

This Coffee Table book traces the journey of Visthar and presents visuals and verses which represent our aesthetics, our passion and our inspiration. Spaces, plants, trees, birds, butterflies - all find their place in the book as they do in our lives at Visthar. Our lives are intertwined with theirs. The contents of the book symbolize change, creativity, freedom, joy, beauty, struggles and hope we have experienced during our journey in the last 30 years.



 Kothanur Post, Bengaluru – 560 077. INDIA

 Tel. : +91 80 28465294 / 28465295

 mail@visthar.org  www.visthar.org

**RESISTANCE AND HOPE**

The Visthar Journey

# RESISTANCE AND HOPE

## The Visthar Journey



# RESISTANCE AND HOPE

## The Visthar Journey

*Compiled and Edited by*  
**Mercy Kappen**



*Visthar*

**RESISTANCE AND HOPE**

The Visthar Journey

Compiled and edited by Mercy Kappen

Copyright @ Visthar 2020



Visthar

📍 Kothanur Post  
Bengaluru – 560 077. INDIA

☎ Tel. : +91 80 28465294 / 28465295

✉ mail@visthar.org 🌐 www.visthar.org

Design: M. V. Rajeevan

Photo Credits:

Nazar P. S: Pages 44, 50, 82,83

Jino Joseph: Pages 54 - 56, 60, 78

C. F. John: Cover and Pages 68 -77, 79, 90 – 93

Francoise Bosteels: Pages 27, 39 - 43, 45-49, 58,59, 63, 85

**PREFACE**

*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.* We began our journey with humble steps, with tentative steps. The only thing we were sure about was our passion for justice and our commitment to be in solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized. We dared to dream, to take risks, to break barriers. The journey was not always easy. But we never gave up. We knew that the right path is characterized by rough roads.

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, we assess ourselves not by the programmes and projects or the campuses we have set up but by the seeds we have sown and nurtured. Our hope is that they will root, grow, branch and uproot the injustices we are all a part of. Structures and cultures which deny us our laughter, creativity, safety and security. We celebrate our journey with the hope that ‘another world is possible’. It is our collective responsibility to facilitate the birthing of that world, where every child, every girl and woman can walk with their heads held high, without the fear of being abused, raped, burnt alive.

This Coffee Table book traces the journey of Visthar and presents visuals, verses and words which represent our aesthetics, our passion and our inspiration. Spaces, plants, trees, birds, butterflies - all find their place in the book. Our lives are intertwined with theirs. The contents of the book symbolize change, creativity, freedom, joy, beauty and struggles we have experienced during our journey in the last 30 years.

It has been my dream to bring out this publication and I acknowledge the support of David and the Visthar team in making this a reality. Thank you Asma for your comments and suggestions. Special thanks to artist and fellow-traveller C. F. John for the aesthetics of the journey and for the text and beautiful images of Mandala and the *Walls of Memories*. We owe a debt of gratitude to Francoise Bosteels, the iconic doll maker who is part of our community, for diligently documenting the events and changing seasons at Visthar. I am also grateful to Bindhu Joseph for copyediting the book and M. V. Rajeevan for his patience and creative design.

Thank you friends for being part of the Visthar journey, for being the journey.

Mercy Kappen



We celebrate thirty years of our journey in 2020. 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 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. We have been negotiating and positioning ourselves, as searchers for relevance; striving to be in a secular and prophetic tradition. Standing with the marginalised, speaking truth to authority.

– David Selvaraj  
Founder and Executive Trustee



## The Visthar Journey

### The Beginning

Visthar has journeyed from a small support service agency working out of a single room rented space to a lively campus with arteries in nearly every area and level of social activism. From the beginning Visthar recognized the need for perpetual introspection and evolution to respond to India's varied social and political climate. The internal environment of Visthar was also of equal concern to us.



In 1987, Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz (HEKS), a relief and development agency of the Swiss Protestant Church, appointed David Selvaraj as a full-time coordinator to oversee the projects funded by HEKS. After 30 years of Swiss representation,

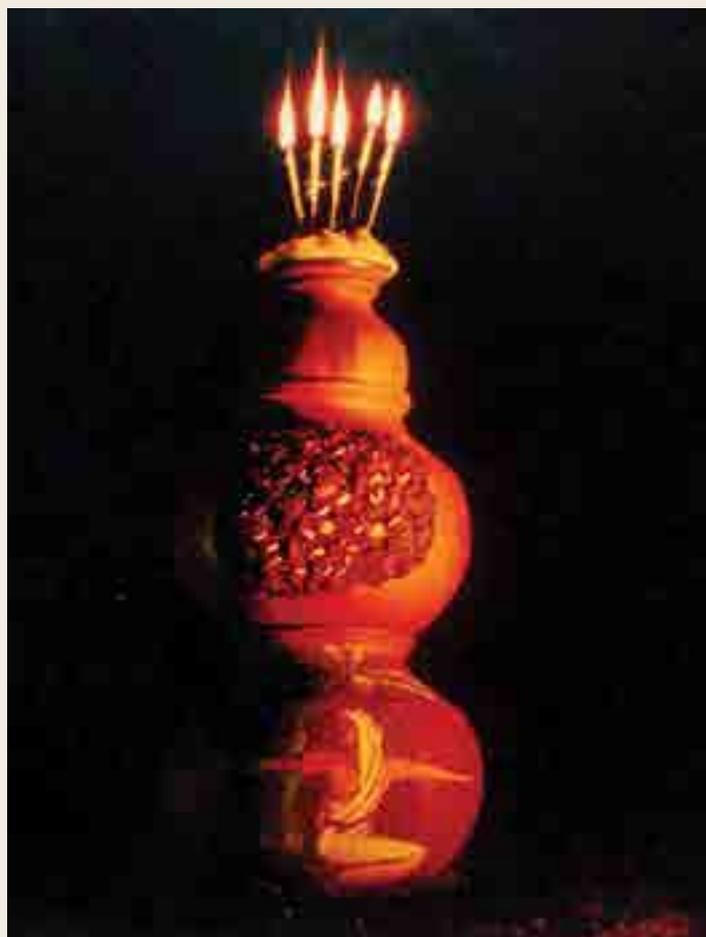
the organization planned to hand over its operations to an Indian. David, while agreeing, emphasized the need for autonomy and creativity in its mission to serve the marginalized in South India as well as ensure the continuity of programs already underway.



Visthar was founded and registered as a Trust in 1989. At the very inception itself David invited me and C. F. John to join the team. While maintaining its role in capacity building for HEKS and others, Visthar stayed true to its name and spread its wings.



We looked at the connections between the work and struggles of several small NGOs and recognized larger problems and power structures that impeded their work. We knew that the only answer to these challenges wholistic would have to be a broader, more far-stretching political and social transformation.



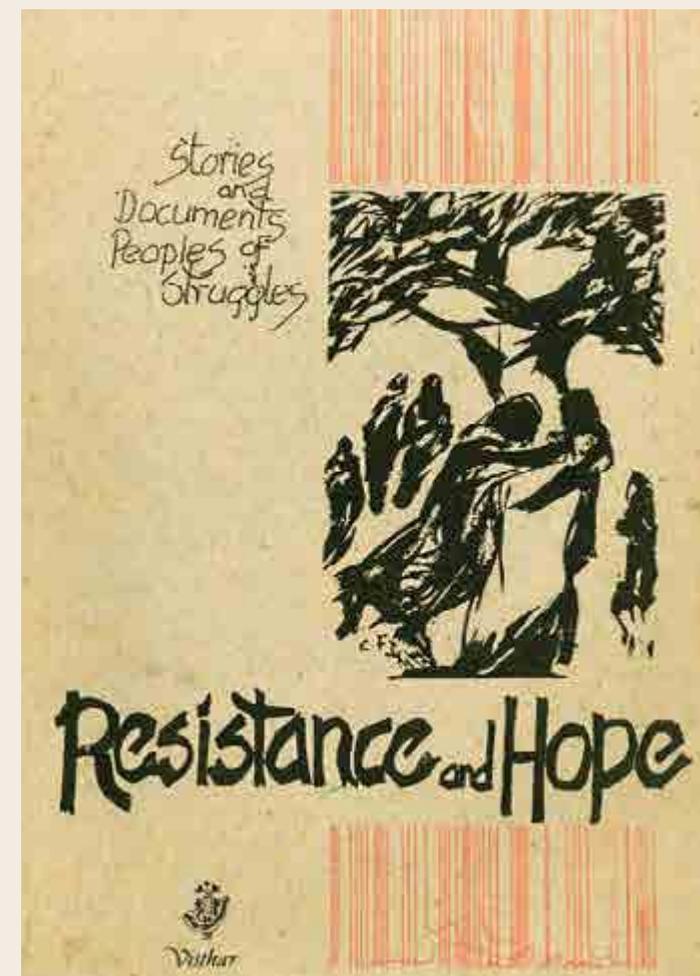
Resistance and Hope - An installation by C. F. John

The early nineties was a significant time to initiate a Civil Society Organization (CSO) in India. Internally, the rise of religious fundamentalism and development induced displacement, gave little voice and space to the poor and the marginalized. Externally, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War and the pressure of a cold-blooded global market made civil society in the Global South feel like an afterthought to the forces of globalization. This new world order brought a uni-dimensional vision of development and progress to India. The disenchantment with socialism also snuffed out much of the usual idealism found among young people. However, the dramatic changes brought about by globalization were viewed critically by those in civil society.

The stage seemed to be set. Visthar saw the links between socio-political and economic forces and sought to address these complexities with holistic perspectives and practices. In a context where the relationship between art and social action was tenuous, Visthar opened up the space for artists and activists to explore the role of art in social change. We began a cultural critique of development led by our colleague and well known artist C. F. John. We vigorously explored questions such as - Is our concept of development just a follow-through of the Western model? and Is there an indigenous model that includes the people and their cultures? We felt that unless we looked at the connections between ecology, culture and spirituality, whatever development we talked of, would have no meaning.

*In the Light of interbeing, peace and happiness in your daily life means peace and happiness in the world.*

- Thich Nhat Hanh



A quarterly brought out by Visthar in the '90s

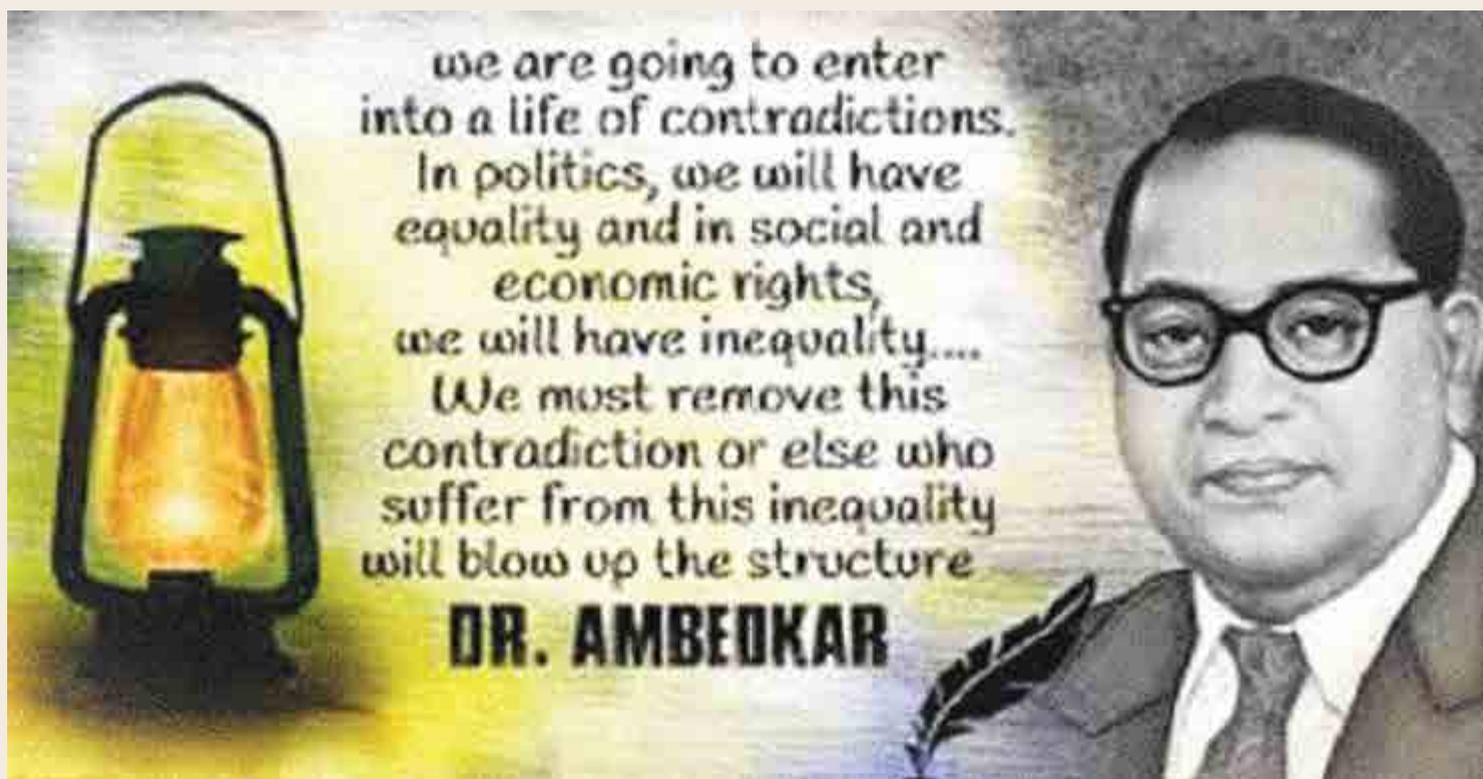
In the first two years, we had our feet in nearly every level and type of engagement. It was apparent that our vision for a "humane, egalitarian, participatory and ecologically sustainable society" would take us through a complex web of related quests. What that journey would be like was still unimaginable for us.

