

**Greening the Young Mind
Eco-consciousness in Contemporary English Language Fiction for
Children and Young Adults in India**

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CONCEPT NOTE

Indian Writing in English for children and young adults has come of age, with a plethora of talented and dedicated writers contributing their creative efforts towards the growth of this new field.

From the re-telling of folk tales, mythological stories and classics such as the *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha* and the *Jataka Tales*, Indian writing for the young passed through a phase of western influence and has now emerged with a voice of its own.

Indian fiction in English for children and young adults is realistic and deals with the problems and interests of the day. It is neither sentimental nor overly didactic. Indeed, it has attained the golden mean.

Humour and fantasy, too, have their place, as do mystery and adventure stories, tales of the supernatural, science fiction and historical and mythological creative fiction. Writers for the young have also shown their concern for ecology and the natural environment.

Prominent writers include Nilima Sinha, Ranjit Lal, Deepak Dalal, Ira Saxena, Paro Anand, Devika Rangachari, Anushka Ravishankar, Asha Nehemiah, Monideepa Sahu, Payal Dhar, Zai Whitaker, Harini Gopalswami Sreenivasan, Vandana Singh, Suniti Namjoshi, and Deepa Agarwal, among others. Writers such as Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Nair, Mahaswetha Devi and Sashi Deshpande have also written for the young.

Apart from long-established publishers such as Children's Book Trust and National Book Trust, highly innovative publishing houses such as Tulika, Tara, Katha, Pratham Books, Karadi Tales, Terrapin, Red Turtle, Young Zubaan, Duckbill and India Ink, to name a few, have emerged successfully.

More academic interest in this burgeoning field which has immense possibilities for fresh research is the need of the hour. This research-based monograph is my humble effort towards this worthy end.

Ecological literacy refers to a conscious awareness and understanding of the relationships among people, other organisms, and the environment in which they live. Many books for children and young adults present environmental issues and contain descriptions of nature and portrayal of wild and domestic animals. Some books introduce social justice issues and social problems in age-appropriate approaches.

It is felt that environmental education should begin early in life. Children who are not exposed to the natural environment and its concerns at an early age never succeed in acquiring the respect for nature ecological concerns that society deems appropriate. Though there are prescribed textbooks for inculcating these values of ecopedagogy, it is an undeniable fact that light reading in the form of fiction creates indelible impressions on the young mind. So, it is of importance that awareness about problems facing the environment, eco-friendly behaviour and also the love of nature should become part of the child's general reading, especially since the country is in danger of being transformed into a concrete jungle. This would ensure that favourable attitudes and impressions would be created in the citizens of tomorrow.

Children's texts are a crucial place for us to detect and combat negative attitudes and behaviour patterns.

Increasing environmental awareness through children's literature is one of the burdens of a socially concerned author. Books for young people are often based on the "Edutainment" principle. How far authors, illustrators, editors and publishers of books for children and young adults, foster ideas favourable to the new "Green Revolution," the fight to protect and nurture our natural environment, is a question of considerable significance.

A realistic and up-to-date study of the representation of ecology and the natural environment in books for children and young adults through interviews with the creators of contemporary fiction for young people will be useful for parents, publishers, authors, researchers and the children themselves. Much attention has been paid to fiction for adults, but little research seems to have been done in the field of literature for children and young adults.

Through this monograph, I intend to fill this lacuna in the area of ecocriticism. By undertaking a study of the ecological and environmental concerns being confronted and through interviews with children's writers, I seek answers to questions such as how far awareness of the latest concepts like life support systems, biodiversity and sustainable development, environmental ethical values and dilemmas, conservation of animals and natural resources, environmental sustainability, environmental consciousness - the respect for life and landscape, global environmental citizenship, adoption of ecofriendly culture, some environmental friendly activities such as using recycled paper, switching off unnecessary lights, using bicycles, organizing tree-planting campaigns, rainwater harvesting, etc. are represented in contemporary fiction for children and young adults which is published in India.

This study is not confined to Indian authors alone, but it includes a few foreign authors whose works are set in the Indian milieu and whose books have been published in India.

Ecology and the Natural Environment in Contemporary English Fiction for the Young in India

This book is based on the analysis of nearly 100 books for children and young adults and has been divided into seven chapters:

Chapter I – Introduction

The chapter traces the origin and development of ecocriticism, its various branches, including the concept of ecoliteracy; defines and traces the development of children's literature and young adult literature, and the growth of fiction for children and young adults in India; the relationship of the child to nature; ecological literacy and children's literature; statement of purpose, significance of the study, its social relevance, and its potential contribution to knowledge, limitations of the study, objectives and methodology.

Chapter II – Traditional Wisdom

This chapter deals with the great oral storytelling tradition of India and its transition into the modern era. The ecological messages in fables and folktales retold are presented. Folktales from various states such as Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, and Himachal Pradesh are included. These folktales from various states and linguistic groups have as their

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background different landscapes - forests, deserts, mountains and the sea - all of which play a vital role in the lives of communities which live close to their natural surroundings. Folktales from different parts of the country are therefore records of the symbiotic relationship that was responsible for the health and wealth of our ancestors.

Chapter III – Picture Books and Illustrated Books

Picture books, including photobooks are among the first reading material in the form of fiction that the child encounters. Innovations are found to be made mainly in this area, with use of recycled paper, seeds attached to books, use of folk art, etc. Topics of ecological and environmental relevance: Use of natural dyes, conservation of wildlife, care of domestic and pet animals, healthy play in natural backgrounds, acceptance of the seasons and natural calamities, pollution, its causes, effects and solutions, renewable energy, different ecosystems and animal habitats, animal behaviour, prevention of cruelty to animals,

Chapter IV – Books for Younger Readers

This chapter examines stories for younger children between 8-12, who are independent readers. These books consist of short stories and short novels. Ecologically relevant topics found: Tribal wisdom, renewable energy sources, the causes, effects and prevention of pollution, deforestation, afforestation, animal rights, need for community action to preserve the environment, life-cycles of small creatures, environmental degradation, kindness to animals, gardening, man-animal conflict, sustainable development, different ecosystems, habitats, adaptations to seasons and the general wisdom of traditional practices and the dangers of western models of development. Post-colonial and neo-colonial relevance of the texts have been studied. Surprisingly complex and extensive, from the environmental point of view,

Chapter V - Books for Older Children and Young Adults

Children in the age-groups 13-16 and those for young adults between 17 and 21 have been taken into consideration. Sanctuaries, the problem of poaching, animal behaviour, human-animal conflict, the healing power of nature, accurate descriptions of landscape flora and fauna, biodiversity, the Web of Life, the Chipko Movement, ecoterrorism and ecofeminism are topics of relevance discussed in this monograph.

Still, there is an abrupt movement away from nature in young adult fiction, which is mainly set in the cities.

Chapter VI- Illustrations - A Brief Glance

The chapter explores the importance of illustrations in children's books, their significance, and the development and present status of illustration in Indian children's literature. It is found that many books use innovative designs, are made from recycled materials, and make wide use of motifs from folk art.

Chapter VII –Summing Up

The ecological concepts represented in the works of fiction for the young are summarized. The dearth of the same in young-adult fiction in India is pointed out. Highlights from interviews with the creators of fiction for the young are given. Scope for further study and recommendations for future creative writing follow.

To Conclude

Publishing of English language fiction for the young in India has seen a tremendous growth spurt during the last decade and the rate is accelerating. Most publishers are particular about having eco-relevant matter in their books of fiction.

- The texts reveal that there is sufficient awareness instilled and information given about ecology and the natural environment in children's books, especially in the books for young readers in the age-group 8-14.
- There is a dearth of books with nature as the setting and about environmental issues in the books for young adults, something which does not reflect their activities and interests.
- Most authors, illustrators and publishers have a deep love and respect for nature and have made conscious efforts to foster the same in their young readers.
- Still, children do not have access to Indian children's fiction in English mainly because of lack of awareness on the part of adults.
- The reading habit, however, is thriving among children and young adults. Young adults are aware of, and have access to, Indian books.

Chapter I Overture

Everything is connected to everything else.

- Barry Commoner's first law of ecology.

The term *ecocriticism* is derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *kritis* which together mean "house judge." The house is the world of nature, our widest home. "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii).

The German zoologist Ernst Haeckel coined the word *ecology* in 1869. Joseph Meeker introduced the term *literary ecology* in 1972. Another American scholar William Rueckert created the term *ecocriticism* from the two words *ecology* and *criticism* in his essay "Literature and Ecology; An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978). The term *ecological poetics* was also used by him in this essay. In 1991 Harold Fromm organised an M.L.A. session entitled "Ecocriticism: the Greening of Literary Studies."

Ecocriticism is the preferred term in the USA, while in the United Kingdom, it is "Green Studies." USA celebrated the Transcendentalists of the 1840s. Emerson, Fuller and Thomson, whereas the UK Green Studies Movement was derived from the tradition of British Romanticism of the 1790s. Raymond Williams, the critic wrote the path-breaking essay, "The Country and the City" and Laurence Coupe, Richard Kerridge and Greg Garrard are other critics associated with the Green Studies Movement. The US movement is celebratory in nature. It appreciates the grandeur of nature. The UK movement is minatory in nature. It seeks to warn of the coming ecological apocalypse, and lesser ecological threats.

Rachael Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962) set the trend for this area of literary study. In the USA, the publication in 1996 of *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm, was the cornerstone of ecocriticism. In 1992, Cheryll Glotfelty became co-founder of ASLE, which brings out the ISLE-Journal. "In the mid-eighties, as scholars began to undertake collaborative projects, the field of environmental literary studies was planted, and in the early nineties it grew" (Glotfelty and Fromm xii). Some universities began to include literature courses in their environmental studies curricula. Special sessions on nature writing or environmental literature began to appear on the programs of annual literary conferences, notably the 1991 MLA special session organised by Harold Fromm, entitled "Ecocriticism: the Greening of Literary Studies" (xviii). In 1985, Frederick O. Wage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature; Materials, Methods, Resources* and in 1989 Alice Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* which promoted the study of writing on nature and the environment.

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Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world, In most literary theory “the world” is synonymous with society- the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere. Ecoliterary terms such as *ecopoetics*, *green reading*, *literary ecology* or *ecological literature*, *green theory* and *green cultural studies* are new but the spirit behind them is ages old. “Ecology is a comparatively recent science necessitated by the march of western civilization because we over exploit our natural resources and remorselessly indulge in species annihilation, legally poison our rivers and seas over and above damming and polluting them smoke out holes in our atmosphere and engage in a hundred different ways of self destruction” (Murali 11)

Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination* says that the non-human is not a mere framing device but a presence. Listing out the ingredients of an environmentally oriented work, he asserts that the human interest is not the only legitimate interest in this world. Therefore, human accountability to the environment should be a part of the text’s orientation (7-8).

Arne Ness, the Norwegian philosopher, professor and mountaineer is the advocate of *Deep Ecology* or *Ecosophy* (ecological wisdom). Arne Ness states the principles of Deep Ecology that are the platform upon which the framework of Ecosophy is built:

1. The non-human has value in itself.
2. Biodiversity
3. Kill only for vital needs (conserve).
4. Decrease in human population to make space for the non-human.
5. Present interference excessive, increasing.
6. Change in policies.
7. Simplicity, quality.
8. Activism.

Deep Ecology demands a return to the monistic viewpoint, the primal identification of humans and the ecosphere, an outlook close to Indian philosophy, especially the *Advaita* theory. As Rajakrishnan V. and Ujwal Jana point out, nature was respected during the Vedic Age (7). In the *Atharvana Veda*, the earth is seen as the nourishing mother who supports all living beings. The Rig Veda praises medicinal trees and plants that grow amidst human dwellings.

The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community. This is what ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude toward nature” (Reuckert 107). This worldview blames anthropocentric dualism for the ills of the environment.

Joseph W. Meeker in “The Comic Mode” (155-69) says that while human social systems have only one animal to deal with, man, and a few domesticated plants and animals, a natural ecosystem

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accommodates not only the complete life of every species within it, but also provides for relatively harmonious relationships among all its constituent species (Meeker 162). Man should modestly accept that he is part of nature. “Human values could no longer be based on the assumption that man is alone at the center of creation; allowance would have to be made for the welfare of all the plants, animals, and land of the natural environment” (168).

The interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism is stressed by the critics Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer who say that ecologically oriented texts can be judged according to the attention they pay to natural phenomena, their degree of environmental awareness, their recognition of diversity, their attitude to nonhuman forms of life or their awareness of the interconnectedness between local and global ecological issues. The current environmental problems are largely of human making. Scholars throughout the humanities are finding ways to add an environmental dimension to their respective disciplines. Psychology links environmental conditions and mental health, some regarding the modern estrangement from nature as the basis of our social and psychological ills. Philosophy has subfields like Environmental Ethics, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism and Social Ecology. Thomas K. Dean incorporates culture in the study of eco literature. “Ecocriticism is a response to the need for the humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction” (2). Ecocriticism is study a environmentalism. Garrard, commenting on Glotfelty’s’s definition writes, “Ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory” (3).

Ecocriticism, which started as a white movement, will become increasingly “multi-ethnic when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice, and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion” (Glotfelty and Fromm, “Introduction”ii).

One of the branches of ecocriticism is Animal Studies which examines the representation of animals in history and culture, or animal studies and the philosophical consideration of animal rights. It raises ethical questions. Cruelty to animals is sometimes justified by stating that they do not have the capacity to feel pain or do not possess the power of reason. This is condemned as ‘speciesism’ Singer points out to the irrational prejudice which forms the basis of our different treatment of animals and humans: “If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration” (qtd. in Garrard 147).

