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family of farmers, and now splits his time between the family farm and his job as a software engineer. His father once had four to five acres of land, but worked hard and expanded the farm to 100 acres. "I have been juggling agriculture and my job for the past eight to nine years. My plan is to retire from software as soon as possible and dive fully into agriculture," says Gowda, adding, "The kind of life I want to lead is very different. Sure, when the salary from software engineering comes in at the end of the month, it feels great. But it's a stressful life compared to farming. I feel good when I am doing things at our farm."

The 32-year-old works on a hybrid model at his day job in Kolar, Karnataka, which gives him the freedom

he needs to work on the farm. He has launched Farmers' Fresh Food, an online store for organic produce, along with another venture, Samriddhi Farms, which delivers free-range country chicken and eggs.

"In today's time, every farmer needs to be a small entrepreneur who can sell his own product. What he grows at his farm, he needs to deliver directly to the customer. Then he can be a successful farmer," says Gowda. The farmer from Kolar adds that with high labour costs, it's tough to make a profit if farmers lose their profit margin to wholesalers. "But if you sell directly to the customers, and they like your product and recommend you to others, your business keeps growing," he adds.

According to the rural inclusions survey, commissioned by the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development, the all-India average monthly income of agricultural households in 2021-22 was ₹13,661. This was higher than the ₹11,438 in non-agricultural rural households. Meanwhile the Periodic Labour Force Survey shows that the average income of a salaried person in urban India was at ₹20,030 in the second quarter of fiscal 2022 and increased to ₹21,647 in the first quarter of fiscal 2023.

But is this the ground reality? "We have not found this to be the case at all anywhere," says Awate, "If it [an increased income] is the case, why are there still suicides? They're just growing day by day."



Gayatri Bhatia's Vrindavan Farm sells a variety of produce such as rice, dal, mangoes and leafy greens directly to consumers

So what does the next generation of Indian agriculture look like? "People who have ancestral land or can afford to lease out larger areas for farming will continue to do so. But those with very small areas like half acre or one acre, it's very doubtful that they will make money farming," says Gowda.

Bhatia predicts that all sorts of approaches in farming will manifest, including fast farming with more chemical use sold under the guise of productivity, high-tech farming such as hydroponics, and the use of artificial intelligence. "On the other hand, there will also be a growing community of slow farmers. Farmers that resonate with nurturing a holistic ecosystem, who learn to live harmoniously within the rhythms of nature and community," she adds.

Awate adds that India has the potential to become a nutrition hub. "Chemical corporations have destroyed all the soil across the globe. Luckily, poor countries like India have been saved—our soil is not as destroyed as others. The reason is our farmers do not have money to buy that urea. We have a great genetic pool [of seeds] even though now seeds have shrunken down to seven to eight per cent native seeds. Who is going to grow in the end? A country which has a great labour force, a great soil and great genetic pool."

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Anjali Rudraraju and Kabir Cariappa set up Yarroway Farm in Coorg, where they grow robusta coffee, pepper, coconut, mangoes, jackfruit, among other things

# Break ke baad

Madhyantara, shot on 16-mm film and winner of two National Awards, is a nostalgic ode to Kannada cinema's golden era even as it shines a light on the unseen history of labour in the Indian industry

## SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

I DON'T know anyone else who at 10 was buying copies of Roopatara," filmmaker Dinesh Shenoy, son of Konkani cultural icon Basti Vaman Shenoy, tells us when we ask him if the heroes of his Kannada short film Madhyantara—movie lovers enraptured by the charms of the big screen who work their way up the film industry—are versions of him.

Growing up in Bantwal, Shimoga and Chikkamagaluru in Karnataka in the early 1970s, Shenoy would often borrow money from his parents to travel to towns with cinema halls to watch Kannada films. He remembers poring over the cinema listings in the newspapers each Friday, devouring every word printed in film magazines like Roopatara and Vijayachitra, and even buying cinema tickets at black market rates.

"I was always in awe [of the medium]. The memories of watching those films are still in my conscience. And I always knew that I was watching them differently from other people. I was not just a movie buff. When people ask me about when I started pre-production for Madhyantara, I jokingly tell them that I started 45 years ago. The research began in my childhood," says the 56-year-old filmmaker, who though based in Delhi, continues to nurture strong connections with his home state.



Madhyantara, which Shenoy refers to as "Act 1" of a three-part longer feature project that he plans to make, is about two movie lovers enraptured by the charms of the big screen who work their way up the film industry

Like his protagonists, Shenoy started his career as a light boy and has worked in the industry for nearly 27 years in various capacities as a cinematographer, line producer and production assistant.

Madhyantara, which garnered two National Awards (Best Debut Director for Shenoy and Best Editor for veteran Suresh Urs) last month, grew out of a story related by producer RF Manikchand in an interview of how while growing up, since he couldn't afford the ticket price of 50 paise, he and a friend would share a movie ticket, each watching one half of the film and later summarising its incidents to the other.

Shenoy stumbled upon this interview in late 2020 when, confined by the pandemic, he got into the habit of watching interviews of yesteryear Kannada actors and film industry

professionals. "The moment he said the line, I knew I had to do something with it," recalls Shenoy. Combing through more interviews, reading books on Kannada films ("I read more Kannada than English") and making several research trips to Bengaluru in search of people and vintage equipment helped him give shape to the short film which he also envisioned as an unconventional pitch for a possible feature-length project.

The National Award has come as a validation and has enabled more appointments with producers, the director told us when we met him after a screening of the film in Mangaluru.

Madhyantara is shot on celluloid which lends it a beautiful grainy quality perfectly suited to its time period and the sense of nostalgia the film centres on. The idea to shoot on 16-mm film was proposed by executive producer Ganesh Shetty who also worked on director Raam Reddy's magic realist film The Fable, also shot on 16-mm film.

Both the camera and 22 cans of film, Shenoy tells us, were borrowed from Reddy for the shoot of Madhyantara. Shot using traditional frames, reflective of both the innocence of the medium as well as that of its two central characters, the film weaves fiction with snippets of film history—audiences gaping at the screen as Anant Nag glides in a helicopter in the song "Eliruve" and jiving to the cult classic "If you come today" from Operation Diamond Racket, and glimpses of Kannada screen icons Dr Rajkumar and Ambareesh on film sets. The film's main characters, the director shares, are inspired by the staff of an eatery that his aunt's family ran in Chikkamagaluru whose workers, being dedicated film buffs, routinely fashioned their own lives on latest film trends.

Given that the film captures their ascent through the hierarchies of film production from light boys to assistant directors, Madhyantara also shines a light on the existent social order, relations and practices on a film set and pays tribute to the unseen history of labour in Indian cinema.

"You need the help of hundreds of people who work in different departments," admits Shenoy. "Since I started my career as a light boy and focus puller, I have been through all of its stages. That's why I think I gathered the courage to direct the film."

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DINESH SHENOY

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