It was a time when dissenting voices were co-opted into the paradigm of the market as mass media sought to de-sensitize the public. **Resistance and Hope** became our catch phrase. Believing that unity of thought leads to unity of action, we brought activists, academics and intellectuals together for critical reflections. We were committed to the process of connecting people, experiences and ideas. This became the key methodology for Visthar.

We were convinced about the need to bring together activists and academics for dialogue. 'We had to challenge the economists in their citadels asking them to come to the ground! To sit on the ground!'. At the same time, we had to tell activists that it was not enough to shout slogans and protest, but it was essential to enlighten ourselves with the volume of knowledge, challenge the knowledge and ensure there is always new theory kept alive'.

*Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.*

- Paulo Freire



The Ambedkar Centenary in 1991 provided the appropriate opportunity to initiate discussions and debates on Dalit liberation. To remember Ambedkar's contributions in this area and to develop perspectives on Dalit liberation, Visthar organized a 3-day national seminar with participants from all over the country. The deliberations urged us to recognize the

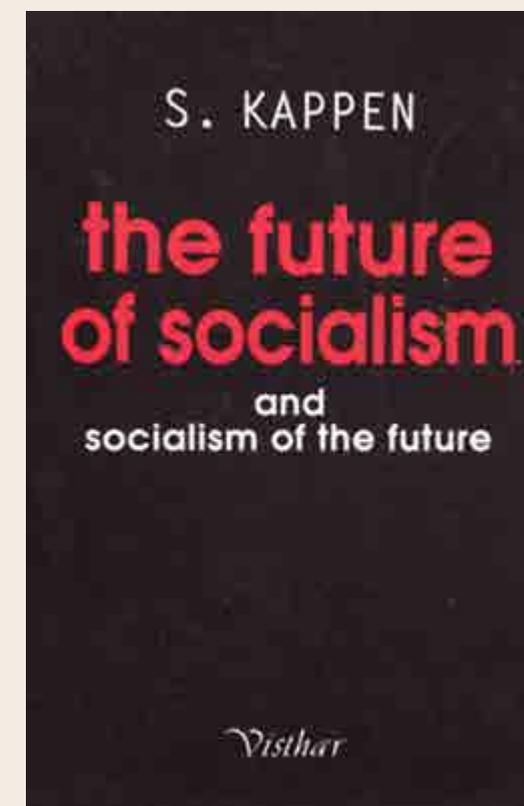
inter-sectionality of caste, class and gender. From this seminar was born the Ambedkar Forum for Human Rights (AFHR). Irked by the identity politics that emerged in the forum which saw 'non-Dalits' only as a means to an end and not as allies, Visthar left the forum. But casteism, social exclusion and issues and challenges faced by the Dalits remained our primary concern.

### Future of Socialism and Socialism of the Future

Despite the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of U.S.S.R we upheld socialism as our ideal. Most significantly this came at a time when the capitalist West celebrated what they termed as 'the death of socialism'. While rejecting Soviet model of socialism and its autocratic character, we had to convince ourselves and civil society that socialism was not dead and was in fact all the more relevant. Visthar went through a process of critique enabled by the philosopher and scholar Sebastian Kappen.

The publication, *The Future of Socialism and Socialism of the Future* by Kappen, published by Visthar, was the outcome of this search. The book came at a time of disenchantment for Indian Marxists. The Communist catastrophe in the Soviet Union needed to be explained and honestly dealt with by committed intellectuals. Kappen described socialism as "the supreme realization of the individual" and a "utopia that can evoke unconditional loyalty and sacrifice without which a humane future cannot be created." The booklet was widely disseminated through alternative and mainstream distributors.

May Day evoked strong feelings in us. I remember participating in a May Day celebration in 1992. We marched in the scorching sun, shouting slogans with the thousands who had joined the celebration, organised by the Agricultural Workers Union in Chittoor district. Participation in such events gave us much inspiration and energy. One such rally inspired David to write a poem titled *Toil Rooted in Love*.



## Toil Rooted in Love

*The passion of lovers , the commitment of workers  
The fruit borne speaks volumes for the tree rooted in love  
Who will count the scores, nay hundreds of fruits,  
Plucked, tasted and savoured?*

...

*Love, solidarity  
Joining hands  
Believing only in the struggle  
We gently, reverentially offer the fruits of our love and toil.*

...

*But will they last for eternity?  
Guided by the unseen hand the best we can do is offer our spirits  
To be carried by the wind  
This we do with workers the world over, today and each May Day.*

– David Selvaraj

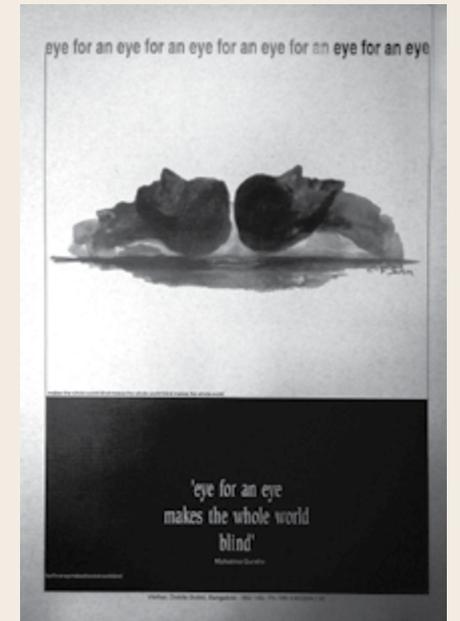
## Campaigns Against War

While recognizing the passion and vision which enabled the Visthar team to dream and carry forward their dreams, the journey has not been without its challenges. There were hurdles within and around. How will we live out our ideals of environmental and social justice in a decidedly unjust and top-heavy world order? This question still nags us.

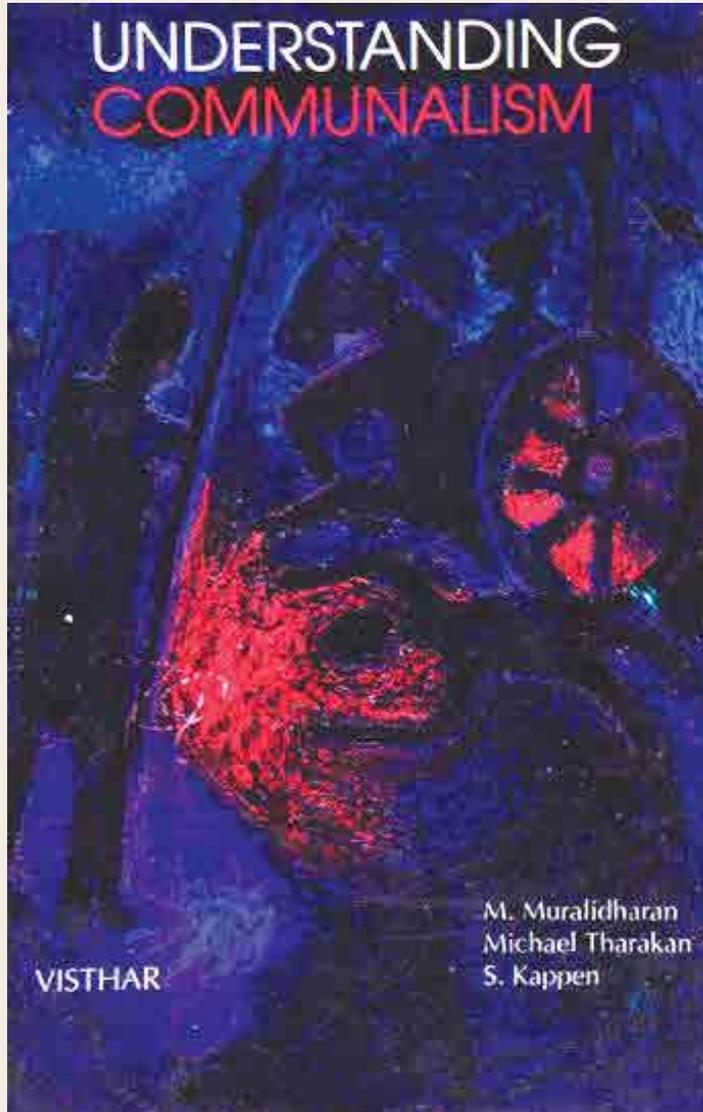
During the Iraq war in 2003, Visthar joined anti-war campaigns in the city, produced posters with quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and hosted discussions on the economy of war. We realized that the only people who would benefit from the war were those in the military industrial complex. Every dollar supporting such a violent extravagance was taking away from progress in the developing world. This angered us but we were helpless. As a tiny organization, what could we do to be relevant?

*If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.  
If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.*

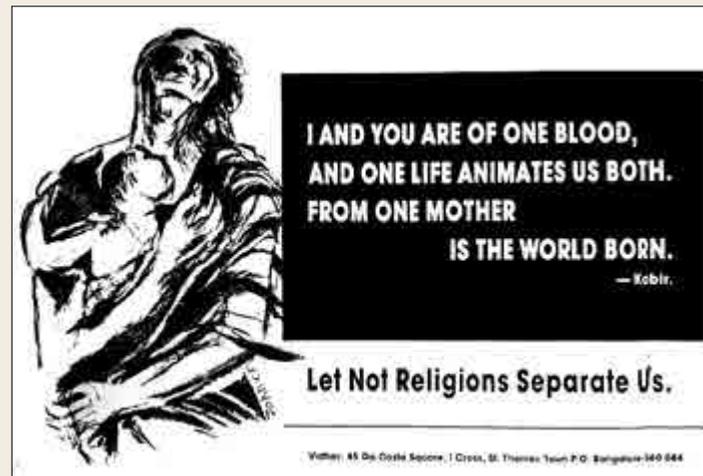
– Desmond Tutu



## Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism



Another issue that has been of concern to us right from the inception of Visthar was the rise of religious fundamentalism and communalism in India. On December 6, 1992, the Hindu fundamentalist movement reached dangerous proportions, with the demolition of the Babri Masjid, brick by brick. The oppressive nature of the Hindutva movement was rapidly gaining momentum. Fear crept into the lives of religious minorities. Muslims were the worse affected. The news cast a gloom over us as we gathered in our office thousands of miles away in Bangalore. We anguished and out of this came our response. Visthar responded by organizing seminars and workshops and brought out publications that would help develop alternative perspectives. An outcome was the publication titled *Understanding Communalism*. However, our immediate response was creating a poster and daring to stick it on public spaces in the city. The poster had lines from poet Kabir with a message "Let not religions separate us".

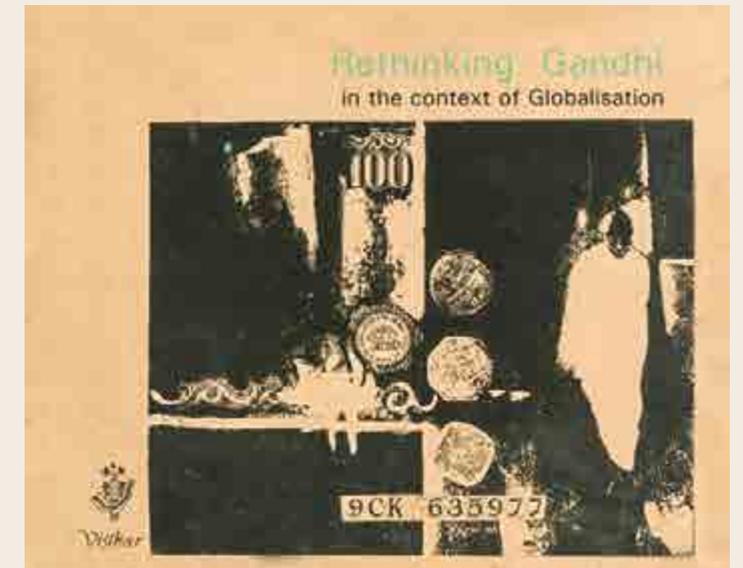


## The New Economic Policy (NEP)

As India began to drown in debt, it was forced to accept and adopt global capitalist monetary management programs. The new policies began to define the pattern of social spending within India. In order to understand how the decisions made at world headquarters were affecting large sections of marginalized Indians, Visthar organized a meeting of prominent economists and activists. These addressed the impact of NEP and focused on measures to sustain micro-enterprises and vulnerable livelihoods. Several groups were formed and educational campaigns on the NEP were planned.

The privatization of healthcare, education and other social services meant that the underprivileged were denied of essential services. An export-oriented market also changed production habits. Where there had been bio-diversity and sustenance farming there was now development of cash crops. The massive injustice to the powerless was not part of the NEP's cost-benefit analysis. Visthar took the initiative to sensitize the public, especially the rural poor, on the implications of these policies and strategies to collectively resist them.

