

# Report on Meeting

## “Save Western Ghats Movement”



*January 28-30, 2011, Alva's Health Centre, Mijar,  
Moodabidri, Karnataka*

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&

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# SAVE WESTERN GHATS

## CONVERGING RESPONSES FOR MEETING COMMON CHALLENGES

*January 28-30, 2011, Alva's Health Centre, Mijar, Moodabidri, Karnataka*

The **Save Western Ghats Movement** has forced the Ministry of Environment & Forests to set-up a Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel to lay the foundation, for setting up the Western Ghats Ecological Authority. The panel has been engaged in **public consultations** over the past couple of months to collectively review its functioning and actions.

The third conclave of Save Western Ghats Movement was held under the aegis of Alva Group of Institutions at Moodabidri, Dr Mohan Alva being the generous host provided all the facilities at this amazing location in the Western Ghats, The previous annual gatherings were held at Goa and at Kotagiri.

It was decided in the 2010 meeting which was held at Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri, that the next meeting would be held at Karnataka. The venue selected was the sprawling campus of Dr Mohan Alva at Moodabidri, a campus now famous for cultural and well as educational activities. The organization team of Karnataka comprised of Sri Pandurang Hegde, of Sirsi, Sri G L Janardhan of Shimoga, and Dr Ashok Kundapur who was organizing secretary designate.

The meeting dates were selected in consultation with Dr Alva and staff members, and it was decided to have the meet from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2011.

Delegates from Maharashtra, Goa, Tamilnadu, Kerala and different parts of Karnataka participated in the meet. This meet focused on the involvement of the youth. The delegates were ushered in by the state leaders. There were 20 youth delegates from Maharashtra, 24 from Goa, 16 from Tamilnadu, 10 from Kerala and 18 from Karnataka. In all 88 student delegates apart from 200 other activists from these 5 states participated in the conference.

The participants met a day earlier on 27<sup>th</sup> January and discussed and deliberated on various aspects of the Meet. This was an opportunity for them to discuss the topics which need be highlighted and plan the strategies to tackle important issues.

Moodabidri (also called Moodabidre), an ancient centre of Jain learning, is a small town 37 km northeast of the Dakshin Kannada district headquarters, Mangalore, in Karnataka, India. Moodabidri comes from two words Moodu and Bidiru. Moodu means East and Bidiru means Bamboo. As this place is known for its Bamboo plantations, this place go named Moodabidri.

Alvas' Education Foundation was conceived and founded by a visionary chairman Dr. M. Mohan Alva, an Ayurveda Physician by profession and Philanthropist by heart. Alva's Education foundation is a living dream of Dr. M. Mohan Alva to impart quality education to students. Accommodation and hospitality was provided free of cost to all the participants throughout the course of 3 days.



DAY I

28<sup>th</sup> January 2011

## Inauguration



On 28<sup>th</sup> morning, the participants were welcomed by enchanting music, played by the Bamboo Group from Kerala using simple Bamboo instruments.



From top left clock wise:

Mrs. Shyla Suryavanshe,  
Dr. Ashok Kundapur,  
Mr. Panduranga Hegde  
Ananth Hegde Ashisara, Mr.  
Dinesh, Prof. Chandrashekar,  
Dr. Mohan Alva,



The event turned out to be a memorable one, with the Chairman of Western Ghat Task Force of Karnataka, Sri Ananth Hegde Ashisara, chairing the inaugural session. The Meet was inaugurated through the formal welcome speech by the Organizing Secretary Dr Ashok Kundapur. This opening ceremony was marked by watering a Tree sapling, which was then to be planted in Dr Alva's campus. Sri Panduranga Hegde traced the history of Save Western Ghats Meet – from the marathon march held some 25 years ago to the revival of the movement through the meetings held at Goa in 2009 and



in Kotogiri in 2010. He gave a brief introduction about the intended goal posts and tasks assigned for the present conclave. Miss Shaila Suryavanshi compered the program.

