

~RANJIT R.J. DANIELS~
APRIL 1990

MY UTTARA KANNADA DAYS

I have never felt tired of talking of my experiences in Uttara Kannada to anyone and whenever I found someone patient enough to hear all of it, I would go on and in the end say, "well, I must write a book on Uttara Kannada". I would like to write a book indeed, if someone's willing to publish it. However, my problem is that if I have an urge within me to do something, I can not really wait for anyone. I would like to do it myself, immediately, even if it does not turn out to be the best possible. A small handmade memoir seemed a brilliant idea to startwith; the result of which is this bunch of papers and photographs. May be sometime, if circumstances permit, I shall make a more ellaborate book - a refined version of this.

It was green everywhere along the road as the bus drove in. There were mosses and ferns on walls, roof-tops, tree trunks and earth banks, giving an emerald touch to this land. It was raining as it was in the middle of July that I first breathed the clean air of Sirsi, a little, quiet town in Uttara Kannada distict. I fell for it. The five years that followed (1983-1988) were definitely the best in my lifetime and here I go recollecting those memorable years which are flashing vividly through my mind.

My second trip to the district was with a team of researchers including Professor Madhav Gadgil, Fr. C.J. Saldanha, Professor D.K Subramaniam, Dr. Vinodh Vyasalu, Dr. S. Narendra Prasad, the overambitious Dr. Raghavendra Gadagkar, K. Chandrasekar, all from Bangalore, Professor M.D. Subash Chandran from Kumta and a few others native to the district. It was during this trip that I had a glimpse of the difficulties I was to face if I had to stay in Uttara Kannada for long.

The first difficulty that I had and did overcome soon was that of learning a new language. Left with Harikantra (who at that time barely spoke or understood English and spoke the most exceptional and confusing kannada that I have ever heard) to accompany me during my field trips, I had no choice but to learn whatever I could pick up to convey my ideas to him. To mine and everyone else's surprise, I very soon fared well with the new language to the extent of managing a brief talk on birds in some kannada speaking local schools!

The next major difficulty was the non-availability of residences with comfortable toilet facilities. This was embarassing. My colleague Chandrasekar and I initially managed to find a place to stay, but could not continue there for more than a week. A set of common toilets shared by those living in eight independent apartments without the least sense of hygeine was all that was available. With just an open well to provide water, it was soon a rather disgusting life we were forced to put up with till we left that place. The next residence we found was apparently better (at least initially). A common toilet facility again, shared by three independent families. It would have made our stay more comfortable if only the doors in the toilets had some latches within! Unfortunately in leiu of this rather insignificant though important bit of convenience, we have often had to be on the alert, squatting within, anticipating a thoughtless kick from the youngest son of our landlord, which

would fling the door almost open much to our embarassment. This was not for long either, as thanks to my colleague Yeshwant Kanade, I was able to move into a section of Mr. Shiroor's house in Bapujinagar. Chandrasekar was called back to Bangalore.

The four years I spent as a tenant in Mr. Shiroor's house were pleasant. However, I was not without trouble while on field trips. Whenever I talk of Uttara Kannada and its toilets, I can not help describe an incident that took place at Belekeri, a coastal village between Ankola and Karwar. On one of our field trips, Harikantra and I found accomodation in a friend's house for a couple of nights. On those nights we were very kindly fed dinner too. However, as is the normal practice in the village, we had to use the beach to ease ourselves. As much as I had observed the villagers deal with this aspect of daily life, it became apparent to me that the women were up early in the morning and on the beaches before daybreak in the coastal villages whereas the men came out later and prefered to squat shamelessly along the beaches exhibiting their 'pride'! The lack of taller plant cover along the beaches was a disadvantage to the girls who probably overslept. If later during the day, they came with their umbrellas. The sight of a few umbrellas that had popped up out of the sand like giant, black mushrooms as we were observing birds on Karwar beach one day, made me more than just curious. I later learnt that this was a common practice too. Anyhow coming back to Belekeri and the memorable event, I must start by saying that it is always safe to do what is customary in one's neighbourhood. It was in the evening and as it was still light, to avoid an embarassing exhibit, I collected a mug of sea water and walked behind a hedgerow of screwpine to ease myself. Harikantra was at a distance on the beach. However, we were not the only people on the beach that evening as there happily perched on a rock was a villager, a male at his business. My behaviour had definitely made him curious as I discovered later. When I stepped out of cover, I was a little disturbed at the sight of Harikantra standing just behind where I had been a while ago and the man a little distance away. Harikantra therefore had to explain the matter to me. He told me that he was not so sure of what the man's intentions were when he decided to walk to the hedgerow and look over to see what I did behind the bush and had walked up to 'protect' me. That was the most unwelcome intervention on my much coveted privacy!

