

Echoes of Eco



September, 2011

Vivekananda Kendra- nardep Newsletter

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Wangari Maathai: a Tribute



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Wangari Muta Maathai born in Nyeri, Kenya (Africa) in 1940 was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree, Professor Maathai obtained a degree in Biological Sciences from Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas (1964).

Professor Maathai was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya in 1976-87 and was its chairman from 1981-87. In 1976, while she was serving the National Council of Women, Professor Maathai introduced the idea of community-based tree planting. She continued to develop this idea into a broad-based grassroots organization whose main focus is poverty reduction and environmental conservation through tree planting. The organization became known as the Green Belt Movement.

Professor Maathai has assisted women in planting more than 40 million trees on community lands including farms, schools and church compounds. In 1986 the Green Belt Movement (GBM) established a Pan African Green Belt Network that has exposed many leaders of other African countries to its unique approach.

Some of these individuals have established similar tree planting initiatives in their own countries using the methods taught to improve their efforts. Countries that have successfully launched such initiatives in Africa include Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and others.

She fought to save the famous Karura forest from land grabbers. She famously declared: "I have invested 20 years of my life in this campaign for the environment and I'm still only scratching the surface. I am confident of winning. Nobody will build anything [in the forest] as long as we live. We cannot dignify theft."

In June 1997, Professor Maathai was elected by Earth Times as one of 100 persons in the World who have made a difference in the environmental arena. In 2004 she was awarded the Nobel Prize and In 2005, Professor Maathai was honored by Time Magazine as one of 100 most influential people in the world. 25-Sep-2011 she died after fighting a battle with cancer.

VK-nardep pays her homage in this newsletter.

[Extracted from the official website of Greenbelt movement:
<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org>]

The Warp and Woof of all Life



The loving Seer beholds that Mysterious Existence wherein the Universe comes to have one home, therein unites and therefore emanates all. Godhead is the warp and woof in all organisms.

–Yajur Veda (32.8)



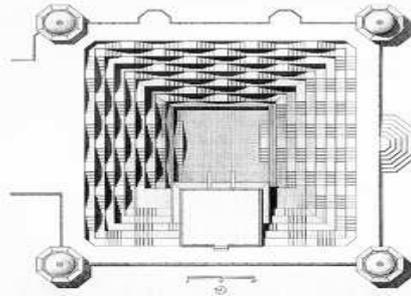


Conserving Ground Water: Reviving the Traditional system with community participation-II

This month...



The Tamil Nadu legacy of Traditional Water Harvesting Structures



Traditional water harvesting and management structures have been an important source of water management by local communities. South India, particularly Tamil Nadu has a long tradition of such magnificent structures.

The Pallavas expanded the irrigation system in the 7th century CE. The famous Cauvery anicut was built during this period. Large-scale construction of tanks (Tataka) for tapping rain water was also done in Tamil Nadu. The Chola period (985-1205 CE) witnessed the introduction of quite advanced irrigation systems, which brought splendid prosperity to the state and still exists as our legacy long after the Chola Empire has ceased to exist. This legacy includes not only anicuts across rivers and streams but also chain-tanks i.e. a number of tanks with connecting channels. This new system was more reliable in terms of water availability and provided better flexibility in water distribution.

Most of the old temples in south India built centuries ago have large tanks in their premises. These tanks are either fed by harvested rain water or by tapping underground springs. In terms of larger area, in Chennai alone there are 39 temple tanks with areas varying from 0.25 to 3 hectares. These are all fed by rain water. Though these were used mainly for bathing and religious purposes, these also recharged the drinking water wells.

Traditionally, temple tanks seem to have played three hydraulic roles as:

- a storage, which acted as insurance against low rainfall periods and also recharges groundwater in the surrounding area,
- a flood control measure, preventing soil erosion and wastage of runoff waters during the period of heavy rainfall, and
- a device which was crucial to the overall eco-system. (Madhavi G., Indian J.Sci.Technol., Vol.1, No.7, pp. 1-8, Dec,2008)

Today there is institutional disrepair with regard to the management of the traditional water harvesting structures. They have weakened due to demographic pressure, social composition of land ownership and the spread of well irrigation. (Vaidyanathan, CSE, 2001).

Though maintenance and allocation continues to be managed by informal community institutions active in a large majority of them, there needs to be awareness generation and local community mobilization to revive these structures to their maximum utility.



Green Health Home at Vivekananda Puram functioned for 7 days and treated 185 patients.



