



REPORT

Living With Drought In Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has a drought problem which is getting worse each year. Due to the deforestation of the Western Ghats, the catchment areas are becoming yearly less effective. Village wells are being deepened each year, lowering the water table still further.

The resultant problems for villagers include an increase in skin diseases and other illnesses which are related to lack of good water or lack of any water at all. If there is no water, there is no harvest. If there is no harvest, there is no work and no income.

Increased poverty has a very direct effect in raising the infant mortality rates, especially that of girl babies. Selvi's father has always been an agricultural labourer.

He knows no other work and is not willing to attempt any other work.

His wife has a small business which bring in Rs 2 or 3 a day. The family barely exists on this. Selvi's mother just stopped feeding her. She grew thinner and weaker until she died.

Some baby boys have been left in the corner or on the floor of the government hospital. They were no more than little bundles of skin and bone. How there was any life left in them is a mystery.

Even if there is some work on dry crops, the women are unable to engage in it as they must daily spend longer and longer hours in search of water. The women walk incredible distances each day in search of a single pot of water to cook and clean for an entire family.

All these things and more are observable particularly in the rural areas. In the cities, the municipalities

take care of the people with water delivery trucks. They also control the flow of water from dams, taking top priority in the allocation of reservoir water for future needs.

The cities estimate their yearly need and what remains is allowed for rural irrigation. All of this serves to exacerbate the problems of rural people. The rivers they normally used and controlled for their own needs are now claimed and controlled by cities for urban needs.

From the local women's perspective, drought and its problems are life itself. They deal with it because it exists and they cannot imagine a life which would not include shortage of water and long searches in times of drought.

When asked to imagine a village without such problems, a group of

women grew very angry and said: "Don't ask us to dream and hope; our lives are too full of disappointment."

As for drought, they say: "Drought we can handle; it's the rain and the floods we can't deal with. Our houses suffer, our clothes are not enough, we can't find dry wood to cook our food. During the rains our lives are miserable. The heat and the dry we can always live with." And this is true. Even their small roadside businesses are unable to function in the rainy season.

Drought brings with it new opportunities for government officials to make money. We constantly read in papers about central government grants for various drought relief programmes. When asked about the nature and effectiveness of these programmes, the uniform response from villagers is "What programme?"

Only one development worker was

able to give some evidence of drought relief. It seems large sums are spent on sinking new wells. A 200 foot well should cost around Rs 11,000. Instead, contractors quote Rs 20,000 to Rs 22,000. Then they sink 90 foot wells which soon run out of water.

Daily, in the villages, one hears the sound of dynamite as well after well is sunk. However, very few are usable. Badly made and badly maintained pump handsets mean that many wells which still have water cannot be used. Sometimes, only a single pump will work in a village of 5,000 people. Fights among the women abound at such times.

Several hundred years ago, a farsighted ruler ordered the construction of tanks all over Tamil Nadu. These tanks, where the walls have been maintained, help to keep the water table high and the local wells full. However, as the population

and cultivation increases, the wells are not maintained, building and cultivation are carried on in the tank beds, and the surrounding wells run dry.

The tanks are good indicators of the condition of things. In 1986 the tanks began to sink and disappear around April and May and were bone dry by June-July. The drought was severe. Since then, some areas have had rain and the tanks got filled again.

But already, by February 1987, the tanks were becoming mere mud puddles. The papers echo the daily cry of drought and call for funds for relief measures. The local people take each day as it comes. Some die, some thirst but all accept the cycle of drought and flood, knowing that others around them will grow rich from their misfortunes.

—A reader from Kodaikanal

Complete Your Set..

The following back issues are available at a cost of Rs 25 in India and \$ 5 abroad (includes airmail postage). Send money to Manushi Trust

No. 1 (reprinted): editorial on women's situation; dalit women's struggle; Iranian women; women in trade unions; family planning; women's hostels; dowry; films: *Ghar*, family planning documentaries.

No. 4: women and electoral politics; mine workers; women in the civil service; electronics workers, Malaysia; rape law (Mathura case); dalit landless women, Punjab; films: *Suhag, Ahsas, Ratnadeep, Premvivah, Kala Patthar*.

No. 5: editorial on dowry; domestic servants' struggle, Pune; commercial women's magazines; life and work of Pandita Ramabai; rape law; films ' *Khubsoorat, Aap Ke Deewane, Naukar, Sparsh*.

No. 6: effects of drought; women in prison; tribal women, Bihar; wife-murder law; Chipko movement; porter women, Pune; abortion; anti-rape agitations; films: *Red Rose, Swayamvar*.

No. 7: editorial on women and forms of protest; Chipko movement; *bidi* workers; new rape bill; menstruation—facts and myths; call for dowry boycott; films: *Insaf Ka Tarazu, Albert Pinto*.

No. 8: women school teachers; women in early Buddhist movement; SEWA; genital mutilation; films: *Akrosh, Agreement, Love Story*.

No. 9: pavement dwellers; women and communal riots; coir workers; working women's hostels; bigamy in films: *Silsila, Chashme buddoor and others*.

No. 10: Amrita Pritam's life and work; women and criminal law; the working of Nari Niketans; Delhi nurses' struggle; interview with a woman who has worked in rehabilitation of prostitutes; films: 36 *Chowringhee Lane, Chakra*.

No. 11: survey of rural women's life and work in Punjab; domestic servants' struggles in Pune; marriage and divorce laws; Tamil Nadu women's struggle for democratic rights; films: *Yeh Nazdeekiyan, Jivan Dhara, Umrao Jaan*.

