

entire Block No.58 in Kottakamboor Village and part of Block No. 62 in Vattavada village in Devikulam Taluk of Idukki Dist. 2006-07 was the year when Kurinjimala flowers bloomed in abundance as part of the 12 year cycle. These flowers bloom once in 12 years. With the blooming of the flowers, it was suddenly noticed by the Government that in many of the Neelakurinji growing areas, land was being encroached upon. Based on an assessment done by the District Collector on the directions of the Commissioner of Land Revenue, who could convince the then Minister (Forest) and could communicate the sense of urgency, it was felt that at least some areas that were still secure should immediately be declared as a Sanctuary so that these Neelakurinji growing areas can thereafter be better protected. The Forest Dept. was required to submit a proposal within a time-limit on which the report of the Revenue officials was obtained and even though questions were raised by the local elected representatives on the ownership rights of the encroachers, after convincing them that these questions will be tackled by the Settlement Officer, the Notification for the Sanctuary was issued. This part of the Neelakurinji growing area was thus being declared a Sanctuary by law. It was done in the hope that the Settlement Officer will confirm the ownership rights of the encroachers eligible to get assignment as per law, evict those who are not eligible and also the Forest officials will thereby get full right to demarcate and fence off the balance land, protecting the future of the endangered Neelakurinji, at least within the Sanctuary premises. But as 2014 has shown, the Neelakurinji's fight for survival continues. In another part, Neelakurinji bloomed this year, ie. 2014. But the effort to protect the Neelakurinji within the sanctuary even after 8 years remains incomplete: the legal process is yet to reach fruition.

Unfortunately even though eight years have elapsed, the Settlement Officer's work remains unaccomplished. The Forest Dept. too could not carry out a geo-referenced survey of the Sanctuary boundaries to a final conclusion. Even during the tenure of this Committee, the representative of