



IMPRESSIONS

Magazine by 54th RR Batch

December 2023



The Temple where Strong Legs of Forester are Made

*Transition from Junior Batch to Senior Batch:
Our Last Class in Shorea Hall*



Letter from the Editor



Abhinav Raj
Secretary and Editor
Literary Club

The Literary Club is pleased to present to you the second edition of our magazine 'Impressions'. The first edition of the magazine was published in August. Since we were on tours for the past four months, the major content of this edition is from tours and exercises held during this period. As we complete one year of training at IGNFA, we recollect the learning and experiences of training and redefine our vision for our service.

The aim of publishing this magazine is to document our experiences of academic training, tours and exercises and to provide a space for the expression of literary and artistic talents of our batch. I thank the Director of our academy for his interview, other faculty members for their support and my dear friends for their contributions to the magazine. Without your support, the magazine could not have materialized.

Working as the Literary Secretary for the past one year has been a great learning experience. Apart from publishing the magazine, the club has conducted a number of quizzes, debates and essay writing competitions. All these events have received enthusiastic participation from the batch. However, the popularity of quizzes has led to this club being informally called the 'Literary and Quizzing club' by our batch.

I welcome the new batch- 55th RR to the academy. Though we get only few months together in the academy, I expect that we make the most of this time to share our learning and experiences and create vivid memories. I hope that the new batch will carry forward the rich tradition of Literary Club in publishing magazines and conducting literary and quizzing events.

Table of Contents

• <i>Interview with Director</i>	5
• <i>India's Fascinating Service</i>	8
• <i>Excerpts from One Year of Training at IGNFA</i>	10
• <i>West India Tour</i>	12
• <i>South India Tour: Eastern Part</i>	16
• <i>A Tale of Indian Vultures in Panna</i>	22
• <i>सुख-दुःखाश्च- कविता</i>	23
• <i>A Forester's Evening</i>	24
• <i>Tour de Thrills: An Unforgettable Adventure Saga</i>	25
• <i>Wildlife Exercise: Best Camera Trap Images</i>	28
• <i>एकान्त- कविता</i>	29
• <i>टूटा तारा- कविता</i>	29
• <i>Picture Perfect Birds</i>	30
• <i>Fond Memories</i>	31
• <i>Sketches</i>	34

Interview with Director

Dr. Jaganmohan Sharma recently took charge as the Director of IGNFA. He is an IFS officer of 1990 batch borne on Karataka cadre. He has been a field forester, an academician and a researcher. Abhinav Raj and Abhishek Agrawal took his interview where he gave his ideas about training and shared valuable insights about the forestry sector and its challenges. Here are excerpts from the interview.

- **What is your vision for training of IFS probationers in this period of *Amrit Kaal*?**

A self-assured India has entered *Amrit Kaal* on the heft of a buoyant economy, human resources, soft power and growing global influence. We will need fresh capabilities and governance paradigms to drive India on the trajectory to a developed nation by 2047. For this, higher civil services will have to engage harder, involve and drive, and provide leadership.

Recognising the aggravating environmental crises such as changing climate, loss of biodiversity and polluted urban environment, environmental restoration has gained centrality in the economic growth discourse. Now, all development will have to be done considering environment. Governance will gradually be built around environment and people managing these.

Thus, our service is also transitioning from narrow scope of forestry to wider domain of environment. The training should be such that it equips officers with wide knowledge base, skills and patience to handle the complex challenges. Change of syllabus and mode of content delivery needs a change and thus the new training rules have been released. No longer can we depend solely on textbooks because in that case we shall need to consult 500 textbooks.

- **What are your views on the sandwich pattern of training which has been prescribed in the new training rules?**



Earlier too, the training had a sandwich pattern. It was removed and is again there. It shows that there is continuous thinking as to how to make the training more effective as time passes. Sandwich pattern is an effort to put certain amount of knowledge gained during Phase-I of training to application. You can see how the inputs and concepts learned are being applied on field. This will develop skills to analyse a particular situation. Then you again come back to the Academy in Phase-II and raise questions about these things.

- **In recent years batch sizes have been very large. Would such large batch sizes create issues in cadre management?**

First we need to understand how we arrive at the batch size figure. If cadre strength of IFS officers in the country is 3000 and average service period is 30 years, then average annual intake will be 100. The sudden increase in strength has been done because between 2000 and 2010, batch sizes had been very small - between 20 and 25 officers. So, we do not have enough officers at DCF and CF levels. We do have the feeder cadre - the State Forest Services. However, these have been marred by irregular recruitment and court cases.

At present we have around 140 vacancies each year and about 100 are joining. This is a manageable figure. Government of India is also expanding and we are not able to spare officers for deputations. So, higher batch strength will

lead to better cadre management. IFS officers need to man sensitive posts. If there will be sufficient number of IFS officers, then government will be subject to questioning when a non-cadre officer will be placed at such a position. In future, environment may become our domain and then we will need more officers.

• **What steps are being taken to upgrade infrastructure in the Academy?**

This Academy has not seen such strength in last two decades. We have removed two blocks of New Hostel and these are under construction. That has taken away a lot of capacity. In the New Hostel, you cannot have two-seater rooms. When I was here, we had common bathrooms. Later, the rooms between two rooms were converted into two bathrooms. The expectation was of 70-75 Probationers joining every year. New Hostel will be completely new and will have 174 rooms.

Even classrooms had wooden benches which could accommodate lot more people. We are now creating new Academic Block and the present building will become Administrative Block. Regarding Old Hostel, there are sentiments attached. We are divided between two choices - demolition v/s maintenance. Your batches are seeing the transition and hence the inconvenience.

• **Regarding usage of social media by government officials, there are two conflicting views- visibility v/s anonymity. What are your views on social media usage by officers?**

If you put anything with responsibility and within conduct rules, then use of social media is good. It helps create awareness and enables one to reach to a large number of people. One should not be insulting or criticize the government. For example, the policy of ban on cow slaughter is having impact on forestry sector and general natural resource management. We do not have a system to maintain these cows. In forest, we have feral cows. They are raiding crops. And much of

those in urban areas are in suffering. I may not agree to this policy decision of the state. If I articulate the impact of this decision on forestry sector, I am stating fact and with responsibility. So, I am not saying whether it is right or wrong but seeking a solution.

There is no compulsion to shoot a message the very next day a policy is announced. Then my motivation is something else. Right articulation is necessary because people can take things out of context. There is always a way to raise an issue and make a point in a decent manner.

• **Wildlife population is increasing and few new protected areas are being declared. What is the long-term solution to reduce human-animal conflict?**

The solution lies outside forests. Wherever you find population is increasing, it is due to strength of changes occurring outside forest. You have

more tasty food and resting areas outside forests. In places like Madikeri, elephants have become now a sizeable population in the large coffee estates. In cities, we have monkeys and leopards.

Human-wildlife conflict is becoming calamitous in certain areas. It cannot be managed by

forest department alone. Other departments will have to coordinate. Every tiger survey shows 10-15 % higher tiger population. Karnataka has 100% household coverage of LPG gas cylinders. This has drastically reduced demand of firewood. As a result, recovery is happening in forest areas.

