

CREDIBLE FANTASIES

T. Vijayendra



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ECOLOGISE HYDERABAD

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Author : T. Vijayendra

Editors : Bhashwati and Karnika Palwa

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Publishers:

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Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: +91 95916 05634

For Copies

Manchi Pustakam

12-13-439, St. No. 1

Tarnaka, Secunderabad - 500017

Email: sureshkosaraju@yahoo.co.in

Mobile: +91 73822 97430

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Preface

Today everyone is talking about environment. We are all aware that our environment is in a very bad shape and something has to be done about it urgently. In the last two hundred years and more specifically in the last fifty years, humans have over exploited the environment and poisoned air, water and soil. Global warming is one of the more visible results. However water scarcity is also a huge problem mankind is facing. Many species are endangered and some have become extinct. Sea levels rising, forests vanishing, ice melting, water bodies drying up and land getting converted into deserts-all of this is happening at various places on earth. We are facing the very extinction of life on earth unless we take corrective measures right away.

But what can we do? Actually we are also part of the problem. No matter how frugal we are, we still are consumers of products that destroy the environment. What is worse, most of the jobs we do

are part of the system that is destroying our environment.

What we need to do is to change our life including our jobs towards green alternatives. The ultimate goal at an individual level is not only to reduce one's carbon footprint, but also to earn one's livelihood exclusively from Green Jobs. We define Green Jobs as those which involve in 'Restoring Ecology through Rebuilding Communities' on the basis of 'Equity and Sustainability.'

These stories explore the possibilities of green jobs. These stories about my young friends have been written in the last few years. In some stories real names and locations have been used. But readers should keep in mind that this is fiction, no matter how credible the situations sound.

I wish to thank all my young friends who are 'characters' in these stories. I am not naming them because in some cases I have changed the names. I also wish to thank Bhashwati and Karnika Palwa who edited this little book and made it more readable.

Hyderabad
June 30, 2023

Viju
(T. Vijayendra)

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Dr. Sadiq's Bicycle Health Check-Up Camp

It was April 30. The examinations were over and summer vacations were to start the next day but that was not the main excitement. Yajat was now in class 6 and according to school rules, he was now eligible to commute on a cycle. After many pleas, his mother had promised to get him a cycle once the vacation begins.

Yajat was tired of borrowing his elder brother, Harsh's cycle and being refused half the time. He was tired of the quarrels that ensued when he took it without Harsh's permission. Life is tough for an eleven - year - old but happy days are here. Yippee!

The whole family trooped to the cycle shop on M. G. Road. They chose a BSA Hercules cycle. Then there was the issue of accessories. Yajat insisted on an old-fashioned stand, an extra strong and big carrier on the back, a lamp and of course a bell. He had a secret ambition of earning some extra money by delivering newspapers in the morning.

Yajat wanted to ride home on his new cycle but his mother put her foot down. The cycle was packed into an auto rickshaw while Yajat and his mother sat behind holding it firmly. His brother and uncle Mohit came home in another rickshaw.

In the apartments complex, there were several children. Yajat's classmate, Malini, lived on the floor below and Rohit, another class mate, lived on the same floor as Yajat. So, they often got together, chatted about school, friends and a thousand other things. Yajat's cycle of course was a hit and all of them came down to watch over the inaugural ride next morning. Rohit and Malini did not know that Yajat had learned to ride using his brother's cycle. They were very envious watching him ride round the block. Yajat was ready to run any errand and he plagued his mom asking if she needed eggs or bread or butter. Soon he learned about every shop in the area and learned what one can buy and where.

He also discovered Sadiq's Cycle Hospital where Dr. Sadiq, in all his 15 - year - old confidence, pimples

and an infectious smile, presided. Yajat loved to watch him deftly looking at brake shoes, adjusting them, hammering the chain cover in place so that it does not clatter. He loved the special ring spanner that was used to tighten the spokes. But best of all was to watch the puncture repair in which the tube was inserted in a tub of water and the air bubbles would spot the puncture hole. After a few days of observing Dr. Sadiq, Yajat was allowed to use the pump for filling air, holding the tube under water and look for the puncture. In return he got free air, and got his cycle cleaned and oiled free of charge. Yajat's mom came to know about this and asked Yajat to always carry some snacks in his tiffin box, to share with Sadiq. The two boys became good friends.

It was the school re-opening day. Morning assembly started at 9 am but Yajat was ready by 8 am and was rushing his mom. It was a 10-minute ride by cycle but he was restless and left at 8:30 am and reached school 20 minutes before time!

Rohit was dropped to school by his mother on her scooter. She had a lot of chores to do and they could only start at 8:55 am. They got stuck at the traffic lights and by the time they reached school, the assembly had already started. Rohit had to stand facing all the children, which was the penalty for coming late.

Something similar happened to Malini whose

father used to drop her in his car. He was very punctual but he got an important call at 8:45 am. He took the call; gestured Malini to go down, and followed slowly while attending to the call. The call continued even after Malini got in. It was past 9 am by the time her father discontinued the call and took the car out. They reached the school only by 9:20 am when children had already gone in to the class. Malini began to cry. Her father took her to the class, apologised to the teacher. In punishment, Malini was made to sit on the back bench!

School started in earnest with homework, tests, and fights amongst children. One day, the teacher asked the students to bring a drawing sheet to the class the following day. In the evening, Yajat reached home, changed his clothes, had his evening tiffin, and took out Rs. 10 from his drawer. His mother always kept some currency notes in his drawer for emergencies. He rode on his cycle to purchase his drawing sheet.

In both Malini's and Rohit's home, the parents reached home late. Both children waited till 8 pm and then came to Yajat's house to discuss how they could arrange drawing sheets for the next day. Yajat asked them to get Rs.10 to school the next day, promising to fetch them the sheets on his cycle, during break time.

Next day, Yajat took care that his cycle was parked right in the front. In the 10-minute break, he

took the cycle out and raced out of the gate before the gate keeper saw him. Within minutes he came back with the two sheets. He also saved Rs. 4 in the bargain.

One evening, Soujanya came to Yajat's house. She told Yajat's mother that she was organising a cycle maintenance workshop in Yajat's school on World Environment Day on June 5. Soujanya had planned to combine it with the 200th birthday of the cycle on June 12. She was looking for a cycle mechanic near the school. Yajat immediately told her about Dr. Sadiq. They designed the workshop calling it Dr. Sadiq's Bicycle Health Check-Up Camp. Yajat, Rohit and Malini were selected as assistants to Dr. Sadiq. They trooped to Sadiq's shop (sorry Hospital) and spoke to him. Soujanya said that he will be paid Rs. 500 for the day and the assistants will be paid Rs. 200 each. Everyone was happy with the prospect of earning. They would check a maximum of 20 cycles and each check-up would cost Rs. 20. The check-up would involve cleaning and oiling and an assessment if further repairs are needed which would be done at the Hospital.

The programme went off very well. It began with Soujanya first telling them about the history of the bicycle and its birth on June 12, 1817. She had prepared beautiful slides on her presentation. She also explained the beauties of the bicycle design and

its benefits in terms of fun, health, and its pollution-free nature. She then explained the meaning of maintenance, preventive maintenance, break-down and repairs. She said it was a joy to ride a well-maintained bicycle and very frustrating to ride a cycle which went rattling. She then introduced the mechanics and his assistants. There was loud cheer when the children recognised the assistants in blue overalls.

Children who had registered for the check-up brought in their cycle one-by-one. The child and Rohit and Malini checked it up, cleaned it, oiled it, and sent it to Yajat. Yajat examined the brakes and ran the cycle to either say it was alright or sent it to Sadiq who further examined it. Quite often it was either the brake or chain cover. Sometimes, a loose chain was also taken care of. In a few cases, Sadiq asked them to bring it to his shop. Yajat gave them an estimate of expenses involved on a piece of paper.

The school principal was very happy with the programme and declared that there would be one period for cycle repair each day where different classes would attend it on different days. Sadiq was appointed a teacher for the class and was promised 100 rupees for a class of 40 minutes.

After the camp, both Rohit and Malini wanted a bicycle. They pestered their parents. Since they were in the same building, the parents met on a Sunday

and decided that they would buy the bicycles. It so happened that both Rohit and Malini had their birthdays in the same week. So, it was agreed that they will have a joint party and that the children will get new bicycles. Rohit chose the same cycle as Yajat's except that he chose a maroon colour instead of Yajat's blue. Malini got a pink Lady Bird bicycle. In the party a tall, dark, and handsome young man walked in a light blue shirt and denims. Only when he grinned, they realised it was Sadiq! Malini ran to him and gave a warm hug. Sadiq was abashed. There were loud cheers when he brought out his presents. They were bicycle decorations – colourful brushes for the hubs. He quickly fitted them on the new bicycle and they looked pretty. Mohit Uncle who ran the 'Ecologise Bookshop', brought copies of, 'You and your bicycle: a guide to maintenance' by Lavanya and Shamala and gifted a copy to every child. It was a beautiful book full of photographs. Viju Uncle also came as a special guest and he urged the parents to buy bicycles for themselves too so that all the three families can have a joint cycle picnic. Every one cheered at the idea.

February 22, 2017
Chamrabad, Chandankiyari, Jharkhand



Priyanka Buys A Bicycle

Priyanka Jain is a nutritionist and a Marwari. This is important to know to follow this story.

