

Questioning CHALLAKERE

'SCIENCE CITY' - 1

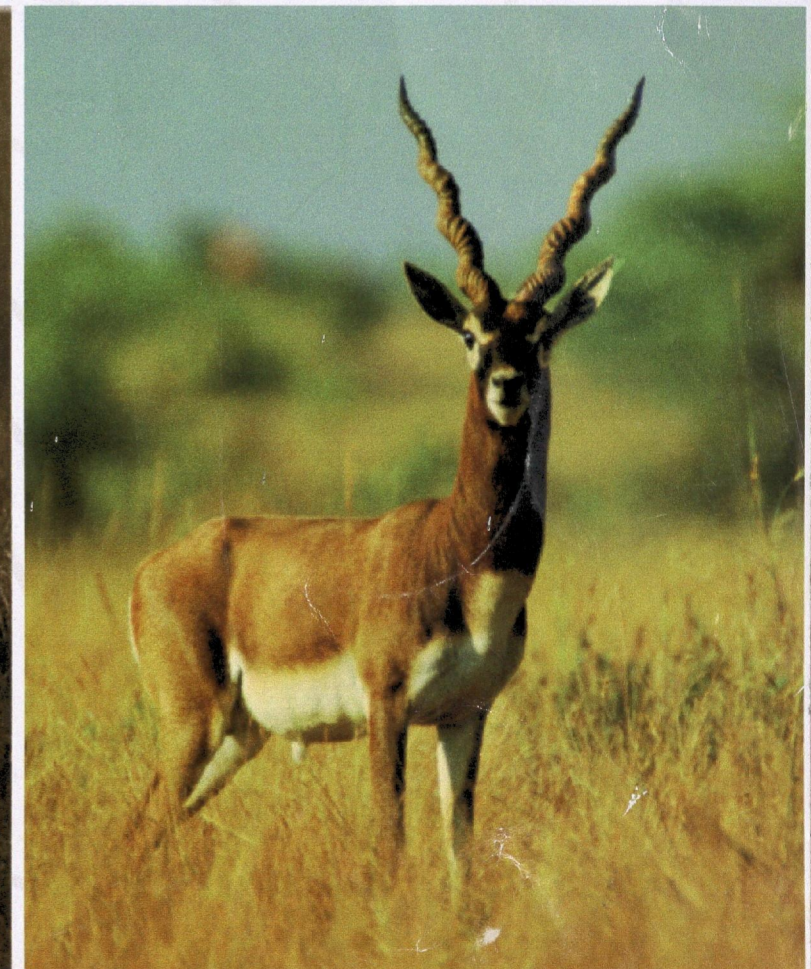
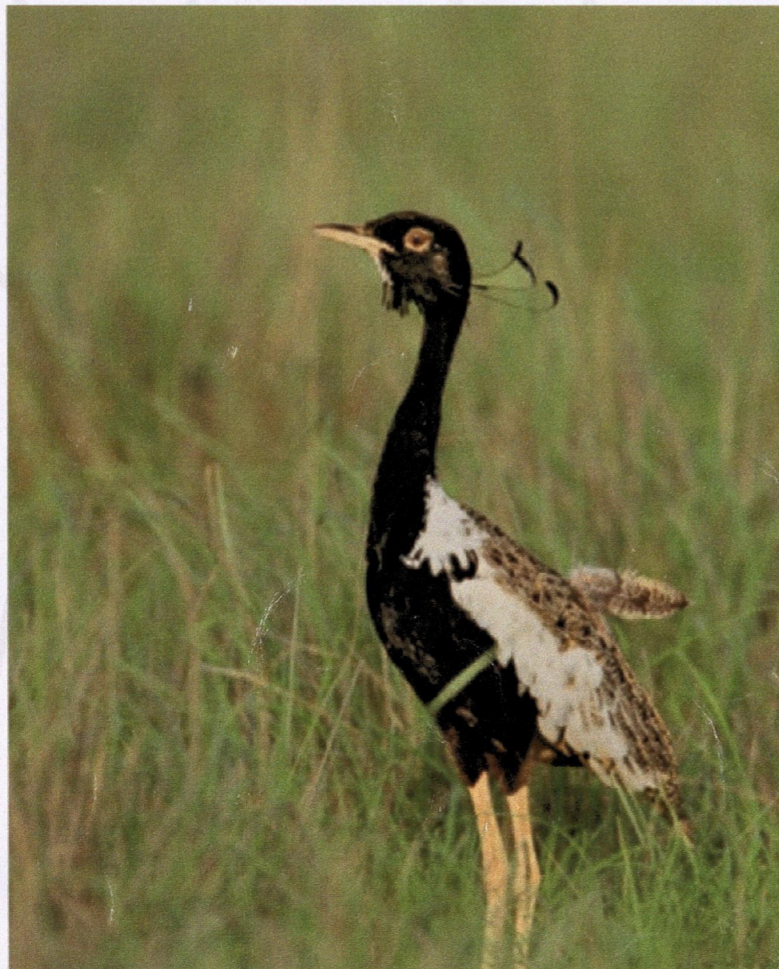


About 10,000 plus acres of pristine Amritmahal Kaval grasslands were diverted secretly between 2009-2012 for India's largest military-industrial-nuclear-solar complex, euphemistically called "science city". Institutions granted land built massive walls - over 30 kms of such walls - blocking access to the Kavals. Agro-pastoral communities from about 70 villages who nurtured and depended on these grasslands for millennia, were completely kept in the dark.

