

Discerning the many stories...

Annual Report

APRIL 2018 — MARCH 2019



Visthar

Annual Report

APRIL 2018 — MARCH 2019



Annual Report

April 2018 - March 2019



Visthar

Kothanur Post

Bengaluru – 560 077. India

Tel.: +91 80 28465294 / 28465295 / 65349492

mail@visthar.org

www.visthar.org

Design and layout: M V Rajeevan

Contents

I. Discerning the many stories...	4
<i>Reflections from the Executive Trustee</i>	
Our Story	5
Mega Story–Two Indias	5
A Counter Cultural Story	7
Conclusion	8
II. Concerns, Confusions, Contradictions	9
<i>Report from the Director</i>	
Introduction	10
Vision, Mission and Transitions	12
Affiliations and Accreditations	13
Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation	13
What Participants Say?	14
Towards Re-Visioning Shelter Homes – An Action Research	15
Gender and Religion – Work with FBOs	16
Community Empowerment in South India	17
Cultural Resources for Social Transformation	18
Eco Education and Eco Art Events	19
Bhoomi Habba – The Earth Festival	21
Bandhavi (Trust)	23
Publications	26
Team Retreat	28
Visthar Conference & Retreat Centre (CRC)	29
Manoranjitham – A Wellness Experience	30

*Discerning the
many stories...*

REFLECTIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE TRUSTEE

Our Story

We celebrate thirty years of our journey this year. A time for introspection. Visthar was established with the goal of sowing seeds towards a counter culture. We draw on enlivening memories of the journey. Our claim to relevance lies in the fact that we have been responsive to other stories. Mega stories of national and international scale. Stories that we are a part of, albeit, peripherally. On the other hand, we have been significantly involved in stories of dissent and authentic expressions of creative alternatives to the mainstream 'development' and way of life.

This piece must be read as a precursor to the report by the director and in a context of situating the Visthar story; one of negotiating and positioning ourselves, as a searcher for relevance; striving to be in a secular and prophetic tradition. Standing with the marginalised, speaking truth to authority. We believe that 'another world is not only possible, but she is on her way and on a quiet day we can hear her breathing'. (Arundati Roy)

This reflective piece will begin with a mega story; the streams within and in conflict. We are part of this conflict; living in tension, inspired that 'another world' is being shaped in the present. It is this inspiration that provides the hope, enabling us take tentative, sometimes even confident steps in reinventing ourselves and stoutly claiming to be subjects and defenders of the Constitution of India. The mega story could serve as a reminder for the younger generation and the generations yet to be born.

Mega Story- Two Indias

India commemorated Martyrs Day on the 30th of January. A few days after Republic day. In 1948, months after India's 'tryst with destiny', Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was shot and killed by Naram Godse, a devout member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Bestowed with the title, Mahatma, M.K Gandhi was killed at the Birla House gardens on his way to a prayer meeting.

On his 71st death anniversary, a few weeks ago, the nation, represented by the President of the Republic, Vice President and Prime Minister paid homage to the memory of the 'Father of the nation'. Whether the majority of the peoples of India, remembered Gandhi on this day

or not, the Hindu Mahasabha did. Led by its General Secretary, Ms. Puja Shakun Pandey, the Mahasabha, recreated the assassination of the Mahatma. In Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, attired in saffron, Ms. Pandey, with a look alike Beretta automatic(pistol) in hand, stepped forward and shot the effigy of M. K Gandhi. With great precision and accuracy she fired 2 shots to the stomach and one to the chest, being true to historical facts. Make believe blood oozed out from the balloon, built into the effigy and the chants praising Godse reached a crescendo. With a smile of contentment, the General Secretary proceeded to garland the photograph of the killer, Naturam Godse. The commemoration ceremony concluded with the traditional distribution of sweets. It was a commemoration ceremony alright, but not of Martyr's Day. For several decades, the Hindu Mahasabha, commemorate the 30th of January as Shaurya Diwas, to hail the bravery of Godse, for killing, with intent, the Mahatma.

Conscious Indians, my generation or younger, know that the title Mahatma was not bestowed on Gandhi alone. Jyotirao Phule clearly justifies the title bestowed on him for his social activism towards eradication of untouchability and women's emancipation. A pity the honour was not extended to Savitri Bhai Phule. Returning to Gandhi, we must also stoutly proclaim that this is a history that is partial and biased, privileging the "Gandhis of the nation, ignoring the contributions of other streams engaged in the struggle for the political independence of India. This history is blind to the contributions of women, dalits and adivasis in the freedom struggle of India. Obviously there is ample scope to research and add to the already phenomenal work of scholarship in the field. That said and returning to the stories of commemoration, we are clearly faced with two distinct renderings of the same event. I daresay this is a trajectory of two Indias or is it three? The first is the India represented by M.K. Gandhi and his ideology. The second and in virulent ascendance is the India represented by Godse, his ideological forebears and those who venerate him in contemporary India. Thanks to the Hindu Mahasabha, it was not Gandhi's remains alone that were set to the flames but a vision of India and a prophetic tradition of 'truth seeking' and civil disobedience. In the Gandhi- Godse story, as it is played out in India today, we see a Mahatma recast as a traitor and a murderer venerated as the hero of the faith hence of the nation. The audacity of Ms. Puja Shakun Pandey, representing the Hindu Mahasabha and her / their action on the 30th of January 2019 points to the aggressive nature in which stories are being retold. Each retelling in the frame of a ritual, cementing distinct memories. A retelling, as if it is the 'good news' is fast becoming the norm. A retelling based on a partial vision, dismantles the very 'Idea of India'.

