United Nations at 50 **Winning Management Ideas**
The House that Junk Built **Uncle Sam's Best Deal**

SPAN

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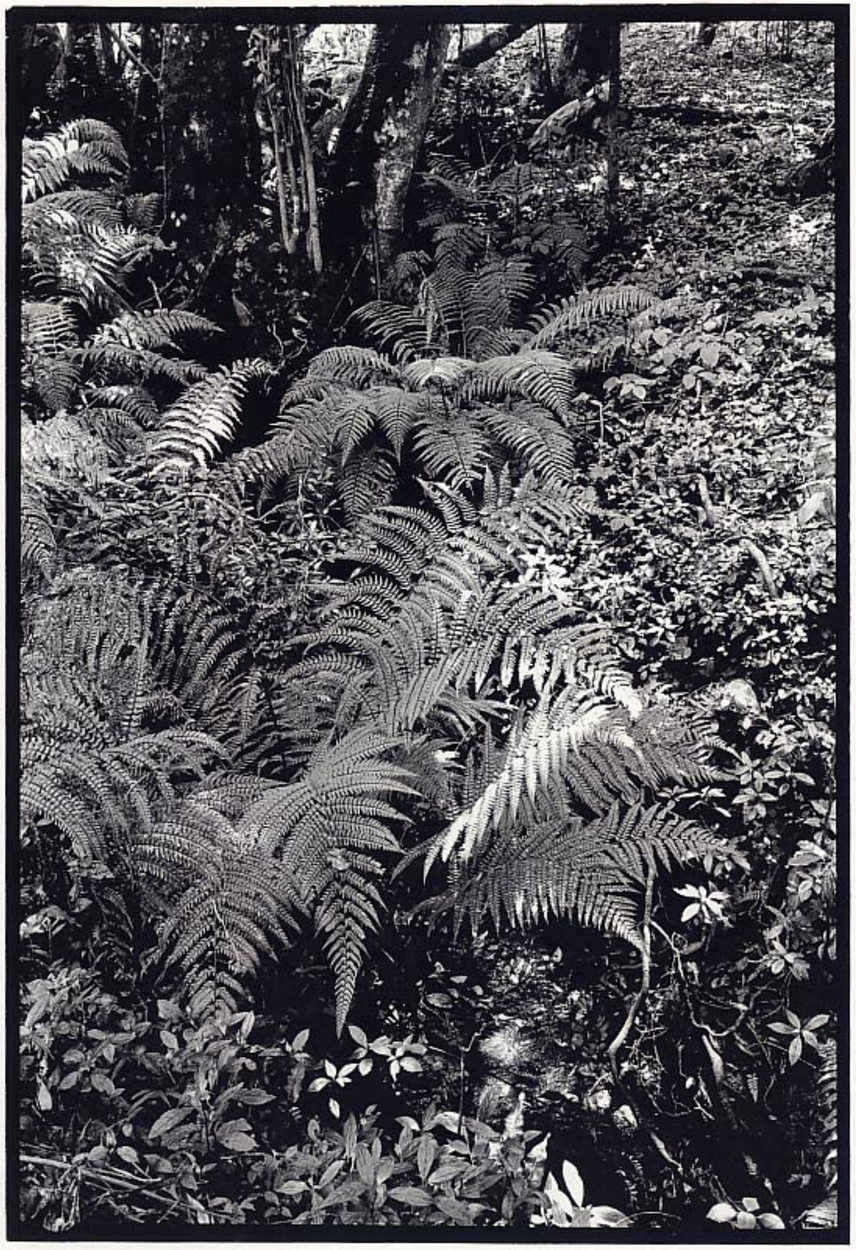

A Photographer's Love for the Western Ghats

A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

I hope that by the time you read this, the hostage situation in Kashmir will have been resolved, and peacefully so. The kidnapping of several innocent tourists, and the gruesome murder of one of them, have caused untold agony to their families and friends, evoked condemnation from around the world, and consumed the anxious attention of countless Indian government officials and security personnel as well as of diplomats from the hostages' countries.

The crisis has been a powerful reminder, as if one were needed, that human rights are a global issue of concern to us all. Two human rights experts, former Indian attorney general Soli Sorabjee and Yale law professor Charles Norchi, write about the subject for us this month.

Sorabjee, in a review of the successes and failures of the United Nations over its 50-year history, says, "One of the UN's greatest achievements has been the remarkable body of human rights law which it has initiated and which has been adopted by its member states." He goes on to note, however, that despite the passing of several covenants and conventions, "Torture and repression are prevalent and discrimination is rampant."