Another difficulty that I had to practically live with was more than embarassing, humiliating. While some of my best and loved friends have turned out to be of the *Havik* Brahmin breed, while in Sirsi, I could not quite accept these 'god-chosen' folks. The *haviks* hold a reputation on their 'hospitality'. However, having lived in Sirsi for a reasonably long period, I found them often very ruthless and snobbish. It took me a while before I realized that my appearance - my skin colour in particular, made these brahmins uncomfortable at the thought that an 'untouchable from a lesser breed' had walked into their residence and alas to the displeasure of their gods! I soon learnt to avoid entering unfamiliar houses. I was never really scared of being poisoned to death by one of the ostracized brahmin widows, but always conscious of some godfearing woman

leaving my cup of water beside me on the floor and walking away. Sometimes I am unpardoning, though I do sympathize on people's ignorance. Having on occasions watched my colleague Kanade made to stay out of the domestic limits in a *havik*'s courtyard and bananas being thrown to the *halakki gowda* servants by a very 'charitable' havik male, I realized that I was only getting a flavour of the humiliation the less fortunate people have had to take for ages in the name of a lesser breed 'declared' by god! After all a staunch *havik* feels that he defiles himself by coming in contact with the unclean lesser breeds. He therefore does well when he takes the trouble to seek a *havik* whore!!

Working with Dr. Raghavendra Gadagkar as an assistant soon turned out to be an unpleasant obligation. He was not only over-demanding but also uncompromising. To add to this, he had no appreciation for honest, hard work and good knowledge of natural history. I could not take his idea of not bothering to know an organism's identity, being content with a well-executed though inadequate field method, fondness for and faith in 'randomizing' every effort to look for birds and insects in the forests and conviction that there can not be anything better than what he had already devised. When I was initially involved in collecting insects along with Chandrasekar, I realised that groups of insects such as butterflies and ants that can be identified accurately and could demonstrate clear patterns of spatial distribution and diversity were paid little attention to, whereas a lot of what was captured in the 'carefully' designed traps and nets was trash and bits of microscopic insects that made even placing them under their appropriate families difficult. Consequently we had too many differences of opinion and at least for a while they were to my dismay! He decided to favour Chandrasekar and not take further interest in what I had to offer. He increased my field work on birds from one sample a day to three. He insisted that Harikantra should assist Chandrasekar with the insects and I had to be 'opportunistic' in taking his help whenever he was free. Well, to make a long story short, I must say that I got out of this too.

Rainy days in Uttara Kannada are worth experiencing. Between early June and October it rains in the district, July being the wettest. On days in July, it rains all day and night, as if it knew not how to stop! It is damp even indoors. Wet clothes do not dry for days and start stinking. A musty odour fills the living quarters. Unless kept inside dry closets, hard covers on books warp, pages take stain and stick together. Leather footwear turn green and soggy. With duckback raincoats on and grandpa's umbrellas, you still feel wet and cold on the streets. There is a dramatic change in the outfits of people. Crude woollen and plastic hoods come in very handy to those who labour outdoors. The variety of plastic footwear - from simple sandals to elegant ladies' and gentlemen's shoes, locally used during this season is remarkable.

The forests are splendid with small, clear streams flowing down every hill. Rivers swell up making them hard to ford. The forest floor suddenly takes life. Besides the variety of short-lived ferns and mushrooms that spring up, the litter is alive with colourful frogs, crabs and the dreaded leeches. However,

much of this is missed due to the difficulty in access to many of these wild places during the monsoons.

October marks the beginning of the best season in Uttara Kannada. The rains are no longer heavy and adamant. Spells of bright sunshine and occasional, mild showers create a clean atmosphere; the most cherished when out of doors. A lot of large and colourful flowers adorn the hedges around all residences. Oversized dahlias on little schoolgirls' hair is a sight to see. Butterflies go crazy, especially at the towering, crimson bunches of *Clerodendron panniculata*.

The marhses and lakes in the east and west are alive with hundreds of migrating birds. More than 15,000 ducks including pintails, bluewinged teals and a few shovellers, etc., winter on these waters. The larger reservoirs around Mundgod and the saltmarshes of the Aganashini estuary form the daytime refuges for several thousands of these ducks during winter. A majority of these birds arrive during early October and form spectacular gatherings before they disperse far and wide over the district. Talking of migratory birds in the district, I must mention the unusual visit by about 2000 demoiselle cranes in the winter of 1986. Whatever be the reason attributed to this, it is certainly the first time this species has visited Uttara Kannada during this century, and probably the only time. The large size of the cranes, the suddenness of their appearance and their loud throats very soon made both the villagers and the enthusiastic local naturalists to raise a racket. After several absurd news reports including the declaration that they were 'Siberian ducks', I decided to go to Mundgod and see the birds myself. We found the birds on the far side of the Bachanike reservoir without much effort. The birds were noisy, but very shy of an observer's presence as soon after their arrival was brought to public notice (I was told) they were shot down happily by local *shikars* and supplied to Hubli. Consequently, at least a few restuarants in Hubli had against their 'TODAY'S SPECIAL' sign, 'CRANE ROAST' to boast!

Mundgod is about 60 km northeast of Sirsi. I had gone there accompanied by Harikantra on the new motorbike I was provided with. It was a Rajdoot, 175 cc. This motorbike served me faithfully during all my 16,000 km on the roads of Uttara Kannada. I drove through forests, forded streams, went over rocks and cart-tracks, always with a pillion rider, loads of ropes and other field equipment and often a big can of extra fuel. The Rajdoot took all of it and a rather unpleasant road accident in the outskirts of Sirsi, without a complaint!

I had learnt to use the motorbike only a couple of weeks before this trip to Mundgod and that being my first long ride on the motorbike, I was quite nervous. Reaching Mundgod was not difficult as the roads were well laid. However, the reservoirs were all linked to the town by stony, rugged dirt roads and riding on these roads, we got into trouble. While returning to Sirsi we realized that we had a flat back wheel - something we were not prepared to deal with 35 km away from town. Fortunately, we were close to Pala, a small village with a few shops on the roadside, one of which turned out to be cycle repair shop. The shop-keeper did come to our rescue. The wheel was fixed and

remarkably inflated full using a cycle pump. We were thus back at Sirsi with no regrets!

