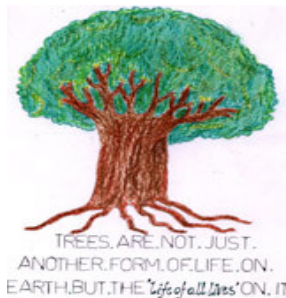




KHAJURAHO Special

Hope
Hope



PLASTICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

With the future of plastics firmly secured through major capital investments in research into new polymers, copolymers, blends and alloys of plastics, there is an awareness of the limits of our natural resources and the energy costs of manufacturing which now favours the continued development of the use of plastic materials.

It is an unfortunate result of our ever increasing consumerism, on all continents, that plastic materials have developed an undeserved reputation for producing intractable wastes which have attracted the attention of environmentalist and legislators in just about every jurisdiction on the planet. *The question is, is it the material or its use?*

Where the government has failed ?

- * In not setting up and encouraging the recycling industry.
- * In not setting standards for manufacture of recyclable plastics.
- * In not enforcing separation wastes at source.
- * In not collecting separated wastes efficiently.

Recycling of plastics in India is a challenge largely because of the lack of awareness to segregate wastes and proper disposal leading to littering. Littered plastics invariably ends up in landfills leaving the Earth noxious. Plastics inside the top soil means: rain water does not seep in, they damage the roots of tree growth and plant life, harm the micro organisms and other animals.

The government has to

- * collect littered plastics on a war footing, and dispose off responsibly.
- * If necessary, the government should assign an agency in a developed country to collect thin plastics to recycle or degrade them.
- * Encourage use of alternatives such as jute, cotton, coir, terracotta, clay, metal, wood, paper, hemp, pulp, cardboard etc.

Responsible usage of plastics is the key. Discouraging the use of freely supplied thin plastics is critical. Neither the private sector recycling industry nor the people are inclined so.

Our Khajuraho

The development of Khajuraho, as it is in present, began in late 1960's. Originally, planned to be a Tourist paradise, Khajuraho has fallen drastically short of its intended goal.....so much that this small township of amazingly beautiful temples looks formidably inhospitable even to its local inhabitants. The credit, above all, goes to its adverse climatic conditions rendering Khajuraho unworthy of visit for almost half of the year

It fills local inhabitant's hearts with pride whenever Khajuraho hits news headlines. But not so when its for being declared the hottest place in the entire state of Madhya Pradesh i.e. Central India – as the studies conducted by Meteorological Department in the year 2002 reveals. After a chilly winter, watching mercury soar is not a pleasure at Khajuraho where it is doomed to go almost as high as 50⁰ C and destined to hang on above 40⁰ C for pretty long.

This tourist destination of irresistible beauty and haunting charm has lost its claim of “paradise” to an unconventional opponent – unseen yet formidable – *its deteriorating environment* !!! this fight is still on.....and khajuraho's populace still holds the losing end. The sides won't change until people's mentality and approach does.

The distress signals of environmental threat are coming.....and coming since ages. Much is already lost but a lot still remains to be safeguarded.

Distress signals.... threats towards Khajuraho.....

SOIL POLLUTION

The economy of Khajuraho is based entirely on two factors – Agriculture & Tourism. Both these human activities in

their own way are responsible towards deteriorating soil conditions.

Khajuraho's soil is not known to be very fertile. Apart from its mixed variety and rocky character, the PH factor too is high rendering it better suited to citrus fruits such as Amla. The scanty rainfall also plays vital role in low productivity. But human role too cannot be overlooked. As is the situation in most other parts of the country, despite a huge number of livestock and therefore readily available organic manure, farmers in the vicinity are more inclined towards chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This is seriously affecting the quality of soil and making the crops and lands poisonous.

Land pollution in the urbanized area of Khajuraho can be ascribed to tourism and the growing population. Apart from its 15000 inhabitants, Khajuraho has a floating population of roughly 4 lac tourists per year. The garbage and litter produced by them is thrown in the open. There are 5 five-star hotels at Khajuraho but none is equipped with recycling, waste or water treatment plant. Worse still, most of these hotels are disposing off their waste and sewage in open grounds ! The lifestyle and eating habits of tourists includes use of tinned food and disposable items which further aggravates the situation. As per a recent survey, over 20% of the open land of Khajuraho is occupied by litter, waste and polythene based garbage.

Prior to the Polythene Management Programme started by **Global Village Development Foundation Khajuraho** since May 2002, approximately 6000 polythene bags were used daily and then thrown in the open. This accounts for a massive heap of waste weighing 60 tons per year ! Following the imposition of ban on use of polythene bags and the regular monitoring of market, situation has

dramatically improved. But there are still miles to go.

INCREASING AIR POLLUTION

The World Heritage Temples of Khajuraho are its lifeline.....almost the sole bearers of the local economy. But the heavenly beauty of the art and architecture of these temples is suffering due to increasing air pollution.

Though Khajuraho has no polluting industry in its immediate vicinity. But the increasing population and tourist inflow supplemented by heavily increased vehicular traffic is causing emission of noxious gases such as Carbon-mono-oxide, Carbon-di-oxide, Sulphur, Lead etc.

Vehicles such as diesel driven auto and tempos are very well identified polluting carriers. Yet their number is swelling on the roads in lieu of any governmental policy and resolution to contain and minimize air pollution in the region. As a result it is harming all – the environment, the public health and the temples on which depends the survival of the people of Khajuraho.

