



THE GREEN SCHOOL

MERI एक कहानी





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INTRODUCTION

Let us hear from our children

Planet Earth houses countless species of living beings including fauna and flora. Their complex interactions make our planet what it is today. Nature is a great provider of natural resources. However, a growing utilitarian way of life and the pressure of anthropocentric development have placed an undeniable pressure on the natural system. It is of vital importance to be aware of the responsibility of every human being for the preservation of nature, and for the maintenance and restoration of natural relations between man and the living world. The role of children in inculcating a more environment-friendly attitude will determine our collective destiny. Experience tells us that there is no substitute for education as an instrument of attitudinal change. Hence the relevance of ‘The Green School’ project is undeniable.

The Green School is a prestigious initiative supported by Tata Steel. It is being implemented at several operational sites of the company in the states of Odisha and Jharkhand, by The Energy and Resources Institute. In the process of conducting this Environment Education initiative, we understood that there is a lot to learn from the children. The states of Odisha and Jharkhand are blessed with major concentrations of indigenous population. Nature has also bestowed richness of resources to these areas. Hence an idea was conceptualized to compile stories based on the knowledge levels of students about the environment around them. The initial focus was on indigenous knowledge, but this was extended to include nature and natural resources.

There is a special section that comprises contributions from eminent personalities from the field of traditional knowledge and culture. The writeups provided by Shri Parmananda Patel, Shri Asoka Kumar Sen, Smt Belmati Champia, and Shri Jiren Topno offer a perfect setting to understand and comprehend various segments of traditional wisdom and are an excellent prelude that helps the reader understand the context of stories contributed by amateur budding naturalists in the later section of the book.

In this book, we have attempted to make readers understand the close bond between human activities and environment, and the degree of awareness of our young citizenry about the relevance of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Many of the stories will sustain the interest of the reader and bring forth a positive change in their environmental ethics, traditional wisdom and attitude towards sustainable living.

We sincerely acknowledge the contributions of the children who have written these stories illuminating common and unusual experiences that provide rich information to further explore, describe, and explain the bountiful resources of nature. These were selected from a pool of entries received under a story writing competition held under the project.

Stories are deeply personal, and storytellers' rights must be honored. Therefore we have not done major changes to the stories and are presenting these 'un-edited' versions in this compilation.

Pankaj K Satija
Livleen K Kahlon





Section 1

Understanding indigenous knowledge systems




Collective memory as indigenous knowledge (IK)

—Shri Asoka Kumar Sen

Introduction

The study of indigenous knowledge (IK) has emerged as a contemporary epistemic trend at the global levels. It is coeval with the growing consciousness of the environmental crisis among intellectuals as well as the articulation of the indigenous (Adivasi) groups against epistemic denial. It will be topical, therefore, to know what this branch of knowledge means. Though more popularly used as IK, it is also called as local knowledge, folk knowledge, people's knowledge, and traditional wisdom. Apart from these, there is a selective denotation to signify the branch or part of knowledge associated with the indigenous communities, who have also been designated as aborigines, autochthons, tribes, ethnics, and Adivasis. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), IK comprises 'the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings' that helped them to develop 'languages, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, rituals, and spirituality'. This knowledge is historical; has grown in close observation of and participation with nature and is re-inventive and holistic in character. As part of indigenous oral tradition, indigenous knowledge has been generationally transmitted with the faith in old people as its natural repository. We cannot deny that often development of IK was impeded by the isolation





of indigenous societies from 'mainstream' and its knowledge system. The other problem has been a palpable prejudice of the mainstream towards this branch of knowledge that has so far cast this source as well as its pursuers in the margins. It has harmed the reconstruction of popular rather Adivasi history for which their collective memory, forming an essential component of indigenous oral tradition, constitutes an important repository of indigenous knowledge. The purpose of this essay is to define collective memory, and how this may play a foundational role in the reconstruction of indigenous history.

Collective Memory and Indigenous History


An important agenda of indigenous identity assertion concentrates on epistemic denial. Adivasi communities argue that they are not only deprived of their rightful place in history but they are also often misrepresented by the 'others'. Let me list some of these. In British-day writings, they were portrayed as barbarous, blood-thirsty, uncivilized, and essentially backward. Furthermore, they were identified as historiless communities who became a part of history only when the British brought the ray of civilization on them. Often, their settlements in the forested and hilly regions and lack of growth and progress were etiologically corresponded. Unfortunately, this characterization has been privy to other unsalutary misrepresentations that survive even today. I would like to discuss two such misrepresentations: first, they are anti-development and second, they are and have been an unredeemable vulnerable group of subaltern people, and as 'unconscious tool of history' their fate had always been determined by others (Sen 2020). People often fail to realize that Adivasis herald an alternate worldview and lifestyle which others should look into to conflate a mechanism to fight the hazards of a development model ridden with anti-human mindset. Their lifestyle has/had understandably

been sustained due to their knowledge system. Generally, their 'folklores, festivals, cultural practices, native language, food, dresses,' etc., are considered as principal sources of IK. The purpose of this essay is to bring into limelight their distinctive way of looking at and preserving their past, as their unique component of IK.

We are all aware that mainstream societies preserve their history in the form of palaces, forts, images of gods–goddesses and kings, inscriptions, texts, etc. On the contrary, generally Adivasis preserve their past in an intangible form through their oral tradition, represented by their folklore, legends, myth, and collective memory (Sen 2012a: 29–44). This essay focuses on the collective memory to unravel the function of the source as the repository of indigenous historical knowledge.

I begin by elaborating what collective memory means and how this source is historically resonant. Though generally reproduced by individuals, this is socially 'acquired', recalled, and reorganized. Scholars, therefore, prefer to use terms such as 'social memory', 'collective remembrance', 'public memory', and 'cultural memory' in place of 'collective memory'. However, underlining its 'unstable, achronological, fragmentary, narrow spatial coverage, and cultural bias', the conventional historians often trivialize this source as 'a jumble of chance genealogies, usurped glories, and proofless assertions'. Contrarily, a section of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists critique this approach as ethnocentric and underline their immense historical content and possibility (Sen 2018: 57–8). As a researcher of Adivasi history, collective memory, along with creation of myth and individual memory, have helped me to tread uncharted domains of history (Sen 2012; Sen 2018; Sen 2020). In doing so, I worked in tandem with R. Rosaldo who





draws on Beita (gossip) and tadek (stories) (Rosaldo 1980: 15–17); J. Rappaport on tales and stories narrated by old people (Rappaport 1994: 1–23); Ajay Skaria on rich stock of vadilcha goth (stories) (Skaria 1999: 1); Gyan Prakash on true stories (Prakash 1990: 34–81), and Ranabir Samaddar on ‘oral accounts of the survivors’ and folklore (Samaddar 1998:13–15) to add new meaning and content to the indigenous history.


To study the collective memory, I referred to the recordings of the stories recounted by the villagers, which were recorded by British-day officials during the land revenue survey and settlements conducted under J. A. Craven (1895–97) (Craven 1898) and A. D. Tuckey (1913–18) in Kolhan (Tuckey 1920). These village papers comprise village enquiry papers, village notes, Khuntkatti papers, papers of cases u/s 83, 85, 86, and Tanaza papers. This genre of manuscripts, kept in vastas or bags in the district record room, Chaibasa, unraveled the pre-colonial past of the Ho Adivasis, the predominant demographic community in West Singhbhum, Jharkhand. The village papers may help to reconstruct the story of the gradual migration and expansion of the Munda tribe across Kolhan-Porahat region of West Singhbhum, and the foundation of their permanent villages that transformed the erstwhile itinerant and pre-peasant Munda groups into agro-rural community, later known as the Hos. This was the time when they played the role of historic agents, the autonomous makers of their destiny, and emerged as a redoubtable force in regional geo-polity. Known as the Larka (fighting) Kols, they frightened their more reputed feudal rivals, the Chotanagpur Rajas, and the chiefs of Porahat, Seraikela-Kharsawan, and Mayurbhanj (Sahu 1985). The colonial-day correspondences and reports are very laconic about this phase of

the indigenous past. Consequently, the image of the Ho community as a barbarous and pre-historic group emerged as the dominant historical theme of the Adivasis in Jharkhand.

More popular histories and ethnographies represent Adivasis as an essentially vulnerable and marginalized group when their colonial and post-colonial discourses are reconstructed (Sen 2020). The knowledge of collective memory acquaints us with the unknown but fascinating story of how an itinerant group adopted permanent village life (Sen 2020). The story begins along the establishment of territorial control and spans out progressively in a distinct pattern. It talks about the advent of the early man, known in Ho as Ham, in a primordial forested tract of West Singhbhum, who delineated the village boundary, followed by distribution of lands among his kinsmen and naming the village either after him or natural objects surrounded by the village. This was how an Adivasi village was born. It tells that a village came in to being after the system of sacred and profane governance took shape. The entire process was likened to the conception, birth, and attainment of maturity by a human being, as detailed in my recent book titled *The Making of a Village: The Dynamics of Adivasi Rural Life in India* (2020).

Why the story of making of a village is salient as a source of historical indigenous knowledge? One who is conversant with the contemporary ebullient ripples among the indigenous communities all over the world will testify that they tend to define their collective selfhood in terms of certain distinct parameters. Top in the inventory is their assertion of being a rural community that enjoys historic control over jal, jungle, and jameen (water, forest, and land). Hodesum of the Hos and Chae Champa of the Santals





(Bodding 1994), the conglomerates of villages, constitute their arcadia, homeland of their venerable pioneers and their progenies. This fondness consummates their notion of rural selfhood, about which many popular empirical works remain generally silent.

This understanding is crucial for diverse reasons. First, this underlines Adivasis as historic agents that combat the dominant ethnographic and epistemic conceptualization of these communities as invariable subalterns or unconscious tools of history, as stated above. Second, sensitization of the indigenous communities towards the pre-colonial agency may immensely bolster up their identarian movements. Last, this may make mainstream societies, especially political leadership, more empathetic to Adivasi sensibilities. It is necessary to understand these societies for democratization of the knowledge domain and retrieval and documentation of this indigenous source.

Shri Asoka Kumar Sen is an independent researcher on Adivasi History and is the editor of Journal of Adivasi and Indigenous Studies.

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Tribal art and crafts in a cross-cultural perspective: the case of Dongria Kondh of Odisha

—Dr Paramananda Patel

Introduction

Tribes consist of ethnic people. They belong to different ethno-linguistic stocks and profess diverse faiths. In India, they are spread in different ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from inaccessible hill tops and slopes to plains and forests. They are at different stages of social, economic, and educational development. The richness and wide variety of tribal cultures can be gazed from the impulsive art and crafts of their little traditions. Their pristine visual art unmasks the reality of grassroots. Their talents, manifested through art and crafts, are concrete, natural, and witness the diversity of material culture of the natives. However, they are not quite familiar with technological advancements, and lead a simple life. With the scarcity of resources and the change in ecological condition, their value-based art and crafts are suffering a lot. Their arts and crafts have historically been collected by ethnographers, anthropologists, private collectors, and museum lovers. Tribal art is often ceremonial or religious in nature. In a sense, tribal art and crafts refer to the subject, the tribe, and the craftsmanship or artefacts of tribal cultures.

