

Internship Report

**Product Diversification and
Design Thinking Co-Creation with
Community**

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Overview

Janastu is an NGO tinkering with how **knowledge, technology, and creative ownership are usually implemented top-down in our society and how can the people at the margins be included and have an equal voice.** And how community-oriented solutions using technology and creativity can empower people living in this landscape of 3 villages of Halekote, Durgadahalli, and Thimmnayakahalli. In these villages, **Patriarchy and Casteism still dictate the livelihoods** of people residing here.

Crafter's Space is one of the ventures to empower women, and the local economy and provide a space for creation and exploration.

My contribution was to first understand the community here, then introduce design thinking for the community to take self-initiation for creation and also pride in their unique visual culture. I further worked to introduce a new form of output: Eco Print for textiles with local flora and fauna found abundantly. I was also assigned to explore the narratives of the women who come here to form a better understanding of them to the world outside.



About Crafter's Space

Built with all recycled and natural materials found in the locality, it's a hub for creativity and dignified livelihoods for 15 women from the neighbouring villages. It's intended to be run by women, for women, with a close-knit community; with flexible and self-dictated working hours. The main production is woven items made with reed grass and khadi textile products.



Revival of Crafter's Space

The Crafter Space was revived after covid when it closed as the master crafters hailing from North Karnataka went back to their homes. Post covid Shalini, the key software developers of Janastu started trying to revive Crafter's Space but was difficult as often families of the women were reluctant as they didn't want their women to gain confidence or exposure that would make them talk back. Often women would work as manual labourers in fields and cleaning but working in Crafter's Space would mean them talking to like-minded women and be taking creative ownership. We believe that empowering women means empowering families as the money they earn goes back to provide for the crucial needs of their families. Shama was invited to train women; a block printing training period was started at Crafter Space and subsequently, Asha also started some workshops on embroidery. Asha being passionate about handmade sustainable goods saw the potential in the talents of the women here took up as a challenge to work with the women here. Then she started investing in sourcing better quality textiles. Their involvement was crucial for the revival of crafter space as Shama brought her textile garment expertise and Asha her marketing and textile knowledge. Together with many societal hurdles to cross they dreamt of a safe space for women to express their creativity and earn their livelihood in a dignified way. The larger vision for this place is for it be self-sustaining with women leadership and a place of experimentation and creativity.





The '*Jandu*' Team

Jandu - Kannada word for Reed Grass . This team primarily works with woven goods made with Jandu.



Rajeshwari

Hailing from Coimbatore but locally settled in Tumkur, Rajeshwari was one of the people that got trained from Master Crafters :Davalappa and Siddhava (artisans from North Karnataka). Initially, a beautician she fell in love with the village here and stayed back for many years. She is passionate about weaving and making clay ornaments. She is currently one of the primary trainers for the weaving team.



Shashi

Shashi is from Halekote and was also trained by Master Crafters :Davalappa and Siddhava. She is one of the trainers for the weaving team. She is also a prominent member of the female community banking Sanga. She also works part-time as a flower garland maker and aeca nut picker. She prefers working here as it's protective against the sun and other elements of nature and she gets to meet everyone. Her favorite thing is to make beautiful vanity bags.



Shardhamma

Shardhamma is one of the weavers. She says she likes to weave just like how she likes to chew her beetle nut, slowly and rhythmically. She is a second wife, her sister wife lives in some other village and her family is mostly out of this village, some studying in Tumkur or settled in Bangalore. She often finds being idle in her home, alone, very boring. She says hanging with all the women every day is very stimulating.



Siddhamma

Siddhamma is one of the weavers. Initially she used to find this work monotonous, now she says she enjoys it and finds peace in doing it.



Kusuma

Kusuma is a weaver. She says the process of weaving and learning this skill has inspired her to learn more and improve her work and made her think that she can now do and learn anything she puts herself to. This is her first job outside home.



Radhamma

Radhamma is one of the weavers. She used to work in a factory cutting vegetables. She came to check out what work is being done in Crafter Space and she really liked the environment here as everyone was making together and learning together and not being isolated. She enjoys the complex weaves as she likes how they look when they are finished.



Varalakshmi

Varalakshmi is one of the weavers who also has a great hand in printing on textiles. She says that she gets immense satisfaction looking at the finished products and also enjoys doing block printing on fabric.



Hanumakka

Hanumakka is one of the new weavers . She is a seasonal worker who does stamping on mustard and removing weeds from fields. She enjoys the work here as usually she has to be home alone , now she has so many people she can work with and socialise and laugh and joke around .



Narsamma

Narsamma is one of the weavers and she says that she enjoys the process of weaving and finds happiness in each and every weave she does.



N. Nagamma

Nagamma is one of the new weavers and currently she is doing the preparation process for the reed grass before it gets woven. She enjoys seeing how this grass transforms into finished items. She is also learning the basic weaves from her peers. Prior to this work, she would be often go to stomp on Ragi to harvest it.



Mamata

Mamta is a weaver and says that weaving as a skill is useful as she can weave household things for her family.



The Textile Group

The inner room in Crafter Space is for tailoring and other textile-based exploration.

