 'development'. This must inevitably destroy the environment.

GLOSSARY

Ecology:

Study of the household of nature (Greek: *oikos* = household; *Logos* = knowledge).

Erosion:

The breakdown of solid rock into smaller particles and its removal by wind, water or ice.

CFC:

(Chlorofluorocarbons) Compounds of carbon and halogens, named 'freons', used mainly in aerosol cans, refrigerators, air conditioners, plastic foams etc. Released into the atmosphere they are dissociated under ultra-violet radiation to release free atoms of chlorine which cause depletion of ozone. The ozone layer in the atmosphere is a protective shield for living beings on the earth. Many countries including the USA, Canada, Sweden and in Europe have banned the use of CFC in most aerosol cans.

Greenhouse effect:

Heating of the air caused by permitting incoming sun rays but inhibiting outgoing radiation. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, produced by the combustion of fossil fuel, absorbs the sun rays, heating the atmosphere.

HITLERISM AGAINST NATURE

We are fond of extolling the achievements of man and are apt to talk with pride of his conquest of nature. This is at present of the same order as the Nazi conquest of Europe. As Europe is in revolt against the tyrant, so is nature in revolt against the exploitation of man. When man preys upon man it is a form of cannibalism. When men set out to 'conquer' nature by exploitation, it is no less a form of cannibalism, for man is a part of nature. If he is to survive he must learn to cooperate with his fellow men. If he refuses to learn this lesson, nature will hit back and exterminate him no less surely than the oppressed masses of tortured Europe are already hitting back, and will shortly exterminate the tyranny that has been ruling them since 1940.

-From the book *The Living Soil* by E.B. Balfour.

ENVIRONMENT: Eco-Logical Answer

The increasing emphasis on ecological harmony among western scientists and thinkers is a natural fallout of an "exploiting" philosophy. For those outside this ideological trap, the concept of *Gaea* - of living earth - is but a natural and perfectly logical part of the symbiotic relationship that exists among all beings in this universe, both animate and inanimate.



The sudden interest in ecology by the so-called developed countries has not developed out of a sudden altruism or a love for nature. Indeed their prescription has been that the developing countries which have 80% of the world's population but use only 20% of the world's resources should cut down on consumption. This moral posturing to further their grossly destructive life-styles is fully supported by the national elites of developing countries.

To develop and adopt a totally environment-friendly lifestyle necessarily means a total rejection of the present destructive structures and can only be a part of a new integrated approach to life - one that is more friendly not only to fellow humans but also to all constituent parts of our

Edwin Jayadas

cosmos. The emphasis will be on satisfying the needs of all before embarking on the non-essentials. Coexistence, both with fellow beings and nature, and not "exploitation" of resources whether natural or human, will of necessity be central to such a doctrine.

While it is difficult for all individuals to make global policy or to drastically change the direction the world is moving in, those really concerned about the state of our environment can begin by being vegetarian. It makes ecological and economic sense.

Technology Vs. Environment

Imbalances in economic development have resulted in the rapid depletion of natural resources. The perception of development and progress endorsed by international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF has given rise to complex structural deficiencies leading to ecological disaster and cultural disintegration.

Big dams which are part of the dominant development scenario have uprooted the indigenous people and have visibly marginalised them. Water-logging and salination is steadily endangering the agro-systems of vast areas. Irrational timber logging and deforestation leads to erosion of fertile surface soil. This not only degrades land but also raises the river/tank bed and also increases the possibility of flash floods. Desertification and soil degradation are the disasters we have brought upon ourselves.

Land is being degraded in other ways as well. For instance, an ever-increasing dose of chemical fertilisers and pesticides is being infused into the soil. The green revolution, popularisation of mono-culture, and emphasis on cash crops have all reduced the nutrient content in the soil. Modern industrial societies have failed to hold themselves responsible for the future of the coming generations.

