

ప్రగతి

Punarchith

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18



Punarchith ('Re-Think') is a collective that focuses on evolving alternative perspectives and activities related to education, environment, democracy, and society. It seeks pathways and perspectives that would lead to ideas and learning for an equitable and just society. Its foundational premise is to evolve and engage with ideas that are suitable for everyday life in rural India.



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Pumarchith

SO we journey on; keeping our broad goals in mind but tailoring our work to what we think are ground-level needs and requirements. Yet, between the different programmes and the trajectories of the lives of the people around us and the life of the land, we ponder as to what is really relevant, what is feasible, and what the future holds for us and for the area. The North-East monsoons of September-October 2017 broke the prolonged drought and with it our sense of despair. A bountiful harvest, a gathering of friends, discussions of new strategies, growing social bonds in the area, and new ideas keep us going. The fund situation is a cause for concern but we hope that sincere work will be appreciated and some contributions will come our way. Watching our youth learners turn into promising agriculturists, engaging in public issues at the village level, and generating creative work through photography has been a heartening experience. We hope to keep on this journey; its travails teach us many lessons, its moments of success give us deep satisfaction. And, for making this possible we thank all our friends, family members, and supporters who have been the backbone of this organisation and its work.

PROGRAMMES AND WORK



LAND/ANGARIKE MAALA

A slow but steady transformation of the land is now visible. Despite the drought that was broken only in August-October 2017, we managed to grow some crops. For the purva-mungaru or pre-monsoon season, we cultivated a mix of green gram, cowpea, redgram, black gram, beans and a variety of millets. Unfortunately, due to the drought the yield was not substantial (about 4 quintals in all for 3 acres). The rains arrived in August and we planted another round of millets, horsegram (red and black varieties), ragi (finger millet), and hucch yelu (niger) and were able to reap a good harvest. As in the previous years, we were happy to share the produce with all those who have supported

PUNARCHITH and we also sold some to organic food stores in Mysuru and Bengaluru. Since we have been cultivating local seeds, several people from the area are now approaching us for local seeds, especially for pulses.

Land restoration and rejuvenation work entailed more bunding across the land, stone pitching the two water ponds, planting tree saplings and improving mulching across the cultivatable space. Periodic lab tests of the soil from various parts of the land indicate an improvement in soil quality. This year, we also planted a stretch with medicinal herbs, sourced from B.R.Hills. To supplement the water supply, we invested in a pump and a network





of pipes and tanks to lift the water from one of the granite quarries. Regular soil testing and analyses also continues. P. Veerabhadnaika, Muthuraju H, and N. Kanthraju are the backbone of Angarike Maala and it is their hard work and commitment that is slowly but surely transforming the land.



To mark two years of cultivation at Angarike Maala and to formally inaugurate the space as a site for agro-biodiversity conservation and land restoration, we held a small social gathering on June 18th 2017 for our close friends, family members, ILP youth, village residents and neighbours. About a hundred people joined us in sharing ideas about the importance of land, local agriculture, ecological conservation and the ideas of community farming and sharing. To acknowledge the workers who worked on the land and helped cultivate it we honoured three key workers; Shri Puttaswamy, Shri. Nazareth, and Shri Kantharaju all of Nagavalli village. We also planted four saplings in memory and honour of beloved friends and family members who had been supportive of us. These are: Dr. Meenakshi Thyagarajan, Smt. H.P. Lakshmiddevamma, Smt. Muddamma, and Shri Gowdki Nagarajappa.



INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

Although we had not planned to have a full 'Integrated Learning Programme' course this year (due to paucity of funds), we had a group of youth from one village, Doddmole, who approached us and expressed interest in the course. We decided to do a shorter version (since all of them were working and did not have time to do the full 60 days course) and initiated the course in April. Of the seventeen of them excepting one girl from a scheduled caste community all the rest were from the Uppara caste, an OBC group. Of the six girls three were young widows (two of them had been child brides). The batch was mixed in

the sense that about half of them had dropped out from middle school and had lost touch with reading and writing and another half had only completed high school. We found it difficult to get them to read and write or to engage in discussions about complex issues. While the men participated with interest in the agricultural activities, it was difficult to get the girls to work on the land and to be regular to the classes. Subsequently, many of the girls dropped out. A final programme/event for this batch was held at Doddmole village itself. The youth wrote out and practiced a play called, 'Ration Shop' which drew on real events



and experiences around the ration shop and raised issues about public institutions, their functioning and people's responsibilities. We note that the post-course engagement by this batch of learners has been significantly more intense and engaged as compared with other batches. The group of boys from Doddmole village have now formed a group of their own called 'Arivu' or 'Understanding' and they

meet regularly to discuss both personal and village issues. They have conducted a tree-planting drive in the village and have begun to participate in the village panchayat. In an attempt to improve village recreation, they have applied for and received sports materials from the Dept of Youth and Sports. They are now scouting for free land to develop a good sports ground for the village.



CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

The children's programme continues and every Saturday the free play, creative art work, dance and singing sessions are conducted at our premises in Nagavalli. The attendance is irregular; when there are local festivals or weddings, the attendance is very thin, but on other days about 50-60 children come to the two-hour sessions. Our resource person, Lakshmi Guruprasad, attempted to introduce

sessions on free movement and theatre and they composed a song on seeds which the children learned to sing. The summer camp concluded with the children presenting short skits and also doing a dance with the 'seeds' song.

As part of encouraging youth to visit the resource centre, we conducted a two-day



reading sessions for them but we noticed that the children were not keen on this. For the summer camp, we had sessions on art, free dancing and theatre. The theme was 'seeds' and the artist cum teacher, Lalita Manjunath, worked with them to draw seeds and then to make items from dried seeds. Veena Basavarajaiah and Shreekanth conducted



workshop called Yuva Chetana. It included sessions on communication, creative writing, environmental awareness, use of the library, and activities from performing arts. Sixteen youth from the surrounding villages participated in this workshop.

HONNERU: RURAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

The alumnae from the Integrated Learning Programme have now formed a group called 'Honneru' (meaning 'first/auspicious plough'). They meet once every month to share their work and experiences and to also learn new issues or engage in discussions. The objectives of the collective are to work as a production co-operative and support network. Currently, the team is producing items such as cleaned grains (ragi ; pulses such as red-gram, green gram; oil seeds like niger etc) and value-added food produce (pickles, papads, sambar powder, baby feed, health drink etc). Some of the youth have started making cloth bags

and hand-made soaps and up-cycled paper products. Profits from the sale of these goods go into a collective fund (which is managed by them) and is utilised for their entrepreneurial activities or for their emergency requirements. They have elected a secretary and treasurer amongst themselves and keep notes of their meetings and discussions. There are currently 22 members and about 16 of them attend the meetings regularly. Additional inputs and support for them included a two-day session conducted by Kokila Deshpande (from Mumbai), who taught them to make products from newspapers and waste cloth.



SPONSOR A FIELD

The prolonged drought of 2015-17 led us to think about a strategy to support the youth who wanted to continue to be in agriculture. We had noticed that several of them had given up cultivation since they had lost crops in 2015 and were now looking for casual jobs in nearby towns and cities. We solicited funds to 'sponsor a field' with which to support some of these youth. Sixteen persons responded positively and we used these funds to support eight young farmers. Since the drought prolonged, only two young persons were able to reap some crops. One of these was our former ILP learner, Madhuchandra, who works in Chamarajanagar town (as a DTP operator) but was keen to reclaim his land that had been mortgaged and

was lying unused since eight years. He used the financial support from PUNARCHITH to repay the mortgage that his father had taken on his land and cultivated it in the returning monsoon season. He was able to grow ragi (finger millet) and hurali (horsegram), some of which he sold and retained the rest for his family's use. Two widows from the Nagavalli and Putanpura village were also provided with support. However, they both lost the crops from their fields. Radha, from Honganuru village, came out a winner and she grew vegetables which she was able to sell. She has also initiated a small horticulture patch on her land.



FIELD VISITS

As in the previous years, this year also the youth learners were taken to visit Shri Shivkumarswamy's dryland agricultural plot in Santemarahalli village. Here they learnt about the possibility of conducting dry-land agriculture with limited water and also about soil conservation and sustainable agricultural practices. In order to expose them to alternative ways of organising for agricultural production, we took the new ILP batch and some of the alumni from the previous batches to Kerala. In Kozhikode (Calicut), they met with and visited the fields of the Kudumbashree agricultural collective, and later spent some time with the Urungal Labour Cooperative members. During the evenings, discussions about the importance

of co-operative organising and possibilities of new ways of organising were held. On the third day, the team visited the rice biodiversity fields at Wayanad, that the organisation Thanal has developed. Here they were able to see the ways in which agricultural bio-diversity was conserved. Many of the youth felt heartened by this experience and several indicated their interest in forming youth agricultural groups to cultivate land through a cooperative.

Some of the youth, including our team members, participated in the Youth Samalochana Sabha conducted in Shira, Thumakuru. They also provided inputs for the state's youth policy and budget allocation.