This group currently tailors khadi garments for children and babies, lining for woven bags, decor items like curtains and pillows; block print, leaf printing on textiles, and embroidery.

There was an introduction of Eco printing; a method of getting direct impressions from plant cuttings using its own color by steaming fabric with the plant flowers, leaves, and branches. This is done by a group of three that are particularly interested.



Mahadevamma

Mahadevamma is one of the tailors and also a weaver. She gets up and works in the field then makes food for 15 people working in the field and goes to give it to them. After which she rushes to Crafter Space, she says it's important for her to learn new skills, she enjoys making blouses, dresses, bags and everything new. She likes the fact she does something new every day here.



Indrani

Indrani is a creative force making designs for embroideries and also tailoring. She got into arts and creativity while helping her children with their assignments and projects. That's when she realized she had a passion for creating visuals. Now she is glad that this passion can be economically viable.



Dhanalakshmi

Dhanalakshmi is one of the tailors and embroidery experts. She used to make blouses in the village on order after learning some tailoring from her husband who used to be a men's tailor. She didn't like working from home as her husband would also not go to work, is a drunk and it was a stressful environment. She was stressed out, worried about her children's education money and how to settle her family's life. She enjoys coming here as she is relieved by this work as she can enjoy and work, and can explore more patterns and designs that she couldn't before. She can speak English as she has completed her 10th class from Bengaluru. Her family has engineers and bankers, but she wanted to learn tailoring so she married her mother's seventh brother for family reasons. Her husband was very attentive and a good tailor making uniforms, suits, and pants, but after getting addicted to drinking he was not interested in his family's wellbeing. She is so happy here that she no longer feels stress-related gastric problems! She boosts how she called police on her husband one time.



Kavya

Kavya is the youngest and most energetic member of the fabric team. She used to work in the fields to harvest crops. Now she enjoys tailoring the most and likes picking and arranging flowers for eco printing.



Hema

Hema is part of printing and tailor team, she lives the closest to Crafter Space. She found it to be very interesting to see what happens here and she started to enjoy the tailoring and printing processes so she wants to learn more that's why she comes here. She also likes the company of her friends here.



Anuja

Anuja is a tailor and, printing member. She likes coming here as she can be tension-free and forget about her responsibilities of home. She can be free here and enjoy working with her friends.



Sandhya

Sandhya is part of the tailoring team. She is from Andhra Pradesh and came here when she got married. This is her first time doing a job or work outside her home. She says learning new things every day has reduced her hesitation and she has started believing that she can also make things happen and make a positive change.

Design Thinking Sessions With *Jandu* Team

- My Trials at Learning Jandu Weaving
- Jandu Basic Weave Peer Review Session
- Design Research : My Dream Bag
- Design Thinking : How to make without Tutorials (footwear)
- Innovative Design Gallery - Fabric Additive to Woven products

My Trials at Learning Jandu Weaving

Jandu is a Reed Grass growing in Marshy ,wet lands near the edges of the lakes . It becomes softer and easily molded into shapes when wet and when dried it becomes stable and holds the shape. This is an excellent material for weaving as it allows the weaver to re-wet the material and make multiple levels of shaping in one product. I tried to make a potter weave with a square opening weave, after making it the same size as the circumference of the Dice (a frame for the weaves to shape. Each and every weave takes a lot of effort and attention (although the experts have reached the level of subconsciously doing it with muscle memory). The weaves need to be fed with more strands to make it broader and it's hard to make it not look untidy in my experience!





Jandu Basic Weaves Peer Review Session

The Jandu Team was assigned to do the basic 7 weaves that we taught on flat template size. This was done to evaluate whether all of the team have an understanding of all the weaves or promote them to learn all of these 7 basic weaves. It had come to our notice that although everyone was comfortable doing bigger woven baskets, but would avoid certain types of weaves and seek the organisational representative's approval on their items.

The larger issue was that when organizational representatives would do quality control reviews deeming one product to be subpar or one to be of better quality; then it was assumed by us that they see what we see. It was assumed that they are on the same page when it comes to understanding why 'this' product is 'bad' (Cennāgilla-ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿಲ್ಲ) or 'good' (Cenna gide-ಚೆನ್ನ ಗಿದೆ).

This peer review was set up so that the weavers can deep dive into the salient features of all the weaves, decipher the quality of the weaves, self-validate those weaves, and also learn from peers. One of the most valuable outcomes was peer learning of each other's subtle techniques to make a weave and why it works better for them. This positive deviance were shared, so that the group can as a whole employ those techniques too.