The dangers from nuclear and other toxic waste, radiation, pollution of air, water and soil are all looming large. This has affected not only human beings, but also all other living beings on the earth. A majority of industries that are dangerous because of the radiation and pollutants they emit are located in the Third World countries. Many of the poorer nations have become dumping yards for industrial toxic wastes of developed countries.

We have been witnesses to Chernobyl and Bhopal. The Gulf War demonstrated how modern warfare can have serious environmental consequences.

The questions to be asked are, 'development for whom?', and 'development at what cost?'. Economic growth needs to be linked to environmental protection. A symbiotic relationship among human beings, the animal world and nature has to be established. A new thinking has to emerge and the political will to act has to be generated. There has to be a thrust towards low-cost, labour-intensive, people-oriented and environmentally sound technology. The search for alternatives needs to be a conscious striving of all responsible sections of society.

UNDERSTANDING OF MANIKGANJ

(Workshop on Environment and Development: A Sub-Regional Perspective)

This workshop of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and environmental activists of Bangladesh, India and Nepal, held at Koitta from October 9 to 13, 1990, expresses grave concern at the increasing ecological destruction in the Himalayan-Gangetic sub-region and, as its inevitable consequence, the steadily deteriorating living conditions of the entire population. The suffering of the poorer people, women, children and tribals has been disproportionately more.

There has been in the sub-region increasing incidence of floods, drought, quicker run-off of rain water, accelerated soil erosion, water-logging, depletion of ground-water, siltation of rivers, sand-bar formation, drying up of lakes and rivers in lean season, sand depositions during cyclonic storms and flash floods, and salt water intrusions in the deltaic regions. These are the results of increasing destruction of forests everywhere, from high alpine woodlands to mangroves of the coastal regions, apart from the tectonic forces active in the Himalayas. Barring the last factor, all are caused by humankind in the name of "Development".

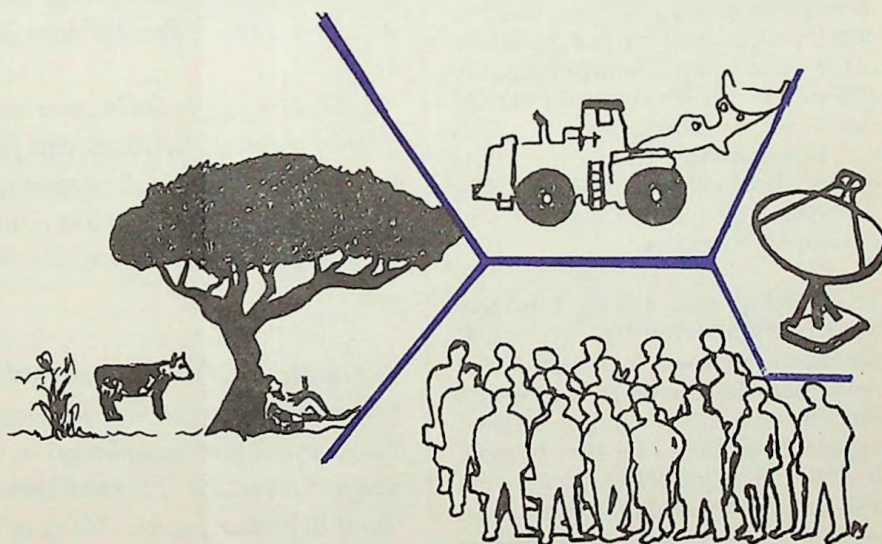
The use of fertilisers and pesticides has led to the ruination of the soil, destruction of aquatic resources and the erosion of production basis of produce such as pulses and milk. In the name of endowing the soil with artificial fertility, nature's fertilising agents have been destroyed. Agriculture has become a high-cost operation which has led to increased indebtedness of the poorer farmers and accelerating landlessness. The pull of commercialisation has deeply affected agricultural patterns, replacing subsistence crops with crops for industrial use. The induction of flush irrigation systems has led to

water-logging, soil salinisation and lowered ground-water levels. The induction of poisonous chemicals sprayed on the land have exposed peasants to new diseases. Even the unborn have been affected by the pesticide residues and toxic substances present in the womb and in mother's milk.

