

# Involving community in eco-restoration

## CPREEC trains teachers, trainers and NGOs in preserving environment

A.D. Rangarajan

**TIRUPATI:** Involving local community for accomplishing a task is a proven strategy. In this case too, local villagers and tribes have voluntarily become part of the movement, understanding well that it is their lives that are sought to be made better.

C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar Foundation, Chennai, formed in 1966, is working on rural development, ecology, heritage conservation, compulsory primary education and related areas.

### Centre's recognition

Formed in the name of the great statesman who was responsible for industrial and agricultural growth in Madras Presidency and Travancore State, the CPR Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC)

has been recognised by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests as a 'Centre of Excellence'. By conducting training for teachers, trainers and NGOs, helps increase people's knowledge about environment and their commitment to preserving it.

Laying thrust on community participation, the centre has taken up afforestation projects in 'manyams' (sacred groves), i.e. backyards of temples having easy access to all villagers.

"This way, we not only develop greenery in and around a village, but also ensure its sustenance with local participation," says Nanditha Krishna, honorary director of the Foundation.

Talking to *The Hindu* recently, she explained how replicable land and water conservation projects taken up by



• **Wasteland transformed into green zone at Nenmeli**

• **Gene pool of medicinal plants developed at Thambatty**

centre had helped in transforming wasteland at Nenmeli near Chennai into a green zone with ample water sources. As part of its drive to con-

serve the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, it had taken up cleaning up of Doddabetta near the famous hill station of Ooty, developed a gene pool of medicinal plants at Thambatty and also promoted smokeless 'chulhas' to cut on firewood usage. "In all the above projects, we worked in close tandem with the community by training Kota, Kurumba, Paniya and Irula tribes in income generation," she adds.

Besides being the resource agency for the implementation of National Green Corps in several states, including Andhra Pradesh, the CPREEC also works on eco-restoration of coastal areas in the State.

### Preserving art

The 'Shakuntala Jagannathan Museum of folk art', a

sister unit in Kanchipuram, preserves mural, Tanjore and folk paintings, antique idols, palm leaf manuscripts, musical instruments and ritual prayer items, while the Saraswati Kendra learning centre for children provides education to slow learners, dyslexic, autistic and learning-disabled children.

### Research work

The CPR Institute of Indological Research conducts research in Indian art, culture and archaeology. Dr. Krishna was also part of Archaeological Survey of India's project to restore Angkor Vat in Cambodia.

Not many know that she is the author of 'Balaji Venkateswara - Lord of Tirumala Tirupati', a religious bestseller that introduces the Lord of Seven hills to the North.