Visthar formed a 'Therukoothu' folk artists forum for the campaigns in the villages in Tamilnadu. While subscribing to and initiating community based action to resist policies which disadvantage masses, we were cynical about high profile seminars and conferences on the theme held at luxury hotels.



*We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness, and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this chariot-drive was progress, and that progress was civilization. If we ever ventured to ask, 'Progress towards what, and progress for whom,' it was considered to be peculiarly and ridiculously oriental to entertain such doubts about the absoluteness of progress.*

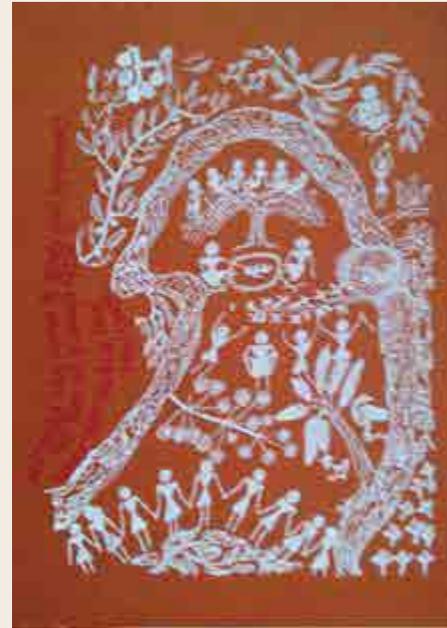
– Rabindranath Tagore

## Development, Not Destruction

The starting point for sensitizing the public on the development paradigms in India began with our association with Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement). C. F. John and team visited the Narmada valley, met with the NBA leader, Medha Patkar and the people in the valley. Inspired, we started a campaign in support of the struggle to stop the dam and ensure people's right to life, livelihood and identity. This led to the formation of the Narmada Solidarity Forum along with Samvada and other organizations in Bangalore. For Visthar the issues were not limited to Narmada but were linked to democracy and development in India as a whole. The goal was to awaken public opinion on issues of development and democracy.

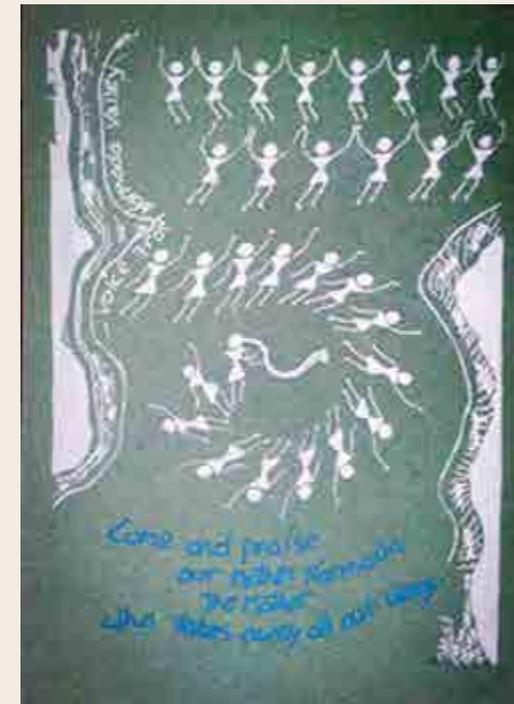
In 1994, under the leadership of David, Visthar organized over 16,000 students from over 15 schools. We had extensive interactions with these student groups, screened documentaries that initiated discussion and helped them critically debate what development is, what the costs are and help them understand the struggles of the people of Narmada Valley from that point of view. This was a great moment in Visthar's history as the entire team got involved, fired by a passion beyond words.

C. F. John designed picture post cards in Warli art style to create awareness on the issues and also to raise funds for the movement. Two lakh cards were printed and sold.



*The Narmada Campaign initiated and facilitated by Visthar and supported by many individuals and organisations in Bangalore is an ideal effort to take the issues, questions, experiences and messages from the struggle for RIGHT TO LIFE to the children who will lead it in the future, to save the future. As one could see from the paintings, messages, songs, idioms...here in Bangalore far off from the Valley of Narmada, amidst stony walls and glittering markets, they have visualised the bountiful nature and integrated communities, the feeling and cries of the struggling tribals – women and children against devastation. The so called innocent new generation has expressed through unsuppressible, uncooptable freedom and frankness, their stance against the established, elitist development that damns and displaces. This gives us strength and hope. For, ultimate victory in the war is beyond Narmada.*

– Medha Patkar



*What do we mean by development?*

*I'm sure I don't know.*

*Is it the blessed monsoon?*

*Is it the poor getting poorer?*

*Is it the industrialists wealth?*

*Is it millions homeless?*

*Is it to better our health?*

*Is it the temples of modern India*

*Destroying the temples of old?*

*Is it a blessing for every person?*

*Is it but fool's gold?*

*Is it a country dying?*

*Is it a new one born?*

*Is it a time for rest and slumber?*

*Is it the coming of dawn?*

*Is it a hungry mother*

*Watching her infant's death?*

*Is it something that you give?*

*Is it what you get?*

*What is meant by development*

*I cannot discern.*

*Maybe it's the right to life.*

*To love, to grow, to learn.*

*'Development' does not give us*

*The right to destroy,*

*To take away someone's home and livelihood,*

*To take away someone's life and joy.*

– Jonne E. Castelino

XB, St. Francis Xavier High School (1994)

(David Selvaraj et al, *Story of a River and Her People*,

Visthar, 1994)

## Education for Democracy

The Save Narmada Movement went beyond Narmada Valley. It reached out to revive public consciousness on issues of democracy and India's emerging identity. As we approached the golden jubilee of India's independence in 1997, the concern for the future of India's democracy absorbed our thoughts. Something needed to be done to ensure democratic processes would uphold people's interests through the changes in development. We initiated the Students for Democracy campaign inspired by Citizen's For Democracy founded by Jeyaprakash Narayan.

In conversation with young people, Visthar sought to reinvent the notion of 'development' so that students would be able to distinguish good development from destructive development. True Development while recognizing differences affirms each person and community to be equally important, and provides space for all to develop and develop differently. The success of the Save Narmada Campaign and Education for Democracy among young people gave a lot of encouragement to our team. We maintained the same activities with schools and colleges in



*Learning is about our relationships,  
Our communities, Our places of work,  
Our bio-regions, Our political structures,  
Our planet and Our universe.  
It is about us.  
It is about the kind of work we do.  
But above all it is about our right to imagine...  
To imagine that violence or the fear of violence in the lives of all  
women and children could decline;  
To imagine that race and ethnicity would be a code for creativity and  
contribution rather than a filter which excludes;  
To imagine relationships of harmony and rhythm with the earth;  
To imagine that we have the courage to speak;  
To imagine that we have the capacity to transform our lives.*

– Budd L. Hall

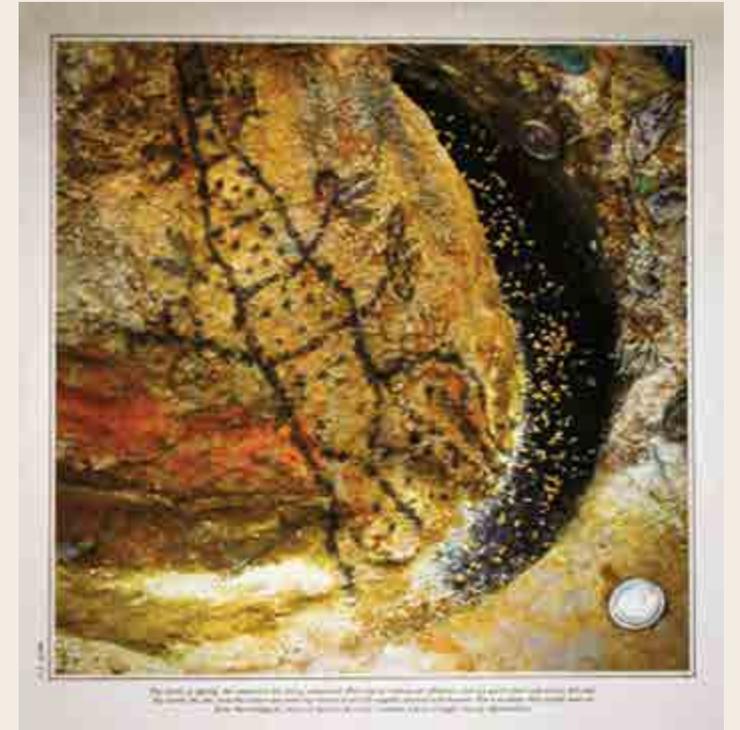
Bangalore under the new title: Students for Democracy. The goal was to help students internalize the systems of democracy and respond to the realities in their own schools and neighborhoods.

The campaign, *Students for Democracy* led to Manthana, a forum for college students. Manthana in Kannada means churning, and the wisdom that comes out of deep thinking, shaping and analyzing. The objective was to enable youth to 'read their reality and shape their own destiny'. The underlying understanding was that the media and political structures had deprived students of the learning of actual social realities. Visthar team worked tirelessly to sensitize the students on secularism, gender and caste discrimination and other social realities. They also discussed how the processes of liberalization, privatization and globalization were connected to their personal lives and helped them explore alternatives. In addition to educating for political awareness, Manthana exposed students to art, theater, dance and music.

## Cultural Resources for Social Action

Right from the beginning we felt the need to have deeper reflections on 'the emancipatory and spiritual possibilities of culture'. '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' (Artists Unite).

Looking at the challenges and barriers we face in our journey towards just, democratic, equitable and sustainable communities, we felt the 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 the India Foundation for Arts (IFA), C. F. John, choreographer/dancer Tripura Kashyap, and visual artist T. M. Azis presented *Walls of Memories*, around the well in Visthar in February 2003. The event comprised a series of 15 installations and a performance inside the well. 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. We are convinced of the power of art to inspire resistance and offer alternatives that 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.



*It is time for us to find our stories, art and poems in seeds,  
soil, and in the open hands that dream with it. It is time to  
denounce the abstract and the floating, and start seeing,  
touching, nurturing and finding joy within the real.*

– C F -0John



### Social Justice, Peace and Development (SJPD)

Visthar has run this study abroad programme for over 25 years. Every fall, 15-20 students from two U.S. colleges come to Visthar for a four-month study-abroad course on Social Justice, Peace and Development. Gustavus Adolphus College and Concordia College are both private Lutheran Liberal Arts Colleges in Minnesota.

The students come from all over the country and bring with them a range of experiences and interests to explore while in India. The course is designed to provoke analytical thought processes about justice, peace and development both in their home country and India. During this period they travel to 5 states visiting formal and non-formal centers of learning. They also have the opportunity to participate in projects run by non-profit organizations. Through field and classroom work and study, they encounter Indian culture and the global situation.

It was in 1997 that David was invited to take over this programme from Desmond D'Abreo, his mentor. In spite of initial resistance (from me), to spending so much time and energy for a group of American students, David managed to convince us and make it a Visthar programme. I fell for the 'globalisation of resistance' and 'global allies' argument though I saw the primary objective as fund raising for our work in India. 'Because globalization is an unstoppable certainty, campaigns must also be on a larger scale'. There must be unity of like-minded people all over the world. This logic led Visthar to start other international academic programs as well.



### Beyond the Binaries: Gender and Diversity

We began our work in the field of gender and diversity in 1991 with an introductory workshop on Understanding Feminism facilitated by Kamla Bhasin and Vasanth Kannabiran. This enabled us to see things with new eyes. Visthar was extensively involved in the pre and post-Beijing efforts. By 1995, we were deeply convinced about and committed to evolving gender perspectives in development and has been offering regular gender workshops and trainings. Social activists, students and various professionals have all benefited from these gender training workshops over the years.

Visthar offered various fora for community leaders to delve further into the themes of gender and the economy, education, health and gender-based violence. We facilitated several gender trainings in India and offered sustained perspective building programmes for Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in south and south-east Asia. We were convinced that gender equality must be accompanied by changes in the other fronts of caste and class as they are all inter-connected. We felt that without minimizing the intensity of Dalit issue, we need to see it in perspective by addressing the linkages between the struggles of women, Dalits and the working class.

Since 2005, we have been offering a month long certificate course titled Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation (GDST). The course is accredited by Xavier Institute of Social Sciences (XISS), We have trained hundreds from over 20 countries in gender and social inclusion and related topics and has several publications to our credit, including training manuals on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals. I acknowledge the contribution of Ranjani K. Murthy (Independent Researcher) a resource person for our courses and co-author of the Gender Manuals published by Visthar.

