



On the forested slopes of the eastern Nilgiris at an elevation of 1000 msl live the indigenous communities of the Irulas and Kurumbas. Their agricultural lands are intercropped with coffee varieties like Robusta, Arabica and Liberica and trees like jack, orange, lime, banana, silver oak and pepper vines. High value spices like cinnamon, clove and nutmeg alongside tubers like arrowroot and yams are also grown together with coffee. Liberica is grown as a boundary plant and sold mixed with Robusta or Arabica coffee beans.

This land use is a holistic option for indigenous households; providing ecological, economic and nutritional support while also meeting the fuelwood and fodder needs of the family.



LAST FOREST COFFEE

Coffee society

When coffee is ready to harvest, the family gathers to pluck and process the fruits. In activities like weeding, manuring, harvesting, pruning trees and drying fruits, the work is often shared in the family. Not much distinction is made between the work of men and women in the indigenous communities. Coffee growing farmers are also free to go for wage labour but are usually more involved in their farm.

Coffee is also grown for personal consumption and is an important drink for the community. In the villages, coffee is roasted, ground into powder and served fresh. Sometimes young coffee leaves are used for making a brew.



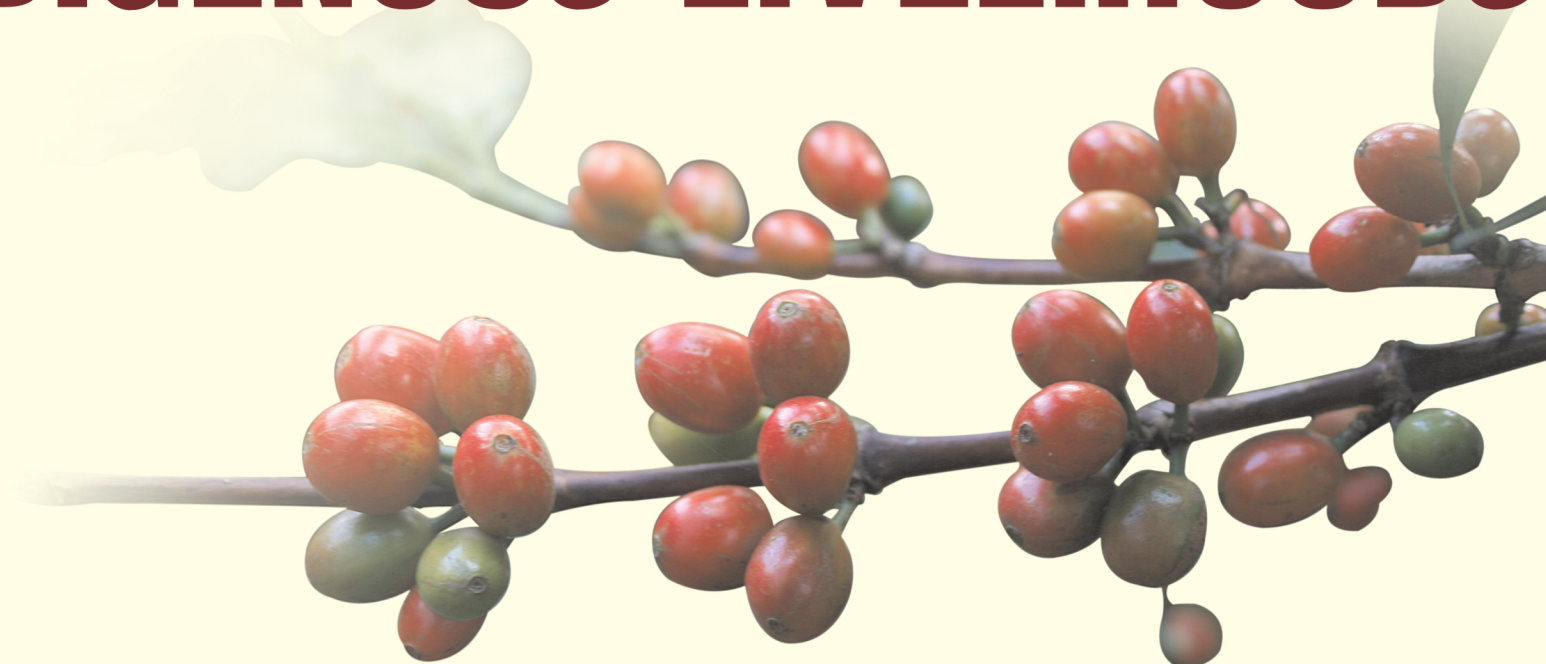
SUPPORTS **BIODIVERSITY** **INDIGENOUS LIVELIHOODS**



Coffee economy

The land use in coffee plantations is sustainable because of the multiple benefits of cash and food security that it provides. Cash incomes are important to meet the needs of the family for education, clothes and medicine. Since the coffee is grown without chemical inputs, it gives a higher value to the product on a lower budget. Income from coffee also comes at the right time, just before the festival celebrations.

Through the work at **Keystone Foundation**, coffee plants are provided to the farmers and nurseries are established in the villages. Soil and moisture conservation activities are undertaken and bio nutrients and preparations are supplied. Production centres are established in the villages to which the farmers can sell their coffee. This reduces the additional expenditure on transport for the farmer and strengthens the local economy. The indigenous coffee growers get a higher price for their chemical free coffee and an assured market. **Last Forest coffee marketed by Keystone is therefore organic and fairly traded.**



Coffee ecology

Coffee lands display high crop diversity providing a good mix of food and cash crops. There are a number of uncultivated foods available on these small farms. From the nutritional point of view, coffee growers have a diverse intake of fruits and vegetables. The land use is very similar to the principles of analog forestry, providing easy movement for wildlife, especially small mammals and birds. Bird diversity has been observed to be high throughout the year. Insect activity is also high in the coffee soil which is an indicator of a 'living' soil. The soil under coffee is less acidic and supports undergrowth.

Compared to other land uses in Nilgiris, coffee farms suffer less erosion. Coffee bushes are closely planted and the high leaf litter, mulch and biomass act like a sponge absorbing rain water. Coffee farms provide a significant amount of fuelwood and fodder for livestock. The tree diversity is an important shade source for the crop. Coffee farms complement beekeeping, as the honey is unique and the coffee flowers are pollinated by bees.

Legend

has it that, from one of the Muslim settlements along the Konkan, an elder by name Baba Budan journeyed to Mecca and Medina in Arabia in the 17th century. He returned with seven hidden seeds in his robes which he introduced in the hills of Chandragiri, situated in today's Chikmagalur district of Karnataka. Birds seem to have spread the seeds. Wild coffee did so well that it was listed among the 'Jungle Produce' of Mysore and was on sale in the markets of Bangalore and Srirangapatna by the 1800s. So, according to the legend, it was an Arab contribution to India that led to the beginnings of the plantation industry.

David Cockburn, the Scottish Collector of Salem between 1820 and 1829, introduced coffee cultivation in the Shevaroyas. Around 1840, Cockburn came to the Nilgiris, he is seen as one of the pioneers of coffee in the Blue Mountains.