Summer is hot and dusty. Motorbike rides turn rude to eyes and lungs. Walking on the hardened, bare lateritic foot hills becomes particularly difficult. The forests are not pleasant to visit either. The forests with dense undergrowth gave me nightmares. The thought of dry, coarse leaves and thorns brushing my sweat covered neck and face made me grumble. The worst menace however was that of ticks. These tiny creatures seemed not only blood-thirsty but also perverted. They always chose to bite in the odd places that made them very difficult to deal with. I could never discipline myself to avoid an embarassing act of violent scratching while in conversation with someone. It was often amusing in the evenings to watch a bunch of otherwise enthusiastic field workers sit and curse the ticks to the accompaniment of a rather silent 'harping'.

Summer was however not totally without charm. The still, clear and deep pools along the rivers offered good swimming and the free service of fish in ridding us of ticks. Smaller puddles were a delight to me. With a towel around my neck, and a little clumsy wallowing, I always fished out a few surprises. Targod was one such favourite summer fishing spot throughout my stay in Sirsi. It was not far. A bicycle was a comfortable mode of transport in this mission. A few zebra danios, a variety of barbs including what looked like a wild rosy barb and the elegant, though boistrous, tiger panchaxes always found themselves inside my small aquarium at Sirsi. I remember how I once brought back six beautiful loaches from a small stream in Devimaneghat and to simulate the rocky pools they naturally inhabit, kept them in the hollow of a grinding stone at my residence. Loaches are good climbers, especially if they are from rocky streams, thanks to their suckerlike mouths. Maintaining them in shallow, open containers was always a difficulty and I knew this even as a child. However, I made this mistake and the result was loaches wriggling all over the floor when I returned after a brief outing. They soon had to go into the deep water tank in the bathroom and I had to take care not to have loaches wriggling through my hair after each bath!

Sighting larger mammals was not a common event anywhere in the district and therefore my adventures with beasts are just a few. The first adventure was that at Santagal. It began when I heard leaves rustling c. 20m off my trail as I was slowly pulling myself up the steep hill and I stopped to peep into the bush. What I thought was a thrush feeding on the ground, however, turned out to be a sloth bear staring at me! I had to stand still and wait. In the meanwhile, Harikantra, who was following a little distance behind, joined me and after a few tense minutes, the bear quietly walked off.

Hulidevaru, the tiger god, is worshipped by some of the natives in Uttara Kannada. Hulidevaragodlu, supposedly the place where this god prowls, is beautiful with good riverine forest along the clean river Aganashini. After field work, I always enjoyed swimming in this part of the river. One such evening, when there were some of my colleagues as well relaxing in those refreshing waters, we remembered the tiger god and were joking

that he might show up suddenly. It was around 5.00 pm and still light when we finally got out and were on the road in our jeep. To my surprise and excitement, something looking like a large dog crossed the jeep, and it did not take much time before the others noticed it too. Though it was not the *Hulidevaru*, it was certainly a leopard! It stopped abruptly seeing the jeep, wheeled around and jumped on to the earth bank across the road. The most exciting part of this story was when we decided to go up the bank and look for it. We certainly had a start as the leopard dashed away from behind the first bush we boistrously approached!

A herd of about 20 elephants roaming the forests off Bhagavati, did make us nervous. A few days before we visited that site for a week-long field study, one drunken *gowli* had been attacked by one of the elephants just outside his residence. This man realizing the presence of an elephant in his cultivation, decided to drive it off. He unfortunately had to be hospitalized with a badly dislocated thigh! Every morning Harikantra and I saw signs of these beasts having walked through our study plot. We however, never got to see the elephants.

Amongst the other mammals I saw were the black panther and leopard cat, while driving for dinner at Anishighat and the three gaur at their evening drink along the river Sharavathy. Liontailed maccaques were probably common in the district during its past history. This primate does not occur anywhere north of the district and its recent status here had been unclear for the last two decades. It was thus a welcome event when I first spotted a single male on the roadside while driving down the Malemaneghat. It was very shy and without sparing a moment vanished within the foliage. About a year after this, I resighted the maccaque in the same forest. This time there were six together unexcitedly foraging overhead as I was watching birds in the understory.

Flying squirrels were common in the outskirts of Sirsi. It was a pleasure to see them come out at dusk and glide from tree to tree. Later at night, they often sat motionless on trees, their eyes beaming like cinder against a good spotlight. There was one rather friendly squirrel outside the forest bungalow at Kulgi. We would hear it call from a mango tree on all nights during our brief stay there.

Discovering the little known travancore tortoise in the Sharavathy valley was a delight. The brown vine snake that I once caught near Castle Rock, is probably a new record too. Writing on reptiles, I am reminded of the small humpnosed pit viper and the green vine snake I collected during my second trip to Uttara Kannada. I was not alone at that time and the night had to be spent within the temple at Unchigi. Despite all my efforts to keep my snakes secure and their being tiny, Professor D.K. Subramaniam, who was one among the team, could not lay his head to rest at night. I was therefore forced to kill and preserve the viper, 'the potential danger' and keep the rather harmless vine snake out of his sight. After all, these damned beings are rarely appreciated by most people. Therefore I understand.

