

11th September- Forest Martyrs day – A day to recognize the Supreme sacrifice of the *Green Soldiers*

By Paushali Roy, TFS

The day, 11th September is observed as National Forest Martyrs Day. It is observed ever since the Ministry of environment, Forests and Climate Change made its declaration in the year 2013 to recognize the value of sacrifices made by the Foresters towards protecting the Forest & Wildlife resources. The day commemorates the Khejrli massacre of 1730 when a group of 359 revolutionary protesters led by a lady Amrita Devi raised voice against Maharaja Abhay Singh who intended to slaughter the sacred Khejri trees of the Bishnoi Community in Rajasthan. In a bid to salute the supreme sacrifice of the valiant green soldiers and to pay homage for those who martyred, this day is observed country wide as a National Forest Martyr's Day.

It is a reality that the Forest Force rendered commendable services to the Nation by keeping the Mother Earth habitable. The increase in forest cover, improvement in endangered flora and fauna like tiger, lion, elephant, rhino, etc against the dwindling trend in the global level, have been made possible only due to untiring, relentless and selfless service rendered by the foresters, even in many adverse conditions. They displayed exemplary courage and valour in the line of duty and many a times even sacrificed lives battling for the sake of green Earth. My heart goes out to the families and survivors of those noble souls. How hard it must be for the children who even cannot feel their father's presence in some grandeur celebrations of life! When people enjoy Dassehra and Diwali, our green soldiers walk along the cradle of forest saying "I have miles to go before I sleep". Its proud to say that our force is full of such brave hearts. The sylvan surrounding and bird's chirping today echo the tales of their heroism and bravery.

In our State Tripura, where 75 % of the geographical area is embraced by forests, one can assess the kind of commitment and services required for protecting such mammoth assets. When we live in the era of poaching and hunting animals to fill stomach, if the next generation can see flying hornbills and orioles in the tree tops and not, only in google page, it is due for their tireless and timeless job in protecting the magnificent megafauna. Fighting with the stray elephants for keeping villagers safe is like an every night lullaby in the hills of Khowai District. Nestled within the lush green and beautiful flowers, the Agartala- Sabroom National Highway roadside plantations which earned Chief Minister's Civil Services Award 2020 are the silent witness to such commitments and hardwork. History reveals that there was no compromise to service even at the cost of one's own life. In one incidence, a Range Officer was attacked and killed while confronting people encroaching into a wildlife sanctuary. There are instances, in which forest personnels were shot dead in the line of duty; tragic end of life by elephant stampede,

animal conflicts, etc have also bereaved our hearts. There are so many tales of heroism and sacrifice that is difficult to narrate all here. Amidst all atrocities, the spirit is never down. Really, the spirit is never down and the mission never fades even if the green soldiers succumb public attacks, stone throw, physical assault in the duty line for protecting the Mother Earth. It is imperative that we stand along with them, instill a sense of our ownership and responsibility in their task and offer them the recognition and support that they deserve. That will be the ultimate homage for the Green Heroes who fought for the Nature till the last breath.

**The writer is an Assistant Conservator of Forests,
Govt. of Tripura
paushali84@gmail.com**