



# PESTS IN THE SYSTEM



The Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK) started the aerial spraying of endosulfan over the cashew plantations in the hills around Padre village in Kasaragod district in 1978. This was done three times a year over an area of more than 4,600 hectares.

Within a year the residents started complaining of environmental and health problems. Residents reported the mass deaths of bees, fishes, frogs, birds, foxes, and congenital deformities in domestic animals like cows.

Dr Mohan Kumar was one of the first persons to bring the health impacts in the region to media attention during the mid 1990s. Going over data for more than ten years, Dr Mohan Kumar YS found that disorders of the central nervous system like cerebral palsy, retardation of mental and/or physical growth, epilepsy, and congenital anomalies like stag horn limbs were very common among the children of the area.



Much to the surprise of the health practitioners, almost all the ailments were restricted to people under 25 years of age. Even more perplexing was that there were no industrial sources of pollution in the area, so it was hard to imagine this deterioration of health among certain areas of the district. He published a letter in a journal for doctors by the Indian Medical Association, asking the experts to conduct a study in the area. He actively shared his concerns on the matter by writing to the media and other doctors. Dr Mohan Kumar also began holding public meetings to explain his findings to the villagers.



The evidence shared by him led to the teachers in the Government Higher Secondary School in the region to start articulating their concerns about the health of the children.

In 1998, Leelakumari Amma, from the Agriculture Department's office at the village level witnessed the deterioration of health of her two children and herself — loss of voice and hormonal problems after she came to live in a village inside the spraying area. She then lodged a complaint in the local court along with two other farmers to stop the aerial spraying in the interests of the people's health and the environment.

Several national and international groups conducted health and toxicological studies between 1998 and 2002, and arrived at the conclusion that the abnormal health problems at Kasaragod were due to the spraying of endosulfan.

The Kerala State health department also conducted medical camps in various regions and subsequently they also conducted a study.

The report reaffirmed the relationship between endosulfan and the health problems in Kasaragod.





In 2002 the Kerala High Court banned the sale and use of endosulfan in Kerala, and following this the State Government also issued a ban order in 2003. Local efforts for relief and rehabilitation started at Kasaragod with the help of the local government, local organizations, and the Calicut Medical College in 2003.

In 2005 the Central Government issued an order that labels on pesticide bottles must carry a message that this pesticide is not for sale in Kerala.



Finally, the Supreme Court of India banned the use, sale, production, and export of endosulfan across the country in May 2011. Currently, relief and rehabilitation measures are being implemented for the victims of endosulfan in Kasaragod.

A Special Purpose Cell for Implementing Relief, Remediation and Rehabilitation was set up by 2007 with the support of the State Government. It is an independent and transparent body which is looking into all aspects of the relief work — health, social, environmental, policy and financial.