Animals may be depicted like or unlike humans. An animal may be understood in human terms (anthromorphism) or humans in animal terms (zoomorphism). Anthromorphism has been criticised for its sentimental projection of human emotions into animals. ‘Disnificatin’ where animals are trivialized. “The visual cue of disnification is ‘neoteny,’ or the set of characteristics we instinctively associate with infant humans and animals: large eyes, a big head relative to the body, short limbs and a generally rounded configuration” (Garrard 155).

Richard Kerridge in *Writing the Environment* says “the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations whenever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (3).

Some of the questions asked by ecocritics are: How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind’s relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?” (Glotfelty and Fromm xix).

What ecocritics do:

- 1) Re-read major literary works from an ecocritical perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world.
- 2) Study ecological concepts applied outside nature eg. symbiosis, balance, sustainable energy.
- 3) Give canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter.
- 4) Factual writing.
- 5) Ecocritical values like observation, collective ethical responsibility and the claims of the world beyond ourselves.

Children’s Literature

Peter Hunt, one of the leading in the field states that “Children’s literature is a term used to describe a set of texts and an academic discipline” (41). The concept of children’s literature poses dilemmas to critics. Kimberley Reynolds, Professor of Children’s Literature, Newcastle University examines the term practically: “Outside academia, the term ‘children’s literature’ has a largely, unproblematic, everyday meaning. From newspapers and other media to schools and in government documents, it is understood to refer to the materials written to be read by children and young people published by children’s publishers, and stocked and shelved in the children’s and / or young adult (YA) sections of libraries and bookshops” (1).” She goes on to add: “For those who research and teach children’s literature, by contrast, the term is fraught with complications; indeed, in one of the most controversial studies of children’s literature of the last century, Jacqueline Rose (1984) referred to the ‘impossibility’ of children’s literature” (Reynolds 2).

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Pery Nodelman postulated: “Children’s literature is defined by its audience. . . it is, for the most part written by adults and not children. Hence, the presence of ‘the hidden adult’ in texts for children” (Nodelman qtd. in Hunt 48). More recently, the literary canon has been challenged in a way the promise is that all texts are complex, and therefore all texts are worth of serious critical and theoretical.

“Children’s literature” itself has become a kind of umbrella term encompassing a wide range of disciplines, genres and media” (Nel and Paul 1). Children’s literature or juvenile literature includes stories, books, magazines and poems that are enjoyed by children. “Currently, everything from folk and fairy tales, myths and legends, ballads and nursery rhymes – many of which date back to preliterate epochs – to such embodiments of our transliterate age as e-books, fan fiction, and computer games may come under the umbrella of children’s literature” (Reynolds 2).

Modern children’s literature is classified in two different ways: genre or the intended age of the reader. Children’s literature has its origin in the oral tradition-songs folklore and so on. In fifteenth century Europe, children’s stories carried a strong moral or religious message. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are known as the “Golden Age of Children’s Literature” as many authors penned children’s classics during that time.

It is very difficult to define the boundaries of children’s literature, since several works originally meant for adults or for undefined age groups are mainly read by children today. Examples are John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and Chales Dickens’s *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. Myths and legends also come under this category. Tales from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* have been the stock reading for children until recently. Adults, too, avidly read books written for children. J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, which was eagerly devoured by British Members of Parliament, is an outstanding example. French historian Philippe Aries argued in *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) that the modern concept of childhood only emerged in recent times. These are known today as “crossover fiction.” As Reynolds explains, “It [the term ‘children’s literature] addresses works that were specifically directed at the young, those that came to be regarded as children’s literature by being appropriated by young readers, and those that were once read by children but are now almost exclusively read by scholars” (2).

Other scholars have agreed that cultural values were passed on to the younger generation in the form of stories, which served to entertain as well as to instruct. John Locke who developed his theory of the *tabula rasa* in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* suggested that picture books be created for the instruction of children. Early literature read by children included chapbooks, which were pocket-sized pamphlets which were not specifically written for the young. The Puritans did write literature to influence young minds and to take them along the desired path. The first modern children’s book emerged in mid-eighteenth-century England. Called *A Little Pretty Pocket-*

Book, it was written and published by John Newbery and contained rhymes, picture stories and games for pleasure instead of dull didactic lore.

Another philosopher who influenced the development of children's literature was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that children should be allowed to develop naturally and joyously. Fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm and later, Hans Christian Andersen began to gain popularity, leading to the development of creative imaginative literature. In the mid nineteenth century, humorous and imaginative literature came to be written. Lewis Carroll's fantasy, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was an outstanding example. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes inaugurated the school story tradition. *Water Babies* (1862) by Charles Kingsley dealt with the problem of poverty. Adventure stories such as *Treasure Island* by R.L. Stevenson were much in demand. In the United States, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* became immensely popular. Frances Hodgson Burnett and E. Nesbit were prominent writers for children in the early twentieth century. George MacDonald's *Curdie* series was the predecessor of fantasy fiction with religious overtones such as those written by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Mystery and adventure stories for children came to be written in large numbers by authors such as Enid Blyton. The reading habit among children was revived by the publication in the late twentieth century of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which led to a spurt in books for children.

It is seen that children's literature came into its own when creative writers began to write for children. Previously, literature for children was written by moral and religious reformers and educators for mainly pedagogical or doctrinal reasons. Research on children's literature began in earnest in the last decade of the twentieth century. Leading critics are Peter Hunt, Perry Nodelman, Kimberley Reynolds, Peter and Iona Opie, Bruno Bettelheim, Maria Nikolajeva and Jack Zipes. The American Library Association began awarding the Newbery Medal, the first children's book award, in 1922. The Caldecott Medal for illustration followed in 1938.

Children's literature can be divided according to genre and age-group. Picture books, traditional literature, such as folk tales, fairy tales and fables, fantasy, animal or pet stories, realistic fiction, historical fiction, school stories, mystery stories, adventure stories and family stories, biography and autobiography, poetry and verse are some of the important genres. According to age, children's literature can be categorized as picture books (ages 0-5), books for beginners (5-7), books for older children (8-12) and books for young adults (13-18). In the Indian context, where English is a second language, books in English are read by an older age-group than in the West. The rise of literacy and the availability of disposable income lead to the spurt in children's book publication in India.

Janet Maybin and Nicole J. Watson enthuse: "These are exciting times for children's literature. . . . Arguably, children's books have achieved unprecedented public visibility, sales and popularity. A market which has traditionally been seen as mostly a matter of maintaining and republishing past established titles suddenly expanded into publishing new titles at an unprecedented rate ("Introduction" 20).

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The Child and Nature

Rousseau in *Emile* (1762) argues that children should grow up “in accordance with nature who does everything for the best” Hugo Cunningham notes: “The child-nature link was being forged, with enormous implications for the future of childhood” its effect and “to mark off childhood as a separate and special world,” the most striking evidence being “the development of a special genre of literature for children” (162). Wordsworth in *The Prelude* (1805,1830) celebrated a childhood of free encounters with nature, which he saw as a teacher and a moral force.

In *The Geography of Childhood*, Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble document and interpret children’s need for wild places (5). “With respect to literary representation, it seems to us that our society’s understanding of the relationship between children and nature is, at the most general level, twofold. On the one hand, there is the belief that children are innocent and / or virtuous, in keeping with the romantic philosophy of Rousseau. Children are still presumed to have a privileged relationship to nature, thanks largely to the legacy of romantic and Victorian literature, which emphasized – often to the point of absurdity – the child’s proximity to the natural world and consequent purity” (6). As Maude Hines makes it clear, children have long been likened to plants and child rearing to plant nurture, such that James Kincaid identifies the “child botanical” (90) as one of the major tropes of childhood. The assumption is that children who are not exposed to the natural environment and its concerns at an early age risk never acquire the respect for nature that society deems appropriate. The second is the more fundamental notion that interaction with the environment is an important part of healthy child development in general, which will enhance learning and the quality of life in the years to follow.

According to Sigler, current environmental children’s literature has begun to reflect the views of various groups, such as aboriginal people, ecofeminists, deep ecologists, and others. It depicts nature as complicated and ever- changing, as something for which the child must fight to save from the anthropocentric actions of humanity (151).

Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination* provides a “rough checklist of some of the ingredients that might be said to comprise an environmentally oriented work”:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or given is at least implicit in the text (7-8).

Ecological Literacy and Children’s Literature

The term *ecological literacy* is most frequently associated with the work of David Orr and his book *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, in which he contends that “all education is environmental education” (90), but also that most education now

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presents environment and nature as resources for people, as products for consumers, as things we as humans act upon rather than that which is within.

Ecocriticism's approach has traditionally been one of interpretation, one of examination of texts through an ecocritical lens. David Orr states:

Hence, I am not drawn to ecocriticism as a methodology for examining literary texts – rather . . . I am interested in how texts themselves are “ecocritical,” are used to foster examinations not only between text themselves but among reader, writers, texts, and environments and organisms. That is, I have become less interested in ecocriticism's agenda of textual examination than in issues of ecological literacy (233).

Ecological literacy refers to a conscious awareness and understanding of the relationships among people, other organisms, and the environment in which they live. “Texts themselves work toward ecological literacy, whether specifically or tacitly” (Orr 233). All texts, all systems of knowledge-making, then, for Orr, are also structures for producing environmental knowledge. All texts, either directly or indirectly, thus teach something about places, organisms, relationships and the use of resources. Orr suggests that if ecology is taught in all subject areas, a change may be brought about in the way one thinks about environment. Orr posits that ecological literacy requires three things: First is a “broad understanding of how people and societies react to each other and to natural systems” (Curry 3). He adds that we should also consider how those same people and societies might live differently to better sustain those systems. Secondly, individuals must understand the importance of the environmental crisis that we face and the speed with which it is accelerating. Third, Orr contends that in order for individuals to become ecologically literate, they must develop their own ecological consciousness and contribute to the development in others.

Ecological literacy, then, becomes a more active sort of critical tool. Rather than offering an ecocritical vision of relationships between texts and environments, ecological literacy provides a mechanism for understanding that when texts are produced, read, and analyzed, whether academically or otherwise, they educate about environment, some consciously, others less explicitly. This point becomes especially important in consideration of children's texts. Texts with implicit agendas of ecological literacy development can be examined not simply for how they teach about environment, for how they project images of environment, but for how they themselves become part of a larger ecological literacy. (Curry 24).

Many books for children and young adults present environmental issues and contain descriptions of nature and portrayal of wild and domestic animals. Some books introduce social justice issues and social problems in age-appropriate approaches. Among these, a growing number describe environmental justice issues. “Environmental justice literature for children is not bound by region or language” (Platt 180).

How does children's literature portray the troubling reality of our world in order to address social issues and to promote a path toward productive resolutions without shattering a sense of hope without destroying (in terms of *The Story*) the "green" and replacing it with "gray"? "This question is especially relevant when many children recognize that their world is more gray than green, literally and symbolically" (Platt 192).

Children's Literature in India

India has the greatest living oral narrative tradition in the world, the folklore tradition. The *Panchatantra*, written in Sanskrit India in 200 B.C, other animal fables like the *Jataka* Tales and the *Hitopanishad* were meant to entertain and instruct young minds. The *Panchatantra* tales have passed into the story-telling traditions of the West in the times of yore. "Animal fables from this source are predominant and remain just a grandmother away" says A.K.Ramanujam ("Introduction"2).

Tales from the *Puranas* such as *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharatha* and *Srimad Bagawadham* enthralled both children and adults. This continues today in the form of television serials and graphic novels. Collections of stories such as *Kathasarithasagara* and legends about brave warriors or witty jesters formed the stock lore of the oral narrative tradition.

The concept of books for children is a comparatively recent phenomenon in India. Previously, printed books for children were confined to academic textbooks. Now, with more disposable income, educated mothers, dearth of grandparents and nuclear families, books are needed to fill the vacuum created by the decline of the oral tradition. When fiction appeared on the shelves, these were mostly confined to re-telling of the oral stories. A few original tales were published, but the purpose of these was strictly for edification. The alternatives were abridged editions of western classic novels and books for children and young adults by foreign authors. Many of these subsequently came out in less expensive Indian editions and promoted the reading habit among the urban, English-literate young.

Children's stories in regional languages began to appear in print much before those in English. Authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray, Subramaniya Bharathi and Vaikom Mohammed Basheer wrote stories and poems for children. These were also translated into English.

Feeling the need for the promotion of original stories set in the Indian milieu, Shankar Pillai established the Children's Book Trust in 1957 in Nehru House, New Delhi. It publishes original stories and retelling of folktales and tales from Indian classics. It aims at providing attractive and affordable books for children. The Children's Book Trust organises an annual Competition for Writers of Children's Books and even today most of its publishing is sourced through the winning entries.

The National Book Trust (1957), under the Human Resources Ministry, started publishing books under the categories of Nehru Bal Pustakalaya for children and Young India Library for young

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adults. The National Centre for Children's Literature (NCLL) was established by NBT in 1993 to monitor, coordinate, plan and aid the publication of children's literature in various Indian languages. It is mandated to conduct surveys and research work related to children's literature. NCLL organises workshops, exhibitions and book clubs.

Rupa Publishers, Jaico Books and several small publishing houses did publish children's books in India, but most of the stories published were either re-tellings of stories from the *Puranas*, *The Panchatantra*, *Jataka* Tales and so on, or were highly didactic in nature and hence had little appeal to children.