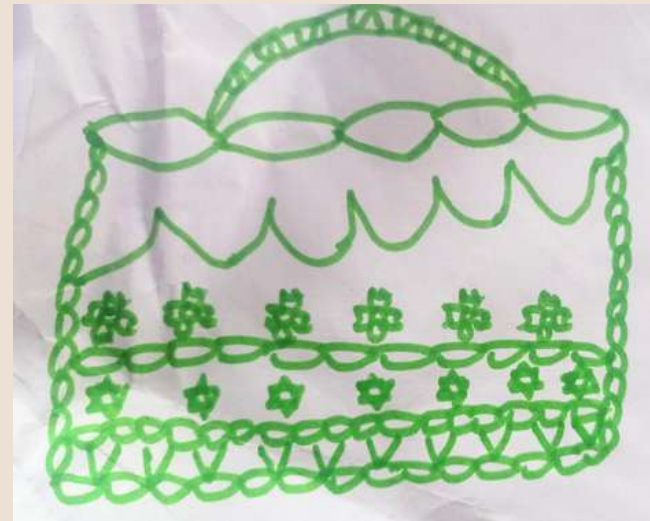
Mood Board



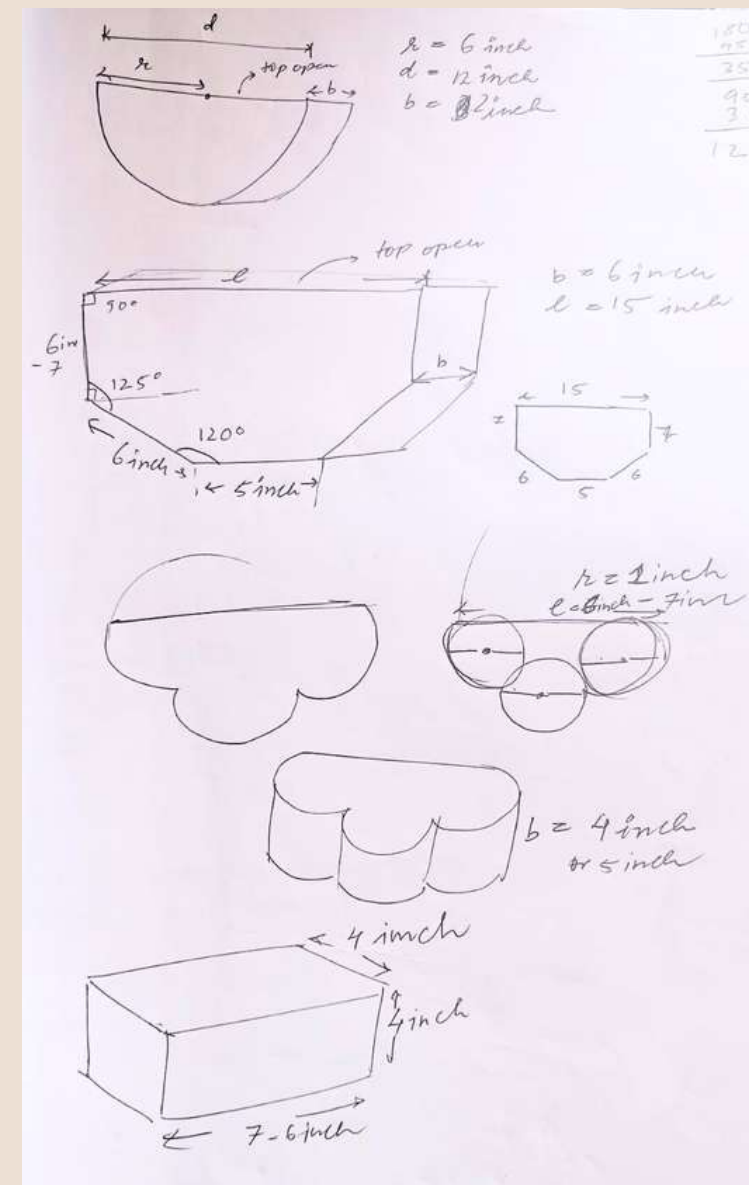
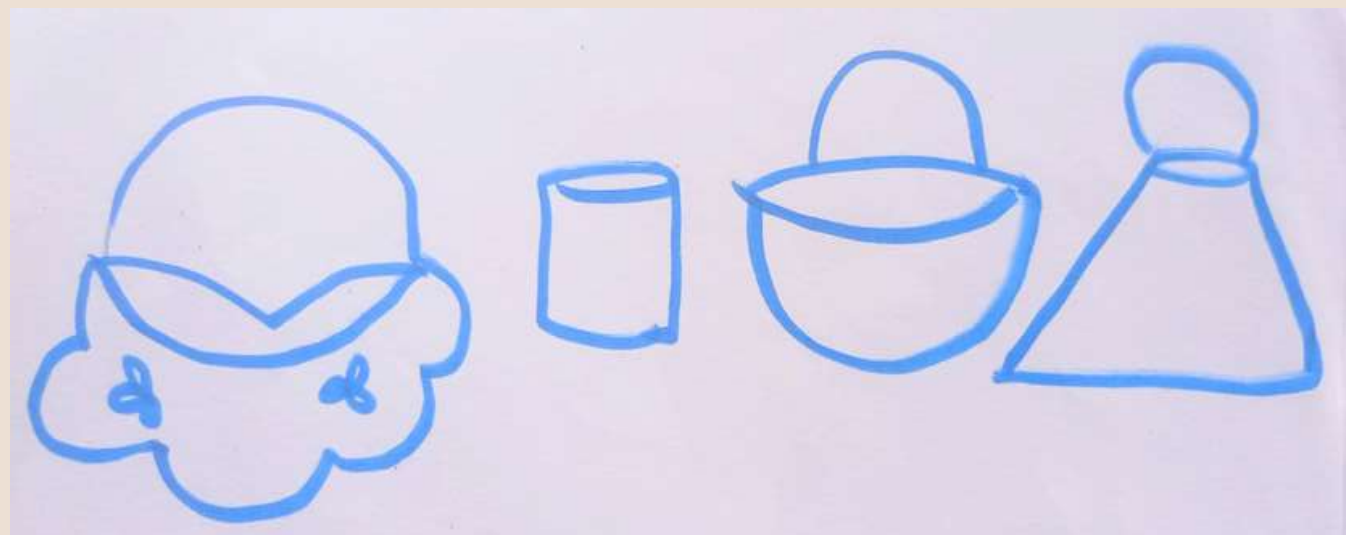
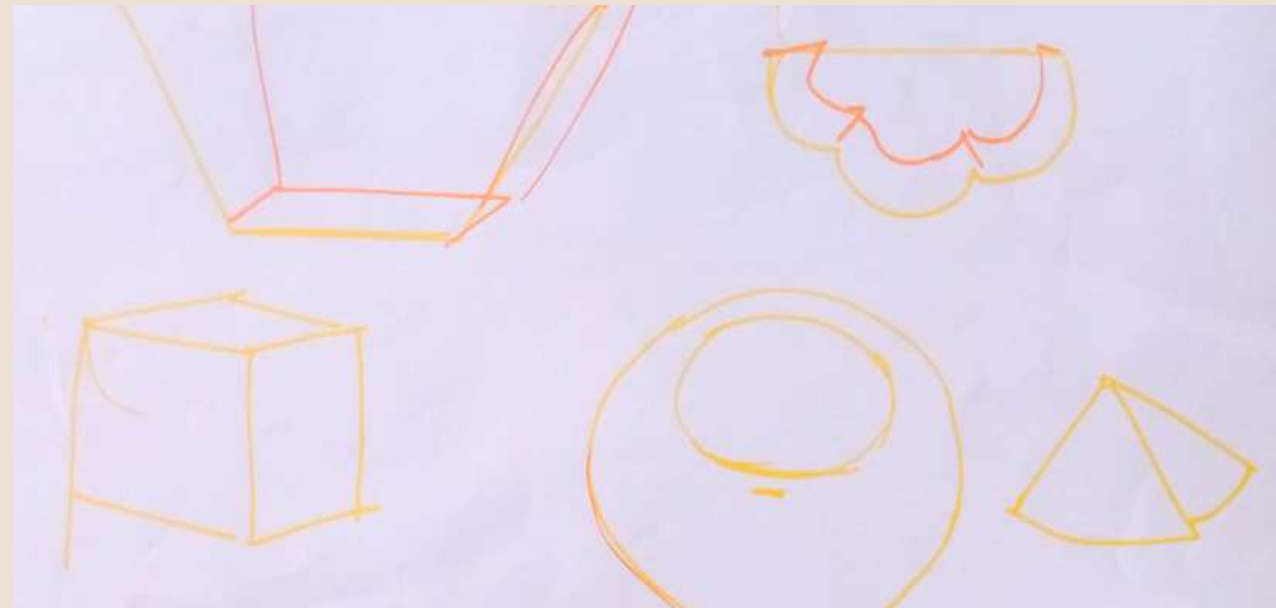
DESIGN RESEARCH SESSION