Torture, killing, kidnapping, and repression are usually what come to mind in connection with human rights violations. But Norchi points out that our post-Cold War era "is yielding new humanitarian crises" as well. One of these is environmental destruction, a subject we touch on in several articles.

An idealistic young photographer, Ian Lockwood, is concerned about threats to the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats, an area where he spent his school days as the son of American[redacted] posted in South Asia. An admirer of the famed wilderness photographer Ansel Adams, Lockwood is building an Adams-like photographic record of the Ghats to spur further conservation efforts there.

Technology often has been blamed for environmental damage, but it also has the potential to do enormous good. An example is our story about how satellites can analyze soil and instruct farmers on the amount of fertilizer to apply, thus avoiding the soil damage and other harm that result when fertilizers are overused.

We also have a small illustrated feature about a modern American home called the "Garbage House" because it was built with recycled materials. Thirty years ago President Lyndon Johnson sent a message to Congress urging that more be done to control pollution, saying that "In the last few decades entire new categories of waste have come to plague and menace the American scene." The Garbage House shows that by applying imagination and ingenuity, people can accomplish just the opposite.

—E.A.W.

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THE WESTERN GHATS

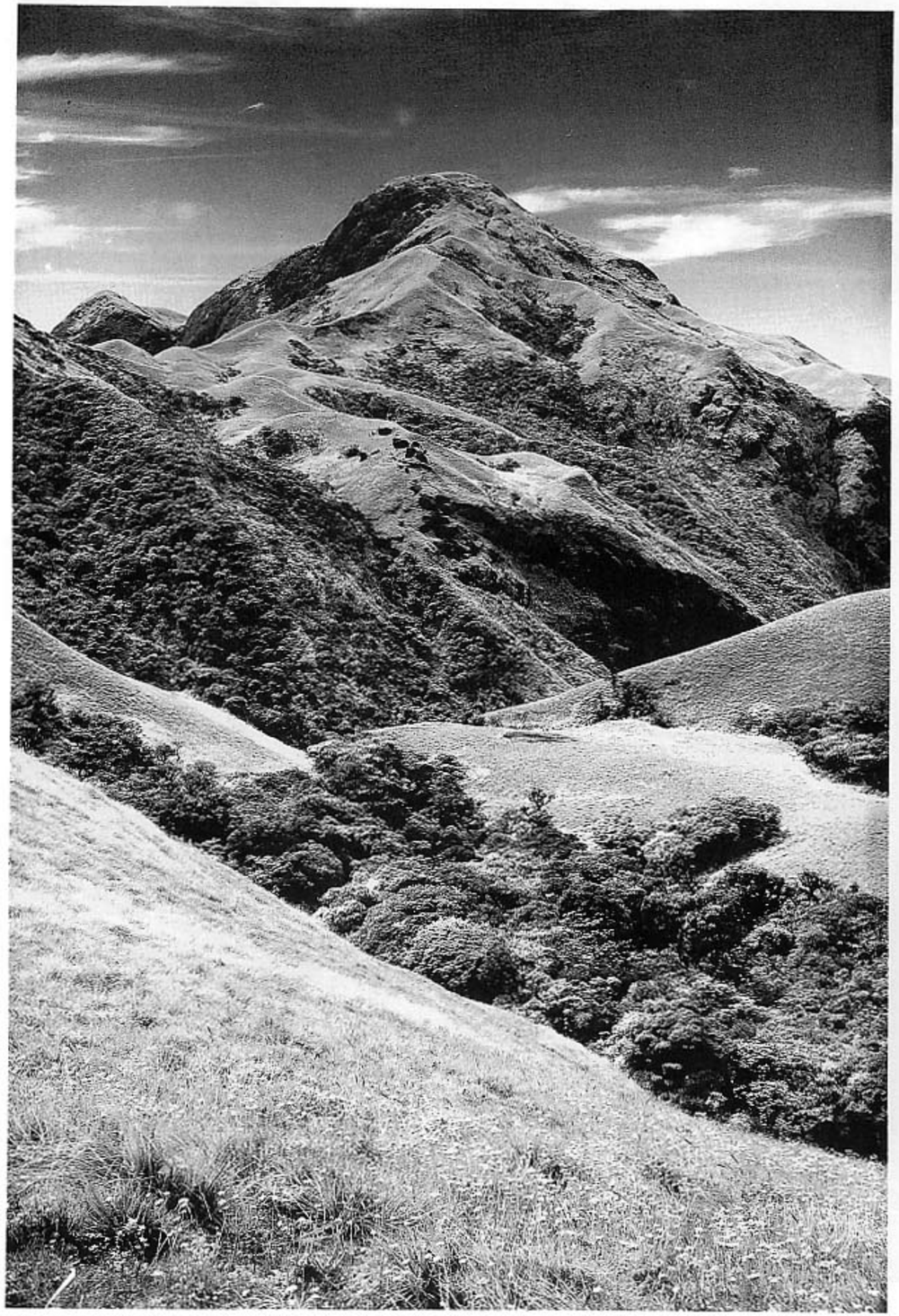
A Fading Bliss

Text and Photographs by IAN LOCKWOOD

I crouch in a wet tea garden and watch as the elephants move dangerously closer to me. Leeches slither up my boots, but my hand is steady on the camera's shutter release. Dark clouds swirl around the towering Anai Mudi peak, portending heavy rains. Several laborers make taunting noises and the elephants become annoyed. Suddenly, the leading female sounds a warning trumpet and