

Forest watcher who champions Silent Valley's cause gets recognition finally

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PALAKKAD: For green activists and even casual visitors to Silent Valley forest here, tribal watcher Ravi chosen for the Chief Minister's Forest Medal for 2020 is an all-too familiar name. Belonging to the Muduga tribe, Ravi has been part of this forest for the past 32 years. Along with several tribal watchers, he had been regularised by the PSC (Kerala Public Service Commission) in 2014. "Right from childhood, I had known Silent Valley forest. My parents and myself used to get firewood and medicinal herbs from there. Naturally, I was part of the combing operations conducted by forest personnel in the area from time to time," Ravi told TNIE from his Kalkandi residence.

"One of my main hobbies was to roam the forest. I had worked in the core area of the forest like Sairindhri, Neelikkal, Walakkad and Poochipara. Now I am working in Neelikkal. The official vehicle will drop us off at Pothuapadam from where we have to trek for around 5km," he added. Ravi is also a major source to researchers, who flock to Silent Valley from across the country, since he knows a lot about the fauna and flora of the forest part of the Nilgiri biosphere.

M Vimal, former assistant wildlife warden of Silent Valley park and currently assistant conservator, hailed the contributions made by Ravi in a Facebook post: "Ravi was the sole tribal watcher to be chosen for the Chief Minister's Forest Medal for 2020. In 2019, the award had been conferred on his colleague and fellow tribal Maarie from Attappadi. The names of Maarie and Ravi are synonymous with the conservation of Silent Valley forest and they will be remembered for ages."

Photo journalist N P Jayan, who had stayed inside the Silent Valley forest for one year starting from December 6, 2006, said, "Ravi is a dedicated tribal watcher. He moves inside the forest like a 'sambhar deer' and it is difficult to keep pace with him. It is watchers like Ravi, Maarie, Musthafa, Sadanandan, Kannan, Krishna Mallan, Kaali, Rajan and a few others who have conserved the Silent Valley forest much more than forest officials."

"Unlike Maarie, Ravi has more practical knowledge of the topography and will help anyone reach the farthest corners of the forest. The award was due long ago but he has been recognised at last," said Jayan, who has shot around 7,000 images of Silent Valley, adding, Ravi had once been attacked with a machete.

On the attack against him, Ravi said that the incident had occurred in 1992.

"I was on field duty when the primitive Cholanaicker tribes attacked me. My knee cap was shattered in the attack and I was admitted to hospital. It took me six months to recover," Ravi said. According to him, he is yet to receive official intimation on when the medal will be presented. Ravi is married to Lakshmi and Aswathi and Aswin are his children.