



## A Handful Of Grain For The Cause

*We received this report, from an Appiko activist, about women's participation, spontaneous as well as organised, in the Appiko movement which is aimed at preserving forest wealth from the deprivations of profiteers. We hope that others from the area will send more detailed reports of the situation and the struggle.*

IN Kannada, Appiko means "hug the trees." The Appiko movement in the western Ghats is similar to the Chipko movement in the Himalayas. Just as Chipko is essentially a movement of women, so also women, especially those of the younger generation, were instrumental in launching Appiko.

On September 8, 1983, about 30 women gathered in Salkani village. With 70 men, they walked eight kilometres to reach Kalase forest. On the way, they had to cross many streams and also a hanging bridge. There were innumerable leeches waiting to suck their blood. When they

reached the site of the tree felling, and hugged the trees, the labourers were shocked. They left their axes and saws and returned to their huts. The news spread like wild fire and the forest department was perturbed. The Appiko movement spread to eight forest areas, and successfully stopped tree felling.

While Appiko enthusiasm was at its peak, organisers of the movement received a letter from the Mahila Mandal of Kerehosahalli village in north Kanara district, Karnataka. It read : "Tree felling has been going on around our village. Rich forests have been cut down near our village, and the area is now overgrown with

epitatorium weeds. Our cattle cannot graze, and fuel wood is difficult to procure. Experiencing these difficulties, the women of nearby villages joined us to launch Appiko. This was the first time that women had come out to halt tree felling. At the gathering, local leaders and politicians spoke disparagingly about women. We, the members of the Mahila Mandal, reminded these dominating male leaders about the objectives of Appiko. They were not prepared to hear our questions, so they left the place. However, the members of the Mahila Mandal went ahead with hugging the trees, and stopped the tree felling."

The organisers were surprised to read this letter. The village was unknown to them but the women seemed not only to have grasped the message of the ecological movement to save trees, but also to have acted upon it.

Immediately, the organisers visited Kerehosahalli to meet the members of the Mahila Mandal and to express their solidarity. Kerehosahalli is a tiny village surrounded by forests. It is 15 kilometres from the bus road. It is one of the interiormost villages in the countryside. The organisers had to walk from the bus road, and reached the village after dark.

It was not difficult to find the house of Kaveri Bhagwat, who is an active member of the Mahila Mandal. She was overjoyed to meet the organisers. She told them in detail how the village women had successfully launched Appiko. The discussion continued after meals. Women from nearby houses also gathered and joined the discussion.

The organisers found that the Mahila Mandal was involved in many aspects of village development. They had started a *balwadi* a year ago, and it is still going on well. They had tackled the issue of harassment of women. The Mahila Mandal seems to be an enthusiastic women's group. Women of different castes, including adivasi women, are members.

The discussion was interrupted by a roaring sound. One of the women said : "It is the tiger. This is the time they roar. Yesterday, we heard the sound in the evening."

In other villages too, the main source of funds for Appiko activists is generated by women. Every house is involved. Each woman keeps aside a handful of grain every day as a contribution to the movement. At the end of the month, the Appiko activist collects the grain which is used for the upkeep of the activist. The grain is also used for *shivirs* or camps, and for those who keep watch in the forests to prevent tree felling. Though this kind of funding has not spread to all the



**Tree felling in progress**

movement areas, it prevails in about 25 villages at present.

Village women have also contributed by communicating the movement message to other areas. Women have devised a drama which they enact in villages, and which has received a lot of appreciation. They have composed songs dwelling on the

ecological themes of Appiko. Their adaptation of local folklore has been so effective that Appiko songs are widely known in the area.

Thus women's support to the movement has been both practical and creative. Women are the base, the genuine supporters who keep a handful of grain for the cause. □