PHOTO PROJECT

Sunita Rao and Matt Anderson initiated a photo project for the ILP youth. The idea was to give some basic training to the youth and then encourage them to take photographs of their lives and surroundings. They also solicited support from friends who donated used cameras and seed funding for the program. They named the project, Mannu-Kannu (Land and Lens) and had six training sessions spread over four months. On July 29th, we held a slide

show in Nagavalli of the youth's photographs, and each of the photographers presented their slides and also spoke about their experience. A similar show was held in Sirsi as part of the Malnad Mela. Some of the photographs that the youth took were unusual and consisting of the everyday events and life processes in the area. Plans are to organise exhibitions of their photographs in Bengaluru, Mysuru, and Chamarajanagar town.



MILLET PROGRAMME AND MILLET MELA

Since a millet programme (training, cultivation, processing, and usage) had been initiated, with Dwijiendranath Guru's support, we decided to conduct a small millet mela. A patch of the land in Nagavalli was also brought under millet cultivation. To coincide with the harvesting of this patch, we organised a mela in September

at our resource centre in Nagavalli. Apart from local residents and the ILP youth, we also invited people from the district, including officials from the Dept of Agriculture. Millets for both cultivation and cooking were sold and a meal with millets was served to the guests.



SEED SAVING AND SEED SHARING

Based on our observation that there was a sharp decline in the availability and cultivation of local seeds (of all grains and vegetables), we decided to scout for local seeds from all the villages surrounding Nagavalli. Two of the ILP learners, Ravi and Praveen, spent a month going to the villages and collecting local seeds. At the end of the month, they had collected about 106 varieties of seeds that included pulses, cereals, vegetables, tubers, and cotton. These seeds have been sorted and a data base about them (type, source,

age etc) has been compiled. To promote the use and conservation of these local seeds, we organised a seed festival called, Beeja Balavalli (Seed Sharing). Two well-known seed savers from the district were invited to speak; Smt. Kamalamma and Shri Mahadevswamy, both of whom called for recognising the importance of local seeds and of conserving and using them. About 120 people attended the festival. We are also encouraging others to take seeds from us and to return some of it later as a way to encourage the cultivation of local seeds.



NAGAVALLI: COMMUNITY RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Based on our observations about the sorry state of natural and public resources in Nagavalli village, we decided to initiate some work in collaboration with the panchayat members. After several months of deliberations, delays, and procrastinations on the part of the elected members, we were able to initiate discussions with them and the residents on the state of the village lake, the use of public taps and water, the absence of waste management, sanitation, and the need for improving the green cover in the village. In September, 2017, since the rains were good, we organised a tree planting drive along with panchayat members. Although their involvement in planting the trees was good (and we planted 46 saplings on two main village roads), they did not continue to care for the saplings. We later constructed tree guards

around the saplings and periodically took care of them. Much later, a young man from the village volunteered to look after them. The panchayat development officer, Shri Madappa, requested help in mobilising village residents to build toilets (as part of his Swaacha Bharat responsibilities). We consented and organised an awareness and mobilisation drive through a cultural format. Janardhan Kesargadde and Nada dressed up as Sharifas (wandering sufi minstrels) and went around the village on three days, singing songs and then discussing issues about hygiene, sanitation, government support etc. By the end of two months, the PDO was able to build several toilets and he acknowledged PUNARCHITH's support for this. We were less successful in the waste management drive, especially in preventing



