

Press Information Bureau
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Vice President's Secretariat

VICE PRESIDENT PRESENTS EARTH ECO-WARRIOR
AWARDS-2008

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The Vice President of India, Shri Mohd Hamid Ansari presented the Earth Eco-Warrior Awards-2008 to the noted environment conservers for their astounding work done towards the cause of environment at a function organized by Earth Matters Foundation here today. The award function coincided with World Environment Day, and celebrate the spirit of conservation in people who have been silently working to protect our natural heritage and resources.

Addressing on the occasion the Vice President said that instead of celebrating once in a year, the Environment Day should be celebrated everyday of the year. He expressed his concern that many species and rare plants have disappeared. Awareness is just about beginning and there is a need to carry this message to every classroom, every office and to everybody. He called upon the people to conserve water.

The Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Shri Namu Narain Meena in his address said that no development programme is feasible unless backed by environmental awareness and education. In view of the needs of the present and future generations, education at schools, colleges and at the common man's level is imperative.

Noted environment conservers, Shri Mike Pansey and Chief Executive Officer of Prasar Bharati, Shri B.S.Lall, also addressed on the occasion.

List of awardees include – Mr. Suraj Mewara, Barmer, Rajasthan; Ms. Sonia Ghosh, Delhi; Ms. Monali Manohar Warwade, Bandrapur, Maharashtra; Ms. Madhu Bhatnagar, Delhi; Mr. Abdul Wadud Banatwala, Junagadh, Gujarat; Mr. G.V.Reddy (IFS Officer), Mr. Chewang Norphel (Glacier Man), Leh, Ladakh; Mr. M.Y. Yoganathan, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu; Mr. John Abraham, Mumbai, Maharashtra; Mr. Tilak Vij, Delhi; Dr. D.N. Chaudhary and Mr. Rahul Rohitashwa, Bhagalpur, Bihar; Dr. Madhu Lal Valliate, Jaipur, Rajasthan; Ms. Komal Parekh and Mr. Mahesh Parekh, Durg, Chhatisgarh and Brahmanand Pandey, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

SK/CS

*Yoganathan has
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26 years*

THE GREEN CONDUCTOR

Nandhu
Sundaram | TNN

In the wild west of American movies, M Yoganathan would be a John Wayne-style lone ranger. For 26 years, the 40-year-old bus conductor has been single-handedly waging a battle to save trees. He has planted one lakh saplings across Tamil Nadu. Today, he is a well-known green activist in this city where school students and forest officials call him the 'ambassador of conservation'.

Yoganathan has no degrees to his name, nor does he make money out of his passion. After passing his Plus Two examination, he moved from Coimbatore to Kotagiri in Nilgiris district to live with his sister. He found the natural beauty of the hills a great inspiration. Thus, when he saw that trees were being cut in large numbers, he protested aggressively.

"Consequently, wood smugglers hired goons to assault me on more than one occasion," he says. "In 1996, I was arrested after I protested against the cutting of trees in Kotagiri."

Over time, he became less militant and more savvy about spreading his ecological message. He began using slide shows to encourage school and college students to save trees and care for the environment. Today, he has done 2,867 slide shows in educational institutions and hospitals across the region.

"By the end of the slide show, students are eager to plant trees and I spend some time showing them how to go about it. I only plant indigenous

species. Initially, the trees have to be nurtured, but eventually they can be left to grow by themselves. It really is very easy," he explains enthusiastically.

"For years, the slides that I developed with the help of scien-

tists and academicians were my tool to spread awareness.

But times have changed and now I need a laptop, photographs and fancy power-point presentations to hold students' interest," he says.

Recently, he made a short film with the help of the Tamil Nadu State Transport Staff Federation.

TNSTSF members contributed ₹5 each to col-

lect ₹60,000 for the film, which cost nearly one lakh rupees to make.

Coimbatore district forest officer I Anwardeen says Yoganathan has been helping the department reach out to the public.

"Without him, we would be unable to talk to people directly and spread the message of conservation. Yoganathan explains with such interest and clarity that students are convinced and he is able to initiate change," he says. The forest department provides him with seedlings to plant.

Yoganathan's green message has struck a chord with the students. "Sir showed us how trees bring rain. He also told us that we have to put cups of water outside our homes for birds. Since he visited our

school we have stopped using plastics and have told our parents not to use them as well," says N Mani, a class seven student at the Thondamuthur Panchayat Union Middle School in Vadapalani South.

His teacher Tamiliselvi says the eco-campaigner's visits to the school have brought about change. "Students no longer pluck the leaves of plants. They don't use plastic cups during school meets," she said.

Dr Tolstoy, associate professor of medicine at PSG Medical College who has helped Yoganathan for nearly eight years, says, "For a bus conductor to work as an activist and plant thousands of trees is a rare thing." Indeed, it is.

nandhu.sundaram@timesmail.com