Sri Ashisar expressed his happiness regarding the involvement of the Youth which he believed would go a long way in strengthening the movement. He also spoke about his recommendation to the Chief Minister of Karnataka to allocate special funds for saving Western Ghats and also for dedicating a full fledged Research Station. He then highlighted some of the works that the Task Force had undertaken and the role they have played in banning mining in the Karnataka section of Western Ghat. Dr Mohan Alva, the primary sponsor and the Chief Guest of the Meet cautioned the group about people who work to fulfill their own selfish motives in the garb of environmentalists. Sri G L Janardhan, Chief coordinator of Environment Research Center of Shimoga, who was the President of the Meet, assured the chief guests and the participants that the meet will strive to achieve the goals which had been commonly decided upon. Prof A S Chandrashekar of Shimoga proposed the vote of thanks.

There were some very strong messages passed on to the youth delegates by the seniors who were addressing them. Mr. Ananth Hegde Ashihar urged the youth to voice the concerns of the environment and brought in this idea by saying that “Plants cannot vote”. Mr. Mohan Alva emphasized on the importance of recognizing “original and fake people while working” while Prof. Chandrashekhar invoked the youth to become “Green Warriors”.

### **Group Sessions:**

Seven groups were formed and were asked to discuss on issues related to the following subjects and then submit reports based on their deliberations.

- Land use and land cover changes
- Energy consumption and Conservation
- Forest and Indigenous People
- Wildlife and Human Animal conflicts
- Mining
- Waste management
- Tourism
- Plantations
- Water resources and its conservation
- Role of media in conservation
- Population and its effects
- Governance and the policies
- Culture and environment
- Movements, struggles and good models for conservation
- Education system and restless youth
- Environmental education systems

The brief issues discussed in the group sessions were as follows:

### **Land use and Land cover changes:**

Land use no doubt has to be reduced by the human race. Population explosion leads to encroachment. And such encroachment even extends to “the national parks” which is the last resort for wildlife.



The farmers are more eager to grow cash crops like cashew, coffee and tea instead of the food crops like paddy and ragi. This leads them to find a rich landscape that supports the growth of such crops. So, excessive cultivation of cash crops needs to be controlled. Use of excess chemical fertilizers and pesticides are major threats to the land and its fertility.

The alarming rate of increase in industrialisation leads to the purchase of land for non-agriculture purpose. The revised tribal act allows tribal community to be given land inside protected areas. The rehabilitation issues have to be critically reviewed on case-to-case basis and laws should be formulated while taking care to exclude wildlife areas from such critical acts.

Developmental projects like hydro and thermal power generation plants should not be permitted to be constructed, close to protected and eco sensitive areas. The Environment Impact Assessment should be mandatory for all such projects even if they are some distance away from protected areas.

### **Energy consumption and conservation:**

Energy utilisation has to be maximised by plugging the leaks in all stages. Decentralising power generation and looking for alternative power sources at all levels – individual houses, community and town – will ease the pressure on the natural resources.

### **Forest and Indigenous people:**

The forest tribes have educated themselves and become more organised. They are following the family system as in the cities and this is a true sign of saving the tribe from extinction, as inbreeding was prevalent among most tribes of Karnataka. They have now adapted themselves to a life where they work as farm hands, leaving behind their identity of being traditional hunters and gatherers. They have forgotten the tribal medicine, sense of smell and hearing and even many in the younger generation do not even know how to climb a tree. The wildlife poachers and wood poachers, as well as the rich landlords in the fringe of the forests, exploit them. Time has come to provide them an opportunity to come to the mainstream. They must be provided education and cultivable land, irrigational facility and support, medical care and also other vocational opportunities, to help them live a meaningful life and give them equal rights

### **Human and Wildlife conflicts:**

These conflicts primarily emerge due to various developmental activities like, building of roads through wildlife sanctuaries, dams, cattle grazing, deforestation, encroachment of forests for non forest purpose and tourism. All these activities are shrinking the wildlife habitats. Wood and Wildlife poaching along with deliberate forest fires, results in further overlaps in animal and human territories, which finally translates into Human and Wildlife conflicts.

Participants from various places expressed that, it is mainly due to poaching that the carnivores are devoid of their natural prey. This makes them come out of their natural habitats in search of food, ex. Sanjay Gandhi national park of Maharashtra.