Drawing attention to global financial capital and its impact on India, I punctuate my observation on 'three India's'. The World Economic Forum (WEF) concluded their 2019 meeting recently at Davos, Switzerland. Founded in 1971, the WEF is a Not for Profit Organisation. Their mission is one of being "committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas" . Tall claims, however the ground realities reflect truth, and speak for itself. Credit Suisse indicate that 1% of India's richest own and control 51.5% of national wealth and the poorest 60% have 4.7% of national wealth, Chart 2 of The Indian Plutocracy (Credit Suisse) points to high inequality nations. India tops this list of inequality at 75%. A recent Oxfam report indicates that 82% of

the wealth generated in 2018 went to the richest 1% of the global population, while 3.7 billion people, who make up the poorest half of the world, saw no increase in their wealth. With regards inequalities, a case in point is the unabashed opulence of the recent Ambani marriage which stands in direct contrast to over 750 million Indians who live on less than two dollars per day.

A Counter Cultural Story

We the citizens of India, must reclaim and solemnly swear “to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: justice, liberty, equality.” We must honour our past, recommitting ourselves to the future and the generation yet to be born. Thank God this process is already in the making. This is the story of civil disobedience, truth seeking and dying that others might live. This is the story of the younger generation, farmers, dalits, adivasis and women. Be it the recent farmer rallies or student protests in Delhi, they echo the clarion call of leaders and activists of several social movements in the country. To name a few Medha Pathkar, Aruna Roy and Arundati Roy. Add to this the work of poets, artists and musicians. All weaving a common thread: Unmask the ‘untruth’ and ensure a life of freedom and dignity for all.

A mere coincidence perhaps, a quirk of sorts, that Rohit Vemula was born on the 30th of January 1989, forty one years after M.K. Gandhi was assassinated. Rohit committed suicide, on the 17th January, 14 days before his 27th birthday. What lies behind the suicide is the Truth. The Rohit story is a phenomenal tale of defiance, resilience and life lived with dignity and hope. Born a dalit, he knew well the negative impact of growing up in a casteist India. That he enrolled in the University of Hyderabad as a Ph.D. scholar, speaks volumes of his defiance and resilience. An active member of the Ambedkar Student Association, Rohit at the early age of 25 was the author of ‘Caste is not a Rumor’. He made his positions clear and spoke truth to authority. The strong arm of the establishment came down on him like a tonne of bricks. The university withdrew paying him his fellowship of Rs.25000 and rendered him homeless. Joining and supporting students in Delhi, he condemned the protest of the APVP to the film, Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai and the death penalty of Yakub Memon. For articulating his right to dissent, Rohit was penalised further; death threats followed and he was branded an anti-national. In a note before he hung himself in his friend’s room, Rohit wrote: “The value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a Vote. To a number. To a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind. As a glorious thing made up of stardust”.

Rohit's death was a seed planted and already bearing harvest. Rohit was killed. His death exposes the vulgarity of caste and untouchability practice in India and the impunity with which the Indian state puts down dissent. Ironically undemocratic acts inspire peoples struggles for peace with justice. Those in the margins refuse to be snuffed out, and deny death its last laugh. This is a story of a counter culture. One that Visthar can draw from and emulate.

Conclusion

Money (in part) does make the world go around. There is no escaping this reality. I am writing to you on a day when we have received information to say that all three colleges from the US have pulled out of the programme this year (2019). This will grossly affect our flow of revenue. Our budget has been recast. Even as I put the final touches to the reflection. I heard news that a friend and mentor passed away. Deeply rooted in a vision akin to Visthar, Deena was forthright and yet with a gentle spirit. He lived and died with idealism. Drawing from him I garner inner strength to embody resilience. This has been an enduring quality of Visthar, over the last three decades.

In order to even dream of my proposals we need seed money. Here is my proposal. The Board of Trustees resolve to set up an empowered committee of financially able well connected and socially concerned people to raise the resources. This would include preparing a concept note and business plan for each. A task that better qualified people can undertake. This can be launched at a function celebrating our 30th year.

To my colleagues on the Board of Trustees, over the last three decades, I owe you a debt of gratitude. To the current Board, I request your solidarity and continued support.