Priyanka read Viju's World Bicycle Day Resolution:

**WORLD BICYCLE DAY
JUNE 3, 2022
RESOLUTION: TO REFURBISH AT
LEAST ONE BICYCLE**

This is my personal resolution. I am making it public so that if anyone else gets attracted to the idea, s/he can follow it up.

1. Make friends with the local/neighbourhood bicycle mechanic.
2. Find rates for overhauling and repainting.

Depending on the size of the city the rates may vary between Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 each for overhauling and repainting.

3. Locate an old bicycle or a poor person whom you know and whose bicycle needs overhauling/refurbishing.
4. Get it done.
5. The whole project may cost you as little as Rs. 1000 or up to Rs. 2000. Recently I paid Rs. 1300 in a village in Odisha.'

Priyanka said to Viju: 'Help me get a second-hand bicycle.'

Viju: 'I think Suresh at Manchi Pustakam has a Ladies bicycle which is not in use.'

So, they went to Manchi Pustakam to ask Suresh.

Suresh said, 'Yes, it is lying downstairs. It is in working condition but you may want to put in air and get it oiled and cleaned.'

Priyanka: 'How much will it cost?'

Suresh: 'It is free.'

Priyanka: 'Thank you.' (Thoughtfully) 'Do you have another free bicycle?'

Suresh looked a bit amazed and Viju started to laugh.

Suresh: 'Actually yes. There is Bhagya's old bicycle at home. It will need overhauling. If you want it, I will send it across to your address.'

Priyanka: 'How much will it cost to send?'

Suresh: 'Nothing. It is on the house.'

Priyanka: 'But why? You will be paying actual cash!'

Suresh: 'I am paying fees to you for learning. I learnt an important lesson in trade enquiry from you: 'Always look for extra opportunities that may be there.'

Viju again laughs.

Priyanka: (turning to Viju) 'and why are you laughing?'

Viju: 'Sorry. I just remembered the old Marwari joke. You know it of course, but I will repeat it for Suresh's benefit. It goes like this: A Marwari goes to a shop in Kolkata and asks the price of a certain item. The Bengali shopkeeper quotes, let us say Rs. 10. The Marwari naturally asks if the shopkeeper will sell it for Rs. 5. At this, the shopkeeper gets irritated and offers it for free! The Marwari coolly asks if he will give two items for free!' 'But of course, Priyanka must have some logic for asking for the second bicycle.'

Priyanka: 'Yes, it is like this! If I get one bicycle, I spend about Rs. 1000 on its maintenance and get a bicycle in working condition. So, it is not free. However, if I get two, I spend Rs. 2000 and get two bicycles in working condition. I can sell one of the bicycles for Rs. 2000 and get one bicycle for free. Even if I donate it to a poor person, I am donating Rs. 2000 and still getting a bicycle free for myself!'

Suresh: 'I see.'

Priyanka: 'By the way, the other day Viju brought a nice diary and a few pads from you for us. Thanks.' Then mischievously she added, 'I asked him if there was only one diary?'

Suresh: 'As the Marwaris say, 'the whole shop is yours!' He then added, 'but I have only one shop!'

Priyanka had heard from Viju about Dr. Sadiq's Cycle Hospital. She went to him to discuss about restoring the cycles. He readily agreed. He said he will charge reasonable rates as it will enhance his business. Since the bicycles would have to be repainted, each restored bicycle would cost anything between Rs. 1000 and 1500, depending upon what old parts are replaced with new ones. Then, he said a bit diffidently that he would like to purchase a paint sprayer and that it would cost around Rs. 2000 and that he wants to raise a loan for it. Priyanka offered a no-interest loan with an EMI of Rs. 200 so that the loan gets paid within a year. She then took both the bicycles to his shop.

Now the problem was to find a buyer who would buy the cycles and donate them to the needy. Viju told her about Dhiraj Kaveri.

The Bicycle Bandhu Programme of Hyderabad

This is a programme to donate bicycles to needy persons in the neighbourhood. The programme was initiated in 2016 in a gated community by Dhiraj Kaveri. He is a physiotherapist, a cyclist and a health promoter. He is a very active bicycle promoter and has slogans like:

#Cycling Connects

#Celebrate Cycling

#Pedal More Pollute Less

#Occupy All Streets

The Bicycle Bandhu Programme also has catchy slogans like:

#Connect Collaborate Contribute

Promoting Active Transport in #Urban Settings...

With No Public Transport due to Covid19 Lock Down: The Humble Bicycle has been 'A Safer & Cheaper Mode of Transport'.

The following 'Question and Answer' with Dhiraj will enable like-minded people elsewhere to initiate similar programmes.

Question: 'Your Bicycle Bandhu programme is great. How many cycles have you gifted so far and in how many months?

I notice that you gift Roadster models to workers and 'fancy' models to children. What is your assessment of these fancy models? My gut feeling

is, and I may be wrong, that they belong to the 'use and throw' culture that is, their life may be only a few years whereas the roadster can last decades.'

Dhiraj: 'So far, we have distributed 51 bicycles since 2018, though the program started in 2016.

The bicycles are given under various options like donation, no-Interest EMI, second-hand and similar.

Your observation about the type of bicycle given is right. Adults prefer the Roadster as it is cheaper, stronger, and durable. The younger students prefer the Ranger models that definitely are a bit costlier, less strong with lesser durability as compared to a Roadster.

If they are taking up cycling to their workplace, it does not matter which type of bicycle they are using. Plus, we also have a budget cut-off range where we don't gift bicycles worth Rs.7000 or more.'

Concluding Remark

It is a humble unpretentious local programme. It is something many of us in the cycle movement can do and should do.

So, Viju arranged a meeting between Priyanka, Dhiraj and Sadiq. Each had a clear responsibility- Priyanka to get old bicycles, Sadiq to restore them

and Dhiraj to distribute them. Both Priyanka and Dhiraj would raise money. Priyanka called her outfit 'Kayakalp' (meaning rejuvenation), since she was a health professional and this was a common term in Indian health practice.

The person who is gifted the bicycle, must go to Sadiq's shop with a letter from Dhiraj or Priyanka and pick up the cycle. After that, Sadiq and the bicycle recipient would individually confirm the bicycle transaction and Rs. 2000 would be transferred to Sadiq's account immediately by phone. Sadiq would pay Rs. 500 to Priyanka for every old bicycle he gets. The Bicycle Bandhu Programme raises a minimum of Rs. 3000 per gift. This way, everybody's overhead costs are covered.

Priyanka worked out a small notice about Kayakalp which she printed and kept copies in her office.

Kayakalp

This is a programme to restore old bicycles and gift them to needy members of the working class. Kindly donate your old bicycle (Ladies or Gents) if you are not using it. Our cost of restoring is about Rs. 2000. You can donate whatever amount you can afford to this cause. It is an informal small programme, so please do not expect invoice and tax deductions. Please send the money to Priyanka@(phone number).

The programme has been working well. Sadiq has been restoring two bicycles per week. If his stock increases more than two, he is free to sell them as second-hand bicycles to his own customers. He sells them for Rs. 2500.

Sadiq also plans to set up his own assembly unit for new bicycles. He plans to call it 'Saathi' and sell the bicycles for Rs. 4000/-.

June 6, 2022



The Vultures

Mala: Hi Viju! Meet Hanif Teltumbde, my partner.

Viju: Hi! What is this new business that you have started? (Flustered) Oh! I get it! You mean he is your lover!

M: (laughing uncontrollably) this is an achievement! I have never seen you so flustered. But you are right on both counts. Damn you! He is my lover as well as my business partner.

V: So what is this business?

M: It is called 'The Vultures'. It all started when we saw a dog crushed by a truck in front of IIT Hyderabad (IITH). I remembered what you had told me about Venkat and how he would usually carry a gunny sack to carry dead dogs to the Permaculture Demonstration Farm at Pastapur near Zaheerabad.

Now, Hanif, You tell the rest.

Hanif Teltumbde: As Mala must have told you already, we run a green initiative at IITH. So, we negotiated with them to allot us a barren piece of land and one gardener.

M: So this is what we do—we pick up the dead dog, bury it in the allotted land and plant a tree.

V: And so, you call yourselves ‘The Vultures’ because the real vultures have all been killed. Great idea!

M: Yes of course! It was you who told me about Diclofenac, the pain killer for cattle and how it killed the vultures who ate the carcasses of cattle injected with Diclofenac.

V: O. K. Now Hanif, you must tell me the story behind your curious name. I am a story teller and all vulgar curiosities must be forgiven.

HT: Don’t worry. Almost everyone has asked me this question. It is simple. My first name is Muslim and the second name is Dalit. I am a follower of Ambedkar to the extent that I will not die as a Hindu untouchable. But I find Buddhism too tame. So, I became a militant Dalit Muslim. Period.

V: How do you get information about dead dogs?

M: Up to 5 Km. either way from IITH gate, we have put up notices near speed breakers, toll gates etc.:

If you see a dead dog on the highway, call this number. We will pick it up.

When the call comes, we dispatch a volunteer on a special bicycle. The cycle has a bag of small hand tools—a spade, a rake and a couple of gunny sacks.

When the dog is picked up, we send a SMS to the caller and also ask them if they would like to give us a donation. A PAYTM number is given along with it.

The dog is brought to a shed in our allotment and if it is night, it is kept covered overnight. During day time it is always buried as soon as possible. There are always a couple of graves ready. And we have ready plants in our nursery earmarked for each grave.

V: How do you get volunteers for these ‘dirty’ jobs?

M: Hanif has a brilliant idea. We have advertised on hostel notice boards:

Part time jobs.