The two national highways NH 212 and 67 passing through Bandipur national park has resulted in lot of animals being killed on the road by speeding vehicles. In Rajeev Gandhi National Park, the developmental work like building of water holes and forest roads by the

Forest department has resulted in Elephants coming out of their natural habitat and becoming victims of electrocutions.

In case of the Bannerghatta National Park, the Human-Elephant conflict is primarily due to the habitat destruction in their traditional migratory route due to human settlements. Apart from this, the influx of elephants from Cauvery wildlife sanctuary results in overcrowding of the park which is only 100 Sq Km in area.

One more view expressed was that, change in traditional crop practices by farmers in the fringe areas, draw the animals to the fields. Crops like paddy, sugarcane and horse gram are high in nutrition and are grown in place of cotton and other cash crops. This is majorly due to construction of dams and availability of irrigation facility to grow more than one crop per year and also availability of water during summer.

One of the reasons mentioned in the discussion was increase in the number of both human and animal population. However the group felt that it is impossible for animal populations to increase with rapidly decreasing habitat.

It was suggested by one of the groups that the access between cities through the national parks should be stopped and alternate access should be provided. Implementation of Supreme Court's order to create Eco-Sensitive zones for 10km from the borders of the national park will create the much-required buffer space for wildlife.

### **Mining:**

Various problems due to mining were discussed. The problems are area specific but the effect of mining on eco system is much more generalized. A blanket ban on all mining and related activities inside the protected areas and in the eco sensitive zones was proposed.

### **Tourism:**

All tourism inside the wildlife areas should be monitored and carrying capacity of each area should be scientifically determined and adhered to. Too much of tourism is creating disturbance to diurnal wildlife and increasing pollution at different levels. However the governments are looking only at the revenue generating capacity of wildlife areas and not the disturbance to the ecosystem or waste of resources in catering tourism to the masses, which is grossly insensitive to wildlife.

### **Plantations:**

Monoculture in the name of afforestation has rendered the afforested area as unproductive for wild life and ecology. The commercial plantations both inside and outside of the protected areas have affected the ground water table and the fertility of the topsoil.

In some of the protected areas, private commercial plantations are creating disturbance and hence should be removed with immediate effect. Ex. Coffee plantation right in the heart of BRT Tiger reserve, Encroachment of forests to make teak plantations in Bhadra Wildlife sanctuary, etc

### **Water resources and its conservation:**

Water is the most precious resource of all, and for southern India where all rivers are rain fed, it becomes more important to conserve the water. The forests of Western Ghats are the source

of all rivers of south and central India. It is important to save these precious forests in order to get perennial supply of fresh water. Industrial pollution is the giant killer of most of our rivers. The un-scientific usage of chemical pesticides has resulted in contamination of rivers at their very sources. The unscientific waste management has resulted in pollution of not only the rivers but all inland water bodies. The untreated sewage is let into these water bodies near towns and cities, killing and choking them. It is also wiping out the endemic fresh water flora and fauna. There needs to be a check to the extent of urbanization. There is gross misuse and wastage of potable water in cities. The modern toilets and increasing number of automobiles in house holds that need frequent washing are fast depleting the surface and underground fresh water reserves. If the exodus of rural and suburban populace towards cities is not stopped by providing the much required employment opportunities and basic facilities like electricity, education and hospitals at town and Panchayat levels not much can be done about saving the inland water bodies.

### **Role of media in conservation:**

The media is the prime tool to bring the current affairs of conservation to the public notice. Media can educate and make people aware about the need for conservation of resources. Media actually reports the truth and sometime the convenient truth within its operating limits to make people aware about the issues related to conservation and environment. Media helps to put pressure on the decision making bodied to act on time and in line with the requirement.

### **Population and its effect:**

The root cause of all the problems regarding over exhaustion of natural resources is population explosion. The population increase in cities is indirectly putting pressure on forest for resources. The human resources are under utilised and Natural resources are over harvested and wasted. The population demands more food and more basic facilities. The maximisation of available resources is not effectively carried out and there is a gross difference between the haves and have-nots.