I have frequently seen and picked up large kraits crushed by moving vehicles on the roads along Devimaneghat. Occasionally I almost rode over or stepped on big-sized cobras. Dead sawscaled

vipers and one Russel's viper, along with the slough of a possible king cobra that I came across, made my list of deadly snakes for Uttara Kannada complete. Yellow and black banded sea snakes were common too.

Snakes gave Harikantra nightmares. Dreaming of snakes he once leaped off his bed, tore through the mosquito screen, stumbled over his chair and hurt his arm before he finally found the switch to the lamp in his appartment in Kumta and look for the snake! He never walked ahead of me if we had to walk through dense undergrowth. Having accepted his timidity, I was not quite annoyed when he dashed away at the sight of the huge slough that we found across our trail at Joida when he should have been leading me! The slough that was well over 10 foot, could have been left behind by a male king cobra. I make this guess after the scale pattern and the unusual splash of red on the underside. Having read a lot on king cobras and their tendency to be territorial, I was nervous too. We therefore decided to choose a different plot for my study of birds.

Harikantra was honest and committed as a field assistant. He liked to appear trim and learned. He always had some resentment towards my untidy (sometimes dirty) appearance. I remember the remark he once made as we were preparing for a field trip to Karwar: "the girls of Karwar are too smart, you better take care to look impressive". He was high spirited and full of wit. His major problem however, was that of having extraordinary visions of demons and ghosts! As a result he suffered frequent nightmares. Also was he extra conscious of his health and physical well-being that he imagined himself to be having high blood pressure and the associated chronic heart ailments. He could never be convinced that he was physically fit. Not even by doctors! This eventually led to his dropping out permanently from assisting me.

I soon chose Masti Jatti Mukri as a substitute. Masti waas young and full of enthusiasm. Being more of a vagabond, he enjoyed travelling around with me. He was however, humble with no self-image and really lovable. He chewed *paan* all the time and appeared bloodshot in his big eyes. The most remarkable trait of his was his fondness for falling asleep - anytime, anywhere and even standing! He went to school but had a tough time dealing with english as a language. However, he made his way through his seventh standard. He then decided to take the tenth standard examination straight, without going to school any further. He decided to manage without procuring the text books either. But he was confident of making it through. All his confidence however lay in his copying tactics which unfortunately let him down and thus he remained Masti J. Mukri, seventh standard!

Harikantra hails from a community of coastal fisherfolk. That he is inherently a good fisherman and boatsman was often demonstrated in the field when we had to cross deep, flowing waters and all that was available to us was a crudely built bamboo raft. It was always a pleasure to watch men from his community cast nets and take surprisingly large fish in shallow estuaries. *Mukris* on the other hand are expert tree climbers as much as I know them. There was someone nicknamed *Kutna* in Muroor whom I once met. He was perfectly at ease high up in the canopies

of forest trees and was sought after much by one of my colleagues who was collecting fruits from rainforest trees at that time. Masti also showed a remarkable skill in scaling up tall trees.

Uttara Kannada is a real melting pot of peoples and cultures. A visit to the market at Mundgod, for example, always had a lot to offer in the form of human diversity. There were the *Siddis* (of negro origin), Sindhis, refugees from Tibet and a variety of Kannada, Marati and Urdu speaking natives. A similar visit to the market in Ankola on the coast would mean coming across the typically half-clad *halakki gowda* women, a handful of malayalam speaking Keralite christians, konkanis and and a variety of other little-known people. Konkanis can be christians or the more abundant *gowda saraswath* brahmins who were locally known as 'GSBs'. These GSBs trace back their ancestry to the Durga-worshipping Bengalis and claim that they are brahmins of the 'first order' though they have food habits of the 'third order'. In Uttara Kannada, food habits indicate one's social status and hence there are diets of various orders! The first order menu is highly protein deficient except when complemented with large amounts of milk and milk products. Second order includes a few varieties of fish in its menu whereas the third is catholic. People's consciousness of social status salted with religion and superstition has resulted in the gross under utilization of the locally available food in the district.

By and large, beef is a taboo. It is shameful to be a beef eater. Consequently, blessed is the 'beef on hooves' prowling the streets and forests of the district! It was however ironical to me when I learnt that more and more communities of people are renouncing the 'shameful' habit of consuming beef when the goddess Marikamba continues to demand buffalo blood if she is to be appeased!

People in Uttara Kannada are exceptionally fond of celebrations and festivities. Being a mixture of cultures and faiths, there are ample excuses to have something to 'ring the bells' all through the year, except may be the wet season. I dislike most festivals as they have some 'holy' cause and there are demonstrations of hypocratic piety in many of these ridiculous events. However, I always enjoyed watching the *suggi* dancers along the coastal side of the district. This probably traditional celebration, has unfortunately been corrupted by a misunderstood version of the famous festival of colours, *holi*, in parts of the district. The festivals coincide and what I have witnessed in Sirsi is madness involving boys of all ages running after people in the streets and drenching them with dirty, fast colours without any consideration!

Suggi in the coast on the contrary is a spectacular event. I have witnessed the *halakki gowdas*, *ambigas* and *kumri maratis* dance the *suggi*. They do it ceremoniuosly with a lot of emotion. Traditional folk songs are sung to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals and the dancing may be solo or as a group. Each community seemed to have a typical costume, taking pains to adorn each individual with flowers and gorgeous crowns.