*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 Bravo, Mexico.*



## Counter Culture Perspectives

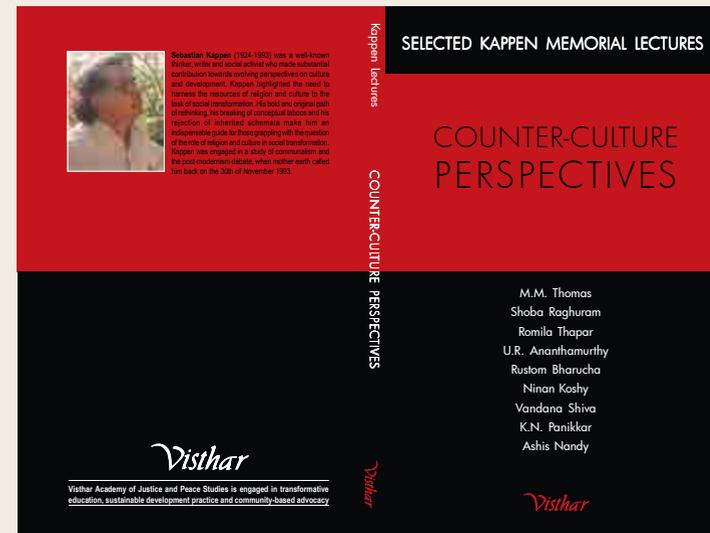
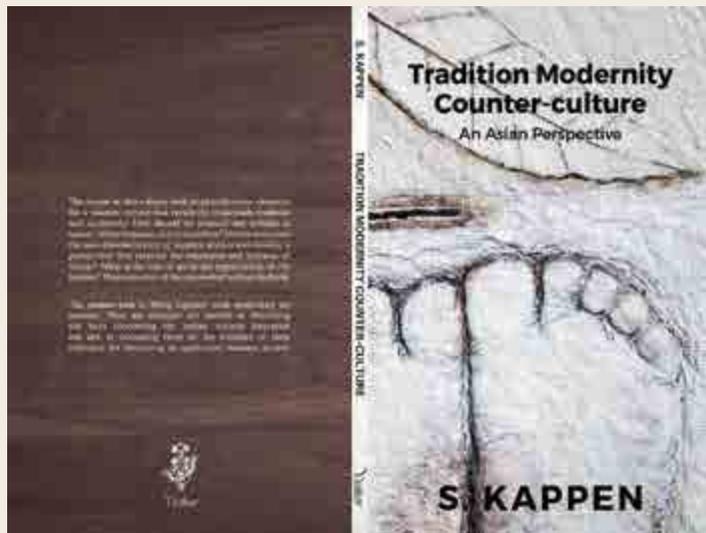
Kappen Memorial Lectures:

This annual lecture is organized in celebration of the life and work of Dr. Sebastian Kappen S. J., philosopher, author and liberation theologian, who has inspired and mentored many 'dissenters and dreamers' in India including some of us at Visthar.

Kappen has been rightly identified as the torch bearer of counter culture. He visualized the process of social transformation as a transition from 'inherited cultural bondages to freedom for fashioning a new humane and humanizing culture'. He strongly believed that 'a new social order could be brought about only by protesting against oppressive systems, by daring to dissent and ushering in a counter culture. The subversive-creative praxis takes concrete form in political as well as cultural action, action aimed at challenging the cultural hegemony of the ruling classes and restoring to the common people the right to think their own thoughts and frame their own scale of values'. Kappen envisioned a culture that celebrates the mystery and sacredness of life.

A socialist by conviction, Kappen carried his beliefs into his writings and talks. His writings have not been without impact on social thinking in the country. His bold and original path of rethinking, his breaking of conceptual taboos and his rejection of inherited schemata make him an indispensable guide for those of us who are struggling to grasp, articulate and build up a theory and praxis of a counter culture.

The speakers at the Kappen Memorial Lecture series included M.M Thomas, Shobha Raghuram, U. R. Ananthmurthy, Romila Thapar, Rustom Bharucha, K. N. Panikkar, Vandana Shiva, Ninan Koshy, Iliana Sen, Ramachandra Guha, Rajan Gurukkal, Ashis Nandy, Rama Mani and Nivedita Menon among others.



## Towards Alternatives in Living and Learning

We have been groping analytically, but never stopped exploring new avenues to make ourselves relevant. In the mid-nineties Visthar acquired a 6 acre plot in the outskirts of Bangalore. This beautiful and rustic land soon became the epicentre of our work. It was our dream to set up a campus and a training centre that would facilitate our programs. It became a reality as we started working on the land and designing the spaces maintaining a rustic aesthetics.

We wanted to keep our goal of empowering the marginalized in the forefront and hold ourselves responsible for our actions in both dialogue and lifestyle. In order to keep these priorities, we determined that the campus must be a manifestation of what the organization stood for ideologically. We worked hard to ensure that the issues of livelihood, gender discrimination, cultural domination and environmental degradation were not jeopardized for the sake of promoting Visthar as an institution. Our question of relevance in a constantly changing global environment hung in the air as a prayer for direction. 'Resistance and Hope' continued to be the theme of these years.

In setting up the campus, we grappled with several questions: 'Is that we need a larger space of our own to organise our

programme? Is that we would like to enjoy the ambience of a natural space free from the noise, pollution and other distractions of a city? Or do we allow ourselves to be affected by the space and soil altering our own sensibilities, taste, and way of perceiving our discourses. These were some of the key questions we kept asking ourselves.

From the time the land came to us we were enthralled by the newer perspectives and forms nature could enlighten us with in our journey. In a seemingly effortless process the land lent herself for us to follow. The very first year the posters and calendars we produced celebrated images created from soil, trees, leaves and other motives as against the imagined visuals drawn or printed on paper or canvas. It was an opening of a different visual sensibility and language where we restrain from our own imagined images but allow the earth to speak herself. We used mud blocks for the constructions. Compressed mud block was conceived by Astra of Indian Institute of Science as a measure to address the energy concerns in the field of architecture. We chose it from the point of both ecological concerns and aesthetic interests.



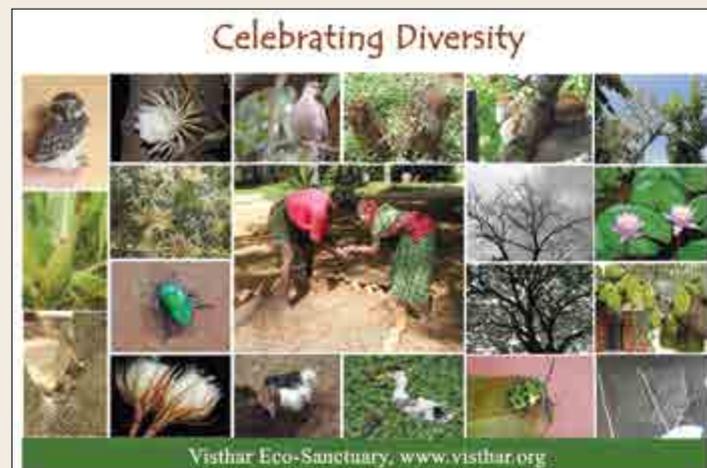
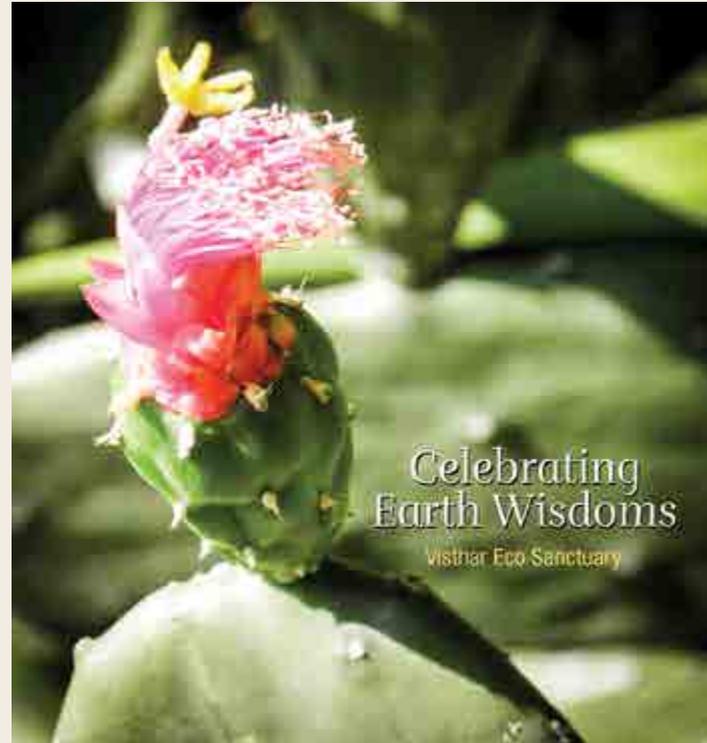
## Visthar Eco Sanctuary

It all began with a walk during our retreat 2014, through the Bio-diversity Sanctuary established by the Jesuits at Shembaganur near Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu. Our proposal to develop Visthar as a similar eco sanctuary was embraced with overwhelming support by both the team and the Board. Visthar as an Eco Sanctuary signified the need to turn around to a cosmo-centric way of life, one with earth wisdoms; and viewing Nature as much more than a backdrop to our lives. Here we see ourselves and the source of life as one with nature and in harmony with the universal rhythm of life.

At Visthar, we recognize the symbiotic relationship between earth and humans and our responsibility to nurture and restore ecological integrity. Our earth has been a native habitat for herbs and plants of healing, beauty and fragrance. In our intricate webbing with the world around us, they are influential and beautiful strands that must be held together for a balanced living.

Visthar as Eco Sanctuary is a conscious initiative to nurture and protect all life on our campus. The Sanctuary transcends being a mere physical space to represent an enlightened programme reflecting inclusion and sustainability. It serves the dual purpose of being an earth-based learning centre and a development locus for 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 bio-diversity and water recharging and recycling.



## Bhoomi Habba – The Earth Festival



When we started Bhoomi Habba, the event 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. Over the years Bhoomi Habba has become an event Bangaloreans look forward to.

*Bhoomi Habba is the best Sustainability/Environment festival I have ever been to. This weekend, I had the honour to inaugurate it, while "My Earth Band" performed our music on Sustainability for Children. There was so much of passion, heart and soul in this festival. So many people working together to make this world a better place for generations. This visit to the Bhoomi Habba gave me so much of hope for our future.*

- Ricky Kej, 2018



## Breaking Barriers, Building Communities

*If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless. You build from the ground up. – Adrienne Rich*

It was in 1995 and against the backdrop of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, that we undertook a study on violence against women. The study was designed as part of a campaign for strengthening women's rights, resisting violence against women and promoting their political participation.

Bandhavi, a short stay home for women in distress was a follow up of this study. It was initially conceptualized to support and shelter the victims of domestic violence – a place where, women could gather the strength to heal themselves and rebuild their lives. Bandhavi offered legal counsel, medical care, physiological and moral support as well as providing vocational training. These skills would empower women to move forward in life once they left Bandhavi.

Bandhavi transitioned into a programme for 'Girls at Risk'. This shift was a natural evolution of our commitment towards marginalised communities; the dalits and the most vulnerable, the Devadasi women and their girl children. Inaugurated on



10th December 2005, on International Human Rights Day, Bandhavi initiated a small step towards restoring the rights of young girls from North Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh largely belonging to the Madiga Community. The program supports the girls build a positive sense of self, raises consciousness about multiple injustices, equips them to engage with society and develops their leadership skills. Currently there are 151 children directly benefitting from the project including children in Samagara Shikshana Shale (SSS), the primary school on the campus which is a component of the project. Bandhavi is supported by Kindernoithilfe (KNH), Germany.

Another major community initiative is the Child Rights Education and Advocacy (CREA) programme. This is a network of five NGOs in five districts of North Karnataka. Initiated in 2010, the program collectivizes children and raises their consciousness about child rights. The program also sensitizes multiple stakeholders who have a responsibility for upholding children's rights. CREA is supported by Kerk in Actie (KiA), Netherlands.

Visthar Ranga Shaale (VRS), Rural Women's Collective and the Children's Movement for Climate Justice (CMCJ) are our other community interventions.

## The Journey Must Continue

The growth and development of Visthar has been organic, responding to felt needs: external and internal. What began as a 'support service' organization, sharing office space has grown and diversified. Visthar currently has a campus in Bangalore and another in Koppal employing over 40 staff, engaged in varied fields of work. This includes educational programmes, community based development activities, conference and retreat centre and an eco sanctuary. With the introduction of educational programmes and community advocacy our profile has changed. Though from the beginning we have been simultaneously serving as a support service body providing a platform for conversations between activists and critical intellectuals.

The journey has not been without hurdles – internal and external. There were times when we, as an organization, were faced with a crisis of confidence. At times we felt we no longer had a grasp of issues and their ramifications. Everything seemed to be so complex and so contextual. Our responses had to be space-time specific, and we often wondered whether we had the depth, the competence and the commitment to respond relevantly and meaningfully to the challenges around. Anchoring ourselves in the struggles and hopes of the marginalised, we continue groping, searching for relevance.

The Board of Trustees and the Chairpersons, past and present, have been a source of inspiration and support in many ways. We also remember with gratitude members of the Board and the team who are no more with us physically but continue to journey with us in spirit.