charges. Scrambling to disengage my camera from its cumbersome tripod, I gawk as the two-ton pachyderm comes hurtling toward us. The tripod and a tangle of umbrellas are abandoned as my companion and I trip over each other in our haste to escape. Slipping and sliding over a mossy path I rush toward a nearby slope. Heart beating wildly, I am relieved to see the defensive mother give up the chase.

Fate and good fortune had brought me here amongst the highest peaks of India's Western Ghats mountain chain. Though I was born in the United States, I was raised on a diet of eclectic cultural values on the Indian subcontinent. Since childhood it had been my dream to explore and photograph these little-known mountains. Home to the largest concentration of biodiversity in India, the Western Ghats have been isolated from human interference for most of history. Unfortunately, they are now under assault as demand for scarce land and resources explodes in the wake of India's current development boom. Conservation of the Ghats has become my passion, and I use photography for this—as an educational tool to bring to the notice of viewers

This shola tree at Kodaikanal's old cemetery has survived the 150 years since the lake basin was first settled by American missionaries in 1845. Shola forests, endemic to the high altitude mountain ranges of southern India, are being increasingly threatened by commercial forestry.



Left: Anai Mudi in Kerala, at 2,695 meters, is India's highest peak south of the Himalayas. At its base is Eravikulam National Park, whose thick evergreen forests provide a haven for tigers and other predators.

Opposite page, top: A view of the distant Palani Hills in Tamil Nadu from Eravikulam's undulating grasslands.

Center: Wild grasses cover Eravikulam's rolling hills. Most shola, such as this, are confined to the valley, where they are protected from high velocity winds.

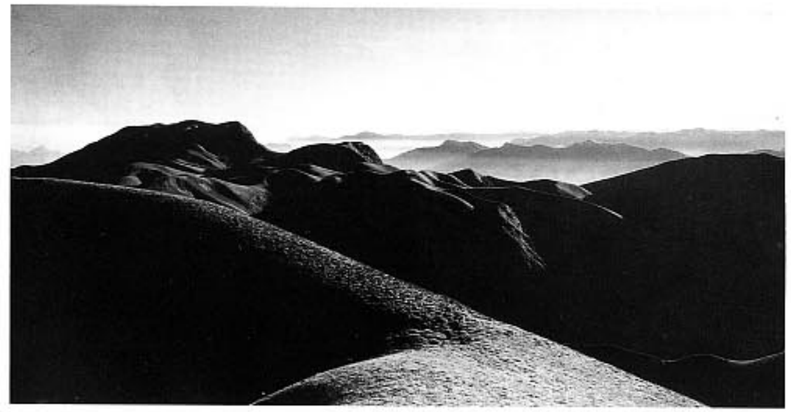
Bottom: Thalayar Falls, commonly known as "Rat-Tail," is a hikers' as well as a tourists' delight on the Ghat road leading up to Kodaikanal.