Life in the drier east is rather difficult. Poverty reigns. Villages abound with landless labourers, shepherds, cattle herdsmmen and the sort. While along the coast it is possible to

distinguish between communities by their overall appearance and costumes, all look alike in the east. Water being a scarce resource and with dust all around, people tend to look browner than elsewhere in the district. People are generally timid, illiterate and very superstitious. Houses are mere shacks appearing as if they would fall apart if given a hard push! Children play in the streets. Dogs, cattle, swine and chicken together create a pandemonium while riding through those narrow, crowded streets. In brief these villages appeared more typically Indian than the others in Uttara Kannada.

Gypsies locally refered to as *bikshakaru*, meaning beggars, were common in summer. These vagabonds had several ways of making their living. Cock fights, fortune-telling, vending medicines and other fetishes, trapping birds and stealing or begging, as they wandered, provided them for their day to day needs. Fighting cocks, monkeys, dogs, chicken and donkeys normally accompanied these people. One fortune-teller we met at Katur had a little pup, four monkeys and a parakeet besides his wife. He believed that she was possessed by the goddess of Saundati and as a result was mad. Though at times she spoke more sensibly than him, he insisted that she shut her mouth as she was insane. To this she would humbly oblige. He somehow got carried away by Harikantra's 'charms' that he ordered his wife to prostrate herself at Harikantra's feet and ask for his blessings so that she was 'healed'. To our embarassment, she did so!

One of our department's research interests was knowing about the resource utilization by the different communities of people in the district. Since Harikantra and I did the most travelling, we were entrusted with the task of interviewing people and filling up questionaires wherever we were. These questionaires were however in Kannada. It was therfore Harikantra who did most of the job. I used to accompany him and photograph the people he interviewed. It was often fun to watch him do his part, as he spoke more like a politician. He started with the following introduction (translated from his Kannada): "the government is interested in knowing the living conditions of the rural and the down-trodden pepole. We have been commissioned to collect data and therefore been travelling around meeting people. Having come all the way here, we would like you to co-operate in this mission.... We can not however promise you that the government would do you any favour immediately. We have just been paid to collect all the required information".

I was more like a 'staff photographer'. Soon after the interview, I organised the people into small groups and photographed them. While some welcomed the idea of getting a photograph of themselves in colour, not everyone was happy about the idea. I could not get any *siddi* women to even join their husbands for a snap. They were exceptionally shy. One muslim man in Sambrani, even refused to accept that it was his portrait when we later took a copy of the photograph to him! Another whom we interviewed at the *harijan* colony at Joida, made a big fuss that we did not speak his language, marati and that we could very well be fakes. It required the kind efforts of an agricultural officer, who interpreted what Harikantra was trying to say to this marati-speaking man, before we could finally get him and his

family photographed.

It was the birdlife of Uttara Kannada that gave me reason to spend the five years there. Days in the field were full of events. Besides learning of birds in the field, I spent time trying to find out what the people knew about the birds in their neighbourhood. While most had something to say on the crows, sparrows, peacock and a few other common birds, few had anything more to say on birds. This surprised me. People seemed not to have taken notice of even some of the very common birds around them. In five years, I managed to compile a list of 250 kannada, marati and konkani local names for birds. But there were often local variations in names refering to a particular species. After carefully interviewing the natives, and eliminating synonyms, it was obvious to me that there were only some 75 species of birds familiar to those of the district. There are however more than 400 species of birds in Uttara Kannada. Not even one native whom I came across during those five years could go beyond reciting 15 local names of birds. It was difficult for some to even recognise a bird from a well-executed illustration!

There were however, a few bird-myths that many had to narrate. I have on more than one occasion noticed very badly preserved heads of the great Indian hornbill within brahmin and non-brahmin residences that I visited. This bird locally known as *garudapakshi* is a fabled 'serpent destroyer'. The head is believed to repel serpents! I have had people ask me if peafowl indulged in 'carnal' acts such as copulating. That the dancing peacocks scatter capsules of sperms which the peahens pick up and swallow to be fertilized, did not surprise me more than what I have heard about the crow pheasant. This bird locally called *kembootha* is popular for the cure-all herb - a *'sanjeevi*, that it occasionally keeps within its nest. Nests have to be collected and thrown into a stream in order to detect the presence of this cure-all. The nest that 'swims' upstream is sure to have this much coveted object. The household that is fortunate to find and possess this *'sanjeevi'* would be entirely free of ailments! How I wish I had found this. Harikantra needs this indeed!


Uttara Kannada
RJRD
1988

THE PLATES

1.

The coastal landscape of Uttara Kannada. Though mostly shorn of the original rain forest, the hills running right into the Arabian sea make a spectacular scenery. A part of the west coast highway, dry paddy fields, coconut groves and the clean white beach of Arga feature in this photograph.





(2)



a



b

2.
a) The beautiful beach of Chendiya, with fishermen's huts, a few dug-out canoes and groves of coconut palms, to be dredged and made part of the proposed Seabird Naval Base.

b) One of the few patches of mangrove vegetation left in Uttara Kannada. This patch of *Rhizophora* is at Sanikatta. I have always been fascinated by the life forms associated with this unique habitat.