The entry of small publishing houses which were willing to invest in technology and creative writing have brought about a sea-change in the children's book scenario in India. These publishers concentrate on original stories for children, though creative re-telling of folklore not only from India but all over the world was also done. Publishers like Tulika, Chennai, initiated by Radhika Menon, Pratham, Bangalore, established by Mala Kumar, Tara Publications, Chennai, initiated by Gita Wolf, Katha, New Delhi, established by Geetha Dharmarajan and recently, Duckbill Books, Bangalore, published by Sayoni Basu and Anushka Ravishankar set the trend for colourful children's books of international standards. Many of these books won accolades in book fairs abroad, bringing Indian children's literature to the international forum. Karadi Tales, Chennai, under the leadership of publishing editor Shobha Viswanath, brings out colourful print books, as well as audio books and interactive multimedia books. Several of these publishing houses, such as Katha's Kathalaya Trust and Pratham Book Trust have extension activities aimed at promoting the reading habit among children of the less privileged groups. Several bilingual and multilingual books have also been published by these enterprising book houses. Storytellers such as Geetha Ramanujam have dedicated themselves to carrying on the oral tradition. Pratham Books has launched the *Adi Khani*, a series of stories written in tribal languages, now translated into English and Hindi. Tulika's *Under the Neem Tree* series was originally written in Telugu by Dalit writer and teacher, P. Anuradha and is now available in nine Indian languages and English.

Established publishing houses also began to bring out special imprints for children's literature. Kali for Women, a New-Delhi based feminist publishing house brought out children's and young adult books under the imprint Young Zubaan, while Mumbai-based Rupa Publications started the Ted Turtle imprint for children. The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi brings out children's books under the imprint Terrapin to promote eco-consciousness among children. New ventures such as Happy Squirrel have also taken off successfully. DC Comics, Kochi has, under its imprint, Mango Books, published several children's books with ecological orientation.

Multinational publishers have also established themselves in the Indian market, with Indian editions of books for children and young adults. Penguin, with its children's imprint, Puffin, leads the way. Penguin India has a special line of young adult fiction, as does Hachette India. HarperCollins India also has several young adult novels to its credit. Scholastic India, which, like

Hachette, used to issue only Indian imprints of foreign novels, has now started to publish novels by Indian authors.

Prominent authors of children's literature include Nilima Sinha, president of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children, Manorama Jafa, Ira Saxena, Sandhya Rao, Jai Whitaker, Anushka Ravishankar, Asha Nehemiah, Monideepa Sahu, Shreekumar Varma, Muriel Kakhani, Uma Krishnaswami, Payal Dharr, Deepa Agarwal and Lata Mani, to name a few. Some authors of adult fiction, such as Sashi Deshpande, Anita Nair, Anita Desai, Manjula Padmanabhan and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have also tried their hand at children's fiction.

Regarding websites, *Saffron Tree* established by Chennai-based Praba Ram is a rich resource. The reading section of the parenting website *Rivo Kids* invites contribution from children, encouraging them to review books for their peers. *Young India Books*, an initiative of Shamim Padamsee, author and educator, contains reviews and runs the Leading Reading Schools of India award and provides information about authors and illustrators, and publishes book reviews and has facilities to buy books online.

The Bookaroo festival of children's literature held annually in New Delhi, Pune and Srinagar features workshops run by top authors and illustrators from India and abroad. Booklore, the roving book carnival in Bangalore, and Chooku Booku, the reading train where storytelling sessions, craft activities and interactive play are conducted, needs mention.

Realistic fiction deals with issues, problems and dilemmas children face in their every day existence. They revolve round themes like sibling rivalry, bullying in school, peer pressure, and lately, child abuse and divorce. Deepa Agarwal's *Not Just Girls* (2004) provides insight into childhood concerns as does *A Moment of Truth* (1991), *Grin and Bear it Abu* (1994). Paro Anand's *I'm Not Butter Chicken* (2006) and Devika Rangachari's *Growing Up* (2000), nominated for the IBBY III Honour List 2002 also belong to the realistic genre. Examples of the Fantasy genre include Nilima Sinha's *Chandipur Jewels* (1979) and its sequels, *Rishabh in the Land of the Flying Magicians* (2002), partly inspired by the *Katharithasagara*, and Deepa Agarwal's *Anita and the Game of Shadows* (2002), while Payal Dhar's *A Shadow in Eternity* (2005) is a good example of Science fiction. Humour is represented by *Younguncle Comes to Town* and *Younguncle in the Himalayas* by Vandana Singh. Arup Kumar Dutt wrote path-breaking books like his environmental mystery, *The Kazhiranga Trail* (1978), that won the first prize in the CBT competition for children's writers. Dutta's work has been translated into Japanese among other languages. Rohini Chowdhury's jungle adventure *White Tiger* and Chitra Banerjee Diavkurani's historical adventure, *Victory Song* all published by Puffin, are recent entrants. Swapna Dutta's *Juneli* series are schools stories written in the British tradition, and are published by Harper Collins.

Young Adult Literature

Young Adult Fiction or Young Adult Literature (YA) is fiction written published or marketed to adolescents and young adults. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the

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American Library Association (ALA) defines a young adult as someone between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Authors and readers of YA novels often define the genre as literature traditionally written for ages ranging from sixteen years up to the age of twenty-five, while Teen Fiction is written for the ages of ten and fifteen. One early writer to recognize young adults as a distinct group was Sarah Trimmer, who, in 1802, described “young adulthood” as lasting from ages fourteen to twenty-one. In her children’s literature periodical, *The Guardian of Education*, Trimmer introduced the terms “Books for Children” (for those under fourteen) and “Books for Young Persons” (for those between fourteen and twenty-one). Examples of young adult fiction in the nineteenth century include *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1821), *Waverley* (1814), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Great Expectations* (1860) and *Jungle Book* (1894). *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy may be classified as YA fantasy, as also the later books of the *Harry Potter* series. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1840) and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) and *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) are examples of YA literature from the United States. As publishers began to focus on the emerging adolescent market, booksellers and libraries began creating YA sections distinct from either children’s literature or novels written for adults. The 1970s to the mid-1980s have been described as the golden age of young adult fiction. Recent examples are the *Twilight* series and the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1993-2000) and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series as well as Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) are outstanding examples of acknowledged young adult fiction.

The various genres covered by YA literature include novels, graphic novels, biographies and autobiographies, short stories and poetry. The problem novel is the most popular type of novel in the YA category. The *bildungsroman* or “coming of age” novel is another popular variety. Themes dealt with include search for identity, sexuality, death, role-models, psychological problems such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, familial struggles including divorce, domestic violence, love, friendship, getting into trouble, peer pressure, bullying, education, employment and money. Young adult literature contains specific characteristics such as “multi-themed story, tension versus shock effect, memorable characters, accurate facts and details, memorable voice, authentic dialogue, effective / clear writing style, sense of humor, widespread appeal, intriguing openings and memorable closings” (Cole 61).

Books for young adult reads have a teenage protagonists and deal with issues that concern adolescents. The age of transition leaves the young adult puzzled as to his role in life and these books help him/ her come to terms with his world, to make his/ her own decisions, overcome problems and gather inner strength.

Young Adult Fiction in India

Swami and Friends by R.K.Narayan, *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai, *Growing Up* by Devika Rangachari, *The Confessions of a Listmaniac* by Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan, *The Sacred Grove* by Daman Singh, *Now or Never* by Ramendra Kumar, *A Shadow in Eternity* and its sequels by Payal Dhar, *The Beast with a Billion Feet* by Anil Menon, *The Hilarious Hauntings* series by Sonia Chandrachud, *The Summer of Cool* by Suchitra Krishnamurthy, the *Juneli* series by Swapna Dutta,

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Jobless, Clueless, Reckless by Revathi Suresh, *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* by Paro Anand, *Faces in the Water* by Ranjit Lal, *The Grasshopper's Run* by Siddhartha Sarma, *Terror on the Titanic* by Samit Basu, *Red Blooms in the Forest* by Nilima Sinha and *Guns on My Red Earth* by Swati Sengupta and are excellent examples in various genres of young adult fiction.

Although YA fiction in India owes its origins and inspiration to the West, it is essentially India in theme and content. There is a certain restraint when dealing with taboo topics such as sexuality. Chick-lit is prevalent as are magic and vampires. Retelling of myths such as the *Shiva* trilogy, *The Return of Ravana*, *The Slayer of Kamsa* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles* as well as religious thrillers such as *The Krishna Key* are immensely popular, though Chetan Bhagat's books tower above them all in terms of sheer quantity of sales.

Systematic studies of literature from the points of view of ecocriticism as well as Ecoliteracy are upcoming areas which are receiving enormous critical attention in the country. The connection between children and the natural environment is an age-long phenomenon in the sense that nature, in the form of plants and animals is an indispensable part of children's stories. Children are traditionally idealized as sharing the Edenic, unfallen state of nature, and are shown as loving and caring for animals. They are variously seen as passive observers or activists, often having an attitude of acceptance and sharing a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment.

Correlated with this is environmental education which is part of the school curriculum. It is felt that environmental education should begin early in life. Children who are not exposed to the natural environment and its concerns at an early age never succeed in acquiring the respect for nature ecological concerns that society deems appropriate.

Children's texts are a crucial place in which to detect and combat negative attitudes and behaviour patterns. Increasing environmental awareness through children's literature is one of the burdens of a socially concerned author. Books for young people are often based on the "Edutainment" principle. How far authors of fiction for children foster ideas favourable to the new "Green Revolution," the fight to protect and nurture our natural environment, is a question of considerable significance.

Till recently, all ecocritical attention was focussed on the environmental literature of adults. Slowly, an affiliated ecocriticism of children's environmental literature begun with a special issue of the reputed British journal devoted to children's literature, *The Lion and the Unicorn* entitled "Ecology and the Child" in 1995 and a special issue of *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly* also in 1995, focussing on environmental issues. Critics such as Glotfelty and A. Fromm (*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literature and Ecology*, 1996) and Kenneth B. Kidd (*Wild Things, Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*, 2004), Greta Gaard (*Towards an Ecopedagogy of Children's Environmental Literature*, 2006), Jennifer Hardy (*Ecology, Environment and Children's Literature*, 2009) paved the way for serious study in the area of children's ecoliterature. The 2009

British IBBY/NCRCL Conference, “Deep Into Nature: Ecology, Environment and Children’s Literature” explored the relationship between texts for children and nature and natural worlds.

The ecological approach to literature, which is an active field on the international scene, has been echoed in Indian academic circles. Projects on the portrayal of ecology in ancient and contemporary writing have been undertaken by authors and ecocriticism is now the centre of attention of several M.Phil. and Ph.D. scholars. Yet, there has not been, to the knowledge of this applicant, any specific undertaking on the ecological aspect of children’s and young adult literature, which is a new and exciting field of study.

Though there are prescribed textbooks for inculcating these values of ecopedagogy, it is an undeniable fact that light reading in the form of fiction creates indelible impressions on the young mind. So, it is of importance that awareness about problems facing the environment, eco-friendly behaviour and also the love of nature should become part of the child’s general reading. This would ensure that favourable attitudes and impressions would be created in the citizens of tomorrow.

Much attention has been paid to fiction for adults, but little research seems to have been done in the field of literature for children and young adults. Answers to questions such as how far awareness of the latest concepts like life support systems, biodiversity and sustainable development, environmental ethical values and dilemmas, conservation of animals and natural resources, environmental sustainability, environmental consciousness - the respect for life and landscape, global environmental citizenship, adoption of ecofriendly culture, some environmental friendly activities such as using recycled paper, switching off unnecessary lights, using bicycles, organizing tree-planting campaigns, rainwater harvesting, etc., are represented in contemporary fiction for children and young adults which is published in India need to be sought.

Books that have been published in India, written preferably, but not necessarily by authors of Indian origin fall into the scope of the book. Since quite a few foreign-born writers settled in India such as Muriel Kakani and Leela Gour Broome have dedicated themselves to writing about the country and its children, and some, like Dr.Graeme Macqueen (Canada) and Mr.Ken Spillman (Australia) have written excellent stories featuring Indian characters and with Indian settings, and their books have been published exclusively in India, their works have also been included for study.

Chapter II Traditional Wisdom

India's fame as the cradle of storytelling has been carried into the print age with a plethora of books containing fables, legends, folktales and tales retold from Indian mythology. Folktales and legends from other nations have also been retold by Indian writers. The oral tradition has been successfully converted into books for the young, largely to replace the function of the grandparents in the nuclear families of today.

Folk tales are set in the lush, unspoilt countryside of yore. They depict the traditional way of life of rural India, with regional differences as to dress, food, festivals, forms of worship, societal norms and so on. They also have as their background different landscapes- forests, deserts, mountains and the sea- all of which play a vital role in the lives of communities which live close to their natural surroundings. Folk tales from different parts of the country are therefore records of the symbiotic relationship that was responsible for the health and wealth of our ancestors.

Children's Book Trust and National Book Trust are forerunners in compiling folktales from various parts of the country in order to bring the country's rich diversity of cultures within the grasp of the child. It is seen that the child who is exposed to variety of cultures will have more tolerance and understanding as an adult (Molur). Many newer publishing houses have jointed these two giants. Picture books from publishing houses such as Tulika and Pratham have introduced folk-art motifs into their folktales. Many are creative reconstructions of folklore, bringing out the wisdom inherent in the stories.