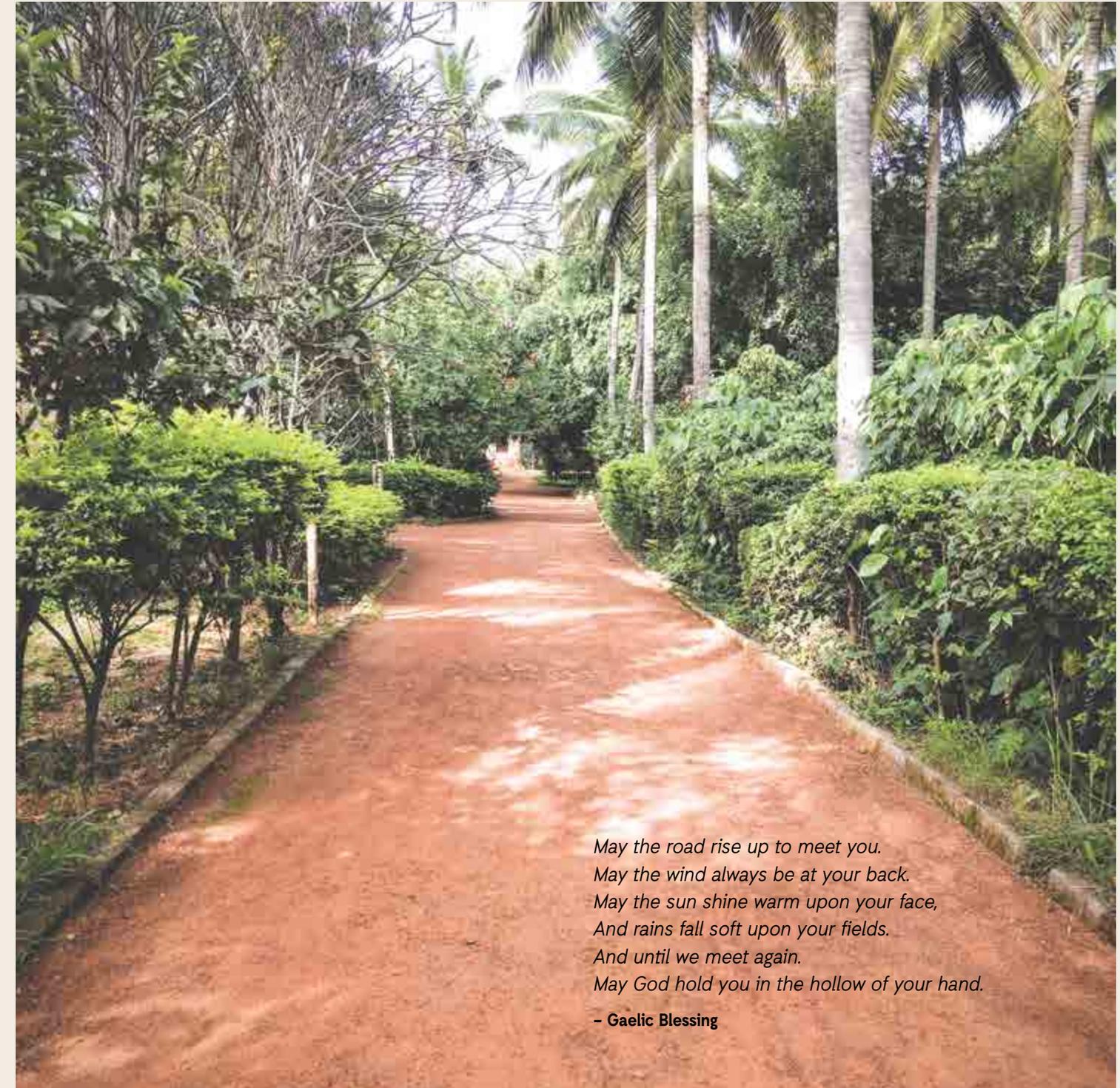
Gen. O. M. Mani (Author) and former Chairpersons Prof. Hasan Mansur and Dr. K. C. Abraham flanked by board members Mercy Kappen and Dr. Deepa Subramaniam.



Visthar team 2019

*We must sleep with open eyes,  
 we must dream with our hands,  
 we must dream the dreams of a river  
 seeking its course,  
 of the sun dreaming its worlds,  
 we must dream aloud,  
 we must sing till the song puts forth roots,  
 trunk, branches, birds, stars,  
 we must find the lost word,  
 and remember what the blood,  
 the tides, the earth, and the body say,  
 and return to the point of departure...*

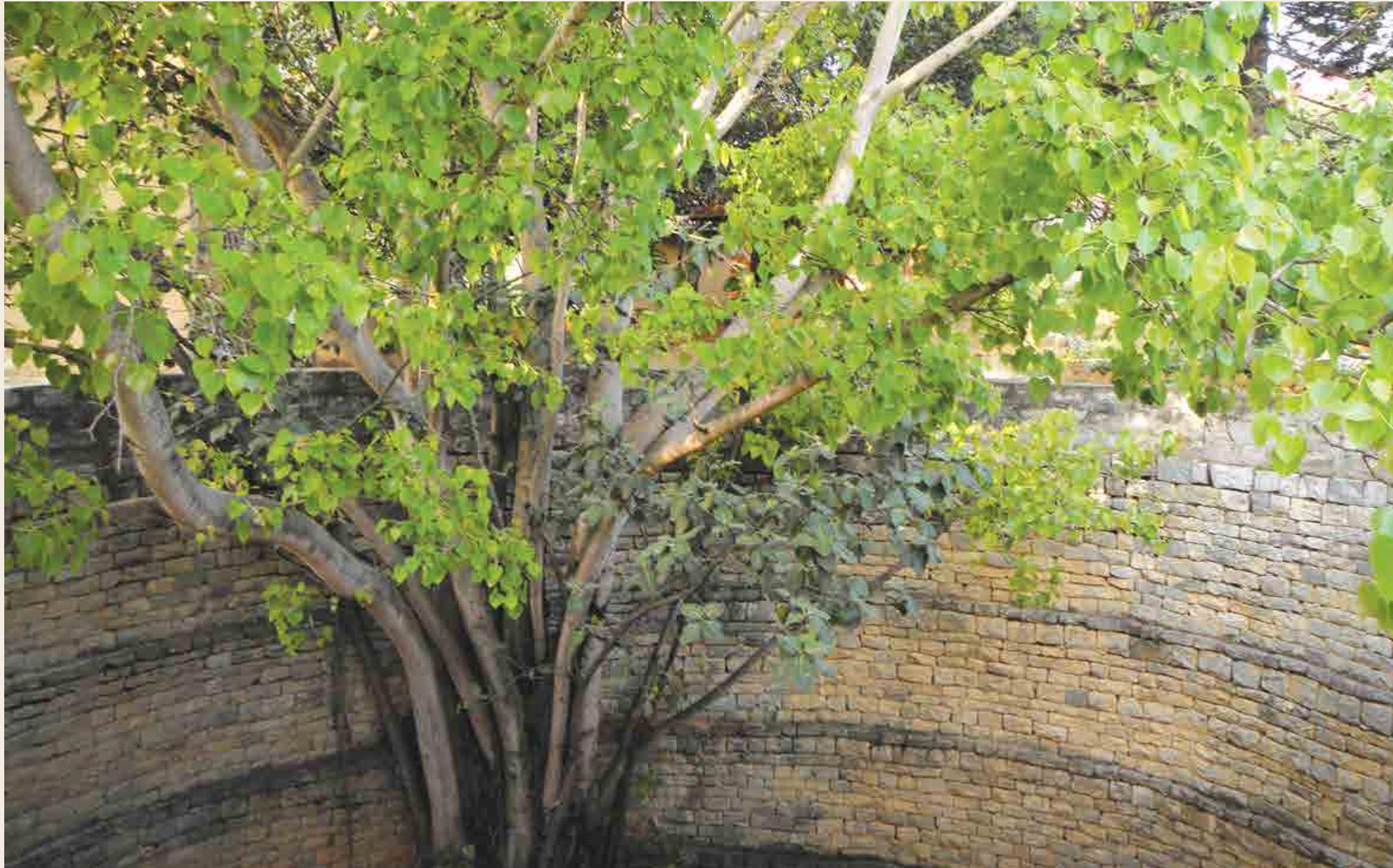
**- Octavio Paz**



*May the road rise up to meet you.  
 May the wind always be at your back.  
 May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
 And rains fall soft upon your fields.  
 And until we meet again.  
 May God hold you in the hollow of your hand.*

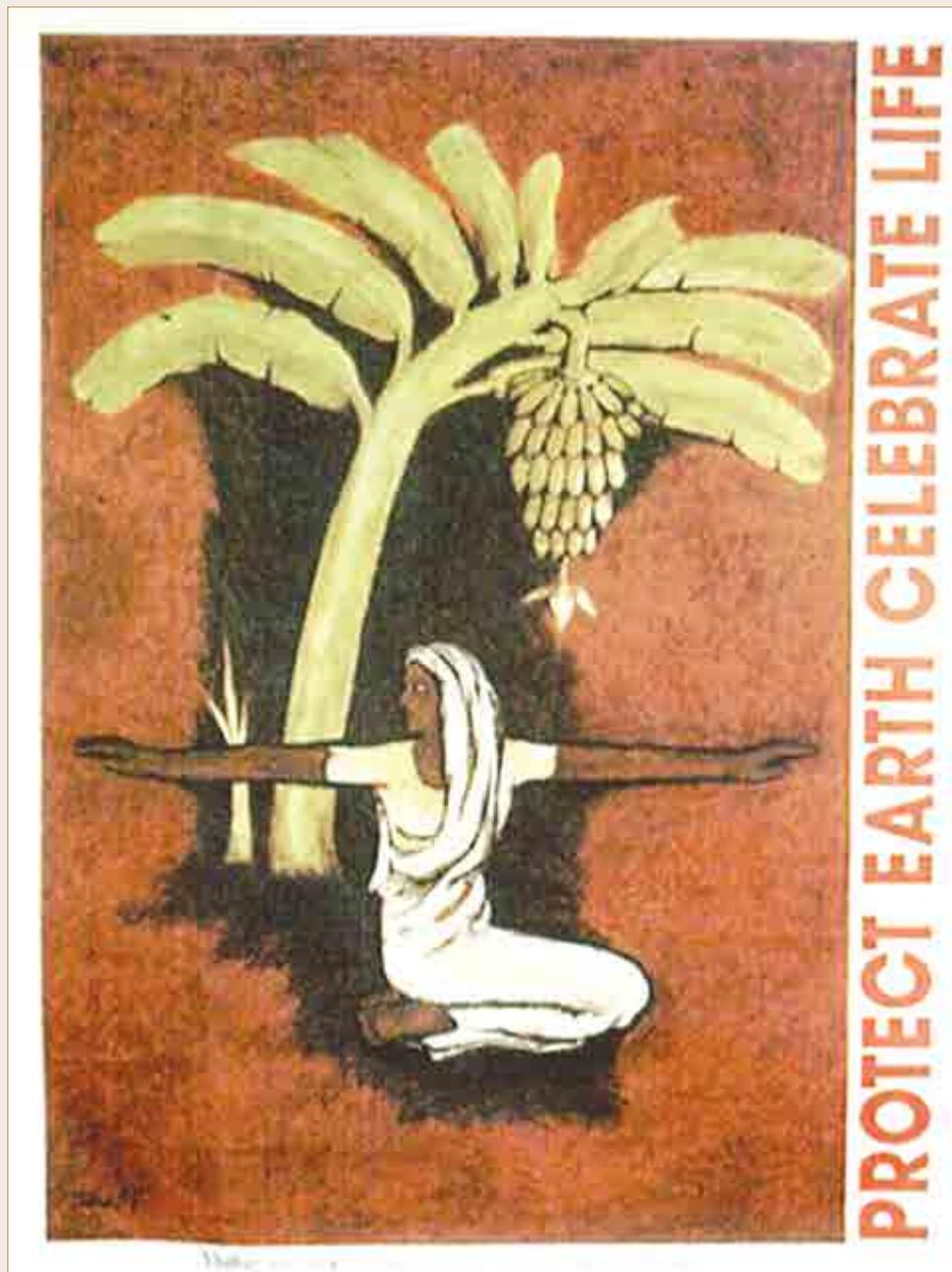
**- Gaelic Blessing**

Paths are made by walking – Entrance to Visthar campus



*This Peepal on the wall of the iconic well at Visthar has been my go-to image when I wonder why I am where I am, who I am, whether I should be this or try to be that. To me, this Peepal signifies the courage to own your being, find resources within and grow, even if the odds look bleak and the world has much to say about your choice.*

**- Charumathi Supraja**  
Treevellers' Katte



A 1993 poster from Visthar, featured in Poster Woman

The painting was created after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The idea was to celebrate earth. The artist, C. F. John and Visthar at that point in time was greatly influenced by the Narmada Bachao Aandolan, especially Medha Patkar. The image of the woman is the re-appropriation of the Greek mythic image, Goddess Isis.