David Selvaraj

14th March, 2019



*Concerns,
Confusions,
Contradictions*

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR

Introduction

"In India's recent history the politics of hate, division and exclusion has never been so dominant as we find it today. Never before has hate been directed with such calculated intent against Muslims, Christians, Adivasis, Dalits, women, trans people, people in conflict areas and even children...The right to life, the right to love, food choices, cultural expression, language and histories are all under assault by this politics, which is at war with the people of India and their diverse cultures. Cultural and social life in India is being torn asunder by a toxic cocktail of propaganda, violence, censorship and distorted histories". (Artists Unite, Declaration)

It is in this context that we are meeting. A context in which violence and authoritarianism

is normalized. According to a recent Amnesty International report, India is among the deadliest countries for defenders of rights related to land, environment, Dalits and Adivasis. The 2018 Thomson Reuters Survey classifies India as the most dangerous / unsafe country for women on three counts – the risk of sexual violence and harassment against women, the danger women face from cultural and traditional practices, and the danger of human trafficking including forced labour, sex slavery and domestic servitude. Though the Women and Child Development Ministry and National Commission for Women had rejected the report stating that the methodology used for the poll was incorrect, the survey is a pointer to the fact that violence against women in India is increasing and that patriarchal and casteist norms and practices continue.



Dissent is being smothered. Human rights defenders and lawyers who have been defending the rights of marginalised communities are being branded "Urban Naxals" and are being detained, arrested or abducted. Mugilan, the Coordinator of Tamil Nadu Environment Protection Movement, has been missing since a month. According to Henri Tiphagne, despite repeated complaints, the police has not filed a 'missing person' FIR. It is suspected that Mugilan was



picked up by the state government over his role in exposing collusion of senior police officers with Sterlite in orchestrating violence in Thoothukudi on May 22, 2018.

Though nowhere near the intensity and injustices of the above incidences, Visthar too has faced the power of the establishment on several occasions, directly and also indirectly. Recently, we had to cancel the lecture by Nivedita Menon on Dissent and Democracy as JNU had put restrictions on her taking leave and giving public lectures. An event for which over 400 people had signed up. The FRRO monitors every foreigner who comes to the campus. Earlier we had the experience of police coming to check the rooms of participants from Afghanistan and Pakistan and Sri Lankans being followed by the IB. At every step of our work we are forced to compromise out of fear that you may be branded as an 'urban naxal' or a 'Christian missionary' or an 'anti-national'. 'Freedom from fear' is imperative to creatively respond to the issues we face today.

"Freedom from fear is the freedom

I claim for you my motherland! ...

Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet's world,

where movements are started through brainless wires,

repeated through mindless habits, where figures wait with patience and obedience for the master of show, to be stirred into a mimicry of life.

This poem by Tagore, written more than 75 years ago, is so relevant today as we experience fear and unfreedom of all kinds and a mimicry of democracy with the approaching general elections.

Vision, Mission and Transitions

Since the inception of Visthar (1989) our work has been focused on resistance and the creation of alternatives to / in development. Our vision has remained the same – just, egalitarian, inclusive and sustainable communities. Our mission has gone through major changes from being a support service organization to a non-formal academy of justice and peace with community based advocacy on the rights of women and children from marginalized communities in North Karnataka to an Institute for Development Studies. And the campus is being developed as an Eco Sanctuary.

The year 2017-2018 was marked by confusions and transitions. As per the decision of the Board of Trustees, the institution has formally been trifurcated and brought under independent and separate governance structures. The trifurcation was made based on the following principles:

- » Sustainability (Economic, political and cultural) of project and the institution.
- » Prudence in responding to mainstream realities (cultural and political)
- » Decentralization and deviation of power in initiating and strengthening the next tier of leadership.

Bandhavi and CRC are registered as separate Trusts with separate boards and governance systems. To ensure continuity and linkages, David serves as the Chairperson of CRC and I as the Chairperson of Bandhavi Trusts. Highlights of our work during April 2018, March 2019.

VISTHAR		
Visthar Institute of Development Studies	Bandhavi	Conference and Retreat Centre
To facilitate and promote transformative learning and social research as a response to gender discrimination, social exclusion and violence of development in collaboration with educational institutions, faith based organizations and social movements.	To respond to issues of poverty, gender discrimination, social exclusion and environmental destruction, by intuitional care and protection and community based advocacy in collaboration with state, civil society and community based organizations.	To run a social entrepreneurship situated in Visthar Eco Sanctuary providing eco-sensitive facilities and professional services for conference, out bound trainings, retreats and events.

Affiliations and Accreditations

Visthar Academy of Justice and Peace is now recast as Visthar Institute of Development Studies (VIDS) - an international learning organization committed to equity, diversity and sustainability. The Institute subscribes to an eco-centric paradigm of development rooted in values and practice of social justice and is committed to facilitating collaborative and trans disciplinary studies and research. VIDS is being affiliated to Bangalore North University. Considerable amount of time was spent during 2018 in conceptualizing and developing curricula for various courses. Will start with a Post Graduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peace Building (Communal Harmony and Social Peace in the university listing).

Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation

The 12th edition of the course Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation was held in May 2018. Over the years, the course has attracted participants from over 15 countries representing Civil Society Organizations, Human Rights Commissions, Educational Institutions, Faith Based Organizations and Social Movements. The course is accredited by XISS, a premier institute for the study of social sciences in India and is held at the Visthar campus in Bangalore. 2018 batch had representatives from 7 countries and they included deputy governor, speaker and CEOs of different government departments of Makueni County, Kenya, Communications Officer of Mennonite Central Committee, Indonesia, Deputy Program Manager, ManusherJonno Foundation, Bangladesh, Founders of Ancla Latam, Chile & Mexico, Students from Hyderabad Central University, Madras Christian College and UTC Bangalore and CSO delegates from Nepal and India.



What Participants Say?



I found GDST a powerful experience because of the interactive learning process where the learner is exposed to real challenges which they solve and later compare with the theories to solve to gain hands on experience.

Rael Muthoka

Social Advocate and Community Organiser, Kenya (2018)



GDST was a very enriching experience, enabling me to see how patriarchy affects different peoples across the world. I learnt how to integrate theory and practice through participatory methods for social transformation.

Melina

Community Psychologist, Mexico (2018)



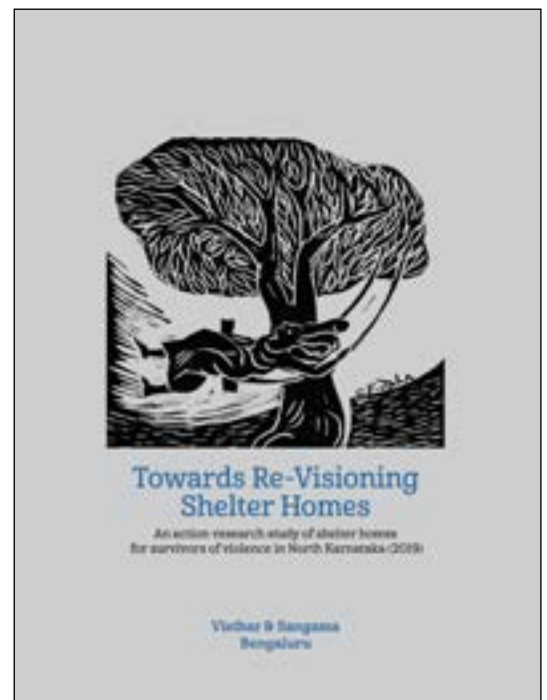
GDST strengthened my ability to resist dominant political, socio-economic and cultural ideologies. It helped me discover myself as an 'urban Dalit woman'. The journey to understand how gender, caste, class, race and diversity intersects in our lives continues.

Vijayashanthi Murthy

Faculty, Baduku Community College

Towards Re-Visioning Shelter Homes - An Action Research

Research on Experiences of Female Survivors of Violence in Shelter Homes. Initiated in October 2017, anchored by Jagori and Visthar, this is a collaborative action research with eight organizations in Delhi (Jagori, Action India, and Nazariya), Assam and Meghalaya (North East Network), Tamilnadu (Ekta), and Karnataka (Vimochana, Visthar and Sangama). The study focussed on the experiences of female survivors of violence. The aim was to gather evidence that would form the basis for recommendations to the government for a wholesome and inclusive envisioning of shelter homes for women. The methodology included In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with current and former residents of shelter homes and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders and communities across the 5 states, Key informant Interviews (KIIs) with persons from law enforcement agencies, shelter homes and professional services, review meetings to share progress, and challenges and plans ahead. The report with findings and recommendations were presented at a national meeting on 19th March 2019.



Gender and Religion – Work with FBOs

'The recent Supreme Court judgment allowing women to enter the Sabarimala temple has walked a tightrope. The Hindutva right is in opposition while the liberals have largely been in agreement with it. There exists a tense stand-off between claims of individual rights and gender equality on the one hand, and matters of faith and religiosity on the other. Disruption of women's entry, by Hindutva forces, despite the Supreme Court order is unconstitutional and unbecoming of a civilized social order. On the other hand, we also need to look at the critical point that religion reinforces covert forms of inequalities and oppression for women. "A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze" (Atwood 1985). <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/how-can-feminist-theology-reduce...>

Visthar has been involved with FBOs in India facilitating gender and social analysis and enabling them to develop an intersectional and transformative approach to dealing with issues of gender, religion and sexuality. I was invited to give the key note address at a consultation of women theologians on the theme "Women reshaping theology" and recently to present a paper on 'Daring to walk towards gender justice" at the international conference of the UELCI. David has been working with theological educators in Myanmar and Sri Lanka and theological seminaries in the USA.

