



What you should be telling your paediatrician

page 2



How Naomi Janumala became the model for Rihanna's Fenty Beauty

page 3

When Kollywood goes sporty

page 4

History, geography and some great saris

Impossible as it may be not to shop at the Crafts Bazaar, you can also walk around, marvel and feel proud of the wealth of Indian art and craft

• PANKAJA SRINIVASAN

Cream butterflies on a khaki Tussar background is nothing to get emotional about, but that is just what happened to me. Damodar Prasad from somewhere in Rajasthan looked a little taken aback at the number of friends I dragged to his stall to look at that sari. Even, if half of a friend had expressed a flicker of hesitation, I swear I would not have bought that Dabu printed sari. But none did; so it is in my bag now.

Year after year this happens when I visit the CCTN Crafts Bazaar's opening with steely resolve that leaves my side the minute I step in to the venue (much like my husband). But there is comfort in numbers, as others wander around – bemused, guilty and gleeful – clutching saris, bags, jewellery, mats, pots, pans... lying in wait for an unsuspecting soul so that they can rope her in to shop too.

Living deep in the south, I can't imagine a better window to the arts of the rest of my country. Manipur, J&K, Bengal, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Karnataka, Rajasthan, UP... There are 117 stalls and 15 are from Andhra. Rejoice sari lovers, as there is the gorgeous Venkatagiris, Mangalagiris, Uppadas, Narayanpet and Kalamkaris to choose from. From Udayagiri, there is carved wooden cutlery (that now has a GI tag). The craft is said to have originated in the time of the Qutub Shahi dynasty and there are but a few Mastercraftsmen who still know the art.



CCTN has taken immense pains to get in touch with the craftspeople and coax them into coming to Coimbatore. Many were uncertain if they would receive a good response here. Going by the crowd on the very first day, they should be reassured.

The beadwork artists conducted workshops where they taught their craft. A Pichwai artist will be visiting schools to work with children – a rare opportunity for them to learn about the rich art and craft of their country straight from master craftspeople.

Jayshree Ravi, President CCTN, and members Lakshmi Raman, Saranya Ramkumar and Sujani Balu travelled across the country, tapped their contacts and used their collective persuasive skills to invite craftspeople who have been elusive for years. "It took us

nearly four years to persuade Niranjan to agree to come here," says Lakshmi about the renowned Kalamkari exponent from Srikalahasti. When you meet him, he tells you how he has been busy training inmates of prisons and has brought along some of their works to sell, besides his own exquisite work.

The bazaar offers not just a geography lesson but also scraps of history. Strike up a conversation with any of the craftspeople and they are more than happy to share their stories. It is not just an over-the-counter transaction, it goes far deeper. When I wear a Kalamkari, I will look for a story in its motifs, and what colours are used (don't you love the idea of a pomegranate-tinted hue? If it is a Kaantha, I know it came from Tangore land near Shantiniketan. The bead-



Heartfelt and handmade Seen at the CCTN Crafts Bazaar 2019 • R. JAYASHREE

ed necklaces made by Daxa from Kutch are a contemporary version of traditional wedding jewellery. Not too far from Daxa sits Medha Bhatt of First Forest (also from the same area) who recreates art with discarded fabric and is now working on a project on the same traditional jewellery that she says was made in the 16th Century with Morano glass beads all the way from Italy!

Sanjhi Art, fine reed mats, yardage in Ajrakh, Benarsi Cotton, Kalamkari, Kanjivaram cottons, the revived saris of Karnataka ... there is traditional fare and then there is tradition that has been

made contemporary. Like the stunning Madhubani paintings on kettles and jewellery boxes.

For those of us who have lived in Coimbatore for some years, the Crafts Bazaar is like an annual reunion. Our friend from Manipur has returned with her black stoneware, as has the glass bird man who has brought fishes along this time, or the cane basket weavers and many more cheerful faces who wave, smile and beckon you to their stall just for a chat.