The weavers were given access to Pinterest; to get a broader perspective of what are the different shapes and designs that are being made with this technique and also be inspired by these products and imagine them with their twist or liking.

They enjoyed looking at so many varied products and got excited about the amount of possibilities that this material Reed grass has. These are the 12 most liked designs that they picked from their surfing for inspiration on Pinterest.



Your Dream Bag Inspiration for Dice



After selecting their favorites on Pinterest, the weaver team was asked to draw out their version of a dream bag/purse or sling.

Initially, they were even reluctant to hold the pen and draw but eventually, some of them took the responsibility to draw while others described their bags.

Many of these drawings are missing as many of them took these back to their homes. The aim was to understand their aesthetic taste and also potentially make new dice (the frame on which Jandu is weaved on).



Design Sprint Prototype Session - Sandles



Four members of the Jandu Team: Mamta, Radhamma, Kusuma, and Nagamma, volunteered to participate in this session. They surfed through Pinterest and really liked the sandals and demanded I find a tutorial for them to make such sandals. I explained to them how tutorials on the internet are hard to find and usually such methods are not put out for everyone's knowledge. I explained further that the people who made these chappals would have figured it out how to make it and with every prototype or trial we make we will find out our own ways of making sandals.



I was trying to make them understand that the trials/prototypes will be not perfect or even work out but with each try we will get there. They had so many discussions amongst themselves discussing how they will go about this, each one decided to do different approaches to the design.

They would also take expert opinions from Rajeshwari and Shashi Akka.

The aim was to give creative ownership to each member as often they would depend on the experts to create a design and they would follow it.

The outcome was greater confidence to create, in each one of the participants, that if they can imagine it, they can make it, even if it's perfect, **its okay to make mistakes as they are the first pillar for success.**



Jandu Gallery



Torana - Door Hangings

The community has a tradition of *Toranas* and usually they are made nowadays with non recyclable or biodegradable materials . As the community already has a connect with this product we started making such products with Jandu .Many more designs and patterns are being made in this format.



