



Ivory seizures and poaching of elephants have witnessed a rise in the last two years in Karnataka and neighbouring states, according to TRAFFIC India, the country's wildlife trade monitoring network



A tree-lover couple from Mysuru grow different species on a single plant, have more than 100 varieties of fruits in their garden

THEY MAKE FRUIT COCKTAIL TREES

VINCENT D'SOUZA @Mysuru

THIS couple landed at Bengaluru airport after a tiring journey when they happened to see a woman from the US holding a beautiful flower. Unable to stop themselves, they approached her and found that a swamiji of Ramanashri Ashram gave it to her. They did not waste time and went straight to the ashram and got the plant.

Such is their passion that Dr C N Mruthyunjappa and his wife Sudha have raised more than 100 varieties of fruits, most of them exotic and exclusively grown in specific regions across the globe, in the front and backyards of their house built on a 120x90 ft plot.

Both, students of botany, they have mastered the art of grafting and are successful in growing different species of fruits on a single plant.

Their lemon tree bears more than a dozen varieties of citrus fruits that have their origins from Kodagu to China and from Darjeeling to Switzerland. The plum, peach, apricot and apple - all are grown on one tree.

Their garden boasts of 10 varieties of jackfruit, some of them gumless, 10 varieties of mango, over a dozen varieties of guava, some weighing over a kilo and a half, mulberry, dragon fruit, fig, almond, butter fruit, plum, pistachio, apricot, rose apple, and the list goes on and on.

The couple, for whom grafting is a passion, keep searching on websites for new fruit plant species and are ready to fly to any corner of the globe just to get a scion (a detached living portion of a plant) to graft it on a tree in their garden.

So far, they have travelled to more than 100 countries in the last five decades. Age is no barrier to pursue their passion and they are planning to visit Sri Lanka and Thailand in August to collect some scions from the beautiful islands there.

The wonder garden attracts more than a dozen species of birds every day and it is a delightful moment for the couple to see them nibble on their exotic fruits. "Our garden fruits are first for birds. Then it's for friends



Dr C N Mruthyunjappa and his wife Sudha show varieties of fruits grown in the front and backyards of their house in Mysuru | S UDAYSHANKAR

and relatives. If there is anything left, then it's for us," they say. No visitor to their house goes empty-handed as the couple not only serves them the fresh and organically grown fruits but also gifts them a basketful.

The roots for Mruthyunjappa's passion were laid in his childhood in Chikkabagilu village in Malavalli taluk, when his mother Parvathamma, an illiterate, who loved to grow trees, grew many of them in their backyard. It was she who inspired him to fall in love with plants. He later chose botany in B.Sc. Luckily, his life-partner also turned out to be a botany student, and together they started the journey of grafting.

When Mruthyunjappa joined M.Sc (Botany) in Karnatak University, Dharwad, news came that he got a medical seat in Mysore Medical College. Unable to resist the temptation,

he grabbed the opportunity to become a doctor. But he ensured that his understanding of botany was put to good use. Moreover, he wanted to see if plants from different climatic regions would grow and bear fruits in Mysuru. That's how he became a collector of plants.

The couple's passion for grafting started in Saraguru and the experimental lab got shifted to Mysuru after they built a house here about a decade and a half ago. Unlike others, the couple's planning of the new house construction focussed more on their garden than the house.

Mruthyunjappa has been chosen for this year's Plant Genome Savior Community Award given by The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority, Government of India. The award will be presented at a function to be held at Champaran, Bihar on April 19.



"We do not shop for fancy items or gold whenever we go abroad. Instead, we collect rare plants from there

Mruthyunjappa

"No seed from our garden goes waste. We take utmost care that every seed grows into plant at some corner or the other in the world

Sudha, wife of Mruthyunjappa

The couple's passion of nurturing plants is amazing. It's very rare to see both husband and wife having similar passion. I have not come across a garden like this where so many varieties of plants are grown and grafted at one place

B S Harish, faculty, Government Horticulture College, Mysuru

ROOTS

Mruthyunjappa is a 1971 Indo-Pak war veteran. He later served tribals in Saraguru in the most backward HD Kote taluk for over four decades as a medical practitioner. He was famous as 'Saraguru Doctor' which saw political bigwigs at his doors. Later, he became Medical Superintendent of JSS Hospital in Mysuru.

FRUIT SALAD

'Sanrupti', their home, boasts of 102 varieties of fruits, 34 varieties of citrus fruits, 45 varieties of medicinal plants and 46 varieties of ornamental trees and shrubs.

WHERE THERE IS A WELL, THERE IS A WAY

This corporator and his family have been supplying well water free of cost for the past five decades



Corporator Sajeed Shaikh driving a tanker to supply water to the residents of his ward

H RAJAN SAMUEL @Belagavi

CHARITY begins at home. For this family, charity begins at its open well. Whenever a resident of Camp area or surroundings in Belagavi seeks water - no matter day or night - this family sends a tanker to his or her doorstep. The supply will be in sufficient quantities and free of cost.

The Shaikh family has been running this charity for the last five decades and the residents of Ward 3 of Cantonment have no worries about the scarce commodity, whether it is summer or drought. It all began about 50 years ago. The Shaikhs dug up an open well and it yielded abundant water. The neighbourhood had problems in getting water and the family offered from its new well. This set the Shaikhs' tradition of free water supply.

Now, the Shaikhs have two tankers. Anybody in Ward 3 of Cantonment can call the drivers and a tanker will pull up at the caller's doorstep promptly, sometimes with a few minutes if a tanker is ready. Not only the caller gets enough water, but the remainder in the tanker is given his to the neighbours.

