

Forests on Ayodhya Hills in Purulia District



লেখকঃ সুশান্ত বিশ্বাস
 যোগাযোগঃ susa1927@gmail.com
 পরিচিতিঃ জন্ম ১৯৬৬। বসবাস ও বেড়ে ওঠা কলকাতায়। পেশায় অনুবাদক, লেখক ও তথ্যচিত্র পরিচালক। বৈদ্যুতিন মাধ্যমে সংবাদ পাঠ, সাংবাদিকতা ও সম্পাদনার কাজে দীর্ঘদিন যুক্ত ছিলেন। webzine ‘চর্চা’র সম্পাদক। আলোচিত বিষয়টি নিয়ে তিনি একটি তথ্যচিত্র নির্মাণ করেছেন।

The trend of receding of forests on Ayodhya Hills in Purulia District, West Bengal, which once extended over a vast hilly and undulating tract, is a source of concern for all concerned. From an exploitation point of view, the Ayodhya forests may be divided into six sectors, namely Arsha, Sirkabad, Balarampur, Matha, Bagmundi and Jhalda, of which Arsha and Sirkabad are the most sensitive. It has been realized that economic strengthening of the forest fringe dwellers is essential for forest preservation. The governmental development initiatives are being focused in this direction to a large extent.



The trend of receding of forests on Ajothhya Hills is a source of concern for all concerned

The basic concept is to unite and mobilize the truly motivated members of well functioning Forest Protection Committees (FPC) for undertaking forest protection and allied activities against forces from within and outside FPCs and meeting and motivating FPCs of adjacent Beat and non-FPC villages to join hands in the *Save Ayodhya Campaign*.

The idea is based on the assumption that a strong and determined appeal, coming from a group of co-members, is more acceptable and binding than one coming from outside agencies, and entrusting responsibility – preceded by motivation and training and succeeded by guidance – is perhaps the only means of meaningful empowerment.



Strong and determined appeal from a group of co-members is more acceptable and binding

The Process is initiated in the Arsha Beat of Arsha Range under Purulia Forest Division by forming a forum named as *Ayodhya Banchao Sangathan*, Arsha, with 10 selected FPCs of Arsha Beat, and an executive committee has been constituted, inducting the willing and able members of the FPCs.



The process is initiated in the Arsha Beat of Arsha Range under Purulia Forest Division

Different trainings were imparted to the members, for developing their managerial capability and vocational skills appropriate to the locality and acceptable to the people.

The Action Plan of the *Sangathan* consists of components like,

- Organizing intra and inter FPC meetings, to monitor & prevent illicit felling.
- Planning and undertaking forest protection and extension activities.
- Resolve conflicts within and between FPCs.
- Forming Women's Protection Group to tackle women's group of illicit fellers.

One unique component of the plan is to conduct study and *Dharna* by assembling a good number of *Sangathan* members on the extraction route of the illicit fellers on weekly market days, to understand, quality & quantity of produce removed, villages involved, forest areas affected, etc.



One unique component of the plan is to conduct Study and Dharna by assembling a good number of sangathan members on the extraction route of the illicit fellers on weekly market days

At the same time the *sangathan* members will confront the illicit fellers *en masse*, and will appeal to and convince them to refrain from forest felling. On the basis of the above study, involved villages will be identified where motivational meetings will be conducted.

The action plan also includes alternate income generation activities by identifying solely and partly forest dependent families and arranging appropriate immediate income option like van rickshaw pulling, vegetable vending, cycle repairing etc. for solely dependent families and also forming Self-Help Groups (SHG) to undertake income generating and income promoting activities for partly dependent families.

Environment and human resource development activities are organized by establishing *Shishu Diksha Kendra* to ensure healthy upbringing of the budding children of 3 to 6 years age imparting values of life and humanity, and to involve their mothers in rural environment restoration activities for the sake of general well being of their children is also an important component of the action plan.



Human resource development activities is organized by establishing Shishu Diksha Kendra

Another aspect of the action plan is inducting FPC and non FPC villages of other areas in the process by persuading FPCs of adjacent Beat to form such forum, sector wise, and motivating non FPC but forest dependent villages to refrain from illicit forest felling, explore possibilities of alternate income for them and establish linkage with the adjacent FPC.

The *Sangathan* members are also contemplating to go on deputation to demand their legitimate share of the government initiatives, from the local government departments and other responsible agencies.

The programme is on for over six months, and most of the *Sangathan* members are still maintaining their enthusiasm and actively take part in meetings and do jobs entrusted upon them without any expectation. In their eagerness to save Ayodhya forests, they have organized *Dharna*, conducted motivational meetings, formed Women Protection Groups, established *Shishu Diksha Kendra* etc.



Cooperation of the Forest Department is essential to build up the envisaged Rural Force to revive Ayodhya Forests to its original glory

A pilot research project to revive Ayodhya forests to their original glory is initiated by the Regional Centre, NAEB, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, at the request of the Forest Department of the government of West Bengal. Cooperation and support of the Forest

Department, particularly of the front line staff, is essential to build up the envisaged *Rural Force* to assist the Forest Department meaningfully and make the programme successful which hopefully may lead to develop a replicable model for participatory Forest Management.

Photographs by: Author

[Acknowledgements: S. Das, Research Scientist, RC, NAEB, MoEF, GOI, JU, Kolkata]