Art and crafts are integral to the community life. Irrespective of the level of development, economic activities, and social security strategies, the tribal people's fondness of art and crafts and their association with social organization of work culture never faded.

Unlike the archaeological spade work on culture and civilization that reconstructs the past, wherein experts scan and confirm art and crafts to relate to the historic upheaval of the area, if any, the tribal art and crafts offer a panorama of living culture. No known society exists out of the domain of arts and crafts. Even among the raiders and captives, who are relatively unstable in less developed societies, the place of art and crafts is unique. The existing arts and crafts also approve the psychic state of fellow beings and emerging humanity of the concerned communities.

In 2006, the erstwhile primitive tribal groups (PTGs) were renamed as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) by the Government of India. The intension behind the change of nomenclature was to erase belittling implication of the term 'primitive' and to identify tribal people equal to us, who need to be taken care of to live life with dignity, while maintaining integrated ethnic identity. However, the term PVTG provides a picture of their culture that is classified according to the varied aspects of human life.

The Scheduled Tribes in Odisha

Odisha has significant number of tribal people inhabiting in it. According to 2011 census, 22.85 per cent of Odisha's population are tribal people. In terms of demography, the state has the third highest population in India. In the Eastern Ghats' hilly region that passes through the western part of the state, more than 50 per cent of the tribal population living there is concentrated in the undivided districts of Koraput, Sundergarh, Mayurbhanj, and Kandhamal. The undivided districts of Koraput alone accounts for more than 25 per cent of the tribal population of the state. There are geographically identified 13 tribal groups who are PVTGs; they are very primitive from cultural and technological point of view.



PVTGs of Odisha

Among 62 constitutionally designated scheduled tribes inhabiting across the state, there are 13 tribes which are the most marginalized and vulnerable ones, and are identified as PVTGs. They remain in the primitive level of existence in the backwater of hilly and jungle tracts. Each such group constitutes culturally homogeneous segment of the tribal population in the state. They have their respective ethnic nuanced characteristics. The colourful folk tradition of arts, crafts, songs, dance, and music forms the peerless ethnic heritage of the tribes. The following are the parameters of PVTGs: low level of literacy, stagnant or diminishing population, relative physical isolation, low level of technology associated with pre-agriculture stage (hunting, food gathering, and shifting cultivation) of economy. The 13 PVTGs scattered over 7 districts in the state are Bondas, Didai, Paudi Bhuiyan, Lanjia soura, Juang, Hill kharia, Mankiridia, Kutia kandhas, Birhor, Dongaria kandha, Chutkia bhunjia, Lodha, and Soura.

The Dongaria Kondhs


Among hundreds of tribal communities living across the length and breadth of our country, there are some groups who are relatively isolated, archaic, vulnerable, relatively deprived, and economically backward. The PVTGs live in their remote mountainous habitats in Odisha with relative isolation that prepared them to preserve their cultural identities manifested in their ethnic markers, viz., languages, unique style of personal adornments, subsistence activities, magico-religious beliefs and practices, social organization, and colourful folk traditions of arts, crafts, songs, dance, and music.

Dongaria Kandha is a sub-group of the numerically preponderant Kandh tribe of Odisha. They take the nomenclature from the place of habitation in the forested hill and mountain habitat and develop an island of ethnic culture and spoken language of their own. They are now found on both sides of the mighty Niyamgiri hill range which stands like a conical top in the Rayagada district. The bounties of Niyamgiri hill ranges provide both livelihood sustenance and ethnic recognition to this most honoured tribe. The area has a Mediterranean climate which is favourable for growing fruits. This natural endowment shapes the tribe as a race of ace horticulturist. They grow banana, pineapple, and jackfruit abundantly in the slopes of the hill range. They stand apart from others for their famous Meriha festival, expertise in horticulture, separate dialect, colourful dresses, and the lifestyle. Since they are found inhabiting on the hill tops and hill slopes, their neighbours named them as Dongaria but they call them as Dongran Kuan or Drili Kuan. Some Dongaria families are living in the Kurli side of Niyamgiri hills and some others are living in the Parceli area of the hills. The total demographic enumeration is around 6000 with slow rate of growth in their population. Dongaria men and women are fashion friendly, which is found in their elaborate routine of adornments. The cultural heritage of this group is maintained with their skills in arts and crafts.

The Crafts

A Dongaria male wears a cloth called kodi of 16 feet in length and 1 foot in width. It is wrapped round the waist for several times and then passed between the thighs so that one end of it hangs in front and the other at the back. There is hardly any difference between Drill and Kodi except the length. Kodi is shorter than Drill in length. Some Dongarias wear shirt when they go to the market





or for some other important work, such as visiting a government office, for marriage negotiation of a kin, etc. The woman uses two pieces of clothing called kapda ganda, each of three feet in length and one and a half feet in width. The first piece is wrapped round the waist with a knot in front. The second piece hangs around the waist and one end of it passes through the armpit and tied at the back to cover the upper part of the body. Both men and women cover their body by means of a piece of scarf with embroidery on it.

Both men and women are fond of using ornaments, and sometimes it is difficult to differentiate their sex from a distance. For example, both men and women fix a wooden comb into their hair knot on one side of the head. A tiny knife is used by the women at their hair-lock. Earrings and nose rings are used by both the sexes. A knife and an axe are inseparable companions of a male. A tobacco pipe either of bell metal or wood is fixed at the waist so artistically by a Dongaria man that it looks like a sort of ornament. The women use necklaces made of beads and coins in bunches. On ceremonial occasions, the women wear waist bands and more earrings to look attractive.

Ethnic Embroidered Shawl (*Kapada Ganda*)

The embroidery shawl is an ethnically unique textile production associated with Dongaria Kandh (young bachelor). The textile has a cultural significance, as being part of the cultural history of this ethnic community. The Dongaria girls are well versed with the traditional needlecraft. They usually love to apply three coloured threads for the craft, signifying vibrant meanings with different kinds of motifs and design. The young bachelor, Dongaria Khanda, uses it during special festive occasions. It is woven and offered by a Dongaria spinster to a boy who would be her potential life partner.

Dongaria response to these calls, for acceptance or rejection, is in form of gifts. Every grownup girl is expected receive a few embroidered shawls before she marries.

Potential Market for Livelihood


Earlier, the shawl had a captive market, strictly confined to Dongaria habitat. In the course of time, the shawl attracted the attention of outsiders and the market gradually opened to the outside world for its anthropological merit. To make it an effective marketable commodity in the present era of interconnected world, newer strategies became indispensable. The following market-friendly strategies can be applied in case of the ethnic shawl:

1. Woollen instead of cotton threads may be used to make it a winter attire. Since winter clothing has been growing sustainable markets, the sale is expected to increase. The breadth of the traditional shawl may be shortened to an extent so that it can be used as a scarf by girls.
2. The motifs of the embroidery may be transplanted to make handkerchiefs, cloth pouches, bags, etc., for effectively marketing the craft, provided it does not impede the cultural norms.
3. The motifs may be used on table spreads, door screens, computer covers, etc.

Art is a medium of aesthetic sense which generally converts into objects or substances prepared by people for their self-satisfaction and requirement. Besides, it is also considered as a source of income in various tribal communities.

The foremost marketing strategy for the arts and crafts of PVTGs can be to sell the idea that highlights their typical features, such as





they are natural, pure, far from any scope of adulteration, dilution, and pollution and also hinting with a sense of philanthropy to help the tribal people in their development.

The tribal handicrafts are specialized skills that are passed on from one generation to another and these handicrafts are means of livelihood of the artisans. However, in the absence of any organized activity in this sector and the products not being adequately remunerative, there is a possibility that the artisans take up alternative livelihood options (which may include migration). In such circumstances, this age-old craft may die its own death. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the problems faced by this sector and suggest the strategies for developing the tribal handicraft, based on which certain policy-level interventions can also be done.

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The tribal community of Jharkhand: worshippers of nature

—Ms Belmati Champia

The tribal community of Jharkhand has been growing and living in the Mother Nature's comforting arms. They are deeply attached to nature. The tribes completely depend on nature for their livelihood as it fulfils their everyday needs. They believe in religion and fundamentalism, that is, what existed, still exists, and will exist. They regard that everything except for nature is immaterial and everything created by nature never ceases to exist, for example, water, forest, land, and the unlimited sky. The flora-fauna kingdom and even the humankind cannot sustain life without these magnificent creations of nature. For this reason, the tribal community of Jharkhand faithfully worships nature.

Water

Water is life. Life without water cannot be imagined. Water has many usages, for instance, animals and humans use it for drinking, and humans also use it for bathing and irrigating crops. Agriculture is the prime occupation of the tribes of Jharkhand. Water is essential for agriculture. In the absence of water there would be no agriculture, resulting in no crops. This would lead to non-availability of grains; thus, humans would die from starvation. The tribes put their faith in water as they realize its significance. Believing in its value, they worship water. According to the Ho dialect, the tribal people of Jharkhand refer to water goddess as 'Nage Era'.





Forest

Earlier, when the tribes of Jharkhand were not practicing cultivation of crops, they depended on forests for herbs, leaves, fruits, root vegetables, hunting, etc., for their existence. Since then, this community has been dependent on forests for essentials, such as wood for fire and construction of houses, leaves, fruits, root vegetables, and 'daatun' (a small tool made from a twig of a tree which is used to brush teeth), among others. They worship forest, as it fulfils various needs of the community. The forest god is named as 'Buru Bonga' in the Ho dialect.

Land

The tribal community of Jharkhand calls Earth as '**Mother Earth**' and themselves as 'Children of Mother Earth'. It is their belief that if you do not belong to Mother Earth you cannot build a house on it. Due to the absence of a house, a person would fall prey to wild animals and would have to face hardships of winter, summer, and monsoon. The prime occupation of this community is agriculture which is impossible without Earth. The lack of agriculture would lead to hunger. Thus, valuing the essence of Earth this community worships Mother Earth.

Sun

In the Ho dialect, 'Singi Bonga' means sun god. Sun gives light and due to this light, humans perform their daily activities. The plants and animals would not survive without sun. Thus, realizing its importance, this community worships sun.

Air

The air god in the Ho dialect is called as '**Baram Bonga**.' This community worships Baram Bonga as it places its faith in the air god's powers and realizes that life without air is not possible.

In conclusion, the tribal community of Jharkhand puts their belief in the elements of nature, as they are necessary for life on Earth. They believe that all these life giving essentials existed, still exist, and will exist. This is their religion or fundamentalism.

Ms Belmati Champia is a retired school teacher from Chaibasa, West Singhbhum





Adivasis and nature: an eternal bonding

—Shri Jiren Topno

The world takes pride in participating in discourses for conservation and preservation of biodiversity. Several branches of different scientific, social, and environmental studies have attempted to explore wide range of possibilities by which the balance in biodiversity is re-established. Seekers have dived unfathomable depths and soared to unreachable heights seeking various ways and means to counter the depletion of natural resources. What irks me is that we take to technological scientific researches but fail to recognize our own age-old practical and proven traditional practices which have sustained the natural balance this far. The Adivasis of India have shown to one and all that they are the best conservators of natural resources and yet they have been kept outside the margin of society whenever and wherever such discourses take place. Therefore, I would urge all to have a look at the ‘Adivasi way of life’, wherein answers to many of the present trivial questions can be found.

“No life can survive without other lives surviving in the neighbourhood.”