Dolls Speak by Francoise Bosteels

*Women of the Chipko movement,  
women of the earth,  
women survivors of violence,  
women of hope....  
They weep no more.  
They heal their bodies.  
They heal the earth.*

**- Aruna Gnanadasan**



An age-old Anthill at Visthar Eco Sanctuary

*Every ant knows the formula of  
its ant-hill, every bee knows the  
formula of its beehive.  
They know it in their own way,  
not in our way.  
Only humankind does not know  
its own formula.*

**- Dostoyevsky**



An installation by Siddhartha M C at Bhoomi Habba, 2018

*Humankind has not woven the web of life.  
We are but one thread within it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.  
All things are bound together. All things connect.*

**- Chief Seattle, 1854**

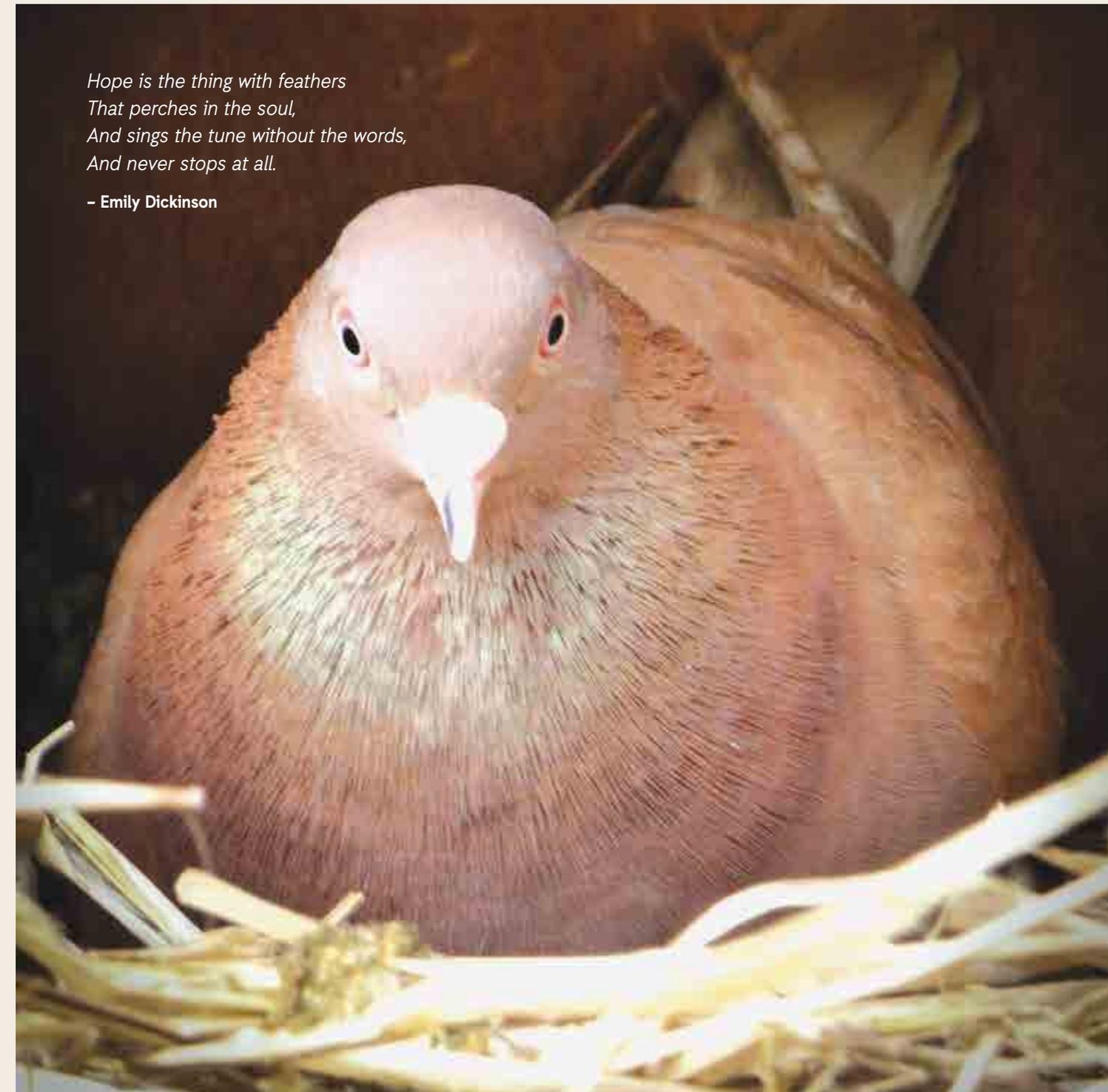


Visthar Eco Sanctuary - a nesting place for several species of birds

*The morning will surely come,  
the darkness will vanish,  
and thy voice pour down in golden  
streams breaking through the sky.*

*Then thy words will take wing in  
songs from every one of my birds'  
nests, and thy melodies will break  
forth in flowers in all my forest  
groves.*

**- Rabindrath Tagore**



*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all.*

**- Emily Dickinson**



### Butterfly Garden at Visthar

"Just living is not enough", said the butterfly, "one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower to love". Butterfly is a symbol of change, creativity, freedom, joy and beauty. A metaphor of transformation. We have much to learn from butterflies. Never to resist change. Never to rush change. Butterflies possess the ability



A visitor at our Butterfly Garden

to grow and change, leaving the safety of their cocoon to discover a new world in a new form without fear, trusting their untested wings to fly without a doubt in their minds.

Just as a butterfly, our campus too has gone through different stages of change. This garden was a parched piece of land, transformed into a sanctuary for butterflies by Nazar and team.



Butterfly Rising' at Visthar

*Like the sun, rising in the sky  
 Like the wind, passing you by  
 Like the dew, after the rain  
 With fire in me, I rise from the pain  
 Like the breath you take, so free  
 Like the love that created me  
 Like the calm, after a stormy rain  
 I don't break, I bend from the pain  
 Like butterfly, so free ...*

- Sonya Braxton



The Cannon Ball (NagaLinga / Siva Linga) tree at Visthar

*The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and  
 day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.  
 It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth  
 in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous  
 waves of leaves and flowers.*

- Rabindranath Tagore.



Water Lily pond at Visthar Butterfly Garden

*Water Lily*  
 My whole life is mine,  
 but whoever says so will deprive me, for it is infinite.  
 The ripple of water, the shade of the sky are mine;  
 it is still the same, my life.  
 No desire opens me: I am full.  
 I never close myself with refusal-in

*the rhythm of my daily soul*  
 I do not desire-I am moved by being moved  
 I exert my empire, making the dreams of night real:  
 into my body at the bottom of the water  
 I attract the beyonds of mirrors..

- Rainer Maria Rilke



A bloom of joy - the mystical Brahma Kamal in the Butterfly Garden

The gorgeous Brahma Kamals are so beautiful that they are glorified by different names two of which are The Star of Bethlehem and the Lotus of the Gods. These breathtakingly beautiful flowers bring with them an aura of calm, peace and beauty, as if to say, that despite the present turmoil in the World all will be well.



Suzi, the fish who responds when we call her name, in the courtyard at Visthar office

A fish symbolizes fertility, feelings, creativity, rebirth, good luck, transformation, health, abundance, serenity, intelligence, happiness, strength, and endurance. Connecting us with the water element, it represents the deeper awareness of the unconsciousness or higher self. (Fish Meaning and Symbolism).



Tommy, the turtle who shares its home with Suzi and her children at the pond in the office

The turtle totem wisdom teaches us about walking our path in peace and sticking to it with determination and serenity. Traditionally, the turtle is symbolic of the way of peace whether it's inviting us to cultivate peace of mind or a peaceful relationship with our environment.

- Eleena Harris



The Pebble Pond at Bandhavi, Koppal

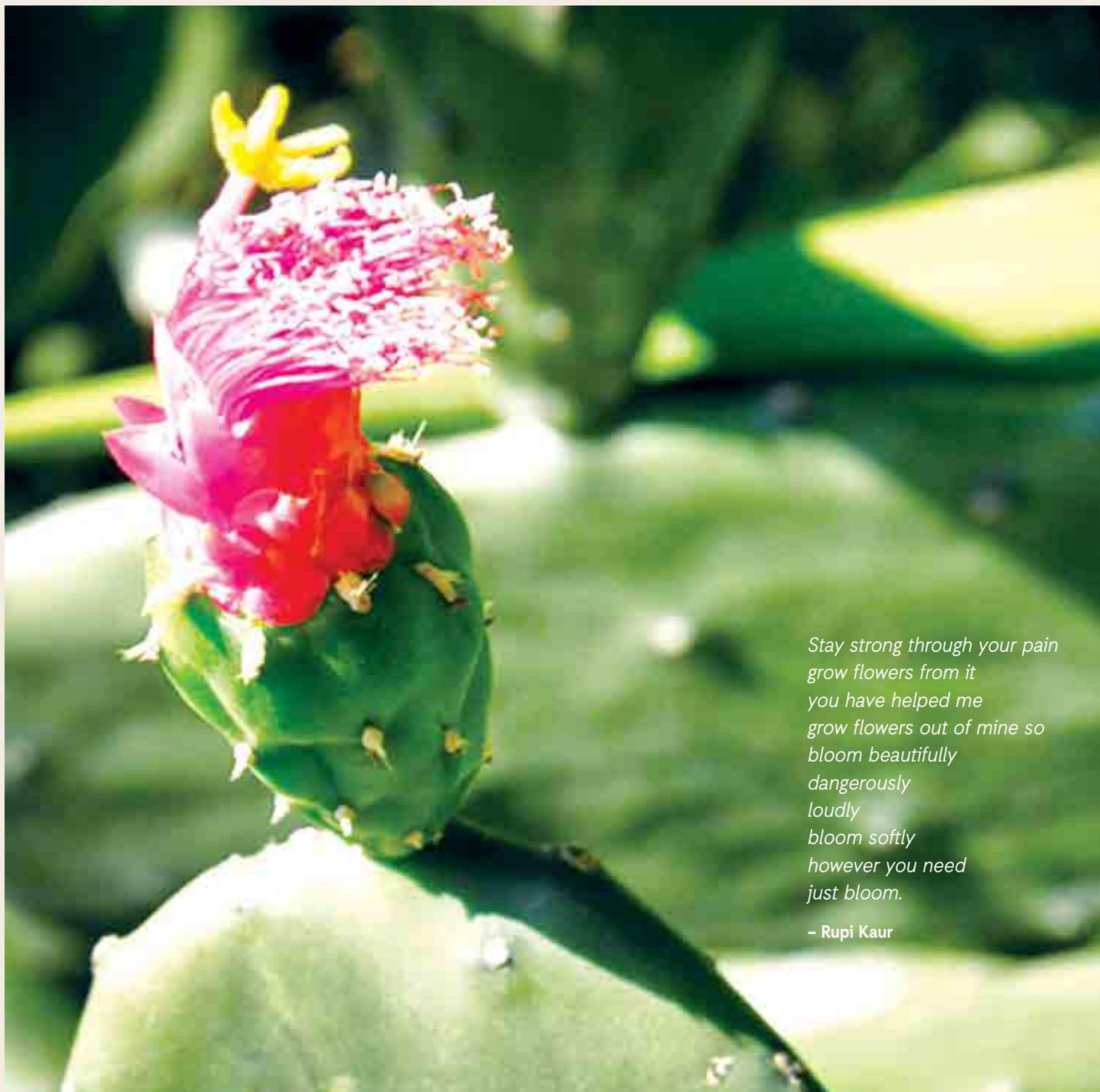
*I want to be a pebble in the pond  
that creates a ripple for change.*

- **Tim Cook**



Celebrating Freedom - Sculpture by Sairaam Rai at the entrance of Visthar

Visthar Conference and Retreat Centre (VCRC) provides a serene ambience that blends rich, earth-tone hues within a simple yet elegant setting. An ideal retreat, an artist's inspiration, or simply a place to relax, walk, breathe the air, take in the natural beauty and experience nature. Away from the bustle of Bangalore city, VCRC allows you to focus on your passions, by living in the serenity of a six-acre eco-sanctuary. From lush green to fluid spaces each and every corner has something special to offer.



*Stay strong through your pain  
grow flowers from it  
you have helped me  
grow flowers out of mine so  
bloom beautifully  
dangerously  
loudly  
bloom softly  
however you need  
just bloom.*

*- Rupi Kaur*

Blooming Cactus from Manoranjitham Nursery



The Manoranjitham plant after which our nursery is named

Manoranjitham Nursery offers a wide range of unique, earthy, green gifting choice for special occasions. Potted herbs, air purifiers, and decor indoor plants in designer planters.



Honeycomb on the Tamarind tree at Visthar

*Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.*

**- Herman Hesse**

### Great Spirit !

*Give us hearts to understand;  
Never to take from creation's beauty  
more than we give;  
Never to destroy wantonly  
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.  
Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,  
whose breath gives life to the world, hear me;  
I need your strength and wisdom.  
May I walk in Beauty.*

**- U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program, 1993.**



Bhoomi Habba – The Earth Festival, an annual eco event organised by Visthar

Bhoomi Habba resonates with Visthar's hope of a transformed world held together by peace and justice that includes eco justice and harmony between humans and the earth. The Habba focuses on environmental crises faced by Bengaluru. Soil, water, trees, and garbage are the thematic areas around which poster exhibitions, films, art workshops, information stalls etc are held. Bhoomi Habba speaks to the participants through music, food, films, exhibitions and workshops. About 4000 people including school children participate in this annual event.



Treevellers' Katta by Charumathi Supraja at Bhoomi Habba

The Treevellers' Katta is an invitation to open conversations with the earth in our bodies. Katta is Kannada for a place where people gather to chat, sit idle and stare, to listen to birdsong or laughter, to talk about their day. The Treevellers' Katta is a space to hang out with tree-images, stories, poetree and other treevellers. It is an earthing point.

