

THE TSUKLAKHANG TRUST ON PLANTATION DRIVE AT TAKTSE

On the occasion of Paryavaran Mohatsav, 2016, the Tsulakhang Trust in coordination with the Forest Environment & Wild Life Management (FE&WLM) department carried out a plantation drive at Taktse on 17th June 2016.

On this day, one reflected, that in this age of mass consumerism and consumption, the world is now facing a massive denudation as well as rampant reduction of the forest cover due to the constant population growth leading to mushrooming of urban settlements with consequent encroachment of the forest lands and this coupled with mankind's insatiable material needs have led to massive pressure on the limited forest resources. Likewise, rapid industrialization and various factors contributing to ever increasing carbon emission have brought about a huge upsurge in the pollution level in the environment because of which effects of adverse weather patterns, notably one being the global warming, are now being felt in different parts of this world.

Consequently, unparalleled natural disasters and strange climatic changes happening world over in the recent years are indication of the damage that we have already caused to upset the ecological balance that should serve us a warning to mankind for all its misdeeds. One of the major causes for such adverse natural phenomena is linked to mindless deforestations and faulty land use that in turn have caused huge landslides and soil erosion; flash floods and land inundation, drought and famines of frightening dimensions. In such a scenario, it is crucial to protect, conserve and enrich the forest mass not only to mitigate natural disasters but also to sustain and serve as the source of our oxygen reserve; facilitate natural control of carbon emission, arrest soil erosion and possibly aid rain formation as well. Without forest cover no life can exist on this earth. Forest resources, therefore, are considered as the lungs of this earth without which life sustenance is virtually impossible.

In the context of inadequate forest cover in the close vicinity, we cannot ignore our concern over Gangtok which is gradually metamorphosing into a sizeable city and for all practical purposes, will stretch from Pyongla (Penangla) right down to Ranipool in near future. The future contour of this emerging city that will be filled to the brim must be recognized critically in terms of stability of the land mass, availability of cleaner air and cleaner and sufficient source of drinking water to meet the demand of ever increasing population in times to come. The picture that one visualizes presently is not very pretty,

It may also be pertinent to mention that that all the major source of drinking water supply are located in the upper ridges of greater Gangtok (figuratively speaking) stretching from **Taktse Luing Reserve forest cutting across Slab Tank ridge- Bulbuley zoological park through Ganesh Tok and Hanuman Tok ridges** - what was once thought of as one of the green belt zones of the capital city. Unless the existing forest cover in the areas are salvaged and augmented by way of a massive afforestation drives, there will be an insurmountable problem in the future in terms of drinking water supply crisis as well as tremendous increase in

the smoke and noise pollution arising out of ever increasing vehicular traffic in the capital and its surrounding areas.

Being seized of these scenario, The Tsuklakhang Trust (TTT), with its genuine environmental concern sought to take requisite measures to restore and maintain one of the rich forest covers falling under its jurisdiction within the Taktse reserve forest, which admittedly, also had depleted over the years, having fallen prey to constant encroachment and illegal felling of trees by intruders and trespassers alike. The commitment of the TTT in this context is not only to salvage, rejuvenate and enhance its property value per se, but more importantly to conserve this area as sanctum sanctorum for environmental and biodiversity reserve of the state and set a bench mark for conservation of **“Environmental Heritage”** of this land blessed by our patron saint, Guru Padma Sambhava.



The Paryavaran Mohatsav, 2016, thus, was one such opportunity for the Tsuklakhang Trust and the FE&WLMD to collaborate in this noble initiative to enrich the Taktse forest reserve by initiating a programme to plant tree saplings and celebrate the moment. The trustees of Tsuklakhang Trust, monk students of the Sheda (Institute of higher Buddhist studies & learning) and Labta (monastic school) under the care of TTT and the Forest department officials carried out plantation of nearly 300 saplings at Taktse on 17th June 2016. Sem Hope Leezum, Chogyal's representative to the trust and her family members also participated in the programme.

In keeping with the Buddhist religious tradition, the plantation drive commenced with a brief prayer conducted under the auspice of Tulku Tshering, the head of Taktse Sheda, for the benefit that the trees and the plants would bring to all living beings in the form of shelter, food and comfort. The saplings were provided free of cost from one of the nurseries of the FE&WLM department. The gesture of FE&WLM department, Government of Sikkim is gratefully placed on record by TTT.



The plantation drive programme was particularly a meaningful experience wherein Mr. James Targain, Assistant Conservator of forest, FE&WLM department provided following useful tips on proper method of planting saplings. Tips such as stake to the sapling to be maintained at a slant so as to keep the sapling upright as well as to deter accumulation of water at the root of the sapling; weeding out the soil meant for filling the pit after planting the sapling. The reason being that, if the weed is not removed and if it remains inside the pit covering the base of the sapling, it will produce **methane gas** which will not help the survival of the plant. This was contrary to the usual practice of leaving the weed to cover the base of the plant on the premise that it will rot and become organic manure.

Furthermore, he advised that every effort should also be made to deter accumulation of water at the base of the plant. These tips were shared with participants and in particular with young monks for whom planting trees itself was a learning process in deference to the Buddhist teaching. The information shared by the officer was a useful revelation to many of us.

The Trust acknowledges that this year's joint collaboration with FE&WLM department is an initiative arising out of a shared vision of not only keeping our environment clean and green but also to enrich, conserve and protect our forest resources in best possible manner for the posterity and for our future generations. Such a concerted effort would undoubtedly sustain our common objective to check environmental degradation and keep Gangtok and its neighbourhood not only environment friendly but also to ensure wise and rational use of our natural forest resources for self-sufficiency and the prosperity of the state.

The Tsuklakhang Trust expresses its gratitude to the FE&WLM department, Government of Sikkim, for facilitating and organizing the plantation programme at Taktse palace compound and its contiguous property and hopes to remain a partner in similar initiatives in coming years also.

(Report released by Tsuklakhang Trust, Tsuklakhang, Gangtok-Sikkim)