



Bhavani River

AN OVERVIEW

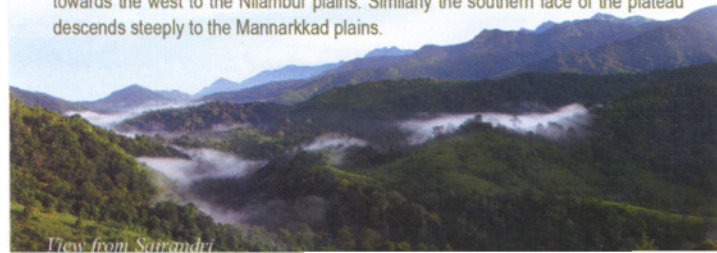
The Silent Valley National Park is a stretch of pristine wet evergreen forest located along the south-west corner of the Nilgiris in South India, in the State of Kerala. The Nilgiri mountains is a high spur range thrusting out east from the Western Ghats immediately to the north of the Palakkad Gap and to the south of the Mysore Plateau. The Gap is a 45km wide discontinuity in the mountain chain.

The Silent Valley National Park has one of the best representative evergreen forests in the country. Its biogeographic location, altitudinal range and its past history where there has been very little human disturbance, have combined to create an exceptional diversity of forest ecosystems, biotic communities and species of flora and fauna. A large percentage of the species recorded from this Park, especially plants and lower animals, are endemic species occurring either only within a few locations in the Western Ghats or collected from Silent Valley only.

Silent Valley National Park at present extends over 237.52 sq km which includes the 89.52 sq km Silent Valley Reserved Forest which became a National Park in 1984. This area has now become the core zone of the expanded Park with an additional 148sq km which has been added as a buffer zone in 2007.

TOPOGRAPHY

The present day Park is essentially two parallel south sloping valleys. The western Kunthi River valley is part of the west draining Bharathapuzha Basin. The eastern Bhavani Valley is part of the east flowing Cauvery Basin. The high ridge separating the two valleys starts from the highest peak in the Park – Anginda (2383m). This north-south ridge has the best forest on both its faces. The Bhavani Valley is essentially a gorge while the Kunthi flows along a 60sq km sub-plateau which has a mean elevation of about 1000m above the sea level. The western edge of the Silent Valley Plateau is again a ridge with peaks reaching 1300m or more. This ridge slopes down towards the west to the Nilambur plains. Similarly the southern face of the plateau descends steeply to the Mannarkkad plains.



View from Sairandri



Inside the rain forest

ECOLOGY, FLORA AND FAUNA

The pre-eminence of Silent Valley National Park is due to its rich forest ecosystems. In the higher reaches of the Park along the Nilgiri slopes it has some of the best preserved shola-grassland ecosystems in the country. These mist shrouded open rolling downs are the refuge for a large number of specially adapted plants and animals. Flowering plants, particularly a great diversity of orchids, impatiens species, strobilanthes, the only species of South Indian rhododendron and many other plants not normally occurring in the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats found here make it an incomparable nature's refuge.

The main valley of Kunthi has an extensive unbroken stretch of undisturbed mid-elevation evergreen forests which continues towards east across the intervening ridge into the Bhavani valley. This stretch of forests is a glorious representative example of the Indo - Malayan rainforest biome. Within Silent Valley it has a range of subsystems including hill top swamps, riparian vegetation, and specialised plant communities along rocky scarp faces and so on.

Although the Silent Valley National Park is famous for its lion tailed macaques, it has all the large mammals found in this part of the Western Ghats including tiger, leopard, wild dog, sloth bear and lesser predators such as smaller cats, otters and mongooses. Herbivorous animals including elephant, gaur, sambar, barking deer, chevrotain and wild boar are found here. Four species of primates, many chiropterans, rodents and squirrels including the giant squirrel and two species of flying squirrels are common in the Park. The park has a rich avifauna with more than 200 species recorded so far. A number of species recorded from Silent Valley are not only found exclusively restricted to the Park area but even within the Park they are found only within extremely restricted localities. Only a small fraction of its biodiversity is catalogued at present and many more species are expected to be recorded in the years to come.



HISTORY

The establishment of the Silent Valley National Park was the culmination of an epoch making environmental saga which was literally a historical milestone in the nature protection movement in India.

At that time the Silent Valley forests were scientifically practically unknown. Its biodiversity richness was only anticipated. The deforestation through inundation and the spectrum of other anthropogenic disturbances it was feared would cause a catastrophic series of extinctions of the specialised flora and fauna that is bound to be present in this rich and diverse habitat.

The controversy raged for many years starting from 1976. It picked up tempo with the help of the media. Public attention was focussed upon not only the Silent Valley but in general on deforestation, the uniqueness of rainforest, lion tailed macaques and other endangered species, river catchment forests and impact of dams on the habitat. Questions were raised on the ecological cost of development for the first time.

In 1984 the Silent Valley Reserved forest was formally notified as a National Park and the Park was dedicated to the nation by the then Prime Minister of India Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in 1985

BUFFER ZONE

Although Silent Valley became a National Park in 1984, only the 89sq km Reserved Forest, an incomplete segment of the forest ecosystem, a small fragment of the contiguous forest stretch had the Protected Area status. Finally in 2007 an additional 148sq km of forest along the eastern, southern and western borders was added as the buffer zone.