<https://artecologyinitiative.wordpress.com/>



Storytelling by Paavathi Om at Bhoomi Habba 2019

*The planet desperately needs more peacemakers,  
healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds.*

**- Dalai Lama**



Pottery Workshop at Bhoomi Habba by Lokesh Murthy

May your hands be full of clay  
And your hearts full of imagination.



Leeza at the painting workshop at Bhoomi Habba 2018

*A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. If I had influence with the good fairy, who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years.*

**- Rachel Carson**



*Climate crisis is the biggest crisis humanity has ever faced ...  
We deserve a safe future. And we demand a safe future.  
Is that really too much to ask?  
We need to get angry and understand what is at stake.  
And then we need to transform that anger into action  
and to stand together united and just never give up.*

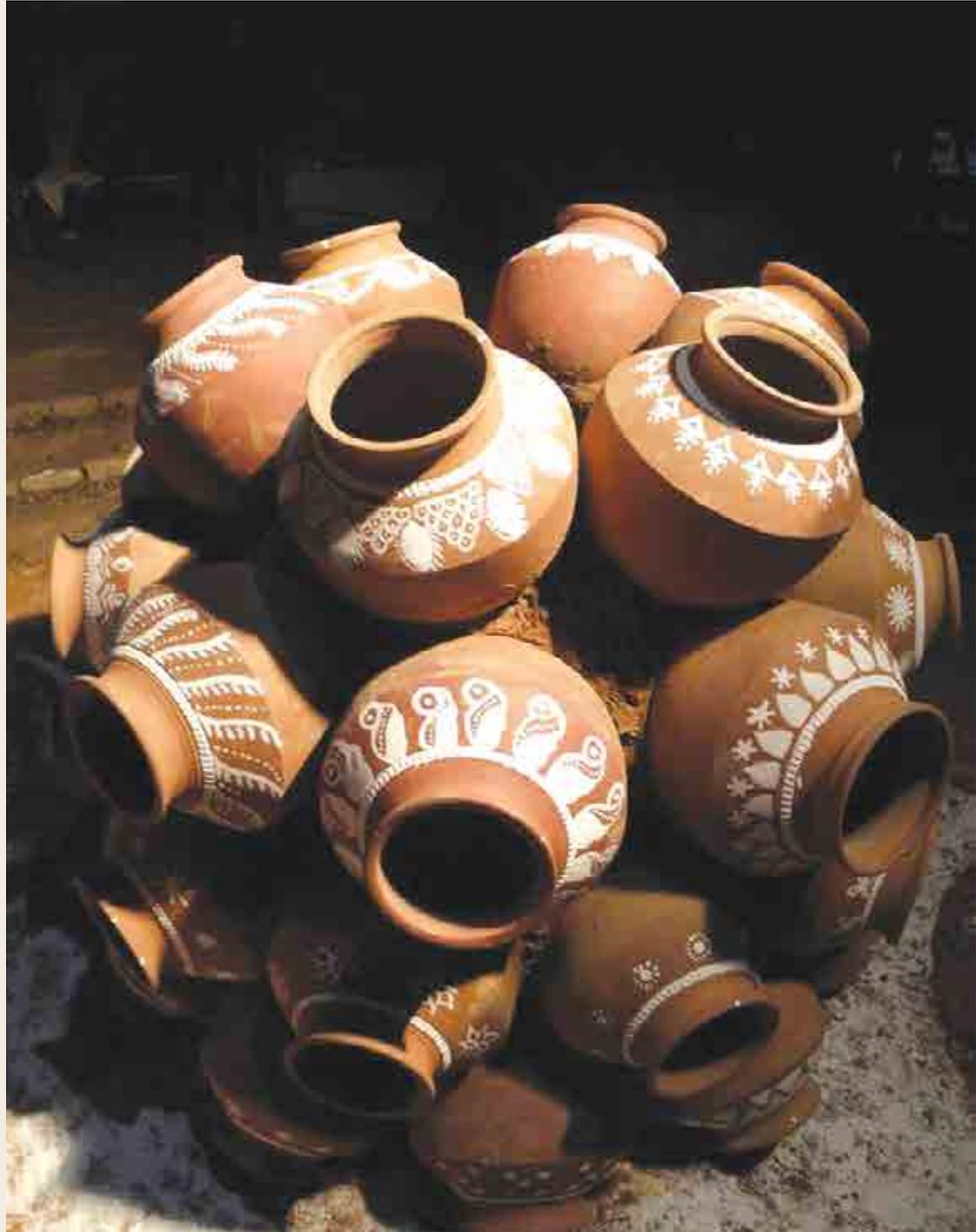
**- Greta Thunberg**



Thea in deep reflection at the inner courtyard in Visthar

*As a child, one has that magical capacity to move among  
the many eras of the earth; to see the land as an animal does;  
to experience the sky from the perspective of a flower or a bee;  
to feel the earth quiver and breathe beneath us;  
to know a hundred different smells of mud and listen  
unself-consciously to the sighing of the trees.*

**- Valerie Andrews**



Installation by Nazar P S at Bhoomi Habba 2018

*We shape clay into  
a pot, but it is the  
emptiness inside that  
holds whatever we want.*

- Lao Tzu



*You are the universe in ecstatic motion.  
Set your life on fire.  
Seek those who fan your flames.*

- Rumi

The concluding ceremony of Bhoomi Habba 2019



Theatre performance by Visthar Ranga Shale at Bhoomi Habba 2018

Visthar Ranga Shaale (VRS) is a project of Visthar, located in Koppal, in north Karnataka. The multifaceted theatre-making course is designed to engage students in creative processes, enabling them to transform ideas into action. The pedagogy involves a combination of research, field visits, theatre improvisations and critical reflection. The course is conducted by experienced theatre teachers and facilitators from all over the country. VRS is affiliated to Kannada University, Hampi.



Theatre performance by Visthar Ranga Shale

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.*

**- William Shakespeare**



A terracotta statuette of Buddha amidst cool, green herbs at Manoranjitham Nursery

*Radiate boundless love towards the entire world  
- Above, below, and across -  
Unhindered, without ill will, without enmity.*

**- Buddha**



Totem Pole at Visthar created by Hartman De Souza

## Totem within

*Your deepest roots are in nature. No matter who you are, where you live,  
or what kind of life you lead, you remain irrevocably linked with the rest of creation.*

**- Charles Cook**



Srujana Recycled serves as an eco-model for sustainability. Bringing new life to once discarded paper, this unit is a promotional, educational and entrepreneurial archetype that inspires hope. Recycling paper conserves natural resources, saves energy, reduces greenhouse gas and the amount of waste to the landfill.



Steven Paul at work at Srujana Recycled

Recycling, crafting and designing paper has been a way of life for Steven for two decades at Visthar. Innumerable people who have attended workshops at Srujana Recycled were inspired to recycle and go green!



Recycled paper art by C. F. John

*Hands playing with pulp  
Soft fingerprints  
On the mindscape,  
Enmeshing leaves and longing  
Into paper lore...*

Amidst recycling and redefinitions, paper is reborn to my mind as part-prose, part poetry; always poetic, never prosaic.

*All it takes is the intuition to tell the mundane from the magical.*

**- Aditi De,**  
Paper Trails



Paper making workshop at Srujana Recycled

*Your sacred space is where you can find yourself over and over again – Joseph Campbell.*

Step into the enchanting world of sacred wells at Visthar. Dry or muddy they open up a world of magic and mystery. The oldest and the deepest one - the well of winged dreams - is unique and iconic. It has been a centre of attraction for all who visit the campus. This well has also been a space for installations and dance by artists, for abseiling by students, inaugurations and concluding ceremonies of public events like Bhoomi Habba, the Earth Festival.

Climb down the 40 plus steps and you reach the roots of the Pipal tree growing from the walls of the well. Symbolic of the search for your own roots and depths. The pictures offer you perspectives from the depths and heights of the well and the roots and branches of the tree growing on the wall of the well. Step in. Explore your connectedness with the universe.



*And now we step to the rhythm of miracles... from The Light, That Never Dies.*

**- Aberjhani**



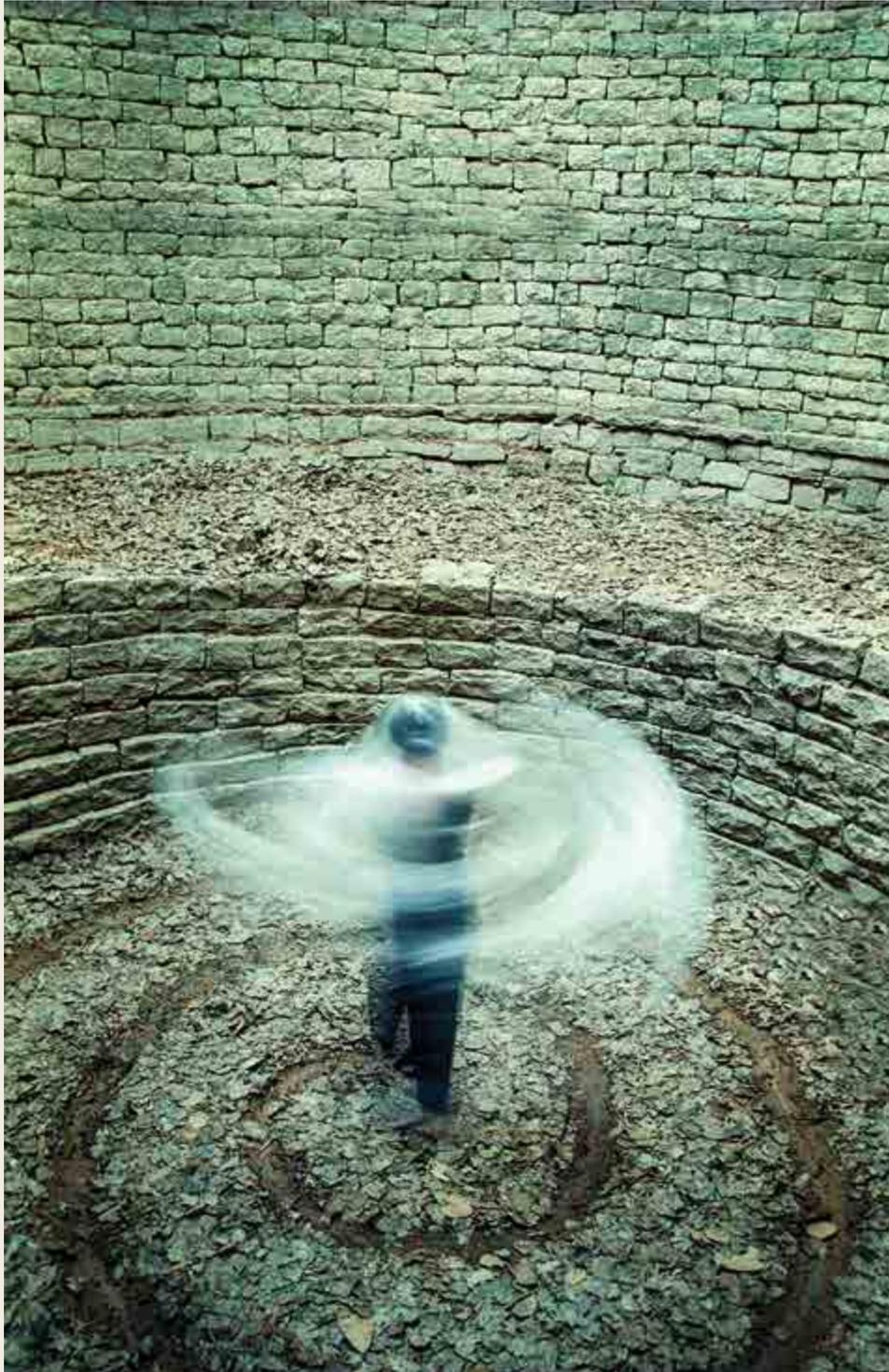
C. F. John, Tripura Kashyap, Azis T. M. - *Walls of Memories*, 2003

*To encounter the sacred is to be alive at the deepest center of human existence. Sacred places are the truest definitions of the earth; they stand for the earth immediately and forever; they are its flags and shields. If you would know the earth for what it really is, learn it through its sacred places..*

**- N Scott Momaday**



C. F. John, Tripura Kashyap, Azis T. M. - *Walls of Memories*, 2003



C. F. John, Tripura Kashyap, Azis T. M. - *Walls of Memories*, 2003

Clouds come floating into my life,  
no longer to carry rain or usher storm,  
but to add color to my sunset sky.

- Rabindranath Tagore



A bottom-up view of the iconic well at Visthar by Charmaine Kenita



Mandala, the meditation space at Visthar, designed by C. F. John

Mandala is an invitation to a journey. It's a journey where you find yourself looking keenly at your own responses to the space and the artwork. These responses could be thoughts, feelings or other body sensations. Mandala aims to facilitate

this journey with gentleness, care, and beauty. Mandala helps you to begin to understand the relationships with time, space, history and everything that impacts us and constitutes our world.



