

# Mangalore

Organ of the Catholic Association of South Kanara  
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*Catholic Association  
of South Kanara  
wishes all the readers  
of "Mangalore"  
Magazine a very  
happy & meaningful  
'Monthi Fest'!*



Lily



Rose



Iris



Periwinkle



Lady  
Slipper

**Five Flowers Associated with Virgin Mary**



# CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH KANARA

Founded in 1914

(Regn. No. MNG/130/2021-2023)

## CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH KANARA

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## EDITORIAL

The month of September has great significance for Mangalore Catholics, who celebrate **‘Monthifest’** – the nativity of Mother Mary on a grand scale. Starting with a 9 day Novena, when children offer flowers to Mother Mary, then a celebratory mass on 8<sup>th</sup> September, followed by all families partaking in a sumptuous predominantly vegetarian lunch and nourished with ‘Nouvenm’ – the newly harvested rice – a very heartwarming ritual that is being followed by Mangaloreans scattered all over the world. May Mother Mary bless all of us.

September is also the month when CASK holds its Annual General Body Meeting. This year it is scheduled for Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at St Agnes College. I request all members of CASK to attend the AGM and the Thanksgiving Mass that will precede the AGM.

Another important day in September is Teacher’s Day observed each year on 5<sup>th</sup> September. As a teacher and educationist for over five decades, I naturally feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in being privileged and blessed to have been able to mould hundreds of children in three countries – Bangladesh, India and Ethiopia. We have an article by Joan Lobo dedicated to Teachers.

Pope Francis now uses a walker and wheel-chair to move around, thereby inspiring all of us, particularly those with limited mobility and those obliged to use the walker or wheel-chair. We have an article on the Pope reaching out from his wheel-chair!

Two books on George Fernandes, one of the icons of our community were released last month. ‘The Life & Times of George Fernandes’ authored by Dr Rahul Ramgundam and ‘Bandh Samrat’ authored by Chris Emmanuel D’Souza. I am sure these books will be useful to introduce George and his contributions to India, to the future generations.

One of the forgotten heroes of Mangalore is Karnad Sadashiv Rao, a freedom-fighter, philanthropist and human rights activist. Though one of the main roads and a library in Mangalore is named after him, hardly anyone from the younger generation have any knowledge about

him and his contributions. We have an article on this great son of Mangalore, along with other interesting articles, notably by Dr Anand & Geetha Pereira on 'Conservation of Grasslands' and Majlis-Mumbai titled 'From Victim to Survivor'.

**Until next time.....Patsy Lobo**

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## THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS...

Season's greetings to all our members and readers of 'Mangalore' Magazine. The month of September automatically reminds us of the Nativity feast that is celebrated by Catholics in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts in a big way. In Mumbai, the Mount Mary feast at Bandra, is celebrated on a grand scale and so also at Velankani in Tamilnadu. It brings to mind childhood memories of excitedly collecting flowers to offer to Infant Mary and the traditional odd number vegetarian dishes at the family lunch, followed by "vorn" (Payasam).

During this month, we have the AGM of CASK where we present the report and audited accounts to our members. Over the past few years, CASK has scaled up its impactful charitable and development activities and is recognized as an efficient, well-organized and transparent organization, committed to the progress and welfare of the communities in the coastal districts. The 109<sup>th</sup> AGM of CASK is scheduled for Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2022 morning at St Agnes College. Please attend the AGM and support the Office-bearers/ Governing Council members.

September is the month which heralds the beginning of autumn in the Northern hemisphere. European, American and Australian continents which are reeling under the heat wave and bush fires, will heave a sigh of relief at this welcome change of season. Climate change is a major issue that will haunt us for many years, unless the world wakes up and takes preventive action. 'Preserve planet earth' is the slogan heard everywhere and Pope Francis has repeatedly warned citizens and the faithful to heed this call.

We celebrate Teachers Day on 5<sup>th</sup> September. We are proud of the close bond we share with the teaching fraternity through our different programmes conducted for them. September 8<sup>th</sup> also happens to be World Literacy Day.

This year the rains so far have been excessive in our region. Even though there may not be water shortage, let us still be careful and avoid wasting water. The war in Ukraine continues to be very

disturbing, the Nuclear plant has received damages, which may cause disaster in the neighbouring countries and world at large. Let us keep them all in our prayers.