No. 12: facts and figures on women in Pakistan; interview with a Pakistani women activist; life and work of two Pakistani women poets; women in Bombay textile industry; women in cashew industry; gobar gas plant scheme; amniocentesis; women in prison; demand for 25

percent reservation of jobs: films: *Shakti, Prem Rog, Nikaaah*.

No. 13: tribal women's land rights; press censorship and women; *Chipko; prostitution*; films: *Prem Rog, Nikaaah, Shaukeen*.

No. 14: women in Bodhgaya land struggle; analysis of women and civil liberties; paper bag makers; women's struggles within the family; films: *Bheegi Palkein, Vidhata*.

No. 15: women musicians; landless women's struggles in Andhra Pradesh; Pakistani women's struggles; incense makers; nutrition and energy expenditure of poor women; films: *Gandhi*.

No. 16: women and water scarcity in Madras; tribal women in Bihar; Pakistani women's movement: rape and dowry laws; dowry in films: *Dulha Bikta Hai, Ek Bar Chale Aao*.

No. 17: women, work and property in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh; land rights for women in Andhra; Pakistani women homeworkers; tribal women in Maharashtra; women headloaders in Bihar; films: *Sex Fire, Sadma, Arth, Katha*.

No. 18: women slaves in ancient India; Pakistani women's movement; women's exclusion from Modi industries: prostitution in Thailand; violence in the family; films: *Subah, Mujhe Insaaf Chahiye*.

No. 19: interview with Ismat Chughtai; musahar and chamar women in Bihar; *devdasis* in Maharashtra and Karnataka; prostitution; analyses of women's protest agitations; harijan women's organisation in Tamil Nadu; women workers in Lijjat papad: film: *Razia Sultan*.

No. 20: interview with freedom fighter, Maharashtra; student nurses; women workers in unorganised sector, Calcutta; traffic in women from Uttarakhand; Nihalani's films: *Ardh Satya, Akrosh, Vijeta*.

No. 21: *anganwadi* workers; domestic servants in Pune; fuel collection in Garhwal; fisherwomen in Kerala; prostitution in Vietnam; story of a sterilisation camp; women's struggles within marriage; films: *Mandi*.

No. 22: interview with freedom fighter Punjab; Muslim women's petition for change in law; *bidi* workers in Vellore; *bidi* workers' struggle in Gujarat; women workers in free trade zones; women in Appiko movement; films: *Jaane Bhi Do Yaron, Swikar Kiya Mainay*.

No. 23: prostitution in Calcutta; tribal women contract workers; witchkilling in Bihar; dowry related deaths and struggles; women in textile industry, Calcutta; women in pharmaceuticals industries, Bombay; Muslim women's inheritance law; films: *Kaanun Meri Mutthi Mein*.

No. 24: antiliqor movement in Uttarakhand; zardozi workers in Delhi; pharma workers in Bombay; amendments to Anti Dowry Act and criminal law; prawn head cutters in Bengal; an activist's experience in Maharashtra; films: *Saransh, Achamillai Achamillai*.

No. 25: anti Sikh riots in Delhi; Family Courts Bill; all-women panel contests panchayat election; Christian women's succession rights.

No. 26 : women and the elections: riot relief work ; literacy for women ; retrenchment of women in textile mills ; film : *Aaj Ki Awaz*.

No. 27 : protest against court judgments in wife murder cases ; *bidi* workers ; childbirth ; women in prison ; vendors ; prostitutes and police ; films : *Khandhar, Kamla, Meri Izzat Bachao*.

No 28: socialisation of women in Punjab; women traders in Madras; effect of wood smoke on women's, health; bigamy; students' and teachers' protests; films: *Bombay, Our City, Bahu Ki Awaz*.

No. 29: Muslim women in Ahmedabad; fantasy interview with Sonia Gandhi; women victims of Bhopal disaster; female infant mortality; childcare; women victims of Bombay riots; film: *Arjun*.

No. 30: interview with Sant Longowal; Hindu goddesses; tribal women; challenge to Hindu law; films: *Akhir Kyon, Janam*.

No. 31: female gurus; women in Telangana movement; extracts from CFD report on army rule in Punjab; film: *Utsav*.

No. 32: Shahbano controversy; life and work of Lal Ded, Kashmiri poet; women in Tebhaga movement; vegetable vendors; films: *Filmotsav' 86 women's section*.

No. 33: communal violence in Ahmedabad; Thai women; Special Marriage Act: *bidi* workers; women in classical music; son preference; film: *Mard*.

No. 34: analysis of dowry practices; adultery law, women lecturers; amniocentesis; film: *New Delhi Times*.

No. 35: domestic servants; migrant labour; rural women, Haryana; Hindu guardianship law; films: *Agnisnan, Ek Pal*.

No. 36: New education policy; anti Muslim riots, Ahmedabad; telephone operators; pavement dwellers; abortion; harijan women, Haryana; Tata employees, Bihar; victims of 1984 riots today; film: *Naam*.

No. 37: Indecent representation of women bill; women in prison; goitre: Thakur women, UP; Christian law; coeducation; fisherwomen, Kerala; film: *Insaaf Ki Awaaz*.

No. 38: editorial on health; Navratri festival; male migration, Kerala; Habba Khatoon; Smita Patil interviewed; Muslim women's divorce rights, film: *Ek Chadar Maili Si*.

No 39: Women in Fiji; community level organising strategies; DDA move on housing; women's struggles in Himachal; naming practices; film serial: *Buniyaad*.

All these issues also contain interviews with women, reports of atrocities and protest actions, letters from readers and fiction.