The main door of the Mandala

*The image of a door is liminal,  
passing from one place into another  
one state to the other,  
boundaries and promises and threats.  
Inside to outside,  
light into dark, dark into light,  
cold into warm, known into strange,  
safe into terror, wind into stillness,  
silence into noise or music.  
We slice our life into  
segments by rituals, each a door  
to a presumed new phase.*

**- Marge Piercy**



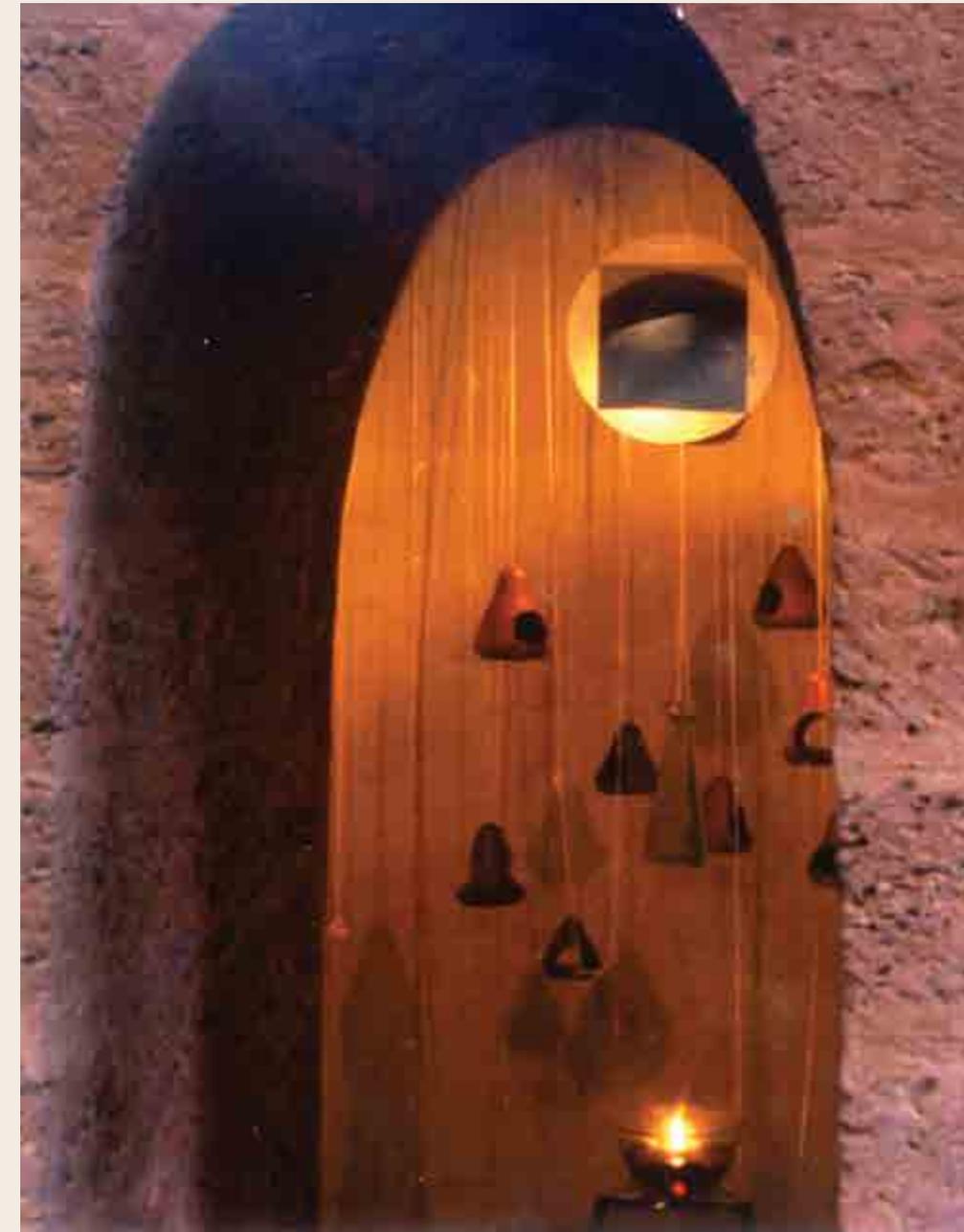
Mandala – an inside view

One thing that Mandala doesn't allow is stridency – in movement or thought. There are no easy answers. To enter the building you have to climb up two feet above the ground, and to get to the next space you have to go down six feet, symbolically human scale. And you have to be slow. The structure doesn't block your movement, rather it forces grace onto it - descending through an archetypal space. There are three staircases going down, separated by two platforms that one has to skirt around. Mainstream perceptions are deconstructed to reveal many truths.



Mandala – A bottom up view

Mandala presents the most ordinary things before you and nudges you to confront what is there - confronting the very basic and at the same time the cosmic.



The sanctum sanctorum of Mandala

At the end of the journey through Mandala, what you discover is none but yourself. The sanctum sanctorum – the final structure – is built into the earth like a cave and has an umbrella shaped disc balancing above it.

As you bend down to look in, you see your own face on the mirror placed inside. And with the lamp placed behind the mirror, you are the hallowed idol. With just a suggestion of it in the outside, Mandala gently leads up to an interiority that offers a secluded - private space with the possibility of finding connection with yourself, the forces of nature and the world at large.



Bandhavi – A Visthar initiative for empowerment of girl children

*No matter what happens,  
Where you go or what you do,  
Always remember:  
No one can take the fire out of your souls,  
The stars from your eyes,  
Or the passion within your heart.*

**- Stephanie Bennett-Henry**

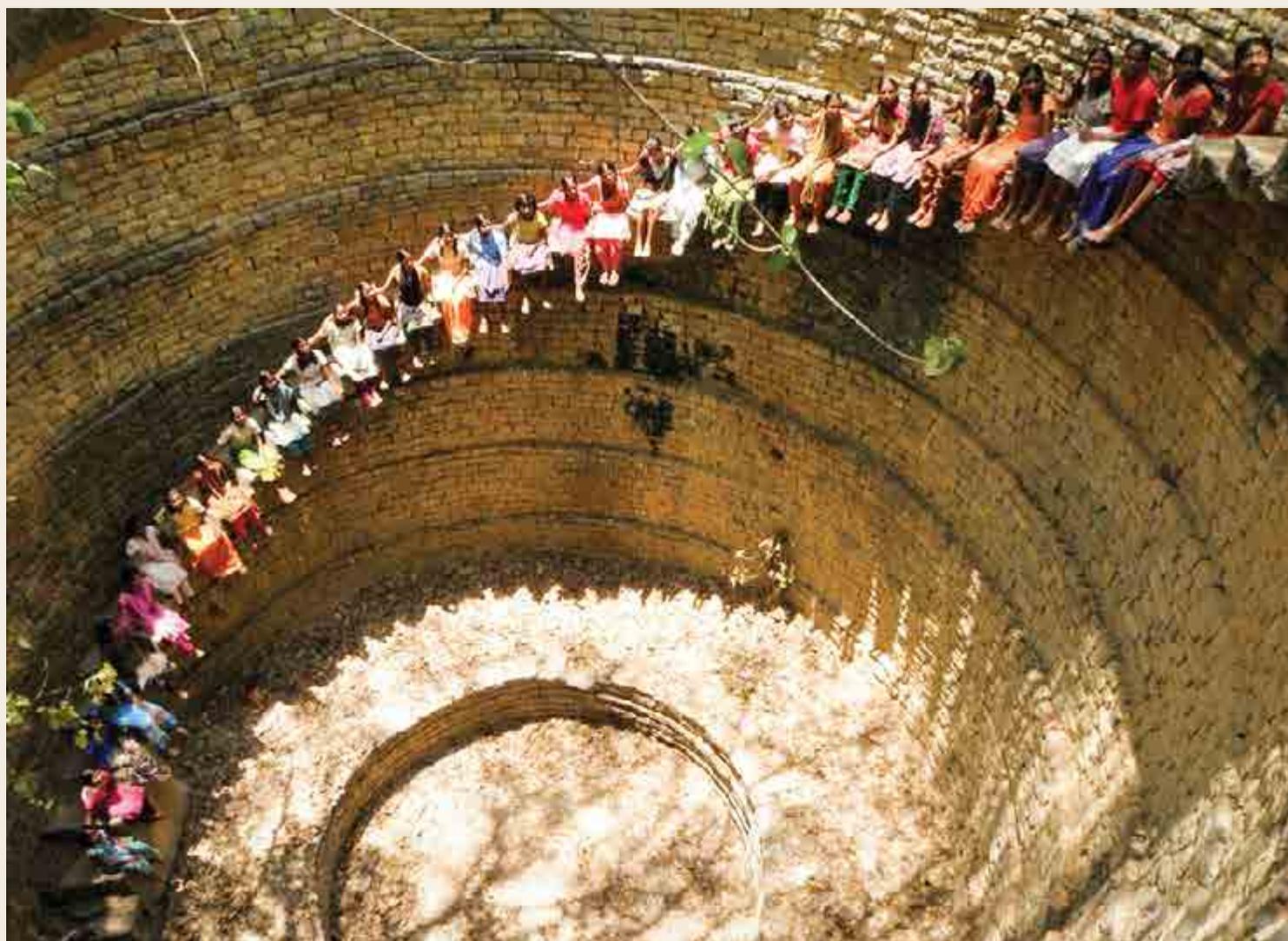


Tripura Kashyap, Territory - An art event

*I will not die an unlive life.  
I will not live in fear  
of falling or catching fire.  
I choose to inhabit my days,  
to allow my living to open me,  
to make me less afraid,  
more accessible,  
to loosen my heart*

*until it becomes a wing,  
a torch, a promise.  
I choose to risk my significance;  
to live so that which came to me as seed  
goes to the next as blossom  
and that which came to me as blossom,  
goes on as fruit.*

**- Dawna Markova**



Bandhavi children on the steps of the well

*Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die,  
life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.*

– Langston Hughes



The circle of love, at Bandhavi, Koppal

There shall be peace on earth, but not until  
All children daily eat their fill,  
Go warmly clad against the winter wind  
And learn their lessons with a tranquil mind.  
And then, released from hunger, fear and need  
Regardless of their color, race or creed  
Look upward smiling to their skies,  
Their faith in life reflected in their eyes.

– Dorothy Roigt

(This poem was printed on a calendar for 2002 displayed in the United Nations Building in New York).

Remember me?  
 I am the girl  
 with the dark skin.  
 whose shoes are thin  
 I am the girl  
 with the rotted teeth.  
 I am the girl  
 with the wounded eye  
 and the melted ear.  
 I am the girl  
 holding their babies  
 cooking their meals  
 sweeping their yards  
 washing their clothes.  
 Dark and rotting  
 and wounded, wounded.  
 I would give  
 to the human race  
 Only hope.

I am the woman  
 with the blessed  
 dark skin.  
 I am the woman  
 with teeth repaired.  
 I am the woman  
 with the healing eye  
 the ear that hears.  
 I am the woman:  
 dark, repaired, healed  
 I Listening to you.  
 I would give  
 to the human race  
 only hope.  
 I am the woman  
 offering two flowers  
 whose roots are twin:  
 Justice and Hope  
 Hope and Justice.  
 Let us begin.

– Alice Walker



Drums of Peace by Francoise Bosteels

### What I Will

I will not dance to your war drum.  
 I will not lend my soul nor my bones to your war drum.  
 I will not dance to your beating. I know that beat.  
 It is lifeless. I know intimately that skin you are hitting.  
 It was alive once hunted stolen stretched.  
 I will not dance to your drummed up war.  
 I will craft my own drum.  
 Gather my beloved near  
 and our chanting will be dancing.

Our humming will be drumming.  
 I will not be played.  
 I will not lend my name  
 nor my rhythm to your beat.  
 I will dance and resist and dance and  
 persist and dance.  
 This heartbeat is louder than death.  
 Your war drum ain't louder than this breath.

– Suheir Hammad



Visthar Banner for One Billion Rising , 2014 at Cubbon Park, Bengaluru



To commune is beautiful, not being communal - Installation at a Visthar campaign



*In the dark times  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will also be singing.  
About the dark times.*

**- Bertolt Brecht**

Nasar P. S. - Drumming From Within



## Speak

*Speak, your lips are free.  
Speak, it is your own tongue.  
Speak, it is your own body.  
Speak, your life is still yours.*

*See how in the blacksmith's shop  
The flame burns wild, the iron glows red;  
The locks open their jaws,  
And every chain begins to break.*

*Speak, this brief hour is long enough  
Before the death of body and tongue:  
Speak, 'cause the truth is not dead yet,  
Speak, speak, whatever you must speak.*

**- Faiz Ahmad Faiz**



Celebrating Womankind – A Visthar Calendar for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

## The Seed Keepers

*Burn our land, burn our dreams  
pour acid onto our songs  
cover with sawdust  
the blood of our massacred people  
muffle with your technology  
the screams of all that is free, wild and indigenous.*

*Destroy, destroy our grass and soil  
raze to the ground every farm and every village  
our ancestors had build  
every tree, every home, every book, every law,  
and all the equity and harmony.  
Flatten with your bombs every valley;  
erase with your edits our past,  
our literature, our metaphor.  
Denude the forests and the earth  
till no insect, no bird, no word can find a  
place to hide.*

*Do that and more.  
I do not fear your tyranny.  
I do not despair ever  
for I guard one seed  
a little live seed that I shall safeguard and  
plant again.*

**- Palestinian Poem**

## Some of our recent publications

