Keeping Vellingiri spick and span

Kailash of the South: It's the other name of the Vellingiri mountains, a popular pilgrim centre on the outskirts of Coimbatore. People believe that many hermits, blessed with supernatural powers, had made these picturesque mountains their abode. Enchanted with these kind of fables, thousands of people undertake an eight-km-long arduous trek on these mountains during the period between Mahashivarathri and Chitra Purnami every year.

While devotees consider full moon nights very auspicious for trekking to the mountains, the rare herbs and the exotic flora and fauna found in the mountains add to the mystical colours of the pilgrimage.

However, in recent years one can find polythene packing materials and plastic carry bags littered everywhere in the mountains following a sharp rise in the number of pilgrims and trekkers visiting the place. So, the Vanashri Eco Center, located at the foothills of Vellingiri at Poonadi and promoted by Isha Foundation, is embarked on a mission to keep the place clean by removing all the plastic and waste materials.

As the year 2002 is being celebrated as the International Year of the Mountains, the Vanashri Eco Center has launched a campaign to preserve the cultural heritage and the environment of the mountains. The volunteers (who include school children) of the eco center and the Isha Yoga Center, in association with the State Forest Department and the Vellingiri Andavar temple authorities have already started clearing the waste materials.

Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of the Isha Foundation and Shanthalinga Ramaswamy Adigalar of Perur Adheenam launched the campaign.

According to Shashidar Hebbar of Isha Foundation, "The Vanashree Eco Center members will trek to the peaks on the second Saturdays and Sundays of every month and assess the situation for ensuring better facilities for the pilgrims." The pilgrims would also be involved in the cleaning operation so that the message of the programme could be reached to more and more people, he added.

Hebbar said the pilgrims would be provided with cloth bags so that plastic bags could be totally eliminated. "The eco center will also organise programmes to educate the pilgrims on the hazards of plastic waste materials. They would also be involved in the afforestation programme, he added."