3.
a) The well-laid saltpans of Sanikatta - a good habitat for migratory waders and other waterfowl. The first records of brahminy ducks, avocets, slenderbilled gulls and a couple of other waders for this district were from here. Sanikatta is historically well-known as it is said that it had been functioning even two centuries ago.

b) A *harikantra* fisherman casting net in a shallow estuary. Note the catch of fish behind him.



a



b

(F)

b



a



4.
a) A lone fisherman with his face protected from the morning sun at Masur. Both hand and foot share the task of hook and line fishing.

b) A fisherman at Sanikatta drawing his catch. All the choice fish go into the basket hung around his waist.

5.
a) A *harikantra* lad tackling an estuarine crab with a piece of fish as bait and a dip net at Sanikatta. Note the string of 'sanctification' he's wearing - a brahmin custom now widely accepted by the 'lesser' breeds too.

b) A lad at Masur casting his line.

a



b



(6)





6.
a) Women at Masur fishing for small prawns in the estuary at low tide. Besides all the dirt and tiny fish collected, there may be a handful of small, glassy prawns.

7.
a) Collecting bivalves (molluscs) at low tide in Masur: a rather back-breaking task as is rice transplanting. T.S.Patgar holds the bag.

b) Masur fishermen return after a morning's round of fishing in their canoe. T.S.Patgar (extreme left) poses with a fish in hand.



a



b

(8)

a



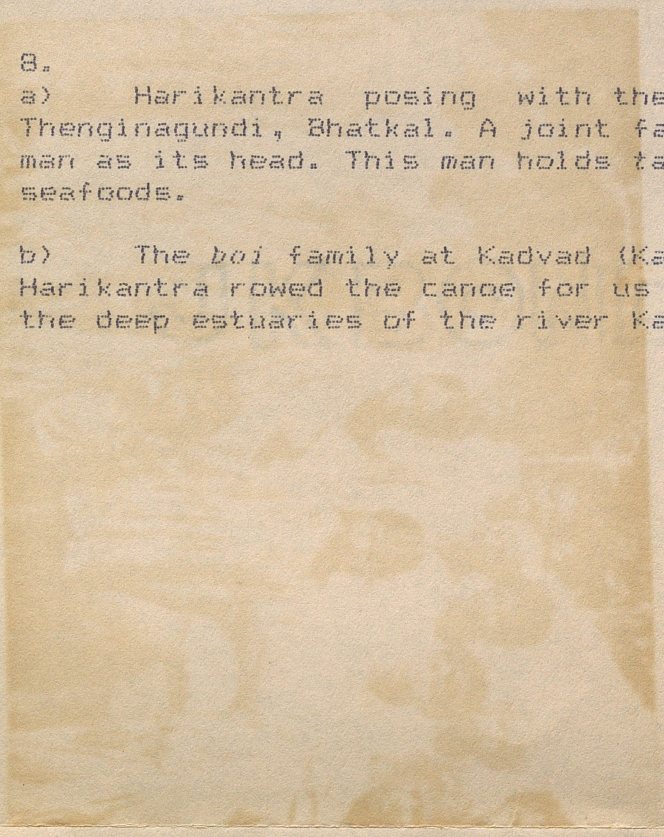
b

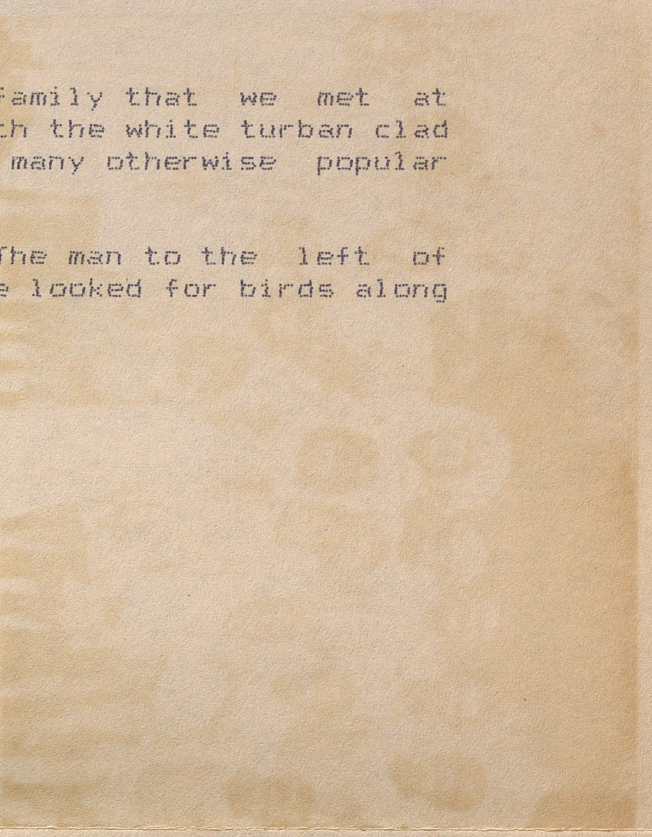


8.

a) Harikantra posing with the *gonda* family that we met at Thenginagundi, Bhatkal. A joint family with the white turban clad man as its head. This man holds *taboos* on many otherwise popular seafoods.