As a consultant with Kudumbashree in Kerala, I had many opportunities to facilitate debates on gender and religion and the Sabarimala issue during the gender mainstreaming training programs. When it comes to matters of religion even the most radical advocates of gender equality give in saying it is a matter of tradition and faith and we should not be interfering with it. What does respecting and celebrating diversity mean in this context? Can religion and culture which remains embedded in patriarchal and casteist norms and inequalities define equality for us? .What role can we



play in the process of 'breaking barriers and building inclusive communities'? These are the questions we have been grappling with from the inception of Visthar and brought into focus again with the recent developments. The questions continue to be the same. Questions in search of answers.

Sixteen theologians from Union Presbyterian Seminary (US) did a week long course at Visthar during January 2019. The sessions centered on themes of Gender Ecology and Spirituality, Religious Fundamentalism and Freedom of Religion. Dolls exhibition by Francoise Bosteels, play reading on Kandhamal (written by Sudhir and David Selvaraj) and visits to villages in the neighborhood were some of the learning methods used.

Community Empowerment in South India

Study Abroad Course, University of Minnesota Duluth

16 students and 2 faculty from University of Minnesota spent a month at Visthar as part of their study abroad program. The focus was on learning the history and culture of India and examining the process of social change and the strategies followed by the marginalized communities to advocate for their social and economic rights. Following experiential learning methods, David Selvaraj, Udaykumar and other faculty from Visthar enabled the students to understand the dynamics of social change in India, and become better change agents in their community, wherever that may be. The course content included contemporary social and political struggles in India, key theories of social change that have shaped contemporary India, interaction with change agents and disenfranchised communities involved in struggles for human rights and parallels between marginality in India and the US.



Cultural Resources for Social Transformation

We need to have deeper reflections on 'the emancipatory and spiritual possibilities of culture' as articulated in the declaration of Artists Unite. 'A culture that speaks of humanity and democracy; a culture that finds its echo in the fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian constitution. It is an appeal to think anew of a politics rooted in economic and social justice; ecological and environmental sustainability; plurality and diversity; decentralization and devolution of power; ethics, love, compassion, tolerance and the rule of law'.



Exhibition at Artists Unite

Reading the Declaration of AU, I was reminded of Sebastian Kappen who did considerable reflection and writing on the cultural challenges facing the people of India. He advocated for a counter culture which rejects the negative / dehumanizing aspects of both tradition and modernity. His book titled Tradition, Modernity, Counter Culture published by Visthar has gone into several prints and is a text book in M.G. University. Looking at the challenges and barriers we face in our journey towards just, democratic, equitable and sustainable communities, I feel we need to revive our work in the area of culture and art. Art for Social Transformation was one of our primary foci during 1992 - 2003 when artist C.F. John was on our team. With support from IFA, C F John, choreographer/dancer Tripura Kashyap, and visual artist T M Azis presented two events, one around the well in Visthar in February 2003. Walls of Memories, comprised a series of 15 installations and a performance inside the well held two consecutive evenings. There were several other installations and exhibitions on various themes held during this period. And these were organized in response to issues and challenges raised by the times like the demolition of Babri Masjid, Gujarat genocide, Cargil war etc. After being part of the 'Artists Unite' I am all the more convinced of the power of art to inspire resistance and alternatives which are sustainable and inclusive.

In this process we need to bring in / strengthen the folk art forms and nurture the talents and skills of youth from marginalised communities. Visthar Ranga Shale (VRS) is a small effort in this direction.

Eco Education and Eco Art Events



Visthar is uniquely situated in what we have come to conceptualise as an Eco Sanctuary - a conscious initiative to nurture and protect all life on our campus. It is not merely a physical space but a programme reflecting inclusion and sustainability. The Sanctuary serves the dual purpose of being an earth-based learning centre and a development locus for traditional seed preservation and biodiversity conservation. The Sanctuary features an herbal garden and nursery, organic farming, water harvesting and recycling initiatives, a recycled paper unit and a butterfly garden.

We believe that caring for the earth and nurturing biodiversity should become integral to all education. The Eco Sanctuary provides scope for children to enhance their imagination and commitment to earth and environment by getting hands on experience working on the farm, making recycled handmade paper and paper products, taking nature walks learning about biodiversity and water recharging and recycling.

During 2018, we have had innumerable discussions and curriculum development meetings to start a weekend Art School on the campus. It did not take off as the artist who joined the team did not have the organizational skills and initiative needed to take it forward. Besides, he had a fear of what he called feminist power, which he felt is at work in Visthar. While I take it as a compliment,



I am also concerned that even the so called socially conscious men find it difficult to share power or to accept women's leadership.

The artist leaving did not deter us. Because, we believe that "the artist is not a special kind of person; rather each person is a special kind of artist" (Ananda Coomaraswamy). We initiated Sunday art events for neighbourhood and eco education for schools. Oasis International School, Paramount Public School, New Horizon Gurukul, Legacy School, Gear International School, Bangalore International School, National Public School are some of the schools who brought several batches of children to the campus. Besides, we also had corporate volunteer engagement through Concern India Foundation from corporates like Thomson Reuters and CISCO. Eco camps and eco themed birthdays were other offerings we made to the public. We have been able to raise about 5 lakhs during the year from these events, besides enabling the participants to connect with the earth and learn about the devastation that is happening worldwide and think solutions.