Jandu Flowers , Fishes and butterflies. Decoration on baskets and bags or potentially making these into earrings and jewellery of sorts.

Jandu Bags with Fabric lining and pockets - A collaboration of both teams











JANDU Sourcing

Although Jandu grows indiscriminately in all water bodies locally but we prefer to bring it from a larger lake 4 Kms away in our tractor. This grass also grows in wet farmlands. This is done so that this grass is not over-harvested by us . This Jandu is cut with a sickle,stacked , brought back and then sun-dried. To weave it it's submerged in water to make it more flexible to give it shape.

Design Thinking Sessions With Textiles Team

- Creating with Fabric Scraps
- Foliage Printing Session
- Jackfruit Printing Session- Leopard Print
- Eco Printing Method Introduced
- Eco Printing exploration session with Botany expert
- Making Children Garments and Khadi Baby Kit
- Gallery

Creating with Fabric Scraps



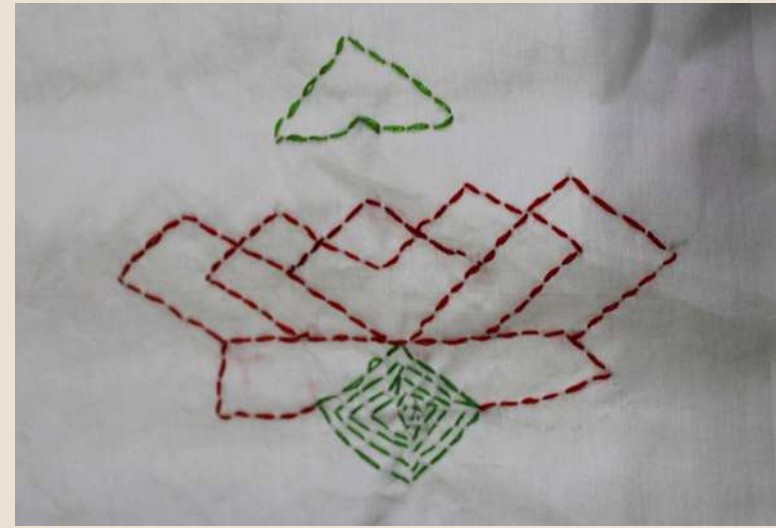


Making with Scraps

There are loads of scrap fabric that are sourced primarily from Shama's Studio and other tailoring studios in Bangalore . Also there is scraps produced from the khaki fabrics here . To have zero waste , we are trying to use cuts of fabric that reduce the waste produced while making such fabric objects . These flowers and butterflies , fishes and so many more are going to part of Bags as charms and zip covers and can be also sold separately as accessories for bags as keychains , etc.







Embroidery

The embroidery that we are doing is inspired from their long known culture of making rangoli , those geometries and colors play an important role in the understanding of their aesthetic visual culture .





Baby Khadi Kit

We saw how there isn't availability of natural khadi fabric items for baby care. This kit consists fabric diapers, headrest made with ragi beads, changing sheets, tucking blanket, towelettes and a bag to carry it all.





The Plant Foliage Printing



Using textile fabric dye , locally relevant plants were painted and used as printing blocks. Plant foliage of Neem, Teak, Bamboo, Castor, and many more edible locally foraged leafy plants.





There are many jackfruit trees here and they are quite well known the locality; therefore we decided to print with jackfruit peel. Initially we were printing it randomly and exploring . There were many Leopard sightings near the villages and that was the only thing they could talk about !Then they decided to do leopard print first by making patterns on the peel by painting yellow and black , then it evolved into making the silhouette of the leopard . With a lot of enthusiasm the leopard was assembled with multiple pieces attached with small twigs . There was a lot of conversations and design ideas coming from everyone on how to print the leopard , hide it in tall grass , make forests ,etc.



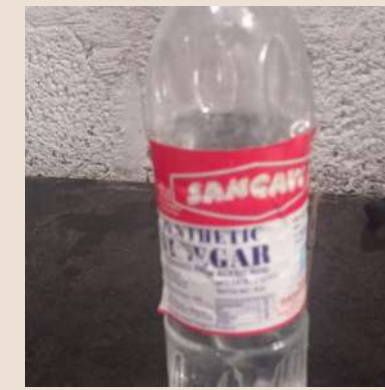


EcoPrinting / Botanical Printing

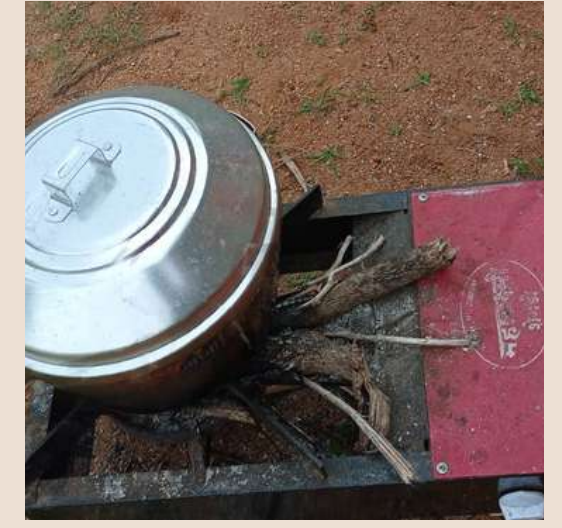


Eco-printing (or Botanical printing as it is also known) is a process by which the colours and shapes of leaves or other natural plant material such as bark, seeds or flowers are transferred onto fabric or paper.

