

People in Conservation

Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security



Volume 10 Issue 1 March – August 2021



Index

1. News and Information

- Nagaland Students setup mini hydropower plant, power highway street lights
- In Ahmadabad, women act to make slums climate-resilient, one house at a time
- Panchayat shows the way in waste management

2. Perspective

- Half-Earth or Whole-Earth? Green or transformative recovery? Where are the voices from the Global South?

3. Interview

- Regenerative Ethic for a Gender Just Transition with Ariel Salleh

4. Signs of Hope

- The duo who revolutionized the folk culture of Rajasthan

Special Issue on Alternatives

Opening word

We are a wounded civilization. Human suffering as a result of systemic exploitation, social oppression, corruption, patriarchy, war, endemic poverty, intolerance, religious fundamentalism, democracy deficit, climate crises etc is there for everyone to see. There is, as it were, a great tear, slowly rending apart the delicate fabric that holds the social and natural order together.

The earth is hurting. And so are its human and non-human inhabitants. The crisis is not only social but also ecological and spiritual. There is an urgent call to suture this rift that is tearing the world apart before it is too late. Before a total civilizational and ecological collapse envelops us all!

How can we think our way out of this imbroglio? Can the ancient sages show a path of happiness and wellbeing? How do we herald a new era of peace, justice and freedom? How can wisdom of ages and modern political thought be constructively engaged with to face the challenges of present and future? What role can creativity and art play in envisioning an ecological and spiritual civilization?

These are some of the questions in need of urgent answers.

Meanwhile all is not lost. There are many, working at individual, community and organization level, who are selflessly working towards not only suturing these wounds, but also so doing the healing, rehabilitation and restoration work required.

You will meet some of them in this issue of People in Conservation

- milind wani

1. News and Information

Nagaland Students setup mini hydropower plant, power highway street lights

By Yoshita Rao



Khuzama village in Nagaland is a little greener and more sustainable thanks to the efforts of its students who set up a mini hydropower plant.

Through the heart of Khuzama village in Kohima district, Nagaland runs the Asian Highway 2, which has street lamps that stand 7-foot tall. Its posts are painted with the motifs of the Angami tribe in colours of red, green, black, white, yellow and orange, among others. This was done to represent the “rich Angami tribe culture” that the village belongs to.

“There are 16 clans of Nagaland, and each has a unique language. So, we don’t understand one another,” laughs Keseto Thakro, a native of the village. But the lamps are a significant milestone for the Khuzama village for more reasons than one.

As the Coronavirus pandemic caused the world to go into lockdown, Keseto, who works as a technician in the mechanical department of NIT Chumukedima, returned to the village. Being a member of the Khuzama Students’ Care Union (KSCU), he began voluntarily teaching e-learning classes, as the schools were closed.

While one class was underway, Keseto chanced upon a unique idea. “The thought of installing a hydroger, a mini-hydro generator, struck me. I shared the idea with the Union, and everyone agreed. That’s why we came up with Project Brighter Khuzama,”

he tells The Better India, adding how the students’ initiative assembled the plant and hydro-powered the village in two months.

“The sole purpose of the project is not only to produce electricity and benefit from it but to educate the students and the community about green energy,” says the 31-year-old. Feeding two birds with one seed, Keseto adds, “To keep the machine running we now protect the forest, where our water source lies. And the students also learned the basic working principles of a hydroelectric power plant.”

In Ahmadabad, women act to make slums climate-resilient, one house at a time

By Kartik Chandramouli



Vishwas Nagar slums in the city of Ahmadabad, Gujarat. The urban poor are more vulnerable to rising climate change impacts such as heat stress and floods. Photo by Kartik Chandramouli

First published by The Better India

For more on this visit <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/nagland-students-micro-hydro-power/>

Ahmadabad experienced one of its worst heat waves in 2010 with 1,344 deaths, while 24,223 people lost their lives between 1992 and 2015 across India. In 2019, the country faced its longest heat wave in three decades, and the year concluded a decade of exceptional global heat and high-impact weather due to climate change.

As the population in urban centers becomes denser, climate change pressures such as heat waves, water scarcity, and floods could make the standard of living in cities fall drastically, especially for the poor.