This is the first tenet by which every Adivasi is taught to live by. Adivasis and nature share an inseparable, symbiotic relationship. Their lifestyle and value systems derive from the lessons they have learnt from Mother Nature and historically, they have, indeed, been the best preservers of nature, always upholding sustainable practices.

The first and the most significant lesson is that every creature is dependent on other creatures. At any specific point in time, one is more dependent on some lives than on others and varies as the earth revolves and our dependence on others change with the passage of time. This brings us to the second lesson that humans cannot survive without nature but nature can without humans. Humans are one of the many species on this planet but are endowed with a superior brain. Hence, the responsibility of preserving nature falls all the more on humans.

Communitarian spirit is one of the most significant values in the life of Adivasis which is embedded across traditional narratives of the various tribes. The Munda's story of creation is one such tale that emphasizes on the same.


According to Munda Adivasis, before Earth was created there was water everywhere. Singbonga (God) decided to make a dry earth, so he went to a fish and asked her to bring soil from the depths of water. The fish swam down, took a mouthful of soil and swam up to the surface. She found that while swimming up, her huffing and puffing made her drop each particle of the soil that she had in her mouth. She apologized to Singbonga for her failure.

Then Singbonga approached the crab to do the same. The crab also dived deep, clutched some soil in its claws and came up to find nothing remained there. He also apologized to Singbonga.

Singbonga, then, turned to a tortoise who also went deep into the ocean, gathered some soil on its back and returned to the surface. Alas! All the soil had washed away during his ascent. He too apologized to Singbonga.

Ultimately, Singbonga went to an earthworm and told it his intention. The earthworm said, *"It is possible but we all must work together."*





He asked the tortoise to be on the surface while it went deep into the water with the others, swallowed soil to their full, came up to the surface and poured the soil onto the back of the tortoise. They repeated this act numerous times until they succeeded in creating dry earth.

The Mundas, therefore, believe that Earth is on the back of the tortoise and due to its movement earthquakes happen. The Santhals, Hos, and Oraons also have similar creation stories. Thus, the norms and rituals of the Adivasis stem from community and end in community.

While the oral tradition captures the essence of the Adivasi community, its fundamental philosophy remains etched in the spirits. For them, the spirit is the soul of a being and each creature big or small has a spirit. Spirits fall into a hierarchical structure based on the power they represent.

The Singbonga is at the top, then come the spirits of nature, such as the spirits of mountains, the spirit of air, the spirit of rivers, the spirit of forests, and so on. They are followed by the spirits of animals, birds, and trees. At the bottom of the structure, the spirits of humans are placed. It is important to note that, the spirits of beings other than that of humans, have the power to protect and nurture humans, as well as to destroy them. Therefore, it becomes the prerogative of humans to appease those spirits by way of offering sacrifices and honour. In other words, conservation of nature is the foremost important ritual that Adivasis must perform.

Throughout the year different elements of nature are worshipped based on climate transition and agriculture cycle in the Adivasi communities. Honouring the spirits is occasioned in the form of

feasts (porob) wherein the spirits are summoned, honoured, and prayed to, in order to foster and protect humans.

The belief system of the Adivasis is religiously cascaded down into the social norms, duties, and responsibilities. Thus, an Adivasi community is divided into different clans. Each clan is identified by surnames. These surnames are derived from totems and these totems are obtained from nature, remaining true to the central tenet of the community. Usually, the totems are names of animals or birds; however, there are surnames which derive from natural elements, such as earth, air, water, etc. Some surnames are also taken from the names of trees, fruits, flowers, and so on.

Each surname brings with it the duties and responsibilities for the clan. For instance, a Munda having the surname as HORO (which means tortoise) shoulders the responsibility to protect tortoise and he cannot kill and eat it. An Oraon with surname Minz (which means a kind of fish) must protect this variant of fish. A Ho with the surname Bandra (meaning monkey) is endowed with the responsibility of protecting monkeys. Thus, the list goes on endlessly, ensuring a community of self-reliance with a sense of harmony.

Conservation of nature, therefore, becomes responsibility of the community. Through its fundamental philosophy and various teachings that are imparted as life lessons each clan and, by extension, each individual ensures that the symbiotic relationship is preserved. In this way, nature continues to remain in balance and humans live in harmony with one another as well as with nature. In practice, one always carries the words of the earthworm in their heart: *“It is possible but we all must work together.”*

Shri Jiren Topno is the Honorary Secretary of Tata Steel Tribal Cultural Society





Section 2

Nature stories
contributed by
children



The golden river


—Aaradhya Archismita Singh

Bhuyan is an important tribal group in Odisha. A majority of the population is found in the Keonjhar district. The tribe is also famous for its belief and worship of Goddess Tarini. The town of Joda is located in this district and is surrounded by forests, with River Sona flowing through the town.

An ancient story is related with this river. Once, the Keonjhar district suffered a severe drought. The king approached the members of the Bhuyan tribe and sought their help in pleasing the gods. Answering the prayers, Goddess Tarini appeared in the dream of a devotee and told him to proceed in northern direction to dig out gold hidden under the earth, and distribute it amongst

Indigenous communities safeguard reservoir of knowledge that has evolved and inherited over generations. This situated knowledge is linked closely with their culture and tradition. The indigenous communities usually live in remote geophysical locations and engage in hunting, collection of forest produce, and primitive forms of agriculture. They also engage in arts and craft and are involved in other forms of non-agriculture labour.





the people. Obeying the Goddess, the devotee marched towards the direction instructed and started digging the earth. After several days of digging, he found a water fountain. The fountain of water gradually turned into a stream and then into a small river.

The king asked the devotee to sow some seeds on the land beside the river. After some days, golden-coloured crop was seen on the land. Seeing this, the people ploughed the land near the river and soon had a bumper harvest.

From that day onwards, the river was named as Sona—the golden river. This river is the lifeline of Joda town.

We should make it our duty to protect our rivers from being polluted.


Harit gyan

—Rituparna Nanda

Once upon a time, a man walked into a forest to escape his worldly problems. He was very sad. Talking to plants and trees made him feel good. While lost in deep thoughts and gently caressing the vegetation around, he heard a strange loud voice echoing in the forest. The man was surprised. It was the voice of a tree. It said, “Why are you so sad my friend? Is there anything which you want to share with me? Do so. It will make you feel better.” The poor man burst into tears and said he had lost his job and his master no longer wanted to keep him as his servant. The tree consoled him and told him not to worry. The tree asked him to share all his concerns. The man confided in the tree. In return the tree assured him that he and his family would never stay hungry as it will

Situated traditional knowledge embedded in indigenous populations vary. This is influenced by factors, such as demographic profile, literacy level, accessibility, and distance from motorable roads. These factors impact indigenous communities in varying combination to further influence their interaction with natural resources around them. This variation is unique for each population and can roughly be categorized as biodiversity and biocultural-based knowledge.





regularly provide them with fruits and vegetables to eat. The tree also offered him to cut its branches and use them to make a shelter for his family. It also convinced the poor man to cut its trunk and burn a fire to keep him and his family warm.

The poor man was very grateful and happy.

This conversation highlights many benefits that plants and trees give to humans. We should always treasure and value the role of plants and trees in our life.


Trees are our friends

—Shrestha Patra

Once upon a time, there was a village called Sundarban. Residents of this village were known as sundar nivasi, and the village was famous for its eco-friendly and green culture. One day a man called Rahul came to the village from the city. He was completely new to the area. He was enroute to his Uncle Shrivastav's house but the bus on which he was travelling broke down in between. All passengers on the bus were forced to disembark. Rahul wandered into the village Sundarban and asked for help from many people.

Trees are revered in Indian culture. They are recognized for their attributes such as medicinal value, edibility, moderation of ambient temperature, providing shade, recharging groundwater. These benefits assist human beings, animals, insects, birds and microorganisms. The Bodhi tree, *Ficus religiosa*, has attained a special place in Indian culture, tradition, and mythology. It is believed that Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment or Buddhata under the boughs of this tree. The heart-shaped leaves and its long stalks give an appearance that this tree is dancing, even in absence of breeze.





But nobody was willing to listen to him, as he was a complete stranger. Rahul soon spotted an old man of 60–65 years of age. He was planting tree saplings on the roadside. He asked the old man why he was working in such scorching heat. What was the point of planting trees? The old man smiled and asked Rahul to sit beside him. He told him that plants are our best friends. They give us oxygen, fruits, vegetables, flowers, medicines, and so on.

The old man also mentioned that to build new cities, trees are felled indiscriminately. Planting trees is perceived as a waste of time, and very few people do so. But as villages are still close to nature, the people understand the value of trees. Hence, the old man had made a promise to himself that he will plant as many trees as possible.

Rahul listened to all this and was lost in thoughts. He understood the impact of developing new cities. He took a silent pledge that he will plant at least one sapling in a week and respect nature.

Our rich culture

—Ananya Raj


This is a story about a tribe that inhabits parts of Central India. Members of this tribe do not practice agriculture. Instead, they hunt and gather food from forest.

There is a very famous fable about this tribe. A woman had put a curse on them, because of which they do not practice agriculture.

A story runs in the tribe that once upon a time there lived a woman with her husband. Her brothers were leaving for their house, after having spent a brief time with their beloved sister. She asked her husband to give them a parting gift. But he responded by saying that he did not have anything to gift them. This angered the woman as she did not want her brothers to leave empty-handed. She started thinking about what she could possibly give her brothers as a gift. And then she remembered a silver pot which she could give to her brothers. She kept the pot on the pathway from where her brothers would cross. However, they crossed the path without noticing the pot and moved on. The woman was very disappointed. But she really wanted to give them a gift. She had a bull with supernatural powers as it was blessed by Lord Vishnu. It could graze for hours without getting tired and was also very strong. She gave the bull to the brothers and requested them to take proper care of it. The brothers promised to do so. They were also aware about the hidden powers of the bull.

The brothers were lazy by nature. They did not like working and were always planning how to make more profit without doing any hard work. A sinful thought came to their minds that if the bull was





so blessed, there must be something precious inside it. The brothers decided to kill the bull and take what was inside it. When this news reached the sister, she was upset and cursed her brothers that from now on they won't be able to cultivate anything. The curse has been carried forward to the members of the tribe. This is the reason why the tribes of Central India do not cultivate anything. They roam around in the forest in search of food, and lead a nomadic life.

Tribal culture is woven around several elements of nature. There is ample representation of animal and plant forms that are linked with the daily lifestyle of indigenous people. Further these human-nature relationships are represented in national features such as the Indian Emblem and the Pashupati seal. A horse symbolizes loyalty, speed, and energy; and a bull represents work efficiency and steadfastness.



Living in harmony with nature

—Piyush Padhi

Indigenous groups hold a fundamentally different view of their relationship with animals as compared to modern industrialized societies. For some, the knowledge of the natural world—land, plants, animals, seasons, and cycles of nature—has been a central tenet of their lives and worldviews since the dawn of time. The best interactions between humans and animals can be seen by the indigenous people living in the Andes and many other places where human habitation is next to impossible. In my opinion, today human settlements are possible in those places only because of the animals that help humans in any situation of life. Their fur protects humans from the harsh and cold climates of mountains; and they also help humans in travelling to far off places by carrying their load even in dangerous terrain. Humans have been using animals such as ox, bull, and cows to fulfil their needs. Animals provide human beings with milk, meat, and many more valuable products that help them in surviving in diverse conditions of life, especially in the earlier age when humans had not advanced significantly in the field of science and technology.