Communities dependent on the kavals for grazing their livestock and for fodder, for water (from ponds, lakes and streams), for herbs and greens to supplement nutrition, and also in sourcing plant material for building houses, making agricultural implements and artisanal products, were suddenly suspended from their ways of life and their livelihoods. Their religious and cultural sites were blocked and destroyed.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE AMRITMAHAL GRASSLANDS/OPEN NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS:

- Such grasslands (Open Natural Ecosystems are home to flora and fauna that are endemic to arid and semi-arid regions.
- They constitute the habitat preferred by critically endangered Great Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican. Blackbuck, Indian Wolf and other fauna prefer such ecosystems.
- These grasslands are critical watersheds giving birth to and sustaining streams, and replenishing ponds, lakes and ground water aquifers.
- Agropastoral communities symbiotically depend on such grasslands, and through the institution of Kavalgara have protected and wisely used them for centuries.



Questioning CHALLAKERE

'SCIENCE CITY' - 2

THE AMRIT MAHAL CATTLE

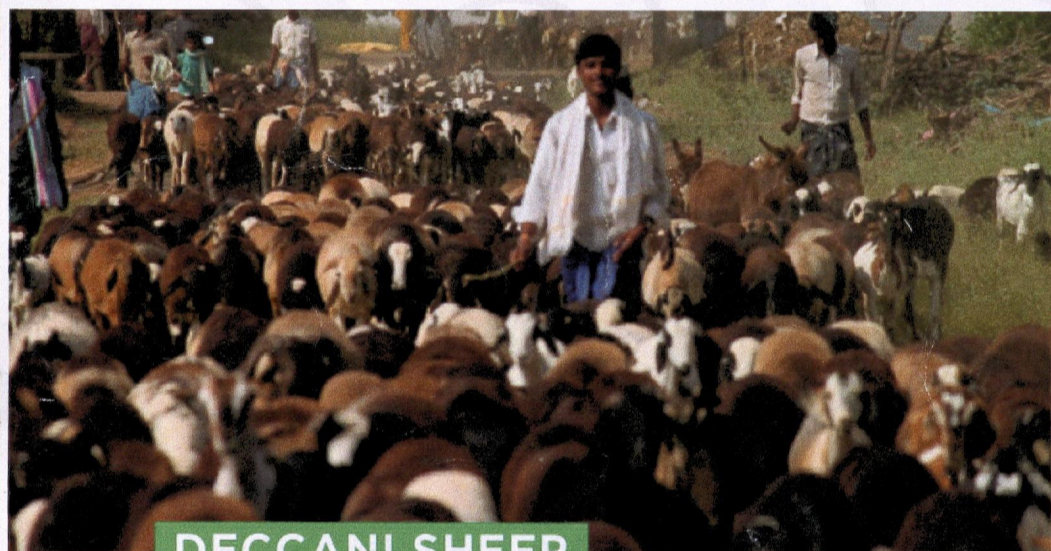
These grasslands (Kavals) are named after the Amrit Mahal breed of cattle, a fiesty, resilient and hard breed which has supported farming in these tough conditions. Equally importantly, the breed has served in many battles - it is believed for almost 1000 years, Amrit Mahal cattle have supported armies in their conquests:

- Drought and disease resistant
- Can walk long distances without water
- Milk extremely nutritious and has medicinal properties as the cattle feed on rich variety of grasses.
- And their unmatched draught power

Over time, large expanses of such grasslands were exclusively designated to grazing by Amrit Mahal herds first, and then by local cattle. These herds would roam such Kavals across Karnataka.

Kavalgara families ensured the grasslands never were overgrazed, and that both livestock and wildlife thrived. Tipu Sultan is credited with fine-tuning this tradition. Through colonial period these ecosystems were neglected as Britishers thought they were 'degraded', and wrote this into Revenue laws, which still survive and are used. At the time of Independence, Karnataka had over 4,70,000 acres of such grasslands. A 2013 Survey revealed only 30,000 acres are left, following the Challakere grasslands divested to the 'science city'.

The diversions are undertaken by the State employing colonial era Revenue laws! Local communities who resist such moves are threatened with dire consequences.



DECCANI SHEEP



MAKING OF THE CHALLAKERE KAMBLI



Deccani sheep which thrive in such grasslands support millions of farmers and pastoralists.

Well suited to tropical climates and long distance migration

Well adapted for pastoral nomadic communities to pen the sheep flock on farmer's fields that contributes to soil fertility

The wool obtained from the sheep provides additional livelihoods to women and households in making blankets. Challakere Kambli, for instance.

The blankets are versatile as they are used by the shepherds throughout the year; it keeps them warm in winter, cool in summer and does not absorb water in the rainy season. Hence, used as ponchos too.

Weaving communities shear wool of Deccani sheep

Women, predominantly, spin the wool into yarn

The yarn is processed with paste of tamarind seeds and then dried to give it strength

It is then woven into the Challakere Kambli (blankets).

Given its light weight and high insulation, the blankets are in high demand from the Indian Army, costing between Rs. 800 - 2000 in the market.

Ironically, the very landscape and its people who support the security of Indian soldiers are being displaced from the Kavals now by the 'science city'



See: <https://tinyurl.com/ESGinChallakere>