Mahila Housing Sewa Trust (MHT), with its 25 years in the field empowering women from marginalized communities and resolving housing issues, pitched in to help slums adapt to the impacts of climate change. With approximately \$1.2 million support from the Global Resilience Partnership from 2015, they expanded their climate resilience program to reach 100 slums across eight Indian cities, one in Nepal and another in Bangladesh.

"We focus on four stresses that are prevalent in a majority of the slums – heat stress, floods, vector-borne diseases, and water scarcity," says Siraz Hirani, senior program manager at MHT.

Panchayat shows the way in waste management

By Karthik Madhavan



Workers in Kurudampalayam Panchayat engaged in preparing panchagavyam. Photo: M. Periasamy

First published by One Earth

For more on this visit <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/climate-resilient-houses-in-abad/>

R. Renuka Devi, R. Dhanalakshmi and G. Rajesh rush with whatever containers they could place their hands on to the cattle that urinates. They collect the urine to take it to a storage container that is half full.

Mr. Rajesh says that he needs the urine to prepare 'panchagavyam', a popular concoction used as pest repellent, toilet cleaner and a few other products.

Even as he is explaining, Ms. Dhanalakshmi exchanges the container for two small, handy tiles to collect cow dung. That is stored in plastic drums and then taken to the nearby biogas generation plant at the Kurudampalayam Panchayat.

The local body, which is on the city's outskirts, is experimenting on a novel resource management system involving solid and liquid waste, says Tha. Murugan, Project Director, District Rural Development Agency, Coimbatore. The agency is helping the panchayat with financial and technical assistance.



2. Perspectives

Half-Earth or Whole-Earth? Green or transformative recovery? Where are the voices from the Global South?

Ashish Kothari

A debate is swirling around various bold proposals to protect biodiversity. One of these proposals arose in part from E.O. Wilson's (2016) book *Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*. The essence of the idea is summarized by the Half-Earth Project (2021), which '...is working to conserve half the land and sea to safeguard the bulk of biodiversity, including ourselves'. Critics have argued the idea is fraught with implications for human rights, likely to be ineffective in achieving its objective, and that—contrary to the proposal—transformations in economic activity across the Earth are needed to bring us within ecological limits (Büscher et al., 2017; see also Büscher et al., 2017; Cafaro et al., 2017).

In parallel to this and related ideas (e.g. CBD, 2020), new approaches to development in a post COVID-19 world are being proposed, some of which are attracting mainstream attention. The so-called nature-based solutionism is fast becoming a buzzword. Its basic tenets, of acting in accordance with the principles and flows of nature, with sustainable management and use of nature for tackling socio-environmental challenges, are unexceptionable. But this approach has also been criticized for ignoring the power and rights dimensions of such solutions, and for lending itself to another kind of greenwash, in which corporations and governments continue their destructive activities while paying or pressurizing others to offset these (Global Forest Coalition, 2020a).

But what I find of greatest concern in all these proposals and approaches is their origin in the Global North. Most of the proponents, and even many of their critics, are based in institutions in northern or western countries, or in the rich and powerful sections of the south. Noticeably missing or weakly represented are voices from the Global South, including Indigenous people or other local communities who live amidst or use

the areas containing most biodiversity (<https://openlettertowaldronetal.wordpress.com>).

If conservationists of the Global North are serious about saving the Earth, and I would like to believe they are, then they need to listen carefully to people such as Nemonte Nenquimo of the Waorani Indigenous people in the Amazon ('This is my message to the western world—your civilization is killing life on Earth'; Nenquimo, 2020), and to those communities who have told the advocates of nature-based solutions that 'our nature is not your solution' (Global Forest Coalition, 2020b). Global networks comprising Indigenous peoples and local community organizations and civil society groups, such as the Indigenous Peoples' & Community Conserved Territories & Areas Consortium (www.iccaconsortium.org), and the Global Forest Coalition, have shown how community-led conservation approaches, especially if there is a supportive policy context such as recognition of tenure and the right of self-determination, can work. Evidence supports this (Bennett & Ramos, 2019; Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2020). The movement to recognize governance of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their territories of life has asserted that coexistence between humans and nature is not only possible, but best achieved under such governance or under equitable co-governance with formal conservation agencies. This movement seeks recognition and support from governments and international institutions, but not of the top-down or patronizing kind, and it seeks the cessation of exploitative, extractive economic activities not only in their territories, but everywhere.

