
INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMINAR

R.S. Lal Mohan

Dear friends,

The desire to organise a seminar and project the biodiversity of the Kanyakumari District was lingering in my mind for last 40 years, ever since my college days in the Scott Christian College, Nagercoil. I am glad that we could organise the seminar today. We are fortunate to have with us the Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamilnadu. Mr. V.R. Chitrapu and the Kerala Chief Wildlife Warden Mr. Surendranatha Achary. I greatly value their presence as co-ordinated action by the two states is essential for the success of any conservation measures.

Kanyakumari District is famous for its wildlife. But unfortunately because of our callous attitude we have allowed the wildlife and the eco system to perish. The prime objective of this seminar is to create interest in people about the rich natural heritage of the District.

One of the important, no, the most important cause for the depletion of the wild fauna is the destruction of our forest under the guise of development. Thousands of hectares of forests are cleared for the monoculture plantations. Many estates have come into existence: Balmore estate, Black rock estate, Victoria estate are some of them. The Government reserve forests occupy an area of 50,486 hectares i.e. about 30.2% of the geographic area of the district. But we cannot assure the quality of the forests. Deforestation is still rampant and the thick natural forest is replaced with teak and other monoculture plantations. Rubber is planted in many areas causing irreparable damage to the ecosystem. It is needless to say that natural forest is essential to maintain the congenial climate. By causing damage to the forest and the ecosystem we will be causing great harm to the millions of people and their progeny of this district. Even now people complain about the deterioration of the climate of the district. If we are not planning our development properly we may cause harm to the pleasant climate for which the district is famous.

We have 50 species of fishes (fresh water), 20 species of amphibians, 45 species of reptiles, 60 species of migratory wetland birds, 45 species of forest birds and 35 species of mammals in Kanyakumari district. Some of them like Nilgiri tahr and the Malabar civet cat are highly endangered. The faunal bio diversity of insects and micro fauna also is impressive.

Further the eco-system diversity of the district is also impressive. In the forest itself there are southern hill top tropical evergreen forest (Veerapuli RF), west coast tropical evergreen forest (Asambu RF & Veerapuli RF), west coast semi-evergreen forest (Veerapuli RF, Klamalai RF), Moist teak forest (Veerapuli RF, Klamalai RF), slightly moist teak forest (Poigaimalai RF, Velimalai RF, Veerapuli RF & Asambu RF), Southern moist mixed deciduous forest (Thadakamalai RF, Poigai malai, Veerapuli RF & Asambu RF), dry teak forests (Asambu RF, Velimalai RF, Klamalai RF), Southern dry mixed deciduous forest (Mahendragiri), Dry Savannah forest (Therkumalai RF, east & west), Carnatic umbrella thorn forest (Mahendragiri RF), Southern thorn forest, (Mahendragiri RF), Southern thorn scrub (Mahendragiri RF), Southern sub tropical hill forests (Mahendragiri RF) and Ochlandra reed breaks (Veerapuli RF). If we study the wetlands of the district we will have many eco-system like ponds, lakes, reservoirs, marshy areas, saline backwaters, rivers etc. All these ecosystem have their own species diversity.

Though for a layman all these interrelated ecosystem may appear as waste land waiting for development in the narrow sense, the importance of these to the various natural phenomenon like rain, humidity, weather is great.

We have many college, schools and other institutions in the district. But our students are completely ignorant of our natural heritage. They are cramped with subjects unrelated to the environment. They have no knowledge about our forest, rivers, plains, mountains and the life sustaining atmosphere. We may produce hundreds of doctors, thousands of engineers scores of teachers and business men. But if the district itself become a unhealthy place full of sick and suffering, what is the use of all the 'developments'?

Convenor, Seminar on Endangered fauna of Kanyakumari District, 21-A, Water Tank Road, Nagercoil - 1.

In 1989 we conducted a National Seminar on Eco-awareness in Nagercoil and emphasised the need to include Ecology and eco-awareness as special subjects. We further stressed the need to protect the ponds and tanks. We wanted legislation to protect the wetlands. We wanted the Government to implement the forest Acts and preserve the forests and the Natural heritage of the District which are unique and may not be appreciated by the bureaucrats and politician coming from north of Aralvaimozhi. All our request have fallen on the deaf years. Many of the serious problems like water scarcity and reduced rainfall are due to the faulty plans of our Govt. machinery.

This seminar is arranged with the high hope that strong steps will be taken to protect the wildlife and its fauna. A mass movement and mass awareness are required to activate and kindle the common man to protect and preserve the forest and its wildlife. We should use our natural wealth but we should not kill the natural for our use. If we do so, we will be doing the same mistake of a farmer who killed the goose laying golden eggs.

I am glad that we have 26 scientific papers discussing various aspects of wildlife. We are pleased to see the young faces from almost all the colleges. It is in their hands the future and destiny of our country lies. I hope this seminar will achieve its goal.

At the end of the seminar we will have panel discussion. We will be formulating the recommendations to be forwarded to implementing agencies. But remember, that you all have to make major contribution in implementing the recommendation. You cannot just suggest and keep quite. The success of the seminar depends on your participation. One of the important recommendations will be to declare Kodayar as a wildlife sanctuary. It is true that there are many private estates and forest. But declaring Kodayar as wildlife sanctuary will go a long way to protect the eco-system and the animals.

We are thankful to the Prof. Arulson Danial, Principal and Prof. D. Joseph Dharmasingh, Department of Zoology, Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, All Indian Association of Christian Higher Education, New Delhi, Forest Department of Tamilnadu, Mrs. Indra Surendran of Dr. Gopala Pillai Hospital for their help and encouragement. Our thanks are due to Dr. S.Z. Qasim, Member Planning Commission, New Delhi, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Dr. Swaminathan foundation, Chennai and Dr. Vasantha Devi, Vice Chancellor, M.S. University, Tirunelveli for agreeing to be the patrons of the seminar. They could not attend the seminar due to their other engagements.

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We are also thankful to Ms. Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore who has agreed to published the proceedings. But for her kind gesture the important information presented during the seminar would not have come to light.

Calicut
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Editor