• **Production forestry has now been limited to a few pockets in our country. About 40% of timber requirement of the country is fulfilled from imports. Also, there is a view that agroforestry cannot fulfill the demand of large timber. What can be done in this context?**

After independence, we focused on production forestry for first two decades. Then came WPA, Stockholm Conference was held, forestry was

If you put anything with responsibility and within conduct rules, then use of social media is good.

moved from State List to Concurrent List. In 1980s, we had FCA, EPA and New Forest Policy. So, the focus moved from forest as source of timber towards biodiversity and conservation. At the same time, it was becoming difficult for forest department to do this alone. So, in 1990s, we came out with JFM scheme. About 29 million hectares of forest is allocated under JFM, which is about 30% of total forest area. This area is available for production forestry. Even if we take 50% of that, 15 million hectares will be available. So, the focus may have shifted, but it is very much possible and the area for production forestry stands apportioned.

We also want to do production forestry to for carbon fixing. By using wood for furniture, we lock carbon for a long time. After 1990s, we wanted more wood, which was available elsewhere on the globe and we imported it. Finally, another issue is giving land to private partners for production. Experience says that if you give land to someone, its reversal to you becomes difficult. Forestry sector and forest officers generally work on precautionary principles because this sector responds with lag.

In the context of large timber, I would say that the ideal plank length is 12 feet. Beyond this length, transportation becomes difficult and you can use composite material, manufactured wood or join planks. No one should say that large timber is indispensable. The issue is that for many people personal experiences become their beliefs. Accumulated wisdom is necessary to take correct decisions in sectors like forestry.








• There has been a lot of push on industrial and infrastructure development in the state of Uttarakhand. You being a native of this state and a forester, what are your views on the 'Development v/s Ecology' debate?

Let's take the example of the *Char Dham* Highway Project. If I were given the opportunity, I would do the project but I will not do equal width at all stretches. I will see which stretch can take wide roads and which can take less wide roads. Then,

people who are more focussed on bringing about the project will say that this would make it ineffective. And then tussle will start. Gradually, we will reach a compromise. We can have no activity which has no impact on environment, particularly of this scale and type.

Our Prime Minister has certain aspirations regarding development of the nation. As a forest officer, I need to do my best to protect the environment. But I do not live in isolation. There is a whole ecosystem. Everyone will influence. Fortunately, God is on our side by doing environmental recovery and natural succession, courts are on our side which proactively take decisions for environmental protection and finally the civil society and NGOs which are working in this field.

• Rapid Fire Questions

-  Favourite place: Mussoorie
-  Favourite book: Sapiens
-  Optional in IFS exam: Physics and Chemistry
-  Hobby: Playing football, singing
-  Favourite sports: Cricket
-  Most useful course: Masters of Management Studies in Public Policy, IIM Bengaluru
-  Inspiring quotation: "The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war."

• Your message for us.

We have to be responsible people. If you are responsible, you take attending courses responsibly, seeking concessions responsibly, conducting responsibly and being mutually respectful to everyone. That one word 'responsible' takes away extremities. At such a high position, I cannot be anything but responsible. I have to take responsibility and any laurels that come to my organisation or under my leadership do not belong to me. They belong to the system which has enabled me, put me in charge of it and then I have achieved it.

INDIA'S FASCINATING SERVICE

-Abhishek Agrawal

***"I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference."***

I first came across these lines of Robert Frost in class 9th. Hardly had I ever imagined that I would start living it by 2022. This was the year when I finally tasted some success in the Civil Services Examination. Although I could not make it to India's (perhaps most) aspired service- the IAS, nonetheless I managed to bag one of India's reputed services -the IRS.

It is said that success brings happiness but mine brought a dilemma and a quite troubling one. Choosing between apples and oranges is difficult especially if you did not want either in the first place. Nonetheless, I made a choice less common and chose to join the green bandwagon as it provided me an opportunity to be closer to home. Humans, like tigers, have a 'homing instinct'.

Many people whom I had known, jokingly used to refer to Forest Service as 'For Rest' service. With logging operations taking a backseat and increasing role of community in forest management, there has been a perception that the service has very little to offer. I myself started feeling a bit perplexed about my future. After all 'buyer's remorse' had to kick in at some point.

Time passed by and I got to know more and more about the service partly through interaction with the officers visiting IGNFA and partly through our tours. I quickly realised that IFS is not a dying service and is much more lively than what people think. In fact it is one of the few services that offers a white canvas on which one can paint their career using their preferred colours.

For the academically inclined, the service offers unparalleled opportunity of both learning and teaching in different institutes like WII and IIFM.

ZSI, BSI, FRI and ISWT offer exposure to research opportunities. There is no dearth of publications by IFS officers in reputed journals ranging from 'The Indian Forester' to 'Nature'.

For the thrill seekers, this service offers much. WCCB offers opportunities like conducting investigations, coordinating intelligence, laying traps, etc. IFS officers are expected to be commanders in cases of human-wildlife conflict. There are officers who have removed illegal encroachment without any support from other agencies. IFS officers have scaled peaks and glaciers. The IGNFA flag on the ice of Antarctica stands a testimony to the spirit of adventure enshrined in this service.

For the engineer inside you, there are roles too. A civil engineer can contribute to soil moisture conservation works, construction and maintenance of depots, forest buildings and rest houses apart from surveying of boundaries and remote sensing. Mechanical engineers can design cages, vehicles and set up an MSP processing units. IT and electronics is useful for emerging technologies like RFID collars, drones and sensors in forest and wildlife management.

There is ample opportunity to apply your legal acumen too. Forest Conservation Act is one of the strongest forest legislation not just in India but in the world. You do not just file prosecutions and petitions, but also hold courts under the Indian Forest Act.

You can unleash the entrepreneur inside you by helping tribals and SHGs in setting up small businesses under PM *Van Dhan Yojana* and state schemes. Forest officers have played a crucial

role in development of innovative products ranging from sanitizers to wine out of *mahua*. As DFO you effectively become the CEO of a division managing planning, budgeting, human resource, procurement operations and supply chains.

All things said, it would be dishonest if we don't admit that for many of us IFS was neither an ambition nor aspiration. But this does not change the fact that it is indeed an excellent profession, and quite a noble one. One can derive an unparalleled sense of satisfaction provided he or she accepts it and is willing to work for it.

It may not be the jackpot but it is a very good

launch pad. Stalwarts like Mr. Ajai Saxena and Mr. Bharat Lal have shown that even sky is not the limit if a forester who wants to fly into the territory of administration.

To conclude I would quote the epilogue from *Mahabharata* and leave it to do the reader to interpret:

***"Whatever is here, may be found elsewhere;
What is not, cannot be found anywhere else."***



EXCERPTS FROM ONE YEAR OF TRAINING AT IGNFA

-Adarsh Sharan

The story thus far:

The IFS OTs of 2022 batch, commonly called the 54th RR batch, have now officially completed one year of training at IGNFA, Dehradun. One can still reminisce the very first day of joining the Academy, the pride one had while taking charge as an IFS officer, the motivation to participate effectively in all components of the training, and the thrill of meeting new people from all walks of life. One could not have then thought, that despite the ups-and-downs, one year would pass so quickly, providing us vivid memories to cherish forever in the process. Add to that the company of such wonderful people, who have become more than just 'colleagues'.