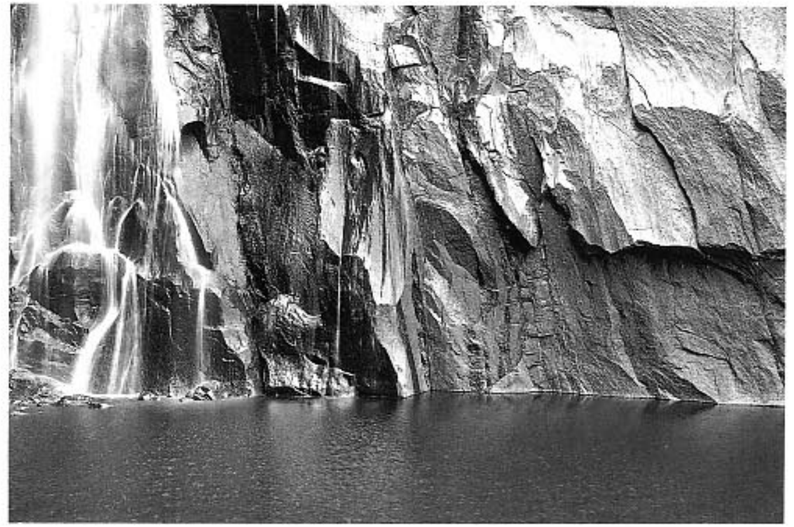
that, unless concerted efforts are mounted, this magnificent natural treasure will be lost forever to man's own peril.

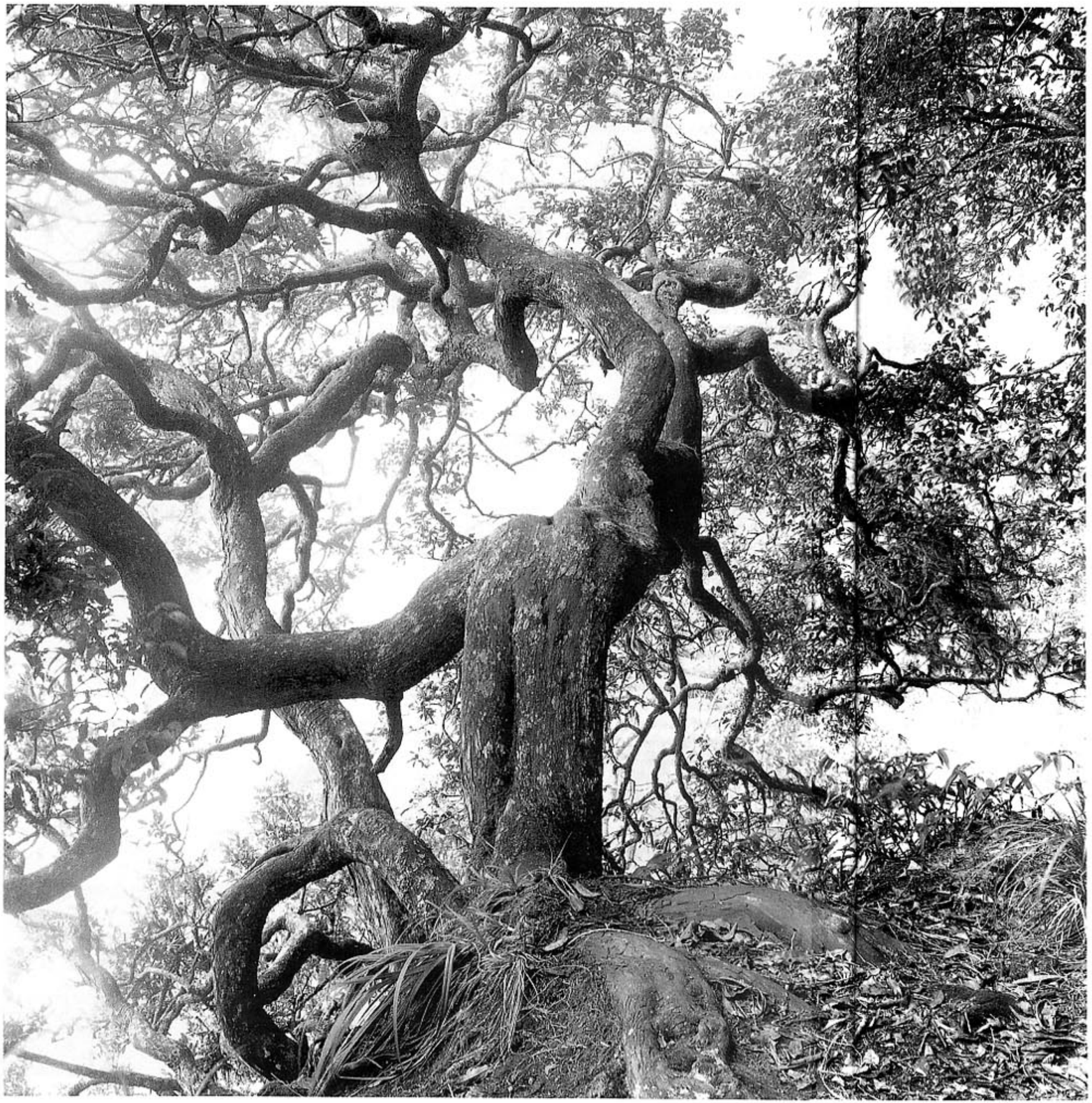
The Western Ghats first captivated me while I was attending boarding school, from 1978 to 1988, in the Palani Hills (an eastern spur of the Western Ghats in the state of Tamil Nadu). Kodaikanal International School, or Kodai as students called it, had a popular hiking program. My friends and I had an insatiable appetite for adventure and always looked forward to these excursions—and for more. If we weren't on a school hike, we were exploring on our own, cruising down the steep Ghat roads on bicycles. In high school I was introduced to photography, and started taking my camera on our adventure trips.