In my last month's message, I had mentioned that we have a Dalit President. I stand corrected, we have a Tribal (Adivasi) President – Draupadi Murmu. We wish her a successful tenure.

Our greetings go out to our non-christian brethren who are celebrating their festivals of Ganesh Chaturthi, Navrathri, and Onam in September.

**Capt.Vincent Pais – President, CASK**

## DISABLED CATHOLICS PRAISE POPE'S EXAMPLE IN PUBLICLY USING A WHEELCHAIR



*Aleja Hertzler-McCain, Courtesy NCR*

When Amanda Martínez Beck saw a photo of Pope Francis sitting in a wheelchair and holding a baby during his weeklong trip to Canada in July, she felt the same sense of camaraderie she feels seeing another mom at her children's elementary school using a wheelchair.

Amanda Beck, who uses a rollator, a kind of walker with a seat, teaches that “all bodies are good bodies” in her fat liberation activism. She said “Something is good that fulfills its purpose, and I believe that the purpose of the human body is relationship with God and others,”

For Amanda “to see Pope Francis, having relationships, doing his papal duties” using a wheelchair or a cane, **“it just reminds me of the goodness of a weak body like mine, because this is one of the holiest people in the world able to love and serve from a wheelchair.”** Beck, who lives in Texas, is one of many disabled Catholics who praised the Pope's decision to publicly use a wheelchair, which he has done since at least 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 due to severe knee pain, making disability part of his visible identity. Other world leaders have gone to significant lengths to avoid being seen in a wheelchair.

“There is this belief that physical weakness yields moral or leaderly weakness,” said Beck. “A lot of people, I have learned, view mobility aids as giving in or being lazy.” “There's just so much shame that keeps us in pain,” she said, encouraging Pope Francis to speak about his experience using mobility aids.

Erin Murphy, a lifelong wheelchair user in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said the Pope's use of a wheelchair “definitely normalizes disability, which is great. It's so valuable to see disabled bodies active because there's a lot of power in seeing people who are like you, and to know that you can be a leader and integral part of the church. But when you don't see disabled bodies, it's hard to imagine being a leader or having a role in the church”. Because the lectern and

the raised sanctuary area in Catholic churches are frequently inaccessible, Murphy has not been able to serve as a lector or a eucharistic minister. Even participating in Mass in many churches, which often do not have cutouts in the pews for wheelchair users, makes her feel isolated because she has to sit at the edge of the church. She said “I’m very obviously not sitting with the body of Christ, and that is really bothersome to me”.

Other disabled Catholics said they found it troubling to hear of rumors that Pope Francis was considering resigning as his knee pain grew worse and he began to use a cane or a wheelchair in public. Amy Smith, who is autistic and has acquired single-sided deafness, said she has been disappointed with the rumors that Pope Francis will soon retire since he started using a wheel-chair in public, this is disservice to people who acquire disability.

The speculation “does a disservice to people who acquire disability,” said Smith, who lives in Parramatta, Australia. “It can perpetuate this idea that if you have any kind of disability, you become a shut-in, and that’s all you’re guaranteed to be. You’re going to be at death’s door at any point. You’re going to have to give up everything that you’re passionate about.”

Disability is not new for Pope Francis; he had a small part of one lung removed as a young man and who has struggled with pain from sciatica for decades. In his public teaching, the pope has repeatedly preached about the dignity of aging, even dedicating a catechesis series to the “meaning and value of old age” this year. He also has spoken about the church’s responsibility to fight ableism and disability discrimination. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis quoted from his 2019 address on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities: “Our concern should be not only to care for them but to ensure their ‘active participation in the civil and ecclesial community. We need to have ‘the courage to give a voice to those who are discriminated due to their disability, because sadly, in some countries, people find it hard to acknowledge them as persons of equal dignity,” the Pope said. Francis has regularly given addresses to commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, celebrated each year on December 3. Disabled Catholics have noted Pope Francis’



commitment to disability inclusion in his interactions with disabled people. On several occasions, Smith said, she has observed Francis allowing nonverbal autistic children to run around him and other officials as he is speaking, during his Wednesday audiences. “Those children will remember those moments, and they’ll be very positive memories,” she said.