As we enter the last leg of training at the Academy, I would like to look back at some of my experiences here and share them with you – my audience – with the disclaimer that views expressed are personal and don't intend to cause hurt to any person.

Games & Tours – the best part of training:

Yes, you heard it right! Games and thematic tours are undoubtedly the best part of training as an IFS officer. These two components are what set our training apart from other civil services, with our visits to the remotest corners of our country becoming a subject of envy for our fellow counterparts in the other services. One can surely appreciate the transformation that we OTs have undergone during the course of the year, from disliking morning PT and evening games at the start, to embracing the 'taxing' physical routine and preferring to play games over lectures. So much so that most of us are actually disappointed on days when games is cancelled due to some unscheduled interaction or programme!

And thematic tours, which are such an indispensable part of the training of an IFS officer,

are what make the sixteen-and-a-half month long training such a fun experience for each one of us. Be it trekking in the Great Himalayan National Park & Singalila National Park or snorkelling in the Indian Ocean to view beautiful coral reefs or waking up at 5 in the morning just to view the majestic Jog Falls, the thematic tours provide us OTs unique opportunities to explore areas and perform activities which we as individuals might not have ever thought of doing. And for this, I couldn't be more grateful to our Course Director for having the vision to facilitate such vivid experiences. Having said that, one cannot help but feel that the upcoming batches would be unfortunate because they would be having only three thematic tours compared to four for us, with the new IFS (Training) Rules coming into effect.



The hot streak of the 54th RR football team:

The 54th RR football team began its campaign as a band of football enthusiasts during the Fit India Games in January 2023. We began with a win on penalties against the 53rd RR football team. After that, we faced a couple of setbacks against the football teams of *Kendriya Vidyalaya*, IMA and Wildlife Institute of India (WII). However, the setbacks proved to be a boon rather than a bane as they pushed us to get our act together; the result being that we have been unbeaten ever since. We subsequently defeated two batches of MCT IFS officers and avenged our defeat to WII by beating them 2-1, playing a combined team of IFS and CASFOS OTs. We also defeated the IAS and IPS 2022 batch OTs by margin of 2-0 each enroute to the unbeaten streak. Personally, the win against the IPS OTs was most satisfying as they are known for their fitness and the match was much more than what the scoreline suggests. And as I write this article, we've just defeated the

55th RR football team as well with a scoreline of 3-1.

In hindsight, I have realised that being part of the football team is more than just playing the game; the game acts as a medium for bonding with your teammates, making each moment a fun-filled and memorable experience. I take immense pride in the fact that our football team has gained much success vis-à-vis other sports such as cricket and volleyball, earning us laurels in the process.

As we enter into our last four months of training at IGNFA, with the coming of the 55th RR, we realize that we have to now take a step back, so that sportsmen from the new batch get similar opportunities to represent our Academy just as we did. In doing so, we pass on the baton with the hope that the 55th RR carries not only the legacy of our football team but goes a step further in dominating across all the sports, portraying high levels of fitness, skill and bonhomie in the process.



WEST INDIA TOUR

-Abhinav Raj

This was our second thematic tour. We covered a large expanse of the country from Goa to Agra within short span of 3 weeks. The tour entailed long bus travel on most days. But the beautiful landscapes, forests and historical places took away the exhaustion of daily travel and bag packing and we were all ready to visit all popular locations in all of the places we visited.

Goa: The Pearl of the Orient

The first stop on our tour was the beautiful state of Goa, popular for its beaches and as holiday destination. Our tour was more oriented towards forestry and the state has a lot to offer in this realm too. We visited Mollem and Bhagvaan Mahaveer National Parks. They have dense evergreen forests and have developed tourist spots such as Butterfly Park, herbal garden, spice garden and nature trail. We visited Salim Ali Bird sanctuary which has mangroves and houses a great variety of birds and fish. No tour of Goa is complete without its beaches. We explored Miramar beach, which has received 'Blue Flag Certification'. Finally, we had an amazing cruise ride on the Mandovi river.



Mumbai: The Business Capital with Forest in its Heart

Mumbai was the new addition to the usual West India tour itinerary. The bustling city has 103 sq. km Sanjay Gandhi National Park at its centre- rightly called the 'Lungs of the City'. The park has good population of leopard and deer species. It receives a lot of tourists who come to visit Kanheri Caves- a World Heritage site and the Gandhi Memorial in addition to jungle safari. We visited Thane Creek Flamingo sanctuary which receives migratory birds in winter. Byculla zoo's penguins were the centre of attraction. The naturalistic and immersion exhibits developed here a model for other zoos in the country.

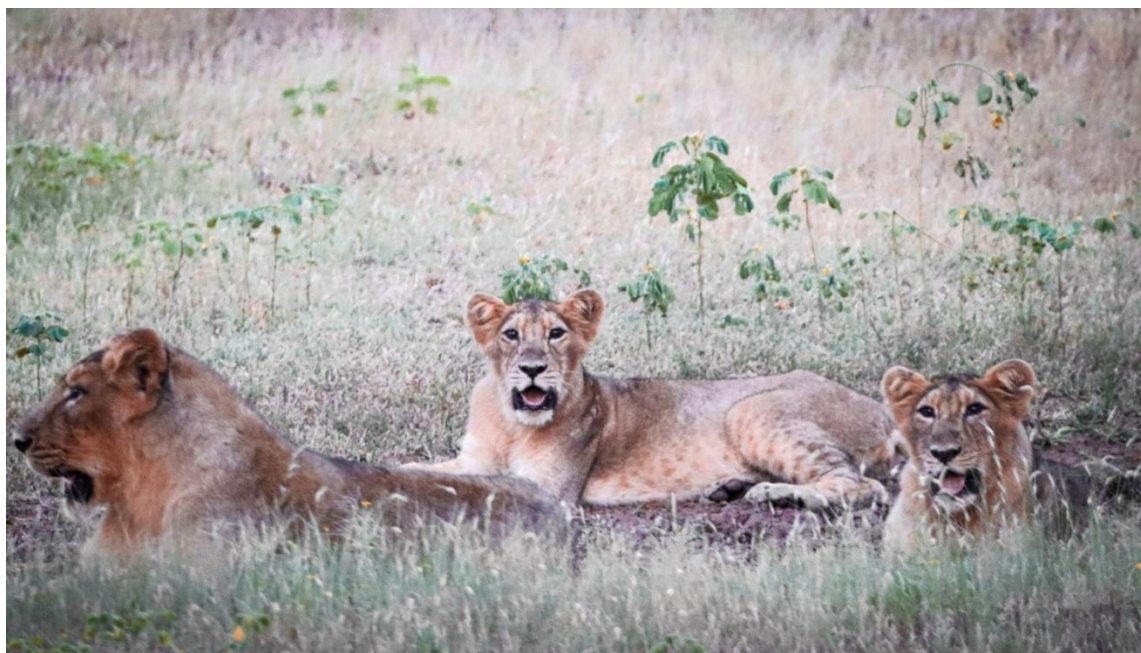


Gujarat: The Land of Legends and Lions

The Gujarat leg of tour started with visit of Reliance refinery at Jamnagar. Apart from being world's largest petroleum refinery, it has the largest mango tree plantation in the world with 1.5 lakh trees. The next visit was to Marine National Park. The inter-tidal distance here is more than 2 kilometres. It is one of the rare sites where one can see marine creatures on foot. We spotted oyster, octopus, crab, sponge, urchin, sea cucumber, etc.