Reserved only for touchables.

Brahmins preferred.

V: (Laughing) That is really a fine touch! It was Ambedkar who called the upper caste Hindus ‘touchables’.

V: Finally as Sucharita, our financial expert, would ask, what is the money trail? Where does the money come from and where does it go?

M: As Sucharita would say, handle as little money as possible. The gardener is paid by IITH. SPCA Hyderabad pays Rs. 200 per dog buried, to The Vultures. Occasional donations trickle in. We handle

on an average 30 dogs per month. There are seven of us - two of us and five volunteers. Everyone gets Rs. 100 per day.

V: So a BOB a day! (BOB = Bottle of Beer)

Every one: (Raising an imaginary glass) Cheers!

September, 17, 2018



Saint Salunkhe

Some call him Sant Salunkhe Maharaj and some, especially children, call him Beej Baba. You can recognize him easily by his appearance. He rides a Ladies Bicycle and wears a long green dress like the Christian priests. He wears a green skull cap over which he carries a half earthen pot. He remains barefoot. His bicycle has a sweet-sounding bell that he rings as he approaches the village and listening to which children run towards him.

He stops at the village square that has a Banyan tree with a platform around it. Children surround him as they watch the routine with great fascination. His dress has a hundred pockets with buttons and numbers. He takes out a bundle of bidis from his

top left pocket and a matchbox covered in plastic from the top right pocket. He carefully lights a bidi and sits down.

After his smoke, he removes a small broom from a bag on his bicycle and sweeps the whole platform. He then carefully removes his dress, keeps it on the platform and opens his shop of seeds. Each pocket has different seeds. Under the green cloak, he wears cotton shorts with pockets and a vest with a front side pocket. He transfers the bidi bundle and match box to his shorts pocket. Then from another bag he takes out a light iron stove. Children who have been watching him spring into action and run to bring twigs and small pieces of firewood. With a smile, he lights the fire, takes off the earthen pot from his head and puts it on the fire. Then from another bag comes out a mixture of seeds. He puts a handful of them in to the pot and roasts them.

From another small bag, he brings out two small rum bottles. One is empty but with a strip of pasted paper marking 30 ml doses. He pours 30 ml rum into this bottle. He then brings out a bottle of water and half fills the bottle containing his drink. He caps the rum bottle, the water bottle carefully and they go back into the bag. With his drink in hand, he turns to the roasted seeds. He brings out a sheet of newspaper, a wooden ladle and carefully takes out seeds from the pot. Two little bottles containing salt and pepper appear and he sprinkles from both on

to the seeds. He turns to the waiting children and gives them some roasted seeds to eat. They run away chewing happily. With a satisfied sigh, he turns to his drink to sip and chews on a few seeds.

People start trickling in. There is a sheet of paper which has names of seeds, their price and pocket number in Marathi and English. People go through the sheet to choose and pick the seeds they need from the relevant pocket. They pay the money which Salunkhe quietly puts away without counting. He then proceeds to chat with them about their family, the trees and the weather.

A little later, Deepthi approaches. She hails from afar, ‘Namaste Salunkhe Maharaj!’ She is an environment teacher at the school. She also helps maintain the school garden with help of the children and runs an eco-club.

Salunkhe asks her, ‘What is happening at the school?’

Deepthi: ‘We have received a grant to maintain the school garden. Now I can pay you for all the seeds you gave us for free all these months. Please give me a bill/receipt for thousand rupees and here is the money for you.’

Salunkhe brings out a receipt book and one Xerox copy of his catalogue. He writes a receipt for seeds supplied as per enclosed sheet. He hands over the receipt, a copy of the catalogue and tells her: ‘You can mark what you have taken in the catalogue so

that it totals up to Rs. 1000/- and then attach it to my receipt. That will do.' He then asks for more news from the school.

Deepthi: 'Next week I am going to teach about the Ficus group of trees – the Peepal and this Banyan tree. I am very excited about it. They are so fascinating.'

Salunkhe: 'You know I can't supply seeds for it.'

Deepthi: 'Yes I know. They must be processed through the stomach of the birds! There are so many fascinating things about these trees, both botanically and socially.'

The Panchayat Pradhan comes by. He says, 'I am so glad you are here. You must come again on August 15 to our village. We are honoring social workers. Shree Kumar from Sangatya, Karkala and Usha from Samaagama Thota, Shrirampura, Chikballapur are also coming. You must come early in the morning!'

Deepthi: 'After the village function, you must come to our school and spend time with our children. They are so fond of you. And do bring lots of seeds to roast! We will have a big fire going!'

Then the school master appears. He says, 'I am so glad that you are here. I am dying of thirst. Let us start the fire again and roast some more seeds and here is a bottle of rum.' And he takes out his bottle with a flourish.

Salunkhe asks the Panchayat Pradhan and Deepthi, 'Will you join us?'

Deepthi shyly brings out a bottle and says, 'Actually I have brought a bottle of Mahua for you.'

Panchayat Pradhan: 'Start the fire and I will get some chicken Kebabs from home in 5 minutes.'

As the evening sets in and it starts getting darker, a couple of more villagers join with fish fry and Toddy.

So, the campfire goes on and old friends make merry!

July 24, 2022



Trupthi Teaches A Lesson

Navin walked into this curious *Dhaba* (an inexpensive roadside eatery), the board above which said, D. M. Dhaba – *Diabetes Mellitus Dhaba*, Proprietor: Nora D. W. The interiors were very ethnic looking; old dark wooden tables and benches. On the right, there was the usual payment counter and at the end of the seating space there was the serving counter. An attractive dark woman was serving the customers. Towards the left centre, there was a table with a bench against the wall. An old man was sitting on it, quietly sipping toddy from a glass. There was an odd-looking kettle on the table.

Navin went to the old man's table and asked if he could join him. The old man nodded. Then he spoke: 'I believe you are a civil engineer from Dharwad

and have come to spend time at the local pottery centre. (Louder) Trupthi, bring a glass for Navin here.'

Trupthi came with a glass and said: 'Hi! How are you Viju?' (Turning to Navin), 'there is fresh Toddy in the kettle. Anything else you would like?'

Viju: 'Well! Bring us a plate of fried *botai* (small fish.)'

Navin: 'Thank you, Trupthi.' (Turning to Viju), 'News travels fast in a small town like Bilgram. Yes to all of your comments! This kettle on the table looks a bit unusual. What is special about it?'

Viju: 'This is special because the cover does not fall when you pour. It was invented by Nora's father at the pottery centre. In fact all the crockery – plates, glasses, jugs, kettles being used here are from Nora's family collection and creations of her father.'

N: 'Wow! Is there a patent? I would like to make this kettle.'

Viju: 'Let us ask Nora. (Louder), Nora! Can you come here a bit?'

Nora: (after joining them), 'Tell me.'

Viju: 'This is Navin, at the pottery centre. He wants to know if there is a patent on this kettle and he wants to try making it.'

Nora: 'I would not like to discourage you, but you are learning pottery and do not have a family background in pottery. It will take some time to get the skill to attempt such a difficult thing. It will be

very frustrating if you try now. Spend about a year starting with small lamps, glasses and plates!’

Navin: ‘Thanks. Another thing, I am curious about the history of this *Dhaba* and its name.’

Nora: ‘Ask Viju here. He knows all about it and about many more things. Sorry, I must return to the counter. Bye!’

Navin (Turning to Viju): ‘So, tell me.’

A hot plate of fish arrived. Viju took a bite and pushed the plate towards Navin, took a sip of the Toddy, cleared his throat, and said:

‘This *Dhaba* is the brain-child of Nora after she was detected with diabetes at 50. The menu includes fried fish, fish curry with greens, tubers like yam/potato/sweet potato and some wild fruits – mainly seasonal and toddy. A diet fit for a Diabetes patient, but also good for everyone else. There is a saying that a Diabetes diet is nutritious and can appeal to all palates.

Many customers do not understand *Diabetes Mellitus*. So, they call it *Daru Machhali Dhaba!* And what does D. W. In Nora D. W. mean? It is supposed to mean Diploma in Wellness, (laughing) but our wise people interpret it as Nora *Daru Wali!*’

Navin: (laughed heartily), ‘That is great!’

Viju took another bite and had another sip.

Navin asked: ‘What is Nora’s background that enabled her to visualise such a fantastically great idea?’

Viju: 'Nora was born in Bilgram, a walking distance from the Bilgram Reserve Forest and the Chinnaprabha River. Her mother was a biology teacher at school and she did not mind Nora and her dog going out to the forest or the river.

After school, Nora would fling her bags and wander off to the forest with her dog Wolfie. She and Wolfie would explore every corner of the Bilgram Reserve Forest. They made friends with forest people, toddy tappers, fishermen and farmers. Everyone loved the pair and they often got to eat choice bits of fried fish.

Nora finished school and a graduate degree in biological sciences in Bilgram. She then went to Pune for a M.Sc. in Zoology. She did not like the big city and refused a fellowship for a Ph. D. Programme. Back in Bilgram, she did various jobs – taught in a school, became an important environmental activist, very knowledgeable about the Western Ghats. She was an honorary warden for the Bilgram Reserve Forest, did a research project on wolves and so on and on. One loses count.'

Navin: 'When and how did the Dhaba come up?'

