

Alu kurumbas see the need for helping each other

Seminar for the community at Kotagiri

Special Correspondent

UDHAGAMANDALAM: Under the aegis of the Keystone Foundation, a one-day seminar, 'The *alu kurumbas* of the Blue Mountains, was organised at Kotagiri on Tuesday. Pointing out that the exercise was to come out with a demographic profile of the tribal community, an *alu kurumba* woman, Selvi said that, of late, a number of health-related problems had become a major source of concern.

Negligence

Stating that it was mainly due to negligence, she said that in the last few months, a few women below 35 and a 12-year-old girl had died. Since those in the community were still baffled over what had caused the deaths, a village-wise survey was undertaken.

The *alu kurumbas* who resided in about fifty villages in Coonoor, Kotagiri and Attapady areas numbered about 2,600.

While many were landless labourers, even those who possessed lands were dependent on the wages they earned as casual labourers.

She regretted that while the low literacy level was another source of concern, the members of the community had of late adopted an 'each man for himself', attitude as a result of which they were not helping each other

- Exercise to come out with a demographic profile
- Each man for himself was the attitude
- Health-related problems a concern
- Low literacy level, another area of worry

er even during medical emergencies.

Changing lifestyle

The Director, Keystone Foundation, Pratim Roy, said that the aim of the seminar was to view in a holistic manner, different aspects of the rapidly changing lifestyle of the *alu kurumbas*. "As a non-Governmental organisation we have been interested in the welfare of the *alu kurumbas* for several years and we are worried about the unwelcome changes that are now taking place," he added.

All concerned must join hands in ensuring that they lead a life of 'dignity and respect', he averred. The Project Director, Hill Area Development Programme (HADP), S.J. Chiru, an authority on the Nilgiris Tribals, Reverend Philip K. Mulley and the State Demographer, P. Muniappan, also spoke.