Forests are the natural regulators of the soil, water and air. Forests of the sub-region have traditionally been the reservoirs of fruit, fodder, fuel wood, medicinal plants and material for

disrupted. Inheriting the colonial form of silviculture, forest departments have engaged in clear-felling and replacing traditional tree species which are valuable for people's livelihood with timber of commercial value.

The existing policies which debar people's traditional access to their forests has led to the breakdown of mechanisms which had in the past ensured both the interest of people and the protection of forests. Transfer of custodianship to the forest



house construction. Given the importance of forest cover, the manner of functioning of the forest departments in Bangladesh, India and Nepal is a reason for special concern. In fact, these departments have proved inherently incapable of managing forests.

Today, the area under forest cover in the sub-region is much less than the required essential minimum. There has been a drastic reduction in the diversity of plant and wildlife species in the surviving woodlands. At the same time the nexus between agriculture and forestry has been

departments in all three countries had led to widespread illegal felling, often with the connivance of forest officials. Ironically, in all three countries, the blame for forests destruction is placed at the door-step of the poorer people. Forests have also been destroyed because governments have pushed big dams and large industry and township projects in pristine wooded areas. Unimaginative road-building programmes have opened up the deep forests for settlement.

Forest destruction leads to loss of the soil's water-holding capacity, drying up of surface water, and blocking of

the recharge of groundwater. This has imposed a crushing burden on villagers, particularly women who have to trek longer distances to fetch water and fuel wood. Deforestation has also cut at the very root of life and culture of the tribals of South Asia, whose communitarian spirit and conservation ethic have been assaulted by the steady destruction of their woodlands. The right of the people to a safe and sustainable environment has been wrested from them by existing forest policies of the sub-region.

DOMINANT DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

Much of the environmental maladies of the sub-region have flowed from the "dominant development paradigm" which, in the name of increasing the Gross National Product, has been undermining the common people's access to resources for healthful living. The prominent features of the dominant mode of development can be summed up as follows:

*This mode survives on the basis of a "destructive circularity" which might begin with the setting up of new industries and building of dams, which lead to deforestation, which in turn leads to erosion and siltation. This is followed by floods and ends in human misery marked by social, political and cultural fallout. The term that aptly describes this whole process is ecocide.

*The patriarchal tendency gains the upper hand in this mode of development, giving birth to newer forms of gender-violence against women. Although "modern development" has played a positive role in terms of fighting pre-modern superstitions, it has given rise to many forms of equally dangerous dogma and irrationality.

*The dominant mode of development is marked by the emergence of new patterns of colonisation, occurring not only at various international levels of economic expansionism and control

but also within the structures of the nation-states of the sub-region. Within the nation-state, colonisation is deeply felt by various social, ethnic, cultural and gender groups.

*Cities, as the focus of "development", register malignant growth while the villages decay. This anomaly results in the rise of unemployment, mushrooming slums, eruption of vices and violence of all types - social, economic, political and environmental.

* This mode of development survives on the basis of centralisation of all types of power at the apex of the system, and the usurpation of people's power. There is increasing reliance on militarisation and growing insecurity among the people. Together with the

proposes three categories of action to be taken by the NGOs of the sub-region.

I. ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES:

Many NGO groups have already set in motion programmes on the environment and related alternatives, mostly at the field level and involving the participation of people at the grassroots. These programmes can be taken by more groups active at the grassroots level in the sub-region. Such programmes should include the following:

1. Promotion of the type of development which is energy-efficient, non-pollutant, not amenable to centralisation, "women-friendly", and is low-cost

Today, the area under forest cover in the sub-region is much less than the required essential minimum. There has been a drastic reduction in the diversity of plant and wildlife species in the surviving woodlands. At the same time the nexus between agriculture and forestry has been disrupted. Inheriting the colonial form of silviculture, forest departments have engaged in clear-felling and replacing traditional tree species which are valuable for people's livelihood with timber of commercial value.

centralisation of power, there is lack of popular participation in programme development. Hasty and immature decision-making is fueled by an inordinate reliance on foreign funding and participation. The existing top-down approach to development provides preferential protection to the interests of a country's elites.

* The predominance of economic forces marks this paradigm of development. Among its negative results is the disappearance of spiritual values.

* The consumption pattern of the elites sets an example for the other classes, including the poor.

ACTION PLAN

To counteract the environmentally destructive legacy of the dominant mode of development, the workshop

and appropriate to the local setting.

2. Afforestation with multiple species on high mountains, wastelands, roadsides and embankments. Access of the people to forests should be the guiding light of these activities. Local communities must be given, if not ownership, then the guarantee of long-term use of forest lands and produce.

3. Programmes to stop chemicalisation and resort to organic natural farming.

4. Promotion of inter-cropping and crop rotation to maintain the symbiotic relationship between crops.

5. Regeneration of lakes, desiltation of rivers and excavation of agricultural tanks; promotion of open water fisheries; measures to stop the

depletion of ground-water, and the rejuvenation of mangroves.

II. TRAINING:

1. Re-examining existing training programmes and methodologies, giving central thrust to ecological concerns. Organising sub-regional workshops for trainers.
2. Promote understanding of inter-regional issues through training of grassroots workers by organising exposure programmes.
3. Strong communication links between the NGOs of Bangladesh, India and Nepal in order to clear misconceptions regarding environmental issues and to support each other's activities.

III. DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH:

1. Case studies of the effect of technologies on environment and development.
2. Environmental policy review at the regional level.
3. Advocacy and its role in sub-regional environmental activity.
4. Role of local and indigenous technologies.
5. The relationship between belief systems of different areas and groups and the environment.
6. Critique of the patterns of activity by multinationals, as well as multilateral and bilateral funding agencies.
7. An action study programme on women and the environment.
8. Promoting the role of information exchange through media and NGOs to provide better knowledge and understanding of regional environment and development issues.

Trees And You

*Cradle for you as a child
Baby cart for training you to walk
Wooden toys to play with
A slate to start writing
Pencil to scribble
Rubber to erase
Cane to the teacher to teach you
Wooden cot you sleep on
Chairs and tables you use to study
Sofa to relax
Almyrah and book shelf to keep your things
Doors and windows of your house
The broom you use to clean
Rope to tie things
Paper to read, write and other use
Leaves plate to eat and drink
Cardboard box to keep item
Ladder to climb
Foot mat and carpet for (cleanliness)
Platform for marriage and other ceremonies
Wheel chair when sick
Walking stick when old
Coffin when die
Fuelwood for cremation
Matchstick to light fire
In addition to food and oxygen, I give fodder to
Your animals and manure to your crop.
Hence use me carefully.*

Courtesy: Caritas India

Publication:

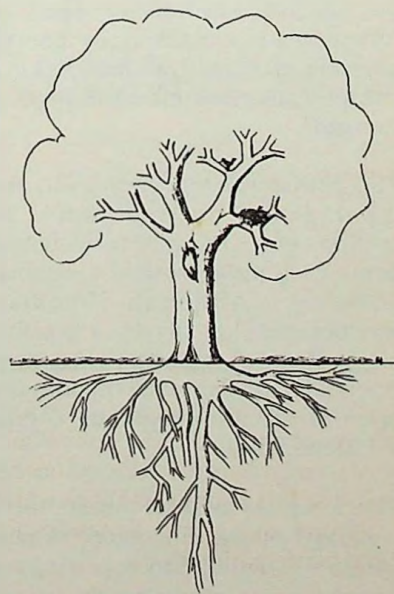
Fedina has published the much acclaimed book *Where There is No Doctor* in Kannada. The translation work was done by Drs. Sharada Dabade and Gopal Dabade of Kittur. Copies of this book are available at Fedina Office, Bangalore.