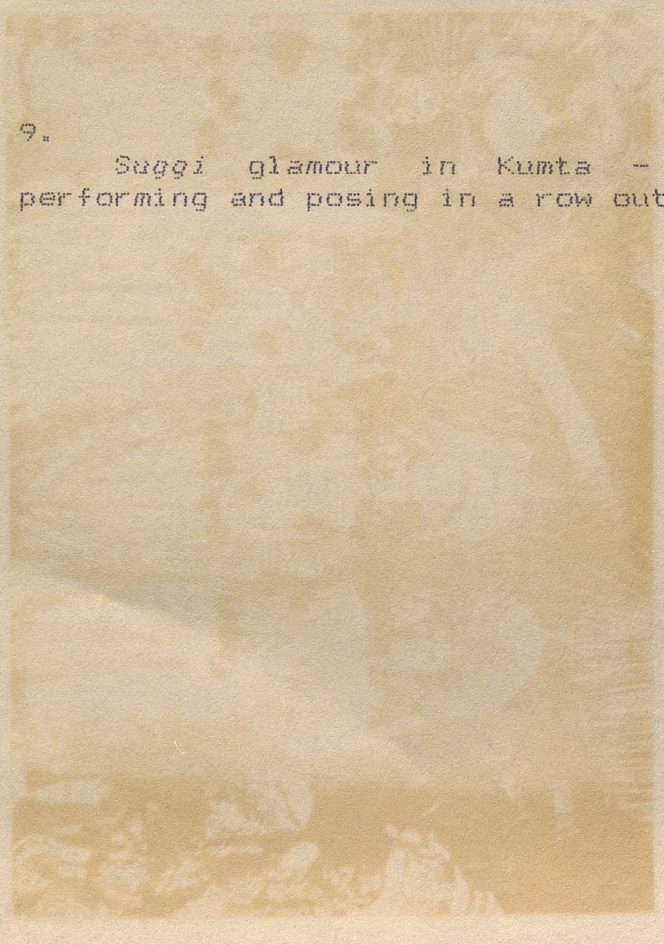
b) The *boi* family at Kadvad (Karwar). The man to the left of Harikantra rowed the canoe for us while we looked for birds along the deep estuaries of the river Kali.

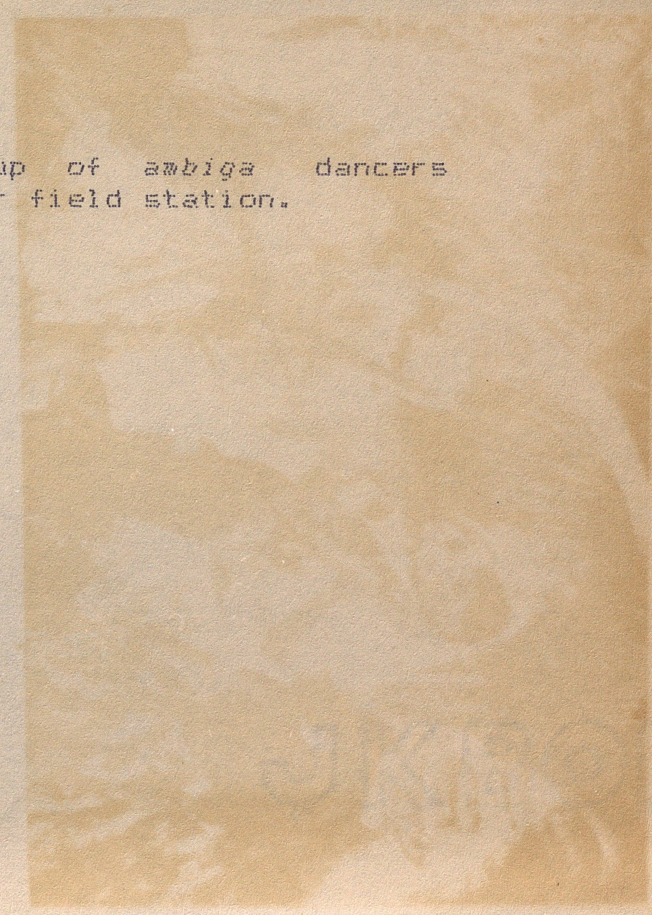




9.

Suggi glamour in Kumta - a group of *ambiga* dancers performing and posing in a row outside our field station.









(10)



a



b

10.
a) *Halakki gowda* dancers at Santeguli (Kumta).

b) Narayana Bomma Gowda proudly poses on the road after the dance. Note the gorgeous costume.

11.
a) Malati and Asha with a *halakki gowda* woman outside her thatch hut at Unchigi (Kumta).

b) Evergreen forests with deciduous emergents along the slopes bordering the railway line between Castle Rock and Dudhsagar (Goa).

(11) a



b



(12)

a



b



12.

a) The rather uninterfered forests above the waterfalls at Magod. The monsoon had just receded and the waters were muddy and rough when I visited this part of the district along with a team of trekkers from the Indian Institute of Science.

b) The Devimaneghat valley from the view-point close to the temple. The descent to sea level begins at this point which is about 450 m high. The browner pacth in the immediate background is a teak plantation. (Photo: Harish Goankar)

13.

The ceylon frogmouth that caused a bit of excitement at Nagur during my frist trip as part of a team of 'explorers' from the Indian Institute of Science. Definitely the wierdest looking bird I have ever come across. Note the wild pepper leaves in the foreground and the ant (*Crematogaster*) nest above the bird. This photograph by K.Chandrasekar (7.10.83) is probably the first of this bird in its habitat.