Viju: 'After she got diabetes, she went through the usual DABDA routine - Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally Acceptance. She was in touch with me throughout and I helped her through the course of medication and a life of physical fitness. I sent her back to the forest to revive her

childhood and adult contacts with forest and nature. Then, I sent her to Udupi to learn to climb coconut trees and got her to bring a climbing harness. In that climbing course, she met Trupthi. After coming back, she learnt to climb local toddy trees and bring the toddy pot down. Her childhood friends were enormously pleased and then they began to have regular breakfast meetings over fish, overnight fermented rice, and toddy. Her health improved and she forgot the misery of the days when she was first detected with the disease. Then I sent her to Pune to Holistic Health Education Centre to learn about the Diabetic Diet. There she got the Diploma in Wellness (D. W.) and came back with the idea of this *Dhaba*. That is all!

Navin: 'Wow! What a great story! I must go now but I will come again and catch up more on this. May I take the bill?'

Viju: '(Loudly), Trupthi, Navin wants to pay. (Turning to Navin), Ok then. See you again. Bye!'

Trupthi came and said: 'Our system is you eat what you want and pay what you can afford. You can make the payment to Nora at the counter.'

So, Navin went to the counter. Nora was busy reading a book, 'H is for Hawk' by Helen Macdonald. She noticed Navin and pointed to the till indicating that he put the money there and went back to the book.

A few days after, Navin came back and joined Viju. Trupthi brought a glass and asked what else they want. Viju asked for potato chips fried in coconut oil and fish fry. Navin asked for the same.

Viju: 'So, how is it going at the pottery centre?'

Navin: 'Nora's father is held in great respect and they asked me to convey their love to Nora. I am just getting around to learning the basics and gathering legends of pottery.'

Viju: 'Good. Don't be in a hurry! The clay has to soak into your being!'

Navin: 'Thanks. Now how does this place run? I was pleasantly surprised and a little shocked at the 'pay as you can' policy. How does it tick?'

Viju: 'There is no easy formula. It has to do with Nora's history, her wide circle of contacts among the local fishermen, toddy tappers and forest people, her environment consciousness, its ethics and so on. It also grew organically step by step. Trupthi joining here was the crucial last step.'

Navin: 'So, what is special about Trupthi?'

Viju helped himself to some chips and had a long draught of toddy. He pushed the plate towards Navin.

Viju: 'Everything! Trupthi is from a fisherman's family in Udupi. She learned to swim before she could talk properly. She knows a lot about fish – breeds, catching, cleaning, dressing them, cooking, pickling, and drying. Her father is an auto rickshaw driver and an auto mechanic. Trupthi is a cyclist –

can easily do 50 kms in a day and has been to the neighbouring towns and villages on her cycle. She is also a good cycle mechanic. All this she achieved before she finished school.

Navin: 'Wow!'

Viju: 'There is a lot more! She got a degree in Naturopathy and so she is Doctor Trupthi though she does not use the term. She practised in Bangalore and then moved on to teach in a school because she loved interacting with children. She spent several months on organic farms in between and she has a fair sense of permaculture.'

Navin: 'She seems to be a superwoman!'

Viju: 'You can say so. When Nora met Trupthi at the tree climbing course, they clicked and later Nora called Trupthi to join her.'

Navin: 'Ok. I will come again for the next instalment of the story. Bye!'

Navin went to the counter, paid Nora, and turned around to flash a big smile and say bye to everyone at the *Dhaba*.

Navin turned up again and as usual went to Viju's table. After ordering food, Navin turned to Viju and asked him: 'Now tell me what Trupthi does apart from what I see.'

Viju: 'What you see is an insignificant part of her work. You see the *Dhaba* has one fourth of an acre of land at the back. On the land, there is a small

construction – a room upstairs and a hall on the ground floor. Trupthi stays upstairs and the hall below is for people who need to take a break or rest awhile like they do on the cots in normal *Dhabas*. Here, it is often a pit stop for the cyclists. Trupthi also takes yoga classes there.’

Navin: ‘What happens on rest of the land?’

Viju: ‘That is Trupthi’s main work. It is an organic farm to grow vegetables for the *Dhaba*. There are also a few toddy palm trees and a small pond for fish and ducks. And of course, there is a compost pile for all the waste produced in the *Dhaba* including dust.’

Navin: ‘What else?’

Viju: ‘In the mornings, she goes to the Chinnaprabha River for a swim and to catch some fish. Then, she does some online work in Naturopathy consultations and she takes some Yoga classes for children.’

Navin: ‘That sounds quite a handful.’

A few days later, Navin turned up again. There was a cheerful jaunty look on his face. He saw Trupthi and called out: ‘Hi! Trupthi! (He went near her) I have been hearing quite a bit about you. You are quite accomplished. I must make friends with you. Give me a hug.’

He moved forward and tried to put his arms around her shoulder.

Trupthi: (slips out under his arm and backs out)
'No, thank you!'

Navin: (still very cheerful) 'Come on. Be a sport.'
(And he moved forward again)

Trupthi backed out a little and closed her hands in 'Namaste' mode. Suddenly there was a change of atmosphere in the *Dhaba*. There was a palpable silence. Nora sat up and Viju stiffened. As Navin's hands moved forward, Trupthi moved like lightening and Navin was flat on the floor. Trupthi signalled to Nora that she was taking off and Nora nodded. Trupthi vanished into the back of the *Dhaba*.

Viju and Nora helped Navin to his feet and made him sit at Viju's table. Viju poured out a glass of Toddy.

Navin: 'What happened?'

Viju: 'You have been given a short lesson!'

Navin: 'But what did I do?'

Viju: 'The first question is who are you? I will tell you. You are an upper class, upper caste, man, qualified as an engineer, speak English fluently and have money of your own. That gives you the confidence that you can do what you like. For instance, you can afford to have a hobby to learn pottery and live in Bilgram with your own money. It was that confidence that allowed you to approach Trupthi without hesitation and you have been taught a lesson.'

Navin: 'What should I do now?'

Nora: 'Nothing! The chapter is over. Hope you have learned your lesson and next time you will have some humility.'

Viju: 'Go home. It will take time. I have been like you almost all my life and have never fully learned! Fortunately, women in my time did not know Judo and I was not so publicly humiliated. Go now!'

Navin went back to Dharwad. His parents were very happy to have him back. They had already chosen a girl for him and they married him off to a young doctor. His father is a well-known doctor in Dharwad and everything went smooth. They live in a two-storied house. Parents live downstairs and Navin and his wife live upstairs.

Navin works in an alternative school teaching maths. The school also has a potter's wheel and Navin spends some time at it with the kids.

October 10, 2022



The Call Girl of Andheri

There was a gathering of seven naturalists at the Conservation Education Centre (CEC) of BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society) amidst lush green cover at Goregaon, abutting the biodiverse forests of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. All seven were dressed in field clothes, that is, dull coloured clothes of khaki or light ash colours. These were no ordinary naturalists. All of them were experts in some fields like birds, insects or butterflies or elephants or reptiles and so on. Many of them were senior officials of BNHS and some were bright young scientists. They all came to meet a slip of a girl known as 'The Call Girl of Andheri.' Why have these naturalists come to meet a call girl? How come? Read on.

The girl in question is Madhulica, a post graduate

in English literature from the English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad. She is 22 and an expert in bird calls. Hence, she got this sobriquet.

Madhulica said, 'You are all senior professionals and you need no introduction to the subject. So, let us go straight to the forest. We shall remain silent. Only I will talk when necessary.'

'We will go to three spots one after another. At each spot we will sit down quietly and listen. I will identify a bird call, reproduce it, and give the bird's name. You can take notes. After that, I will point the direction where the bird can be spotted. I hardly need to tell you that you must use the binoculars sparingly, raise it very slowly and all that.'

'I will give the direction in terms of a clock and the height in feet. My location is to be considered 6 o'clock and right opposite me will be zero or 12 o'clock. If the position of the bird is behind me, I will refer to it as minus hours.'

'As you know the National Park has 275 species of birds. Birds do not know borders and many of them are in the CEC campus. One should be able to spot some 50-80 species in one visit. Let us see.'

In the next two hours the group identified some 70 birds. Names like Hornbills, Bulbul, Sunbird, Jungle Owlets, Peacock, Woodpeckers, Golden orioles, Racket-Tailed Drongo, Minivets, and Magpies were spoken in hushed tones. Some migratory birds like

Swifts, Gulls, Egrets, Kingfishers, Paradise Flycatchers and Herons were also mentioned. This was followed by 2 o' clock 20 feet, 7 o'clock 33 feet etc. spoken in hushed whispers. Then they all came back and assembled in the hall. Tea and breakfast were served.

Then Madhulica asked, 'How many mistakes did I make? Give me some feedback.'

One of the seniors spoke first. He said, 'First, I must congratulate you. I had heard about you but did not expect this level of expert performance from a self-taught person. Yes, science and natural history is full of such remarkable persons but it is also rare.'

Others also spoke. All of them praised her. Some pointed out a few mistakes. The number of mistakes ranged from 3 to 7, but they all said her performance was remarkable and were curious to learn about how she learnt. She said it was part natural aptitude and mainly the app* she got on her phone. Of course, now she rarely needs to use the app.

The next question to her was, 'How did you learn to spot the direction?'

Madhulica grinned and asked back, 'You are the experts. You tell me.'

One young scientist asked, 'Are you a night birder also?'

The grin on Madhulica's face widened and she said encouragingly, 'Yes. Go on.'

*The app is called 'BirdNet'.

Scientist: 'There is nothing much to go on. You have learnt it from the Owls.'

