



Report on Sahyadri Festival, Moodbidri

Save The Western Ghats Movement

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PREFACE:

The 2010 youth meet at Moodbidri, Karnataka was an attempt to carry forward the vision of Save the Western Ghats movement by invoking the youth of the Western Ghats to be shareholders in this process of change. This was an attempt to bring together, age and experience, enthusiasm and wisdom, so as to create a synergy between people which could as a result lead to better conservation efforts and more informed decisions about sustainable development in the region. The involvement, interest and enthusiasm of the youth, is critical for any such vision to take concrete shape and this was the first step towards filling that gap. The AERF Team comprising of Dr. Archana Godbole, Sayali Gaikwad, Nikhil Kulkarni and Hemant Angarkar were joined by 21 youth members from Maharashtra during this meet. This report is a compilation of the shared perspectives of the team members and the youth contingent regarding the Moodbidri conference.

INTRODUCTION:

25 years ago, a group of people had walked down the entire Western Ghats to understand the biological diversity and cultural heritage of the area. The vision behind this march was to conserve those resources and values for future generations. A long time has passed but the drive to act on their findings during the historic march continues. They themselves and other equally enthusiast people continue to meet and discuss the issues and how to deal with the new problems arising in the area. Sahyadri Festival at Moodbidri, Karnataka was one of those meets, where the issues of the Western Ghats are discussed and deliberated. The AERF team which has been working in the Western Ghats of Maharashtra since a considerable time represented Maharashtra in this meet.

As a team, it was a great opportunity to meet people from southern parts of Western Ghats and share the knowledge which they have gained through their activities in those areas. The conference was held for a period of three days and had a number of sessions and events lined up for the entire duration of the event. The entire team along with the youth volunteers participated in the conference for all three days and attended all the events in groups.

EVENTS:

Moodbidri was a beautiful place nestled in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. There were various cultural programs which described and brought to focus the cultural heritage of Western Ghats. This was very well received and appreciated by the participants.

We presented AERF's work in Northern Western Ghats with brochures and posters. We also



had volunteers and staff describing the work of AERF to the delegates and audience who visited the stall. Under the Energy and Biodiversity project of AERF, we produce Straight Vegetable Oil (SVO) of Karanj and Mahua. We had a small (scale model) engine which we used to give a demonstration of how engines can run on SVO, to the people present.

We also got to meet renowned personnel like Mr. Sunderlal Bahuguna who initiated the Chipko Movement and the renowned environmental advocate Mr. Ritwick Datta.

As a part of the events, we also visited the Kudremukh National park where we could see the Shola forest. But the mining site right in the middle of the park was a sad sight. The destruction was massive and the damage to nature is irreversible.

One of the most interesting parts of the conference was that, we could discuss various issues with the youth of different states who had come to the conference. Most of the issues were centered on the lack of action against the malpractices happening in the Western Ghats. All of us agreed upon the fact that, people who make decisions are either not sufficiently educated or corrupt or both. We met and interacted with all sorts of people, for example people who are working on road kills, human animal conflicts, in forest departments, etc. Some of them raised the point that data collection system is faulty. Faults are further amplified in the process of data entry, analysis, conclusion and finally decision making.

These photographs give a parallel account of all the proceedings at the Moodbidri conference



Cultural Programmes organized during the Conference





Shola Forest of Kudremukh National Park



Kudremukh iron ore mining in park



Weapons of destruction



Group discussion



AERF team presenting findings of discussion



Dr. Archana Godbole, Director, AERF, during a session.



AERF team member making a point during interaction with the youth



Stall of Team AERF



Model Diesel engine used for demonstration of SVO of Karanj and Mahua as a Fuel



Karanj and Mahua oil Samples with description



AERF team giving a Demonstration of the Engine



Mr. Sunderlal Bahuguna addressing participants

CONCLUSION:

The Moodbidri conference was a great opportunity for the entire AERF team and more so for the youth members of the contingent, to interact with other participants with similar views and interests. Most importantly it was significant because it brought together people with the shared goal of conserving the Western Ghats and bringing it back from the destructive road which it finds itself in. This conference was another step in strengthening the belief in the cause of Save the Western Ghats movement and a building block towards greater cooperation and activism between various civil society organizations and the youth of the country