Name: Tree Medium Size
Age: 50 years
Occupation: Voluntary Service
Life Span: 20 to 200 years

Services Rendered

Production of Oxygen @ Rs. 5/- per kg. 1000 kg/year	2.5 lakhs
Pollution control	5.0 lakhs
Control of soil erosion and fertility, humidity recycling of water	3.0 lakhs
Shelter/home for animals, birds, fruits, flowers, fire wood, protein conversion	5.15 lakhs
Timber	0.05 lakhs
Total	<u>15.70 lakhs</u>

(Often tree is cut for timber which is hardly 0.3% of its real value.)



NEWS FROM OUR AREAS

SARJAPURA

International Women's Day:

March 8th will not be easily forgotten by the people of Sarjapura. Women from all the villages turned out in large numbers to celebrate the 3rd International Women's Day at Sarjapura. S. Sarojamma, the Headmistress of the Middle School at Sarjapura, was the chief guest. Y. Shreerama, an active local dalit, spoke about the role of women in society. An exhibition of the various programmes of Fedina was also



organised to mark the occasion. Samples of locally made medicines which are quite effective in treating common diseases without any side-effects were also displayed.

Leadership Training for Women:

Since our programmes at Sarjapura are mainly women-oriented, it was decided to conduct a leadership training for women. 21 women participated in this 3-day programme conducted at I.Y.D. premises at Koramangala. Being away from their usual surroundings of the village, helped them to actively participate in the workshop without any outside interference and much freedom. Our own staff members were the resource people for this training. There were discussions and group dynamics to initiate participation by all.

Community Halls:

Even though it was planned to have community halls in all the villages where we function, non-availability of land has made this dream a remote possibility. However, work is going on in two villages and is progressing well. A third village where land is available has also been identified and the work should begin there in the near future. Pressed bricks are being used in all the community halls. Alternative roofing system will also be used to reduce the amount of wood. This method of roofing will reduce the use of steel considerably.

H.D. KOTE

Creche Programme:

In all the 5 creche centres of Fedina at H.D. Kote we give importance to health, attendance and cleanliness of children. Equal importance is also given to the establishment of good relationship of parents and children. To give motivation for these objectives, we have introduced a scheme of giving prizes to children who perform well in the above objectives.

Capart follow-up Programme:

27 people participated in this 3-day programme which was conducted at Damanakate. The function was inaugurated by the Zilla Parishat President. Local government

authorities also actively participated in this programme. Evaluation of our training programme, tribals and the environment, government programmes, tribal culture etc., were the main issues dealt with during these 3 days.

Tribal Health:

With the help of Vivekananda Youth Movement, Fedina-Vikasa organised a one-day meeting at Nadahadi tribal settlement. About 120 women and 50 men participated in this function. A special attraction of this gathering was the Baby Show that was organised to mark the occasion. Prizes were given to the most healthy babies. Traditional medicines were prepared in the presence of the participants to demonstrate their use. The entire programme was funded by the tribals themselves.

WAYANAD

Core team meeting:

At the beginning of January 1991 our team at Wayanad had two weeks of intensive discussion and meetings to prepare an action plan for the first half of the year. This has resulted in the drawing up of programmes upto July. Even though this programme schedule keeps the team on their toes, they have been quite successful in implementing all the activities until now. It was decided at this meeting to rearrange the staff and programmes. The practice of giving full responsibility of a particular area to a particular team member had its limitations. Hence it is planned that each of the core team members will be involved in the specific programmes of other areas as well.

Environment:

Special emphasis is given to environmental issues in the action plan for the first six months of 1991. To this effect film shows, slide shows and exposure trips are being

conducted. Our team spent one day at Kuruva Island which is a natural forest about 60 kilometres away from Sultan Battery. This was an enriching experience for our staff.

