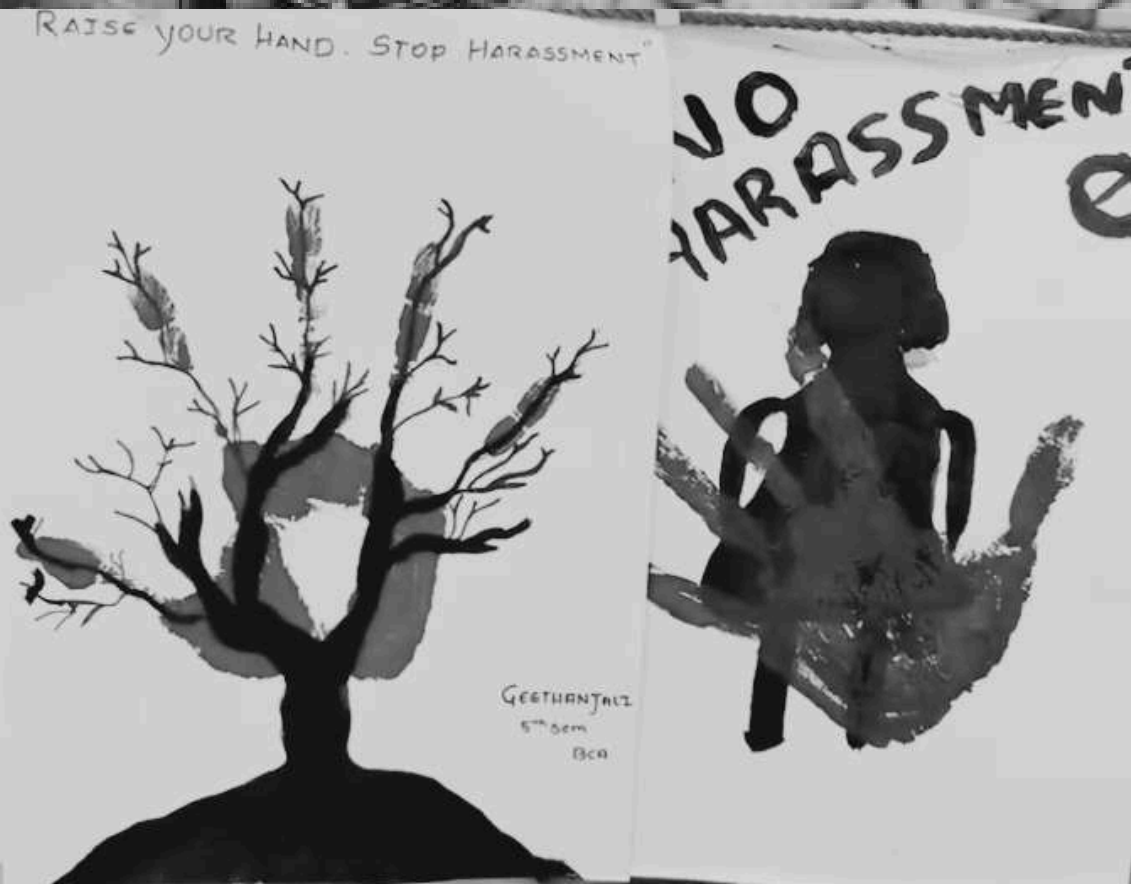


March 2026

DURGA DARES

Durga India's official newsletter



Here's what you'll read:

From the Editor's Desk

What's Happening at Durga?

Why collective care is a need to enable safe spaces

Crossword

Comic: Bad Areas!? / ಕೆಟ್ಟ ಪ್ರದೇಶಗಳು?!

What does collective care look like?



From the Editor's Desk

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Care as Community!

This first newsletter of the year feels especially meaningful as it is being published in March, the month of UN Women's International Women's Day, whose 2026 theme, "Rights. Justice. Action.", deeply resonates with us.

It felt only fitting to title this edition Care as Community.

At the heart of our work is community-building. For us, care is not confined to the private sphere, nor is it an individual responsibility to "self-manage" harm. Care is collective. It is disruptive. Through this edition, we invite you to explore with us:

- What does it mean for communities to challenge the systems that enable unsafe spaces?
- What does action look like when it is grounded in care?
- How might justice be reimaged not only as punishment or policy change, but as the creation of conditions where dignity, safety, and belonging are possible?