Some animals such as alpacas are so useful that they are known as the ‘beast of burden’ even today. In modern society too, humans have not stopped using animals. People still keep dogs in their house for protection, farmers use oxen instead of tractors to plough fields, and animals such as horses and camels are the livelihood of many. Animals are also brought to public places such as beaches or other tourist places where they give people ride on their backs and



earn for their masters. I feel the interaction between humans and animals has weakened a little in today's era but has not vanished completely. If we try we can definitely make our bonds strong with animals by loving and caring for them for the support that they have rendered to us over the ages.

Animals are considered sacred in Indian culture. In Indian mythology animals are symbolized as vehicles of god or deities. Prominent among these are the bull, the tiger, the mouse, and the peacock.



My friend

—Pinak Priyadarshan

“When I look into the eyes of an animal, I do not see an animal, I see a human being, I see a friend. I feel a soul.”

Anthony D Williams

It was 9.00 p.m. as Pinak’s mother shouted, “Pinak come and sleep.” But he ran away from his mother. She also ran after him. Pinak ran all around the house. At last, his mother caught hold of him and made him go to bed. His mother then narrated a story to him about a boy Roma and his sister Diana. They had great love and affection for animals but their parents did not like animals and pets. Roma and Diana wanted to get a pet animal but the family refused to let them have one. One day while playing in the park, the children saw an unattended box. They both went near the box and heard soft growls. On opening it they saw a cute and furry little puppy. The puppy took an instant fondness for Diana. It licked her hand and rolled its eyes. The children named it Lily and carried it home with them. They hid it very carefully in their room’s cupboard. When their mother caught them moving around with a box in hand, they smartly got off by saying that it contained books. But soon the parents got suspicious due to their long absence and spending more time in their room. And one fine day the well-guarded secret was out. Their mother found Lily. At first she was very upset. But gradually, seeing the sad faces of her children she gave in. She agreed to keep the little puppy in the house. The happiness that the puppy brought into the life of the family was unimaginable.

Animals are our best friends and we must understand their feelings and treat them as our family.





Real love

—Pratyush Singh

My grandmother had a dog named Shelu. He was like our family member. My grandmother treated Shelu as her son. She gave him a bath everyday. When he was a small puppy, she trained him to walk. In some time Shelu started taking our orders and my grandmother trained him to follow the rules of our house. He was an intelligent dog as he learnt the rules very quickly. Every morning, Shelu along with other children of the house used to touch her feet to get blessings.

One day our house was attacked by a gang of armed robbers. Shelu was sitting outside the house and started barking at the robbers. Hearing the continuous barking and the commotion, the neighbours informed the police. The robbers were so annoyed that they shot Shelu in his leg. Because of this incident, Shelu received a lot of attention and more affection from the family members.

One night my grandmother had a paralysis attack. After that, her health deteriorated and soon she passed away. Shelu could not recover from this loss and stopped eating. He remained empty stomach for 14 days before he died too. Shelu loved my grandmother in a very special way. He could not live without her.


Gifts from forests

—Sudeepa Dhal

During the last summer vacation, I and four of my friends, Arun, Sunil, Dipika, and Mallika, along with our mentor and guide, Sanjit Sir, had visited Simlipal Tiger Reserve, which is in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, to explore nature. The trip provided a lifetime opportunity of staying in the lap of nature. The reserve is known for its dense forests and perennial streams. We started our journey on 4 May and reached the destination on the afternoon of 5 May. After freshening up, we were called by Sanjit Sir for a group discussion about the venture. The trip offered us an opportunity to interact with nature and instil a natural sense of wonder with an experience which is unforgettable.

Indigenous populations thrive on an economy that is dependant on forests and its produce. Travel to local markets (haats) is need-based as most of the requirements are met through natural resources around these habitations. Strong family bonds are observed in villages. Depending on seasonal availability, men and women collect forest produce. They also engage in agriculture based or other daily wage jobs.





We were specially directed to follow forest-friendly behaviour, which included looking closely for animals like owls; for things that change, such as cloud shapes, light patterns, bubbles, and streams; for different shapes, colours, and sizes of natural objects; for something that makes us feel happy and excited; for different postures of animals such as sitting, standing, and perching; and listening closely to twittering of birds, rustling of water, blowing of breeze, or sounds of animals. We spent a week at Similipal and the trip made us realize that we are so closely connected with nature and that human beings and nature have a reciprocal relationship. It was a soul-stirring experience.

The crow and the naughty boy

—Soumyashree Praharaj

My cousin is a very naughty boy. One day he saw a crow's nest on a tree near his house. There were eggs in it. He planned to break the nest. While he was throwing stones at the nest, the crow saw him and immediately plunged to attack my cousin with her sharp pointed beak. He got scared and ran inside the house. In this entire commotion, the eggs fell down and broke. But the crow did not leave her nest. She waited there for four days to take her revenge without eating or drinking. She kept making sharp and sad sounds, mourning for her loss.

My cousin was extremely affected by this incidence. He went to my aunt and confessed what he had done. My aunt was very angry and scolded him. Thereafter my cousin took a pledge that he will never harm anyone again.

In Indian culture, there is a belief that our deceased ancestors visit us during special days observed as Shradh. Feeding crows is a ritual since they are considered as manifestation of our dead ancestors. It is a way to pay homage to one's forefathers and gratify their souls.



Festivals of joy

—Manish Prusti

The tribal-dominated state of Odisha is inhabited by many primitive tribes such as Kandha, Kolha, Santal, Sabar, Munda, Paraja, Koya, Juang, and other ethnic groups. With distinct traditions, differences in social practices of each tribe can be noticed. They celebrate various festivals in their communities. One such festival is 'Karam', celebrated by the Binjhal tribe on Shukla Ekadashi in the month of Bhadra (August–September) for two days. The third day is the day of immersion. Karam tree is commonly called as Kadamb tree. Some communities also call it as 'Karam Sani', 'Karam Sai', or 'Karam Raja'. The priest of the tribe, called Jhankar, worships and offers prayer at the festival. Indulged in dance and songs, the tribal people go to the forest to cut the branches of 'Karam' during the festival. They worship the 'Karam' branches, by placing them on a well-decorated altar in the middle of the village. After the priest (Jhankar) performs Karam Puja, he prays to 'Karam Sani' for the well-being of the village. Sweets are offered to the deity during the puja. After the puja is completed, the priest recites the 'Karam' anecdote to the devotees present. Everyone listens to it attentively.

Another festival, 'Maghe' falls in the month of Magha (January). Saraswati puja is also celebrated in this month. Tribal people in the region make a variety of cakes on this day. People celebrate this festival with joy. They visit their friends' and relatives' houses. Children dance and sing. The festival of Maghe is celebrated for fifteen days. Tribal people consider the Maghe festival as a major festival. During the festival, the tribal people make drawings and paintings at home and paint the walls.

Many ethnic and religious groups live in Odisha. Each group has different festivals. Therefore, to understand these tribes, it is important to participate in these festivals to understand their importance. We should encourage and support the rich culture and traditional heritage of the tribes.

Indigenous people have a strong belief in religion, and this quality is attributed mainly to their close association with natural elements in their daily routine. Temples and pujasthans feature in their habitations. Regular prayers and offerings are made to village deities. Special ceremonies are performed to worship the village God. Religious fervour is seen through indulgence in singing and dancing during all festival occasions.



Our cultural diversity

—Silpi Das

Once while travelling in a train from Dhanbad to Delhi, I met a college student. Soon we started talking to each other and became friends. His name was Rajesh. He was a student of traditional arts of different countries. At that time, he was studying the traditional art forms of India.

It is rightly said that India is an abode of a diverse range of art forms. Every region of India has its own style and pattern of art. Some of the famous art forms are paintings, sculptures, music, poetry, dance, architecture, etc. Each has an extraordinary history behind its origin which makes it even more interesting. I was curious to know about the traditional art forms of India, so I asked him to tell me about them one by one. He described one of the most famous art forms in India, that is Madhubani painting of Bihar. This style of painting is traditionally done by the women artists and it is characterized by line drawings filled in by bright colours and patterns. He also explained about Pattachitra style of painting. It is one of the most popular and oldest art forms of Odisha and done on canvas. Various themes are represented through this art form, such as Krishna Leela, Panchmukhi, the Dasbatra Patti. The Pattachitra art form is known for its intricate details as well as the mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it.

I asked him to explain about some other forms of art. Affirmatively, he described the remarkable role played by Indian dance and music in the unification of the country. Some of the most popular traditional dance forms are Bhangra from Punjab, which is mostly performed during the harvest festival of Baisakhi, Raasleela from

Uttar Pradesh, Garba from Gujarat, which is performed during Navratri, and Bihu from Assam.

He also told me about various tribal festivals and their dance, music, and art forms. Knowledge about the tribes living in Chhota Nagpur plateau in Jharkhand, festivals of Jharkhand, such as Karam and Sarhul, the dance forms performed by local tribal people, their living style, food, traditional way of living, traditional forms of treatment, interaction with nature and animals and birds, were all at his fingertips. He was like an encyclopedia on tribal knowledge. He told me that tribal people remain closely attached to nature and they treat the land as their mother. Mentioning about Sarhul festival, practiced by the Oraon tribe of Jharkhand, he explained how they worship nature. He told me the history of the Sarhul festival. It dates back to the period of Mahabharata. This festival is celebrated when the Sal trees get new leaves and flowers in the spring season. The tribal people offer prayers to the Mother Nature. It is a thanksgiving festival and marks the onset of spring and blooming of flowers. People start the celebrations with traditional music and dance. They enjoy every moment of the festival with a grand feast.

Another major festival, called as Baha is celebrated by Santhali tribe of Jharkhand. Sal and Mahua flowers are used in this festival.

I learnt so much in this trip and thanked him profusely. The conversation enthused me to do well in my studies and spend more time in exploring the world.

Traditional art and architecture occupies a special place in indigenous communities. It is a part of their natural heritage and is preserved over generations.

Traditional art forms

—Saina Mohanty

This year, during Durga Puja vacations, I visited my village. On one of the nights, I dreamt that my elder brother and I planned for a night camp with our cousins, Sonu and Aani. I am fond of drawing and painting, especially Madhubani portraits. My brother likes to make sculptures. Aani is fond of collecting stationery items and Sonu is good at crafts. I saw that it was 8:30 p.m. and after eating our snacks we went for camping with all the necessary accessories. But by sheer bad luck, we forgot our tent at home. On reaching the camping site, we first lit a bonfire and sat around it, thinking what to do. Then, my brother said, “Let us make sculptures and decorate them to pass the time.” It seemed an interesting proposition instead of sitting idle. But Sonu and Aani were not interested.

Then, my brother made a clay sculpture of a peacock, and I painted it to give it a Madhubani art look. Meanwhile, Sonu and Aani joined us and started decorating it with pearls and other items. Next day, when we went back home, we showed the artwork to our family, who praised us for making such a beautiful sculpture. Thereafter, we set up a small business of selling paintings and sculptures.

Suddenly, the sun woke me up. It took me a while to realize that it was just a dream. I mentioned the dream to my brother and cousins, and we wished that this dream to be true so that we could contribute in some way.