Done with DST core support

Ecological Wisdom of Farmers



The peasants of the Third World have some clues to what may spark an ecological renaissance in the farms all over the world. The peasant carries the seeds, centuries of wisdom, every truth having been learned from living in balance with nature. The peasant talks about eons of wisdom tested in nature.

-E.G.Valliantos
(Development Historian)



The women of the Green Belt Movement have learned about the causes and the symptoms of environmental degradation. They have begun to appreciate that they, rather than their government, ought to be the custodians of the environment.

- Wangari Maathai



Explaining organic inputs like Fish-Amino to villagers in an around Sevaiyur, Virudhunagar Dist.



Kit with inputs for Organic Agriculture is given to a farmer in a village Timmapuram of Virudhunagar district.



Workshops and training programme on “Enhancing Livelihood of farmers through Sustainable Agriculture” under the sponsorship of FORD Foundation, New Delhi, were held in the villages around Virudhunagar Dist.

More than 1000 beneficiaries, mostly small and marginal farmers benefitted. The Azolla Kit given to more than 100 farmers and Vermi technologies as well as organic farming materials were also distributed to the farmers.

Instructions were given to farmers and the resource persons interacted with them individually as well as in groups and disseminated the technologies.

An Azolla bed is installed in the backyard of a farmer’s house at Mukkulam: Children get curious about green technologies.



Water and Sanitation

Tested water from 14 wells in Kanyakumari Dist – programme of Central Ground Water Board, Chennai.

Murugan Kundram traditional rain water harvesting structure renovation work has been finished and waiting for the monsoons to fill the tank.

This month... Networking



72 students from Govindammal Aditanar College for Women, Tiruchendur visited the Gramodaya Park on 24th and studied various Sustainable technologies.

On 27th, 20 farmers from Human Formation Organisation, Thootukkudi visited our TRC and learned about Azolla technology and technique of Bio-methnation.



Azolla Goes to Andhra: Dr.Kamalasannan Pillai installing the mother nursery of Azolla at Ramayanpet, Andhra Pradesh. As part of the NABARD sponsored programme. 12 decentralized mother nurseries are installed in three regions of Andhra.

We are aware that our children and the future generations have a right to a world which will also need energy, should be free of pollution, should be rich with biological diversity and should have a climate which will sustain all forms of life.—Wangari Maathai



Dr.Kamalasannan Pillai installing the mother nursery of Azolla at Barithpet Nizambad, AP.



Happenings: This month for Sustainable Agriculture

Under the NABARD sponsored Propagation of Azolla technology Dr.Kamalasanann Pillai gave training to 35 SRI farmers of Kolkakotha village, Kurnool Dist. On 18th Sept. Five officers also attended the programme.

Azolla technology training was conducted at TRC Kalluvillai on 24th. Smt. Premalatha was the resource person. 4 farmers benefitted.

Happenings: This month for Holistic Medicine

❖ At Sreeputu Mahrshi Peedam, Vellore, Dr.V.Ganapathy gave a lecture on “Use of Ethno medicines in Varma practices” on 5th and 147 beneficiaries attended. It was organized by Tamilnadu Paramparia Siddha Vaidhya Maha Sangam, Vellore.

❖ National Conference on Herbal Miracles was organized by the Dept. Of Plant Biology, Vivekananda College, Agasteeswaram, Kanyakumari. It was held at the Auditorium of Vivekananda College on 13th September. Dr.V.Ganapathy gave a talk on “Herbal Miracle” 300 students and staff participated.

❖ “State Level Siddha Graduates meeting” was organised by Sai Siddha Foundation, Chennai at the World University Services Centre, Chetpet, Chennai On 17th of this month. 350 doctors participated. Dr.V.Ganapathy gave a lecture on “Siddha’s basic fundamentals for selection of drugs and diagnosing the disease”.

❖ Dr.V.Ganapathy gave a guest lecture on “Use of Ethno medicines in Varma practices”, The programme was organised on 28th by South Indian Traditional Vaidyars Federation at St.Xavier’s College, Palayamkottai. 110 persons attended the lecture.