**Communications and Narrative
Building**



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT DURGA?

Jan to March 2026



Looking inwards:

1. Team Retreat in Goa – Stepping Back to Step Forward

Earlier this year, the team travelled to Goa for our annual retreat, a much-needed opportunity to pause, reflect, and reconnect. The retreat created space for us to step away from our day-to-day work and think about the road ahead together. Alongside reflective team-building exercises, the retreat was also about joy and relaxation. We spent time by the beach, shared music, dance and food, and simply enjoyed being together outside of work.

2. Weekly Learning Huddles

We host weekly learning huddles where one team member facilitates an hour-long session to share something they are exploring or thinking about. These sessions are intentionally open—team members can bring a concept, a skill, or even a new way of looking at a film, book, or everyday experience. This quarter topics have ranged from collaboration practices to discussions on gender and sexuality, reflections on queering the everyday, film reviews, and book club conversations.



Facing outwards:

This quarter (Jan to March 2026) has been an eventful period for us at Durga. This is what our outreach for this quarter has been:

Women at Work: 581 women

The Women at Work program is dedicated to ensuring workplaces are safe, nurturing, and enabling for women and girls. We work with flower vendors, BBMP wastepickers (pourakarmikas), domestic workers, etc.

Work with Men: 518 men

The Work with Men program seeks to shift the responsibility for violence away from survivors and onto the environments and social structures that perpetuate it. Public spaces, historically created by hegemonic, gendered, caste, and class-based power structures, remain inaccessible and unsafe for marginalised communities. By engaging men as allies and active bystanders, we challenge the harmful norms of masculinity, and dominance that underpin harassment and violence.





WHAT'S HAPPENING AT DURGA?

Jan to March 2026



To feel proud of:

Our engagement with the **Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC)** continues to grow meaningfully. Through this partnership, we are going deeper into behaviour change work with bus staff and commuters, using messaging, training, and campaigns to build safer and more inclusive public transport spaces.

Alongside our intra-city work, we have also been expanding our engagement with the **Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC)**. Over the past four months, we have been working closely in **Kolar**, where our efforts have included training over **250 staff members** and placing safety messaging **stickers across 100 buses**. These early steps mark the beginning of a promising journey.

Initial conversations with both staff and passengers have shown strong potential for building community confidence and **collective ownership** of safety in public transport spaces. Encouraged by this response, we are exploring opportunities to expand this work to other regions, including **Mysuru**.

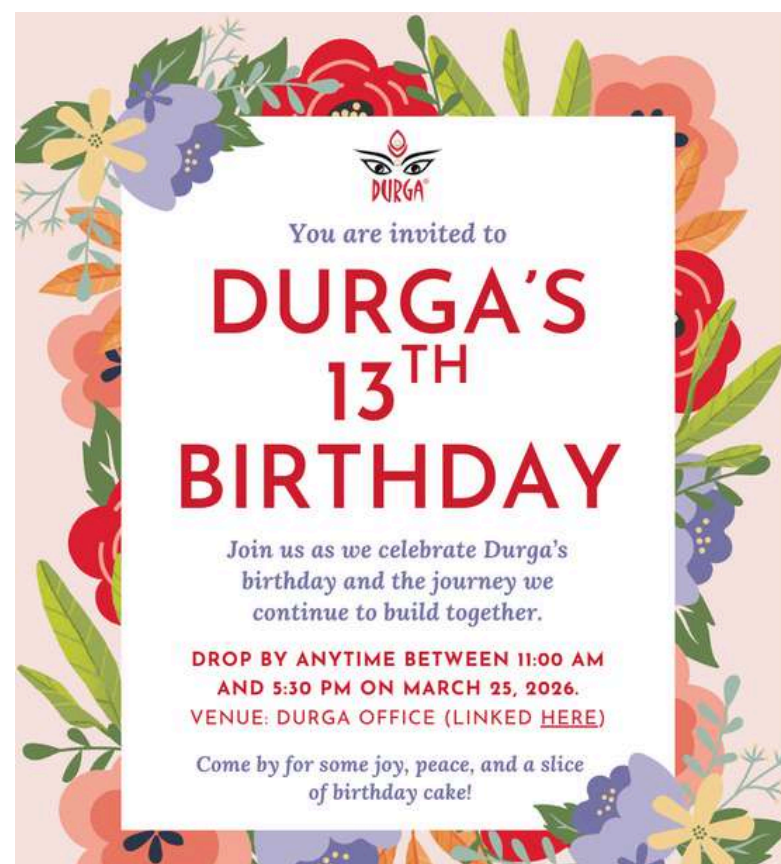


Durga turns 13!

