

Spectrum statescan

Along the Varada's course...

AGRICULTURE A recent workshop conducted by the Western Ghats Task Force highlighted the importance of conserving *desi* varieties of paddy. Banavasi, an ancient capital with a rich legacy of the arts and architecture, is also known for its rice heritage, reports Sandhya Hegde Almane

Banavasi, the ancient capital of the Kadambas, has always been known for its rich heritage and has found an important place on the map. But, the erstwhile capital is also known for its rice heritage. Banavasi's paddy varieties are well-known across the country.

The village, 24 kms away from Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district, is situated on the banks of the river Varada and agriculture is the life breath of the people in the region. The river Varada is a volatile one, and has been both a boon and a bane at different points in time to agriculturists of the region. Farmers here are always on tenterhooks, unable to comprehend the course of the river. This has resulted in a style of agriculture unique to the region. In the rainy season,

the river Varada is in spate. Come summer, the river metamorphoses into a heap of sand. So the very lifestyle, folk culture and food habits of the people on the banks are knitted with the flow of the river during rains and the scanty trickle that it is during summer.

Paddy has been the pre-dominant crop grown on the banks of the Varada since time immemorial. It is an inevitability for farmers to grow paddy because Varada flows to the brim during rain. The solution for farmers is to cultivate the variety of paddy that withstands the flood. Pineapple, ginger, banana and arecanut are the commercial crops grown on the banks of Varada, but Banavasi is a storehouse of paddy diversity. The Banavasi region safeguards the rich rice heritage that we have. Around



PADDY DIVERSITY Banavasi is known for its varieties of flood-tolerant paddy. Below: *Desi* varieties of paddy at a workshop. PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



“PINEAPPLE, GINGER, BANANA AND ARECANUT ARE THE COMMERCIAL CROPS GROWN ON THE BANKS OF THE VARADA, BUT BANAVASI IN UTTARA KANNADA DISTRICT IS A TREASURE TROVE OF PADDY DIVERSITY.”

ANCIENT CAPITAL

Banavasi was once the capital of Kadamba kings, who first established their reign in the fourth century.

60 varieties of traditional paddy even when there is a clamour to raise modern, high-yielding varieties and around 35 other varieties are grown in the region.

Bilejaddu, a traditional variety has sustenance in deep water for about 30-40 days, *Karejaddu* seedlings survive 25-30 days in water. Even *Edikumi*, *Somasala*, *Mattalaga*, *Mattiga*, *Halaga*, *Siddhasale*, *Nyare Minda*, *Sannavalaya*, *Karekanthaka*, *Honnekattu*, *Jenugoodu*, *Budda Bhatta*, *Hejje* and *Mullu Bhatta* have the capacity to fight flood situations. When the Varada is in spate, 11,002 acres of paddy land are inundated in Soraba, Sirsi and Sagar taluk. There have been times when the spate continues for longer intervals, and farmers who relied on modern varieties have had to go back to *desi* paddy varieties. Farmers in the region conserve seeds of traditional varieties and don't have to run from pillar to post to get these varieties from elsewhere.

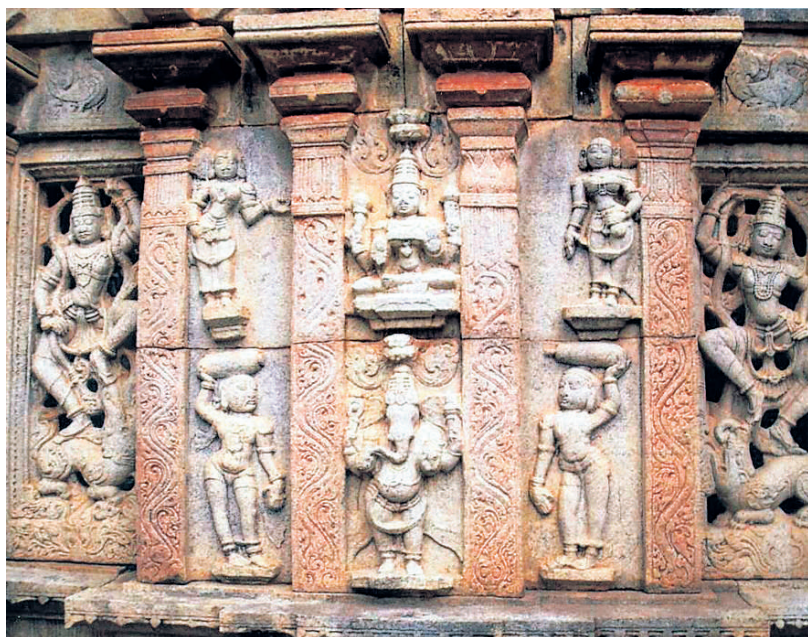
Importance of *desi* varieties

The paddy seeds supplied by the Agriculture Department are not deep-water varieties. During sowing time, an overall 3850 quintals of paddy are used in the villages on the banks of Varada in Sirsi, Soraba and Sagar taluks, but the paddy procured from the Department is only 800-900 quintals. This is because the many farmers who opt for *desi* varieties share the seeds as they have realised the worth of indigenous rice varieties. The speciality of these varieties is that they sustain themselves even in times of a flood. In fact, after the water recedes, the paddy grows profusely because the soil is enriched after the flood recedes.

“*Desi* varieties are free from diseases and pest attacks,” say local farmers. Sahaaja Samrudha, an NGO, has established a seed bank at Banavasi with the cooperation of the local Gram Panchayat so as to revive and conserve traditional rice varieties in fields here. The Western Ghats Task Force had arranged a paddy conservation workshop in association with different associations, to stress the need to conserve these varieties recently.

Desi paddy, medicinal, deep water, and scented varieties were exhibited at the workshop. Participants at the workshop have urged the government to declare the Banavasi region an agriculture bio-diversity heritage centre so as to conserve the rice heritage of the region. Rare paddy diversity should be conserved and a special conservation fund should be set up, as part of which an honorarium Rs 5000 should be given for every acre of paddy that a farmer owns, the participants sought.

MISCELLANY



SET IN STONE The Bhoganandishwara temple is said to have a history of a thousand years. PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

An ancient village near a modern airport

Situated next to the famous tourist spot, Nandi hills near Devanahalli, is a small village called Nandigram, said to have been founded in the 17th century by the chieftain of Avathi, Bhairagoda. Those who visit the Nandi hills usually miss this hillside village with a grand old temple, an archaeological monument since 1985.

The foothill village, Nandigram, has the famed Bhoganandishwara temple which has a history (as per the inscriptions) of thousand years. The village temple, named after its presiding deity Bhoganandishwara, is known to be one of the earliest built temples of its kind in Karnataka. Rathnavalli, the queen of Bana dynasty (of the eighth and ninth centuries) is said to have built the Bhoganandishwara temple which flourished for more than thousand years during the reigns of Hoysala, Chola, Pallava and Vijayanagar empires who developed it into a magnificent temple complex occupying a vast area covering the small village Nandigram. The spacious *mukha mantapa* (entrance hall) with rows of artistically sculpted supporting pillars and *naga mantapas* apart, the sprawling temple complex (370 X 250 ft) has a twin-towered ornate structure comprising separate *sanctums* adorning the deities of Bhoganandishwara, Arunachaleshwara and Umamaheshwara. The mid *sanctum* has the deity of Umamaheshwara. On either side of the shrine are the other two *sanctums* with deities of Bhoganandishwara and Arunachaleshwara (towards the north and south respectively). The *garbha gudi* (*sanctum*) of Arunachaleshwara has Ganesha (lion faced deity) and a black stone image, said to be of Cholaraja, can



be seen inside the *navaranga* of Bhoganandishwara temple. The exquisitely built Vasantha Mantapa (royal marriage hall) is adjacent to the *sanctum sanctorum* and the picturesque *Pushkarni* called *shringa teertha* is located (towards the north) near the temple complex. Shringa teertha gets its name from the sage Shringamuni. The river Dakshina Pinakini (South Pennar) is known to originate from Shringateertha.

Built in the Dravidian architectural style, standing tall on a raised *talapaya* (foundation), the Bhoganandishwara temple, its sacred shrines and holy pond apart, is also known for its aesthetic structure and classy art work. Wonderful carvings on temple walls and pillars; beautiful black stone idols and images from mythology and nature; eye-catching friezes and stucco figures are an important aspect of this temple.

Getting there

The village is just a 15-minute drive from the Bangalore International Airport. There are frequent buses from Bangalore (via Devanahalli) to Nandi hills. Take a right turn at the base hill on Devanahalli-Muddenahalli route to reach the road side temple spot.

S V Upendra Charya

Life is lonely for these zoo animals

ANIMAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME Stringent rules laid down by the government and the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) regarding procurement of animals on an exchange basis have meant that many species in Mysore's century-old zoo lead a life of solitary confinement, writes Shyam Sundar Vattam

The century-old Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore, houses many species living a life of solitary confinement. They have ended up as mere showpieces placed inside enclosures for the sole purpose of entertaining thousands of tourists who flock the zoo daily.

Stringent rules laid down by the Government of India and the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) regarding procurement of animals on an exchange basis, have made the animals' lives miserable.

The zoo authorities seem helpless about the issue too, because the permission of the central government and the CZA is a must to bring any species from international zoos to Indian zoos.

Such a situation did not prevail even two to three decades ago when zoos across the world freely exchanged animals and birds without any problems. But the rules were made more stringent following complaints of misuse by some zoo authorities.

But, this has affected genuine zoos such as the Mysore zoo that enjoys a very good reputation at the international level. In the current situation, it will take not less than two to three years to get any exotic animal from an international zoo, thanks to elaborate procedures. In the Mysore zoo too, there are some species that are in need of partners for many years now. A male gorilla Bobo was brought from a German zoo in 1996-97 to partner Sumathi, a female gorilla, which was leading a solitary life. By the time Bobo arrived in Mysore, Sumathi was not interested in a partner.

The breeding programme of the zoo authorities fell flat after Sumathi died. Since then, Bobo has been looking for a companion. If one goes by the restrictions imposed by the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP), then, such programmes will hardly take off.

The nod of the EEP is a must when it comes to sourcing any animal from any zoo in European countries. In the absence of a companion, Bobo is leading a tough life. “Most of the times he sleeps in the enclosure and rarely comes out. He sits in a corner and takes whatever is given to him,” says an officer of Mysore zoo, on the condition of anonymity.

Gorillas are typically hyper-active and are among the best of entertainers. But, Bobo is an exception. The gorilla has spent a solitary life for almost 14 years. The government and CZA are yet to make efforts to



A LONELY LIFE An African elephant called Timbo and (below) Bobo, the gorilla, have no partners at the Mysore zoo. DH PHOTOS: VISHWANATH SUVARNA AND ANURAG BASAVARA J.

“WHILE THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE MYSORE ZOO HAS A GREAT REPUTATION, NOTHING WORKS WITHOUT CONSTANT PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA. THE ZOO HAS A RECORD OF BREEDING OVER 150 SPECIES IN THE LAST 20-25 YEARS.”

break his solitary confinement at least now.

Like Bobo, there are other animals such as the white rhino, black rhino, African elephant, leopard cat and flamingoes that are in need of company. The Mysore zoo brought Timbo and Zambi, an African elephant couple in the 70s. Zambi died last year. The male elephant Timbo often goes on a rampage and attacks his own cub. “The task of finding a companion for this elephant is among the biggest challenges for the zoo authorities. No zoo is ready to spare a female African elephant in spite of the zoo offering a good sum.”

“If we start the procedure now it will take at least two-three years to reach the ministry concerned which has powers either to reject or accept the proposal. In case of any change in the government, the procedure needs to be started afresh.”

“While there is no doubt that the Mysore zoo has a great reputation among international zoos, nothing works without constant pressure from the government.”

“The zoo has a record of breeding more than 150 species in the last 20-25 years. More importantly it is one of the oldest zoos in the world,” noted the officer.

Some zoos are ready to spare “exotic” species in exchange for Indian elephants. But a few non-governmental organisations and animal activists are against this exchange. Now most zoos in Germany have almost all the animals that Indian zoos have and a time may come when the authorities of Indian zoos will have to approach the former for species.