The Pope’s public use of mobility aids has tapped into disabled Catholics’ dreams of greater inclusion. “The Pope has shown that one can have a disability and lead the church. This will lead to a greater respect for persons with disabilities in the church.

For example, can ‘lame’ or ‘crippled’ be swapped out for ‘unable to walk’? “Special needs’ implies that they’re extra needs when in fact getting into the church is a basic need,” Murphy explained. “The word ‘special’ can also imply it’s optional.”

In this moment of attention to the Pope’s disability, “I would strongly encourage people within the church to seek out disability liberation theology,” Smith said, recommending Jesuit Fr. Justin Glyn’s *‘Us’ not ‘Them’: Disability and Catholic Theology and Social Teaching* and Nancy L. Eiesland’s *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*.

“Clearly the Scriptures have lots of stories, both in the Old and New Testament, of persons with disability,” said Mary Jo Iozzio, a Professor of Moral Theology at Boston College who studies disability theology. “It’s really quite remarkable how the discipline has grown and gone into so many different directions,” she added.

Disabled Catholics also hope that the Pope’s public disability challenges the infantilization of disabled people. “As a parishioner, I’ve had a person routinely pat my head after Mass, as if I were a child,” said Murphy, who is 42. “This attitude that disabled people can’t really lead does need to be discarded,” said Smith. “There needs to be greater disabled-led support for disabled people within the church”. The Pope’s example is an opportunity for the church to improve its understanding and relationship with its disabled members. This is a way to shift the thinking about disability from a paternalistic charity-based model of thinking.... into one that is based more upon solidarity.

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## **CELEBRATE GRANDPARENTS AND THE ELDERLY!**

*Fr. Cedric Prakash SJ*

On Sunday 24 July, the Catholic Church celebrated the ‘**World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly**’. This is the second such year of this extraordinary day, which began in 2021. The day will be always on the last Sunday of July, closest to the Feast of Saints Anne and Joachim (26 July). Though precious little is known about these saints, the very fact that they were the parents of Mary and the grandparents of Jesus, is sufficient to hail them as role models: wonderful, exemplary, caring and sensitive senior citizens, worthy of emulation today!

Pope Francis, referring to this significant day, said during his Wednesday audience on 2 March 2022, “*Old age certainly imposes a slower pace: But they are not merely times of inertia. Indeed, the measure of these rhythms opens up, for all, spaces of meaning of life unknown to the obsession with speed. Losing contact with the slower rhythms of old age closes up these spaces to everyone. It is from this perspective that I wished to establish the feast of grandparents, on the last Sunday of July. The alliance between the two extreme generations of life—children and the elderly—also helps the other two—young people and adults—to bond with each other so as to make everyone’s existence richer in humanity*”.

Grandparents (old, ageing, elderly, senior citizens) have a special place in the heart of Pope Francis- and thereby of the Church. His message for the day this year, focuses on the theme ‘***In old age they will still bear fruit***’ (Ps 92 :15). This is a powerful and meaningful message considering the plight of the elderly today. Pope Francis says, “*the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly is an opportunity to proclaim with joy, that the Church wants to celebrate with those whom the Lord has “filled with days”. Let us celebrate it together! I ask you to celebrate this Day in your parishes and communities; to seek out those elderly persons who feel most alone, at home or in residences where they live. Let us make sure that no one feels alone on this day. Expecting a visit can transform those days when we think we have nothing to look forward to; from an initial encounter, a new friendship can emerge. Visiting the elderly who live alone is a work of mercy!*”

He is clear, direct and does not want the elderly, to feel excluded, unwanted and isolated!

**‘Times are changing!’** A cliché that is repeated from one generation to another. Today, the families have become smaller; careerism and consumerism has overwhelmed the average person. The rapid strides in technology have made us less human and more individualistic! The value time that families enjoyed in the past: caring, sharing, praying, playing, bonding and nurturing – seems to have become a rarity. Those times of the traditional ‘joint family’ where the very presence of elders was deemed sacred, has all but disappeared! **“We have no time”** – scream one and all; there is much less time for grandparents and the elderly. Often, they are just tolerated, if not regarded as an absolute nuisance! It is so easy for well-to-do children enjoying a comfortable life abroad, to dump their seniors in a ‘Home for the Aged’ back home. They attempt to absolve themselves from all responsibility and guilt saying *“the Sisters look after them very well; we call every week and of course, we pay for their monthly expenses!”* What the elderly want is the presence of their very own: their flesh and blood- just to be there!