This felt like an important moment to pause and reflect on how far we've come, and how we want to grow from here. Over the years, Durga has evolved through the energy, commitment, and imagination of many people who have shaped the work. Turning 13 feels symbolic: like a teenager, the organisation is growing, asking new questions, experimenting.

Our recent Durga Week, held in the last week of March, was part of this reflection. We stepped away from fieldwork to spend time together as a team—reviewing our journey, thinking through strategy, and discussing where we want to go next. These conversations allowed us to connect more deeply with each other and with the purpose that anchors our work.

Durga Week was also a moment of celebration. We took time to relax, reflect, and celebrate Durga's birthday together—honouring the spirit of the organisation while looking ahead to the next chapter.





Why collective care is a need to enable safe spaces!

Intervening is not a neutral act. To step in, name harm, or disrupt violence is to challenge power, especially when that violence is normalised, trivialised, or dismissed as ‘just how things are’. Silence is often mistaken for neutrality, but as feminist thinkers remind us, silence almost always sides with power (Ahmed, 2017). Bystanders, then, are never just witnesses. They are potential agents of social change.

Bystander intervention challenges a deeply embedded idea: that safety is an individual responsibility. We are told to protect ourselves, manage risk, and stay out of harm’s way. In contrast, **bystander action reframes safety as collective, relational, and political.** When people intervene, through de-escalation, distraction, accompaniment, or support, **they disrupt the conditions that allow harm to continue.** This disruption matters because it directly contests hierarchies of gender, caste, class, religion, and sexuality that determine whose bodies are protected and whose are left exposed.

For too long, the burden of safety has been placed on those most at risk. Women, queer people, marginalised caste and religion people, working-class communities and people with disabilities are taught to adjust rather than resist: dress differently, avoid certain spaces, speak carefully, don’t provoke. Violence is framed as a consequence of individual behaviour rather than a product of unequal systems (Crenshaw, 1991). Bystander intervention attempts to flip this script. It insists that responsibility does not lie with those experiencing harm alone, **it belongs to everyone present.**



What this looks like in practice is often unspectacular yet deeply powerful.

One evening around 8 pm in Bangalore, Krishnamma, a pourakarmika (wastepicker), noticed a young girl lying near a parked car. The girl had consumed alcohol and appeared disoriented. A group of five or six boys stood around her, saying they would take her to the hospital. Nothing overtly violent was happening but something felt wrong.



Krishnamma trusted her instinct. She woke the girl, took her phone, and called her roommate. Within thirty minutes, the roommate arrived with friends and safely took the girl home. Enabling safety, she realised, is not about authority or strength; it's about attention and care.

Research backs this up. Studies on active bystander approaches show that when people are equipped to recognise risk and intervene safely, harassment decreases and collective accountability grows (Banyard, 2011). More importantly, intervention shifts how we understand violence. It is no longer a “private matter” between individuals, but a public concern that demands collective response.

Safety, then, is not simply the absence of harm. It is a **democratic practice**. Justice requires shared responsibility, especially in the face of structural violence (Young, 2000). This is particularly urgent in public spaces, where power operates through visibility and control. Who can move freely without fear? Who is watched, policed, or threatened? Intervening in everyday moments—catcalling, moral policing, communal harassment, intimidation—is a way of **reclaiming public space as shared**, rather than dominated.

Suresh, a street vendor who runs a medical store, experienced this one evening when he noticed a man verbally abusing a woman in a dark, unlit corner of the street. What alarmed him was not only the aggression, but the isolation. He hesitated, recognising a familiar pattern: people intervene quickly when two men argue, but look away when a man and a woman are involved, calling it “private.”