One afternoon, we were all busy in the Durga Puja arrangements. Suddenly my aunt shouted after realizing that the new Durga idol had not reached. All were in panic because it was time for puja. This moment of chaos and commotion made me revisit my dream. I sat down to make the Durga idol. My brother and cousins also helped me in this. Finally, a small idol of Goddess Durga was made. We received applause from the entire family.

This is how my hobby saved the day. I took a pledge to continue and improvise my work. It may help me in my life too. This was a big learning for me.

Madhubani paintings owe their origin to a district in Bihar with same name. These paintings highlight a close association between people and nature.

Along with picturization through geometric designs of natural elements of the universe, depiction of social scenes and festivals are also common. Madhubani paintings are bestowed by GI (Geographical Indication) tags, as they have a specific geographical origin.



Traditional festivals


—Kshiti Mohan Mandal

With numerous religions, ancient temples, local shrines, tribes, and an array of sacred places, Odisha is a very famous cultural destination in India. The tribes of Odisha have a rich cultural heritage and their festivals constitute an integral part of their social life. These festivals are part of their strong belief in the power of supernatural elements and community togetherness. Some of the popular celebrations include a week-long travel fair at Bhubaneswar, the Chhow festival at Baripada, the folk dance festival at Sambalpur, and the tribal festival at Koraput.

The most popular festival among these is the Parab festival celebrated in Koraput district of Odisha. Since 1996, this festival is being celebrated annually in the month of November. It is a unique festival in which the rich tribal heritage of Odisha is showcased. It

The Chhau dance is performed by male dancers, at night in an open space, called akhada or asar. This dance is rhythmic and set to traditional folk music played on the reed pipes, mohuri, and shehnai. A variety of drums accompany the music ensemble including dhol (a cylindrical drum), dhumsa (a large kettle drum), and kharka or chad-chadi. Themes that dominate these dances include local legends, folklore, and scenes from the holy scriptures.





includes dance performances, music, sports, and handicrafts. This festival teaches us about the traditional tribal cultures, adventures sports such as boat racing, mountaineering, and so on. The major highlights of this fair include gathering of poets (kavi sammelan), an art exhibition of tribal handicrafts and handlooms, antique displays, and book fair. Tourists get an awesome opportunity to witness a genuine tribal festival and interact with the tribes of Odisha to know more about their lifestyle and rich culture.

This festival is an excellent platform for the different tribes to interact with other participating tribes and communities. It is a great effort towards creating awareness about tribes and their indigenous culture and a need for their conservation.




Dance forms

—Saradarani Mohapatra

Once a girl named Erona belonging to the Mawai tribe lived in Assam. This tribe gave equal status to girls and allowed them to pursue their hobbies. A matriarchal system was prevalent in the society. Erona was very fond of dancing and she was greatly influenced by her mother and elder sister who were also very good tribal dancers. At times she used to discuss with her father, why Mawai tribe was not very famous. Why was the tribal culture and tradition not reaching out to the mainstream society so that they could also become famous? All this used to make her feel very sad.

And then she did something very extraordinary for an 8-year old girl. She requested her father to give her Rs 50 at the end of every week. She continued collecting this money till she was 17 years old when she participated in the TV reality show called Dance India Dance. She wanted the beautiful culture and dance forms of her Mawai tribe to be spread out to the world.

Her performance was appreciated and she was also selected in the category of best 15. She was successful in bringing glory to her tribe and became a national hero.



Tribal dances of India are much more than a routine activity of expression of joy. These are symbolic to the way of living, and are entrenched with a richness of history, traditions, and culture.

Plants and man

—Eshan Omm Mishra

One fine winter morning, our school principal made an important announcement. It was about a one-day nature camp which was to be held on January 14, 2020. All interested students were asked to register their names at the earliest, as the available seats were limited. Being an ardent nature seeker, I immediately decided to enroll my name along with my friends.

On the day of the camp, we were very excited. We took a bus to reach the site. After de-boarding, we walked towards the forest and soon it became very dark. After resting for a short while, we again started walking. On reaching a village, our guide took permission from the village headman for us to take shelter for the night. We set up our camps and got ready to sleep. A villager came and invited us to a festival. Our guide accepted the invitation on our behalf and all the children went to the celebration site. The place was decorated uniquely with wood, leaves, flowers, and so on. A bonfire was also lit. We were asked to make ourselves comfortable and then the programme began. The villagers started singing a song in their native language and began to dance in a circle around the bonfire. We were also invited to join them. At the end, a dinner of fruits, vegetables, and many more mouth-watering delicacies were served to us. The next morning we said goodbye to the villagers and returned to our homes. Till date I keep on thinking about those humble and innocent people who are still living a life of obscurity. And today while writing this story, faces of those people come in front of my eyes.



मेरी खुशी का सार

—निकिता

आज मैं अपने नानी के घर से धनबाद की ओर लौट रही थी। ट्रेन की खिड़की से बाहर झांकते हुए अचानक ही मुझे कुछ बस्तियां नजर आईं। मेरे चेहरे पर एक मुस्कान छा गई। मैं कुछ सोच ही रही थी कि इतने में मेरी बहन ने पूछा— क्या हुआ दीदी मुस्कुरा क्यों रही हो? मैंने उन बस्तियों की ओर इशारा किया और बताया कि यही मुस्कुराहट का कारण है। उसकी जानकारी हेतु मैंने उसे बताया कि वह आदिवासी जनजातियों का निवास है। दरअसल जब मैं छोटी थी तब मेरा घर पतरातू में हुआ करता था। मेरे क्वार्टर के आउट हाउस में एक आदिवासी परिवार रहता था। उसी परिवार में मुझसे कुछ 2 या 3 साल बड़ी एक लड़की भी थी जिसका नाम शालू था। वह मेरी बहुत अच्छी दोस्त बन गई और मेरी उसकी कुछ आदिवासी दोस्तों से भी दोस्ती हो गई। आज उन बस्तियों को देखकर मुझे फिर से उसकी याद आई और यही मेरी मुस्कान का कारण था।

उस वक्त मैं काफी छोटी थी पर अब जब उसके विषय में विचार करती हूँ तो लगता है कि ऐसे लोगों से बहुत कुछ सीखा जा सकता है। आर्थिक परिस्थिति खराब होने के बावजूद मैंने कभी उसके चेहरे पर उदासी नहीं देखी। आखिर हो भी क्यों, खुशियां तो ढूंढने से मिलती हैं। उस छोटे से आउट हाउस पर वह अपने माता, पिता और दो बड़े भाइयों के साथ खुशी से रहती थी।

ऐसी ही एक खुशी का पल था जिसमें मैं भी शामिल हुई, यह था— सरहुल। यह एक जनजातीय त्योहार है जिसे आदिवासी लोग बड़े उत्साह के साथ मनाते हैं। मुझे याद है एक बार शालू अपने गुल्लक के पैसे गिन रही थी। मेरे पूछने पर उसने बताया कि सरहुल आनेवाला है जिसमें वह भी अपने बाकी दोस्तों के साथ शामिल होना चाहती है। उसने बताया कि उसे एक सफेद और लाल रंग की साड़ी चाहिए जिसके लिए वह बहुत दिन से पैसे जमा कर रही है। यह सब सुनते ही अचानक ही मेरे मुंह से निकल पड़ा कि क्या मैं भी इस पर्व का हिस्सा बन सकती हूँ? उसने बहुत ही खुशी से हां में जवाब दिया। घर जाकर मैंने यह बात मां को बताई। बहुत हठ करने के बाद मां मान गई और उन्होंने हम दोनों के लिए कपड़े मंगवा दिए। परंतु शालू ने इनकार कर उन्हें वापस लौटा दिया। मुझे थोड़ी निराशा हुई फिर मैंने खुद से जाकर उसे भेंट स्वरूप वह कपड़े दिए। ना नुकुर के बाद उसने कपड़ों को स्वीकारा।



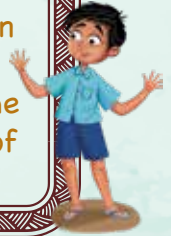
बस अब इंतजार खत्म हो ही गया। दिनभर मैं शालू के साथ उसके दोस्त के घर में ही थी। उस दिन पता चला कि वह बस्तियां भले ही छोटी सी हो परंतु वहां रहने वालों का दिल काफी बड़ा होता है। उन सबने मुझे भी अपनी तरह ही तैयार किया। मैं बस सबको देख ही रही थी क्योंकि दृष्य ही कुछ ऐसा था। फूल और पत्तों की चूड़ी और माला इतनी अद्भुत लगती है क्या, मैंने कभी सोचा ना था।

उनके जीने और खुशी मनाने का ढंग अनोखा है। जिस दुनिया में लोग बड़ी गाड़ी और बंगले के लिए लालसा करते हैं, वहीं इनका सहज स्वभाव सच में हृदय को छू जाने योग्य था।

तैयार होने के बाद हम लोग निकले और मुझे बताया गया था कि हम पूजा करने जा रहे हैं। मैंने सोचा था कि हम किसी विशेष मंदिर में जा रहे होंगे। पर वहां जाने पर मेरी आंखें खुली की खुली रह गईं। हम जैसी कुछ और लड़कियां एक वृक्ष की पूजा कर रही थी। मुझे बताया गया कि वह सरना वृक्ष है और सरहुल में विशेष कर इसी वृक्ष की पूजा होती है। साथ ही यह प्रकृति से जुड़ा हुआ पर्व है। इसमें लोग प्रकृति को सहयोग के लिए धन्यवाद देते हैं। वहां से लौटने पर एक जगह हम लोग पहुंचे और वहां और भी लोग थे। वह किसी मेले से कम नहीं था। वहां हंसी मजाक के साथ आदिवासी लोग गाना भी गा रहे थे ढोलक और तबले के साथ वह शाम मेरे दिल को छू रही थी। ऐसा लग रहा था कि मानो सारी थकान दूर हो गई हो। साथ ही शालू ने मुझे उनका लोकनृत्य भी सिखाया। घर आकर हमने मिठाइयां और तरह तरह के पकवान का लुप्त उठाया। विशेष कर धुस्का और हरी चटनी काफी स्वादिष्ट था।

उस दिन मुझे असल मायने में खुशी की अनुभूति हुई। सच में, खुशियां तो ढूंढने से मिलती है शायद मैं वह लम्हे कभी ना भूल पाऊं।

Sarhul is one of the most popular tribal festivals celebrated to worship trees across the Jharkhand region. This festival marks the beginning of Indian year. It is celebrated by the Oraon, the Munda, and the Ho tribes. Sarhul marks the advent of the spring (Phagun) and is celebrated till the month of June (Jeth).



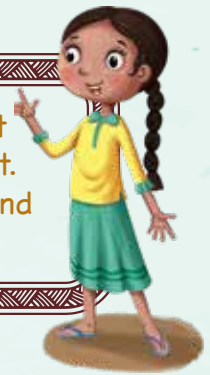
Worshiping nature


—Shreya Dey

Last winter, my family decided to spend time with the tribal people living in the nearby hilly area that adjoins our town. We wanted to know more about their culture. My cousins and me were very excited about the trip. As our journey began, we saw wide expanse of greenery enroute. Several hilly zones, water bodies, and many more beautiful sights enthralled us. We reached our destination around 9 p.m. and rested in huts made of bamboo and mud. We slept on the grass spread out on the floor which had made it very soft.

