



**BROWWATCH**



**Standards to fall**

Industries using advanced technology, housed in other countries, deforestation, destruction of lakes and ponds and the degradation of our cities has become the hallmark of our nation today. "A lack of democracy and non-implementation of laws" are among the reasons responsible for such environmental problems, said Deputy Chairperson of the Karnataka Legislative Council, Raju Saitish. She went on to add that India lags far behind other developed and developing countries with regards to environmental protection. If such trends do not change, we can anticipate a sharp fall in the living standards of all Indians in the days to come.

**Brown for prawn**

In a historic judgement in defence of the livelihoods of over 50 million coastal people, the supreme court ordered the demolition and destruction of thousands of aquaculture prawn farms set up by multinationals and Indian companies in an estimated one lakh acres of ecologically fragile lands along the country's coast. These areas had been taken over and encroached upon by prawn farms using money and muscle power. In future, no public and/or government land can be diverted for aqua-farming, stated the Supreme Court.

**Their last swing**

One of the rarest of the pinnacled species, the golden langur is facing extinction. Increasing encroachment on their habitat and smuggling have led to a sharp decline in their numbers. The Chakrapathi Wildlife Sanctuary is one safe haven for them, say activists of Nature's Renown, an environmental group. Though there have been encouraging trends in recent months, the government response to the crisis is still not adequate, they point out. Primarily all over the Northeast are in trouble on account of large scale deforestation.

The issue of people and parks is destined to take on greater significance in the days to come. This view expresses one issue of immediate and serious concern writes

Ashish Kothari

**ENVIRONMENT**



Pic: R Yadav

Adivasi cellars should be used to further conservation objectives. But how will this be possible if the adivasis themselves are alienated from the objective of meeting forest?

**Clean the air, but not at cost of poor**

In India, the natural environment is important not only for its aesthetic and intangible ecological benefits but more so for being the source of livelihoods for hundreds of millions of poor people who rely on a daily living from land, forests and water and wildlife. While it is morally imperative that nature be protected, the survival of the poor cannot be swept aside.

The Supreme Court orders to relocate 1500 polluting industries from Delhi, and to throw out all encroachment from the Delhi Ridge Reserved Forest, are laudable landmarks. Over 9000 workers employed in these industries may be rendered jobless, and cash compensation is no substitute.

The slum dwellers and villagers who are being thrown out of their current settlements on the Ridge, also number several thousand.

At the same time, luxury bungalows belonging to influential people, which are immediately adjacent to the villages have been declared to be outside the Reserved Forest, and thus allowed to stay on.

Other examples are symptomatic of a malaise that has deep roots in the urban environmentalism. The legitimate concern for wildlife conservation has resulted in the establishment of an extensive network of protected areas (PAs). These areas harbour some of our most precious natural and wildlife populations, but they are also home to perhaps over three

million rural people. Unfortunately, conservationists demands for strict protection have resulted in the forced relocation of thousands.

Conservationists justifiably point out that outside women enter into (fish markets in Pench, the land mafia in Bhopal) often benefits the name of the poor, and that resource exploitation is often extremely destructive. But in the process of targeting these unscrupulous elements, the poor who are worst affected.

Unfortunately, most conservationists have remained unorthodox about helping the poor to gain a respectable livelihood which does not take them away from the clutches of commercial interests.

Unfortunately too, human rights activists have ignored the fact that legally protected areas have often been the only defence against destructive industrial expansion, and that sharply divided local communities are not always the best conservationists.

Environmentalists are unthinkingly acting out of a legitimate sense of urgency and desperation. Yet, though we cannot always predict the outcomes of their actions, we seem to be very slow learners from past experience, and suffer from huge blind spots.

We put full faith in bureaucratic action to save the environment or rehabilitate the poor, though we know that governments lack the will-power to do so.

We feel (rather nervously) that any resource that is de-

stroyed is detrimental to biodiversity, but accept (more so) to be "eco-tourism" in the same area, and nothing in it ourselves.

Most damaging is our blind spot towards our own consumerist demands on resources which give rise to many of the country's destructive developmental projects. Marble from mining in Simsha Tiger Reserve adorns our homes, our cars, and the cars which we want the Delhi Ridge to be starry.

We do not want the eye-see industries which produce the products we use, as we do condemn them being relocated, a somewhat area where they result in terrible degradation of agricultural land and hazards to the air and water of villages.

As urban environmentalists, we must be willing to confront the model of development which we benefit from, and which is the cause of many of the problems.

The problems of Raghu National Park emanate not from Cujars and rope-makers and more from the unchecked urban expansion of Dehraadun and Roorkee and Haridwar, the Chilla Hydro-electricity channel, and massive industrial complexes. All of which have created problems not only for wildlife but for the villagers of Tapladah who fish in the reservoir, the Pench dam itself, to build which the villagers were brought there in the first place.

Yet how many of these benefits for the name of the Chilla's name) or for taking off private cars from

Delhi's streets and replacing them by good public transport?

Some environmental groups have begun to speak out against the above injustice. Kalyanesh, Shreshth, Vatsavahan, WWF, DRAC, and others have condemned the action against slum-dwellers and villagers of the Delhi Ridge, and demanded that action instead be taken against the major destroyers. Wildlife conservationists like Feroz Sahgal have joined mass movements against destructive developmental projects, including movement leaders like Medha Patkar, have joined the appeal to protect the tiger.

As urban conservationists, we are realising that when it comes to the crunch, it is not we who will be blocking the bulldozers of development. It will be villagers whose livelihoods are threatened, as in Sandi Tiger Reserve where they stopped rampant mining. Local communities must therefore be involved in forest and wildlife conservation, with rig to decision making powers and to reclaimed resources.

Environmentalists and human rights advocates need agreement on some basic elements of a common platform, including no forcible replacement of local communities from either environmental or developmental projects; no exploitation of threatened wildlife species; rejection of commercial industrial projects in natural habitats; and equitable partnerships for conservation and livelihood generation.

Environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without social equity. Rich poor people and urban environmentalists have a common enemy in the commercial-industrial juggernaut which threatens to convert every natural habitat into new material and every rural community into cheap labour. The women of urban environmentalists create new food spoils and start keeping pigs from the points of view of the poor, the same will we be achieving our objectives.