Despite his hesitation, Suresh stepped in. He approached the pair, and both insisted that it was a “private matter.” Suresh responded that even if it was private, there was no need for it to take place in the dark—especially when the woman was crying and sitting in a corner of the pavement. When the man became increasingly aggressive and attempted to physically harm both the woman and Suresh, he acted decisively. Suresh immediately sought support from nearby bystanders and the situation de-escalated, not because someone used force, but because care became collective.

Care is often dismissed as soft or apolitical. In reality, care is disruptive. It is a political ethic that exposes interdependence and the failures of institutions to protect those most vulnerable (Tronto, 1993). When practiced collectively, care breaks the isolation that violence depends on.

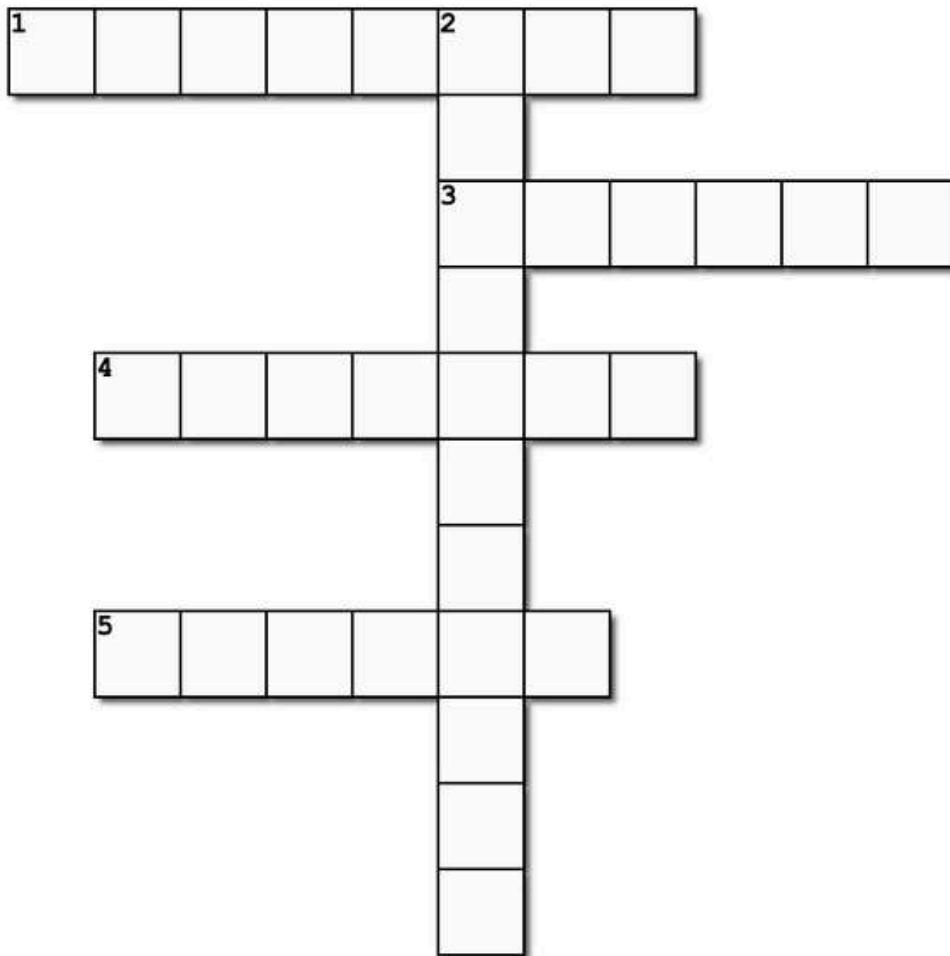
De-escalation is not passive. It requires awareness, emotional intelligence, and strategic action. Collective responses calling out harm together, accompanying someone home, offering support after, show that violence will not be met with silence.