Pope Francis in his message calls this painful reality out, very strongly, *“Many people are afraid of old age. They consider it a sort of disease with which any contact is best avoided. The elderly, they think, are none of their concern and should be set apart, perhaps in homes or places where they can be cared for, lest we have to deal with their problems. This is the mindset of the “throw-away culture”. The Scriptures see things differently. A long life – so the Bible teaches – is a blessing, and the elderly are not outcasts to be shunned but living signs of the goodness of God who bestows life in abundance. Blessed is the house where an older person lives! Blessed is the family that honours the elderly!”*

The fact that the entire world is ageing (and India too!) is the hard truth! According to the United Nations, *“By 2020, the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than 5 years”*. Further, *“Over the next three decades, the number of older persons worldwide is projected to more than double to 1.5 billion*

*persons in 2050 and 80% of them will be living in low- and middle-income countries”.*

India is not far from these global predictions. About a year ago, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released its ‘Elderly in India 2020’ report. The report flagged concerns around an ageing population and stressed the urgent need for India to plan for a changing population structure. Some of the official statistics include:

- \* India’s elderly population (aged 60+) is projected to touch 194 million in 2031 from 138 million in 2021, a **41%** increase in 10 years.
- \* There will be 93 million males and 101 million females in 2031 - up from 67 million males and 71 million females in 2021.
- \* NSO’s National Sample Survey (NSS) data from 2017-2018 notes 70% of the elderly in India were dependent on others for their daily living. The situation was worse for females – only about 10-11% of females were economically independent in rural and urban areas, compared to the 48% males in rural and 57% males in urban areas.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in India. The reality is that in every family, community and society we do have a growing number of senior citizens. Unlike the past, the painful dimension of this reality today, is that there is a sizable number of elderly in India who feel lonely, unaccepted, rejected and isolated; their own infirmities, illness and lack of independence make life even more difficult for them. The country has not made comprehensive and publicised provisions to respond to the needs and frailties of the elderly. Many senior citizens are subject to abuse by their own children/grandchildren; they are thrown out of their homes and kept destitute to fend for themselves. There are those horrible stories of grandsons murdering a grandparent for some monetary or material game. The Indian Railways has stopped concessional fares to Senior Citizens.

Pope Francis highlights the role and responsibilities of grandparents and the elderly too! He says to them directly, *“Our world is passing through a time of trial and testing, a lingering pandemic and a war in Europe that is harming peace and development on a*

*global scale. Nor is it a coincidence that war is returning to Europe at a time when the generation that experienced it in the last century is dying out. These great crises risk anaesthetizing us to the reality of other “epidemics” and other widespread forms of violence that menace the human family and our common home. All this points to the need for a profound change, a conversion, that disarms hearts and leads us to see others as our brothers or sisters. We grandparents and elderly people have a great responsibility: to teach the women and men of our time to regard others with the same understanding and loving gaze with which we regard our own grandchildren. We ourselves have grown in humanity by caring for others, and now we can be teachers of a way of life that is peaceful and attentive to those in greatest need. This attitude may be mistaken for weakness or resignation, yet it will be the meek, not the aggressive and the abusive, who will inherit the earth”* Yes, senior citizens have an important role to play even in India today – which has mainstreamed hate and violence, divisiveness and discrimination. The elderly must play a healing role!

As one celebrates another ‘World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly’, those who still do fall under the category of ‘seniors’, are called to revisit and celebrate the warmth, love, sacrifices, the generosity, the selflessness and the sensitivity: that ‘revolution of tenderness’, which one may have experienced from one’s own grandparents and the other elderly in families and communities. Today, one needs to accept and appreciate that the elderly too, have their rights which include, the right for independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. The younger ones need to work towards the realization of these at all times! Grandparents and elderly, particularly in India today, must be cared for! There should be no debate about this! It is a non-negotiable!