(14)

a



b



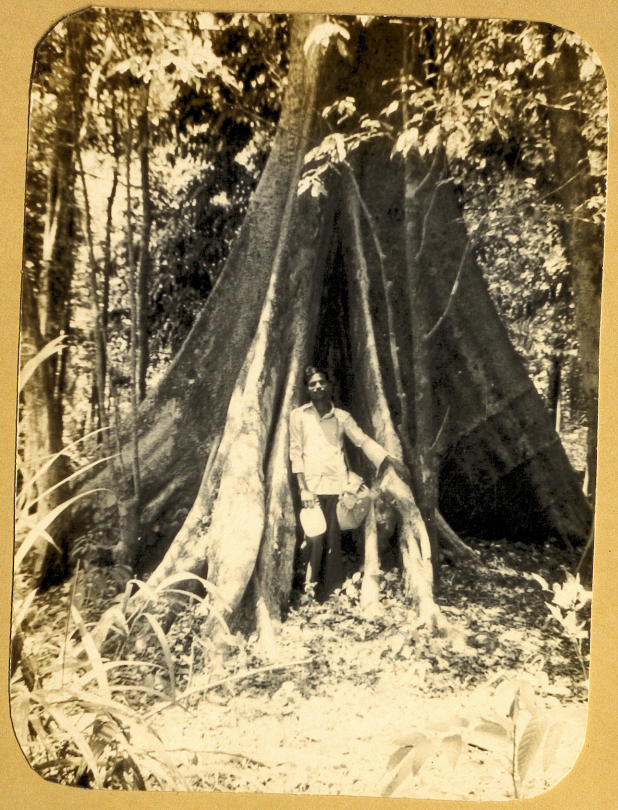
14.
a) The rather still, clear summer waters of the river Aganashini at Hulidevaragodlu. I enjoyed swimming here.

b) Harikantra demonstrating his skill with the bamboo raft that we used to cross the river at this point.

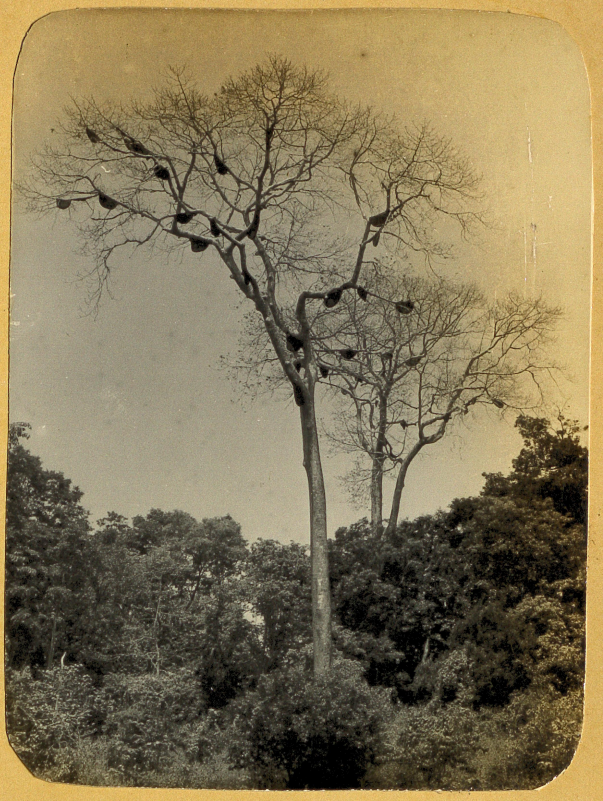
15.
a) Rock bees (*Apis dorsata*) on a bare *Tetrameles* tree beside the road to Yellapur. Though attractive, not always safe to stand under one such tree and contemplate for long.

b) The massive buttress of an emergent *Tetrameles* tree almost 'swallows' work-worn Harikantra at Hulidevaragodlu.

b



a



(16)

a



b



16.
a) A typical valley scene with a betelnut plantation in the foreground, rice fields in the background and the consequently much interfered evergreen forests (far background) at Yan.

b) The betelnut gardens shelter a variety of flowering plants, native as well as introduced. This species of the ginger family is common in the wetter gardens.

17.
a) *Havik* brahmins at Bharatnalli (Yellapur). The grey-haired widow and her son and daughter (to her right) are part of a Bhagwat family whereas the other two were just neighbours. One of the few *havik* women to be spared from having their hair shorn after being widowed. Note the bunches of ripe yellow betelnuts.

b) School children, mostly of the *havik* breed who participated in the nature camp at Salkani high school (10.5.86). Mr. G.N.Hegde wearing the white cap took a lot of interest in all these.



a



b

(18)



a



b

18.

a) A typical paddy cultivation in a forest-clearing at Bharatnalli. Note the flame of the forest (*Butea frondosa*) trees in bloom (January 1987).

b) An abandoned cultivation with signs of recent human occupation in a remote forest at Castle Rock. Note the coconut palms in the background and the remains of a brick wall under the trees in the far right.

19.

Suggi dancers of the *kumri marati* stock at Doddamaneghat. The pictures feature the solo dancer with red turban and towel, the singer with plastic flowers on his head (lower left) and the drummer (lower right). These people also use a variety of home-made drums: mud pots, their mouths tied with monitor lizards' skin.









b



a