Some of the books under consideration are: *Folk Tales of Gujarat* by Alka Shankar, *Folk Tales of Uttarakhand*, *Folk Tales of Himachal Pradesh* by Pratibha Nath, *Folk Tales of Andhra Pradesh* by Gita Iyengar, Devika Rangachari's retelling of the ancient story collection, *Stories from Kathasaritsagara*, *Famous Folk Tales of East India*, *Famous Folk Tales of West India*, *Famous Folk Tales of South India*, *Who Will Be Ningthou?* By Indira Mukherjee, *Kolaba*, *Magic Vessels: A Folktale from Tamilnadu*. Retold by Vayu Naidu, *Under the Neem Tree* by P.Anuradha, *High in the Sky: A Korean Folktale* retold by Cathy Spagnoli, *And Land was Born*, retold by Sandhya Rao, *Gulla and the Hangul* by Mariam Karim Ahlawat, *Tibetan Folk Tales* by A.L. Shelton, *Best of Jataka Tales* edited by Shyam Dua, *Famous Jataka Tales* retold by Meena, *Folk Tales of West Bengal* by Swapna. Dutta, *Folk Tales of West Bengal* by Swapna Dutta, *Indian Folk Tales and Legends* by Pratiba Nath, "Babhloo!" Paro Anand, "Dark Storm and Bright Pearl" by Mala Marwah, Paro Anand's, *The Little Bird Who Held the Sky Up with His Feet* and Mamang Dai's *The Sky Queen*.

Alka Shankar has written a series of folktales collected from different parts of India. These beautifully brought out books have been published by Children's book Trust, New Delhi. In *Folk Tales of Gujarat*, it is seen how the people are attached to their native villages, drawing water from wells, selling curd in the marketplace, going to local fairs, and generally living on organic, local produce. The superiority of life in the countryside over urban living is shown through the story of

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Menna, who tells the prince who is infatuated with her: “The palace is a gilded cage. I am a free bird and I love to wander around, live in close proximity to nature” (7). The villages are blessed with cattle wealth and many villagers are cowherds by tradition. Farmers cultivate corn, bajra and seasonal vegetables. There are nomadic people called Charans who practise traditional crafts such as pottery.

In an interesting story, “On choosing a Bride,” Jadhav Singh, a farmer, poses a question to his prospective daughters-in-law as to which season, they liked most. This leads to a lively description of the seasons by the girls. Sejal, his friend’s daughter answers that she finds “all seasons have their own beauty and charm, their own distinct attraction, yet none of them is perfect” (34). Change is inevitable in the world of nature and in the life of man. There is interconnectedness everywhere, the interlinking of the human and the natural world.

In “Bhima Jat, The Outlaw, it is seen that the outlaws pick up fistfuls of sand and spray it on themselves before they go to fight the Thakur. They believe, “that was symbolic of diving blessings from Mother Earth” (54). In the story, “Dilram and Chandrika,” royal babies cast upon water in a basket, are picked up by a sage and brought up in an *ashram* which is close to nature. Some women choose to mingle with the elements through fire. Thus, the closeness and identity of humans and the elements of nature are emphasised throughout the books.

In “How Bhinkanu Saved Her Eggs” from *Folk Tales of Uttarakhand*, there is a description of nest-building, egg-hatching and the feeding of nestlings. Pauin, the bullock strays into the forest and crushes the small brown bird’s eggs because he is not given much to eat. This shows the disastrous effects of cattle grazing on wildlife.

In “Kaafal is Ripe,” it is seen how, in the month of Chaita (during the hot summer season), red, juicy *kaafal* berries, grow. Two birds, formerly a human mother and her daughter, call out in bird-language to inform the inhabitants of the forest that the *kaafal* is ripe. Stories of human-animal transformations are symbolic of the oneness of all living beings. In several stories, animals are accepted as humans and vice-versa. One such tale is that of a prince who is born a rat. In “The Rat Prince,” The old king encourages his grandsons to learn farming in order to establish closeness to the earth. He tells them to turn a plot of barren land into a garden. The rat prince digs and makes a fine terraced garden. People are frequently turned into birds as is the case of the ungrateful sister who slept in during sowing. In another story, a prince sincerely mourns a monkey wife.

In “Parli,” a girl is tortured by her mother-in-law who sets her impossible tasks before allowing her to visit her parents. Birds and animals try to help her. Even the Sun does not set for four days until she has completed the stipulated tasks.

The story “The Stone Valley” is set in the beautiful valley of Johar which lies on the border of Tibet and the people who live there are known as “Shankar.” They rear sheep and goats. Shankar Shakkia Lama, a Buddhist monk, provides them with salt. Rock salt is the norm in high-lying areas.

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“The Wishing Ring” shows that kindness to animals pays off. A wealthy merchant’s son “squanders” the money given by his father by buying a cat, a dog and an ill-treated mouse. The mouse was about to be killed by a shopkeeper and the cat was beaten by a sweet shop vendor. The merchant’s son prevents cruelty to animals and is suitably rewarded.

“Jaidutt and the Ghost” is set deep in a forest which is the haunt of a hunter deity. The fearsome hunter is believed to be accompanied by spirits and detests intrusion into his area. This piece of folklore, common to many areas of the country, probably discouraged the villagers from interfering with the wildlife and their habitat, an example of how folk wisdom protected the natural environment in the form of customs and traditions.

Folk Tales of Himachal Pradesh by Pratibha Nath abounds in descriptions of the mountainside. “The Valley of the Stone Temples” is set in Hatkati, which lies at the confluence of Pabar and the mountain stream Bishkulti. “The Haunted Castle” depicts the Pir Pangal Range. There is a description of the valley with its fertile soil and the surrounding expanse of rock and moraine. Cattle and horse graze there. This is the home of the lovely maiden Kanchana, with whom a king falls in love. When she marries her royal suitor and goes to live in his palace, she is unhappy and homesick. The gods in the form of wild bees bring back to Kanchana, a piece of rock from her father’s home and this consoles her for a while. But later, when she is hurt by the jealousy of her kingly husband, she plunges into a gorge and mingles with the elements.

“Two Leaves” is set in a mountain village, where the inhabitants live in mud huts with roofs of slate. Two brothers, of differing temperament, hear a “Koo-koo, koo-koo” sound. Damru, the younger brother says, “That’s a bird for sure,” (44) while Birju says that it being too cold for birds so it must be an evil spirit. A beautiful bird with green shiny feathers and a beak the colour of gold flutters out of a log. The warmth of the fire makes her think summer has come. The kind-hearted Damru invites her to stay with them. He feeds the little creature with crushed grains. The bird brings joy with her singing and tales. When winter is finally over, she leaves, promising to return with a present. Birju is dismissive. The bird says it would bring two leaves, one of gold and the other a green one. The gold leaf would make the possessor rich while the green one would make the possessor happy. Brijju unwisely chooses the golden one but Damru is content with the green. The story shows that material possessions are not conducive to real happiness, which lies in nature, symbolised by the green leaf.

“The Magic Tree.” is set in the lower reaches of the Shivalik hills, where lies a broad valley carved out by the mighty river Satluj. The greenery of the mountain slopes, the country huts with corn cobs drying on the rooftops, fields of potatoes and walnut and mulberry trees are all faithfully described. The area is the home of the Gaddi tribe, who are shepherds.

In “Monkey Tricks,” the author writes, “There was a time when leopards roamed freely in the Shivalik hills” (54). The reader is informed that there were dense forests all around, for trees were still to be felled to make room for agriculture. Game was plentiful, for man had not yet grabbed the

gun for sport. So, leopards had everything going their way. Nature had made them expert hunters, too. Swift and light of foot, they climbed trees with ease and often spent the afternoons dozing among the leaves overhead. Around that time there were many monkeys in the forests, too. They had not yet moved to cities for their habitat had not been disturbed. There was plenty to eat in the wilds – roots and fruit and clusters of ripe berries. When they had eaten their fill, the monkeys would play, leaping from one branch to another and chattering “because it was such fun” (54). The story bemoans the disappearance of the big cat and points out the causes- the destruction of its habitat and the introduction of guns for hunting.

The story, “Cleverness of Oo Mayalam,” a folktale from Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, from *Famous Folk Tales of East India* relates how the state of Meghalaya came into existence. Shilong Peak towers over the plateau of Shilong. It is a divine place where the goddesses used to enjoy bathing in the springs. They tasted sweet fruits of the plants and enjoyed playing with the beautiful butterflies (11). Shilong Devi, the presiding deity, sends her daughter Ka Pah Shinyu to help the people. At first, she is reluctant to leave the pristine beauty of the peak, but later, when provided with flowers and a ladder of bamboo, she condescends to descend. The goddess teaches the Kumari dance to the village maidens. The closeness of nature to religion and customs is shown. The mountains are revered and their purity undisturbed by the tribal people.

“Killing is Sin,” another folktale from Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya says that men and animals were friends until man started cultivating crops and building houses. There was nowhere for the animals to graze. They start intruding into the fields. The headman of the village goes to the king of the jungle, the lion, to complain. The lion replies that if the animals were not to die of hunger because they could get not grass, they had to graze in the fields. So, the animals declare war on humans. The humans retaliate by performing animal sacrifices. This superstitious practice, though cruel, acknowledges that animals are filled with more power of life than human beings. Primitive man hopes to imbibe this power from them through assimilation.

In “The Pet Deer,” a fierce headman terrorizes his village. He is an opium addict. In his intoxicated state, he bumps into the trunk of a tree and started bleeding profusely. He falls unconscious, only to find a deer licking his wounds when he wakes up. He takes up his bow and arrow, but the deer was not afraid. So he gathers the animal into his arms and returns home. The deer brings about a healthy change in the headman. He gives up opium and hunting and asks the villagers to concentrate on farming. Man, when receptive to the gentle forces of nature, is transformed.

“The People who Hugged the Trees,” a folktale from Rajasthan from *Famous Folk Tales of West India* is based on the legend of the brave and courageous Amrita Devi, who inspired an entire community to protect the trees. The king wants a fort to be built in that area, and this requires the felling of trees. When the men armed with axes came to chop her favourite tree, she hugs it and refuses to move. The villagers, who sympathise with her, appeal to the king: “Your majesty, these trees are of great importance to us. Please ask your soldiers not to cut them” (98). But the king ignores their pleas and orders the soldiers to carry on with their work. The people run to hug the trees

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as the soldiers again start cutting them down. Suddenly, a storm whips across the desert with full force. After the storm calms down, the king sees the damage done to the houses and fields. He understands the importance of the trees to the village. He tells the villagers that he admires their courage and promises that their trees would not be cut down anymore. The story shows the importance of trees in the prevention of desertification and disaster control. The wisdom of local people and activism by women which initiates the Chipko Movement are depicted. However, the harsher aspects, such as the slaughter of the villagers, are not mentioned. The story is changed so as not to hurt the sensibilities of the children, but at the cost of some of the effectiveness of the original legend.

“Naag Panchami and Snakes.” from *Famous Folk Tales of South India*, emphasises human-animal equality, animal rights and the evils of human invasion of animal habitats. A farmer who is lost in the sweet baby talk of his infant son ploughs into the hole of a snake. All the children of the snake die, and it wants revenge. The farmer pacifies the reptile in the form of prayer, which becomes a regular ritual. The wisdom of the ancients, who taught respect for creatures great and small through their customs and traditions, is seen in the story.

“Alone in the Storm from *Folk Tales of Andhra Pradesh* by Gita Iyengar, is the story of a mynah caught in the storm in the forest. The crows sheltering in the banyan refuse to share their place with the mynah. The little bird is afraid that it would be blown off, but trusting in God, takes refuge in a mango tree. She tries to get as close as possible to the trunk, hoping that its thickness would stop the wet wind from blowing her off. A branch cracks and drops to the ground. The mynah notices that there is a large hollow where the branch had been. This gives her security and she does not have to worry about keeping her footing. The mynah nestles within the hollow, tucks her head under her wing, and falls into a tired sleep. The next morning, when she wakes up, everything looks green. The crows’ tree has fallen down and many of them are injured. Their nests with the eggs and little nestlings are gone, since there was no hollow to protect them. God keeps the faithful and unprotected one safe from nature’s fury. Though it is primarily didactic in nature, the story contains an accurate description of the storm, the reactions of the birds and also the forest after the rainstorm through a series of strong images.

“Deep in the Forest” is a typical folktale about the rivalry of two queens. The grief of the exiled elder queen affects the plants, animals and birds. She feeds the wildlife that she comes across in the forest. She is given an axe but does not want to use it on any of the plants and trees, the snakes or the birds, “for all those creatures were dear to her” (63). When the queen meets a tiger by a lake, she bows respectfully but is not afraid. She worships to the setting sun and takes only the specified number of dips in the lake, indicating that she abides by the laws of nature and is not greedy. She is rewarded for her consideration. On the other hand, the younger queen uses the axe viciously on the dense foliage and animals and has no real respect for the sun. She dips too many times into the lake in the hope of getting a boon. She is eaten by the tiger when she tries to attack it with her axe. The story shows that violence to nature ends in violence to oneself; one should bow down to the laws of nature and should not fall prey to the temptation of overconsumption.

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Who Will Be Ningthou? By Indira Mukherjee is an award-winning book based on a folktale of Manipur. It emphasises the importance of living in harmony with nature and has ecofeminist overtones. *Ningthou* is the Manipuri equivalent of 'ruler.' A king and queen of the region have to choose a successor. They are people with a broad world-view because they declare "Everyone in Kangleipak should live in peace. Not only the people, but the birds, animals and trees." Various tasks are set for the three princes- Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba. At a certain point, Sanajaoba, the eldest, in order to prove his superiority, pierces a huge Khongnang tree with his spear and jumps his horse through the opening. The second son, Sanayaima jumps his horse over the tree. The third son uproots the tree and triumphantly lays it at the feet of his parents. Seeing this, his five-year-old sister Sanatombi feels sad and lonely. She stares at the fallen tree and the birds searching frantically and hopelessly for their lost homes. "The Khongnang is dead," she mourns. The people who had rejoiced at the triumph of the boys realise the folly of their anthropocentric outlook. The queen turns to the people and admonishes them thus: "A Ningthou is one who sees to it that everyone in the kingdom is happy A Ningthou is one who doesn't hurt anybody in the kingdom." The king, the Ningthou then declares that his daughter is the winner "Because, it was she who felt the pain when the Khongnang was hurt. It was she who told us to look at the soul of the Khongnang. Sanatombi feels the pain of others. She feels the pain of the people, the animals, the birds, the trees." The little girl, not caring for her new exalted status, takes the place of the tree, comforting the birds which come trustingly to her with grains.