In a certain sense, the Half-Earth protagonists are close to Indigenous visions in their entreaties for an ethical relationship with the Earth. But the commonality is somewhat superficial. Most Half-Earth protagonists live in conditions radically altered by modernization and industrialization: they cannot possibly imagine living one's whole life as an artisanal hunter, gatherer, fisher, farmer or forest-dweller whose livelihood, culture, entertainment, language, food, relationships, emotions, and much else is conditioned by everyday interactions with the natural world. As Nenquimo says:

It took us thousands of years to get to know the Amazon rainforest... My elders are my teachers. The forest is my teacher... I won't be able to teach you in this letter, either. But what I can say is that it has to do with thousands and thousands of years of love for this forest, for this place. Love in the deepest sense, as reverence. This forest has taught us how to walk lightly, and because we have listened, learned and defended her, she has given us everything: water, clean air, nourishment, shelter, medicines, happiness, and meaning. And you are taking all this away, not just from us, but from everyone on the planet, and from future generations.

Even those of us in the south living in cities (I include myself) are unable to adequately fathom such a life. The non-duality that such communities thrive on is lost on those of us who think in terms of humans and nature, rather than in terms of humans and the rest of nature. This is not to say that people in industrialized societies are not able to transcend their constraints and return to a life within nature (nor that all in the Global South are paragons of co-existence!), but if the Part-Earth protagonists were of this ilk it is doubtful they would propose dividing the Earth into separate parts, one for nature, the other for humans. This duality is the biggest flaw in these approaches.

Rather, following the calls of Indigenous people and local communities, we have to imagine and struggle for an approach that strives for co-existence amongst all species, including humans. This means taking Nenquimo's message to its logical conclusion: a radical re-imagination of civilization itself, a systemic transformation towards a more just, sustainable, equitable world that does not base itself on the futile promise of economic growth and so-called development. Here, too, there are diverse ways of achieving and sustaining well-being (Kothari et al., 2019; Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, 2021).

The need for fundamental change has not escaped the attention of northern scholars. Sandbrook et al (in press) examined the likely political and economic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic,

and stressed the need for transformative economic reconstruction, noting that green recovery approaches will simply not be enough. But even they limit their horizon to approaches to degrowth emanating from the Global North, and do not mention the dozens of radical approaches emerging or resurfacing in the Global South. Some of us have recently laid out key principles for a new, post-growth approach to conservation (Fletcher et al., 2020): conviviality, diversity, decommodification, valuing the sacred in nature, decolonization, social justice, direct democracy, redistribution, subsidiarity, global interconnectedness, linking conservation and resistance, and redefining power. All of these come from listening closely, being involved with grassroots movements, but it is not an attempt to speak on behalf of these movements. They must be enabled to speak for themselves in both local and global debates on the future of conservation, or indeed the future of Earth.

The COVID-19 slap in humanity's face should make us realize it is not enough to set ambitious biodiversity targets, such as those set in 2001 and 2010, both largely missed. Such targets, and Part-Earth approaches, are not fit for purpose. Without fundamental change encompassing Whole-Earth, we are looking at a prospect of No-Earth. We are already being engulfed in a wave of post COVID-19 greenwash in the name of green recovery, and although so-called green new deals are head and shoulders above conventional development paradigms, they do not go far enough in challenging political and economic structures of unsustainability and inequality (Kolinjivadi & Kothari, 2020). A robust recovery must focus on revolutions of multiple hues, a rainbow approach that integrates conservation, livelihood security, democratic practice, and solidarity-based economies across entire landscapes and seascapes.