Bhoomi Habba - The Earth Festival

The 12th edition of Bhoomi Habba was held on 9th June 2018. When we started the event it was called Festival of Justpeace (to imply that peace is not possible without justice) and held around May Day. It was organised as part of an international School of Peace, a semester long justice and peace education jointly offered by Visthar and Interfaith Cooperation Forum during 2007-2012. The School of Peace moved from our campus to Hong Kong in 2012. But we decided to continue celebrating the event under a new banner - Bhoomi Habba. We realised the need to broaden our concept of justice and peace to include eco justice and peace between humans and the earth. The date of the event too shifted to June, closer to the environment day. Since the last five years we have been holding the festival on second Saturdays in June, after the schools reopen. This helps to involve children in large numbers and serves as a site-specific environment campaign.



2018 edition of the Habba focussed on environmental crises faced by our city. Soil, water, trees, and garbage were the thematic areas around which we had poster exhibitions, films, art workshops, information stalls etc. Bhoomi Habba speaks to the participants through music, food, films, exhibitions and workshops. About 3000 people participated in Bhoomi Habba 2018. Inaugurated by Rickey Kej and his band, My Earth Songs.



The grass is always greener

Devagaurians are to make an earthy connect at the recently-held Bhoomi Habba

By SUDIPAN SARKAR

Imagine a day when you could walk through studios, galleries with the wind in your hair and your appetite calling for some coffee, some herbal tea, some juice, and children some of their creative talents while you relax under a 100-year-old tree. This is not a pipe dream a fiction novel. This and much more took place at Bhoomi Habba at Yashwantrao Chavan Auditorium last weekend.

Inaugurated by Indian musician, Grammy Award winner and Oscar-nominated Rishi Rich, the display instead of the earth-friendly events and stalls - all with one message - from young people across the state and across a few generations to come.

That's the spirit of Bhoomi Habba, where what the focus is all about. Bhoomi Habba is in its 10th edition. The motto is constant is all and it becomes our responsibility to preserve this heritage. We challenge environmental issues, water, trees and air quality to make the earth more friendly of going to our future generations.

Spreading across the vast terrain were forests of state where everybody brought their own bottle, carroms, dholak and a host of creative performances and musicians showcased their work. Apart from the entertainment, visitors also got to learn at the art exhibitions as well as classes from the artists of shops selling organic soap, bamboo toothbrushes, reusable water bottles, clothing and food.

The exhibition showcased programs to participate in the biggest event. From an artist and a student, one "I've done something in everyone. That's the beauty" available everywhere. The campus makes everything beautiful. Despite the rain, people seem to be enjoying the weather and being so vibrant.

The day saw people of all ages and walks of life join in such vibrant events. Dhanish Jain, a 16-year-old student and a member of the club, says, "This is our third visit to the Habba and the place is just great as we live in the city and hardly get to see a tree. It's nice to see a tree. It's nice to see a tree. It's nice to see a tree."

We explore new things, meet lovely people and have a beautiful day. My children love coming here every year. Our friend highlighted the day was a day exhibition held by friends, a course by professors and a passionate folk artist. Originally from Belgium, she moved to India 10 years ago and makes folk art with people and makes the art (art) over the years.

"I visited in a village for a while and was fascinated by their way of life. I don't know what life was like then. I don't know what life was like then. I don't know what life was like then."

The exhibition people to write poems for each of the days and exhibit them along with them.

Bandhavi – Visthar Community Resource Centre

A group of concerned citizens in India have brought out a manifesto highlighting 19 issues for elections 2019. Manifesto for change: 'Reclaiming the Republic'. (<http://reclaimingtherepublic.in/>) Like AU they also uphold the philosophy of the Constitution and belief in the idea of a plural, democratic Republic of India. They see the forthcoming Lok Sabha election as an opportunity to retrieve and reclaim our legacy of the Republic. I was happy to note that Visthar, through Bandhavi, is directly working on 3 of the issues the manifesto highlights:

- » Ensuring basic services and social security
- » Turning Right to Education into a reality.
- » Assuring minimum critical presence of women in decision making.

As discussed earlier, the mission of the newly formed Bandhavi Trust is to respond to issues of poverty, gender discrimination, social exclusion and environmental destruction, by institutional care and protection and community based advocacy.