My love for these mountains and interest in photography had deep roots. My father had studied at Kodai School for more than ten years—1948-59—and been captivated by the surrounding mountains. He had been born in Sri Lanka—then known as Ceylon—to missionary teachers from Boston, Massachusetts. (My grandparents, in fact, had been married in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, in 1928.) Most of the students at Kodai in his day were the children of American missionaries working in this part of the world. He met my mother, the sister of one of his hiking pals, while at school in Kodai. They got married in 1968 in Virginia, where my mother's parents, who had also worked as missionaries in Madhya Pradesh after World War II, had recently retired.

At that time, Dad was doing graduate work at Kansas State University while Mom was finishing her degree in physical therapy in Washington, D.C. But India fascinated them so much that, soon after I was born in 1970, they came back—to Mysore, where Dad completed research for his PhD dissertation at the Central Food Technological Research Institute with the help of a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development. However, after about two years we moved to Bangladesh, and for most of the past 23 years we have been living in Dhaka where my father has been working with several NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) to develop alternative energy sources. Nevertheless, the mountains of southern India, despite their







distance from the delta of Bangladesh, have drawn us back every year.

* * *

Until the 19th century much of the Western Ghats, with their high altitude plateaus and thickly forested slopes, were largely impenetrable and pristine. Several tribal groups did live in the hills, but they had no adverse effect on the fragile ecological balance.

Then, in the early 1800s, the British surveyed many of the Ghats' higher reaches. Finding the climate to their liking and reminiscent of England, they began developing hill stations. In the years to come lower slopes were converted into tea and coffee plantations. Hydroelectric dams were built to tap the monsoon's torrents and commercial forests were planted in place of indigenous vegetation.

Yet, despite all these glaring realities, the mountains still have areas which retain primal wilderness untouched by the long arm of "development." It was these obscure areas and their tenuous state of existence that beckoned me.

In the 1950s when my parents were in school, commercial forestry was confined to the area adjacent to the township; the Palani Hills, for the most part, were undisturbed. Kodai itself was a sleepy village attracting mostly American missionaries and Indian honeymooners. Life in the hills revolved around boating, picnics, hiking expeditions, and church. However, as a result of hunting, a popular pastime, populations of animals like the Nilgiri tahr (see SPAN, July 1992) and gaur had touched dangerously low levels.

On returning to India in 1970, Dad was shocked to find old haunts unrecognizable and now occupied by long stretches of sterile eucalyptus trees. He would try to take our family hiking to places that still retained some semblance to the not-so-distant past. This became increasingly difficult.

The pace of conversion has increased in the past 40 years with aggressive, but sometime thoughtless, exotic tree-planting drives that have replaced the native grasslands. There is also much more pressure on hill stations by the fast emerging, multiplying middle class with its newfound wealth. Thus the carrying capacity of hill stations like Ooty, Mahabaleshwar, and Kodai is being stretched to the breaking point. The cumulative ecological impact of all these activities on indigenous flora and fauna has been disastrous.

* * *

One of my earliest inspirations was the great American landscape photographer, Ansel Adams. His timeless black and white images, besides being studies in technical perfection, did true justice to nature's indescribable beauty. What is most important, his photographs were used effectively by citizen groups, like the Sierra Club, to campaign against the wanton destruction of the American West. Adams's work had awed Dad and he had visions of documenting the Palani Hills with a large-format camera. When he got busier with other projects and I became interested in photography, he passed those dreams on to me.