The next morning we woke up early. We saw the local people pray in groups, have rice water as breakfast, and head towards the forest for hunting. We also accompanied them to see how they hunted. Thereafter, we went on a hill top to see the sunset. The hill top was very beautiful and scenic. After reaching home, we washed and played with the children. I started understanding a little bit of their language too. Soon it was night and we joined them for dinner.

Indigenous communities have a strong respect and reverence towards nature and environment. They worship natural elements as living Gods, and protect them with zeal.





It was a healthy and wholesome spread of fruits and vegetables.
The hospitality of our host was outstanding. We slept content and
happy.

We bid farewell to our host the next day with a heavy heart.
They gave us lovely gifts such as dresses, flowers, and many more.
I came to love their culture and lifestyle and hope to meet them
again soon.




Festivals

—Sruti Shree Singh

India is a land of diverse cultures spread across several states of the country. The government is taking initiatives to preserve and promote it further by celebrating several tribal festivals. The Indian tribal festivals are a feast for the eyes. The festivals also serve as a marketing platform for the tribals to display and sell their handicrafts, textiles, jewellery, paintings, traditional garments, as well as other natural and organic products. During these festivals, women dress in colourful costumes. A special sect of the tribe wears traditional red and white sarees and locally made ornaments. The revelry, pomp and show usually have religious significance. The Karam festival in Odisha is a good example of this. Between the months of August and September, the branches of a Karam (commonly known as Kadamb) tree are planted by unmarried women, seeking an early marriage. Similarly, the Sarhul festival in

The Warli or Varli is an indigenous community with unique beliefs. They practice customs and traditions inherited from their ancestors. They are also known to have adopted practices of other populations with whom they interact. This fusion has resulted in acculturation. The Varli dialect belongs to the Indo-Aryan language spoken by inhabitants of this community.





Jharkhand is about securing the safety of the village by worshipping the Sal tree—the abode of Goddess Sarna. However, unlike in the past, the tribal people do not necessarily gather solely for religious reasons today. Only a relatively small number of tribal groups celebrate these festivals as a reminder of their glorious past.

Tribal groups that are blissfully untouched by modernization require varying degrees of support from the government. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has initiated several initiatives to help preserve the heritage of these tribal groups. The protection and preservation of these communities is their primary function.

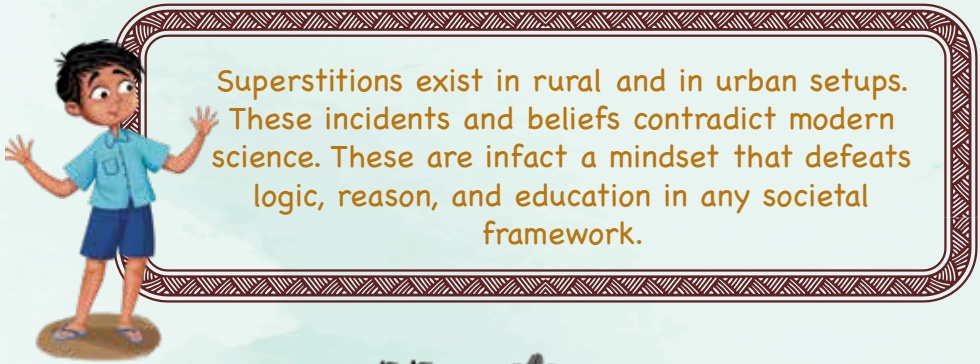


The fortune teller

—Sai Jyoti Biswal

A long time ago, there lived a man named Sham who proclaimed that he was an astrologer and could read the future in the stars. He used to gaze at night sky for hours. He had many followers who would visit him to know what their future holds. One evening when he was walking along the road outside his village, lost in his thoughts, he suddenly felt that the end of the world is near. He was lost in his deep thoughts and kept walking while looking at the stars. As he was looking at the sky, he did not realize that he was approaching a swamp. He fell into it and was sinking fast in the swampy water. He cried out for help. Hearing his call for help, the villagers came running. One of the villagers gave him a branch of tree to help him come out of the swamp. He was saved and one of the villagers said that “you pretend to read the future in the stars, but you did not see what was in front of your feet.”

This incident was a big learning for him. Thereafter, he took a pledge to start living in the present and not worry about the future.



Superstitions exist in rural and in urban setups. These incidents and beliefs contradict modern science. These are infact a mindset that defeats logic, reason, and education in any societal framework.

बस्तर की यात्रा

—सुजाता हेम्ब्रम

बात उन दिनों की है जब मैं कक्षा सात का छात्र था। पापा फौज में थे। फौज में रहने के कारण पापा का बहुत कम ही घर पर रहना होता था। इसलिए हम तीनों भाई बहन उनको काफी मिस करते थे। खैर एक बार लंबी छुट्टियों में पापा का घर आना हुआ। हम सब काफी एक्साइटेड थे कि इस बार पापा हम सभी को कहीं घुमाने ले जाएंगे। हम सभी की गर्मी की छुट्टियां हो चुकी थी। पापा के घर आते ही हम ने उन पर अपनी डिमांड्स की बौछार करना शुरू कर दिया। मम्मी भी हम लोगों के साथ हो गई। आखिर पापा को हार माननी पड़ी। पापा ने भी तुरंत हामी भर दी। पापा ने बताया कि उन के बचपन के साथी शर्माजी छत्तीसगढ़ के बस्तर में एक छोटे से गांव में रहते हैं। तो बस्तर जाने की प्लानिंग शुरू हो गई। पापा ने शर्मा अंकल को कॉल कर हमारे आने कि खबर दे दी। अंकल ने फौरन आने को कहा। पापा ने दो दिन बाद की ट्रेन की टिकटें ले लीं। हम नियत दिन पर निकल पड़े।

हम ट्रेन से प्राकृतिक दृश्यों का नजारा लेते हुए आगे बढ़ रहे थे। पापा ने हमें इस दौरान छत्तीसगढ़ की बहुत सी जानकारियां दी। उन्होंने बताया कि बस्तर पहले मध्य प्रदेश का हिस्सा हुआ करता था। बस्तर एक आदिवासी बाहुल्य इलाका था। आदिवासी लोग जंगलों में काफी अन्दर रहा करते थे। उन्होंने बताया कि जब वे आठवीं कक्षा के छात्र थे तो वे दादाजी के साथ एक दिन जंगल में काफी अन्दर चले गए थे। पहाड़ी पर चलने का एक अलग आनंद था। रास्ते पगडंडियों से बने पड़े थे। पथरीली रास्ते से वे आगे बढ़ रहे थे। उस समय जंगल बहुत घने हुआ करते थे। चारों ओर साल के बड़े पेड़ थे। बांस के जंगल भी बहुतायत ही थे। फलों के पेड़ भी ऐसे थे कि कहीं किसी ने इस को फुर्सत के क्षणों में लगाया हो। दादा जी ने पापा को बताया कि आदिवासियों का जीवन बड़ा सादा होता है। मुरिया, गोंड, धुरव, भील आदि कई जनजाति उस समय वहां रहा करती थी। वे अपना सारा काम जंगलों से ही पूरा करते थे। यूँ कहें कि वे लोग प्रकृति पर ही निर्भर थे। हम सब पापा की बातों में कहीं खो से गए थे। मेरा मन भी उन पगडंडियों से चलने और प्रकृति को नजदीक से देखने का किया। पापा ने आगे बताया कि जंगलों का मनुष्यों से पुराना नाता रहा है। आदिवासियों का एक नियम था। वे प्रकृति को ईश्वर तुल्य मानते थे। वे जंगलों की

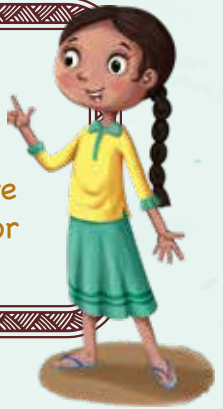


पूजा अर्चना करके अपनी कृतज्ञता प्रकट करते थे। आदिवासियों का मानना था कि वे अगर सुख संपन्न हैं तो प्रकृति की वजह से। मारिया और मुरियजन जाति के लोग फसल काटने के बाद प्रकृति का धन्यवाद करते हुए उनको फसल समर्पित करते थे। प्रकृति के आलावा वे जंगल, नदियों, पर्वतों, पशु पक्षियों, सूर्य और चांद की भी पूजा करते थे।

हम पापा के इस किस्से का आनंद लेते हुए ट्रेन की रोमांचक यात्रा को पूरा कर रहे थे। हमारी ट्रेन सरपट पटरी पर भाग रही थी। मध्य प्रदेश में ट्रेन मार्ग में काफी सुरंगें थी जिससे कि हमारा रोमांच और बढ़ रहा था। इतने में एक हॉकर के आवाज से हमारा ध्यान भटका। हमने गरमा गरम समोसे और चाय ली। ट्रेन मध्य प्रदेश के जंगलों को चीरते आगे जा रही थी।

तभी मेरे भाई ने पापा से जंगल जाने वाली बात को आगे बढ़ाने को कहा। पापा ने चाय की चुस्की लेते हुए अपनी बचपन की बातों को और आगे बढ़ाया। दादाजी के साथ साथ चलते दोनों काफी दूर चले गए। दादाजी ने उनको बताया कि उन जंगलों में भालू, लोमड़ी, सियार और लकड़बग्घे अक्सर घूमते रहते हैं। तभी उन्होंने कुछ दूर झाड़ियों में एक छोटा भालू देखा। दादाजी ने पापा को सावधान रहने को कहा। वे कुछ पीछे हट गए। तभी उनको पीछे से एक आदिवासी व्यक्ति को आते हुए देखा।

The district of Bastar falls in Chhattisgarh in central India. Indigenous communities of this region are Ghond, Maria, Dhruva, Bhatra, and Halba. Each of these has its own unique culture and heritage. The region of Bastar is famous for its colourful festivals, arts, and crafts.



पापा ने बताया कि उसकी भाषा हिन्दी नहीं थी। पर दादाजी को कुछ कुछ समझ आ रही थी। उसने दादाजी और पापा को एक और रास्ते से आगे बढ़ा दिया। कुछ आगे बढ़ने पर उनको एक बस्ती दिखाई दी। ये आदिवासी जन जाति लोगों का गांव था। पापा ने बताया कि उन दोनों को देखकर वे लोग कुछ सहम गए। दादाजी ने उनको नमस्ते कहा तो वे लोग कुछ नॉर्मल हुए। उन्होंने धीरे धीरे घुलना-मिलना शुरू किया। उन्होंने दादाजी को पत्ते पर कुछ जंगली फल और पीने के लिए काढ़े जैसा कुछ दिया। फल स्वादिष्ट था पर काढ़ा कुछ कड़वा था। बड़ी मुश्किल से पीया गया। फिर वे दोनों लौट आए। यह कहानी सुन कर हम बहुत रोमांचित हो उठे। पापा ने बताया कि अगले एक घंटे में हम बस्तर पहुंचने वाले हैं।

शाम के ठीक सात बजे हमारी ट्रेन स्टेशन पहुंच गई। मैंने पापा से कहा, थैंक्यू पापा, बस्तर पहुंचते पहुंचते ही बस्तर की यात्रा पूरी हो गई।

सब खिल-खिल कर हंस पड़े।





Sound of music

—Anouska Mandal

Once upon a time, there lived a man named Tablu. He was very famous for playing Pakhawaj, which is an Indian musical instrument. It is a two-headed horizontal drum played with both hands.