Madhulica: 'But how do the Owls do it?'

Scientist: 'Why don't you go first? I will add.'

Madhulica: 'Ok. The Owls hunt by night and although they have good night vision, they also depend on hearing. An Owl can hear a mouse moving in the grass 30 feet below. Now, for a 3-point direction finding, the two receptors must be big and spread a little widely. The Owls have large ears but their heads are small and their ears are too close. For this, it seems that nature has spaced them a little asymmetrically. One ear is at a slightly higher level. This increases the distance between them. This is all I know.'

Scientist: 'Well, you seem to have got the essentials. More than this will be a bit technical. I will send you some papers and can lend you a book on Owls. If you come to the Hornbill House, the BNHS office, we can spend some time together discussing it. Here is my card. Well done!'

Then the senior person spoke: 'I would like you to become a Life Member of BNHS. I know the fee is a bit high for you. So, why don't you take a few classes at CEC and we will arrange some fees so that you can afford the membership? Over time, we will work out a proper engagement between you and BNHS. Thank you for coming here and giving us this wonderful demonstration on identifying bird

calls.'

Madhulica: 'Thank you!'

Madhulica Walks The Park

Madhulica was quite pleased with her performance with the BNHS team where she gave a demonstration of her ability to identify birds with their calls alone. Her score of 63 out of 70 was quite satisfactory although out of the seven, the two she missed were great mimics of the bird world. However, there are 275 species of birds in Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and she felt she had to learn a lot more. While parting, the BNHS team told her about the coming Bird Count at SGNP on May 29 and asked her to apply for volunteering. She told them that she has no binoculars. They laughed and said that she did not need one and that she can always borrow it for a day from a friend.

Viju had told her that Deepthi Amin recently bought good binoculars at a reasonable price. She wrote to Deepthi and Deepthi promptly replied:

Dear Madhulica,

The details of the binoculars that I use are:

Krevia Binocular for Long Distance | Telescopic
Durbin for Bird Watching Trekking Sports | Range
- 1000 Mts | Zoom-8x40 | Adjustable Lens For

Clear Vision | Storage Bag with lens Cover |
Hanging Neck Strip (Black) | Rs. 1849/-

https://www.amazon.in/dp/B078MPTF2F/ref=cm_sw_r_em_apan_i_38MKR4WZP4QS H92TCC9X?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1

So Madhulica immediately ordered it.

Then she decided to find out a little about bird surveys in forests. A Google search gave her this link:

How to Conduct Bird Surveys in Forests:

<https://birdcount.in/forest-bird-surveys/>

Although she did not understand much, she achieved a nodding acquaintance with the subject.

While filling the form for the survey, one had to give one's preference of the meeting point out of the five offered choices. She gave the following:

Haathi Gate, Waghoba Temple, Film City, Goregaon East.

She hoped it meant CEC (Conservation Education Centre of BNHS inside SGNP area), an area she was already familiar with. Building on your existing experience was the motto she believed in.

Well, the D - Day arrived and she was very excited. She got her preferred 'Transect' of the CEC area and her bird expert was Gaitonde - person in-charge of CEC. They had met before and they got on well together. The Forest Officer, Mr. Gharpode, was also

very nice. Madhulica decided not to show off and speak out only when asked even if she recognized the bird immediately by the call.

It went off very well as Gaitonde was experienced and had taken part in earlier surveys. For Madhulica, it was a big new experience and she began to get excited about a career in nature studies in general and birding, in particular. Well, she already had a part time job with CEC. She decided to do some courses at BNHS starting with birding. She felt quite comfortable working with Gaitonde.

Madhulica began to go to CEC every Sunday morning at 7 a. m. Gaitonde also had half day work on Sundays. Monday was his off day of the week. One day, she saw Gaitonde nursing a baby bird. He told her it was a Baby Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Known as Cheel in Hindi. It is thought to be the world's most abundant species of Accipitridae (birds of prey). The baby had fallen from its nest. He told her that no bird can lift its baby and so the fate of babies in such cases is that they are eaten by dogs or cats.

He was trying to feed the baby with some crushed insects and cooing some endearing words. Madhulica, quite unconsciously, began to give the Cheel call. Suddenly the baby perked up. Gaitonde laughed. He said now you have become its mother. He told her about Konrad Lorenz and his book 'King

Solomon's Ring.' Konrad Lorenz was a Nobel Laureate and sort of father of ethology (study of animal behaviour). The legend is that when King Solomon wore his ring, he could understand animal languages. Well, Konrad Lorentz understood many animal languages and could communicate with them. He is also responsible for the term 'imprinting'. Famously described by him in the 1930s, imprinting occurs when an animal forms an attachment to the first thing it sees upon hatching. Madhulica found that Gaitonde was a good teacher. He taught many complex things casually and effortlessly.

So, Madhulica began to feed the baby. Soon the baby went to sleep in her arms. Gaitode told her that the kite is an *Accipiter*, a bird of prey and so its beak and feet are meant to tear flesh and are quite dangerous. People who tackle these birds, particularly hawks, have special equipment - leather arm bands, leather gloves, hoods for the head of the bird etc. Then suddenly he turned around and said, 'You are an English literature student, aren't you? Then you must read *H is for Hawk*, a 2014 memoir by the British author Helen Macdonald. Then and there, Madhulica decided that she was going to study the *Accipitridae* especially.

Madhulica ended up adopting this baby kite. She brought it home to Jose's flat because it was relatively empty and there was more freedom. She bought all the equipment necessary one by one and came to

know many birders who specialised in Accipitridae. This is quite a special group as they go out of town, to nearby hills where these birds nest. One is required to recognise the birds by the shape of their wings and tails/silhouette as they fly far above in the sky.

On Sundays, after her class with the children at CEC, Madhulica would often explore other parts of SGNP. The CEC is situated on 33 acres of forest land of the BNHS Nature Reserve. This land was leased by the Government of Maharashtra to BNHS in 1983 during its centenary celebrations. The CEC was established in 1993. The BNHS Nature Reserve lies between the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Film City.

Lot of people would come on Sundays to the park. It is a huge park - 87 km² of protected area in Mumbai. It was established in 1969 with headquarters in Borivali. The 2400 - year - old Kanheri caves sculpted by monks out of the rocky cliffs lie within the park. Many families come here for a picnic. Tourists come to visit the caves. Small video companies make films here after obtaining special permission. But overall, it is clean and quiet.

No one usually disturbed Madhulica as she walked around listening to the bird calls. However, one day two young men accosted her. They were wearing jeans, colourful shirts and sported modern haircuts. One of them said, 'Hi! Darling, all alone?' The other one said, 'Come with us.' Madhulica said, 'Go away,

I am busy. 'The men persisted and followed her. Madhulica put her hands around her mouth and gave a shrill Cheel call. The men were surprised and suddenly her own Cheel careened down in an arc, came down and sat on her shoulder. The sight unnerved the men and they backed away hastily.

After a few minutes, a woman and a man approached Madhulica. The woman said, 'Sorry to disturb you madam! I am Sharada and he is Praveen. We belong to a small video company. We saw the bird coming down and sitting on your shoulder. We also accidentally filmed it. Of course, we will not use it without consulting you and if you wish, we can erase it right away. However, we would, with your permission, like to keep it and may want to contact you later. Here is our card and if you can kindly give your phone number, we will be grateful. We assure you we will not misuse it.'

Madhulica chatted with them for some time and after feeling a bit reassured gave them her phone number.

Madhulica Walks Down the Ramp

It was 10:30 in the morning. Madhulica's mother was having her coffee and reading the newspaper. Madhulica cautiously sat down opposite her.

Mother (without taking her eyes off the newspaper): 'What is it?'

Madhulica: 'Mom, I must tell you what happened

in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park yesterday. Two youths tried to harass me. I made a Cheel call and suddenly my Cheel careened down and sat on my shoulder. The youths of course backed away but a pair of young people approached. They were a video unit and they filmed the entire episode. They were apologetic about it and ready to wipe it out if I wanted but requested me to allow them to keep it. They also said they would like to contact me and took my number.'

Madhulica's phone rang. She picked up, listened, spoke and said 'just a minute' on the phone. Turning to her mother she said, 'it is the video couple and they want to come and talk about a contract for advertisement for a denim dress company and a shoe company'. Her mother said, 'Tell them that your mother is your business agent and ask them to come at 6:30 in the evening' and she turned back to her newspaper.

In the evening, Sharada and Praveen turned up. Madhulica's mother welcomed them and offered refreshments - beer or wine or tea or coffee. She added, 'I am going to have beer, Madhulica may have a glass of wine and so you can choose.' After some hesitation they chose beer. Madhulica's mother beamed, 'That will break the ice fast!' Everyone laughed and after cheering and emptying half a glass, Madhulica's mother asked Sharada and Praveen to

tell a bit about themselves.

Sharada: 'We, both of us, have graduated from Satyajit Ray Institute of Film and Television, Kolkata two years ago. We are Bengalis; I am Sharada Dasgupta and he is Praveen Mukherjee, but we are not from Bengal. Praveen grew up in Bhagalpur and I grew up in Ranchi. So, while we know Bengali, our first language actually is Hindi. In the film industry, the money is in Bombay and for newcomers it is ad films.'

Madhulica's mother (MM): 'Ok! I am a CA and a banker. My husband is also a CA and works in film finance. Madhulica here has a postgraduate degree in English literature from EFLU Hyderabad and is working with the food industry on a sort of copywriting job. So, we have some notion of your business. What is your proposal?'