EPILOGUE

In more than one sense the Silent Valley has established itself as a symbol. It is not just a local issue or a long-settled controversy merely of academic, historical interest. Its very name is evocative. The mind conjectures an image of brooding silent woods in a dark valley, a primordial wilderness from before modern human times, in a sense a true precious remembered heritage. The 25th Anniversary of the Silent Valley National Park was yet another occasion to look around and to look into us and reiterate our convictions.





Lion Tailed Macaque



Cullenia exarillata

The Administrative System and the Visitor Amenities of the Park

The Park headquarters is located at Mannarkkad 40 km northwest of Palakkad, the district headquarters. The logistic base of the Park is at Mukkali 20 km north of Mannarkkad at the entrance to the Attappady Plateau. The core area of the Park begins 23km further northwest of Mukkali. There is a network of inspection paths and logistic support bases for the protection of the far flung areas of the Park spread over a very broken terrain.

There is no recorded history of human settlements within the core area of the Park but there are 9 tribal settlements along the fringes. A number of Eco Development Committees (EDCs) function as part of the Park mechanism for public participation in forest protection.

The Park is routinely open to visitors from 8.00 am till 1.00 pm and permission for entry can be obtained at the Park headquarters or at the Range Office located at Mukkali.



Gloriosa Superba

During contingencies such as forest fire threat in summer the Park may be closed to visitors. There is a visitor amenity centre at Mukkali where vehicle hiring, obtaining information or guidance regarding the Park or guides to accompany visitors are arranged. Overnight stay inside the Park is not permitted and accommodation at Mukkali requires prior booking. Trekking in the core area of the Park is not permitted.

The National Park regularly arranges nature study camps for the public especially students. The nature orientation, nature education camps usually last two to three days and they include lectures, audio-visual programmes, field visits, interactive sessions with resource personnel etc. For participation in the nature camps requests are to be forwarded to the Wildlife Warden. There are also extension programmes wherein a mobile exhibition is taken around on request to venues outside the Park.



Entrance to Sairandri

HOW TO REACH

BY RAIL

The nearest railhead is Palakkad Junction (Olavacode) which is nearly 60 Km away from the base camp of the National Park, Mukkali. Shornur junction, another railhead is about 75 Km from Mukkali. Coimbatore Junction in Tamil Nadu is 45 Km away from Mukkali.

BY AIR

Nearest air ports are Cochin (135 Km), Coimbatore (55 Km) and Calicut (80 Km).

BY ROAD

From East : Palakkad (60 Km) and Coimbatore (45 Km)

From South : Thrissur (115 Km) and Shornur (75 Km)

From North : Calicut (120 Km)

The nearest town is Mannarkkad, which is 20 Km from Mukkali.

For accommodation-Contact:

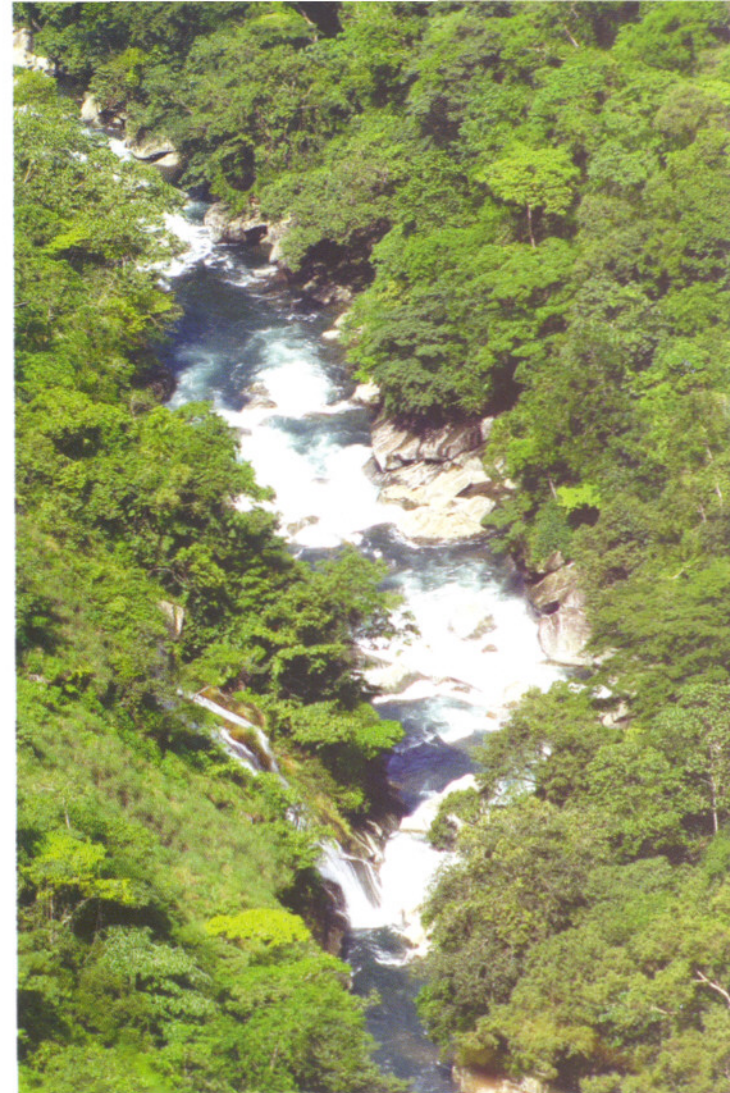
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For visit-Contact:

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