One day there was a function in a village where he was invited to play Pakhawaj. The function was in the evening and the distance from his house to the function hall was very long. So, he started his journey early so that he could reach the venue on time.

On his way to the function, he decided to take some rest under the shade of a tree. He was very tired and soon slept off. When he woke up, he realized that he was late for the function. While running towards the venue, he fell down and his Pakhawaj broke into two pieces. He was disappointed and tried to come up with a solution. He tried to play with the two broken pieces of Pakhawaj, and it worked. So, he decided to play with the same and again started his journey. He reached the function hall and started performing with the two pieces of Pakhawaj. The crowd was amazed by the sound of a newly made instrument and applauded. Later, the organizer asked him about the instrument. Tablu told the entire story and said that he played with the broken parts of the instrument.

The audience also enquired about the instrument from the organizer. As the instrument was invented accidentally by Tablu, they called it 'Tabla' as it sounds similar to 'Tablu'. This is how the traditional instrument 'Tabla' became popular.

Our musical heritage


—Swastik Pragy

Musical instruments have been a quintessential part of tribal communities, especially in India. Since time immemorial music has been a part of the society in times of both grief and happiness. Some of the most famous tribal instruments are Tumdak, a two-faced drum with skins at left and right, Tiriao, a bamboo melodic flute, Junko, Singa, etc.

Tumdak is an atonal and trustworthy drum with two heads, the right one being smaller than the left. Tiriao, mostly used by the Santal tribe, is a bamboo flute with seven openings and gives of an acoustic and melodic sound. Phet Banam is a stringed instrument, generally with four strings and has animal skin on it for securing its bended paunch. Singa is an S-formed breeze instrument, made

Music is ingrained in all societies. Traditionally to support the flow of music a variety of instruments were used. These were a double-reed oboe-type, a straight, curved, or S-shaped horn, a variety of drums—kettle-shaped, cylindrical, or frame drums similar to the tambourine—and cymbals. The names of these instruments sometimes vary from one region to another, although it seems likely that they represent a common link.





of copper, and is a generic wedding instrument. Chikara is a bowed stringed instrument, mostly used by the tribes of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. It has three strings tuned in C, F, and G.

These instruments are still used with pride by many tribes to make several functions more and more delightful. Music is now greater than ever but only as EDM (electronic dance music) as the face of the industry. That is why it is always refreshing to get to know about these traditional melody generators.

My best friend


—Ayank Kumar Giri

A boy was sitting on a bench in a street. A man approached him and asked, “What happened, my friend?” The boy explained that nothing was going well in his life. The man asked him the reason and the boy narrated his story.

“One day in the school my teacher said that plants are our best friends. I asked my teacher how a plant can be a friend to a human being. The teacher reassured me that they can be. From that day onwards I made a tree my best friend. We were happy together. I watered the tree every day and in return the tree gave me fruits, shade, and other utilities. I used to sit under the shade of the tree and eat an apple and share my daily activities with it.

One day, my father lost his job. A month later, he had a heart attack in which all our savings were used for his treatment. So, to earn my livelihood and to sustain my family I left my studies and took a job. But my job did not last for long and after a few days I was jobless and the financial condition of my family deteriorated further. Suddenly one day I heard a voice from my friend, the tree. It asked me to cut it and earn money for myself and my family. I was in great need and hence I cut it off and sold the wood and fruits in the market. The money that I earned helped me to start a business which in turn expanded. Now I was a very rich person but I had no happiness in my life as I had no friend. I soon got a new plant and planted it back and was happy again. Really, plants make people happy.”





“Then why are you sad again now?” the man asked the boy. The boy replied that he was thinking about the time when he cut off the tree, his best friend. He was repenting his action now. The man comforted him saying that what had happened was now in the past. He told the boy to be more considerate and compassionate towards plants and trees because they really are our best friends and companions.

पेड़ बचाओ

—सोनम परवीन

एक दिन की बात है। बज़ार से लौट रही थी, मेरे साथ मेरी दादी भी थी। मुझे एक पौधा दिखा। वह बहुत मुरझाया हुआ था। मुझे लगा वह खराब है इसलिए मैं आगे जाने लगी। मैंने देखा कि वहाँ बहुत से पेड़ कटे थे। मैं उसे देखकर आश्चर्य चकित रह गयी। फिर से मैं पीछे गयी उस पेड़ के पास। मेरी दादी ने कहा चलो यहाँ से यहाँ कोई पौधा लगाने की जरूरत नहीं है। हर साल हम यहाँ आते हैं पर कोई फायदा नहीं। यहाँ के लोग पेड़ काट देते हैं। हम लोग इस धरती के बारे में सोचते हैं। आगे यह धरती शमशान बन जाएगी। मेरी दादी वहीं रोने लगी। मझे भी उन्हें देखकर रोना आ गया। अब मैं क्या करूँ ? मुझे कुछ समझ नहीं आ रहा था। तब मुझे कुछ दूर से काम करते हुए आदमी दिखाई दिए।

तो मैंने कहा दादी आप घर जाओ मैं कुछ करती हूँ। दादी ने कहा अँधेरा होने से पहले घर आ जाना। उसके बाद दादी घर चली गयी। फिर मैं उन लोगों के पास गयी, और बोली की आप यहाँ क्या कर रहे हैं? तो उनमें से एक ने कहा, मैं यहाँ पेड़ काटने आया हूँ। मैं दंग रह गयी। फिर मैंने कहा उन्हें कि पेड़ काटना एक अपराध है, आपको जेल भी हो सकती है। पर वह नहीं माने, और उन्होंने मेरे आँख के सामने एक पेड़ काट भी दिया। फिर मैंने उन लोगो से ये पूछा आप लोग ये सब क्यों कर रहे हैं? तो उन्होंने कहा हम इन्हें बेचकर पैसे कमा सकते हैं। यह लकड़ी फैक्ट्री में जाती है और उनसे बहुत सारी चीजें बनती हैं जैसे किताब, कॉपी, पेंसिल, क्रीम, बेंच और भी बहुत कुछ बनता है। कमाने के लिए यही एक रास्ता है, हम अपने बच्चों के भविष्य के बारे में सोचते हैं, अगर ये सब आना बंद हो जाये तो आप सब के पढ़ाई का क्या होगा, हम सब कुछ सोच समझ कर करते हैं। मैंने कहा “आपके कितने बच्चे हैं” तो उन्होंने कहा ‘तीन’। तो मैंने कहा “कौन सी क्लास में पढ़ते हैं?” उन्होंने कहा एक पहली में, एक दूसरी में, एक तीसरी में तो मैंने कहा अगर आप उससे पुराना किताब चलने दें तो उससे एक पेड़ बच सकता है। लेकिन बुरी बात यह है कि आजकल के स्कूलों में पुरानी किताबें बहुत कम चलती हैं। इसी के साथ उन्होंने कहा हम लोग तो कर लेंगे पर औरों का क्या? वो नहीं करेंगे। इसलिए मैं उन स्कूलों से निवेदन करती



हूं कि आप सभी बच्चे को पुराने बुक इस्तेमाल करने दें वरना यह दुनिया किसी काम की नहीं रहेगी। अब मैं इसी के साथ यह कहानी समाप्त कर रही हूँ।

पेड़ बचाओ-पेड़ लगाओ !!!

Paper products make up the largest component of solid waste. We should try and avoid wasting paper. A conscious decision is to use old books instead of buying new ones. Another option is recycling. Paper production involves huge energy consumption, and is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions.



Each one plant one

—Prayas Manna


Fifty summers ago, there used to live a rich merchant named Sheikh Al Kharib. He was a very egoistic person and proud of his wealth. He had a court of his own where people used to come to ask for help for land and money.

One day a young man named Arif came to his court. As soon as he arrived, Sheikh's assistant enquired the purpose of Arif's visiting the court. Arif said, "O Lord, please give me land for plantation." Sheikh Al Kharib said, "Why do you want land for plantation?" Arif replied, "I want this land to sow some seeds and plants for the well-being of humanity as it will be useful for all of us in the near future." After listening to Arif, the merchant outrightly started making fun of him by saying that how could these immobile things (plants) help humankind. He also refused his proposal.

Arif went to his friend's house and discussed the problem. Surprisingly, Arif's friend Naran gave him his land which was situated in a dry area where there were no trees. Arif started doing his work. After 2-3 years, many trees were planted in the area. This also brought rainfall in that area. Everybody was very happy and satisfied. The plantation of so many trees revived the water cycle in that place which was earlier dry. Eventually, Arif also made many camel carts from the wood of trees planted by him.

One day, Sheikh Al Kharib went on a journey on his camel to another place. On his way back home, he faced a strong sandstorm that blew away his food and umbrella, which protected him from the harsh rays of Sun. On his way, he saw a place full of trees and





was surprised to see it in such a dry place. There he saw Arif and approached him for help. Arif helped him. Sheikh took rest under a tree and ate some fruits and drank water. This entire episode made the merchant realize the benefits of planting trees.

Henry Cuyler Bunner said in his poem:

*“What does he plant who plants a tree?
He plants a friend of sun and sky,
What does he plant who plants a tree?
He plants cool shade and tender rain.”*

Planting trees help in combating deforestation and desertification. Plantations keep the ground fertile, and also check soil erosion. Afforestation also helps in creating a more ecologically balanced environment by reducing the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere.



Work is worship

—Meenakshi Lal

Plants and humans have a great relationship. It is important that we realize the value of plants. We should not waste even a single minute to appreciate the beauty of nature. This is a story of a lady named Mira. She was a working lady, who used to be busy for 365 days in a year. She had to travel a lot for her job, and was not able to live with her family. She was finally sent on an assignment to a foreign land for two years. The company offered her a huge bungalow with several facilities. The area was very green. There was a big garden with a swimming pool. But Mira did not have the time to enjoy any of these. She used to lock herself in a room and work without any distraction. She wanted to be successful. This continued for over six months. Mira became a machine, who just knew how to work without a break. She gradually started feeling lonely. One day, while standing by the window of her bedroom, she saw the gardener watering the plants with a smile on his face. Mira was confused and curious to know why he was smiling. She went to the gardener and asked, “Why were you smiling while watering those plants?” The gardener replied, “Ma’am, when I saw the newly bloomed flowers, I just thought that these were stairs to reach heaven.”

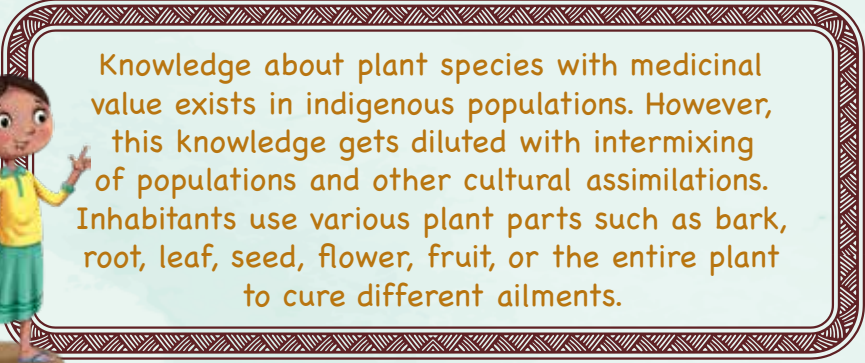
The peace and happiness provided by nature is priceless. So we should never ignore our Mother Nature.