Praveen: 'We were excited about the kite landing on Madhulica's shoulder and we thought that it has good potential for ad films/campaigns for the denim clothes industry and sport shoe industry. Sort of 'tough girls need tough clothes and shoes.' On the screen, she comes across such an incredibly tough woman. A bird of prey is somehow more frightening than large mammals like tigers. Because the latter live in far off places but this bird can come right up to your window!'

Sharada: 'So we approached 'Ruff and Tuff' denim clothes company and 'Hike' shoes and showed them

the video. They were also excited and wanted proposals for pictures for print media ads, short videos for TV and appearance on a show - a ramp walk with their clothes and shoes and the kite on the shoulder.'

Madhulica: 'A ramp walk with the bird in front of people, noise and lights is risky, even if I use a hood for the bird's head. The bird may get excited and fly and then there will be chaos.'

MM: 'It may also be illegal under some act of using wild animals for exhibition. What you may do is to make a film of ramp walk in studio conditions - like the hall is closed, no sounds, fixed camera and just Madhulica walking down the ramp with no one present. Or the shoot can take place in a lonely location. The sounds can be added to the film later. Just show the film and let Madhulica walk down the ramp without the bird or with a stuffed bird!

Madhulica: You can take the stills in Sanjay Gandhi National Park. It is a huge park and it can be quite empty on weekdays. I think you can find every kind of location in it. I can travel with Cheel using the hood. Cheel is also comfortable there.

Praveen: Ok, we got an idea and we will work on it. Now how do we go about fees, dates etc.?'

MM: I suggest you work on the proposal and make a draft budget and then meet my husband. As I told you, he works in film finance. He will guide you about the budget and fees. We will not haggle or

negotiate - just work professionally on every aspect. We will account everything properly - travel, accessories, rentals, and all that, and work only with 90% advance payment based on the budget, otherwise you will not be able to chase them for payment. And hand over final copies only when the rest of the payment comes.'

'Before you go and if you like, you may visit Cheel and take some stills. Madhulica will take you there. Bye!'

Next week, Sharada and Praveen came several times and were closeted with Madhulica's father. When Madhulica asked them how it was coming along, they said her father was really good, but they gave her no other clue. So, Madhulica decided to concentrate on her role. She decided to practice ramp walk. She looked up on the net and found:

Five different walks by a ramp walk trainer Alesia
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17fhQ5WY-Pc>

After studying all 5 walks - Attitude, Sexy, Happy, Flirty and Indian, she chose 'Happy', as it seemed to suit her personality. She walked in her apartment and later on the ground beneath her apartment.

Two weeks later, Sharada phoned Madhulica. She said, 'we have transferred Rs. 90,000/- to your account. We worked it out with your father and you can check it out. On Sunday morning, after your session with

the CEC, we will have photo sessions with you at various locations in SGNP. Bring your Cheel! Hope it is all right.' After Madhulica agreed, Sharada added, 'I will pick you up tomorrow evening at 6:30 to get your dresses and shoes'.

Next Sunday, they spent 3 hours in the car all over SGNP. They had selected sites beforehand. They took many stills and shot some videos, including her calling Cheel and Cheel careening down on her shoulder in an arc. The call, a shrill whinnying call, was very effective and both Praveen and Sharada said it will fix the deal!

For the actual ramp, they got a stuffed kite from BNHS Museum. A Museum employee came with it in a box and a shoulder strap, to which the kite was attached. On wearing it, the kite sat comfortably on Madhulica's shoulder.

The show was jointly organized by 'Ruff and Tuff' denims and 'Hike' shoes. The organizers explained to the audience that it is dangerous and illegal to put up a real kite on the show but they had a huge screen on which the stills and video were repeatedly shown. They carried pictures of Madhulica at various spots; videos of the shrill whinnying call that Madhulica made; the kite careening down in an arc on her shoulder and Madhulica walking away and towards the camera in a natural fashion in the forest. The ramp walk was also casual, just like in the videos

with Madhulica talking with fellow trekkers dressed in denims and shoes. The show was a huge success and was covered in newspapers in their tabloid supplements and fashion magazines.

Over dinner next evening, Madhulica's father informed that the contract was signed by his company and he has Rs. 19, 10, 000/- in his bank for Madhulica. Madhulica and her mother should work out about what to do with the money. He also ordered a Biryani, a bottle of wine and some beer for dinner.

May 29, 2022



Number Two Nursery

What is a Number Two Nursery? It is a nursery for plants created from the seeds obtained from the shit/excreta of birds and animals.

It all began when Deepthi was visiting the Bewda Hill, which is a hill top hidden by green trees and shrubs. In the late evenings/nights, the local drinkers use it. They leave tell-tale signatures - empty bottles, packets of junk food and fish bones. Deepthi discovered the hill by chance and found it a good place for birding. She also thought that she could use the empty glass bottles for her seed library.

Deepthi had recently seen the Kannada film, *Kanthara*, and was wondering if wild boars visited this place. She immediately admonished herself, 'You want to be a naturalist. Look for the signature signs

of boars.’ She immediately found signs of boar excreta. Continuing to want to be a naturalist, she took a piece of small stick and unraveled the shit. And Lo! Behold! There were seeds. She found Triphala (*Terminalia chebula*) - used in Indian medicine, something she had been looking for, for a decade. She took out old used milk packets that she used to store samples, and a small hand trowel from her bag. She carefully transferred the seed and some dried shit into her sample packet. Then she wrote time, date, place, name of the animal and name of the seed on a piece of paper.

She also took a picture on her phone and sent it to Viju and Madhulica. Madhulica and Deepthi are doing an online course in Ornithology. The former works for an organization in Mumbai that promotes safe sanitation and she has been reading Jenkin’s ‘Humanure.’ So, her mind is full of shit!

Most people, who are even a little bit interested in plants, know that some seeds need to be processed before they are planted. Sometimes it is just about putting them in water, sometimes in hot water and sometimes some stronger chemicals are needed to soften the hard outer shell of a seed for it to sprout. In nature, such ‘hard nuts’ are cracked inside an animal’s stomach which contains acid. It is well-known that in nature, all Ficus trees, such as Banyan and Peepal, germinate from seeds processed inside a bird’s stomach.

Madhulica quickly did a Google search and found this:

Q. How can plant seeds - tomatoes, for example - survive the digestive processes of birds and other animals and thus are spread through their droppings?

A. “Many seeds, including tomatoes, have an impermeable outer layer that protects the seed and allows the delicate embryo to survive the trip through an animal’s digestive system,” said Kerry Barringer, curator of the herbarium at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. “After eating a fruit, the animal carries the seeds away from the parent plant, helping that plant to spread,” Dr. Barringer said. The animal then defecates, leaving the seeds in a rich, moist medium that nourishes the growing seedling. Another factor protecting tomato seeds, he said, is that most will not germinate in the dark, remaining dormant while inside an animal, so “tomato seeds will not grow inside you, but they germinate within a few days once they emerge into the light.” Some seeds will not germinate at all unless they pass through an animal, said Dr. Barringer, an expert on local plant species. “The hard seeds of our native raspberries and blackberries need to be abraded (scraped) in a bird’s gizzard or eroded by digestive acids before water and air can enter the seed and germination can begin,” he said. To grow these plants from seed,

gardeners may soak the seeds in sulfuric acid or scrape them with a file or sandpaper.

C. CLAIBORNE RAY (New York Times)

Dec. 26, 2011

Madhulica sent this information to Deepthi. Deepthi decided to start a nursery exclusively from seeds obtained from animal shit. This is how, the Number Two Nursery; Prop: Deepthi Amin and Madhulica Kallat, was born.

Now Deepthi's forest walks acquired another dimension. Previously she mainly looked above for birds and around for other living things. She also began to look at the ground – looking for dried 'scat' or shit.

Madhulica, who is confined to the big bad city, began to do research on Indian plants that often get planted in nature through their seeds passing through bird or animal stomachs. But she found a bit more about how the seed in such situation gets planted.

'Animals provide seeds with the legs or wings they need to survive, Rogers says. Plants' future progeny travel inside mouths, beaks and stomachs; hitchhike on legs and fur; and are carried off, dropped, regurgitated or excreted some distance away from the parent plant. In new territory, there are better odds that the seeds won't sprout in big, competitive clumps, be deprived of light, infected

by pathogens or eaten by seed predators.’ These natural systems are well designed: Digestion, for example, offers power - washing services, with acids stripping away pulp and neutralizing compounds that attract fungus and pathogens, a process that may improve germination. Animals then defecate seeds, depositing them within their own dung fertilizer packet.

As animal seed dispersers go the way of the dodo, forest plants are at risk

by **Sharon Guynup**

on 28 April 2022

<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/04/as-animal-seed-dispersers-go-the-way-of-the-dodo-forest-plants-are-at-risk/>

Madhulica sent this too to Deepthi. Deepthi began to plan her nursery seriously. Meanwhile kids, who are never far away from Deepthi, began to ask her why she is doing all this ‘*chhi, chhi*’ business. She patiently explained the whole plant - animal relationship. Soon, some of them were excited and began to observe scats in the jungle. Slowly, Deepthi’s ‘scats with seeds’ collection began to increase and she began to start planting them in nursery bags. When the first seed sprouted, there was such celebration!

Deepthi told all this to Viju on the phone. Viju told her that some archeologists have found seeds in

scats thousands of years old and in some cases, botanists managed to germinate them after thousands of years. Deepthi was amazed and immediately decided that she will look for them in archeological sites in Karnataka.