INCREASING CONCRETE JUNGLE.....DEPLETING THE GREEN ONE !

This factor has dual implications. While the increasing habitation is contributing a lot towards depletion of green cover, this factor is also acting independently. The result is – once known to be a densely thick forest, Khajuraho, today, is reduced to a dry rocky plateau with minimal greenery. The closest of the forest-covers that remains are :

~ Panna National Park, towards east of Khajuraho at 20 kms;

~ Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary, towards north-east at 17 kms.

The land around Khajuraho has been cleared for agricultural and other miscellaneous purposes and the remaining of its greenery too is being rooted off under increasing pressure of growing urbanization and vested human interests.

While deforestation is a regular process, *the afforestation programmes* (*) undertaken so far have not been taken seriously either. The subsequent result is utter failure in safeguarding and restoring greenery at Khajuraho. Day by day, with increasing habitation, the pressures against the local ecological factors and the greenery of Khajuraho are further mounting....

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SHRINKING WATERBODIES – DYING WATERSHEDS

Khajuraho was a huge lake with 85 temples erected within it. The accounts of ancient travel writers such as Ibn Batuta and Huen Tsang bears testimony to this fact. Sikander Lodi, the Emperor of Delhi in 15th century, during one of his battle campaigns in central India attacked Khajuraho and broke the dam causing the water of this lake to evacuate the valley.

But due to its bowl-like shape, despite water evacuation, a large area still remained submerged. As late as upto 1950's and 1960's, a major part of the present Khajuraho township was waterborne. Especially during monsoons, not much of the land area used to remain unsubmerged !

In early 1970's, with the first realization of Khajuraho's tourist potential, blue print was drawn and development started. While this development of last 3 decades have been successful in establishing Khajuraho as an international tourist destination, it has been a greater success in killing and curtailing the water-bodies, destroying watersheds and infesting upon itself the havoc and wrath of water scarcity and sinking water table.

Due to dense habitation and improper landuse, the watershed is disrupted. The lifelines of the existing water-bodies in the form of canals and channels are mostly wiped out. The course of natural waterflow during monsoons have been blocked or altered at convenience by those occupying these lands.

Khajuraho once boasted of being a huge lake itself. Today, only 8 water-bodies remains – and they too, in all their miserableness, are fighting a war against the haphazard development and changing climatic conditions for their very survivaland loosing ground inch by inch. Even the 3 small water-bodies – *Shiv sagar, Prem sagar and Ninora Taal* – which are the largest in Khajuraho, gets dried up every year !

Lakes are shrinking, watersheds are dying, water table in the region looks determined to penetrate deeper in the ground with each passing year.....these bad omen of environmental deterioration and disintegration are too serious to be overlooked any further.

DECREASING RAINFALL – INCREASING TEMPERATURE

Khajuraho is characterized by extreme climate. The temperature varies from as low as 4⁰ C in winters to an unbearable 49⁰ C during summers. Winter, the peak tourist season is short-lived while summer seems to be never-ending. The rainfall, officially, is as feeble as 114 cms annually. But in effect, it looks feebler.

As a universal phenomenon but considerably more pronounced in this area, which can largely be attributed to human mismanagement, the climate and the environmental conditions are getting more hostile towards human survival. The summers are getting longer and hotter while winters are getting short. The mercury has crossed the once established limit of 47⁰ C and now soars well upto 50⁰ C in May-June. The rainfall is getting scantier with each passing year.....all this, and its ill-effects are visible even to the naked eyes.....its time now that we should get alert and undo our wrong-doings in context of environment over the decades to combat these adverse environmental changes.

POACHING AND ILLICIT TREE- FELLING DESTROYING NATURAL HABITAT AND ITS DWELLERS

Of the 13 Bio-diversity regions in the world, India is the richest ! It proudly boasts of the maximum variety of flora and fauna put together. India is every nature lover's delight – just the right place for the tourists trotting the globe seeking paradise in wilderness. But this paradise-like wilderness is fast being rooted out alongwith its natural habitants. And Khajuraho is no exception where such activities are more pronounced.

Till its rediscovery in the year 1835, officially, by an English Engineer T.S.Burt – Khajuraho was lost in wilderness. The thick forests, marshy swamps and ferocious wild animals kept Khajuraho out of human reach for ages. But just as a reckless human activity in 15 the century destroyed the lake giving chance to growth of jungle at Khajuraho, similarly, in 20th century again, the human intervention caused jungles and its original dwellers to perish leaving open plateau behind.....and this phenomenon is still on. Compared to its past, not much remains to be safeguarded. But even this left-over of the glorious green cover of the past is gravely threatened and facing 'human invasions' every now and then.

Under pressures and reasons such as growing population, economic scarcities, **requirement of cooking fuel**, building material, clearing land for agricultural use, fodder land for cattles, etc, the green cover is thinning day by day. Apart from these human reasons the greater threat is from unending economic lust. The forests are fast depleting. This misery of forests is equally shared by its natural inhabitants. Their dwellings have been largely snatched. Their home is still threatened and being encroached. And to add to all these woes, poaching, though legally banned, is a common practise in this part of the country ! Most of the wildlife is endangered. But under prevailing conditions, there are every chances of their getting extinct soon enough. One unfortunate example is of Peacock – the beautiful National bird of India – which have been in a very large number in the vicinity. But following their poaching at large scale, there are'nt many to be seen any longer. Same is the case with most of the other animals and birds in the region.

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To,

Between an irresponsible civil society and an indifferent authority, waste management seems a hopeless exercise.