Medicinal value of plants

—Sai Smruti Swain

It was the time of summer vacation when my family and I decided to visit our ancestral village. I was excited about the trip. Next morning we started our journey. It was a long journey and soon it was dark. We decided to halt for a night in a village enroute our destination. By the time we were about to sleep in our tents, my grandfather felt uneasy. We reached out to the villagers and asked them about any nearby hospital. They informed us that there was no medical service available nearby. The only hope was the village practitioner (Gram Vaidya). As we had no other choice, his help was sought. The Vaidya brought some herbal leaves and roots, made a paste and gave to my grandfather. After an hour, my grandfather felt much better. We were all surprised to see that the treatment worked. We all thanked the Vaidya and came back to our tents and slept. The next morning after spending some time in the village and thanking the villagers profusely, we all decided to come back home.



Knowledge about plant species with medicinal value exists in indigenous populations. However, this knowledge gets diluted with intermixing of populations and other cultural assimilations. Inhabitants use various plant parts such as bark, root, leaf, seed, flower, fruit, or the entire plant to cure different ailments.



Community living


—G. Aditya

It was during the summer vacation when my friends – Rohit, Akash, and Bharat – and I decided to camp in the forest which is on the outskirts of our city. Before starting the trip, we bought camping equipment and snacks, including chips, biscuits, water bottles, and cold drinks. We reached the site on our bicycles and parked these nearby. As we entered the forest, the weather gradually changed. We thought of going back but we lost the way and the compass was also not working. Slowly black clouds covered the sky and wind started blowing. We were too scared. We ran looking for a shelter. My friend Bharat fell down and hurt his leg. We did not have any first aid kit with us. We quickly tied a clean cloth over his injury. But he could barely walk. It started raining. We soon found a cave and went inside. The cave looked scary and it was dark inside. We had a flashlight, but were more scared when it was switched on. We saw bones of animals scattered all over. Bats were also flying and hovering over our heads. Scared we huddled close to each other and munched some biscuits and chips. We left the cave after sometime.

Bharat's leg started bleeding and he was crying in pain. But we kept walking.

We started hearing some weird noises. When we looked behind, a wolf was standing. We were terrified and ran as fast as we could but Bharat could not. He fell down and the wolf caught with him. Suddenly, an arrow came from between the trees and hit the wolf. It got injured and fell down.





We spotted some tribals, who approached us. When they saw our situation, they quietly asked us to follow them and took us to their village. They lifted Bharat on a wooden cot and took him to their medicine man. He looked at Bharat's injured leg and brought some leaves. After grinding them into a paste, he applied it on the injured leg.

Soon Bharat started feeling better, and after resting for a while we thanked them profusely and left the village. We can never forget that day.

Change your lifestyle

—Dhanvi Rastogi

Once upon a time, there were two brothers, Pawan and Varun. Pawan was an ayurvedic doctor and he lived in the village near his clinic. Varun was a software engineer and he lived in Mumbai. Varun believed that it was better to live in a city than in a village. He regarded that in cities there were so many places to enjoy, such as cinema halls, clubs, and other recreation centres.

Varun always advised his brother to shift his clinic to Mumbai or any other big city so as to improve his lifestyle. Once, Varun said to his brother, “Pawan why don’t you come here, why are you wasting your talent by staying in such a small village. Here you can also earn more money every month than what you earn there in an entire year.” “Brother I don’t want to live in a city with so much pollution. I want to cure people at minimal cost so that more people would be cured. Besides, I can also help farmers to grow crops”, Pawan replied.

One day Varun started suffering from respiratory tract ailment due to pollution. He was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital. His recovery was slow because of his poor immunity as he used to eat junk food. When his condition did not improve much, his family took him to their village where he got fresh air. His brother Pawan treated him with natural herbs, and soon he started showing signs of recovery.

Varun got well and returned back to Mumbai. Once he recovered completely, he started planting trees and took important measures to reduce pollution in Mumbai. He also started a programme to clean the water bodies.



उस दिन की बात

—गौरव कुमार सिन्हा

बात उन दिनों की है जब हमें स्कूल की तरफ से एक एक्स्कर्शन के लिए पारसनाथ के जंगल देखने के लिए भेजा गया। तीस सदस्यों की एक पूरी टीम रोहित सर के साथ पारसनाथ की पहाड़ी जा पहुंचे। हमने स्कूल बस से पारसनाथ की यात्रा की। सोशल स्टडीज के छात्र होने के कारण रोहित सर ने हमें जंगल में पाए जाने वाले विभिन्न तरह के पौधों की प्रजातियों, कीड़े, मिट्टी के प्रकार आदि को नोट करने को कहा।

हम सब तीन घंटे की मौज मस्ती के साथ, खाते पीते, गाते बजाते पारसनाथ की ओर जा रहे थे। सर भी हमारी शैतानियों को नजर अंदाज कर रहे थे। जब पारसनाथ पहुंचे तो दिन के दस बजे थे। कार्यक्रम के अनुसार हमें दो घंटे जंगल में घूम कर नोट्स बनाने थे और फिर एक घंटे बगल के जनजातीय समुदाय के गांव के लोगों से मिलकर उनके रहन सहन के बारे में जानकारी प्राप्त करनी थी।

बस को किनारे लगवा कर ड्राइवर अंकल के साथ हम पारसनाथ के जंगल की यात्रा शुरू की। सर ने पहले ही जानकारी दे दी कि जंगल में सांप, बिच्छू और अन्य कीड़ों से सावधान रहें।

हमने जंगल में पाए जाने वाले विभिन्न प्रकार के पेड़ पौधों मिट्टी के प्रकार, कीड़ों मकोड़ों, औषधि वाले पौधों की सूची बनाई।

सर भी अलग अलग तरह के पत्तियों, फूलों तथा औषधीय पौधों की जानकारी दे रहे थे। इतने में क्लास के कुछ शरारती लड़के मुझे लेकर कुछ आगे निकल गए। उन्होंने चुपके से मोबाइल से जंगल में सेल्फी लेना शुरू कर दिया। फिर क्या था, हम लोगों ने अपनी लापरवाही शुरू कर दी। साथियों के कहने पर मैंने अलग अलग पोज देने लग गया।

इन सब बातों से कुछ अलग, लगभग दो मीटर की दूरी पर एक हुरहुरिया सांप सूखेपत्तों में लिपटा आराम फरमा रहा था। अचानक मेरा दाहिना पैर उस पर रखा गया जिससे कि उसने मुझे घुटने के ऊपर डस लिया। हम में से किसी को पता नहीं था कि वह एक विषहीन सर्प है। ऐसे सर्पदंश से किसी की जान नहीं जा सकती।



मैंने जोर-जोर से चीखना शुरू किया। वहां सभी हड़बड़ा उठे। सर तेजी के साथ मेरी तरफ दौड़े। ड्राइवर अंकल भी तुरंत उस जगह पहुंचे। मेरे सारे दोस्त अब अलर्ट हो चुके थे। कुछ लड़के मदद के लिए पास के गांव बस्ती भागे। सर ने इतने में रूमाल से मेरे पैर को जोर से बांध दिया। कुछ ही देर में कुछ गांव वाले मदद के लिए पहुंचे। उनके हाथ में एक छोटी सी खटिया थी। उस पर मुझे लिटा कर मुझे बगल के गांव ले जाया गया।

मैं दर्द से कराह रहा था। मेरे दोस्त मेरी बाहें पकड़े मुझे ढाढस बंधा रहे थे। बस लग रहा था कि जान निकल जाएगी। रोहित सर मेरी दाहिने पैर को कभी रस्सी से तो कभी रूमाल से कस कर बांध रहे थे। गांव वाले हम सब को घेरकर खड़े हो गए। एक ग्रामीण ने गांव के एक वैद्य को बुलवा भेजा जो की सांप के काटने का इलाज बखूबी जानता था। सर बार बार मेरे गाल पर थपकी दे कर मुझसे ना सोने को कह रहे थे।

इतने में एक महिला हाथ में कटोरा कुछ पत्तियों के साथ वहां पहुंची। उस कटोरे में कोई लेप था। उसने पहले मेरे घाव को साफ किया। फिर कुछ पत्तियों को कूट कर मेरे पैर पर मलहम की तरह लगाया। फिर लहसुन और शहद का लेप लगाया। यह एक पारंपरिक विधि थी जिससे कि सांप का जहर असरहीन हो जाता है। एक और महिला तुलसी पीस कर ले आई जिसे मुझे पिलाया। यह भी जनजातीय समुदाय द्वारा प्रयोग किया जाने वाली एक औषधि है।

फिर एक व्यक्ति ने उस घाव पर हल्दी का लेप लगाया जो कि एक एंटीसेप्टिक क्रीम का काम करती है और घाव को भरने में मदद करती है। लोगों की भीड़ ने हम लोगों का उत्साह बढ़ाते हुए कहा कि हिम्मत वाला बच्चा है कुछ नहीं होगा। तभी एक ने पूछा कि कौन सा सांप था? मेरे एक दोस्त ने कहा कि पीले रंग का एक छोटा सांप था। तब सब लोगों ने बताया कि वह सांप एक विष हीन सांप है जिससे जान नहीं जाती।

सर ने उन जनजातीय समुदाय के लोगों को धन्यवाद देते हुए कहा कि उनके सहयोग और समय पर उपचार के बगैर यह संभव नहीं था। हम सारे बच्चों ने भी उन लोगों का धन्यवाद किया और बस की तरफ बढ़ चले।



बस में रोहित सर ने बताया कि वे जनजातीय समुदाय के लोग हर परिस्थिति का सामना खूब डट कर करते हैं। उनके पारंपरिक इलाज और प्रेजेंस ऑफ माइंड खूब होती है। वे प्रकृति से ज्यादा जुड़े हुए लोग होते हैं। उनको पता है कि बीमारी का क्या उपचार होता है। वे स्वार्थहीन काम करने में विश्वास करते हैं।

मैं बड़ी सीट पर लेटे लेटे सब सुन रहा था। मैं ईश्वर का धन्यवाद कर रहा था कि कोई बड़ी मुसीबत नहीं आई। मैं उस दिन कि बात को कभी भूल नहीं सकता।



The Green School project is a joint initiative of Tata Steel and TERI, and is implemented in TSL operational areas across Jharkhand and Odisha on issues related to climate change. The focus is to create awareness and enable the school fraternity to comprehend their relationship with environment through curriculum linkages, competitions, workshops, etc. and empower them to impact the school campus and their immediate communities.



MERI एक कहानी

Meri Ek Kahani is a compilation of experts' essays and nature stories submitted by children under 'The Green School' project. During the earlier phases of the project, it was felt that the rich traditional knowledge which exists in the remote areas of the project locations needs to be documented and shared with the world. Thus, this book was compiled by bringing together the experience of indigenous knowledge experts and the creativity of the students. Through the medium of storytelling, we get an insight of how our young citizenry perceives the world around them—their thoughts, priorities and areas of interest.

About Editors

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