Phases of Eco Printing



- 1.Scouring : First step to remove starch from the fabric. It can be done with two methods : either soaking in detergent for a day then rinsed clean or for a faster method , boiled with the detergent then rinsed .
- 2.Mordanting : Mordanting is important as it prepares the fabric to readily accept color dye. The mordanting solution we made was using locally available materials like alum , table salt , vinegar , baking soda and slaked lime (chunna - white paste put of paan leaves) . The fabric has to be soaked in the mordant for a few days.
- 3.Drying the mordanted fabric with all the liquid it has soaked , do not squeeze or rinse this fabric .
- 4.The mordanted dry fabric is sprayed lightly with some mordant liquid so its lightly moist and activated .

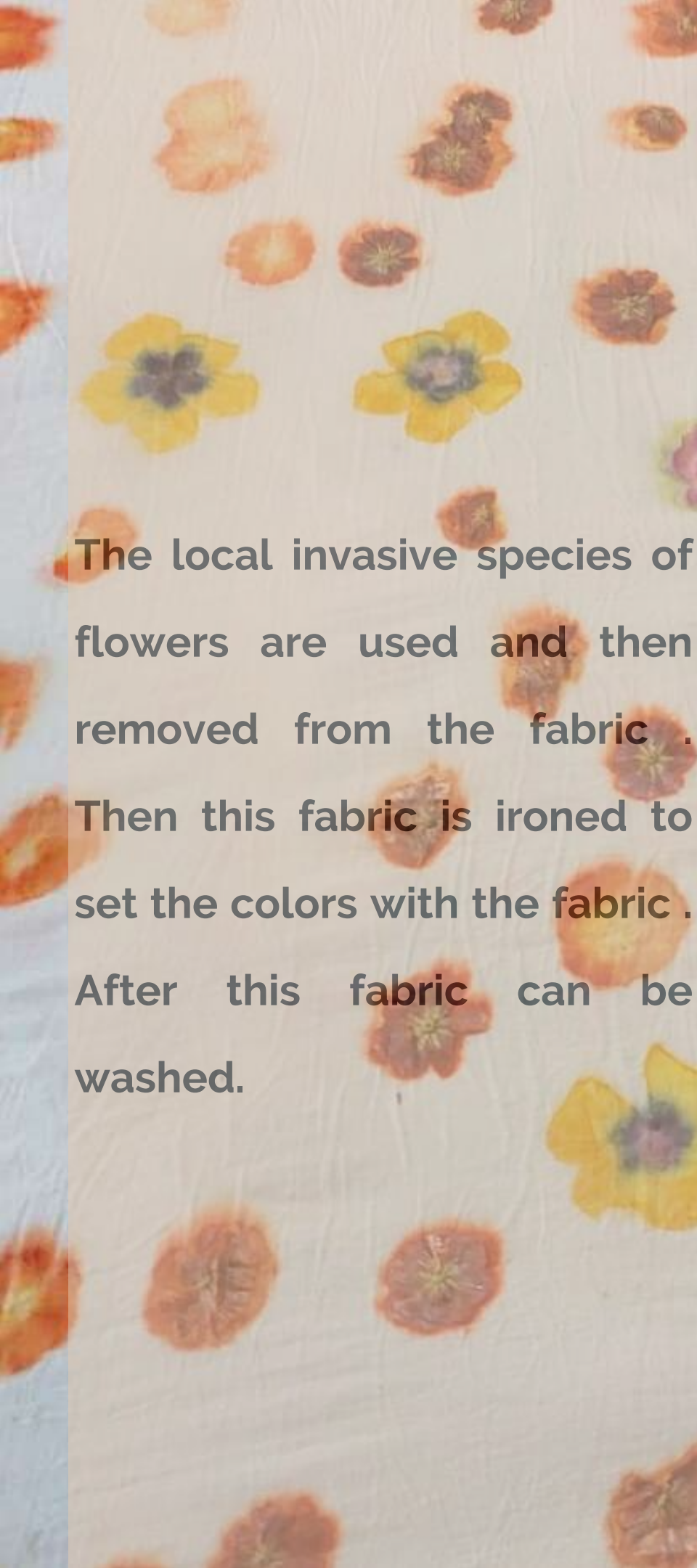


5. The damp cloth is laid and can be folded to have a mirroring effect ,arrange the foliage in it.
6. Then the folded fabric is rolled using a stick and then wrapped with fabric strings and tied tightly .
7. Then this bundle is steamed for 2- 3 hours.
8. Unwrapping the bundles , removing of foliage remains , then this fabric is ironed to set the color . After ironing it can be washed and no pigments leak out.

Flower arrangement on fabric before rolling it in bundles



We are using Cosmos flower , guava leaves , hibiscus and dried marigold from old garlands .