### **Governance and the policies:**

The policies of the government are usually not helping the cause of the masses as far as conservation is concerned. The human oriented projects and development of cities and urbanisation of townships at the cost of nature are resulting in wastage of precious natural resources. It is not just wasting the resources, but also creation of voids and depletion of lung spaces and water sources, which are irreversible.

There needs to be a watchdog body, which can check such blatant violation of environmental norms by the government. The political will to conserve the natural resources, especially Western Ghats, which house so many endemic flora and fauna, is missing. The public should make it a point to elect the government, which is sensitive to environment related issues.

### **Movements, struggles and good models for conservation:**

There are many localized movements, which are fighting against projects that are eco hazardous. They are waging local battles regarding local issues. It is in the form of protests, demonstrations, legal battles and awareness programs. There is a need to take this fight in concerted manner, by bringing the entire local organisation under a single umbrella and make an impact on the government or judiciary. The best example cited for such movements which

aim at saving the nature, was the stopping of Kuduremukh iron ore mining. One such movement which is creating an impact on the decision-making bodies is the Save Western Ghats movement.

### **Education system and restless youth:**

The education system should be changed so as to educate the children and the youth about nature and its importance in their lives, thus making them more concerned about the conservation of the natural heritage.

### **Environmental education systems:**

There is Environment Education imparted in schools and colleges. But, it is just a formality as marks attained in the subject do not carry any significance and there are no dedicated teaching staffs to teach this important subject. If the government is serious about saving the environment, it should make efforts to make this a scoring subject and also implement projects and field visits for students to get first hand information about nature and its conservation.

### **Cultural Program:**



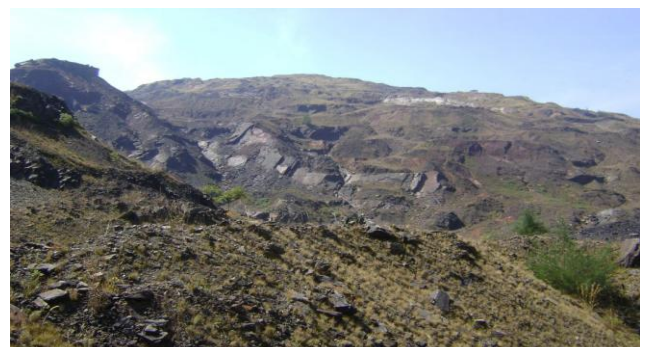
Discussions continued well beyond schedule time in the evening. This was followed by an excellent cultural event presented by the students of students of Dr Alva's foundation.

The performance included a Bharat Natyam and a Kathak recital. There was a folk dance performance from Tamil Nadu, Veera Gase Kunita of Karnataka (a folk dance event traditionally performed by men was rendered by all girls team), Sword Dance and Bamboo dance by students coming from North East India, who were studying at Alva's. The students were lavishly complimented and were given a standing ovation.

### **DAY II**

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

### **Field Visit**



The landscape of Kuduremukha forest and exposed mining area



Day two commenced very early with the participants lining up to board the Bus taking them to Kudremukh National Park. Karnataka Forest Departments Deputy Conservator of Forests, Dr Prakash Netalkar had made all arrangements to see that the tour was successful. His staff met the party near one of the perennial falls, the Kadve Falls, and then escorted us to the Kudremukh mining site, which was kept out of public sight for a long time. Participants were flabbergasted by the devastation caused by mining. The Range Forest Officer of the area Sri Kamble, briefed the gathering about the history of mining in the area.

**Kudremukh** is a mountain range in Chikkamagaluru district, in Karnataka, India. It is also the name of a small town situated near the mountain, about 48 kilometres from Karkala, The name *Kudremukha* (as it is known by the natives) literally means 'horse-face' (in the local language Kannada) and refers to a particular picturesque view of a side of the mountain that resembles the same. It was also referred to as 'Samseparvata', historically since it was approached from Samse village.