The biggest attraction of the state is the Gir

National Park- the only land of Asiatic lions. As a result of excellent forest management, the population of lions has increased to 674, spread over 9 districts. We saw a pride of majestic lions during evening safari. We also learnt about the management practices of the park which included Lion hospital and rescue centre, *banni* grassland improvement, animal tracking and research. This part of the tour ended with interaction with senior forest department officials at Ahmedabad and learning urban forestry techniques such as *Miyawaki* and *Punit* van.



Rajasthan: The Colourful State

Rajasthan is sometimes mistaken for having only desert landscape. This myth was busted with visit to the Udaipur- the city of lakes. The city has dense forest and beautiful Pichola and Fateh Sagar lakes. We visited the magnificent City Palace and Sajjangarh Monsoon Palace, which is located on Bansdara peak of Aravalli hills and provides a breath-taking view of the city. On way to Jodhpur, we visited the Kumbhalgarh Fort. It is one of the largest forts and an example of secure fortification. We learnt about various research

activities conducted at Arid Forest Research Institute, Jodhpur. Our next stop was Jaisalmer- the Golden city. We visited the Desert National Park, which has distinct desert landscape and the only place where Great Indian Bustard is found in wild. The visit to Sambhar Lake and safari at Jhalana Leopard Reserve were equally memorable. The tour provided a glimpse into forestry, history and culture of the state. There would hardly be a person who visits Rajasthan and returns without purchasing traditional handicraft, clothes and artefacts from the state.



Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh

In MP, we visited Chambal sanctuary, which has the largest population of the critically endangered *gharial*. The high point was tour to Kuno National Park which is in news for cheetah reintroduction projects. Uttam Sharma sir explained nitty-gritty of the project and challenges involved in establishing sustainable

cheetah population. The last city on the itinerary was Agra where we visited Soor Sarovar and the Taj Mahal.

This tour covered large part of India and exposed us to diverse landscapes and cultures. Overall it was a great learning and enjoyable experience. We started waiting for the next tour eagerly.



SOUTH INDIA TOUR: EASTERN REGION

-Md. Abdul Rawoof

Our group visited the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The other group of our batch covered the Western Ghats. Our tour covered diverse landscapes ranging from Western Ghats and Shola grasslands to coasts and plains. A significant highlight of the tour was that we travelled in electric bus, which is environment-friendly and in line with the goals of LIFE mission.

KARNATAKA

Visit to Bannerghatta Biological Park

We visited the Bannerghatta Biological Park in Bengaluru. Shri Vishal Patil ACF and his team accompanied us during the two parts of the visit - the Butterfly Park and the Safari. The Butterfly Park is spread over 7.5 acres, which comprises of a butterfly garden, a conservatory dome made of transparent polycarbonate sheets, captive breeding lab and museum. The park is reported to have 48 butterfly species in various seasons. Then we went for bus safari. The zoo safari has six sections: herbivore section with gaur and 6 types of deer, sections for elephant, sloth bear, lion, tiger and an under-construction section for leopard. We were also briefed on conservation practices, tourist education, revenue model, visitor management and media management.



Visit to Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary

We visited the Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary, which is the only Ramsar site in Karnataka. The wetland was formed by damming the Kaveri River. Shri Basavaraj (IFS) spoke about the history of the sanctuary and its importance. He also highlighted the various species of birds that can be found in the sanctuary, the need for protection of the islands from flooding and erosion, as well as the efforts being made to protect them. After the briefing, we went on a boat ride. We were surrounded by birds of all shapes and sizes, from the majestic painted stork to the tiny kingfisher. A wide variety of bird species that can be spotted in the sanctuary include Spot-billed pelican, Black-headed ibis, Great egret, Little cormorant, Indian pond heron, etc. A distinctive feature of the sanctuary was the frequent spotting of mugger crocodiles. It is one of the most important breeding grounds for this species.



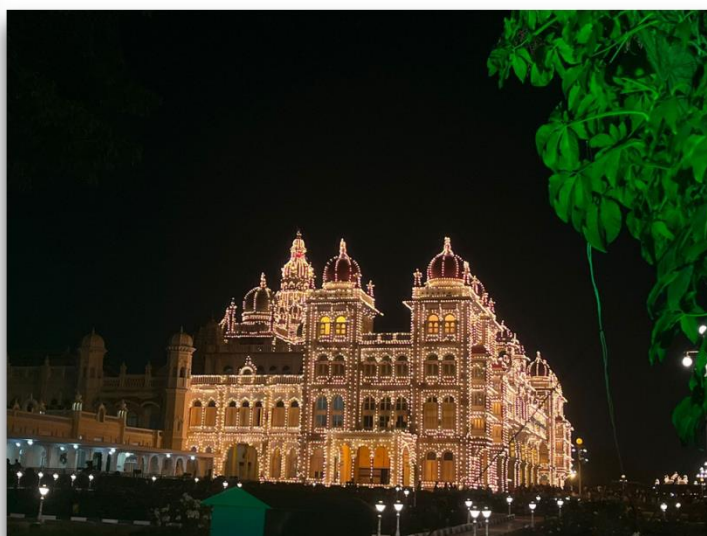
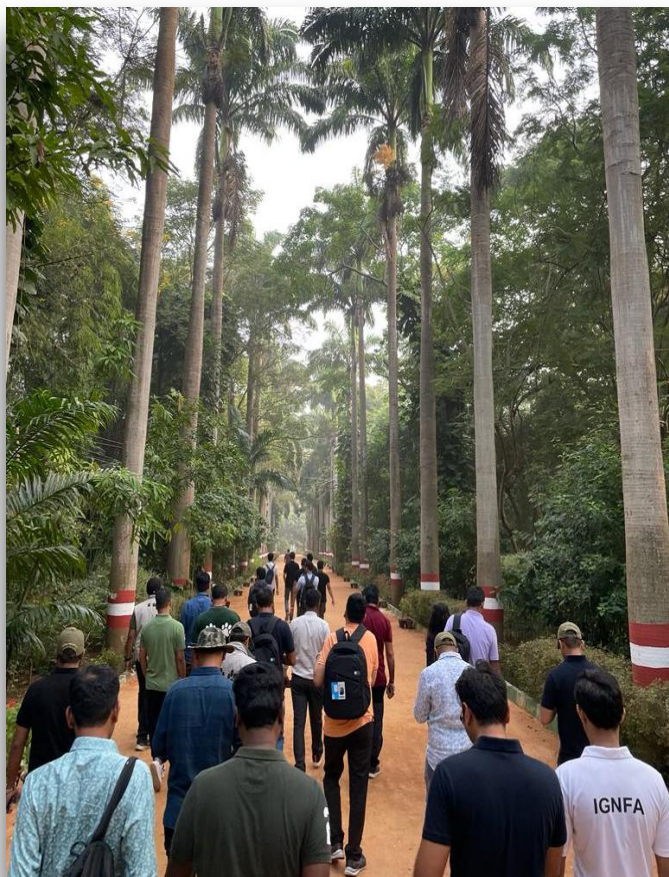
Visit to Mysuru Zoo