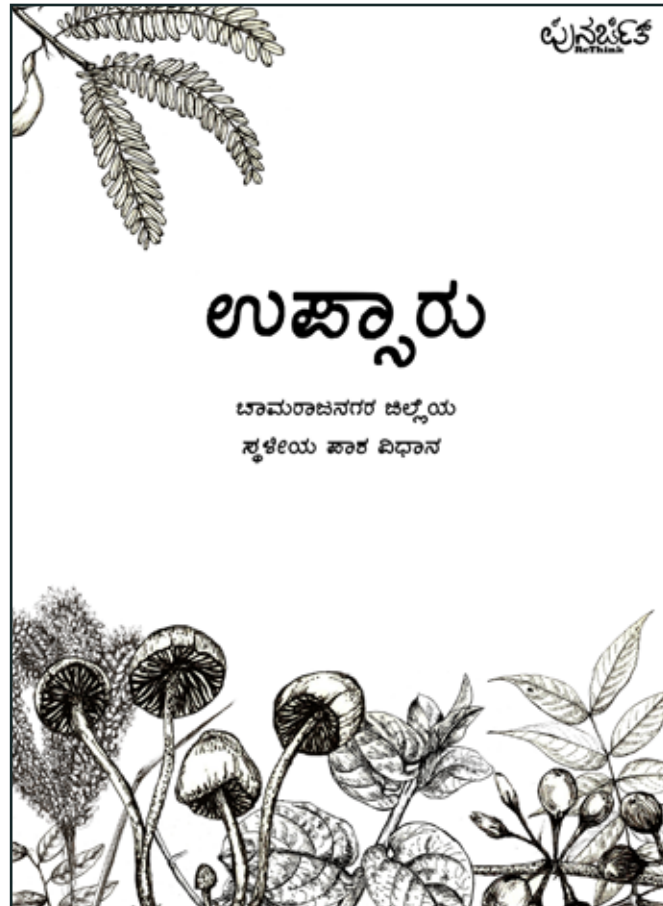


the shops from disposing their waste on the main road. The inability of the elected members to meet regularly, take decisions and enforce rules was a key problem. We then had Dharnappa, a young person who had trained in water and sanitation issues, spend three months with us. He conducted a survey on the use and misuse of water, especially in the public taps, and we presented details of this to the panchayat members and to the residents. They consented to having the leaking taps changed, and to regulate their use (or wastage) of water. We also designed posters and had them hung on the water tanks. The work continues and plans are to meet with the district officials to see what can be done about the state of waste management and natural resource conservation in the village.

Over the course of this focussed work, we were able to initiate discussions with the women's groups at the anganwadis, and we conducted a 'Children's Gram Sabha' at the Nagavalli Gram Panchayat. The process of preparing the children to participate in the Gram Sabha involved visiting the three main schools in the village, conducting workshops in the schools, and then identifying children who could speak about various issues. The gram sabha was very successful in that the children were vocal about their concerns and the panchayat took a few decisions to alleviate some of the distress that they faced.

PUNARCHITH PUBLICATIONS

We were very pleased to release a booklet of local recipes that the ILP youth had collected from their families. Abhisheka Krishnagopal took a lot of trouble and designed the recipe book to reflect its origins and orientation. We named it 'Upp Saru', after the basic but very nutritious curry that is popular in the region. It is a priced publication and is being sold at various outlets and through the Honneru network. We were also pleased to have launched our website (punarchith.org) in both English and Kannada, which was designed by Cheluvaraj, Mysuru. Team members also published an article on the drought conditions in the state in the Praja Vani, a leading Kannada newspaper. Siddharth Joshi of Bengaluru provided additional research support for this.





DISCUSSIONS AND OUT-REACH

Team members participated in discussions and out-reach at various fora. These included meetings of the State Vision 2015 held at the Dept of Agriculture, various meeting conducted by the the Department of Tribal Welfare, at the International Adivasi festival etc held at Chamarajanagar; at Ragi Kana, Bengaluru organised by Gram Seva Sangha; with members of Vanastree at Sirsi, and at the Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (New Delhi). Apart from this team members also delivered lectures at various fora including universities in India and abroad.

VISITORS

P. Somaiah spent a few weeks with us as an intern and helped out with work on the land. On November 29th, 2017, we had a team of faculty and students visit us from Massey University, New Zealand. The team discussed various issues about the state of rural India and were especially keen on knowing about alternative learning programmes and sustainable agricultural methods. Smt Sarada and Dr. Gopal Dabde from Belgaum, Anusha, Jude Pais, and Archana from Bengaluru,

and Sanjay Gubbi and Harish from Nature Conservation Foundation visited us for discussions. In addition, Dr. Rajendra, Jostein Jacobsen (a student from Norway) and Rajanna from Hanur visited us. Dr. R. Sunder of BISS, Bengaluru and his team visited us to review the work before sanctioning a grant to us. Other visitors including team members of the former Vidyankura group visited us and spent a day with us



SUNITA RAO, one of the core members of PUNARCHITH,
was recognised for her pioneering work with VANASTREE,
the collective that focuses on women and seed saving.

She received an award from the Ministry of Women and
Child Development.



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Dr. Shubha Vijay

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Ms. H. Suma

Ms. Rekha Jayakishan

Smt. Vatsala Parthasarathy

Shri M. Pramod

Shri Rahul Patani

Trustees

Kala Sunder, Harish Narasappa, Venkataraju, A.R.Vasavi

Core Team Members

P. Veerabadranaika, Muthuraju H, M. Mahalakshmi, S. Sowmya, N.
Katharaju, H.Suma, P. Srinivas (Vasu), Dwijendranath Guru, Sunita Rao,
Samira Agnihotri

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Punarchith Learning Centre
Nagavalli Village, B.R.Hills Road, Chamarajanagar District-571342, Karnataka

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