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CROSSWORD: The Change Collective



Across:

- 1.to bring together and activate collective effort, often for social, political, or community change
- 3.collective efforts undertaken to address an issue or challenge injustice
- 4.a transformative process aimed at dismantling systemic oppression and inequality
- 5.fundamental human entitlements to equality, dignity, and autonomy

Down:

- 2.a critical, political, and creative capacity to envision alternatives to oppressive structures

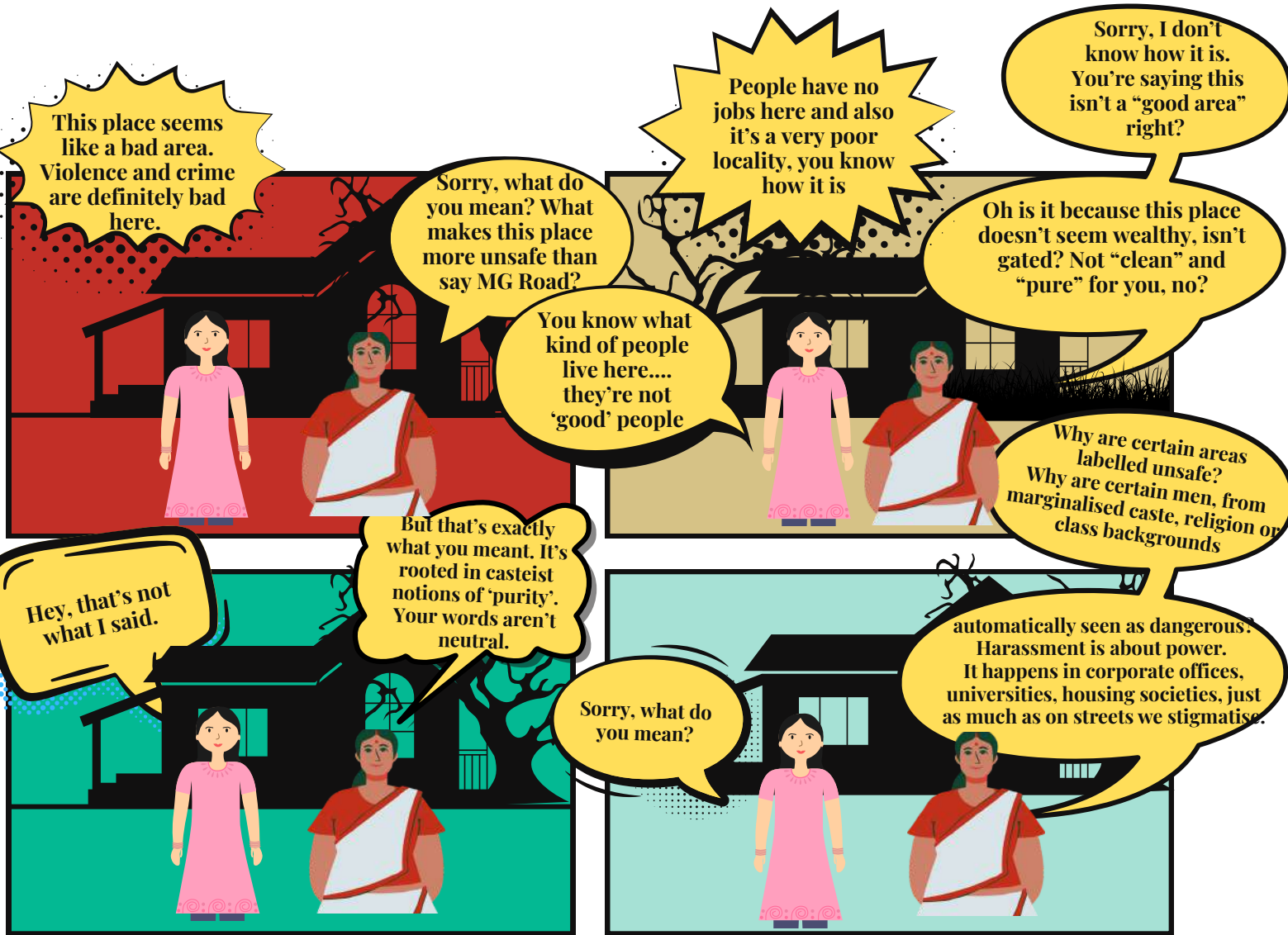


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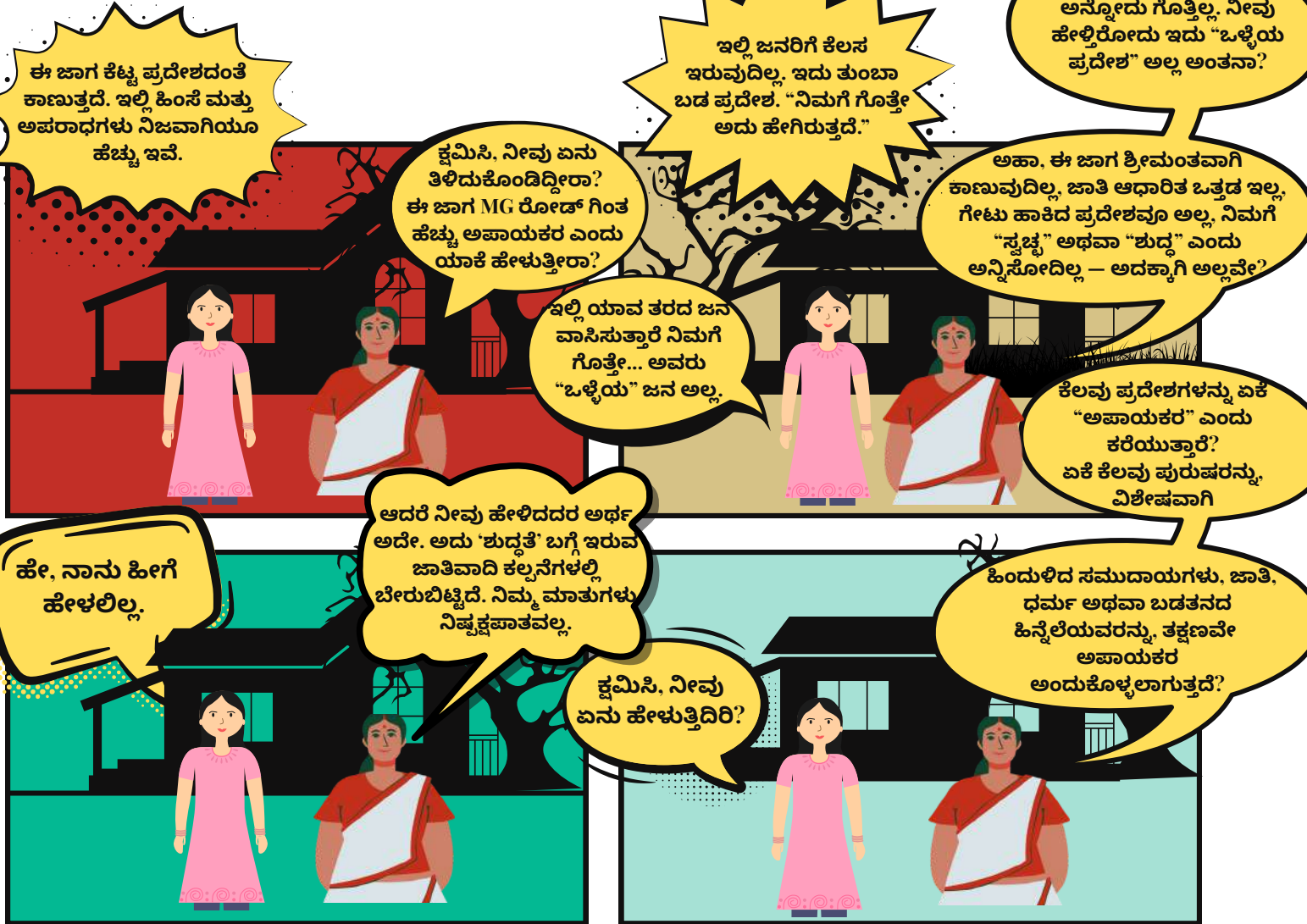
BAD

AREAS?!



When we blame “bad areas”, we shift attention away from behaviour and abuse of power and onto harmful stereotypes.

ಕೆಟ್ಟ ಪ್ರದೇಶಗಳು?!