Projects under the new Trust:

1. Bandhavi : A holistic programme for girl children from the devadasi tradition
2. Samagara Shikshana Shale (SSS): An integrated learning programme (primary school)
3. Children's Movement for Climate Justice (CMCJ) : A children led national level movement



4. Child Rights Education & Advocacy (CREA): A sustained campaign towards creating child labour free zones
5. Rural Women's Collective: A campaign focusing on violence against women and women's political participation
6. Visthar Ranga Shale (Theatre School), a diploma course in theatre arts accredited by the Hampi University

The Bandhavi project ensures that 150 children, from Devadasi and Dalit communities enjoy their childhood and child rights. During this reporting period, 87 children are resident at Bandhavi, accessing holistic institutional care and protection. Children have been participating in decision making processes related to their life at Bandhavi including festival celebration, preparing the menu, etc. With support from the community, children received medical facilities and supplementary nutrition which improved their health condition. The percentage of children with anemia decreased through regular use of vegetables and greens from the kitchen garden maintained by children. Regular activities like Yoga, inter-faith prayer and periodical health awareness classes have contributed to their overall well being. The older children have been supporting the younger ones in the learning process. Bandhavi girls are leaders in their schools for sports, games and arts events.

Children's Movement for Climate Justice (CMCJ) is a children led network for ensuring ecological rights of children as part of overall child rights as specified in UNCRC. CMCJ is a national network of children from Tamilnadu, Andrapradesh, Telangana, Orissa and Karnataka. Visthar serves as the Convener for CMCJ activities in Karnataka. Akshaya is the Karnataka coordinator.

Samagra Shikshana Shaale (SSS) - a regular school with an alternative way of teaching and recognised by government. Co-education and opportunities for children from deprived communities of neighbouring villages. Started in the year 2013 and having classes till level 5.



Through mobile museum reaching its transformative learning to neighbouring schools and villages, Right now there are 62 children in SSS.

The **CREA** project works to ensure that every school is Right To Education compliant; establishes child labour free zones in the community and ensure public provision of quality education, health, and early childhood care etc. CREA has a wide outreach in 5 districts (Bagalkot, Chitradurga, Raichur, Bellary and Koppal) of North Karnataka. CREA is a network project initiated by Visthar and funded by KIA.

The Rural Women's Collective focusses on eliminating violence against women and promoting women's political participation. During the reporting period, large numbers of women in Koppal district participated in the Women's Day celebrations and actively involved in the 16 days campaign on violence against women and girls. . The focus of the 2018 global campaign was on ending violence and harassment in the workplace and raising awareness on the violence and discrimination faced by women in various labour sectors including domestic violence.

Visthar Ranga Shale (VRS) offers a diploma course in theatre arts, accredited by the Hampi University. The pedagogy involves a combination of research, field visits, theatre improvisations, creating, preparing and performing, and critical reflection. The course is conducted by qualified experienced theatre teachers and facilitators from Karnataka. 22 students have completed Diploma in two batches. There are 11 students in the current batch.



Theatre performance by VRS

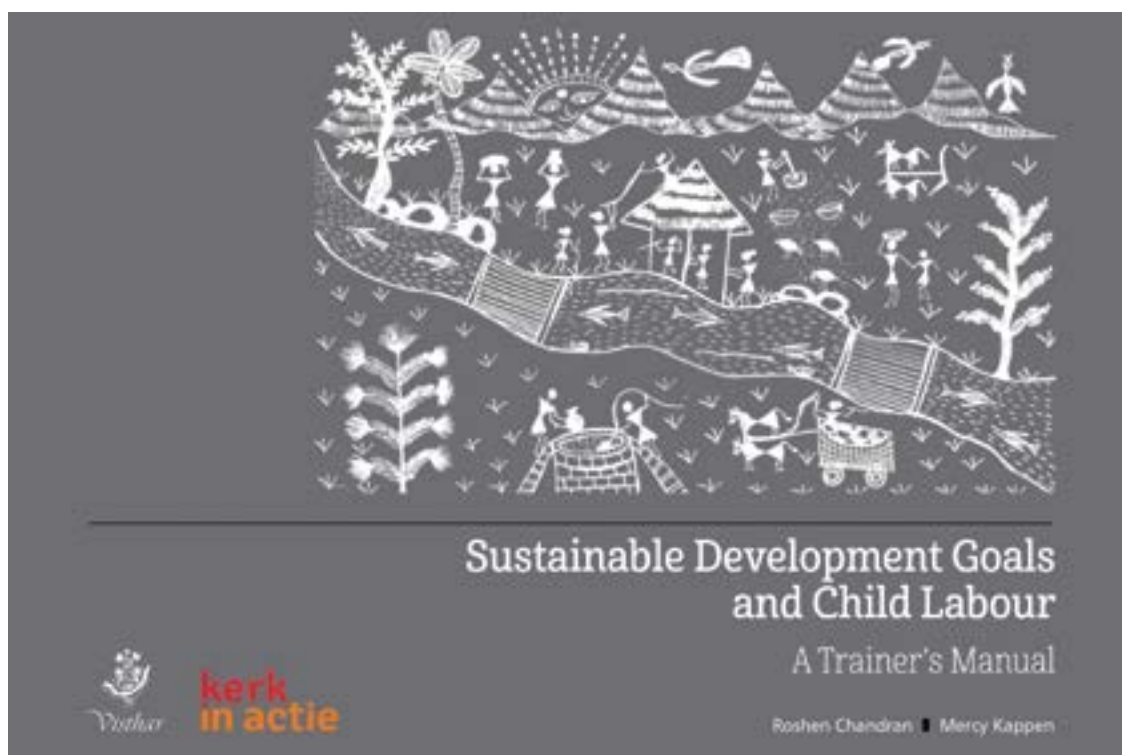
Publications

Sustainable Development Goals and Child Labour

This Trainer's Manual is an outcome of a three-day capacity building workshop conducted primarily for ICCO-KIA partners working on child labour / child rights related issues. The workshop dealt with the following topics : concepts of equity, equality, diversity, inclusion and empowerment