The local invasive species of flowers are used and then removed from the fabric . Then this fabric is ironed to set the colors with the fabric . After this fabric can be washed.





Making with EcoPrint Textile

After the ecoprint was ironed and washed and then again ironed , it was finally ready for cutting and making. Shama -the fashion designer thought it will be great to make toddle clothing out of it.









The Eco Print Collection





Guava leaf print



Dried Marigold Print



Colocasia esculenta Print





Onion skin Print







Wild flowers found abundantly called *GHANTE* gives a beautiful yellow or orange color with black or blueish core depending upon the time it was steamed .





Sheshadri

Eco Printing Exploration Session with Botany Expert

One of the people who visits often to Janastu is Sheshadri - an environmentalist and ecology specialist. He heard about the eco printing also known as Botanical print . He was excited to tell the group about high tannin containing indigenous plants growing nearby . We all went for a walk to collect all these plants and did a trial steam for these cuttings. The group got to know the scientific and the Kannada names for plants they see everyday but aren't aware about . He also talked about the other uses of these plants . Further we are developing ideas for archiving local flora in this Biodiversity hotspot ,with a few embroidered lines about the plant . This could be made into curtains or handkerchiefs or any other decor item . This idea is still in progress.



Some of the failed fabrics



Key Learnings on EcoPrinting

1. Too much spray on fabric before rolling leads to blurry or color spreading effect .
2. Larger fabric (like 2meter -4meter) bundles take longer to steam as heat doesn't reach the inner rolls and heat gets divided in the large fabric , making not very effective color extraction. If using larger fabric , thinner or lighter fabric should be preferred .
3. Larger leaves take longer to get extracted , so steam longer .
4. Often some natural colors don't have color fastness; meaning they may fade with exposure to sunlight . Trials must be done to see if the plant pigments will stay on fabric.





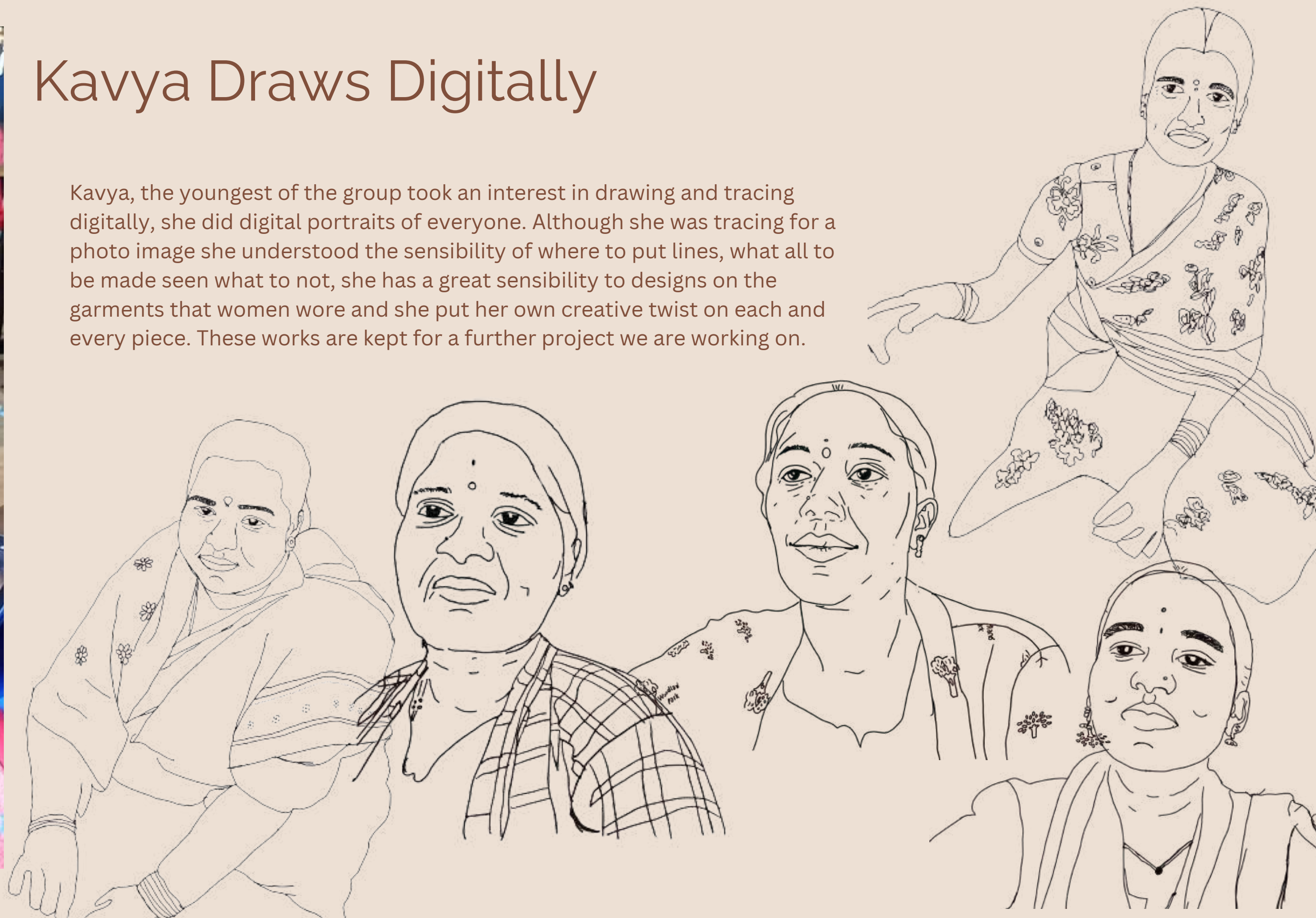
Terracotta Jewelry Making :