Meanwhile Madhulica prepared a list of Indian plant seeds that are germinated after going through the stomach of animals.

Number Two Nursery Part II

Deepthi taught environment at the local school. It was a part - time job and she had a lot of time to interact with children and villagers outside of school hours. She would wander around in the forest a lot of times, watching birds, animals and their dried 'scat' or shit. She found valuable seeds in the scat of animals and birds and they would go as inputs to her very special Number Two Nursery.

There were some children in the village that did not come to school and Deepthi was quite curious about them. She often saw one girl, about 9 - year - old, wandering in the forest. She was healthy but poor. She wore one frock which was clean but old and discoloured. She remained barefoot and her hairs were a bit straggly. She collected various things – firewood, fruits, and flowers. Deepthi once found this little girl catch fish in a small piece of old sari in a shallow pond! The girl also had a small dog, which she called 'Kitta' who would follow her sometimes

or just wander around near her catching his meal somehow. The girl also had a sling and some pebbles in her pocket. She was an expert shot and got fruits and birds from the trees. The dog of course was the retriever and got them from the shrubs where they would fall.

Deepthi found out that the girl was called Kusuma and she lived with her grandmother in a hut on the outskirts of the village. The neighbours helped the old woman to get her ration from the government ration shop but the rest – fuel, vegetables, fish, birds, came from the forest through Kusuma who conducted some informal barter for oil, salt and masalas.

Kusuma of course, had noticed Deepthi and knew what she did and where she lived. One day, she came to Deepthi's place and observed her from a distance. Deepthi noticed her but said nothing. Deepthi's dog Kariyamma first barked at Kitta, then went closer and smelt him. Kitta stayed close to Kusuma. This went on and off for a few days. The dogs got friendly and played together. Then one day, Kusuma came inside and wandered all over the nursery. She saw the packets of poo with seeds. Next day, Kusuma came with a grin on her face. She came straight to Deepthi and gave her a newspaper packet. Inside there was some scat with seeds. Deepthi laughed delightedly and grinned at Kusuma.

After that, whenever Deepthi was in the forest,

Kusuma would appear out of nowhere and drag Deepthi to show some scat which had some seeds. At first, to please her, Deepthi collected everything that Kusuma showed, but after some time, she would often tell her that she didn't need it and that she already had enough. This would make Kusuma sad but soon, Kusuma began to understand what Deepthi was looking for. It happened like this.

Kusuma began to come regularly in the morning when Deepthi would be working in her nursery. She soon learned making holes in the packet, filling them with soil and compost, watering them and finally putting the seed properly with its original bed of dried scat. She began to share the thrill with Deepthi, watching seeds sprouting and small shoots coming out. Then Deepthi explained the tree's life – seed – plant – flowering – fruits and back to seed! Deepthi showed her the great Tree Book that showed different parts of the tree in one place. Kusuma was delighted with the book and kept turning its pages.

One morning, Deepthi did not go to the forest. She was planning to wash her hair and her clothes. Kusuma came wandering. Deepthi told her about her plans and asked if she would like to have her hair washed too. She put some water to heat and oiled Kusuma's hair. Then she put Kusuma's frock to wash and after giving her a bath dressed her in one of her long tee shirts. She then finished her own bath and washed all the clothes. Then they cooked

some fish curry, rice and had a great meal together.

In the evening, Kusuma took Deepthi to her house to meet her grandma. Grandma was very pleased that Kusuma found Deepthi. Everyone in the village knew Deepthi and respected her. Deepthi gifted some vegetables from her farm.

Word spread about the nursery and people came in cars from distant places to buy plants from her. She charged them half the price that online commercial outlets did. With the money, she bought one more frock and some children's books for Kusuma.

They read the books aloud, together. Usually, each poem had a picture. Whichever poem Kusuma liked, she would open the page and ask Deepthi to read it. Soon, she learned them by heart and began to 'read' them aloud herself. Deepthi bought a notebook for her and began to write longer words in text in the notebook. To her delight, Kusuma recognized many of the words and read them. In a few months, Kusuma was reading many small books aloud on her own. Then finally Deepthi secured an old copy of Bolwar Mahammad Kunhi's "Tattu Chappale Putta Magu", a collection of over 100 poems; got it photocopied, bound it and gifted it to Kusuma.

March 11, 2023



Madhulica and Love Jihad

Madhulica Tries to Marry!

It was 10:30 in the morning. Madhulica's mother was having her coffee and reading the newspaper. Madhulica cautiously sat down opposite her.

Mom (without taking her eyes off the newspaper):
What is it?

Madhulica: Mom ... (clears her throat) Mom, I want to get married.

Mom: Go ahead.

Madhulica: I want you to get me married.

Mom: Why? You are already living with Jose. Go to the office of the Marriage Registrar. They will explain everything. Get registered. And after a month you can get married. We will come and sign. I suppose Jose's parents will also come and sign. Do it

in Mumbai. It will be easier. I can't afford to travel.

Madhulica: (patiently) No Mom, I want a proper marriage – dresses, reception, friends, dinner and all that.

Mom: I can't afford it.

Madhulica: But I am your only child!

Mom: And I have only one life! Do you realise that the minimum budget for that kind of marriage is Rs.10 lakhs! Think of how many bottles of beer I can get, to say nothing of steaks, chicken, fish and pastries! Nothing doing!

Madhulica went to Jose's flat and told him.

Madhulica: Now it is up to you to get your parents to do it.

Jose: They are not interested. If we get married, they will at the most bless us and have a family dinner. That is all.

Madhulica: Oh dear! What shall we do?

Jose: Don't worry. Something will come up.

Madhulica: (suddenly) what is the date today?

Jose: February 12. Why?

Madhulica: I have an idea. On February 14, let us go to Shivaji Park in the morning – all in nice party clothes. Let us buy love balloons and mooch around on the benches. Soon the Bajrang Dal people will come and get us married!

Jose: I am a bit scared, but let us try it out.

February 13 evening,

Jose: Let's have a party.

Madhulica: No, we will have it tomorrow evening.

Jose: Maybe we can fly a bit!

Madhulica: Ok. Why not!

February 14, 10 am, Shivaji Park. Jose is dressed in a blue and red batik T- shirt. Madhulica is wearing a pink T - shirt. Both are carrying pink love balloons, sitting on a bench and holding hands.

Jose: I am a bit nervous. No one is coming.

Madhulica: Hold on. It is only 10 in the morning. Also, they may have a busy morning.

A young man, with shining moustache and hair parted in the middle, in white Kurta Pajama and wearing a red *tilak* on his forehead approaches them.

Young man: My name is Virendra Katiyal. May I ask what you are doing here?

Madhulica: Why? It is a public garden. We are free to sit.

Katiyal: But why the balloons and why holding hands?

Madhulica: Don't you know it is Valentine's Day. Don't you have a girlfriend?

Katiyal: (Abashed) No, we are Hindus. It is against our culture. And my grand uncle was head of VHP. They will be horrified. They have sent me to stop people like you. Why don't you quietly go home?

Jose: We want to stay a bit longer. Also, it is our

right to stay as long as the park is open.

Katiyal: I will have to take action then.

Jose: What will you do?

Katiyal: I will call my party people and take you to Arya Samaj Mandir and get you married.

Jose: But I am Christian! They can't marry a Christian in Arya Samaj Mandir!

Katiyal: Oh dear! (Turning to Madhulica) don't you have any shame? Why don't you have at least a Hindu boyfriend? It is 'Love Jihad'! We will have to convert him to Hinduism.

Madhulica: Ok. Go ahead. I will make him agree.

Suddenly Katiyal flops down on the lawn and takes a big red handkerchief and mops his brows. A tea vendor comes. Katiyal looks up to them and they nod and he orders three cups. He pays for it. Then after a little while he speaks:

Katiyal: What will I do? There are so few volunteers. The party just orders and although they have crores of rupees, they expect us to work for free! Then there is such a crowd at Arya Samaj Mandir. On top of it, conversion also! No, it can't happen today. There is a shortage of everything – there are not enough priests to perform the wedding, very few know how to convert, most of them are very poor in Sanskrit. Oh! We Hindus have no pride! Every Muslim child knows some Arabic but hardly any Hindu knows any Sanskrit!

Jose: Why don't you have any Madrasa kind of school?

Katiyal: No Hindu wants to open a school or send his child to a Hindu school. They all want the English medium St. John/Paul/Xavier school. I am telling you, we Hindus have no pride in our religion. Although Sanskrit is taught in schools, no one learns anything. It is just a scoring paper and even if you fail, they just give you pass marks (he starts sobbing).

Madhulica: There! There!! So, what do you want us to do?

Katiyal: (clears his throat), I think you should go to the Marriage Registrar's office and register. They will put up your names on the Notice Board. I will tell our Party people not to object. Just let me have your names and please go home quietly after some time.

An ice cream vendor comes. Madhulica buys three chocolate ice cream cones. Katiyal says thank you and greedily licks it.

Madhulica and Jose reach Jose's flat. They pick a couple of beers and some fried fish on the way. Madhulica flops down and exclaims, '*Ghar ke buddhu lautke ghar ko wapas aye!*'

MADHULICA MARRIES!

It was 10:30 in the morning. Madhulica's mother was having her coffee and reading the newspaper. Madhulica cautiously sat down opposite her.

Mom (without taking her eyes off the newspaper):

What is it?