We visited the Karanji Nature Park and Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens in Mysuru. The visit started with a briefing by Shri Manjunath, RFO about the zoo, its maintenance and revenue activities including boating and

fishing. We then visited the zoo where we saw immersion exhibits in naturalistic landscape. We were given a presentation by Shri Mahesh Kumar (IFS), Executive Director, about the management, conservation breeding, various species and their population, finances, waste management, Rescue & Rehabilitation Centre, animal transfer procedure and upcoming projects. This zoo is considered one of the best managed zoos in India.

Vijayadashami Procession

We attended the grand *Vijayadashami* procession at the Mysuru Palace. The procession attracts visitors from all over the world. Colourful tableaux, dance groups, music bands, decorated elephants, horses and camels form a part of the procession which starts from the Mysore Palace and culminates at a place called Bannimantap where the *banni* tree (*Prosopis spicigera*) is worshipped.



Visit to Bandipur Tiger Reserve

Next, we visited the Bandipur Tiger Reserve. The day started with morning safari from JLR Bandipur. We witnessed the rich flora and fauna of the landscape. After this, we went to the site visit to study solar tentacle fencing, followed by Rampura Elephant camp where we were briefed about capture and training of conflict animals. In evening, there was an interaction with the Field Director Shri Ramesh Kumar (IFS), who gave a holistic briefing on the park management including the protection, conservation and tourism aspects. We went on night patrolling, which was a unique experience.



TAMIL NADU

Visit to Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

The day started at the Thepakadu Elephant Camp with briefing by the department officials. Ms Vidhya C. (IFS), DD Core MTR, gave a presentation on various protection measures being undertaken in MTR vis-a-vis Bandipur and explained different aspects of captive elephant management, ecotourism, and habitat management. We went on safari and site visits to see invasive species removal work, real time monitoring system set up, Imberhallah APC and Ombetta APC.



Trek in Mukurthi National Park

We trekked in the Mukurthi National Park amidst the unique Shola grasslands. It was a 12 km route which started from the Avalance forest rest house and ended at the Bangihallah earthen dam. On reaching Kolaribetta, the highest point of the park and the second highest peak in the Nilgiris hills, we sighted a herd of over 30 Nilgiri tahrs, the keystone species of this ecosystem. We also sighted other herbivores like gaur and sambar on the trek.



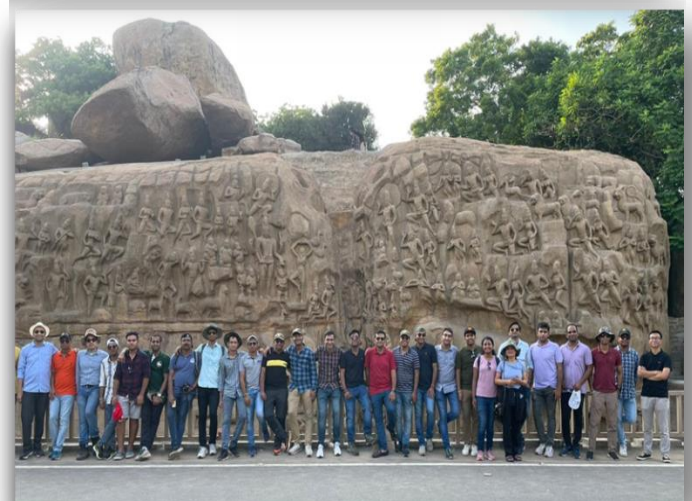
Visit to TANTEA HQ, Coonoor



Visit to Chennai Airport and Mahabalipuram

We had interaction with Shri Saiprakash Baddi (IRS), Addl. Commissioner and Shri Saravanan (IRS), Deputy Commissioner from the Airport Customs and Shri Kirubashankar (IFS) from WCCB. We were briefed about the working of Customs department and coordination of the authorities for wildlife crime control. Later, we visited Madras Crocodile Bank where we were explained about conservation education, research and captive breeding of reptiles and amphibians. We also attended snake display and vermin extraction session conducted by the Irula Cooperative Society. Finally we went for sightseeing to Mahabalipuram, where we visited the Shore Temple and other cultural heritage of the place.

At Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation (TANTEA) headquarter in Coonoor, we interacted with the General Manager Ashok Kumar IFS, who briefed us about the administration, financial status and human resource management of the corporation. Thereafter, we visited TANTEA's tea plantations and its Tiger Hill Tea Factory, where we witnessed the entire tea production chain, right from plucking to packaging. We returned from Coonoor to Coimbatore via the Nilgiri Mountain Railway Line steam locomotive, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Call on Tamil Nadu PCCF (HoFF) and Vandalur Zoo Visit

We called on the Tamil Nadu PCCF (HoFF) Shri Subrat Mohapatra. We were given an overview of Tamil Nadu Forests and Wildlife, followed by interaction with senior officers on the role, challenges and the future plans of the department. Finally, we visited the Arignar Anna Zoological Park (AAZP) in Vandalur. We were briefed about the management aspects of the zoo which make it the best rated zoo in the country as per the Ministry's MEE ranking. A special emphasis was given on the Human Resource management and veterinary aspects.



ANDHRA PRADESH

Tirumala Darshan, Interaction with Forest Department Officials of Tirupati Circle and Central Red Sanders Depot visit

We did 'Darshanam' of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala. We travelled from Tirupati to Tirumala and back via the electric buses of APSRTC in line with the spirit of Mission LiFE. After this, we proceeded to the Sri Venkateswara Zoological Park where we had an interaction with the CCF Tirupati Shri Nageswara Rao and other officials present. This was followed by a visit to the Red Sanders plantation of TTD which was done in lieu of the diverted land in Tirumala forests for social infrastructure like drinking water. Finally, we visited the state-of-the-art Central Red Sanders Depot.



Visit to Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary

Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary is an estuary situated near Kakinada. It is the third largest stretch of mangrove forests in India. It is home to the critically endangered white-backed vulture and the long billed vulture. At Coringa, we did the boardwalk which is over 3 km in length to experience the dense vegetation and unique physiognomy of the mangroves. Then, we all went on a boat ride to witness the pristine beauty of this forest and its wildlife.



Visit to Borra Caves, APDFC Coffee Plantation & Processing Unit, Coffee Museum

We visited the Borra Caves located in the Ananthagiri hills of the Alluri Sithaama Raju district of Andhra Pradesh. These limestone caves are an excellent example of Karst topography, showcasing stalactites and stalagmites. They have been leased by the AP Forest Department to the AP Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) for operation and maintenance. This was followed by a visit to the coffee plantation being managed by the AP Forest Development Corporation (APFDC) and the primary processing unit of coffee seeds that are harvested from



these plantations. Finally, we visited the Coffee Museum in Araku Valley which exhibits the history of coffee in India and also showcases various types of Araku coffee for sale.

