

Polluting Fireworks No Fun for These Eco-conscious Kids

by Ram M Sundaram

Coimbatore: Can Deepavali be fun without firecrackers? Yes, say students from a Panchayat Union School in Coimbatore district.

While Deepavali is all about bursting crackers and distributing sweets to many, students from the Thondamuthur Panchayat Union Middle School have been saying 'no' to crackers for four years.

The 186 students of this school, from class 1 to 8, have not only avoided bursting crackers in their school campus, but also in their houses. They celebrate Deepavali by planting trees.

Tamil Selvi, a teacher from the school, told *Express* that they have conducted many awareness campaigns these four years in nearby areas and have been role models for others in the matter.

Bursting of crackers increases the level of air pollution. As inhaling this air would cause breathing problems to many people, it is wise to avoid fireworks, pointed out a student.

This school was started in 2002 through the efforts of its former headmaster, Ramesh. The site was then a dump yard; the school has now been honoured as being 'eco-friendly', she added.

M Yoganathan, a bus conductor and environmentalist who has received several



Students from the Thondamuthur Panchayat Union Middle School during the morning assembly | EXPRESS

awards for his service, was behind this eco-friendly approach. He regularly conducts students awareness classes for students of the school.

Yoganathan challenges one to find even a small bit of plastic on the entire campus. The students follow their eco-friendly approach even outside. They refuse to drink anything if given in one-time plastic tumblers, avoid use of drinking straw and use cloth bags instead of plastic carry bags, he told *Express*.

The students are so passionate about their cause that they do not pluck flowers in the school garden or walk on the lawns, said Tamil Selvi.

Says Trishila Nandini, a

The 186 students of this school, from class 1 to 8, have not only avoided bursting crackers in their school campus, but also in their houses

eight standard student, "I celebrate Deepavali by getting new dresses and distributing sweets. I avoid the firecracker part. I have also not allowed my family to buy crackers during the past four years."

There are around 20 trees in the school grounds. Three

them are 'aromatic' trees. They also have a garden of medicinal herbs. Products from these herbs are distributed to people in the neighbourhood.

Vegetables for the noon-meal scheme are grown in the school ground itself and the students themselves clean the school premises, said another student, Sandhya.

Even more surprising is their readiness to water the plants during the summer vacation. As the school would be closed, they prepared a time-table fixing duties for students like water plants, cutting grass and other related work. They make sure that no plant is abandoned.