Before our further interference in nature results in the next pandemic, conservationists, from Indigenous peoples and local communities to scientists and civil society groups need to combine their expertise in an atmosphere of mutual respect and equitable collaboration. We have enough common ground (Sandbrook, 2019), but to succeed

we need the Global North to shed its remnant colonialism and to acknowledge the central role of the Global South, both in the specific arena of conservation and in the wider paradigms of planetary well-being.

Ashish Kothari-Kalpavriksh Environment Impact Group, Apartment 5, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411 004, India. E-mail ashishkothari@riseup.net

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3. Interview

Regenerative Ethic for a Gender Just Transition with Ariel Salleh

This interview, titled 'A Regenerative Ethic for a Gender Just Transition' with Ariel Salleh follows from the expert workshop IGD held in 2020 to discuss feminist approaches to a 'just transition'.

Somali Cerise, IGD Research to Practice Associate asks Ariel to share ecofeminist ideas on redefining the relationship between humans and the environment and what a different system of power and economic relationships might look like.

A just transition requires fundamentally rethinking the relationship between human beings and nature. This means we stop seeing the environment as there simply to serve human interests, and instead, view humans as just one part of the ecosystem. Can you elaborate on why we must move from the West's anthropocentric dualism of 'Humanity over Nature' to achieve a gender just transition?

A broad public understanding that the global economy is 'anthropocentric' is critical to the survival of Life on Earth. Crises like climate change, biodiversity loss, and the 2020 pandemic, are each outcomes of the dominant Eurocentric imaginary that positions Humanity over Nature. This dualist H/N assumption, derived from ancient Abrahamic religious cultures, was secularized by the European Enlightenment and scientific revolution. Modern science shifted from seeing nature as a living organism to a view of nature as a 'machine' that could be designed and improved by men. The dualist logic of Humanity over Nature also implied Subject over Object, Mental over Manual, Production over Reproduction, Man over Woman, and White over Black. This life-alienated patriarchal ideology is closely tied into Eurocentric masculinist identities and indispensable to capitalism. It is not only women who are conventionally treated as 'closer to nature than men', but indigenous peoples, and children. This subconscious hierarchy of capability, entitlement, and power infuses everyday talk and political decision-making.

Most governments and multilateral agencies are now taking the global environment crisis seriously – the Anthropocene conversation is a marker of that. Yet the very term Anthropocene is part of the problem, since like the mainstream international discourse, it too is anthropocentric. Academic disciplines, say economics or Western legal constructs, are premised on the super-ordination of Humanity over Nature. But the anthropocentric lens blurs the fact that the choices, decisions, and actions of subjected populations - most women and colonized peoples around the world - have not been responsible for damaging the planetary system. As an empirical fact, all humans are Nature; simply 'nature-in-embodied form'. People involved in the labor of nurturing young bodies or growing their own food, know this very well. So it was, that 5 decades ago, women opposing polluted urban neighborhoods in the global North or local deforestation in the global South, came to recognize the destructive arrogance of the dualist logic and its instrumental rationality. Working with natural processes means facilitating living metabolic transfers, so discovering complex skills and the need for a precautionary ethic (Salleh 2017). From this vantage point, social and ecological crises clearly reflect competitive attitudes, embedded in the sex-gendered political economy of international institutions.

The politics and theoretical literature of an Ecological Feminism developed from this insight. Ecofeminists also noted how in capitalist patriarchal societies, the resourcing and commodification of nature, occurred in parallel to the resourcing and commodification of their own generative reproductive bodies. The latter exploitation can be seen today in the existence of two parallel paradigms Public over Private: an individualistic monetized economy (ME), and a non-monetized relational economy (WE). The domestic WE economy materially maintains the ME economy, but is generally treated as a 'natural' activity

What does ecofeminism propose as an alternative to the dualism of 'Humanity over Nature'? What would be some positive examples that we can learn from?

Ecofeminist activism for Life on Earth responds to the interconnected injustices of neoliberalism, militarism, corporate capture of science, worker alienation, reproductive technologies, sex tourism, child molestation, neo-colonialism, extractivism, nuclear weapons, land and water grabs, deforestation, animal cruelty, genetic engineering, climate change, and the Eurocentric mythology of progress.