Trek In Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre Project, Coastal Shelterbelt, Vizag Zoo an AP Innovation Society

We did a 3 km in the Kamabalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary situated in the heart of Vizag city, where we got mesmerising view of the Eastern Ghats. This was followed by briefing by DFO Visakhapatnam, Shri Anant Shankar about the management of the sanctuary and associated challenges. After this, we visited the coastal shelter belt plantations raised by the forest department in Rushikonda beach for protection against cyclones as well as to protect from encroachment of the land. This was followed by a visit to the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park, where zoo curator Smt. Nandani Salaria (IFS) explained the management and best practices of this large zoo. WE also learnt about the conservation breeding programme of the wild dog, Dhole, being done in the zoo. Lastly, we visited the AP Innovation Society (APIS) situated in Startup Village in Vizag. Here, we got an exposure to the latest technologies developed by two startups, namely Geo Climate Risk Solution (GCRS) and Antar IOT. They demonstrated software like 'Lake Management System' (LAMAS) for wetland health assessment and management and 'Carbon Exchange' for forest biomass estimation using GIS.



Overall, the tour was an amazing touring and learning experience. We eagerly started waiting for our last thematic tour- the East India tour.

BECOMING HOMELESS IN ONE'S HOME: A TALE OF INDIAN VULTURES IN PANNA

- Pavan Khade

Congratulations humanity! We've heard that you are advancing to the second phase of clearances for the river interlinking project, diverting my homeland. It's encouraging to see progress towards addressing the pressing water scarcity issues in the Bundelkhand region.

As a native vulture species, should I even be concerned about the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project? Does it matter if I become homeless or vanish permanently from Panna Tiger Reserve? Does your conservation policy aim to protect me and my habitat? These questions persistently echo in my mind. Observing the houses of my relatives and neighbours charges me emotionally. Witnessing groups of vultures bathing and basking after their lunch, I feel that this joy is fleeting.

But why must we endure this agony? My attention shifts to the social dynamics of human beings, contemplating whether social hierarchies, akin to those among humans, also exist in wildlife. This leads me to believe that I may be the bird from a lower caste, an untouchable. Who else would undertake the seemingly insignificant scavenging work if not untouchables like me? Many label me as abominable, hideous, an ugly bird undeserving of attention. Hence, the clamour for charismatic, beautiful animals like tigers, leopards, and cheetahs dominates discussions. Perhaps they occupy the upper echelons of the wildlife hierarchy. How else can I reconcile the fact that a foreign cheetah received ₹500 crore for reintroduction while natives like me are entirely disregarded in your development projects?

This must be the feeling of the Indian vulture nesting in the escarpment at the Sakru range of Panna Tiger Reserve. Admittedly, our conservation and management practices lean towards big mammals with well-celebrated

projects for tiger, elephant, crocodile, etc. Despite their significant ecological roles, vultures seem to lack dedicated attention in our conservation efforts. Vultures play a pivotal role in maintaining forest hygiene by consuming dead animals and decaying carcasses, reducing greenhouse gas emissions during the process. Moreover, they serve as indicators of carnivore kills within the forest. Scientific studies establish their role in managing feral dog populations and preventing rabies transmission to wildlife.

Vultures hold a special place in our culture, as evident in the great epic Ramayana, where the vulture king *Jatayu* attempted to protect *Sita* from *Ravana's* abduction. The *Griddharaj Parvat* in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh is considered *Jatayu's* birthplace. Beyond Hinduism, vultures are significant in Parsi and Tibetan Buddhist communities. Tibetans believe that vultures take the remains of the body to the heavens, allowing the soul to be reincarnated. Similarly, Condors- a type of vulture native to South and North America, have prominently featured in artwork throughout the Andean region of South America. Presently, the condor holds the status of the national bird in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, earning a distinguished place on Chile's passport.

Consequently, vultures bear cultural significance in various parts of the world. Nevertheless, the declining vulture population in India and globally is a cause for concern. In India, the vulture population has witnessed a rapid decline, plummeting from around 40 million in the 1980s to approximately 20 thousand in 2017, according to estimates. Several factors contribute to this alarming decline, including the widespread use of *Diclofenac* as a veterinary drug, poisoning of cattle for retaliatory purposes, the construction of windmills and power transmission lines in

vulture-inhabited areas and the destruction of vulture nesting sites for developmental projects.

In response to these challenges, the government has implemented various initiatives to curb this decline. Notably, *Diclofenac* was banned for veterinary use as early as 2006. Upholding this prohibition, Chief Justice Banerjee of the Madras High Court emphasized the universal recognition of vultures as natural sanitary workers

crucial for environmental and ecological balance. Consequently, the preservation of the vulture population is deemed non-negotiable. Furthermore, India's Vulture Conservation Action Plan for 2020-25 gives detailed guidelines for

comprehensive vulture conservation. The establishment of eight dedicated vulture breeding centres underscores a concerted effort to systematically revive the vulture population.



Yet, after visiting vulture nesting site at Panna, I am convinced that our traditional conservation model requires a paradigm shift. While conserving top predators is vital, it should not overshadow the importance of other species. Each species in the environment plays a unique

ecological role, and every link in the chain is indispensable. Therefore, we must address the grievances of vultures before they face homelessness in their own home at Panna Tiger Reserve.

सुख-दुःखाश्च -सचिनलांडे

निरागसनिखळ पवित्र हास्य ते कोमल
तेजोमणींचे जणू कोंदणच अनमोल ।
तरि अपरिचितास मात्र संपूर्ण अनभिज्ञ
हास्यामागील मनाचे अवशेष ते भग्न ॥

शालीन, सोज्ज्वळ, सुरेख, रूप ते पावक
चैतन्याची जणू अन्सरिता स्फूर्तिदायक ।
सरितेत परित्या अश्रूंचे थेंब दोन कातर
दुःखही पांघरते आनंदाची खोटी ही चादर ॥

द्वंद्व जुंपलेले आता हे विचारांचे विचारांशी
होईना तडजोड येथे भविष्याची भूताशी ।
उगा म्हणून गमावले बलपण ते उनाड

निरागस अन्निखळ, जीवनातील ती धमाल ॥

अपरिचित खेळ हे भावनांचे तूखेळ लास का,
दुर्दम्य इच्छाशक्तीवर नैराश्याची जीत का ।
देव नाही तर सखा मानला मी परमात्मा
तरी दुःखी कष्टी होऊन झुरतो का हा आत्मा ॥

नाही कळत पामराला या लीला थोर तुझ्या
कसा जाऊ सामोरा त्या बालरूपास माझ्या ।
कवटाळलेले एकच स्वप्न मी माझ्या उराशी
होईन एकरूप पुन्हा पवित्र या जन्मभूमी ॥

A FORESTER'S EVENING

- Apoorv Dixit

You are in the field the entire day. Travelling through the lush green forest of the Western Ghats, you are shown seed production area, teak beds, timber depot, etc. (as part of the training). You walk through the undulating moist trails within teak forest- sometimes several kilometres. You take lunch at an Inspection Bungalow right on the banks of river Kali. There is no time to rest as you proceed to an interaction with CF sir who along with DCF sir and the entire range staff give inputs about the Forest and wildlife of the area. It lasts for about 2 hours. It's 4 o'clock. At this point your body is tired from the physical toil which started early in the day and mind is tired from the lecture post lunch.