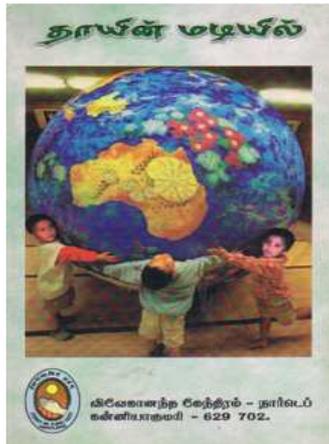
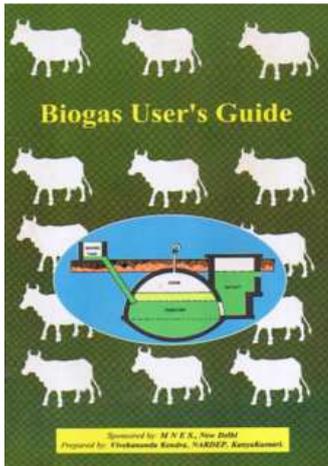
Dr.Ganapathy giving a lecture on Importance of ancient agronomic practices in the field of medicinal plants



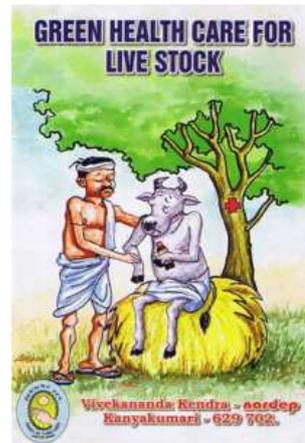
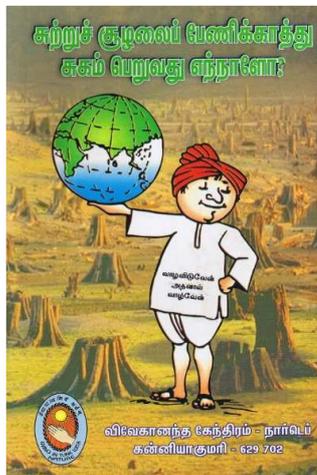
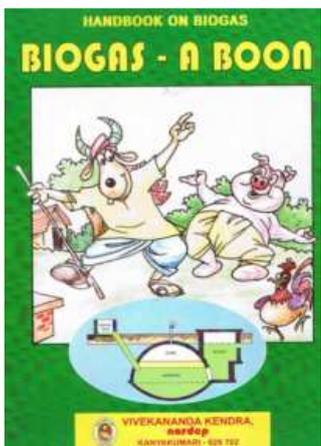
Rural women attending Dr.Ganapathy’s demo cum lecture at the Convention of Medicinal plants for Sustainable Livelihoods. The event was held at Thamukkam Ground, Madurai Dist. on 16th. The event was organized by Dhan Foundation. 275 participants benefitted.



If we conserved our resources better, fighting over them would not then occur...so, protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace ...those of us who understand the complex concept of the environment have the burden to act. – Wangari Maathai



Gramodaya Goes to Italy



The highly popular eco-technologies exhibition: "Gramodaya - for Right Living" is at Vivekananda Kendra Kanyakumari. Now an Italian Ecology group has adapted the panels of this exhibition and has come out with three dimensional interactive models for eco-education. The Gramodaya exhibition is housed at the building shown below: the address is - Villino Campi, Riva del Garda

**How to feed the future humanity?
How to make development sustainable?
Some of the best publications on the subject for layman and professionals alike are from VK-NARDEP.
Contact: The Secretary, Vivekananda Kendra-NARDEP
Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari-629702
Tamil Nadu
Phone: 04652-246296 Email: vknardep@gmail.com**

This month... Shakti Surabhi



This month training programme on Bio-methanation plant (supported by DST, New Delhi) was conducted at TRC, Kalluvilai on 27th. Er. Ramakrishnan was the resource person. 25 persons attended.

Seminar on "Technological solution for Environmental issues" was held by Chemical Industries Association, Chennai at Hotel Savera, Chennai on 16th of this month. Shri.V.Ramakrishnan Read a paper on "Avoid Pollution by Biomethanation solution"



In the world there is a new collective force of people mobilising around the issue of peace but linking it to the need to protect the environment. We must assert our collective vision and responsibility to shape that peace not only for our country but also for the whole of the planet.
=**Wangari Maathai**



Story of the Humming Bird

One day a terrible fire broke out in a forest - a huge woodlands was suddenly engulfed by a raging wild fire.

Frightened, all the animals fled their homes and ran out of the forest. As they came to the edge of a stream they stopped to watch the fire and they were feeling very discouraged and powerless. They were all bemoaning the destruction of their homes. Every one of them thought there was nothing they could do about the fire, except for one little hummingbird.