The simple folktale is quite revolutionary, redefining as it does the concept of heroism, making empathy an important constituent of a true leader. To the princess, the tree is a living being, having rights of its own. The birds are homeless subjects whom the sovereign is bound to protect. It is to be noted that birds have an unerring instinct when it comes to trusting people. The unique relationship between woman and nature is brought out. The loving, caring woman extends her feelings to the flora and fauna, while the egoistic man, bent on proving his physical prowess, unfeelingly destroys the natural environment.

Kolaba is a Marathi folktale which depicts a woman Sonabai who lives alone but is never lonely because she has many friends among the birds, insects and animals. She prepares delicious *halwa* from the red berries growing near her hut.

Magic Vessels: A Folktale from Tamilnadu, retold by Vayu Naidu is part of the "Under the Banyan Tree" series of folktales published by Tulika Books. The story is an unusual one since it centres on a tree. The protagonist Muthu, a playwright lives with his wife and children under the shade of a great banyan tree. He does not see the need for a regular house, since he is a lover of nature. He enjoys the sight of the "orange butterflies settling like flames on creepers." The humming of the bees attracts him. He playfully cups his hand to catch the sunlight "dancing between the leaves." The tree-spirits pleased by his good nature serve him an excellent meal and present him with a magic vessel which is capable of providing food for his family and friends. Nature showers her bounty when one recognises her greatness and lives close to her, not depleting her wealth.

Relieved of cares, Muthu and his family continue to lead happy lives under the banyan, lighting a lamp in gratitude to the tree and joining the tree spirits in their song.

In *Under the Neem Tree* by P. Anuradha, the tradition of storytelling and the simple delights of childhood play in the villages of Andhra Pradesh make up the theme. In between the folktale of the old couple Ookiah and Ookamma, there is an interesting interlude of a doll's wedding. Kala and her friends plan a doll's wedding on a Sunday, to be held under the neem tree. The dressing of the bride and bridegroom dolls, decorating the pandal with flowers, the arranging of Allaneredu (blackberry) branch for the dolls to sit down, the simple wedding feast of rice and dhal, served on *badam* (almond) leaves reflect the traditional life of Andhra villages. In this story, too, a tree plays a central role. The children sit on a palm leaf mat under the neem tree to listen to an old woman's narration. "It couldn't get better! The children think." The rural ambience where "issues of work and food are constant concerns" leaves no place for the exploitation of nature.

High in the Sky: A Korean Folktale retold by Cathy Spagnoli narrates the story of two children who escape from a wily tiger which has consumed their mother. They ascend to the sky by means of a rope and turn into the moon and the sun. The story is a typical example of how people of yore sought explanations for natural phenomena.

And Land was Born, a tale of the Bhilala tribe of Madhya Pradesh, retold by Sandhya Rao is a creation myth that has definite ecofeminist overtones. The story is narrated by a tribal elder, Guna Baba. At first there was only water- no land at all. Humans, animals and birds too, could swim. They then appealed to the four *jugni matas*, mothers of the universe (embodiments of the feminine principle). The goddesses persuade a masculine god to find land, but he is unsuccessful. At last the *jugni matas* find Kalikachcha the tortoise who brings them an egg, again symbolic of fertility and the feminine in nature. When the egg hatches, land is born. "As wind and rain touched it, the land grew. Slowly, trees began to dot the earth, and grass and shrubs and herbs, as well as rocks, boulders and mountains appear. Birds began to nest in the trees and bushes, and flowers bloomed. Animals roamed the forest and man built little round huts and lived off fruits and nuts." The *jugni matas* went to sleep under a wide-spreading tree, dreaming beautiful dreams. The interest that traditional folk have in nature is evidenced in such tales of creation.

Gulla and the Hangul by Mariam Karim Ahlawat is a tale set in the verdant valley of Kashmir. Gulla is a shepherd boy whereas *hangul* is the name of a small deer species which is an animal protected by the tribals. It "carries the many shades and tones of the region- the quiet life of the villagers in the valley, their close link with nature, as well as the underlying disquiet that they learn to live with." Descriptions of the high Shanshabari ranges of the Himalayas, the valley of Tanngdhaar with its whispering pines and the rushing Kishenganga river are supplemented by beautiful illustrations. "The illustrations evoke the rugged, rocky and less familiar part of the beautiful state with a soft charm."

The people live in harmony with the seasons, working hard during the summer months and taking rest during the harsh long winters. They live in rooms built above their sheep and goat sheds in order to utilize the warmth from their animals, thus saving fuel. However, the idyllic landscape does not escape natural calamities. Gulla remembers vividly that a terrible earthquake shook the valley some years ago. Still, he accepts it and enjoys the beauty of nature, munching fresh apricots and drinking clear water from the streams. He avoids the forests, which is the home of bears, wolves and leopards, thus leaving the wildlife in peace. According to local belief, the terrible Banbudiya, the wicked old woman of the forest, haunts the place. As in the legend of the Terrible Hunter God, traditional wisdom keeps the villagers from intruding into animal territory and lessens the chances of human-animal conflict. More than anything else, Gulla is afraid of the men with guns. He wonders, “And why didn’t they let anyone go to the other side of the wire fence?” The people there looked and dressed the same as the villagers of Tangdhaar. He had heard that there were even boys called Gulla who lived on that side. Man-made divisions tear apart the beautiful valley. That Nature is divided by an artificial iron fence is seen through the innocent eyes of a young boy.

The love of the people of the valley for animals is boundless. Gulla risks his life to save the helpless *hangul* when it is pursued by two large stray dogs. Probably motherless creature is about to be killed by the strays. He gently gathers up the deer in his arms, intending to take it home. But darkness comes fast. The *hangul* changes into a Shen, a spirit of the Eternal Snows. He wants to grant Gulla a wish, but the boy does not want anything for himself. He asks that there should never be earthquakes in Tangdhaar.

Tibetan Folk Tales by A.L. Shelton has several stories such as “The Wise Bat,” “The Cony Who Got into Bad Company” and “The Man and the Monkeys” are set in edenic states thought to exist long ago, when there was peaceful co-existence between man and beast who generally understood each others’ language. But the duplicity of man soon ruins this harmonious relationship. In the days when Eden was on earth, a monkey saves a man from drowning through his tremendous efforts. But the rescued man thinks that the place would be very beautiful if there were no monkeys in it. He shakes the tree on which the monkeys are sleeping. The simians fall down and die. The wicked man is punished for his cruel selfishness.

That greatness lies in leading a minimalistic existence, is shown through the story of the lama who led a life of austerity in “The Cony Who Got into as in Bad Company.” Some baskets of grains and sacks of *tsamba* (mountain wheat), earthen-ware pot for tea and small wooden bowl are all he possesses in the world.

“The Ingratitude of Man,” “How the Raven Saved the Hunter,” and “The Story of the Tree of Life” show the helping tendency of creatures great and small and the falsity of human beings. “How the Louse Got the Black Streak Down His Back” and “How the Sacred Duck Got His Yellow Breast” are interesting and amusing tales which stand witness to the interest that the mountain people take in little creatures.

“The Frugal Woman” is set in a little mud village in the Tibetan mountains. A sparkling stream flows near it from an unknown source. The village headman’s daughter is married to a local prince. On the way to the husband’s home, her entourage stops for the night in a lovely valley. The bride says that it is a dangerous place, where flood may strike without warning. The men re-load the yaks with many complaints. But that night, a flood comes and washes away the place. When the bride reaches the palace, she notices a crane dropping a few seeds of grain. She carefully gathers them and has them planted. She knows in her wisdom that these are grains of rice have been brought from near the sea and hence have medicinal value. When the need arises, she is able to save the queen’s life. Thus, the traditional wisdom of the villagers, which springs out of their understanding of nature, helps them survive.

The Jataka Tales are Buddhist tales of compassion in which the nobility of wild creatures teaches human beings a lesson. The Buddha’s love and respect for all living beings runs through the tales as a linking thread. “The King’s Lesson” from *Best of Jataka Tales* edited by Shyam Dua portrays antelopes as timid creatures that generally avoid humans. Greed for sweetened grass traps one of the poor creatures. Fortunately, after imbibing the moral behind the happening, the wise king releases the animal which had strayed into his garden. In “The Cautious Antelope,” however, the antelope learns of the hunter’s presence through his footprints. In “The Noble Antelope a king wants to trap a golden antelope, but the kind-hearted creature saves him. When the king offers him a home in the royal palace, the antelope refuses, saying, “Sir, I have no use for a luxurious palace life. I am a wild creature and the forest is my home. To me, even the palace would be like a prison.” (115). He elicits a promise from the king that he would stop hunting wild animals. The story shows the cruelty of trying to domesticate wild animals.

In the story, “Rupesh and the Golden Deer,” from *Famous Jataka Tales* retold by Meena, Rupesh, a spendthrift, is helped by a golden deer. But at the first opportunity, he betrays it for money. “The Secret Mango Grove” speaks about how human-animal encounters can be avoided. A monkey king and his subjects inhabit a mango orchard. A human king is attracted by the taste of the mangoes. When he tries to kill the monkeys who eat the mangoes, the monkey king sacrifices his life to save his subjects. This moves the human king who promises the injured monkey not to harm the simians. They come to an agreement. The monkey king gives a few mangoes to the humans as gifts but retains his territory. Till the grove was secret, it was safe for wildlife and for the trees. But what man discovers, he colonises and exploits.

“Seven Champak Brothers” from *Folk Tales of West Bengal* by Swapna Dutta has as the human - nature transformation motif running through it. Royal children who are thrown on the ash-heap become champaks and camellias. Such stories reveal the ancient perception of the oneness of all living beings.

“Sukhu and Dukhu” is the story of how consideration for nature is rewarded. Dukku, a poor girl runs after the piece of cotton that her mother has lost. Yet she spares the time to feed a hungry cow with grass. She ties banana plants together to prevent them from being ruffled by the wind. She

cleans the place beneath a huge banyan tree of bird-offal. She does this at the request of the respective living beings. She is gifted with a calf, a bunch of golden bananas and a pot of gold coins for her kindness.

Rituals and festivals in the lives of traditional communities were based on the cycle of the seasons “The Legend of the Pipal-Leaf Ritual.” In the introductory part of the story, it is stated that during summer, from the last day in the month of *Chaitra* to the last day of *Baisakh*, for a period of four years, women perform a simple ritual that requires five papal (Indian fig) leaves. They worship the pipal tree after taking a dip in the river and then set the leaves afloat. In “The Legend of Itu Brata,” women worship the sun, ‘Itu’ being one of the names of its names, during the month of *Kartik* and continue during the following month on every Sunday. This was done to ensure and happiness and prosperity of their families. “The Legend of Harish Mangal Chandi” reveals that the brata (fast) of Haish Mangal Chandi is observed every Tuesday during the first month of the year, *Baisakh*. “The Legend of Ma Shasti” shows how women worship Goddess Shasti, the goddess of fertility who blesses people with children. The ritual, sacred to her, is observed in the month of *Jaistha* during the bright phase of the moon. The black cat is believed to be Ma Shasti’s *vahana* (vehicle). Thus, animals are associated with deities and are protected and nurtured, as are trees and plants associated with worship.

Indian Folk-Tales and Legends by Pratiba Nath is a representative collection of folklore from various parts of India. Pratiba Nath gives an introduction to each region or state before the story. “The Two Daughters” (14-18) from the collection is a story of the Kurava tribe that lives in Kerala. The Kuravas are simple people, untouched by modern civilization. They earn a meagre living through agriculture and cattle rearing. An old man visits his elder married daughter who lives in a village. Her home, like his own, is a thatched hut They eat cooked rice and pumpkin from the vine that grows at the back of the hut. The old man concludes that their elder daughter is very happy. He then visits his second daughter who lives in the town. He finds that they cannot eat cross-legged, there are no plantain leaves but only plates full of white rice. He thinks that he has to sleep atop the mosquito net. This is not impossible for him, because he is used to climbing coconut trees, but he finds it highly uncomfortable. The next morning, when his daughter brings him toothpowder, he thinks he has to eat it. The taste is horrible. The Kurava had always used a fresh green twig for the purpose of cleaning his teeth. He comes to the conclusion that his younger daughter is leading a miserable life. When he gets home, the Kurava and his wife worry that their younger daughter does not have to good fortune to be able to sleep on the floor on a length of sacking like they do. The story, in a humorous vein, points out that real wealth lies in using natural resources in simple and sensible ways.

“The Stone Lion,” a tale from Himachal Pradesh describes the region of Lahaul-Spiti, which is inhabited mostly by shepherds belonging to the Gaddi tribe. During summer they graze their flocks on the mountain slopes of the district. But before the onset of winter, they move down to the lower hills of Kullu. During the long winter months, when they are confined to their homes, they spin wool and weave or knit shawls and other garments. They also entertain themselves with storytelling.

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“The Tale of Rupali Ba” is about the brave people of Rajasthan who settled down in Gujarat. In the olden days, people travelled from one place to another on foot. Sometimes they rode on camels or carts drawn by bullocks or horses. Journeys took a long time, as men and animals moved slowly through desert and plain. They were also extremely dangerous because bands of robbers and outlaws roamed the countryside on fast horses, waylaying travellers.