Ageing is indeed a blessing! *Let us then celebrate our grandparents and the elderly today and every day!*

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**PLEASE NOTE THE CASK UPDATED WEBSITE**

**[www.caskmangalore.org](http://www.caskmangalore.org)**

## K.S.R.ROAD – MANGALORE – WHO IS KSR?

Everybody in Mangalore knows KSR Road – it hosts the City Mall, many prominent restaurants and a famous school – St Aloysius Gonzaga (SAG). Ask any student of SAG or any young man or woman strolling in the City Mall – what KSR stands for and it is unlikely you will get the right answer. The road is named after **Karnad Sadashiva Rao**, a wealthy lawyer turned freedom fighter and philanthropist, who died penniless in 1936, fighting for India’s freedom and dedicating his life for the welfare and upliftment of marginalized communities in his home town Mangalore.

Sadashiva was born in 1881, the only son of an eminent lawyer Ramachandra Rao and his wife Radhabai. After schooling in Mangalore, he graduated from Presidency College-Madras (now Chennai) and followed it with a Degree in Law from Mumbai and came back to Mangalore to practice. He had a compassionate heart even as a student – gifting books, pencils and toys to children unable to have them. The sufferings that he saw especially of widows and lower castes deeply affected him.



*Sadashiva Rao*



*K.S.R. Road (2022)*



*Home of Sadashiva Rao  
now SCDCC Bank*

Along with his wife – Shanthabai, he established Mahila Sabha in 1911, with the aim to educate, support and uplift widows and help them to be self-reliant. Many women were professionally trained to become independent. He successfully fought against the restrictions imposed on backward castes in temples.

Sadashiva Rao joined the National Freedom movement in 1919 and was the first volunteer from Karnataka to join Mahatma Gandhi.

The house where Sadashiva Rao was born and brought up, on the road named after him, has vanished. A swanky building of South Canara

District Central Cooperative (SCDCC) Bank - Utkrushta Sahakari Soudha — has come up in its place.

He was actively participating in the struggle for freedom of his beloved country, while tragedy struck home in 1921. His only son, his youngest daughter and his wife died one after the other due to illness. Devastated by these personal setbacks, Sadashiva Rao tried to find some solace in the company of Gandhi in Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad. However, he couldn't stay there for a long time, as he had to rush back to flood hit Mangalore and initiate relief work to the affected people. He spent all his inherited assets generously to provide food and shelter for the people in need. He exhausted all his wealth by this charity work and fell into deep debt.

In 1936, Sadashiva Rao chose to attend the Faizpur Congress session in spite of high fever. There he got completely drenched in the rain due to leakage in the hut where he was staying. In this bad condition, he travelled to Mumbai, where he expired on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1936 at age 56. He didn't live to see his beloved country winning freedom, a cause he had dedicated his life.

When he passed away, there was no money left to perform his last rites. His aged mother and his two daughters had to move to a rented house. When his two-floor house, where he was born and did all his charitable work, went for auction to recover the debt, DCC Bank (now South Canara District Central Cooperative Bank) founder M.Shiva Rao bought it and built a huge building after demolition. Now, nothing remains to reminisce the great son of the soil in Mangalore, except a road and a central library named after him. Sadashiv Nagar-Bangalore is also named after him.

Mahatma Gandhi visited his mother to offer condolences. He was known as the '**Gandhi of South India**'. Renowned Kannada novelist Dr. Shivaram Karanth considered Sadashiva Rao as a hero and made him the protagonist of his novel, *Oudaryada Urulalli* (In The Web of Generosity). However, people of South India, Karnataka State in general and Mangalore in particular have almost forgotten his selfless service to the people. So, let us celebrate his life at least now, as a part of *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav*.

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## MONTHI FEST REFLECTIONS

*Dr Emerine Selma Edwin*

“You’ve come just in time for the Monthi Fest,” Father Santhumayor said. It was September of 2020 then, and I was new to Mangalore, having just gained admittance to pursue my MD at KMC. “It is a Feast to celebrate the nativity of Our Lady, a very unique Mangalorean feast,” he was saying as I interrupted him and said “Father, I know what Monthi fest is – we used to celebrate it every year in Abu Dhabi.” He seemed pleasantly surprised and said “Well, then you must partake in our celebrations this year. Not something you should miss!”

