

## Common Cause

### WOMEN EMPOWERED IS INDIA EMPOWERED

#### Nurturing biodiversity

On the eve of Biodiversity Day, environmentalist Kanchi Kohli gives an insight into her work

Jyoti Verma

Tomorrow will be a special day for Kanchi Kohli. International Biodiversity Day will be a stock-taking day for the 30-year-old environmentalist.

She was a member of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), which submitted its report to the government quite some time ago. Nothing has come out of it as yet.

Undeterred, she has been working with Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group for the last six years and making people understand what 'biodiversity' actually means, and how valuable it is for all of us.

"Biodiversity is the essence of life. Right from the rajma varieties grown in our fields to the species of birds chirping around us—every element of biodiversity is an extension of our life," she avers.

Her biggest regret is that development is not people friendly. "We need to make development people-centric — and environment friendly. It involves realising the importance of biodiversity, and thus making little contributions at an individual level to preserve and nurture it."

She thinks simple and straight. She urges people to look at traditional ways of balancing development with the environment. She says, "We usually plan a bigger picture and accordingly attempt to achieve the targets. This leads to problems. We must try to work for development from the grassroots, begin with smaller things, and keep on doing value additions."

Kohli is not a qualified environmentalist. She became one on the job. In fact, she is recognised as a young leader by environmentalists as well as other experts. Says management guru M B Athreya, "Kanchi is a role model for young men and women with a conscience and social awareness. She is concerned about our ecology, environment, the marginalised and poorest of the poor. She exhibits the sreshtha dharma, namely the right aacharam (conduct) and praaman (standards)."

Recollects the alumna from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, "I got my education in social work. I started by working with communities in Uttar Kannada district of Karnataka, which is essentially an ecologically fragile area. People there made me realise how important environment is to them. I also found out that the environment is respected more by rural people than urbanites."