There is a lot more to discover. And do visit two stalls – run by Amrit Centre

for Special Needs and by Kaumaram Prashanthi Academy respectively – without fail. Children with special needs have used their considerable talent and skills and created skin products, stationery, paper bags, trays and wire baskets. They are made with love and their products will enrich your lives. "We consider it a privilege to provide free space for both these stalls at our Bazaar," says Lakshmi Raman.

The bazaar is on from 10.00 am to 8.00 pm until July 4 at Suguna Kalyana Mandapam, Avinashi Road. Please carry your own shopping bags

No carbon miles, no waste and no side effects

Leaves from a drought-resistant local tree not only clean and condition hair but also provide a source of income for tribal women in their own villages

• SREEDEVI LAKSHMI KUTTY

A few years ago, a friend handed me a packet of a bright green powder and said, "Just try washing your hair with this and you will not try anything else." Since then on I have been completely sold on the arappu powder made by grinding the dried leaves of the local drought-resistant Albizia amara (Usilai maram in Tamil), which has tiny leaves like the tamarind.

As a teenager I moved to shampoos despite my mother's efforts to make me use traditional hair washes. After around 20 years, I discovered natural shampoos along with organic food and began to investigate what went into natural shampoos. On a quest for simpler products with no chemicals, I stumbled on hair wash powders.

The arappu powder removes grime and oil and also has a conditioning effect. On the flip side, it



Clean and green The leaves from the usilai maram are excellent as a hair wash • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

takes a few minutes to mix it in water without lumps and some attention to wash it off. If it is finely powdered, there won't be bits sticking to the hair.

Curious about how the powder is made, I visited my supplier, Sulochana who lives in a village abutting the forest and mountain ranges near Anaikatti. With elephants destroying food crops, "wild collection is the major source of income for us," explained Sulochana. "We collect various items of forest produce like shikakai, gooseberry or tamarind during different seasons. The arappu leaves are collected especially when the leaves are tender. Generally the older women in the village collect it." Since the tree is of medium

height, I wondered how the older women managed. Before I could ask her, she turned to an inconspicuous shrub beside us, plucked a handful of tender green leaves and said, "This is the young tree and we collect tender leaves from them. The leaves have to be cleaned of twigs or other debris for the powder to foam and wash hair effectively."

The plucking of the leaves is similar to the way tea leaves are harvested. These are stored in a cloth tied like a makeshift bag at the waist, later dried and stored in bags. When there is an order for the powder they clean the dry leaves and sieve them through a basket to separate the leaves from the twigs and tiny stems. As her mother, a sprightly old lady

with jet black hair, demonstrated how the leaves are cleaned, Sulochana remarked, "Look, she doesn't have a single grey hair. If you use only arappu, you will not grey till you reach a very old age."

Finally my search for a perfect hair wash solution ended in my own backyard. A simple leaf from a drought-resistant tree that also provides a livelihood for tribal women in their own villages can clean and condition my hair without coating it with chemicals and provide grey water for my garden. It has no carbon miles, no waste and no side effects. What more can I ask for?

The powder is available in Khadi Gramdyog stores and most organic stores in the city

For a healthy you

Sri Krishna Sweets and Arogya Siddha Hospital organises Nalandhana: Well-being in Our Hands, a seven-day programme on various health issues. Participants include medical practitioners from Allopathic and alternative medicine streams. Open for all. Entry is free.

JULY 1-7; 6:30 PM

@ Sarojini Nataraj Auditorium, Kikani Higher Secondary School, R S Puram



Of ice, snow and a faraway land

Mango Education's Open House #86 will be about The Antarctica Expedition. Jayaram Srinivasan who has visited the continent twice and has lived there for four years as a part of the Indian Antarctica Expedition will share his experiences and discoveries. Register on <https://forms.gle/mXJaKZkEJ6aJyFGu7>.

JULY 3; 7:00 PM TO 9:00 PM

@ Mango Education, GV Residency, Uppilipalayam
 ☎ 7397786541, 9952243541.

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