How did I celebrate my first Monthi Fest? I was just changing out of my altar server’s robes when suddenly one of the senior altar servers poked his head into the sacristy and said, “Hi, we’re short on altar servers for the Monthi Fest mass. Would you volunteer to serve?” A quick word with my father, who was in similar fashion, roped into serving as a Communion minister for the same, and I changed back into the same robes I had prematurely removed. The mass in itself is a blur on account of my not comprehending the language. I remember thinking Konkani songs were beautiful, realising how many Mangalorean Catholics lived in Abu Dhabi based on the magnitude of the crowd gathered for the mass, and noting the sing-song inflections with which the Mangalorean people spoke the language. My most distinct memory, however, is the procession leading to the grotto. I followed suit of the Mangalorean altar boys and girls ahead of me and we arranged ourselves on either side of the Marian devotion featuring Our Lady appearing to St Bernadette. We found ourselves surrounded by young children with flower baskets. They were beaming. The faithful, led by the choir, joined in song as the children grabbed fistfuls of what I suddenly realized were whole flowers and not peeled flower petals as I had expected. One could say this realisation, quite literally, hit me in the face. The weight of the large roses combined with the velocity with which it was hurled at due to the innate competitiveness



of children to get it as “close” to Mary (egged on by their parents) had my cheeks smarting and my eyes blinking back sudden tears. Somehow, my reaction seemed only to encourage them, as they kept reaching into their baskets with their tiny palms and grabbing fistfuls of floral grenades. The song, as lovely as it was, was mercifully short, and the rest of the mass was relatively unmemorable.

I have read and heard much about Monthi fest but I only recently came to know, something which curiously even many of my Mangalorean friends and acquaintances were unaware of – the origin of the word “Monthi”. In my ignorance, I had presumed it to be a Konkani term of Marian endearment. But it was Fr Joachim Miranda, the Franciscan Goan Catholic parish priest of St Francis of Assisi church at Farangipet (which literally translates to foreigner’s town) who first started the tradition of celebrating Monthi Fest. On top of a hillock in Farangipet, a little away from the north bank of the Nethravathi River, is an ancient Catholic institution called the Monte Mariano – the Mount of Mary. “Monthi” fest was coined, with little deviation, from this Monte Mariano church which was, at various times, a seminary, monastery and a friary. While the ruler Hyder Ali and Fr Joachim were comrades, his son Tipu Sultan was not in favour of the priest, and although he went about destroying Catholic churches around Mangalore in an effort to gain supremacy over the Catholic faithful, he spared the Monte Mariano, possibly in deference of his father’s friendship to the holy man. Many a devout Catholic would since set out on foot to Farangipet to partake in this annual celebration at the Monte Mariano church.

Although the Monthi Fest celebrates the nativity of Our Lady, it is also a harvest festival, possibly a nod to Mary’s own conception and birth after St Anna’s barrenness for many, many years. To the farmer, it symbolises hope for a good harvest and for all of us, the promise of prosperity - both material and spiritual.

**Wishing everyone a joyous and fruitful Monthi feast!**

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## CONSERVATION OF GRASSLANDS

*Dr. Anand Titus and Geeta N. Pereira.*

Grasslands are recognized globally for their high biodiversity and their social and cultural values. However, in India, grasslands are treated as waste lands and indiscriminately used to promote Industry or agriculture. This is due to the fact that their full capacity to deliver ecosystem services (ES) as part of agricultural production systems is not well appreciated.

More importantly, Grasslands are not just important wildlife habitats but are also reservoirs of crop genes and the backbone of the livelihood of indigenous communities. This gene pool acts as gene banks, which can be used for developing new climate-resistant crop varieties.

The urgency in writing this article is to bring awareness to citizens in safeguarding the last remaining grasslands not only in Karnataka but in India as a whole. The article throws light on a unique ecosystem, namely grasslands, tropical scrub forest, and stunted semi-evergreen forests, which are facing multiple threats due to land-use change by humans. These forest types are often termed wastelands and are neglected by both policymakers and public citizens, which makes them vulnerable to pressure, from human populations. However, new

scientific studies throw light on these forest types as crucial links for people and wildlife to live in harmony.