- » Gender and disability inclusion – concepts and processes
- » SDGs and their importance and relevance for Stop Child Labour Projects
- » SDG targets and indicators pertaining to SDG 4 and their strengths and weaknesses
- » Monitoring tools for SDG 4 and related indicators at community level
- » Review measures adopted by participating organizations to end child labour.
- » Identify good practices to contribute towards SDG-4 and other child rights related targets

The modules in this manual were tested out at the workshop . We have incorporated the insights and learnings from the different sessions and best practices in community monitoring. We hope the manual will help in mainstreaming child rights and SDGs in our work.



Visthar Calendar 2019

“The protection of Earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life”.

The thematic focus is the principles of Earth Charter. The calendar contains drawings by children from Warli community at Nareshwadi Learning Centre, Maharashtra.



Liza's Home Calendar

Visthar also designed and produced a calendar for Liza's Home with pictures from Françoise Bosteels. The photographs and texts in the calendar symbolize girls/women who “rise” challenging multiple vulnerabilities and are celebrating diversity, solidarity and community.

Team Retreat

The annual Visthar Retreat was held on the 21-22 Jan 2019 at the Bangalore campus. Staff members from Bandhavi, CRC and VIDS came together for a fun filled learning time. The thematic focus was on Unity and Diversity, given the trifurcation that took place recently. The sessions covered included History, Vision and Mission, of Visthar, Understanding Gender, Exploring Self and Team building. The retreat was facilitated by Executive Trustee, David Selvaraj.

Chandraskhar, Yosef and Manikandan from VIDS, Bandhavi and CRC were awarded Vistharite 2018.



Visthar Conference & Retreat Centre (CRC)

CRC is a unique space for conferences, trainings and workshops, lodged in the Eco Sanctuary.

Facilities include

- » Board and lodging in twin sharing rooms or dormitories
- » Classrooms equipped with LCD projectors
- » Uniquely designed dining halls
- » Aala - a meeting space for large groups which can accommodate up to 200 persons
- » Mandala, an inspiring and aesthetically designed meditation space
- » Black box, a theatre space for workshops and performances
- » Namma Angadi – an Eco Store

The CRC also offers

- » Outbound/ Corporate trainings
- » Eco theme birthday packages
- » Eco theme picnics
- » Theme weddings
- » Nature walks



Manoranjitham - A Wellness Experience



“Within you, there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at anytime and be yourself.”

– **Hermann Hesse**

Manoranjitham - the herbal nursery, which symbolises my second life has also been able to raise funds through sale of organic and native herbal, air purifying & decor plants and green gifting in terracotta and bamboo planters.

Visthar has been my sanctuary and Manoranjitham my passion. I have experienced the power of nature to heal and restore broken bodies, minds and brains. Also the power of authentic relationships. I thank all my colleagues and board members, especially David for all the care, support and solidarity I received during my death and resurrection experience in 2018.

Mercy Kappen

March 2019



A Prayer to the Great Spirit

Great Spirit, Give us hearts to understand.
Never to take from creation's beauty more than we give.
Never to destroy want only for the furtherance of greed.
Never to deny to give our hands for the building of earth's beauty.
Never to take from her what we cannot use.

Give us hearts to understand
that to destroy earth's music is to create confusion.
That to wreck her appearance is to blind us to beauty.
That to callously pollute her fragrance is to make a house of stench.
That as we care for her she will care for us.

Give us hearts to understand.
We have forgotten who we are.
We have sought only our own security.
We have exploited simply for our own ends.
We have distorted our knowledge. We have abused our power.

Great Spirit, whose dry lands thirst,
help us to find the way to refresh your lands.
Great Spirit, whose waters are choked with debris and pollution,
help us to find the way to cleanse your waters.
Great Spirit, whose beautiful earth grows ugly with misuse,
help us to find the way to restore beauty to your handiwork.
Great Spirit, whose creatures are being destroyed,
help us to find a way to replenish them
Great Spirit, whose gifts to us are being lost in selfishness and corruption,
help us to find the way to restore our humanity.

<https://www.witchbeme.com/native-american-prayer/>



Visthar

Kothanur Post
Bengaluru - 560 077, India
Tel.: +91 80 28465294 / 28465295 / 65349492
mail@visthar.org
www.visthar.org