“The Magic Wrap” is a tale from Assam originating with the Garo tribe, who called themselves “Achik-mande,” meaning “Men of the Hills.” They believe that their original homeland was Tibet. The legend relates how a magic shawl transforms a human couple into a peacock and a peahen. The husband, who catches hold of a much larger portion of the magic wrap, gets bigger and brighter feathers than his wife. Human-animal transformation is a leading motif in folk literature and reveals the closeness of the traditional people with their natural surroundings.

“The Secret Valley” is a folktale told by the Lepcha tribe of Sikkim. The Lepchas are a people who came to inhabit Sikkim a long time ago. They settled down on the slopes of the great peak Kanchenjunga. The Lepchas call themselves *Rong*, which in their language means ‘the people of the valley.’ Lepcha stories are about creation of the world, the origin of the Lepcha people, the seasons and other natural phenomena and ghosts and demons. They believe that the Kanchenjunga is the home of gods and spirits and is therefore sacred. They also believe that, high up in the mountains behind the Kanchenjunga, there is a secret valley called Mayel, the home of the ancestors of the Lepcha tribe. An old woman from the secret valley gives them seeds of different varieties of grain to sow, advising them to sow them at the correct time. The people of the secret valley send white birds as messengers to let them know the time to get down to work in the fields. Till now when they see flocks of white birds, the Lepcha know it is time for them to sow their crops. Thus, the science of agriculture is taught to the people through folktales.

“Enter Mulla Do Piazza” is an early story about waste recycling. A young scholar is given the task of looking after the hen-house in the royal court of Akbar. He uses vegetable stalks, fruit and vegetable peelings, stale *chappatis* and dough used for sealing the mouths of vessels for feeding the birds. The birds are healthy, and a lot of money is saved. Next, he is put to work in the royal library. He has the books covered with silk, velvet and brocade, from the bags in which petitions are given to Akbar.

“Babhloo!” by Paro Anand is a folktale from the short story collection *The Carpenter’s Apprentice* edited by Rosalind Wilson. It narrates fancifully how the Himalayan Bear got its white ‘V’ marking. Babhloo was a Himalayan bear who lived in the icy heights of the mountains. He had a thick black glossy coat with not a speck of white in it. One day, while raiding a maize field, he spots a tall deodar. Bhabloo thinks that if he could climb it, he could touch the moon. The branch breaks because he is so heavy, and he falls down. His mother saves him by stitching his chest close with a silver moonbeam. Hence, all Himalayan bears from then onwards had a bright white ‘V’ mark on their chests. Though only a legend, the landscape and some of the habits of Himalayan bears are faithfully depicted.

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“Dark Storm and Bright Pearl” by Mala Marwah stresses the importance of community work in disaster management as well as the part played by trees in soil conservation. In the story, a dark storm with black clouds gathers over the sea near a peaceful valley full of people who “tilled land, sold vegetables and fowl, washed clothes, laughed and talked” (62). The Dark Storm could not bear this happy sight. “All its fury gathered upon its brow, and in a rage, it swept like the hand of death upon the sunny valley below. It rained in torrents, the raindrops like knives and the wind like a scythe” (63). The people who were unaffected by the storm did not come to the aid of the affected. So the storm continued to lay waste to the countryside. “One by one each village that had thought itself safe was destroyed” (63). Then a miraculous thing happens. A little white bird, shining like a pearl emerges out of its nest and sings so beautifully that the only survivor of the village, a woodcutter, comes out of his ruined hut. The bird leads him to find other people. Soon, the group of survivors swells. Finally, the bird, known as Bright Pearl, stops on a mountain. One side of the mountain lies bare with uprooted trees, while the other remains green, because it was sheltered. Bright Pearl shows the people the openings of safe caves. The people begin to hope. They plan to protect themselves. “They straightened up every young sapling and tended the ground around other trees so they would grow to hold the earth firm. . . . They agreed to break no branches for fuel, but gathered dead wood which had fallen, and pine cones and dead leaves which they mixed with a little dung and used sparingly” (65). Most of the dung was dried and stored for manure, as it would enrich the soil when used. Thus, they used organic manure and began to behave in a totally eco-friendly manner. They started to look for seeds and pods which they dried and kept, waiting for a time when they could plant them. They gained eco-wisdom, which they then passed on to their descendants. They begin to scatter a few grains for birds and small animals outside, signifying interdependence of man and nature. Now, they were ready to face the Dark Storm when it returned. Community work saves people from nature’s fury. Above all, making suitable eco-friendly adjustments in their lifestyles helps them survive.

Another legend about a storm is Paro Anand’s, *The Little Bird Who Held the Sky Up with His Feet*. Every year, the Monsoon Army’s rain attacks the forest, destroying trees, plants, nests and burrows. The denizens of the forest are in a dilemma whether to fight or to flee because they learn that this time, the monsoon army is determined to destroy them. Then Pididi, the tiny little sparrow has a prophetic dream in which the Sun commands him to help him win the battle with the Monsoon Army. His weakness is his strength. He has to hold up the sky with his feet. All the animals except King Lion do not take him seriously. Pididi, the Chosen One, resolutely faces the Monsoon army, turning on his back with his eyes shut, his feet holding up the sky. The terrible storm rages, but Pididi does not budge. At last, the Monsoon Army is defeated. But Pididi had given up his life for the general good. Thereafter, in memory of Pididi, all birds lie on their backs with their feet held stiffly in the air when they die. The story makes the reader think about the importance of small creatures in the chain of life and also about the singular way in which dead birds turn up their feet to the sky.

Devika Rangachari’s retelling of the ancient story collection, *Stories from Kathasaritsagara* reveals surprisingly contemporary issues. In “The Bracelet” King Sahasranika is separated from his queen, Mrigavati due to a curse. Mrigavati goes to a hermitage in the forest, where she gives birth to

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the king's son. She names him 'Udayana.' One day, when the boy goes to the forest, he comes upon a man with a beautiful snake in his grip. Udayana, moved by the creature's plight, pleads with the man to release it. But the man refuses, saying that exhibiting dancing snakes was his livelihood. He was of the *shavara* community who dealt with performing snakes. The boy gives the precious bracelet gifted by his mother to save the snake. This bracelet is the cause of the reunion of his parents. The story, like many ancient tales, is set in a forest. Other stories in the collection, like "The Abandoned Children," and "Magic Pitcher" also have forest backgrounds. "The Golden Arrow" has the sea as its setting.

Mamang Dai's *The Sky Queen* is set in her native land of Arunachal Pradesh, the home of an ancient civilization named Kojum-Koja. The people celebrated many festivals with hunting and fishing ceremonies. The legend goes that one day they accidentally caught in their net the son of Biri Bote, the monarch of the water kingdom. The people ate the creature up, thus incurring the wrath of Biri Bote. The angry king sent his water armies to ravage the land of the Konjum-Koja. Storm and driving rain attacked the land, destroying it totally. "The Kojum-Koja disappeared from the face of the earth. With them, everything that belonged to them, also sank into the sea created by the floods." But after the flood, something wonderful happened. Nyanyi Myete, lady of the Kojum family descended from the skies in her beautiful silken white skirt with its emerald green border. She floated into the Doni-Donger family and filled the lives of the people with happiness. "Her robe, *maying ga-le* became the green trees of the Doni-Dongors. Her green-bordered skirt became the plants." The many different colours of her costumes gave life to leaves and flowers and birds and butterflies, that flitted on wings of many colours. Her silken white *gimur-ga-le* changed into white clouds. "And when her moods changed, they became the different seasons. Her sweat and tears became water and rain. Her sweet songs and music are the fresh voices of birds and humming insects you hear even today." She reminds everyone of the fact that she had come from the land of Konum-Koja which was destroyed in the floods. She passes on the songs, dances and festivals of her native land to the Adi people of Arunachal Pradesh. Myths of floods, destruction and re-creation and the worship of Mother Nature as Mother goddess are all present in the story, which lends mythological interpretation to natural phenomena.

U Sie'r Laplang is a Khasi tale retold by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and illustrated beautifully by Maya Ramaswamy. Katha has published this story from the cloud land of Meghalaya. It is the poignant story of a young stag who, against the advice of his old mother, ventures into the cool hills in search of his favourite food, the deliciously bitter plant, *jangew*. The mother deer warns him about the Khasi hunters, but U Sie'r Laplang is confident that he would be able to outrun them. He is shot down by cruel hunters, who carry his dead body triumphantly on a pole. His old mother, who comes in search of her son, sees this sight, and after singing a sad song, dies of grief. This song goes down as a legend in Khasi history and has been related in story form by the writer, who belongs to the tribe. The note at the end says that forests are destroyed, and animals hunted down mercilessly, leading to the depletion of India's natural wealth. It suggests an alternative to hunting. The Khonoma village in Nagaland lost its wildlife due to hunting. One day, the elders of the Angumi tribe realized that there was no birdsong in their villages. Without the birds, the villages were like places with no

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children. So, the Angami tribe of Khonoma worked round the clock to bring the birds back and succeeded after two years. They planted alder trees which produced nitrogen and controlled soil erosion. The villagers built septic tanks and practiced rainwater harvesting. They gave up hunting and instead started promoting ecotourism, which ensured that they got an income and also preserved the forest. The combination of a legend with emphasis on wildlife depletion and its consequences, followed by a real-life case study which offers solutions is an excellent formula.

Room in Your Heart, based on the original story by Kunzang Choden and illustrated by Pema Tshering, narrates a heart-warming tale of a kind old woman who lives on the hills and provides shelter to passers-by. The work of one of Bhutan's leading writers it contains descriptions of landscape supplemented by watercolour paintings that bring the natural beauty of the mountains to life.

The Seventh Sun, a tribal tale from Odisha is a bilingual book published by Pratham Books, 2011. The Mundas are a tribe of people who live far away from India's cities in Jharkhand, Odisha Bihar and other states. The language they speak is called Munari. Their surnames suggest their closeness to nature-Topno (from tree ants), Kongari (a rare bird), Jojo (Tamarind) and Bhuinya (earth). The book emerged from a weeklong workshop for children, held in Bhubaneshwar in December 2010. The images in the book have been created using the drawings made by the children.

In Bob Bibi's Forest by Sandhya Rao is part of Tulika's series, 'Our Myths.' It is a tale from West Bengal, home of the dreaded Sunderbans tiger, which appears in myth as the demon Dokkin Rai. The resolution of human-animal conflict lies at its heart. Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, twins, are brought up by a deer and enjoy living in the islands of the Snderbans. Honey and wax, the produce of the forest is collected and sold by the forest-dwellers, but they are in danger of attack from Dokkin Rai. Bon Bibi realises she has a mission-to keep the forests safe. In an encounter with the tiger demon, she demands to know why he attacks people. Dokkin Rai replies: "I don't know what else to do! . . . These people, they come and take away everything from the forest. Wood, honey, wax, birds, fishes, molluscs, everything! Should I just sit and watch? You tell me. They are everywhere. They give me no place to roam, no place to sleep, no place to be! I have to do something to protect myself! They leave me nothing, not even to eat!" It is then that Bon Bibi realizes that she has to protect the tiger also. So, she declares: "From now on, people and animals will learn to live as one family, sharing the forest equally, and caring for it. You will take from it only what you need. No more." The tiger refuses to trust humans, But a small boy, Dukhi, promises to make his people listen to Bon Bibi's words. Still, it is only when he vows to take Bon Bibi's permission whenever he enters the forest, does the tiger promise not to frighten people. The practice of obtaining the forest deity's permission and thereby honouring her words is carried on even today in the Sunderbans, were the tiger is the king.

Where's the Sun? by Janu Bhiva Ravate and Niveditha Subramaniam is a story inspired by a painting by a Warli artist. The traditional art form from Maharashtra has white drawings against a red background, Design student Roma Singh did this book as part of a special project under Nina

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Sabnani of Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay, Mumbai. The story is strung together from portions of a large painting full of details, the whole of which is given as a folder in a pocket on the inside cover of the book. The story is nature oriented. A mother and child go in search of the sun. “Their journey comes alive in a vast dotted landscape where lively birds, quick-footed animals and busy humans meet and share the forest, the river and the mountains,” says the blurb. The pictures convey a sense of oneness with and respect for the shared natural environment.

The Road to the Bazaar by Ruskin Bond contains a folktale, “The King and the tree-Goddess”. Bond writes: “Grandmother loved trees, and this was one of her favourite tree stories” (42). A king decides to build a palace supported by column made of the tallest tree in the kingdom. Many Himalayan trees are named- the spruce, pine, oak and the deodar. Deo-dar, being the tallest, is considered the Tree of God. The Prime Minister is set the task of finding the tallest deodar. His daughter protests that the deodar is a sacred tree, used only for building temples. The king’s soldiers find a magnificent tree worshipped by the villagers as a goddess. The Prime Minister and his men came to worship the Goddess and warn the tree of impending danger. That night, the king has a dream of “a glorious figure draped in shining green foliage” who speaks in a voice “that was like the rustle of autumn leaves” (44). The voice tells the king that the tree is a place where birds nest and men rest. It shelters plants and binds the earth with roots. The tree-goddess asks to be felled in three parts because she does not want any of her tree- children to be crushed by her fall. The king, on awakening, realises he has learnt a lesson in conservation. He is touched by the care and consideration as well as the sacrificing tendency of the mother tree. He orders a stone pillar to be installed to support his palace. The great tree is saved and continues to spread deodars through the forest.