Rajeshwari Akka has been making terracotta beads to compliment the Jandu jewelry; after seeing these beads a lot of people have become interested in learning this technique . Currently we are working to have a trail run at making such jewelry so that it can be shown to other women in the village and we could recruit 3-5 women who will be further trained by the women who did the trail training previously. This will be done so that more local leadership takes place.



Kavya Draws Digitally

Kavya, the youngest of the group took an interest in drawing and tracing digitally, she did digital portraits of everyone. Although she was tracing for a photo image she understood the sensibility of where to put lines, what all to be made seen what to not, she has a great sensibility to designs on the garments that women wore and she put her own creative twist on each and every piece. These works are kept for a further project we are working on.



AutoEthnography

When I first came to Janastu for my Thesis Project for college; I went to see Crafter Space and Radio Centre (right next to it). I thought that these places both looked like remains of a very lively environment, at that time both the radio center and Crafter Space were inactive. All the things lying around like evidence that so many conversations, so many people's presence, and so many stories were buried away with time in that space. One could see how much activity and life these places have had before their closing. Beyond the dust and webs were objects of creativity, woven bags, clay sculptures, bamboo weaving looms and so much more and I wished so dearly that I could see life come back to these places, I wish I could interact with that life.

The wishes came true when I received an invite from Dinesh to come work at Crafter Space and he told me 'Hey, it's active and running now '. I was so very excited to jump right in. As a Product /Industrial designer, it was very impressive to see designs for disassembly, meaning designs that don't contain glue or any adhesive so that the product has one type of material that can be dealt with easily in its life cycle, in this case, areca nut plates were stitched with reed grass to make varied shapes and functionalities.



The first weeks, overwhelmed with new faces and new names I felt very lost, I felt like there wasn't a need for me to be here as enough people were working with both the teams. Connecting with the women here was a little difficult when I had a language barrier, I started learning a little Kannada for basic conversation. Through my weird mix of English, Hindi, and Kannada words I would try to convey my thoughts to the women, it took some time but eventually, we found a common ground of understanding each other to a large extent. And I found myself in a warm embrace of feminine energy, with a plutonic touch of care and voices filled with genuineness. These women were so kind to me that they would oil and braid my hair when they saw it was too messy, they dressed me up in their own sari when festivals came and they hugged me when I looked sad. There is something so healing, so melting when women care for women, putting flowers on each other's hair, removing safety pins from their own sari's to give you, it's something so divine.

There are these small In the mix of all the love I received and reciprocated my objective was to instill creative initiative and ownership. I personally believe that if they aren't involved in the creative design collaboration part and also not voicing their opinions in important decisions for this place (Crafter's Space) then we are not only losing so many creative inputs but also reducing this initiative to a mere worker taking orders from employer kind of state. Often safeguards against this happening were not being taken into account. To create a space where 'dignity' 'doesn't mean not doing manual labor on a farm but working in here, but what's the difference if they don't get a say any which way? Yes, Crafter Space has way more liberties than farm work but how do we make sure it's self-initiated creativity and organization? My suggestion was weekly meetings where women sit and talk about their problems or reflections decide the working schedule and navigate how they are going to democratically approach this workplace. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of understanding of why they are doing it and for what purpose we are choosing these choices like Khadi fabric or leaf prints or why not use synthetic fabric that they prefer, to bring about the understanding of why 'eco-friendly ' or 'sustainability' is also a task that can be addressed in such meetings. One of the first meetings that I hosted was to propose this idea of having weekly meetings and we started the meeting by playing Chinese Whisper(everyone whispers a message given by a previous member and the whispers evolves and then we compare the whisper given and whisper that it became). They were not aware of this game and it was way too much fun as we had non-Kannada speakers like Roshan, Rekha, and I. Therefore words got jumbled to a very very great extent that nobody could stop laughing. I started an English word for one of the rounds: ' Jazz Dogs 'and it evolved to ' Bangaluru'! After this game, we started discussing the idea of self-scheduling a week's work, when one learns from the internet, when one explores new design or product ideas when one many many levels of production activities, and who does what. I explained to them that although we could decide these things for them it just won't be truly suitable for them and these timetables are not hard and fast, but rather ever-evolving resolutions coming out of these discussions where everyone can share freely. Although everyone was participating consistently, but arrival of certain authoritative figures disrupted such freeness and instead the charge was given to these figures. Janastu doesn't intend for authoritative figures to emerge but naturally, it happens. That someone comes and takes charge and they are perceived as this authoritative figure with all the answers? Is it just a tendency? I don't know. Anyway, this is a gradual process of a lot of unlearning and a lot of learning for everyone who is associated with this place.



Thank you