Then, when you want the day to end, you are taken to this place. This view you see in the picture, is the view in front of a Forest Rest house. Just one view is all it takes for all your tiredness to vanish. Your tea is ready- *pakodas* and biscuits to go along with it. As you grab your chair to sit and sip your tea admiring the view, you wonder, how on earth this place exists.

This forest rest house is tucked in the corner of dense forest overlooking this vast water body. It's

slightly on a higher pedestal compared to the ground, which gives the vantage point view to this beautiful scenery in front. The view you see is of Kali backwaters. The rest house has a huge portico where you can sit and enjoy your tea. There is no signal on phone. The quietness is loud. The peace louder. As the sun sets, you listen the sounds of the flowing water as music.

You don't realize how quickly time passes in such places. You have your batch mates as company. You chit-chat in the evening, with snacks and nature to go along. The staff serves you sumptuous 4-course dinner.

Post dinner, you came out of the rest house in the open area overlooking the backwaters, waiting for others to finish their dinner. A cool breeze gushes past your face. Stars gleaming; moon staring. You glance back. And in that moment, you realize how privileged you are to have experienced this evening.

And this is a typical 'Foresters Evening'. Field work during the day. Quiet, enchanting evenings. Peaceful night sleeps. A wholesome life.



TOUR DE THRILLS: AN UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE SAGA

-Goldy

My friends have already documented the academic aspects of our tours and attachments. I shall explore the non-academic moments and stories from these experiences.

In the enchanting setting of the **Tadoba** Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, a magical moment unfolded during our introductory tour. There, amidst the lush surroundings, our Course Director along with many of us, sighted tiger in wild for the first time! It was none other than Maya, the regal queen of Tadoba, as she engaged in romance with tiger Rudra. Though Maya is no more, the memory of that first sighting remains etched in our hearts.

In the **Hill tour**, some of our companions grappled with motion sickness as we traversed the majestic landscapes of the Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. Yet, when we were elated by the snowfall, pure joy enveloped us all.

Amidst the **Yumthang valley**, Prabhanjan surrendered to an irresistible urge, ascending a local elevated surface leading to ridge with unbridled enthusiasm. Only due to time constraint did he step back from the top.

In the **Fambonglho Wildlife Sanctuary**, our journey unfolded through a captivating trek. Time constraints compelled handful of us to quicken our pace, ascending to the summit of the trek, the majestic Tinjurey Peak. Amidst the dense vegetation and along the picturesque route, we captured moments frozen in fun at the pinnacle.

Eaglenest wildlife sanctuary revealed its unique charm as the sanctuary served as the exclusive habitat for the *Bugun liocichla*, a new bird species discovered to the world in 2006. This discovery turned the sanctuary into a magnet for bird enthusiasts, drawing them from across the nation and beyond. The Forest Department, spurred by this ornithological endemism, envisioned a

paradigm of high-income, low-impact tourism to safeguard the sanctuary's natural wonders.

At **Lachung**, our post-dinner stroll became a quest for the local elixir, *Chaang*. A small local shop, tended by hospitable mountain people, beckoned us into a homely haven. In the homely shop, friends with a taste for local delights were treated with the warmth of *Chaang*, the millet beer that mirrored the spirit of the mountains. For tetotallers, the ever-present cold drink stood as a refreshing alternative.

At the **Hasimara** air base, the experience of witnessing Rafales nestled within the hangars, surrounded by the web of laboratories and workshops, was an amazing experience. The sheer awe inspired by these fighter jets gracefully taking off from Hasimara airbase was a cheerful spectacle.

Sandakphu trek in West Bengal unfolded against a backdrop of rainy weather. Some of us opted for the trek on foot instead of traveling in vehicles. The relentless rain prompted the unveiling of raincoats. Vikas Yadav and I chose the less-travelled path—a rustic trail branching off the main road. These *kaccha* roads, adorned with the forest vegetation are used to shorten the distance travelled. Engulfed in the foliage, mobile network was non-existent, and thoughts of encountering a bear, echoed in our minds. With due alertness, we navigated the forest paths. We emerged from the forest, stumbling upon a local tea shop where our friends had gathered, immersed in conversations. Locals used emptied bottles of Old Monk to fill masalas and kitchen essentials. Amidst laughter and warmth, we indulged in hot tea, exchanging our cash for Nepalese currency as a souvenir. Our journey continued, leading us to a village nestled on the Nepal side

In **Kurseong**, our Forest Mensuration exercise unfolded amidst the *Cryptomaria japonica* trees.

Kurseong is renowned for its haunted locales and historic churches. DFO sir not only imparted knowledge but also captivated our attention with tales of his haunted house. His narratives, shared with unwavering enthusiasm, walked the fine line between reality and made-up story. Whether true or not, the stories cast an eerie spell upon those who embraced their authenticity and added a touch of amusement for those who admired sir's masterful storytelling prowess.

West India tour became the catalyst for crafting our intimate music ensemble. Despite our collective lack of instrumental prowess, we curated a unique assortment: *damru* from Somnath, a pair of entertaining (or irksome, depending on perspective) *bhopus* from Jamnagar, and a mouthorgan. Bus journeys transformed into joyous escapades, as impromptu singing and dancing became our cherished pastime.

In the history of West Thematic Tours, **Goa** made its inaugural appearance. The itinerary featured a cruise ride to 'coastal ecosystem'. Amidst beers and shots for the enthusiasts, teetotalers found solace in a modest cup of cold drink. In consideration of teetotalers, the arrangement was less ideal. Beneath the surface of famed beaches, the tagline 'Goa beyond the beaches' materialized. Venturing on a scooty ride, we delved into the less-traveled expanses of Vagator, discovering its tranquil charm, and navigated the lively shores of Baga Beach, absorbing the dynamic landscape that defines Goa beyond its iconic beaches.

Transitioning from the dry state of Gujarat to vibrant **Rajasthan** added a special note to our adventure. The first stop at the state border marked a moment, as jubilant souls indulged in acquiring *somras* to elevate their spirits and create an unforgettable entry into the royal realm of Rajasthan.

In **Jaisalmer**, Our journey led us on a thrilling bike expedition to the revered *Tanot Mata* Temple,

which gained prominence in the aftermath of the Indo-Pak war. As the Pakistan army launched bombshells, not a single explosion occurred. After the event, every evening, the resonant echoes of *Aarti* is performed by Indian Army *Jawans* with unwavering enthusiasm.

