



Where I work Vishwanath Srikantaiah

Photographed for *Nature*
by Sayan Hazra.

In this photo, I'm visiting a once-abandoned well, known as the Three Trees Well, north of Bengaluru, India. In the past, this type of well would have been filled with concrete and the land used to build properties, but thanks to community outreach efforts it has been protected and cleaned by local community members. Their work has been rewarded by the well reconnecting with the below-ground aquifer and bringing water to the community again. It now contains around 3 metres of water during the peak summer months.

This is a success story, and we need more of those. People on the city's outskirts are struggling, and the state's government has responded by arranging tankers to bring water from the Kaveri River, 100 kilometres away. Unfortunately, this kind of event is taking place across much of urban India. Around 50% of the supply in Indian cities comes from groundwater and, without it, life grinds to a halt.

I work as an adviser for the Biome Environmental Trust in Bengaluru and

develop policies related to sustainable water management. I am also an adjunct faculty member at Azim Premji University in Sarjapura, where I teach courses on water conservation and management.

Here in Bengaluru, I've been working with the traditional well-digging community, known as the Mannu Vaddar or Bhovi, to complete works in the city and surrounding rural areas. If the culture of the well can be revived in India, it might help people to find a path to sustainability in the face of climate change.

Since our success at the Three Trees Well, the government has funded a further programme to rejuvenate wells and shallow aquifers in 10 cities across India. Now, the government wants to replicate that programme across a further 5,100 urban areas in the country. I am a small part of this journey, and it all began with Bengaluru's wells."

Vishwanath Srikantaiah is a civil engineer and urban planner working to restore wells across Bengaluru, India. **Interview by Alexia Austin.** Interview edited for length and clarity.