At its deepest level, ecofeminist thinking is an alternative epistemology, a way of knowing quite distinct from the capitalist patriarchal manipulation of people and nature. Yet it would be masculinist ideological nonsense to attribute women's political insights to some inborn 'feminine essence'. The source of ecofeminist judgments is neither biological embodiment nor cultural mores, although these will influence what is perceived. Rather, the source of an ecofeminist epistemology is labor, as people discover understandings and skills through intentional interactions with the material world. People like care givers, farmers, gatherers, are in touch with all their sensory capacities, so able to construct accurate and resonant models of how one-thing-joins-to-another.

The global majority of women as care givers have been historically positioned as labor right at the ontological margin where so called Humanity and Nature meet. Unlike factory or clerical workers, culturally diverse groupings of women oversee biological flows and sustain matter/energy exchanges in nature. In fact, the entire thermodynamic base of capitalism rests on material transactions mediated by the labor of this unspoken 'meta-industrial class'. Day by day, the global economic system is accruing a vast unacknowledged debt to these workers. In recent decades, women care givers in the global North and colonized communities in the South have come together in a political 'movement of movements' charged by the knowledge that emancipation and sustainability are interlocking goals. The unique rationality of their meta-industrial labor is a capacity for economic provisioning without externalities - that is to say, without passing on a social debt to others or forcing natural processes into degradation and entropy.

- In Ecuador, women have invented a concept of 'ecological debt' to describe the 500-year colonial theft of natural resources from their land; the ongoing modern theft of World Bank interest on development loans.
- In the USA, Code Pink activists work tirelessly for world peace; others focus on ending cruelty to animals.
- In Africa, women whose livelihoods are threatened by mining near their village homes have established a continental anti-extractivist network with its own ecofeminist manifesto on climate change presented to COP25 in Paris.
- In China, village women are refusing to use industrial fertilizers and pesticides, choosing to restore soil fertility by reviving centuries old organic technologies, then modeling communal food sovereignty.
- In India, they organize schools for eco-sufficiency and 'banks' traditional seeds to save them from biopiracy and corporate patenting by Big Pharma.
- In Australia, suburban housewives known as MADGE actively oppose genetically engineered foods.
- In France, young women and men are pioneering economic degrowth and rebuilding vibrant communities around permaculture.

What are the roles of different actors, for example governments and social movements, in achieving this shift?

At Rio+20 the business sector, politicians, World Bank, and UNEP stepped up with a Green New Deal proposition. This was later exposed as a public relations exercise for an emerging nanotech based bioeconomy. The capitalist patriarchal method of protecting Nature is to commodify 'ecosystem services', subsuming the living metabolic flows of forests, sunlight, or ground bacteria, under a pricing mechanism. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund and others advance a Green Economy built on free market ideology. But intellectually, decision

making by world leaders relies on a thoroughly confused vocabulary of 'financial capital', 'human capital', 'natural capital', and 'physical capital'.

Many well-meaning citizens in both global North and South believe technology transfer and digitization is necessary to achieve 'a just transition' to sustainability. The preferred and tacitly masculinist response to the crises of globalization is innovation. It is claimed that new technological efficiencies can de-materialize the amount of resources used by industry. However, automated production does not avoid displacing self-sufficient rural communities for mineral extraction, nor does it avoid heavy energy draw downs for manufacture. The said engineering 'optimization' of material throughput rarely factors-in all the relevant operational aspects of mining, smelting, manufacture, communications, transport, and waste disposal. When fully researched, 'ecological modernist' expectations of progress do not hold up.

UN agencies operating under the Eurocentric liberal political discourse sanitizes environmental, decolonial, or sex-gender matters by departmentalizing them as separate 'single issues'. This piecemeal problem solving policy inadvertently disguises existing, often intersectional, power relations because it stops people 'joining the dots'. For sure, micro loans are offered to poor Bangladeshi women, but this is hardly liberating. As long as thinkers at the UN are guided by liberalism, and people are processed through an anthropocentric divide and rule as 'stakeholders', progress towards 'a gender just transition' will be very slow. To paraphrase veteran Caribbean feminist Peggy Antrobus as she contrasted the Women's Beijing Plan of Action with the UN Millennium Development Goals: MDGs = Most Distracting Gimmicks! (Francisco and Antrobus 2009).