This particular hummingbird decided it would do something. It swooped into the stream and picked up a few drops of water and went into the forest and put them on the fire. Then it went back to the stream and did it again, and it kept going back, again and again and again.

All the other animals watched in disbelief; some tried to discourage the hummingbird with comments like, "Don't bother, it is too much, you are too little, your wings will burn, your beak is too tiny, it's only a drop, you can't put out this fire."



And as the animals stood around disparaging the little bird's efforts, the bird noticed how hopeless and forlorn they looked.

The hummingbird decided not to be discouraged. It kept going up and down to get the water and put it on the burning forest. And as the animals were discouraging it, without wasting its time, the bird looked back to these other animals and saw how desperate, discouraged and persuaded they were to stay on the sidelines and not get involved. As one of the animals asked, "What do you think you are doing?" the hummingbird, without wasting time, looked back and said, "I'm doing the best I can."

Do not underestimate what each one of you will do wherever you find yourself. I want to tell you that when things become very difficult, which they will do, no matter how dark or how clouded, if you look very deeply and finely, you will always find a silver lining. Sometimes the silver lining is extremely thin, but just look and you will definitely find it. Hold onto that. That's your hope.

[A story by Wangari Maathai]

Tributes to Maathai



Her work serves to enlighten us all that alleviation of poverty, sustainable development, preservation of our environment, establishment of truly democratic institutions, and peaceful resolution of conflict are all integral parts of a safe and secure global future. As the first recipient of a Nobel Peace prize for her environmental work she helped bring about a new understanding of the inter-connections between environment and peace. This is one of her very important contributions.

-Mikhail Gorbachev

Wangari Maathai understood and acted on the inextricable links between poverty, rights and environmental sustainability. One can but marvel at her foresight and the scope of her success. She was a true African heroine.

-Desmond Tutu

In all situations—whether on the public stage or away from the cameras—Wangari's passion for justice, and her deep desire for a better, fairer world shone through. She always identified with those who are less fortunate, or those experiencing hardship, no matter where they are from—and she translated this into a forceful articulation of the need for those with power to do more.

-Bhaarat Jagdeo

We have come a long way from ignorance to deep insight, from fear to courage and from the streets to Parliament. We moved from self to others, from 'my issue' to 'our issues', from home to communities, from national level to global. Now we embrace the concepts of our common home and future.
-Wangari Maathai



The Challenge

It is not easy. One time I wrote a paper and I tried to describe the problem of trying to uplift the poor, the disadvantaged, the deprived. I wrote a paper which I called "The Bottom is Heavy," because the people at the bottom sometimes can make themselves extremely heavy. You try to lift them out and constantly they go back to the same depth. So we need to commit ourselves to raise them, to not give up. If you give up, believe me, sooner or later those you think you have set aside will come back to you; they will come haunting you even in your living room, on your television. When you see those dying people, when you see the wars, when you see the conflicts even though you may be very far from those conflicts, they come. Right there, in your living room. So, we cannot say that we are very comfortable, we are in a comfortable zone, we should not be concerned. It is not possible to run away from the problems. Sooner or later they become our problems. customs and activities of the present civilization are based on this assumption; but if thought comes first then thought is more important than the thinker.



The Heart

So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them! I call those men who strut about in their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor, wretches, so long as they do not do anything for those hundreds of millions who are now no better than human savages.... The first of everything should go to the poor; we have only a right to what remains. The poor are God's representatives; anyone that suffers is his representative. Without giving, he who eats and enjoys eating, enjoys sin....Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad --then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy.... What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. ...No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger.... India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, . . . More bread, more opportunity for everybody



The Means

When I asked myself this question, 'What would be the appropriate technology for rural India or rural Latin America or maybe the city slums? I came to a very simple provisional answer. That technology would indeed be really much more intelligent, efficient, scientific if you like, than the very low level technology employed. But it should be very, very much simpler, very much cheaper, very much easier to maintain, than the highly sophisticated technology of the modern West. In other words it would be an intermediate technology, somewhere in between. There are products the typical outcome of highly sophisticated modern industry and cannot be produced except by such an industry. These products, at the same time, are not normally an urgent need of the poor. What the poor need most of all is simple things—building materials, clothing, household goods, agricultural implements—and a better return for their agricultural products. They also most urgently need in many places: trees, water, and crop storage facilities.



Wangari Maathai
Eco-Feminist



- *Swami Vivekananda*



Schumacher
Economist