ಈ ಜಾಗ ಕೆಟ್ಟ ಪ್ರದೇಶದಂತೆ ಕಾಣುತ್ತದೆ. ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಹಿಂಸೆ ಮತ್ತು ಅಪರಾಧಗಳು ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಇವೆ.

ಕ್ಷಮಿಸಿ, ನೀವು ಏನು ತಿಳಿದುಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದೀರಾ? ಈ ಜಾಗ MG ರೋಡ್ ಗಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಅಪಾಯಕರ ಎಂದು ಯಾಕೆ ಹೇಳುತ್ತೀರಾ?

ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಜನರಿಗೆ ಕೆಲಸ ಇರುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಇದು ತುಂಬಾ ಬಡ ಪ್ರದೇಶ. "ನಿಮಗೆ ಗೊತ್ತೇ ಅದು ಹೇಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ."

ಕ್ಷಮಿಸಿ, ನನಗೆ ಹೇಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ ಅನ್ನೋದು ಗೊತ್ತಿಲ್ಲ. ನೀವು ಹೇಳ್ತೀರೋದು ಇದು "ಒಳ್ಳೆಯ ಪ್ರದೇಶ" ಅಲ್ಲ ಅಂತನಾ?

ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಯಾವ ತರದ ಜನ ವಾಸಿಸುತ್ತಾರೆ ನಿಮಗೆ ಗೊತ್ತೇ... ಅವರು "ಒಳ್ಳೆಯ" ಜನ ಅಲ್ಲ.

ಅಹಾ, ಈ ಜಾಗ ಶ್ರೀಮಂತವಾಗಿ ಕಾಣುವುದಿಲ್ಲ, ಜಾತಿ ಆಧಾರಿತ ಒತ್ತಡ ಇಲ್ಲ, ಗೇಟು ಹಾಕಿದ ಪ್ರದೇಶವೂ ಅಲ್ಲ. ನಿಮಗೆ "ಸ್ವಚ್ಛ" ಅಥವಾ "ಶುದ್ಧ" ಎಂದು ಅನ್ನಿಸೋದಿಲ್ಲ - ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಅಲ್ಲವೇ?

ಕೆಲವು ಪ್ರದೇಶಗಳನ್ನು ಏಕೆ "ಅಪಾಯಕರ" ಎಂದು ಕರೆಯುತ್ತಾರೆ? ಏಕೆ ಕೆಲವು ಪುರುಷರನ್ನು, ವಿಶೇಷವಾಗಿ

ಹೇ, ನಾನು ಹೀಗೆ ಹೇಳಲಿಲ್ಲ.

ಆದರೆ ನೀವು ಹೇಳಿದದರ ಅರ್ಥ ಅದೇ. ಅದು 'ಶುದ್ಧತೆ' ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಇರುವ ಜಾತಿವಾದಿ ಕಲ್ಪನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಬೇರುಬಿಟ್ಟಿದೆ. ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮಾತುಗಳು ನಿಷ್ಪಕ್ಷಪಾತವಲ್ಲ.

ಕ್ಷಮಿಸಿ, ನೀವು ಏನು ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದೀರಿ?

ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ಸಮುದಾಯಗಳು, ಜಾತಿ, ಧರ್ಮ ಅಥವಾ ಬಡತನದ ಹಿನ್ನೆಲೆಯವರನ್ನು, ತಕ್ಷಣವೇ ಅಪಾಯಕರ ಅಂದುಕೊಳ್ಳಲಾಗುತ್ತದೆ?

ನಾವು "ಕೆಟ್ಟ ಪ್ರದೇಶ" ಎಂದು ಆಪಾದಿಸುವುದು/ದೋಷ ಹಾಕಿದಾಗ, ಜನರ ನಡೆ ಮತ್ತು ಅಧಿಕಾರದ ದುರುಪಯೋಗದ ಕಡೆಗಿನ ಗಮನವನ್ನು ದೂರ ಮಾಡಿ, ಹಾನಿಕಾರಕ/ಕೆಟ್ಟ ಪರಿಣಾಮ ಬೀರುವ ತಪ್ಪು ಕಲ್ಪನೆಗಳ ಕಡೆಗೆ ತಿರುಗಿಸುತ್ತೇವೆ.

What does collective care look like?

here's what team members shared