What would a different system of power and economic relationships look like?

The global economy already overshoots planetary capacities by 50% every year and the UN Sustainable Development Goals do not remedy that. Additionally, it is estimated by an anthropologist

at the LSE that it will take 207 years to eliminate poverty using the SDGs (Hickel 2015). Again, the World Bank and UN SDGs promote privatized management of water supply. But since markets can only increase the value of a commodity by making it scarce, this method of water protection is a contradiction in terms. Similarly, environmental solutions like carbon trading, geo-engineering or climate smart agriculture will not restore nature's life-support-systems once these are broken. For the small producers, landless rural women, indigenes, youth, and farm workers of the international peasant union Via Campesina, the Green Economy is just another structural adjustment program realigning national markets.

In response to imposts such as these, a global 'movement of movements' began to form after the 1999 Battle for Seattle against the World Trade Organization. This broad people's alliance held its first World Social Forum in 2001 - and two decades later, WSF now remodeling itself, still believes Another Future is Possible! On the streets of Davos outside the World Economic Forum and at UN COP negotiations, activists are pursuing a tapestry of alternatives based on political subsidiarity and eco-sufficient bioregional commoning.

More recently, academics have met in Barcelona, Leipzig, and Budapest to discuss degrowth.

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung is also working on Socio-Ecological Transformation. Yet in both North and South, among elites and movement cadres alike, there is a need for 'capacity building' to include sex-gender consciousness-raising. It is time to hear women's critique of the anthropocentric imaginary and its anti-Nature institutions. Ecofeminists are well qualified here, since they are not ambitious for an equal piece of the toxic pie. Earlier feminisms, liberal and socialist, had anthropocentric framing; whereas ecofeminism, born in environmental struggle was oriented to oikos from the start. As such, it was immediately transnational, cross-cultural, and decolonial in focus. The ecofeminist subsistence model complements and deepens European moves towards degrowth, South America's buen vivir, India's swaraj communities, the South

African ethic of ubuntu, Oceania's Kastom Ekonomi, and the goals of Via Campesina (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria and Acosta 2019).

A deep sociological divide exists between the anthropocentric culture of business, governments, multilateral agencies, and transnational technocrats versus those whose livelihoods are destroyed by industrializing development models, inconsistent climate policy, militarized resource grabs; and closer to home, by domestic violence. If Life on Earth has a future, it inheres in disarmament and degrowth - a regenerative ethic.

Ariel Salleh is a Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Humanities, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa; a former Senior Fellow in Post-Growth Societies, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany and Honorary Associate Professor in Political Economy, University of Sydney.

She taught in Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney for a number of years; and has lectured widely, including New York, Toronto, and Beijing. A long-time activist, she co-founded the Movement Against Uranium Mining; The Greens (reg. party); served on the Federal Government's Gene Technology Ethics Committee; and was a governor at the International Sociological Association Research Committee for Environment & Society.

She writes in the field of political ecology, extending the remit of political economy by focusing on the role of reproductive or meta-industrial labor in sustaining relations between humans and nature. She has three books - Ecofeminism as Politics; the anthology Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice and Pluriverse: A Post Development Dictionary edited with Kothari et al. as well as some 200 chapters and articles. Her work can be found at www.arielsalleh.info.

Source: Institute for Global Development (UNSW Sydney)

Website: <https://www.igd.unsw.edu.au/conversation-just-transition-ariel-salleh>



4. Signs of Hope

The duo who revolutionized the folk culture of Rajasthan

By Kankana Trivedi

It was in the year 1960 that Komal Kothari and Vijaydan Detha, then in their early 30s, started a decades-long journey of understanding the nuances of language by documenting the folklore and cultural anecdotes of Rajasthan. Friends since childhood, the duo, in 1965, founded Rupayan Sansthan in Borunda village (Jodhpur district) which is also the native place of Vijaydan Detha. Detha was known for his art of storytelling and for his writing in folk journals like Lok Sanskriti, and his 14-volume masterpiece, Bataan ri Phulwari. There are also film adaptations to the folk stories that he wrote. And Komal Kothari became the first secretary of Sangeet Natak Academy in Jodhpur. Widely remembered for his work on ethnomusicology, he is today known as one of the pioneers of Rajasthani folk music and an environmental activist who worked on the traditional local practices of water harvesting and agriculture.

