Striving to prevent an eco-hazard

Living amidst chaos and confusion, everyday life, for many, seems an uphill task. Taking a break from their respective professions is all they want to unwind and spend some happy time with their family.

Though there are many ways to spend holidays, a pilgrimage would be an ideal choice. Finding solace at the feet of God is soothing for people, especially those who are caught in the hustle and bustle of modern life.

It is particularly relaxing when a temple or a place of worship is situated atop a hill and is quite a distance to travel.

One such temple is the Arulmigu Poondi Vellingiri Andavar temple, the abode of Lord Shiva. Situated about 30 km from the cotton city, the Vellingiri hills are a popular pilgrimage spot in western Tamil Nadu. Thousands of devotees throng the temple, especially during the Tamil New Year and Chithra Pournami festivals to seek the blessings of the lord.

With no proper laid-out roads, the visit to the temple will be more like a trekking trip. It will be particularly challenging to those who love climbing dizzy heights.

As the number of pilgrims is swelling by the year, with it the levels of environmental degradation also increases.

The amount of litter, particularly plastics, along the path leading to the hills had led to gradual degradation of the ecological system in and around the hills.

Over the years, materials such as carry bags and water bottles have been strewn all over the place. As the environmental hazard reached alarming proportions, there was a pertinent need to rid the place of such litter.

Concerned over such an ecological hazard, the Vanashree Eco-Centre, an arm of the Isha Yoga Centre along with the Forest Department, the temple administration and with the help of hundreds of young volunteers began cleaning up the hill since last year. As a result, several tonnes of plastic materials were removed.

Instead of playing a reactive role, the Vanashree Centre, Forest Department and temple authorities have played a pro-active role by preventing littering of plastics at the Vellingiri hills shrine.

On March 1, the volunteers from Isha Yoga Centre, Forest Department, local youth led by Muthu Palaniappan, Executive Officer, V.R. Guruswamy, Forest Range Officer, besides Balasubramanian and Mani from the Isha Centre camped at the foothills with anti-pollution handbills and educative banners, appealing to the people not to litter. Besides, they also collected about 20 kg of plastic materials from the pilgrims such as water bottles and carry bags, thus preventing them from littering.

The Vanashree Centre also introduced newspapers and banana leaf for packing food materials and gave away 26,000 free cloth bags to the devotees. So far about 50,000 pilgrims were screened at the foothills before embarking on the trek.

The volunteers threw light on the need for using recyclable materials and the pilgrims were encouraged to bring cloth bags of their own.

However, to remove even the little plastics that could have escaped the attention of the volunteers, the Isha Centre has planned another cleaning up exercise at the hills on May 16 and 17.

The Isha Yoga Centre has called for people with a concern for ecology to participate in the drive.

Boarding and lodging facilities would be provided for them. Those interested could contact Isha Centre at 2651298, 2651141 and 23319655 or e-mail at ishayoga@vsnl.com to be part of the programme.

Towards a plastics free Vellingiri

By V.S. Palaniappan