Regrettably, landscape photography is an undependable career. So when I went to the College of Wooster in 1989 in the distant corn fields of Ohio, I opted for a standard BA degree in international relations. To pay for my photographic pursuits and other expenses I worked as a photographer for the college. It was a rewarding experience, but I absorbed enough to realize that commercial photography was too artistically and intellectually limiting for me.

Throughout the sojourn in the United States thoughts of tropical South Indian mountains haunted my winter-weary mind. Free time was scarce, but when it came my way I buried my head in books about India and the Western Ghats. As graduation loomed nearer I made long-range plans to study sustainable development in graduate school. At the same time, I made some short-range plans to pursue my photographic ambitions down in the misty mountains of southern India.

I returned to the subcontinent soon after graduating from Wooster in 1992. I knew little about wildlife, conservation dynamics, and the mountain ranges beyond the Palani Hills. By motorcycle, bus, truck, train, and foot I have since been visiting as

Left: A shola teeters on the edge of a precipitous cliff in the Palani Hills.

much of the Western Ghats as possible. Meetings with wildlife researchers, forest officials, and estate managers have given me a greater understanding of the mountains and the endemic wildlife. Firsthand encounters with wildlife have proved to be quite educational—and made me a first-class sprinter!

The novelty of simply seeing new areas and wildlife soon wore off. Looking for a more meaningful way to channel my energy, I started working on a series of articles and photographs that would highlight conservation themes in the Western Ghats. I had never taken a journalism class, nor tried to get work published before. It was a brave and sometimes daunting world, but, taking the wise advice of mythologist Joseph Campbell, I set off to "follow my bliss."

The Western Ghats stretch 1,440 kilometers from Kanyakumari to a little north of Bombay. Thus far my work has focused on the southern high-altitude ranges. Lately I have been working in the lower rain forests, and eventually I hope to explore all the significant areas encompassing the chain. My photographs mostly depict empty places (a psychological consequence of living in an overcrowded city like Dhaka), but increasingly I am recording human interaction with the natural environment.

Mountain dreams, explorations, and photography still don't pay my bills, so I teach at the American International School in Dhaka to cover costs. I spend almost all of my spare time in the Western Ghats. The more I see of these enchanting mountains, the more I feel committed to the cause of their conservation.

Still a little shaken, I sit in a thatched shack sipping a cup of tea, reliving the elephant chase and other adventures I have had. Staring up toward Anai Mudi's massive granite ramparts I am again reminded of how minuscule we human beings are in the face of Mother Nature. As a fledgling artist I try to convey nature's infinity in my photographs, while as a young conservationist I attempt to spread awareness about nature's treasures that we human beings are frittering away. As a restless adventurer I keep moving, following some murky thing called bliss. □

Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams, who died a little more than ten years ago, was perhaps America's greatest landscape photographer. Born in 1902 in San Francisco, California, he took his first photographs in the Yosemite Valley when he was 14. But it was not until Adams was in his late twenties and about to become a concert pianist that he decided to make photography his profession. "I can look at a fine photograph and sometimes hear music," Adams once said, "not in the sentimental sense, but structurally."

Indeed, that's what his photographs are: Musical. They are resonant, highly structured, and perfect in technique. He would spend hours, even days, before taking a shot to capture the feeling a subject evoked in him.

All through his lifetime, his was a world of mountains and woodlands and the vast, timeless reach of the Western landscape. A well-known American writer once said of him, "If a country as limitless as this can ever be said to have posed for its portrait, certainly the photographer behind the camera was Ansel Adams."

Adams's love for nature photography led him to become an ardent campaigner for wilderness preservation, although he claimed that advocacy of any kind was never among his intentions when he made his photographs. Conservation to him was "a cause beyond politics," and he was "greatly pleased" to allow the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations to use his art in their promotional material, and with notable success. His images so compellingly brought forth the beauty and significance of wilderness that even the most environmentally skeptical found it hard not to become a convert to the cause of conservation. His 1938 book, *Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail,* was among the major factors that led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to persuade Congress to turn the King's Canyon area of east-central California into a national park.

Adams's accomplishments include the publication of scores of books and the appearance of his work in hundreds of volumes; more than 600 photo exhibitions all over the world, including India; and America's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, the citation for which said "regarded by environmentalists as a monument himself, and by photographers as a national institution."

But, perhaps the most eloquent tribute to this ardent nature lover were the naming of a mountain in the Yosemite National Park and the renaming of the 56,000-hectare San Joaquin and Minarets Wilderness in his name. □