We would like to draw your attention to a very important development in Karnataka, especially in and around Bangalore. On the periphery of Bengaluru city is the Hesaraghatta lakebed which spans an area of about 1912 acres. The 356 acres of the landscape surrounding the lakebed is the last remaining grassland habitat in the Bengaluru region. The plan to protect these grasslands by declaring it a conservation reserve was rejected by the State Board for Wildlife, despite a proposal for declaring the 5,010-acre land area as “Greater Hesaraghatta Grassland Conservation Reserve”. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the State Wildlife Board will determine the fate of the Hesaraghatta grasslands. The land is likely to be turned into a concrete jungle if a development project is approved in the coming month.

Around 235 species of birds, some of them listed as endangered or vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, glide across the sky. A whopping 400 species of insects, of which nearly 30 have been described as new to science, and 100 species of butterflies including the very rare Lilac Silver line, have chosen this land as their breeding spot.

Overall, grasslands and scrub forests provide habitat for wildlife, in addition to carbon and water storage and watershed protection in improving the water table. (The earth’s land area covered by grasslands vary between 20 and 40 percent, yet, only a small percentage, less than 10 % is protected due to political and economic reasons.) It is a fact that though grasslands occupy a quarter of the earth’s landmass, most of it has been lost in less than 3 decades to urbanization, Industry and Agriculture.

Threats to natural grasslands, as well as the wildlife, include creating special economic zones, for setting up Industry, oil refineries, unsustainable agricultural practices, farming, grazing, and invasive species, illegal hunting, poaching, and climate change.

The shared spaces between human beings and wildlife in such a delicately balanced ecosystem imply that the conservation of all species

of wildlife in these sensitive areas has to be socially inclusive. Easier said than done, but strategies need to be worked out, without any bias, such that there's a high degree of coexistence between Man and wildlife. As you browse through this article, you can understand that this harmonious relationship, indeed works, and coexistence is a reality, if and only the model is based on scientific aspects.

From what we have observed over the years, the habitat around grasslands is subjected to both high human impact zones where the industry is located and low impact zones where villagers border the wilderness zone and grassland habitats. In the past two decades due to housing all along the banks of rivers, thickets that were the favourite haunt of the lesser-known mammals have resulted in the disappearance of the jungle cat. As more and more land is transformed into commercial crops, it has impacted the carrying capacity of the ecosystem and has resulted in habitat degradation and disturbance of wildlife.

**Recommendations** - One time tested method accepted to address this problem, is to conserve separate areas as a Reserve for wildlife and develop other areas for human habitation and Industrialization. Yet another model, involves the merger of the two areas by developing small pockets of conducive habitats for wildlife within the newly developed zone. However, this model has been a total disaster because its implementation is not scientifically done. The success of this model rests heavily on first understanding the ecological behaviour of wildlife.

**Farmers to the rescue of wildlife** - Thanks to the wisdom of the locals and their deep understanding of wildlife, farmers living in these borderline areas, make it a point to leave behind on purpose, their aged livestock like bullocks/buffalos/sheep to graze in the transitional or fringe areas of the forest. This has been an age-old practice in the surrounding villages. These old livestock provide prey for leopards and other mammals. The understanding has gone a long way in mitigating human-wildlife conflict because leopards and other carnivores do not come and steal healthy livestock from farmers.

**Conclusion** – Several recent scientific studies have revealed that grasslands and scrub forests contain multitudes of wildlife species that are uniquely adapted to live in only such specialized habitats. Any man-made change can result in the disappearance of many of

these species. We are not against development, but it needs to be properly planned and sustainable. A proper scientific study will help wildlife, coexist with man, and conserve the unique grassland ecology. In addition, talking to local people, not just to the experts, is of utmost importance. Investing in this ‘social capital’ is vital to finding mitigation and adaptation solutions during a crisis. We must break down the concept of grassland conservation into simpler units and build a narrative that people can connect with and understand as an imminent threat. When people know their roles, and feel accountable, change will happen. After all, these ecosystems are critical for the health of our natural world.

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