During our NEERI attachment, our sojourn at the **National Academy of Direct Taxes (NADT)** for a week was nothing short of adventure. Amidst the intellectual discourse, a few officer trainees seized the thrill of leaping from a lofty 5-meter platform into the waters of the swimming pool. Mohammad Abdul Rauf, Tarun, and I, accompanied by NADT friends, embraced the exhilaration of a morning run during their Cross Country event.

Our visit to **Mysuru** coincided with the vibrant *Dussehra* festivities. The city, teeming with a lively crowd, was transformed into a bustling fairground. The eagerness to witness the majestic elephant *karvaan* was quite high, with spectators standing up from their seats for a glimpse. We got mostly general tickets for *Dussehra*. It allowed us to enjoy a few intriguing episodes of a web series when enthusiastic people ahead of us kept blocking our view. In the midst of the festivity, navigating the vicinity of Mysuru Palace was an adventure in itself—walking proved to be a swifter mode of travel than vehicles. Amidst the energy of *Dussehra*, the city pulsed with enthusiasm and charm.

Embarking on a *golgappa* quest in **Visakhapatnam**, Dhanraj and I strolled on the expansive stretch of RK Beach, eagerly anticipating the tasty delight. Surprisingly, the elusive *golgappa* stand remained elusive, leaving a void in the vibrant street food scene. However, as we retraced our steps from the fascinating INS Kursura submarine museum, a glimmer of hope emerged – a lone *pani puri* stand nestled along a side road. In that moment, Visakhapatnam seemed poised to reclaim its street food glory.



WILDLIFE EXERCISE: BEST CAMERA TRAP IMAGES



एकान्त

शैलेश माचरा

बैठा हूँ मैं यहीं एकांत में ।
भीड़ में भी अकेला अजनबी इस प्रांत में ॥

जो अपने थे वो रूठ गए ।
जो रिश्ते थे वो छूट गए ।
जो वादे थे वो टूट गए ।
जो पालक थे वो लूट गए ॥

कसर कुछ बची नहीं लेकिन
बैठा हूँ अपने अभिमान में ।
आँसू का समंदर लेके
बैठा हूँ रेगिस्तान में ॥

जो बोझ है मेरे दिल पे
काश वो उतर गया होता ।
जो अबोध है है मेरे तेरे बीच में
काश वो बिखर गया होता ॥

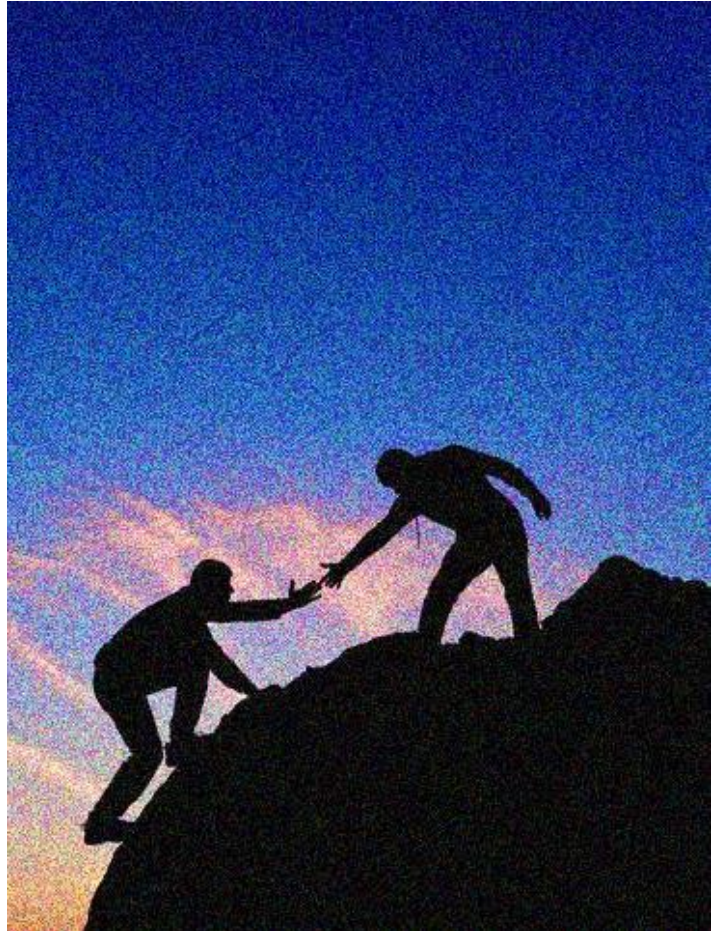
टूटा तारा

विकास शर्मा

टूटा एक तारा, रोता है क्यों?
तारा ही है, जन्नत नहीं...
थाम ले हाथ मेरा तू भी,
संग चलेंगे, मंजिल को...
ले आर्येंगे पास अभी...
टूटा एक तारा, रोता है...१

सपने हैं तो...बुनना ही है,
बनते बिगड़ते, यही है तकदीर,
ख्वाबों में ही तो तुझको है जीना,
ऐसा ना सोचे तो जीवन भला,
टूटा एक तारा, रोता है..२

झुकी मीनार, नींव का पत्थर रहा वजूद में,
इमारत को बन के एक दफा गिरना ही है,
तुझको है केवल चलते ही जाना,
बस यही सोच तू रख सदा...
टूटा एक तारा, रोता है..३



PICTURE PERFECT BIRDS

-Prashant Baviskar



Common crow butterfly



Indian roller



Verditer flycatcher



Rufous babbler



Greater racket-tailed drongo



White-crested Laughingthrush

FOND MEMORIES







SKETCHES BY SACHIN LANDE



“WHAT AI THINKS - AN ACADEMY SONG FOR IGNFA” GENERATED BY GOOGLE BARD

-Concept by Rajiv Shankar

(AI has developed the capability to write stories, poems and songs. Our Academy does not have an Academy song. I am not a song writer. So, I decided to use AI tool to create an Academy song. This song is a testimony to the power of AI.)

हम हैं वनस्पति और जीवों के रक्षक,
हम हैं प्रकृति के संरक्षक,
हम हैं वन विभाग के कर्मवीर,
हम हैं राष्ट्रीय वन अकादमी के छात्र।

राष्ट्रीय वन अकादमी,
हमारा गौरव, हमारा सम्मान,
हमारा प्रेरणा स्रोत।

हमारे पास है ज्ञान और कौशल,
हमारे पास है समर्पण और साहस,
हमारे पास है देश सेवा का जज्बा,
हम हैं वन विभाग के भविष्य।

राष्ट्रीय वन अकादमी,
हमारा गौरव, हमारा सम्मान,

हमारा प्रेरणा स्रोत।

हम वनों की रक्षा करेंगे,
हम वन्यजीवों का संरक्षण करेंगे,
हम पर्यावरण को बचाएंगे,
हम देश को हरा-भरा बनाएंगे।

राष्ट्रीय वन अकादमी,
हमारा गौरव,
हमारा सम्मान,
हमारा प्रेरणा स्रोत।

हम हैं वन विभाग के कर्मवीर,
हम हैं राष्ट्रीय वन अकादमी के छात्र,
हम हैं प्रकृति के रक्षक,
हम हैं देश के भविष्य।



A Memorial to commemorate the foresters who laid down their lives to protect forests and wildlife