The devastating effects of mining were predominantly visible to us as we moved through the national park to reach the nature camp. On the way the details of the mining issues and how mining was stopped in the area was explained by Mr. Ritwick Dutta who is a Supreme Court Lawyer and deals with many of the environmental issues. Mr. Panduranga Hegde explained how mining was done when Kudremukh Iron Ore Company limited (KIOCL) was functional and how the water of Lakya dam was used for cleaning the ore. Huge machineries were still resting, non-functional, in the vicinity of the old factory area in a hope of becoming functional again. The government is still hoping that the case be reconsidered in court. The KIOCL is still paying its employees even though the company is non functional since five years.

After the visit participants were taken to Venur to witness local buffalo race known as *KAMBALA*. The group then moved to Bhagavathi Forest Resort for lunch.

Stimulated by their observations throughout the day, the youth demanded a late night meeting with senior members of Core group and discussed about various aspects of conservation strategies.

### **DAY III            30<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

On the last day groups were formed according to the states Maharashtra Goa, Karnataka, Tamilnadu & Kerala. The next generation leaders were identified and the plan of action was discussed with the expert panel. Many youngsters including Mr. Anirudh spoke in front of the panel and expressed their views and opinions.



Mr. & Mrs. Sundarlal Bahuguna during the event

The 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the meeting commenced with lot of expectations, because the organizers had invited more than 30 elected representatives from different levels of governance, from Assembly to Panchayat. Sri Palimar, the Minister of Environment and Ecology, Karnataka was the only person who honored our invitation, but did not spend much time nor presented his views to the gathering. The discussions continued with the youth, and senior members including Dr Pratim Roy, Sri G L Janardhan, Mr. Claude Alvares, and Mrs. Carmen Miranda. In a surprising move, the youth took over the proceedings and continued the discussions up to 3.30 pm. The organizing Secretary then briefed the youth as to the tasks they can do, like visiting nearby villages, having discussion with them on aspects of conservation, enacting small plays to enthuse them, writing articles about the importance of Western Ghats, launching a dedicated Web Site, contributing actively to it, and the like. He also reminded the gathering about some of the resolutions taken at Kotagiri meet, the previous year.

**"A true conservationist is a man who knows that  
the world is not given by his fathers but borrowed  
from his children."**

Chief Guest of the valedictory function Padma Vibhushan Sri Sundarlal Bahuguna arrived on time and the function commenced at 4.00 pm. Sri Bahugunajii talked on several aspects of conservation movements and suggested several far reaching programs like launching a Chipko like movement to save the Ghats, to ban the use of chemicals, to stop mining and construction of dams in the area. He suggested that Village centered programs should be launched in the future. Bahuguna raised the question that if one state government can ban a specific Pesticide, why can't other states do the same? He complimented Sri Shankaracharya Bhavathpad who hailed from Kerala and united the country at a spiritual level, and wished that such a person would emerge soon to unite the Countries Environment lovers. Shri Bahuguna's short presentation was followed by question and answer session between him and the eager and inspired audience.

Dr Vijayan, who presided the chair for the event cautioned the house that though the Endosulphan has been banned, it has resurfaced even in Kerala as Devisulphan. He also said that the Eco service value of Western Ghats is several crores of rupees per hectare per year, much more than that could be generated by any other human activity, this facts need to be brought to the notice of policy makers so as to safeguard the ever deteriorating environment.

Dr. Archana Godbole informed the gathering of next year's SWG meet in Maharashtra to celebrate 25 years of Save the Western Ghats March of 1987-88 and invited all for the meet. She also informed that the SWG 2012 meet will be a practitioner's conclave where action and success stories of civil society struggle for Western Ghats will shared and discussed in a practitioners' conclave.

Master Sharath Bidappa aged 10 who participated actively on all three days, was evidently stunned by the view of Kuduremukh area which was destroyed by iron ore mining, posed a question to the gathering – "What are you going to leave for us ?" We feel this question should stir our passions to save Western Ghats and work more towards the cause. Miss Andrea Pereira, a very talented photographer and actress, compeered the program. Dr Ashok Kundapur proposed a formal vote of thanks.

“Only after the last tree has been cut down,  
Only after the last river has been poisoned,  
Only after the last fish has been caught,  
Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.”