Madhulica: Mom ... (clears her throat) Mom, I want to get married.

Mom: Go ahead.

Madhulica: I want you to get me married.

Mom: Why? You are already living with Jose. Go to the Registrar of the Marriage office. They will explain everything. Get registered. And after a month you can get married. We will come and sign. I suppose Jose's parents will also come and sign. Do it in Mumbai. It will be easier. Also I can't afford to travel. But we seem to have gone through this dialogue in February. What is new?

Madhulica: (patiently) Yes Mom, we have registered and after a month we can get married. I want you to be involved a bit more.

Mom: So that you can splurge your money.

Madhulica: (in a hurt tone) No Mom. You haven't noticed but I am a changed person. With money comes responsibility. Anyway, it is not exactly my money. It is ours. It was you who spoke with Sharada and Praveen and it was Dad who negotiated the deal so professionally. Both Sharada and Praveen admire him and he has got their account for the future. (Madhulica has become a bird watching person and has a Cheel as a pet. She did a photo essay with Sharada and Praveen for advertising firm and earned good money. But that is another story.)

You haven't noticed that I have become an outdoor

person and tanned. And I am much healthier now. I get up early and go birding in the morning. I eat regularly and all my stomach problems have gone!

Mom: Good! So what do you want?

Madhulica: Well, on Sunday I want a party with my close friends. We will go early in the morning to Sanjay Gandhi National Park. I will show them my Cheel and his famous response to my call. We will wander around watching/listening to birds and other wildlife. Then we will go and have a great breakfast. After that we will decide by the mood of the group – more parks or a noon show. Then, we will have a late lunch. Yes, I do want to spend on this outing and it will be thousands of rupees and not lakhs!

Secondly after the registration, I want you and Dad to host a lunch for Jose's parents and whosoever comes with them from Kerala. You should include your close friend/relative in Mumbai. Finally, Jose and I will visit grandparents with boxes of sweets. Later we will go to Kerala to visit Jose's family. That is all.

Mom: That sounds reasonable. I will arrange the details after consulting your Dad. Yes, indeed you have grown up. Do you need any money?

Madhulica: You are so sweet, Mom. (Gets up and hugs her). No, I don't need any money. I have enough money from the advance and then I have my salary.

Everything went according to plan. However, at the Registrar's office, they had a surprise waiting for them. They found a group of Hindu outfit waiting with their red *tilak* on their head. They all felt a bit apprehensive. Then a tall young man broke away from them and approached Madhulica and Jose and said smiling, '*Pahachana* (Do you recognise me)?' Madhulica instantly recognised him and said, 'Oh! You are Virendra Katiyal. I was so scared. I hope you have not come to stop our marriage!'

Virendra Katiyal: No, I came to give my good wishes. My party people informed me. Also, I want to tell you that our unit has changed our stand. Since we are opposed to forcible conversion, how can we force anyone to convert to Hinduism? Frankly speaking, no one likes it. We find it uncomfortable and difficult to organise. The registrar and local police also find it unnecessarily irksome. So, we decided that we will respect the law of the land. Since our law permits inter-faith marriage through registration, we will respect it. My best wishes for your marriage'.

He gave Madhulica a bouquet of flowers and a box of sweets.

Both Madhulica and Jose said, 'Thank you'; and they all went away quietly.

Valentine's Day

It has been a few months since Madhulica and Jose have been married. Jose has his job and Madhulica still works mainly online. On Sundays, she goes to CEC (Conservation Education Centre), BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society) in SGNP (Sanjay Gandhi National Park). She has become a Life member at BNHS and once a year, she and Jose join one of BNHS's out of town camps in a far - off place like the North East.

Spring had arrived. The colony garden was full of flowers and Madhulica was happily listening to flowerpeckers' calls. The ads in papers started announcing Valentine Day products. Madhulica said to Jose: 'Let us go to Shivaji Park again. After all, it all began there. Jose agreed and said, 'But there won't be your Jihadi outfits. I think they have realised that it is a waste of time. Our friend, Virendra Katiyal, also appeared a bit disillusioned. Anyway, let us go. Spring in Shivaji Park will be just as good.'

They managed to sit on the same bench with pink love balloons in their hands. Then a young couple approached. The man was in jeans and T-shirt and the woman was also in jeans and a pink top. Suddenly Madhulica realised that it was their old friend Virendra Katiyal!

Madhulica: 'Hello! What a surprise! And congratulations! You are, if I am not mistaken, with your girlfriend on Valentine's Day! And hello to you

also Miss Valentine!’

Virendra (a bit abashed): ‘Well, meeting you last year changed my life completely. I realised that as a young man, I ought to have a girlfriend instead of harassing young couples. Let me introduce you to Irene Fernandez from Goa. She lives in the same building as ours and goes to the office also in the same building as I go. Of course, I had noticed her before but in those days, girls in pants and skirts were the ‘other’. And Goans! Ram! Ram!!’

Irene: (Laughing), ‘I too noticed him and we girls talked about him. He appeared to be a Hindu fanatic. A few months ago when he said ‘Hello’, I was quite surprised. Slowly his attire and attitude changed and we began to talk.

Madhulica: But how did your parents agree to it?

Virendra: It was my grandmother who approached Irene’s mother with a marriage proposal!

Madhulica: What?

Virendra: Yes, I was also surprised. I asked her. She said she wanted a pant/skirt wife for me. I asked why? She began to cry. She said, ‘you know, I hardly ever saw your grandfather. We were in *ghunghat*. When he was dying, he wanted to see me but I could not go as he was surrounded by all the men. To this day, I feel bad about it.’

Madhulica: Oh! My God! How awful!’

An ice cream vendor came and Virendra promptly bought four cones. He said this was his turn.

Then Irene said she will take all of them to a pork Vindaloo meal. Everybody said yeah! Jose said he would like to host but Irene vetoed. She said it was her marriage and it became possible only due to Jose and Madhulica.

At the restaurant, Madhulica asked Virendra what he was doing these days as part of his party activities. He said he was running an NGO called Civil Marriage Society. Madhulica asked where he got the idea.

Virendra: It seems there was someone in Bidar in the nineties called T. Vijayendra, who started this society. He started it as a reaction to Babri Masjid demolition. He engaged with local BJP cadre and said that if one wants UCC (Uniform Civil Code), then first convert Hindu marriages into civil marriages because they were the majority. Then, reformers in other religions will also take initiatives. You should not force your opinion on others. In any case, Christian reformers are very much in support for it. In Goa, registered marriage is compulsory for everyone anyway.

There is a provision in the Special marriage Act to register existing religious marriages. I see a lot of Muslim couples going to West Asia going through it. It makes their visa procedure easier. We should try to register existing Hindu marriages in the Special Marriage Act.

I liked the idea and we have a good connection

with all the officers of the department. And our office is always crowded. We have made a lot of friends and our office is full of sweets every day. We will all become diabetic!’

Madhulica was smiling. She asked, ‘Have you met T. Vijayendra?’

Virendra: ‘No. I don’t know whether he is still alive. It was all so long ago.’

Jose and Madhulica began to laugh. Then Madhulica said, ‘I talk with him every week. He is not dead. But, yes, he is old, almost 79 years. He often lives in Hyderabad.’

Virendra: ‘You must give me his phone number. He has given me a new career.’

February 14, 2023

About The Author

T. Vijayendra (1943 -) was born in Mysore, grew up in Indore and went to IIT Kharagpur to get a B. Tech. in Electronics (1966). After a year's stint at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, he got drawn into the political whirlwind of the late 60s.

Since then, he has always been some kind of political - social activist. His brief for himself is the education of Left - wing cadres and so he almost exclusively publishes in the Left wing journal *Frontier*, published from Kolkata and the online journal *Countercurrents.org*. For the last thirteen years, he has been active in the field of 'Peak Oil' and Transition Town movement. He is a founder member of Peak Oil India and Ecologise. Since 2015 he has been involved in Ecologise! Camps and in 2016 he initiated Ecologise Hyderabad. In 2017 he spent a year celebrating the Bicentenary of the Bicycle. Vijayendra has been a 'dedicated' cyclist all his life, meaning, he neither took a driving license nor did

he ever drive a fossil fuel-based vehicle.

He divides his time between organic farms at several places in India, watching birds, writing fiction and staying at Hyderabad. He has published a book dealing with resource depletion, three books of essays, two collections of short stories, a novella, an autobiography, a children's science fiction about the history of the bicycle and several booklets. His booklet, *Kabira Khada Bazar Mein: Call for Local Action in the Wake of Global Emergency* (2019, <https://archive.org/details/kabira-khada-bazaar-mein>) has been translated into Kannada, Bengali and Marathi and is the basic text for the emerging Transition Networks in these language regions. His last book 'Vijutopias: Dreams of Local Futures', which has 12 short stories, is an entertaining book full of hope and energy in these dismal times.

Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: 95916 05634



CREDIBLE FANTASIES

T. Vijayendra

Many years ago, I read a book by G. K Chesterton, 'The Club of Queer Trades.' In that book each story had a character that was pursuing a trade that had never been practiced before.

The central idea of the fantasies presented here is, to imagine a future for my young friends with 'Green Jobs' that is, jobs that help in restoring ecology and creating equity among humans. It is a very difficult proposition under the present circumstances and hence I refer to them as 'fantasies'.

However, conditions are changing fast and soon it will be possible for these fantasies to become real. Hence, they are 'credible' or so I fondly imagine!

ECOLOGISE HYDERABAD