

Text of RIS Dean Dr. Eric Miller's
Ecology Club Inauguration Speech,
at Rojavanam International School
(Nagarcoil)
on Saturday 13 April 2024.

Dear All,

Vanakkam!

Today we at Rojavanam International School are inaugurating our Ecology Club.

Did you know that since ancient times, Tamil culture has classified the landscapes into five environmental-cultural zones? Yes, it's true! The five zones are: 1) The seashore, land for 2) agriculture and 3) pastures, 4) desert, and 5) mountain forests.

And each zone is associated with a different flower, and a different experience in the relationship between a husband and wife. For example, the seashore is associated with one spouse looking out at sea, hoping the other spouse would return soon from a long sea journey. And mountain forests are associated with joy over the togetherness of husband and wife and their children. Have any of you ever been to a hill station, such as Kodaikanal? Do you remember feeling joy there? Joy is the emotion traditionally associated with mountain forests in Tamil culture – joy about the living, growing plants and animals, and about being together with other members of one's family in the midst of that relatively-cool and moist environment.

So in Tamil Nadu, nature also involves culture.

By the way, 20 years ago I did fieldwork for my PhD in Folklore in the nearby mountains. Actually, we can see those mountains from here at Rojavanam School. I did my fieldwork with members of the Kaani tribal people, the Kaanikaran people. They know a lot about nature, including ways herbs and flowers can be used for medicine. Maybe eventually we could go on a field-trip and some Kaani people could show us some nature. The Kaani people live around Pechiparai. That is only about an hour drive from here.

I will conclude by saying that Biological, Cultural, and Linguistic diversity are mutually supportive to each other, and are healthy for the environment, and for society. Everybody knows Biological diversity is healthy – different types of trees and plants keep the soil in place, and will not all be affected by conditions that may be challenging for some particular plants. A people's knowledge about nature is stored in their language, and in other aspects of their culture. And the more languages and cultures there are, the more points-of-view there are that could be called upon to face any challenges that might come up. That why the saying goes, "Two heads are better than one"!

Thank you very much, and let us all wish the best for our Ecology Club!