Kuldeep Kothari, Komal Kothari's son, who today oversees Rupayan Sansthan and the Arna Jharna Museum, shared the story of the inception of decades-long work that the duo did,

"My father and Vijaydanji initially began collecting the stories from the women who were married into the village. This was because these daughters-in-law in Borunda came from different places in Rajasthan, bringing with them diverse customs and literature. Today we have over 10,000 folktales from across the state."

Over the years the archive expanded to being the sole centre for preserving the cultural heritage and further the livelihoods of many traditional folk and performing artists in Rajasthan. In particular, the Rupayan Sansthan has created a deeper relationship with "hereditary caste musicians" – a term used for the communities from particular caste groups whose livelihoods were based on music performances for

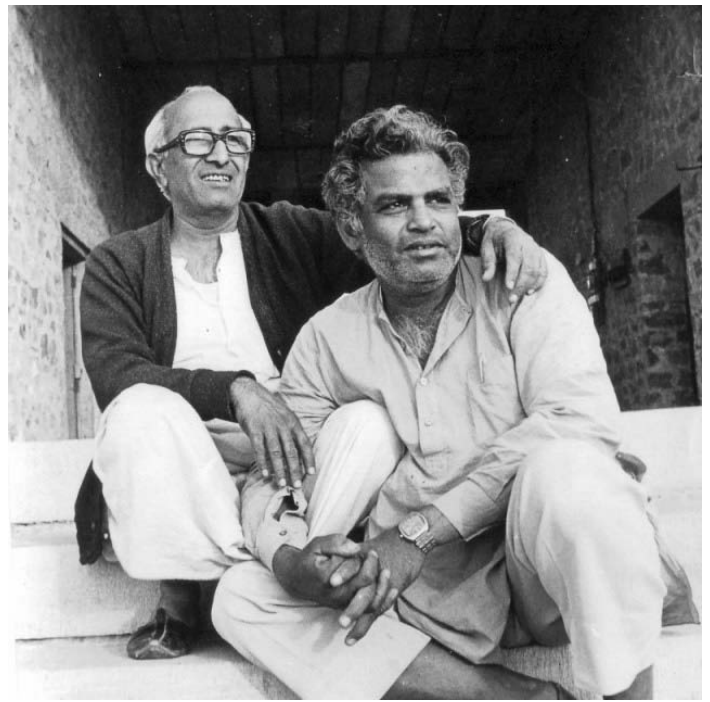
their respective so-called upper caste patrons. In Rajasthan, there were Mangarias (patrons to the Rajputs and others), Dhadis (patrons to the Jats) and Langha (patrons to the Sindhi-Sipahis). Their songs were primarily in celebration of childbirth, wedding, death or other ceremonial events. However, with changing caste dynamics and the need for catering to changing entertainment demands, many musician families started leaving this livelihood and the art form and were forced to sing new-gen Bollywood songs. "Traditionally", explained Kuldeep Kothari, "the relationship between the patrons and musicians was an innate and important part of both the cultures; however, now we hear stories of musicians being treated badly".

These experiences have become the basis for Rupayan's visionary work for community empowerment, in the form of research, networking and connecting the artisans, especially from the poorer families, to the festivals and urban households. Over the years they have also been working towards improvising instruments and musical scores (*laya*) to create newer versions of melodies.

For many years, Rupayan was the linchpin for various community interactions, attempting to connect 36 inter-dependent occupational caste communities in Rajasthan. It was instrumental in improving the artisan's salaries by the Sangeet Kala Academy from Rs.3000 to Rs.8000 per performance as of today.

Kothari strived to foster dialogues between folk and classical music. He believed that a folk traditional practice unlike classical music (with *gharanas*) emerges from a social system that is "learnt but not taught". This led to the opening up of spaces in the form of educational camps by senior musicians for children from these folk communities so that they could learn about traditional instruments, build vocal skills, etc.