Adivasi Aikya Samithy:

It is to the credit of our team at Wayanad that the Adivasi Aikya Samithy has reached the stage where they are competent enough to take over the programmes in all the areas. It has been a long process of training, meetings and discussions. Now the Aikya Samithy is in charge of all the activities and the core team plays only an advisory role. Non-tribal animators are replaced by the tribals.

Formation of Balavedi:

As a counterpart of Adivasi Aikya Samithy, we have formed a samithy called Balavedi. The members of the Balavedi are Adivasi children in the age group of 10 to 15. The system of functioning is the same as that of the Aikya Samithy. It is hoped that this Balavedi will develop a counter cultural reform among the tribals in future. Two camps were organised for the members of the Balavedi - one in Wayanad and the other in Tamil Nadu. Both the camps were well attended.

Workshop on Health:

In the month of February, Dr. Gopal Dabade of Kittur conducted a workshop on health for our team at Wayanad. During the 3 days of workshop, the participants were given a clear picture of the health situation in India and the problems facing the tribals in Wayanad. He also explained to them about the essential drugs, banned and bannable drugs, use of tonic etc.

NILGIRIS

Extension of work:

Fedina has extended its activities to 11 more villages in Nilgiris, making the total number covered in this area to 30.

To cope up with the extra work load it was inevitable to increase the number of staff as well. Hence one field officer, one community organiser and nine more animators were appointed. The office at Nilgiris is also shifted to Bitherkad where facilities are adequate to cater to our needs.

Street dramas:

These dramas were to highlight the plight of women and the problems they have to encounter in the villages. Ill-treatment of women by their drunken husbands, exploitation by landlords, discrimination against women etc. were very effectively presented through these dramas which lasted for two days.

Medical Camp:

Dr. Satyanar from the Doctors Corporate Hospital of Sultan Battery conducted this camp where more than hundred men, women and children participated. Importance of hygiene, nutritious food, preventive and curative measures of various diseases were explained. Medical check up and distribution of medicines were also organised at this one-day camp.

Legal Seminar:

A one-day seminar was organised at Ambalamoola for all the office bearers to impart basic knowledge of law. This is an important aspect as the people are not aware of their fundamental rights. Quite a bit of malpractices and exploitation could have been avoided if the tribals knew their basic rights. Their ignorance is well-exploited by the landlords and politicians for their vested interests.

KITTUR

Land Issue:

Much time and energy was spent in recent months to look into the issue of land which is a crucial problem facing the poor and marginalised people of Kittur. Our staff at Kittur have managed to organise the people and to make them aware of the various types

of exploitations to which they are subjected to. Once the powerless become powerful and organised, they challenge the systems that go against them. This is not very palatable to the landlords and politicians, who always had their own ways of functioning. Many instances of exploitation and corruption especially regarding land issues are being examined not only by our own team at Kittur, but by other agencies as well.

CHENGAM

Fedina-Scope:

Social Centre of People's Education at Chengam taluk of T.S.R. district in Tamil Nadu is another area where Fedina has extended its activities recently. 17 tribal hadis in the hilly areas of Chengam are covered in this programme.

Community Health:

An area of much concern for Fedina at Chengam is the health problems facing the tribals there. In view of this we conducted two-day health camps in two villages during which the doctors and nurses who came as resource persons explained to the people about the importance of health and common diseases affecting the tribals at Chengam. Much care was taken to create awareness among the tribals about the need for curative and preventive measures. Medical check-up and distribution of medicines were also done as part of the camp.

Legal Aid Camp:

About 2000 people from all the hadis assembled for this one-day camp. The Village Administrative Officer and many lawyers spoke on this occasion highlighting the rights of the tribals. Problems regarding land issues were discussed in detail. Many of the local newspapers gave adequate coverage.

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