

His heart bleeds when trees are butchered mercilessly

COIMBATORE: "If trees and nature were to seek wages from you, you cannot survive." "You can buy everything except air and water." This is how **M. Yoganathan**, who has won the Eco Warrior Award from the Vice President of India recently, opens his interaction with school-children.

Of the 14 honoured as Earth Eco Warriors by the Earth Matters Foundation, Loganathan is the only one who is neither a scientist nor an Indian Forest Service Officer. For the 40-year-old conductor of the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation, felling trees is tantamount to murder. Even as a boy he had the courage to fight tree felling. Though only a matriculate, he has learnt quite a lot about nature from nature lovers and scientists. To him, tree planting is a mission and propagation of the benefits of preservation of nature his bounden duty. In a chat with **G. Satyamurthy** he explains why he has chosen to enlighten the younger generation on Nature. Though I hail from Mayiladuthurai, I spent a substantial time in the Nilgiris at my relative's place as I lost my parents early in life. I loved writing poetry too. Then I used to seek the solitude of

forests for writing. "Then when I saw trees being mercilessly butchered I started bleeding in the heart." Thus was born some of his wailing in poetic form. "We name our children Cauvery because of our slowly fading memories (about the river)". This was his homage to the perennial river whose pristine purity is lost in mindless pollution.

"Even as a tree was felled, the bird that died then had the food for its young one" was his lament over the mind boggling damage to the flora and fauna. "When I was just about 13 my love for trees started. It was stoked by the green activist Jayachandran. Thus began the learning curve." Not only did he come to know a lot about Nature's bounty but also had established an excellent rapport with a lot of Nature lovers and wildlife photographers including Dr. Mayilvahanan, Ramachandran Rangarajan, Dr. Vijayan, Dr. Sivalingam and Guru. Karthikeyan enlightened him on various characteristics of birds. Besides, he had a passion for teaching children. For this he used to cut articles on wildlife from newspapers and show them to children. He started making even slides regarding trees, birds, animals and in-



M. Yoganathan.
— PHOTO: K. ANANTHAN

sects. When he got a projector later, this has become a major part of his mission. "Of course, only when I was attacked for preventing tree felling I started thinking that I should do something else to preserve Nature instead of mere protesting felling." The best way to do is to enlighten younger generation on the importance of trees and tree planting.

His efforts attracted a lot of attention and the Junior Chamber honoured him in 1987 for this. "This virtually proved a turning point in my life". I started going to schools whenever possible and presented a slide show for 90 minutes. I use to start talking

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about hills, grass, trees, air and water. My endeavour is to make children understand how important are all these for humanity. I use to make it very simple and keep on asking them some simple questions. I use to tell them stories with slide shows. I explain why a bird is called Black Widow. How king cobra spits 14 ounces of venom in a second. Why Wild dog is called the forest scavenger. I talk to them about peculiar features and also various scientific truths. I use to ask them "why should we wail when some of us die though we rejoice when birds are killed." Then I could even bring in the pain of the children who lost their dear ones saying "why do we lament for the loss of our fathers who went into the sea for fishing while we regaled ourselves with the death of these Malabar Hornbills." I always speak quite a lot about elephants also. "Elephants tell children that by destroying their homes, human beings are raising their crops". That is the reason for them entering the human habitations.

He laments that several areas in the elephant corridor

have been taken over for constructing cottages etc. Besides, how electric fences and polythene covers prove fatal to them. He has so far covered 1,687 schools and colleges all over Tamil Nadu and planted thousands of saplings. His presentation even for weddings is saplings and he celebrates the World Forest Day, World Environment Day, and World Water Day at his own expense. He wants every one to plant at least one sapling on birthday or any festival and celebrations days.

He would not like to deride dogs by putting up boards like "dog beware". "Instead you should say Jimmy is at work; walk carefully". As he concludes his slide show, he makes the children take a pledge that they would strive to preserve Nature.

He expresses his gratitude to M.S. Dhiraviam of Malaysia who got him the ticket to travel to Delhi to receive the award and also Mike Pandey, the chief of the Earth Matters Foundation, for his hospitality.

"When I was asked to plant a sapling in a Delhi park I thought it was the greatest award I could get".