The archives have enhanced ethnomusicology literature. It has also been useful for training purposes. Kuldeep Kothari shares, "These archives aren't just historical documents to reminisce about



In 1973, Detha was awarded Sahitya Kala Award and Padma Shri in 2007. Kothari was honored with Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan in 1983 and 2004 respectively. (Image from Sahapedia)

the old times, but very useful for us. With the help of senior musicians, we are working with the kids of 7-14 years of Langha community in order to develop their repertoire on some highly complex songs that were in the archives with us. So far, we are teaching 30 kids three days a week. Hopefully, some of these kids will carry forward the tradition."

The Sansthan remained somewhat dormant logistically during the 1990s due to Kothari and Detha's advanced years. Yet their minds remained sprightly. Kothari broke the ground by creating a framework to visualize the culture of Rajasthan within the distinct ecologies, which influenced the culture and local modes of food and music production, including the former's symbiotic connections with the musical instruments.

"My father believed that the culture is to be understood through food. And divided it into three zones: Bajra (pearl millet), Makka (maize), Jowar (sorghum)", says Kuldeep Kothari.

"The kamaicha (a bowed string instrument) is said to be played in grass-growing areas, prone to three to



Like rambling in the countryside, Arna Jharna is a 'living museum' that celebrates the local ecosystem and life in this terrain. Photo: Kankana Trivedi



Kuldeep Kothari navigating through the traditional architecture with few varieties of brooms on the left corner.

four inches of rainfall. The algoja (flute) is found in jowar-growing regions dominated by pastoralists."

Such initiatives eventually gave birth to the desert museum called Arna Jharna: the Thar Desert Museum in 1998. This museum is an accolade to and a representation of Kothari's vision for an alternative tale of Rajasthan.

The museum spread across over ten acres of land in Moklawas, about 15 kilometres from Jodhpur city, is a myriad display of native flora and fauna (many of which are not available so commonly). Surrounded by rocky scrubland with a ravine created from a stone quarry, it includes 700-800 plants of 200 species of trees, grass, shrubs around. Some of the grass varieties were Dhaman, Sevan and Lompdra, growing like a carpet.

Going inside the mud structures, the eccentric open gallery displays musical instruments, pottery, puppets and brooms. The key element in the museum is brooms, which is also understood as (known as jhadu in Hindi) one of the need-based daily life objects, and astounded, as we may be, the museum has a collection of over 180 types of grass, shrubs, bushes for brooms and more to be coming soon.

The curation of the museum brings forth environmental and socio-cultural connotations using brooms for representing three ecological zones: bajra, makka and jowar. Kuldeep Kothari has been overseeing this museum since its inception and designed and collaborated with many

communities and artists to nuance the narratives around brooms as well as help create a broom economy. He explained,

"Our housing styles have been evolving and this changes the broom material demands. Today the phool-jhadu comes from Northeast India, coconut-jhadu from the south, while date-palm-jhadu are made in the Mewar region of Rajasthan. Before phool-jhadu arrived, panni-jhadu was used. Bamboo-jhadu is used by communities, like Harijan, for a mix of dry and wet cleaning on hard surfaces."

Over the last few years, Kuldeep Kothari has been researching grass fiber development and experimenting with newer and connected topics. With the museum as a base for collaboration, he is working with scientists to create a gravity filter (known as G filter) from the pottery items.



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Kalpavriksh,
Documentation and Outreach Centre,
Apt.5, Shree Dutta Krupa, 908, Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411 004, Maharashtra, India.
Website: kalpavriksh.org

People In Conservation - Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security

Volume 10

Issue 1

March 2021 – August 2021

Compilation & Editing: Milind Wani

Editorial Assistance: Anuradha Arjunwadkar

Cover Photograph: Kankana Trivedi

Published By:

Kalpavriksh, Apt. 5 Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004

Phone: 91-20-25675450, 91-20-25654239

Email: kvoutreach@gmail.com

Website: www.kalpavriksh.org

Funded By: MISEREOR, Aachen, Germany

For Private Circulation

Printed Matter

To: