

CAMARADERIE

DEPARTMENT OF LIBERAL ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Special Edition: Thinking The City

Conceptualizing 'Thinking The City'

-Dr. Swathi Shivanand (She/Her)

“The city is a lie that we tell ourselves”

The city as radically different from the village is an idea that has attained the status of the common sense in our age of the urban. It is a site of progress, of development, of modernity and represents human endeavor at its creative best. On the other hand, the village is a 'sink of loyalism, a den of ignorance and narrow mindedness', as B.R. Ambedkar once famously characterized it.

These binaries that inform our understanding of the city-village dyad have been challenged extensively from various vantage points—caste, class, gender, environment—among others.

The promise of the metropolis' as a space where long-standing forms of social hierarchies will be decisively broken has not quite panned out. Instead, the urban and the rural are not two discrete categories and are irrevocably marked by the presence of the other. Boundaries between them are blurred. Social hierarchies have traveled back and forth between the city and the village, acquiring newer, virulent forms.

Yet, in this urban age, it cannot be denied that cities have been sites of extensive state intervention, host to generative creative ideas and the locus of many social justice ideas and movements.

To think about the city then is to think then about how we lead our lives and what we desire from it, how we can act and how we can intervene in the world around us.

This seminar series, curated by the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Bengaluru campus, offers a look at the city through different disciplinary and perspectival vantage points. This is conceived as an introductory series to thinking about the city, how it is structured and how people live in it.

Letter from the Editorial Desk

After the kind reception of the first edition of Camaraderie, it was an exciting job to curate the second edition. This time, our special focus is on the lecture series - Thinking the City. Organized by Dr. Swathi and Ms. Sumathi in February, the series brought about narratives from various facets of the city.

The editorial team has tried its best to reflect on this series, and do justice to it. Imprinting the discourse through Camaraderie, the team has tried to archive the lecture series for further conversations.

As a prelude to m.i.l.a.p. 2023 Manipal International Literature and Arts Festival.

In Conversation with Bengaluru, the lecture series for further conversations. We hope you like this edition of the newsletter. Camaraderie will be back with its future editions and bring forth many such conversations.

The five-day lecture series was held from February 6 to 11, 2023.

Our Cities Are Made Of Villages

-Angelica Joshi (She/Her)

Most studies had hitherto imagined deeply divergent ways of being "Rural and Urban". But how does it operate in reality? We see that parts of our cities resemble villages and some of our villages resemble cities. The high technology, 4G, and smartphones reaching the villages; the simple life followed by the rural population being adopted by the urban people and such examples force us to ponder upon the differences between both. Then what exactly makes a "city" a "city", and a "village" a "village"? What use do these terminologies have in the contemporary times, when most of our inhabited spaces embody characteristics of both? How do we study these spaces of inherent contradiction?

These were some of the questions posed by Dr. Sushmita Pati, Assistant Professor at National Law School of India University, in her talk 'Our cities are made of villages' where she attempted to destabilize the water-tight notions of the village and the city". This was the first of the five talks organised as part of the seminar series 'Thinking the City'.



Dr. Pati in conversation
Photo Credits: Shafi

Dr. Pati's talk was not directed towards giving methodical ways of thinking but rather raising the question of how we can begin to make sense of these binaries. Cities are considered modern with high technology, speed, and industry whereas villages tend to consist more of the traditional aspects including culture and caste. A common service available in the contemporary city is quick delivery, be it of food, groceries, accessories and clothes. Transportation is swift, easy to access, and effective- especially with the addition of apps like Ola and Uber in our lives. The city is uniquely designed and organized and is differentiated from the village by the notion of time we inhabit which informs our daily routine—when we sleep, when we work, among others.

Dr. Pati made a reference to E.P. Thomson's "Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial Capitalism". There is a sense of clock time in urban places where time is taken to organize weekends, months, and yearly progress. In cities, we tend to become increasingly sensitive toward the concept of time. This is markedly different from the concept of time in villages where the experience of time is deeply connected to seasons, especially if you are in an agricultural profession.

Dr. Pati said cities 'cannibalise' villages, by which she meant that cities would envelop and take over villages. Yet, remnants and traces of the village continue to persist even within a global city. This is evident in how we have urban villages right in the heart of modern cities such as Delhi.

In Conversation With Dr. Pati

-Nandani (She/Her)

The first day of the lecture series was inaugurated with an eye-opening talk by Sushmita Pati, an assistant professor at National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru. She questioned the commonsense segregated notions of the city and the village, emphasizing how the spaces we occupy today are a combination of both. After the lecture, we sat down with her for a conversation about her interest in her research areas, the ideas of urban and rural village and her method of approach in research regarding governance. Here is Sushmita Pati in conversation with Nandani from BA Psychology, DLHS.

Your research area includes urban politics, political economy, state democracy, and gender, so why did you choose to focus more on these areas only?

I have been a student of political science and the matter of gender is very relevant and deeply political for me.



Dr. Pati amidst the session
Photo Credits: Shafi

Being women, presence of gender also deeply affects the way we are perceived, so in this way I was thinking about the state and gender together. At a certain point in time when it came to my own research, I was keen on understanding city spaces which can be influenced by what's happening around you, what you experienced or what's bothering you about something. I think the city had begun to fascinate me. I come from a small town; it got me interested because it was such a uniform space. So that's what I'm interested in studying the city and that's why I am where I am.

Can you explain the idea of urban and rural villages? Like from where it came and what influenced you to write about these issues?

The whole story of rural and urban village is very specific story. Very few city administrations like Delhi and Chandigarh use this system where villages are designated as urban village or rural village depending on how close they are to the city, so some villages are called urban village because they are very close to the cities and some villages are called rural cities because they are very far from the cities. But I see it as a process. I am constantly trying to push this idea where this rural and urban village thing is actually the way urbanization takes place.

We may not call them urban village, but every city more or less will have these village-like spaces on the outskirts, in the suburbs which are becoming integrated with the urban economy.

"Academic work has focused on both the conceptual and empirical dimensions of urban governance. As with any disciplinary area, a very different approach has been applied" - what role does it play in your frames of reference?

There are a lot of ways of doing academics- some works are focused on policies in helping devise policies, methodology, creating statistics, data to have better understanding of the world.

It is so you can contribute to the questions of government, to speak to the governance be it urban or otherwise. I am not directly interested in the question of creating data for policy. I'm more interested in understanding things like - what's happening in the process of this governance? What are the dynamics here? Whose interests are being served and whose interests are being ignored? We are trying to bring politics back into it. Because it seems as if policy making is not a political activity, but policy making is a deeply political act and there are all kinds of negotiations and there are all kinds of power play that is going behind the back which you don't see in UN policy document or accounting a government policy document.



Photo credits: National Law School of India

Seeing Cities Through Waste

-Suhani Jamwal (She/Her)

The idea of stigma shapes and constructs the cities we live in. Our cities are constructed to keep waste and the stigma of waste out of view. This stigma gets attached to the bodies of people who work with waste—pickers, segregators, traders. “If we rethink the idea of stigma, how will our cities look like?”. This was the question posed to the audience by Dr. Shireen Mirza, an anthropologist currently working as an assistant professor at Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

Dr. Mirza was speaking at the seminar series on “Thinking the City” organized by the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences on 7th February 2023 at MAHE, Bengaluru campus. Her talk was titled “Seeing cities through waste.”

The lecture started with a discussion about the idea of stigma regarding waste and how it builds cities. The talk further explored the ways in which caste constructs waste technologies and structures the sanitary infrastructure of cities. This was illustrated by the example of the Deonar landfill, the largest dumping ground in India, located in Shivaji Nagar, Mumbai.

Photo credits: Vice

Stories about how people found precious jewels, basmati rice, etc. while picking up garbage were fascinating to hear. Dr. Mirza said, “Someone’s trash is someone else’s treasure,” in relation to their work. As the area developed, the inhabitants also solidified their job positions. She highlighted the difference between waste pickers and waste workers. Waste pickers do not get fixed wages, but they are an asset. Individuals always think of the big technological solutions and never the people as the solution.

BMC has been too slow in listening to petitions for shutting down this mountain of waste. The Deonar landfill fires, which happened in 2016 were also briefly mentioned. The fire mobilized affluent and elite elements of Mumbai's population. Protests were primarily led by the middle-class neighborhood groups against the BMC.

“Blazing over nine days, a satellite image of the fire captured by NASA's satellite was politicized by local and national political parties to criticize the ignorance of the ruling government.”

The land became politically controversial after the fires.



Dr. Mirza delivering her lecture
Photo Credits: Sangeeta

She critiqued the idea of cities as synonymous with the urban and opposed to non-urban others (suburbs and rural). Instead, through caste constructions of waste technology and urban infrastructure, she emphasized urban and rural as theoretical constructs and categories of analysis i.e., zones of thought and representation.

It was an informative session because of the first-hand experiences of the people living there shared by Dr. Shireen. The lecture ended with a question which undoubtedly pushed the students to ponder and gave rise to a curiosity to learn more about the recent happenings pertaining to the topic.

Stigma in the City

-Kannammai (She/Her)

Dr. Shireen Mirza, an assistant professor at the School of Development at Azim Premji University, led the second day of the lecture series exploring the relationship of caste and sanitary structures and infrastructures in cities like Mumbai. She sat down with Kannammai Alagapan, a BA Psychology student, for a conversation on areas such as the general stigma towards waste disposal and management in India, the Anthropocene era, the recent G20 summit, and her upcoming book 'Stigma in the City: Waste work and animal slaughter at the margins of Mumbai'.

A German tourist was the lone person cleaning up Fort Cochin's beach, but the local authorities as well as the larger community were almost nonchalant about the whole scenario. This is a microcosm of the larger culture of apathy to waste disposal and management. I know this is a topic close to your heart, so do tell us how the public can become conscious about it in a proactive way.

This apathy exists is one and I think it is a little deeper than that. I was calling stigma and disgust right so it is more than just apathy.

This is almost a caste-like association. "It's not my job", "It's not something I should even be thinking about" so that takes little more than apathy. There is a sense of entitlement that this is something that those who traditionally have been doing should continue doing and it's not my problem. Unless that changes, nothing can be done. We are then talking about change in traditional attitudes and hierarchy in terms of how we look at other people, how we look at the poor. So, all those are built into how we think of waste. Only then we'll realise that it is not only their job but also my job". If that doesn't change then our attitudes towards waste will also not change because then that will be very cosmetic. Surface solutions will not really be effective. For a larger consciousness, there is a consciousness literally about our social structures and that consciousness needs to come in.

"Anthropocene" is a term that is new to us and which you referred to in your talk. Could you please elaborate? Do you see it as the age of destruction?

Anthropocene is a term a biologist or natural historians or scientists use to talk about various timelines or eras on this earth. Anthropocene is supposed to be an era we are entering in which the division between the human and the natural world collapses or rather the human activities like fossil fuel and carbon dioxide emissions have done so much to the natural world that the division between the natural and social world is collapsing. One can talk about how the earth is behaving, how the climate is behaving, how the glaciers are melting, how the nitrogen levels are depleting in the soil, etc., have something to do with man's action be it post industrial revolution, post the spread of capitalism and so on.



Photo credits: Azim Premji University

Anthropocene is sort of marking and noting the fact that man's actions are causing a huge change in the natural world and that demarcates the deep time in which you can measure the earth's history.

With the true spirit of the G20 Summit 2023 being "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or the "World is One Family", the sustainable developmental goals seem to have been properly laid out but at what cost? What would you suggest India to do?

The whole topic of climate change is difficult to navigate. You have the first world with very large carbon footprint and energy consumption compared to the third world. There is already a divide so what can the third world countries do to address climate change? This whole concept of "One World One Family" is too simplistic, as anthropologists contributing towards climate change are very clear on how much and who is going to be affected. The people who will be affected are the most vulnerable and the poorest. Just like COVID-19 did, climate change will also affect the most vulnerable. It will increase the gap and hierarchy and show up the fault lines in our society. Those who can pay, those who can manage and those who can move away, will perhaps still be fine.

Those who are vulnerable will become even more vulnerable. It is no more "their" problem as it has started to affect us, be it from small towns in Uttarakhand, for example, where places are cracking down, mountains caving in, extreme temperatures in Delhi, crazy monsoon cycles in Bengaluru, urban floods, etc. No one can pretend that climate change isn't going to affect them anymore. In that sense, it is hitting the rich as well as the middle class. Any kind of cosmetic response may not actually add up to it, one has to rethink structures and profits. Unless one is able to step out of capitalism and its cycle of profit, no one can stop the destruction of this planet.

I agree with you on that ma'am, as we can see that on one side India is all prepped for the G20 Summit whereas on the other side, the Joshimath disaster is taking place.



India will be hosting the G20 this year
Photo credits: Outlook India

Yes, it all just seems like business like usual and anything will be done only if it leads to better business. With regard to waste, recycling will be done if it fills someone's pocket and this is just going to be another way to earn profits and not address the real issue.



Joshimath Disaster
Photo Credits:
TOI (top); Hindustan Times (bottom)

What spurred you to write your forthcoming book 'Stigma in the City: Waste work and animal slaughter at the margins of Mumbai' on a subject that will give the phrase "Holy Cow" a whole new meaning?

First of all, I wanted to write a book which talks about the commonalities between Dalits and Muslims. We often think that caste is a story that portrays certain groups and minorities. I wanted to talk about how both these categories have a history of colonial disciplining

and that they are not as separate or disciplined as they are made out to be and that they have interconnections between them. One interconnection we can see is through the idea of stigmatised labour. Those who work with waste are stigmatised and often Dalit. Those who work with animal slaughter are equally stigmatised. Slaughterhouses are also always located at the periphery of cities so I wanted to tell the story of these interconnections. Then with the beef ban, I also wanted to talk about how everything commonly affects the Dalits and Muslims and how they sort of become a surplus population who don't seem to matter and that there will be things actively done to keep them out commonly.

I IN THE CITY

-Sreya Suresh (She/Her)

The city turns on its promises when it marginalizes some of its people. It starts with something as simple as failing to notice or acknowledge, knowingly or unknowingly, the people who do not look or present type themselves in certain classed ways to downright discrimination and intolerance of them. Stories of individuals who migrated to the city for education and employment and the ways in which they navigated the city's unfamiliarity, and its discriminatory practices were at the heart of an exceptional session by Vijeta Kumar in her talk 'I in the city'. This was the third of five talks organized by the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at MAHE, Bengaluru campus as part of the series 'Thinking the city'.

Perhaps the most significant part of the session was the realization of how much caste discrimination and prejudice exist around us and still go unnoticed by the privileged. Discrimination and privilege manifest in different ways. The city consists of numerous stories, much of which are masked in order to fit in among what is considered the general idea or thought of what a city is supposed to be. Many times, identities are stripped down and minimalized to appear 'normal'. Behind the concrete walls and the doors barely separating one apartment from the next, these 'secret identities' unravel when people cook the food belonging to their culture, speak their native language, and so on. Often, the privilege and entitlement of a city dweller are related to how and why they ended up in the city and how much they are allowed to contribute to the overall story of the city or the 'dream' that a city offers.

Even with all its flaws, cities do present a possibility of Dr. B.R Ambedkar's dream coming true of 'mixing people', gradually and in its own way, if not completely and quickly. The diversity, the rush, and business of the city force people out of their comfort zones of mingling and conversing with people of their own caste or class. It offers an opportunity for someone to come out of their prejudice in a way that a village often cannot.



Prof. Vijeta Kumar delivering her powerful lecture
Photo Credits: Shafi

Food often acts as a cultural barrier, but it is also something that brings cultures together. The city often presents an opportunity for the exploration of cuisines, unmarked by caste barriers. Vijeta's anecdotes about food and them being a unifying factor among people brought forth the ways in which a shared lunchbox can go a long way in dismantling prejudiced attitudes at least on a personal level, if not on a larger scale. And for everything to reach such a scale, it must start with something personal. Her story about a young janeu-wearing boy who fell in love with boiled egg and took it off every time he ate it stayed with many of us long after the talk.

Discovering and rediscovering what caste meant to oneself and how we navigate between these classifications as a privileged section of the society were conversations, we had post the talk. We spoke of how perhaps it is up to young people now to break the chain of subtle and micro aggressive caste demarcation and take deliberate steps to create a society that will accept and make space for an inclusive future. For some of us, the cleaning staff of the university having their lunch inside the washroom was something that had been bothering us and the conversations after the talk centered around this aspect.

We wondered how this came to be—was its self-exclusion or were there implicit or explicit instructions to not occupy the dining area or something else? We had wanted to take this up with both the sanitation staff and the management, but this seems to have been resolved with a dining space allotted to the staff at the university now.

Another discussion that we had was around having to prove one's vegetarian status in order to rent an apartment in the city. The common question "Are you veg or non-veg" is a poorly masked attempt at trying to discern the caste of the potential tenant. There were a few among us who could relate to such incidents. In fact, anyone who has tried renting out houses or apartments in the city can say the same. This goes to show just how much the stories of the famous Dalit Kannada Siddalingaiah and others like him are far from being incidents of the past and is prevalent just as much even today, which makes sessions such as the one we had with Vijeta, all the more important.

Talking Caste and the City

-Zaafirah Siddiqui (She/Her)

We sat down with Vijeta Kumar for a conversation after her insightful talk about caste, social status and equality in cities and classrooms on day three of our lecture series. The conversation broached topics like her experiences in the city of Bangalore, her perceptions of the urban and rural structures in India and abroad, her teaching experiences at St. Joseph's College, her views on Ellena Ferrante's works and so on. Here's Vijeta Kumar, in conversation with Zaafirah from BA Journalism and Mass Media, DLHS.

How has your area of upbringing and background impacted you? Your ways of thinking, understanding "city" and "rural" structures, your understanding of the social structures in cities?

Much of my experiences growing up in Bangalore left me wondering if there was something I didn't do, if there was something I wasn't doing right, if there was something wrong with me. It wasn't clear what the problem was, the questions were answered when I learned to read, read Ambedkar and Siddhaligaiah and other writers, because in the stories that they wrote, even though they were not claiming to explain everything about your experience, I could see why some of the things that were unexplained during childhood or school were still happening.

St. Joseph's is a widely acclaimed and credible university that has students enrolling from all over India, from all castes, backgrounds, and factions of social structures. How has your teaching experience with students from both cities and rural areas been at St. Joseph's?

It's very difficult to get to talk to students because of the classroom experience, they've either muted themselves, so they don't talk to anybody, and if they do then they make sure they don't say much. I'm not saying these are all the same people or that they're very easy to distinguish. Because the classroom forces people to mix and sometimes even unmix. Some might only talk to each other and not others. As a teacher, the most challenging thing for me in the classroom was to identify the students who are uncomfortable in the classroom, not because of what someone said or if someone said something, but because they haven't been trained to be in a classroom. Even such a thing as entering a classroom and being okay with not having anyone to say hi to is an exercise. Some people are able to do it very well, and some aren't. I've noticed that there are a lot of challenges involved in making friends, understanding how things work inside the college, understanding how universities function, the dos and don'ts, and even something as simple as making friends in a classroom remains a mystery to people, that's the division I've seen, some of which I spoke about in the session.

Your love for Gilmore Girls has always been open. Lorelai and Rory live in Stars Hollow, which isn't a slum area, but not a city like New York either. Stars Hollow is a small town.

Contrarily, suburban small towns in India like Stars Hollow are rare. Why do you think cities, small towns, and social structures are so different in the U.S. as compared to India?

Because of caste. I don't think they're that distinct in the U.S. as well, because it's clear from the way that black writers are responding to things happening in the country and from what I've read in the last 10-12 years, it's not easy for them to remain black in a white country. There are stories and videos of black people entering predominantly white neighborhoods and white people calling the cops on them, things like that. I'm sure these experiences also facilitate figuring out what's a suburb and what is a city, etc, I've never been able to understand those distinctions.

But I do know that when Claudia Rankine, who was this African American writer I was reading, pointed out that cities come with their own language, and in order to learn that language. you need to train yourself in English or whatever urban language is spoken in the country and learn how to be.

Through her and another couple of writers I've been reading. I've also developed a certain kind of language to talk about here in my own country.



Prof. Vijeta Kumar with Dr. Shilpa Kalyan (HOD-DLHS)
Photo Credits: Shafi

Elena Ferrante's work has had an impact on you, according to your writings. Her works and contributions to feminist literature have been widely celebrated. You mentioned that you teach it to your students. Have your students from different backgrounds interpreted her work differently?

They do, yes. Sometimes students are also accustomed to a certain way of teaching, of being taught. If it's a fair-skinned, tall, and slim teacher walking into the classroom, the discipline is set. They're taken more seriously.

“ The practice of teaching itself, I'm talking about knowing specific words and jargon, using them, bringing in critical theory when talking about a poem, and things like that. Learning what Shakespeare says about Henry IV. Sometimes these are modes of education, sometimes these are modes of access. ”

My own teaching in the classroom is inspired a lot by storytelling, which is not something most students are trained to understand as a way of teaching because then they'd think "I can listen to this from my grandma I don't need you for

this", so not all students respond the same way. I notice that the students for whom it's very difficult to be taken seriously in the classroom tend to respond positively because they see me and they think "okay if you're struggling with language and you're still an English teacher, then there's hope for me". As to how the students respond to Elena Ferrante's work when I like a piece of literature or an author, I take it to class with me, I talk from the position and perspective of a fan. My colleague recently wrote a very fascinating essay on the third eye, centered around fangirls. It's about how for her teaching comes from recognizing herself as a fangirl. This is not recognized as a serious pedagogy anywhere; you need to offer contexts and give histories and locations. Many of the students to whom I spoke about Elena Ferrante's work couldn't understand this 'fandomness', or this 'fangirlness', which to give them credit is their right. If they want to be taught a certain way and they expect from me. However, I'm also interested in the students who took to this new kind of teaching.

Intersections between Cities and Mental Health

-Preethi Gopi(She/Her),
Kannammai Alagapan(She/Her)

We live in a rapidly urbanizing world. Does the fact that most people across the world live in urban areas matter to their mental health? What does this mean for how we study and understand mental health? Is mental health to be considered a public health issue? These were some of the key questions raised in the talk on mental health and cities, organized as part of the seminar series 'Thinking the city'.

Dr. Arvind B A, Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Dr Harshitha, senior resident in the Department of Psychiatry, both from National Institute for Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) raised these questions during their talk on the fourth day of the seminar series on 9 February 2023.

Villages are built on social relationships, unlike lonesome cities. Mental health among those living in cities has been neglected and it is only getting worse as these cities develop. Urbanization is inevitable and India being a key driver of it, needs to pay attention to urban mental health, according to Dr. Arvind. This applies to the rest of the world as well because every region of it is expected to be urbanized in the next ten years.

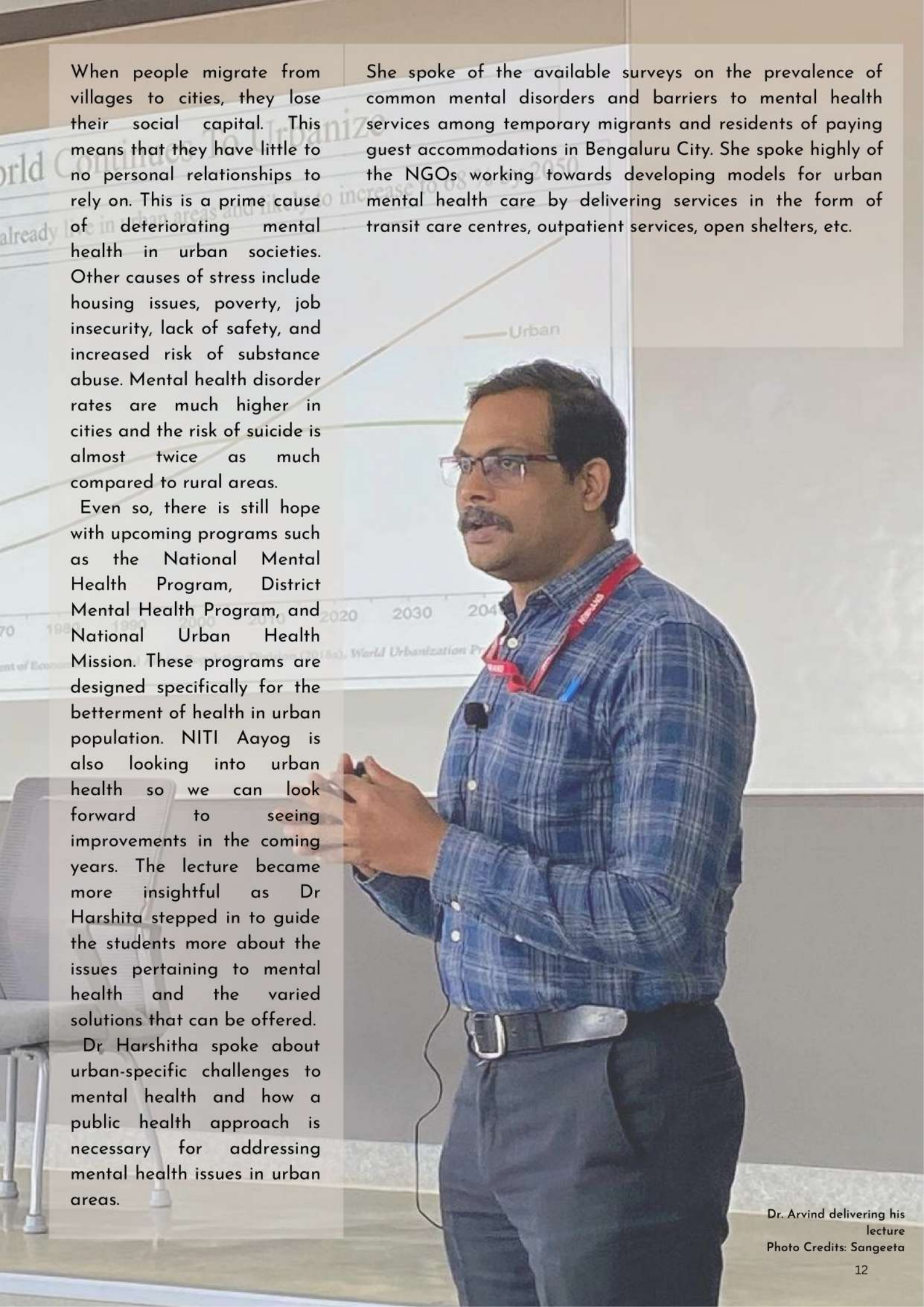
He also discussed the factors that determine health and the ill effects of urban life on health. Health is determined by factors such as food, education, environment, living and working conditions, sanitation, and healthcare services.

When people migrate from villages to cities, they lose their social capital. This means that they have little to no personal relationships to rely on. This is a prime cause of deteriorating mental health in urban societies. Other causes of stress include housing issues, poverty, job insecurity, lack of safety, and increased risk of substance abuse. Mental health disorder rates are much higher in cities and the risk of suicide is almost twice as much compared to rural areas.

Even so, there is still hope with upcoming programs such as the National Mental Health Program, District Mental Health Program, and National Urban Health Mission. These programs are designed specifically for the betterment of health in urban population. NITI Aayog is also looking into urban health so we can look forward to seeing improvements in the coming years. The lecture became more insightful as Dr Harshita stepped in to guide the students more about the issues pertaining to mental health and the varied solutions that can be offered.

Dr Harshitha spoke about urban-specific challenges to mental health and how a public health approach is necessary for addressing mental health issues in urban areas.

She spoke of the available surveys on the prevalence of common mental disorders and barriers to mental health services among temporary migrants and residents of paying guest accommodations in Bengaluru City. She spoke highly of the NGOs working towards developing models for urban mental health care by delivering services in the form of transit care centres, outpatient services, open shelters, etc.



Dr. Arvind delivering his lecture
Photo Credits: Sangeeta

Dr Harshitha introduced the students to the hub and spokes model of NIMHANS, where NIMHANS acts as the hub and extends its services to various spokes such as districts, prisons, relief and rehabilitation centres. She also explained the lay counsellors module where they train members of civil society to provide psychological first aid to distressed individuals. She also spoke of the Bengaluru Urban Mental Health Initiatives (BHUMI) which aims at the treatment of mental disorders and the prevention and promotion of mental health as well as . Tele MANAS, a national programme to make mental health services accessible through telephonic services. Dr. Harshita also called for formulating mental health strategies that have to be implemented for cities in specific and of how public-private partnership, particularly through NGOs, is the need of the hour.

The Relevance of Mental Health

-Angelica Joshi (She/Her)

We had an in-depth conversation about mental health in India with Dr. Naveen Kumar and Dr. Harshitha C.V. from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) after their incredibly informative lecture regarding the relevance of mental health and urban spaces. The discussion covered various concerns, such as the effects of migration on mental health in India, initiatives required for mental healthcare of migrated laborers, mental health awareness in rural areas, reasons for higher rates of mental disorders and illnesses in cities, Tele-Manas, the scope of various disciplines of psychology in the country and so forth. So, here we have Dr. Naveen Kumar and Dr. Harshitha C.V. in conversation with Angelica Joshi from BA Psychology, DLHS.

As we were talking about the Urban and Rural population, there are a great number of rural people who come to the cities for education and occupation purposes, so do you think that fast city life and the idea of urbanization affects their mental health and if so, how? Furthermore, how can they overcome it?

Dr. Harshitha: Definitely it affects their life as we already spoke. They are not from this population, this demography. There are a lot of migrants who come, who are not familiar with the geography and they are not familiar with this society. The social system is itself poor, so when social security is poor then definitely it will have an impact on their mental health. There is distress. Whenever a human is posed in an unfamiliar environment, definitely it will cause distress. When the social system is poor, their social security is poor it will invariably evoke distress in an individual.



Dr. Aravind: Adding to what Harshitha said, from rural to urban you just can't say it is one group of population. From rural to urban we are different segments of society, that is few people move here as laborers, few people move here for studying, few people come for settling and they are working different jobs. So not all of them are equal. Therefore, for laborers the factors that operate are totally different as opposed to a student who is coming to the urban area. For example, a laborer is settling in a slum, so the environmental condition is not conducive for him. Look at his life in a rural area then look at his life in an urban area, so now there is a lot of stress built up. Now he has come here for livelihood, so what is the type of work he is engaged in, in the urban area. Let us say he is working in a construction site. So, what are the rules and regulations in that construction site, what is the working environment, how much work does he have to do, so all of this affects his mental health. Suppose a student comes; does he have a supportive structure in the urban area? We hear many people who study here live in paying guest accommodation, they didn't have anybody in the city. So, the social support system which was at their home is not here. So here the rural population is coming and living to make a living, so the type of work they do- especially those who are involved in informal work, their working condition is itself so poor that it will affect their mental health. Then, let's say he earns 5000 rupees in rural area but still can manage many things there. If he's even earning, let us say 20,000 thousand here, it's difficult for him to manage. So, all of this will add together and contribute to worsening of their mental health. Let us say this labourer develops some health issues, he has to go and seek treatment from public health system, but that system is open only from 9-12. That poor fellow can't leave his work and come, so he will only come in the evening, evening means only private healthcare facilities are there. So, now he has to take and give 200 rupees extra for his check-up.

WHAT DOES CLIMATE CHANGE HAVE TO DO WITH CITIES?

- Zaafirah Siddiqui (She/Her)

Cities are the biggest contributors to waste and pollution and hence to climate change. Cities are also where climate change is experienced with greater intensity, particularly because of the urban heat island phenomenon. The high levels of concretization in the city because of buildings and road infrastructure generates and



Photo Credits: Indian Institute of Human Settlements

traps the heat. These were some of the key points raised by Prathijna Kodira in her talk 'What does climate change have to do with cities'. She was speaking at the seminar series 'Thinking the City' organised by the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Kodira also offered an in-depth explanation of how global warming works, and how it really affects the earth and its inhabitants. She explained that, in addition to sea level rise, global warming also causes the oceans' water to absorb more carbon dioxide, causing it to become more acidic and harm coral reefs and marine life.

She spoke on the rise of extreme events such as cyclones and floods now occurring on the west coast of India. The intersection of cities and the role they play in climate change is evident due to the phenomenon of urban heat island, cities are now approximately 2°C hotter than other areas, which leads to disproportionate climate change impacts, owing to economic vulnerabilities in different subsections of the population. Cities built in low-lying coastal areas tend to be the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Students were sensitized to the complications that come with climate change and how its realities are rooted in the economy, poverty, and politics.

Toward the end of the lecture, she recommended "Limits to Growth", and also provided resources on climate action with an interactive session amongst the students, which sparked a spirited discussion on fossil fuel alternatives such as biofuels or bioethanol.

The seminar was brought to a close by Dr. Swathi Shivanand and Ms. Sumathi Nagesh who worked to organize the week-long lecture series. They spoke about how cities are not a stage or backdrop to the lives of students, but a relationship that is each student's responsibility to shape. They went on to recount the seminars of the week and their individual objectives, expressing their hopes for a changed perspective among students. They concluded with a teaser to the outbound activity they had planned for the students the next day, to Nandi Hills and its surroundings.

Day five of the lecture series witnessed Prathijna Poonacha Kodira, a climate change researcher and practitioner at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bangalore, expertly navigate the centrality of cities in the phenomenon of climate change. After the lecture, her views about the incorporation of climate change and climate action in school syllabi and inclusive climate change public policy were recorded in a conversation with Mohammed Shafiulla, an MA Multimedia and Communication student from DLHS.

How can we effectively incorporate climate change in the syllabus of school students so that they understand the nuances of it better?

This is super interesting because one of the big levers for change is education. The way I studied geography did not speak anything about the changing climate, which was very normative at that time. It is absolutely necessary that we talk about the things that are happening in our world right now, right from the beginning. Kids these days can understand what's happening. Things are immediate and relatable because it is happening now and here. Bringing it sooner into the curriculum is definitely a really important way to go. I think there are multiple ways this can be achieved. One, of course, is classroom teaching. There are incredible amounts of resources that are available, free to use, and tailor-made for children as young as five-year olds to adolescents and teenagers. There's so much accessible material which was

Towards an Inclusive Stand for Climate Action

- Mohammed Shafiulla (He/Him)



Prathijna Poonacha in an engaging moment
Photo Credits: Shafi

not there five to ten years ago. One can look at western websites such as the United Nations website, and even the Government of India is producing educational material that can be used in schools and colleges. Also, relating it to everyday experiences makes a powerful tool to actually ingrain some of these things.

Another approach is hands-on learning. For example, the school my son goes to, had this year-long program about growing ragi. Right from preparing a piece of land to sowing the ragi, watering it, studying the environmental factors affecting its growth, looking into what one can make out of it, how much does the endeavour cost, everything was taught. The program covered concepts of science, English, biology through that act of growing ragi. Not do programs like this only make such professions very real and relatable, but they also equalize people. The experience of growing something equalizes people from different backgrounds, be it people from an upper-middle class household or a lower-middle class one. And, it also teaches you where your food is coming from, how much is the water intensity of that food, what does it mean to waste food when you have put in so much effort into growing it, all those sorts of concepts. I thought it was quite a powerful way of understanding certain concepts, but also imbibing certain values around these concepts as well, which could be sustainable.

How do you think the Government of India should approach the inclusion of marginalized communities into public policy about climate change?

“I think fundamentally, the discourse around climate change and climate action is a discourse on justice.”

At the heart of it, at least in the global negotiations and politics around climate change, it is about the historical emitters who pace for the change and despite that a lot of smaller, developing countries have nothing to do with global emissions, their per capita emissions are so small, despite that they are the ones who pay the highest price of climate change impact. So, at the heart of it, the discussion at all levels, right from global policy to even how it plays out in the cities, is a question of justice and equality. If you relate that to other intersections such as gender, caste or identity, it's also a question of justice at the end of it. All those intersections are a question of justice and equality at the heart. Coming to what the Government of India can do.

In climate action, especially in terms of both mitigation and adaptation, the idea of justice has to be kept in the centre. Suppose, for instance, somebody was talking about the example of solar farms. Solar farm is a great example of climate mitigation, but what is it doing to the people living around that, what is it doing to the livelihoods of people who are living around that? Is it marginalizing some people in favour of certain technology, these are the kinds of nuances that policy-making in its true sense should take into account while thinking about climate action. Climate action should not result in the marginalization of certain groups.

Viewing the City- A Trip to Nandi Hills

-Viha Disley (She/Her)

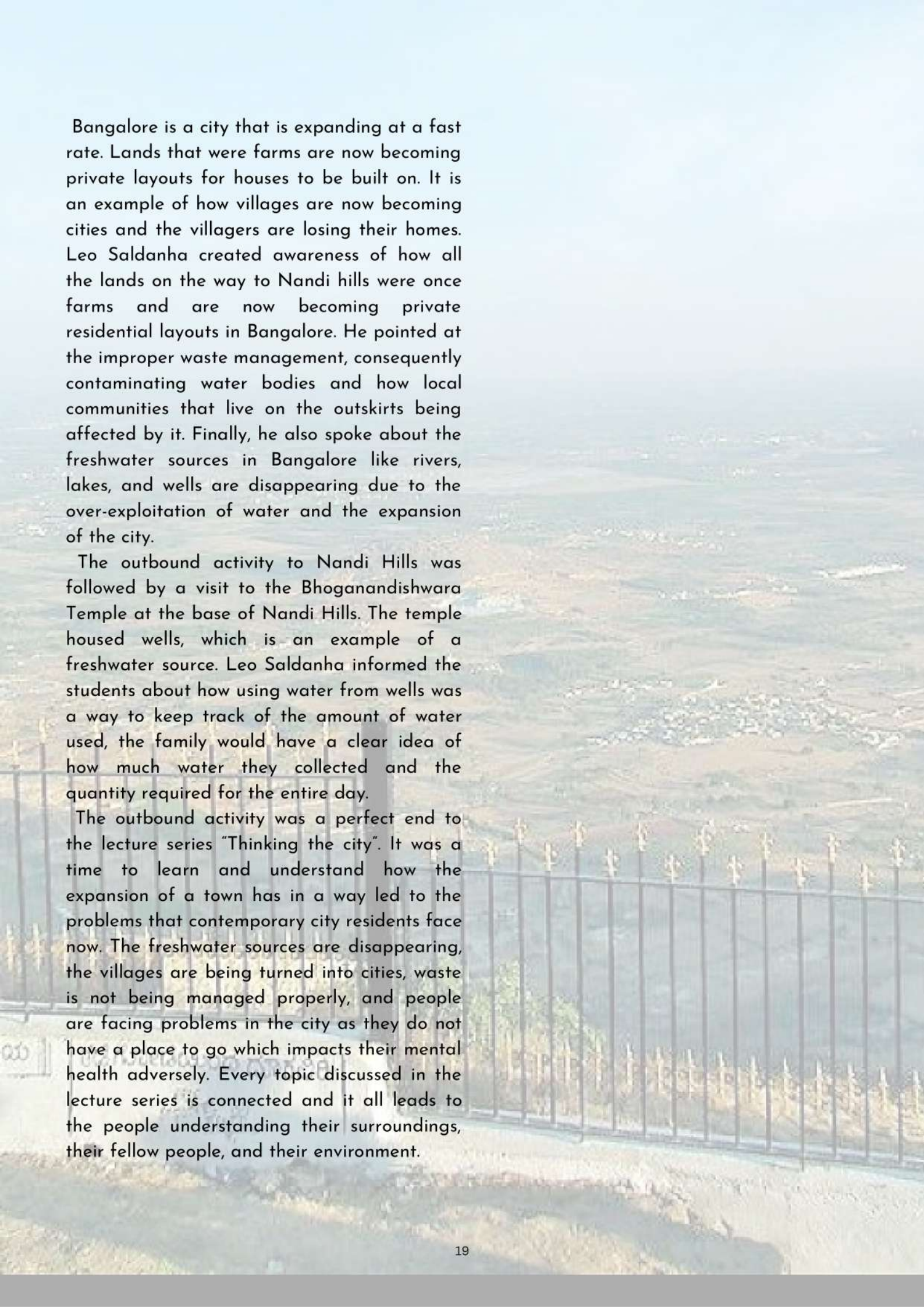
On 11 February 2023, an outbound activity to Nandi Hills was planned by the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to provide a practical experience to the learnings of the lecture series. It was in collaboration with the Environment Support Group (ESG) which was led by Leo Saldanha. ESG works to help the affected local communities, the ecosystem, and to protect the environment.

Leo Saldanha began by speaking about how Bangalore as a city has grown over the years. He also pointed out the changes that have occurred in Bangalore and how it has impacted the lives of people living here.

The outbound activity was a time to reflect on how Bangalore has evolved from a village to the city that one perceives today. Bangalore has come a long way from being a town with a population of 1.2 lakhs to a city with a population of 14 million.

The outbound activity began with a visit to the Nandi Hills which is the point of origin of the Arkavathi river. The river was supposed to provide water for the people of Bangalore. However, it does not exist anymore. It has dried out and the only thing that remains is the river basin at the top of the hill.

Throughout the day Leo Saldanha spoke about the amount of water that is consumed by the people and how it has affected the environment. One such example was how the water of the Arkavathi river has been used up and there is not a lot of water left. He also highlighted that there is only 3% of freshwater left and with the manner in which the city population is growing, there will be an insufficient amount of freshwater left for the people.



Bangalore is a city that is expanding at a fast rate. Lands that were farms are now becoming private layouts for houses to be built on. It is an example of how villages are now becoming cities and the villagers are losing their homes. Leo Saldanha created awareness of how all the lands on the way to Nandi hills were once farms and are now becoming private residential layouts in Bangalore. He pointed at the improper waste management, consequently contaminating water bodies and how local communities that live on the outskirts being affected by it. Finally, he also spoke about the freshwater sources in Bangalore like rivers, lakes, and wells are disappearing due to the over-exploitation of water and the expansion of the city.

The outbound activity to Nandi Hills was followed by a visit to the Bhoganandishwara Temple at the base of Nandi Hills. The temple housed wells, which is an example of a freshwater source. Leo Saldanha informed the students about how using water from wells was a way to keep track of the amount of water used, the family would have a clear idea of how much water they collected and the quantity required for the entire day.

The outbound activity was a perfect end to the lecture series "Thinking the city". It was a time to learn and understand how the expansion of a town has in a way led to the problems that contemporary city residents face now. The freshwater sources are disappearing, the villages are being turned into cities, waste is not being managed properly, and people are facing problems in the city as they do not have a place to go which impacts their mental health adversely. Every topic discussed in the lecture series is connected and it all leads to the people understanding their surroundings, their fellow people, and their environment.

Through the City- A Photo Essay

-Praveen Singh W (He/Him)



Leo Saldanha introduces what students can expect from the trip.

The DLHS students, as a part of the 'Thinking The City' seminar series, went to Nandi Hills and Bhoganandeeshwara Temple, to understand the city of Bengaluru. They were accompanied by Leo Saldanha, from Environment Support Group. It was an opportunity for students to involve themselves with nature directly, and learning outside a traditional class setting.



Students observe the plastic ban at Nandi Hills during the expedition. Leo Saldanha addresses the condition of water resources in the city.



Students participate in meaningful conversation about Arkavathi preserving river water

NANDI HILLS: AN ESCAPE FROM THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

11/02/23



An inspiring day appreciating and connecting with nature



Students walking barefoot on the ground in the temple.

AFTERTHOUGHTS- STUDENT TESTIMONIALS



Akanksh Nair (He/Him)
BA Psychology, DLHS

The lecture series "Thinking the city" was a very interesting one. It delved deeper into the various environmental, ecological and economic problems that society faces today. The guest lecturers also spoke about how these problems are very prominent in society and discussed some temporary and permanent solutions.

The lectures really piqued my interest in certain topics. In particular, the talk given on Cities affecting mental health of humans given by the lecturers from NIMHANS was very inquisitive. I got to know about the current statistical data regarding mental disorders in cities.

I really enjoyed the outbound activity. I found the facts stated by Mr. Leo Saldanha very interesting. I also learnt about the "Blue Dot" and that was something very intriguing to me. Overall, the lecture series has left me with questions and thoughts which I think we should all ponder on.



Kannammai (She/Her)
BA Psychology, DLHS

The one-week long lecture series for me, was an eye opener in a lot of ways. It showed me new perspectives on cities and climate change and came across new but interesting terms like Anthropocene and a few more.

The five seminars had different levels of impact on me. The day 3 of the lecture series delivered by Prof. Vijeta Kumar had a huge impact on me as it was from a very personal perspective. The day 4 of the lecture series delivered by Dr. Arvind and Dr. Harshitha intrigued me as it had all the latest statistical data regarding mental health and people living in cities.

I felt the outbound activity was indeed the best way to conclude the seminar series. The visit to Nandi Hills and the Bhoga Nandishwara temple made me actually feel at peace and ponder on the talks given by the previous lecturers. It was definitely more than just a field visit. It also turned out to be an opportunity for the department to bond. The whole seminar series of "Thinking the City" actually made me think more of the city from different perspectives.



Ganesh Ramesh Kulkarni (He/Him)
BA Double Majors, DLHS

In a high-paced world, the lecture series helped me slow down and observe the usual activities from a different perspective.

The "Thinking the City" series was more a kind of skull session than a lecture. The speakers were specialized in different disciplines, thereby uniquely contributing to the lecture series. I learned how an issue can affect different people differently, for example, climate change.

Miss Prathijna Poonacha, one of the speakers, had an offbeat opinion about the government and its efforts toward combatting climate change.

If one was looking for different viewpoints on climate change, then the best bet was this series. I'd like to see more such series!



Sharvari Varthak (She/Her)
BA Psychology, DLHS

The lecture series was very informative as it gave a view on the city in a way that we as students never thought about and the different perspectives of each speaker really opened our mind to different ideas and problems present in the society ranging from discrimination against Dalit people to water pollution. The Nandi Hills trip helped us acknowledge the problem to a wider extent. Sitting in the classroom we don't see the severity of the situation. It was impactful, seeing it in person. Overall the lecture series was a very good, influential and has a lot of relevance to our courses. I look forward to more of such interactive sessions with guest lecturers.



Mahima Ann Shaji (She/Her)
MA English Language and Literature, DLHS

The lecture series 'Thinking the City' was a very different experience for me. I got to explore new perspectives on how to think about and around cities. Being part of the logistics team, I was able to witness how the event took shape and worked out perfectly well. Each day we had a different view of the city from each of the resource people. My favourite lecture of the series was day 3 titled 'City and I' by Vijeta Kumar. She spoke about how a city and an individual are connected. How each individual has a different perception of the city. Each speaker opened up our minds to fresh viewpoints on society and about the problems that we face in the city whether its waste management or climate change. I had a wonderful time organizing the event and attending the same.



Ankita Sahoo (She/Her)
BA Double Major, DLHS

The series really reflected the various inequalities and gentrification acting within the city. It portrayed the dichotomy of the city in action and the reflection of social structures retained in city spaces. As the Activities Coordinator of DLHS, I felt very excited and nervous managing the event, but with fabulous teammates and excellent guidance by faculty coordinators, it was a successful event that impacted our thought processes. I am extremely elated to have organised and imbibed reflections from the same. I especially loved the series' first lecture, by Sushmita Pati on cities being not alienated from villages and how the concept of urban employment and industries intersected with rural lives.

Thinking The City- The Inception

-Shafi B (He/Him)

Aaheri Bose (She/Her)

The Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences organized a five-day lecture series that hosted conversations about cityscapes and the multitude of intersections revolving around them. For most of us, cities are spaces representing growth, modernity, capitalism, and development. But, amidst all these aspirations, what we see is that there is an immense intersection of ideas resulting in identities that pick up cues from everything that the city has to offer. 'Thinking the City'; discussed these intersections in detail that laid the premise for the upcoming Manipal International Literary and Arts Platform (m.i.l.a.p.)-2023. The central theme of this art and the literary festival is cityscapes, and places its crux on, "In Conversation with Bengaluru."

The lecture series was an insight into various conversations that emanate from cities. It was the brainchild of Swathi Shivanand and Sumathi Nagesh. The two are assistant professors at the department, one hailing from a history, media and urban studies background and the latter from theatre and literature.



Swathi in conversation post the series
Photo Credits: Sangeetha

We sat in conversation with the two to understand their conception of cities, their experience in organizing the lecture series and what they took back from the week.

To understand the various intersections that define a city, we tend to often look at our own interactions with it. Swathi grew up in Bengaluru's Malleshwaram, a Brahmin-dominated area, the significance of which she understands now. She glances outside the library window, thinks a little and goes on to talk about the aspirations and the imagination that come with the city. She says,

“ I look at the city now in terms of whose interests are served and whose interests are not served. ”

She explains further with the example of the street in front of her house that has not been asphalted for a while now. But given the elections that are upon Bengaluru, it has now been asphalted.

With the diverse interdisciplinary background she has, being a journalist, an academician, and a professor, her interactions have developed further. Her vision now also stars the animals that live on these streets, and are prone to be hit by speeding vehicles. Sumathi takes this conversation further, "What I think of the city is that I was born in the city". As a kid, she always wished she had some other place, a 'native place', like most people have, where she could go away from the city. But for her, the city is her native. This is her reality, like for both of us too. Aaheri and I are both city-born and bred people. All we know is the city, and this shapes us in a way so complete that our very paradigm of living is in the model of a city. But, Sumathi has something interesting to add. She's found these small pockets within the city that can be her getaway from the city itself. That's the thing about cityscapes. They provide us with access to locations that aren't the city, but are housed by it. It's all in the way you explore it.



Sumathi wrapping up the series
Photo Credits: Sangeetha

Which Sumathi says, is through public transport for her. It is through public transport, the people she meets, the roads she traverses on, the hoardings, the trees that pass her by, that she truly gets to experience and interact with the city. She draws a distinction between her experiences with the city. She gets to interact with the city when she uses public transport but she just transverses with it, when she does not use public transport, like when she travels to her workspace.

“ To me cities are a living, breathing space; each pocket of it brings a different experience. ”

Swathi has worked with Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS), Bengaluru. It is an institution that primarily deals with questions around the city. The academic work that comes out of this space has heavily contributed to urban studies in India

.She's worked on two projects under IIHS. "We look at the eviction of slums from city spaces in Delhi. It was a larger project of gentrification and aestheticization of the city, and it was taking place under the Congress government." She and her colleagues could locate this situation in a historical context. Sumathi on the other hand looks at cityscapes and art habits. "I often look at how theatre spaces are produced as part of the cities, and how it is marketed as an alternate space that is consumed by people with 'taste'." She explains further by stating that it is often understood how city spaces with theatres develop as cultural capitals. She builds on Pierre Bordieu's argument that people who consume art or theatre do it for leisure and to develop a sort of taste.

Both Swathi and Sumathi have translated their personal interactions with cities and their academic engagement with it into the five-day seminar series. .

They have built on what they understood of the discourse of cityscapes and explore the margins of such spaces. Both took up the daunting task of organizing this lecture series with the vision to cater to mainly first-year BA students who are still developing the knack to interact with academia.

Hence, it was important for them to curate a panel of speakers that could break down their work into bits that can be perceived easily by the students. Sumathi says, "the lecture series could be seen as a prelude to m.i.l.a.p. because we spoke so much about cities, and certain concepts around cities." They bottled down on the various topics to be discussed in the series by looking at, for instance, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and how cities respond to them. For example mental health, waste management and so on. They wanted the lecture series to not be very abstract but actually engage with constructs that students do encounter in reality.

One of the challenges they faced was to put together a panel of speakers that was diverse enough. But mostly seen on it were women speakers. However, they brought in narratives from various components of the city's structural identity. They concluded 'Thinking the City' by 'Looking at the City: An Outbound Trip to Nandi Hills'. The trip was primarily conceptualized to look at how cities have developed out of contingent historical events, and how Bengaluru in itself is a reflection of these contingent ideas. . However, the week does translate into an effective prelude to m.i.l.a.p. 2023.

MEET THE TEAM BEHIND 'THINKING THE CITY'



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