The well has never gone dry. It does not mean Cantonment Board, the local civic body, does not supply water. In fact the Cantonment Board supplies piped water once in 3-4 days as done by the larger Belagavi City Corporation which governs the rest of the city. But the supply slackens in the upper reaches because of inadequate pressure. There are also a number of other wells in the locality, but lifting water poses problems. These make the residents turn to the Shaikhs.

As Shaikh family became popular, it came under public pres-

sure to enter politics and it obliged in 1972. Dawal Jangu Shaikh was the first member of the family to enter the Cantonment Board. He was elected for a record seven consecutive terms. Dr Raheela, another member of the family succeeded Dawal as Board member in 2000. Her husband Sajeed Shaikh is the current member of the Board from Ward 3.

Politics restricts supply

In a way politics restricted the water supply by the family. In fact, the family says its well can cater to the entire one lakh population of Cantonment. But if the family supplies water to any area beyond the Ward 3, the local people's representatives object to it, obviously for political reasons. So the Shaikhs have confined the free water supply to the Ward 3 which has a population of 2,500.

However, Sajeed says water is supplied to other wards only during emergency that too with the "consent" of local corporators.

Sajeed says the family has purchased two tankers to ensure round-the-clock water supply. Despite being a corporator, Sajeed drives the tankers when the drivers are away. "Callers get water within an hour and this tradition has been followed ever since the service was started," he says.

Basically, the Shaikhs are a business family. It runs Chandan Inox multiplex near BSNL office in the city. It has also been engaged in forest contract business for about five decades and has other businesses employing more than 1,000 people.

The Shaikhs are also rendering free medical service to the poor. Dr Raheela, who enjoys a good reputation in the medical field, provides free medicines to poor patients.



Our home is in the upper reach of the city because of which we do not get sufficient tap water. Neither did my family nor others suffer shortage. We get as much as water we require whenever we call up the Shaikhs

Asha Ruttonji, resident, Cantonment area

By the grace of Allah, our open well has enough water which we are using for people. We are happy to supply water to the needy

Sajeed Shaikh, member, Cantonment Board

We get water even if we call at midnight. The water which the Shaikhs supply is pure and till date not even a single person has come to me with any water-borne disease

Dr Anand Desai, Cantonment



A wall being constructed around the open well at Camp area in Belagavi; women fill containers with water supplied from the tanker at their doorstep



WHISPERS UNDER THE SUN

Once upon a time... Reviving grandma tales for the young

SRIDEVI S @Bengaluru

MEMORIES of childhood were the dreams that stayed with you after you woke," writes Booker prize winner Julian Barnes. Some of the best memories of our lives are from our childhood. Like the first story we heard.

But today's generation is missing out on many things, including these magical words - "Grandma, tell me a story". In order to revive story telling, Smrthi Harits, a final year engineering student, has come up with Kagakka Gubakka (which translates into crow and sparrow) - a platform for children to learn about culture, traditional games and storytelling.

The goal is to keep alive the long-forgotten stories, to imbibe moral values, life skills and lead-



Smrthi (Right) narrating a story to the kids during a session in Malleswaram

ership among kids and to make better use of public places through community involvement.

Kagakka Gubakka is just a few

months old but is extremely popular among many. "I come from Malleswaram, popularly known as 'Pensioners' Paradise'. I know a lot of old people whose children

and grandchildren are settled abroad. I also know kids from nuclear families, who rarely come out of their homes or interact with people. I thought of bringing them together, on one platform, where grandparents could narrate stories to the kids of this generation, who know nothing but to play games on mobile phones. And that's how Kagakka Gubakka began in July last year," Smrthi said.

Sudha Abhiram, who is also part of the initiative, said her passion towards tradition and the need to convey it to kids drove her to it. "This is an avenue for me to pass on the tradition to the next generation. It is also one of the ways to tell children that there is a beautiful world away from computers," she said.

They seem to be succeeding. Neelandan, a third standard student from Kumaran's School,

who regularly attends the sessions, said, "They tell us so many stories which we haven't heard before. We also get to play many games which we can't play anywhere else. I have made lots of friends there and I want to go to the camp again."

"Growing up in a joint family, I always wanted a similar childhood for my kids. This came as a boon. I take both my kids, aged 10 and 4, to these sessions. They mostly spend half of their Sundays here, playing in the sun, socialising with other kids and also learning in the process," said Divya Gupta, a homemaker.

It is a very small team of five members - Smrthi Harits, Sudha Abhiram, Shaila Iyengar, Prathima Arun and Shrikanth. They also conduct story-telling sessions in orphanages.

The event is open for public and is free of cost.



The seedball making activity held last week was an amalgamation of three generations. Around 120 kids participated and learnt to make seedballs, which are thrown across the city. In a few years they become trees. When we told this to the kids, they were excited

Smrthi Harits

THE NARRATION

The storytellers narrate to the children popular traditional stories of Akbar Birbal, Tenali Rama, Panchatantra, and tales from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Each storyteller in the group has her own style of story telling. Smrthi, who is also a classical dancer, ensures she uses a lot of facial expressions, voice modulation while narrating stories. Sudha uses a lot of pictures and Prathima includes songs in between the tales to make it interesting.

THEME-BASED SESSIONS

The team ensures they try out different things to keep children interested. "We plan activities based on the festival or event of the month. Last year during Dasara, we taught Kolata to the kids. For Krishna Janmashtami, we narrated tales of Sri Krishna. Our aim is to keep the children culturally rooted in our land, while keeping them entertained," Smrthi said. Storytelling sessions are followed by games, where the children learn and play traditional games like Kho-Kho, Kabaddi, The cow and the tiger, hopscotch and even some board games.