The author finds that folktales are popular among first-generation English-language learners, who are familiar with the story patterns, having read or listened to some of them in their mother-tongue. Traditional stories are highly significant in research about ecology and the natural environment, since they are the repositories of traditional wisdom. The people of yore and the communities that follow their traditional lifestyles adapt to their habitat, the cycle of seasons, do not over-consume, pollute or interfere with wildlife. Even their taboos have meaning. The concept of forbidden groves, for example, was conducive to conservation. Worship in the past included the flora and fauna of the land. Nilima Sinha points out in her interview with the author that people worshipped medicinal plants such as the *tulsi* and the environment was taken care of by traditional practices. Folktales for children reflect the diversity of cultures, different landscapes and habitats, biodiversity and conservation and respect for animals. Man-animal transformations are common to folktales, and this reveals the feeling that man and nature are inter-related. Kindness to animals is always shown as being rewarded. The wicked are the greedy and the exploiters of nature and they are suitably punished. Many stories are about the origin of the natural world. This shows the interest taken by ancient man about his surroundings. It is of special note that some of the folktales have been adapted into English story form the actual narratives of traditional people.

Chapter III Picturebooks

“What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?”- Alice in Alice in Wonderland.

Picture books are among the most delightful books for children, appealing also to adults with their colourful illustrations. Picture books are among the first reading material in the form of fiction that the child encounters. The books may be read out to the child even before he begins to read on his own. The books sow the seeds of the reading habit in the child, who is full of curiosity and eagerness and wants to read on his/her own in order to enjoy the stories.

Distinction has been made between “illustrated books” or “picture books” where the picture complements the texts and “picturebooks” where the pictures predominate and are essential to the meaning of the text. Picturebooks have little or no verbal content. In reality, it is extremely difficult to separate the books into the said categories and this study makes no attempt to do so. “Picture books are profusely illustrated books in which the illustrations are, to varying degrees, essential to the enjoyment and understanding of the story” (Nodelman 81).

Early childhood is a crucial stage when the child forms impressions about the world around him. Writers of Indian fiction for the young have realised this and have produced books rich in stories about nature, creating love for plants, trees and animals. Picture books depict children enjoying and adapting to the seasons, being kind to animals and developing respect for them,

The child learns to empathise with wildlife, especially with young animals and to distinguish between pet and domestic animals and the wild ones. Small children love to observe little creatures such as insects and small birds and these, more than big animals, appeals to them. The importance of freedom and respect for animals and their habitats and the development of clean, green habits is cultivated through these picture books. The books are laced with humour so that the intelligent child would be entertained as well as instructed.

Of particular note are the illustrations that go with the picture books published in India in recent times. The illustrators, who are highly talented and educated in premier schools of art and design, have taken motifs and styles from traditional art forms in order to develop the aesthetic sense in the child. Animals largely retain their original characteristics, as do the fauna. Artists, with a sense of responsibility to the young, have taken care to maintain scientific accuracy along with aesthetic appeal while portraying biodiversity and landscapes.

Dancing Bear by Manasi Subramaniam is a picture book which reveals the plight of wild animals forced to entertain humans. Altaf, on his twelfth birthday is given Somu the bear as a gift. He is delighted, since he belongs to the Galandars, an ancient gypsy tribe descended from the royal entertainers of the Mughal emperors. They had been working with dancing bears, a profession that had been handed down from generation to generation. Soon, Altaf notices Somu’s heavy breathing

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and panting. He sees that the bear's mouth is bleeding. A rope had been inserted through Somu's muzzle. Several cuts in Somu's jaw give out a steady flow of blood. Altaf's uncele, Bavik Chacha, who owns Toufan, the bear, has no compunction when it comes to torturing to poor beast. He pulls hard on Toufan's rope until the bear squeals with pain. He also mercilessly lashes it with his whip. It is shown that some cruel traditions exploit animals for monetary gain. Altaf tries to make Somu dance. Every time the bear seems tired and tries sitting down, Altaf instinctively pulls on the rope to make him continue. At last Somu slumps down.

Bear rescuers from a wildlife rescue unit take Toufan away. Altaf learns to his shock that making bears dance is against the law. He overhears his uncle saying that he would take Somu instead of Toufan. He plans to whip him and to pull out his teeth, which was the usual practice among bear-trainers. Altaf's father says that Somu is too old for tooth extraction. But Bavik does not listen. Altaf, unable to stand the thought of Somu being in the control of his uncle, goes to the bear rescuers. The rescuers take Somu away to a sanctuary in Agra and Altaf accompanies him. There, Somu's cuts and bruises are treated and the rope from his muzzle carefully removed. Altaf stays in the sanctuary, going to a local school. He hopes that one day, he would work there full-time. Now, Somu looks happy. Altaf's brother Jeeja agrees to bring his bear too to the reserve. Gradually, all the family members are persuaded to bring their bears there.

The poignant story is about friendship between a young boy and an animal and the boy's unique understanding of what the animal truly wants. This tale depicts the true predicament of dancing bears in India and offers a solution. Rescue teams are required. The younger generation has to take the initiative when it comes to changing and adapting. Illustrations by Gwangjo, Jung-a- Park add value to the narrative.

Set Me Free by Ashish Sengupta is about circus animals seen through the eyes of the young boy, Manu. The boy watches a snake, a deer and a monkey who are forced to entertain humans. The boy, filled with the power of empathy, puts himself in their place-what if the animals had caught him and were watching him dance? Horses, elephants, tigers do tricks in the circus. Wild animals are put behind bars in zoos for no fault of their own. Far away from their homes, they languish in cages, Manu suddenly remembers Mithu, his pet parrot and sets him free from his cage. He imagines playing in the wild with animals. He comes to the conclusion that visiting wild animals in their habitats is true enjoyment.

Monkeys Come to Village by Swati Bhattacharjee introduces the child to man-animal conflict, its causes and consequences. While five-year-old Tuku plays in the school ground, a troop of monkeys invades the place and the children run for safety to the school building. The simians cause havoc in the place. When Tuku reports this indignantly to her mother in the evening, her mother gently explains the situation to her. She asks Tuku what she would do if her house was destroyed. Tuku replied that she would go and live with her aunt. Her mother continues, asking what she would do if all the houses in the village were destroyed. "Because that is what has happened to monkeys. . . . Men have cut down the forests. Now there is no place for the monkeys to live (6). The little girl's

grandmother adds that brick kilns have taken the place of a dense forest. “It was full of jamun, litchi and jackfruit trees. All the trees are now gone. The monkeys have nothing to eat” (7). Tuku develops empathy for the homeless creatures and even rescues a baby monkey which has been injured. She names it ‘Monu’ and becomes very much attached to it. One day, the mother monkey comes in search of her little one. Tuku is reluctant to part with her new pet, but her mother gently chides her saying, “How would you like it if you were taken away from me?” (15). The little monkey is restored to its mother and goes with the monkey-tribe to which it belonged. This is a lesson of “letting go” with regard to wild creatures who can never be truly happy among humans. Tuku continues to look after sick animals and birds, having learnt to love animals from her association with Monu.

Pratham Books has taken the initiative of bringing out the Rituchakra Series based on the cycle of the seasons. The colourfully illustrated books by Mala Kumar and Manisha Choudhry relate stories involving sensible traditional practices associated with each season.

Lassi, Ice-Cream or Falooda? Teaches children how to live healthily in summer, known as *Greeshma Ritu* in Sanskrit. One should sit under the trees, eat fruit and tell stories instead of exhausting oneself in rough play. Children are urged to drink plenty of *nimbu pani* (lime juice) to restore water lost due to sweating. *Khus* mats, covered windows in Delhi in earlier times. Saplings should be planted in this season.

Peacocks and Pakodas is about the monsoon season, known as *Varsha Ritu* in Sanskrit. People harvest rainwater by saving it in buckets as it falls down from the roof. Peacocks love to dance in the rain. Nature is beautiful and one should enjoy the monsoon, keeping warm by eating hot fried *pakodas*, roasted corn and hot milk. The girl protagonist remarks, “All the trees and plants will look green and happy” (7). The mango tree she has planted in the summer has grown very tall during the monsoon season. She is glad that she no longer has to water it. Even clothes are compared to vegetation. Her dupatta is the green colour of paddy saplings, or *dhaani*.

Kheer on a Full Moon Night is about the Autumn, the season of colds and coughs. The Dasara Festival is celebrated in a grand manner. In fact, Autumn is the season of festivals. Meera celebrates the Malayali festival Onam festival with a *pookalam*, a rangoli using flowers. The children do not burst crackers during Deepavali because, they say, “Our teacher says that crackers are bad for the air. . . .He says if we don’t take care of the water, air and land, then the seasons will all change after some years” (7-8). The children learn about the dangers of noise and air pollution at an early age.

Hot Tea and Warm Rugs as about accustoming oneself to winter. Hot nuts and millet grains called “ponkh” are consumed. During the Sankranti festival sesame seeds and jaggery sweets, which are good for health in the winter are served. The children looking forward to spring. They anticipate that their tree would be full of “birds and mangoes and squirrels and parrots very soon” (12).

Everything Looks New brings to an end the cycle of the seasons with the advent of spring. The trees blossom and the world is filled with happiness. The vibrant festival of Holi is celebrated. However, it is emphasised that the water used to spray friends in fun is coloured using *tesu* flowers, orange-natural dye. Artificial dyes, which are harmful, are avoided.

Vayu, the Wind by Madhuri Puri, celebrates one of the elements of nature which can be a gentle breeze, hard blowing, rainy wind, carrier of smell of sweets, sound, which “Cannot be seen / Cannot be heard / Does all the work / Without a word” (18).

We are all Animals by Madhav Chavan and Meera Tendulkar is a thought-provoking tale in the form of a conversation between a human and animals. The animals say that they are in no way inferior to human beings. “Look at me, animals! I am a human being! I know everything!” (3), the girl boasts in typical anthropocentric style. “So what? We have eyes too. And we can see in the dark!” (5) reply the animals. “We are all animals. We all belong here. Just like you” (28). The need to respect animals’ harmonious co-existence and eco-centric view are all beautifully portrayed in a simple, yet effective manner.

The Mystery of Blue by Muriel Kakani is set against the background of the traditional weaving community in Ilkan during the reign of the Chalukyas. It is the tale of a little girl called Kunka and her pet blue-necked pigeon, Chandrakali. The story describes how vegetable dyes are made. Different colours such as red, orange and brown are prepared using the root of the *madder* plant and pure river water. The dye changes colour when iron and alum are added. But to get the colour blue, the pigeon Chandrakali flies to far-off Varanasi and returns with the indigo plant and some samples of dyed cloth. Kunku surprises her people on Makar Sankranti Day by offering a piece of brilliant blue cloth to the Sun God. Thereafter, everyone in the village learns the art of preparing indigo dye and the village of Ilkan still remains famous for its beautiful dark blue sari called Chandrakali, after the brave and enterprising bird which made the dangerous journey for the sake of her human friend. Using organic dyes, the story behind the use of indigo in the region, village crafts and human-bird bonding are some of the points to be noted in the story.

Putul and the Dolphins by Mariam Karim-Ahluwat is the tale of friendship between animals and human beings, showing how they can live in harmony and render mutual help and support. The setting is a small fishing village called Dhabri, beside the Ganga in West Bengal. The village is an old-fashioned one, where oil lamps are still used and people follow a traditional life-style. The villagers accept both the fury and the friendship of the mighty river. They enjoy swimming and catch fish. But during the monsoon, they are afraid of its great swell. “The river would become a demon . . . sometimes, the river swept angrily over the village, pulling down trees and hills. Then the people scattered and fled to places close by.”

The coming of the monsoon heralded the advent of the dolphins. The children loved watching their antics. But the fishermen harpooned them. However, the clever creatures avoided the fishing boats.

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On one such day, when their hut was flooded, the dolphins enter Putul's hut, delighting the young girl with their squeaking and squalling. Putul is delighted, but her mother's reaction is callous. She wishes that they would stay there till her husband comes to kill them. In order to encourage the animals to stay, she throws some stale rice into the water. In spite of her mother's protests, Putul climbs into the water and leads the dolphins out of the hut. She swims far away from the village, till they are out of sight. She is caught in a strong current, but the grateful dolphins help her ashore. Her tearful mother then vows, "I will never let your father kill dolphins now." From then on, the people of Dhabri never harmed the playful creatures. The portrayal of the girl child as activist, conservation of animals, the setting of the village near the river and how traditional lifestyles are moulded by the landscape are to be noted.

In *The Black Panther* by Aravind Krish Bala, the author describes a stunning encounter in the wild with the elusive feline, the almost legendary black panther. The story is based on the real-life experiences of the author's friend, Natarajan, an Irula tribesman. The adventure takes place in the Anamalai mountain range, a region of the Western Ghats famed for its rich wildlife. The story is told through the narrative voice of Veera, a tribal. The appropriate use of the first-person narrative ensures that the reader would experience at second hand a good degree of the actual encounter. Veera introduces himself and states his love of wild animals and birds. He recalls how, as a fifteen-year-old, he showed the nests of the Anamalai birds to Dr. Salim Ali and was given a pair of binoculars by the great man. The black panther was spoken about by his forefathers, but no one had actually seen it.

One day, Veera's eleven-year-old son Kari spots the big black cat in the thorny bushes near a red silk-cotton tree. Father and son spend twenty-two evenings near the place. They see many wild animals like the elephant and the gaur. On the evening of the twenty-third day, the brilliant black panther saunters majestically down the road and lies down to sleep, scarcely bothered by the slight drizzle. Wanting to take a closer look, Kari and Veera quietly roll down towards the big cat from either side. Being tribesmen, they do not upset the animal and there is no conflict. The dynamics of man-animal encounters are sketched. The silent, secretive, shy creature evokes curiosity, wonder and fear. The tribals do not want to hunt it. Despite their precautions the smell of humans wakes up the sensitive beast. The black panther comes close to Veera, sniffs and then starts licking him. Kari shouts and the panther backs away, with his "cold, terrifying eyes." Veera comments later, "It looked like he was telling us that he would have his day." The man-animal encounter is realistic and not glamorised. The beast has adapted to life near humans. Yet the true thrill of the forest is retained through careful creation of the atmosphere. The greatness of artist Ashok Rajagopalan accounts for a large part of the book's attraction.

My Friends in the City is a bilingual book, (English-Hindi/English-Tamil) by Samina Mishra. Here, animal and bird life is seen in the common urban setting. The man-made environment has overtaken the natural setting. Still, nature adapts quickly. The blurb on the cover express it thus: "Who says the city belongs only to people?" The reader is introduced to some of the non-human life in the crowded city - Moti the elephant, Phad Phad the pigeon and Banno the buffalo live on the

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roads that “eat up the forest.” “People built the city but look. There are others trying to live there too,” says Suraj the Sun, who acts as a commentator. The pictures are innovative- the road becomes a crocodile attempting to swallow running trees and plants. Moti the elephant who lives in a *basti* by the side of the river and gives rides to children at birthday parties “came to the city from a jungle when he was very small. But he still remembers the jungle.” The pathos of wild animals who are enslaved impacts young minds. Domestic animals like the goat, Granny Chew Chew and Banno the buffalo do not mind sharing space with their human neighbours. The pigeon Phad Phad sneaks into people’s balconies and windows to make his nest. “Most people don’t like that but what is Phad Phad to do? Pigeons like to nest in hollows on trees or rocks. But the city doesn’t have any rocks or big trees with hollows.” The pathetic state of birds whose natural environment is destroyed by humans is seen in the pigeon’s adaptation, an example of animal “intrusion” and human-animal conflict.

Even in *Pavo and Cavo*, a humorous tale by Nirupama Raghavan, there is mention of the differences between the Asiatic and African varieties of lions, elephants and buffaloes.

The Sweetest Mango speaks of the simple joy of eating a mango in all its lovely squishiness. The protagonist Suma gives shares among friends. The mango fruit is turned into traditional concoctions like pickles, mango curry and so on. *Mundappa, langra, daseri, banganapalli* varieties are named. The setting of the village is near Udipi, with its coconut and mango trees.

Another mango tale, *Brave Kamala* by Alka Shankar shows the traditional lifestyle of seven-year-old Kamala and her parents. Kamala’s days are spent in gathering firewood, milking their cow, cooking simple meals of rice and salt, looking after her baby brother, catching fish from river with a towel and climbing trees for mangoes.

Magnolias by Malati Shah, beautifully illustrated by Amrita Kanthe, speaks of the wonders of tree planting. The story is set in the hill town of Shimla. Gulab the gardener fails to bring home magnolias that his wife asks because he gives a flower each in appreciation, friendship or gratitude to several people. But most importantly, he brings home the seeds of the magnolia tree and plants them so that his daughter would have magnolias by her window when she grows up.

The Kite Tree by Avanti Mehta poetically described the seasons and Nature’s moods. The narrator, who is a close observer of nature, walks up a hill to observe a tree growing on the top. The tree’s progressive growth-burgeoning green buds, scarlet ladybirds coming out, red flowers blossoming, mynahs circling and seedpods bursting are described. The sky is filled with “wispy white cotton clouds.” Red ants climb the tree. In autumn, the tree is bare and sadlooking. In springtime, the tree is suddenly colourful. It is covered with kites. “The tree is full of surprises,” remarks the narrator. The festivals are related to the cycle of the seasons. The march of the seasons is depicted in the story.

Sunu-sunu Snail: Storm in the Garden by Sandhya Rao is a delightful snail’s eye view of a thunderstorm and encourages the love for little lives like Sunu-sunu Snail and his friends the ants.

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The sudden crash of the thunder and the flash of lightening signal the onset of the thunderstorm. The crows caw and fly hurriedly away when the clouds appear threateningly. The ants, taking shelter under a stone near the well are fairly secure. Close observation of the habits of little creatures and the use of sound words related to nature are the highlights of the book. “Shag! Shag!” trees sway. “Zzzak” for lightening and “Fadaam! Gudoom!” for thunder are other examples. The “Sitta sitta! Pitta pitta” of the raindrops lessens into “plip! plip! plip!” Innovative Indian sounds instead of the traditional western, hackneyed “pitter-pat” and “pitter –plop” make a welcome change. The visuals and the onomatopoeic words take the young reader close to actual experience of a thunderstorm. The book is excellent for reading out and making the child interested in nature. The concluding punchline: “And do you know what? Sunu-sunu didn’t get wet!” implies the intuitive wisdom of creatures.

The Sweetest Mango, The Tamarind Tree and Brave Kamala relate to everyday experiences of children in small towns and villages. In *The Tamarind Tree* by Lata Mani, a group of seven-year-old boys cycling home from school are attracted by a tamarind tree. Mallikarjuna, the leader climbs high up the tree and shakes its branches, causing tamarinds to fall. The simple, healthy pleasures of childhood now almost a thing of the past is brought to life through the text and pictures. The boys’ excitement when “the sweet-sour fruit in their bumpy brown skins thudded gently onto the ground” is palpable. After gathering the tamarinds “they sat together on the ground, broke the crisp shell of the fruit and sucked the pulpy flesh inside.”

The tree’s point of view is stated. “The tamarind tree loved it when the children came to eat its fruit or to gather it for their mothers.” “One thing that puzzled the tree was the rush to pick every single fruit- why couldn’t some of the fruit simply be left to sway in the breeze?” The boys, by gathering and eating the tamarind fruit, help in the dispersal of its seeds. They thus form a part of the chain of nature. Nature also nurtures team-spirit and friendship. This is shown through the manner in which the boys climb the tree, standing on their friends’ backs while one friend pulls them up. The boys have the delightful experience of climbing a tree, the thickness of which is “like a forest.” This is something denied to most urban children. The boys enjoy a peaceful afternoon sitting in its branches, in close communion with nature. It is seen that nature moulds their characters and shapes their souls. Vayu Naidu says: “The Tamarind Tree pays loving attention to the environment.” It is a journey of discovery.

A Kite Called Korika by Sharada Kolluru is a faithful depiction of rural life. It is set in the village of Pamidi in Andhra Pradesh. The Penna River goes “gala gala sala sala.” Farmers sing and dance “thai thaka thai thaksa.” Cowbells go “tinga tanga tinga tanga.” Yelliah, a nine-year-old village boy’s family give the cow Lakshmi a home. The cow has been abandoned because she is too old and sick to yield milk. An old woman selling fruit sits under a giant peepul tree. Bullock carts carry seasonal produce. During the windy season, the villagers fly kites. The unselfish wish of Yelliah for his brother’s recovery is an example of the close family attachments fostered by the traditional way of life and is a reflection of the landscape.

Gajapati Kulapati by Ashok Rajagopalan is the story of a big, friendly temple elephant and the care and concern that people show for him when he catches cold. It emphasises the responsibility that goes with the domestication of wildlife.

Crocodile Tears- Sandhya Rao, Jonathan Lindstrom and Tautik Riaz is a story born of the interaction between a Swedish writer and an Indian one during an Indian children's writers and illustrators' meet in Goa. The emotion of losing a loved friend is portrayed in this. Unfortunately, the story is not acceptable in from the point of view of purists who are against anthromorphic portrayal of animals and also of the transporting animals fictionally to foreign habitats. Payal B.Molur, author and wildlife educator in her interview given to the author, has opposed such mismatching of animals and their habitat, and their habits as well, though she does not object to them talking, since the child is able to distinguish and accept the mores of storytelling and does not take it literally.

The Sky Monkey's Beard by Niveditha Subramanian is a whimsical tale of monkeys which live in the sky. Though a fantasy, it does contain beautiful descriptions of scenery. One little sky monkey is attracted by the silvery river and the green grass. She makes her home on the earth, leaving behind her life in the sky. Habitat change and subsequent adaptation are also sub-themes.

Colour-Colour Kamini by Radhika Chadha is a story which revolves around the habits of chameleons. Kamini is a young chameleon who starts flashing colours whenever she is excited. This helps elephants who want to avoid stepping on nearly invisible chameleons. Kapila Aunty (a chameleon) teaches them the basics of colour- changing. The creatures change colour to blend into their landscape and so avoid detection by predators.

The Milkman's Cow by Vidya Pradhan is a prize-winning picture book from Children's Book Trust. It deals with animal psychology. The milkman's cow stubbornly refuses to get up from the middle of the road, where she has taken her seat. Force cannot move her. Various strong people try, but they cannot get her to budge. At last, a small boy offering a bunch of greens attracts the cow's attention and causes her to get up, much to the relief of all concerned. The moral of the story is, "being kind and loving is the best remedy; force and brute strength usually fails" Animals have the right to have moods and they sometimes display them quite openly. The domestic cow, proverbially docile, can be very adamant. Kindness is the way to handle animals . . . and humans, too.

The Mountain that Loved a Bird by Alice McLarran is an allegorical tale beautifully illustrated by Stephen Aitken. The part played by birds in the growth of vegetation is depicted. A mountain stands cold and alone until one day, a small bird appears. A change of heart occurs in the mountain. The ecological process is fully evident. The mountain is at first bare rock. Birds do not like to nest there. The bird called Joy says that since nothing grows there for her to eat and drink, she cannot stay there. She just rests on the bare mountain on her migratory path. Every spring she flies to distant lands, looking for the best place to build her nest and raise her young. The bird returns every year to the mountain, since birds always follow the same route wild migrating. On the hundredth

spring comes the parting. The mountain's heart breaks. "Tears gushed forth and rolled down the mountainside in a stream."

When the bird learns about the presence of water, she brings a small seed. The seed sends down roots which cause small cracks breaking into the hardness of the rocky mountainside. The stone is further softened by water. It is seen that the presence of water is all-important. The bird returns with a seed in spring. The mountain keeps weeping water. The softened stone becomes soil. Moss grows in the sheltered corners. Grass, insects and flowering plants appear. "Tiny insects, carried to the mountain by the winds, scurried among the leaves." A tree springs up on the mountainside. The mountain is now full of happiness. Soon, it has many streams and plenty of greenery. The next spring, the bird returns with a twig. She places the twig on the branch and starts to build her nest. "I am Joy," she sings. The bird represents the spirit of nature and life. The bird says that one of its daughters or descendants would bear the name of Joy and would come the same way. This is true of migratory birds. Their habits have their roots in family tradition. Mothers pass on their nesting habits to their daughters. The mountain and the bird are endowed with human feelings. Yet they retain their essential qualities and are not anthropomorphised. The bird, though small, comes out as a creature to respect, endowed with wisdom, a resolute will and the power and mystery of nature.

Brahma's Butterfly by Meena Raghunathan is the story of the lifecycle of the butterfly. The caterpillar turns into a pupa and then into a lovely butterfly. It is a lively tale, based on folk legend and narrated in a humorous vein and enhanced with attractive illustrations. *Jhimil the Butterfly* by Vijayalakshmi Nagaraj is also written along similar lines.

My Mother's Sari by Sandhya Rao evokes the world of nature through the garment. To the child, her mother's sari is "A rainbow . . . it fills the air with colours when I dance, and I sing. I sail down a river . . . and climb up a rope. I hide with my friends" (in the garden). The imagination of the child creates natural surroundings in a man-made environment and links the human mother with Mother Nature.

The Spider's Web by Lata Mani brings out the importance of parental attitudes and guidance in the formation of the child's interest in nature. Observation of insects is part of childhood, a stage when wonder and curiosity is at its height. The book has been described in the blurb as "a contemplative journey of discovery." Mr. Rashia, the photographer father points out the spider in the coconut tree to his son, Ali. A spider, unlike a butterfly, is not usually considered attractive. Yet Ali is fascinated to see that the spider seems to be dangling in the air. The difference between "looking" at nature, that is, mere noticing and "seeing," that is, paying close attention to it, is explained to him by Mr. Rashia. Ali looks through his father's telephoto lens and sees the spider sparkling or waving its legs in the morning light. He observes, "The spider seemed relaxed." Ali admires the play of the sunlight on the intricate spider web. His father explains how insects are trapped in the web and tells him that there are 30,000 kinds of spider and not all of them spin webs. Ali is so attracted to the spider and its masterpiece that he says, "Can I look at it again and again?" His father waits for him to

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have his fill before he begins photographing the spider and its web. Inculcating the love of nature in children, who imbibe it from their parents, requires patience, especially in the midst of the urban jungle.

The Tree Party by Nandini Oberoi is published by TERI, in its Terrapin imprint, which has divided its books according to age-level. This book, belonging to Level I, concentrates on little creatures such as rain beetles hiding under a leaf and introduces children to the concept of biodiversity. The little girl Saira counts at least ten little creatures in a tree. The book also shows how to identify a champa and a frangipani tree.

Anju and the Stream by R.P. Subramaniam brings out the dangers of water pollution and features a young girl activist. Every day, on the way to school, Anju crosses a bridge and watches the small insects and birds that live around it. One day, things are unusually quiet. The stream seemed to have vanished. An old crow looks forlorn since the little water that is left is stinking. A new factory which manufactures soap and shampoo spews out smoke and dirt. “The Factory gulps down the stream’s waters and throws out filth – oh! Isn’t that cruel!” When Anju warns the villagers about the dangers of water pollution, the village folk drain the sewage. Anju approaches the village elders and asks them to approach the factory owner with their problem. The factory owner feels ashamed and promises to set the problem right. The villagers help. The entire community is involved in de-polluting the stream.

Flight with Birdy by Sharmila Sinha is aimed at creating awareness about air pollution. Young Priam meets the great Indian hornbill which offers him a flight on its back. The trip reveals the extent of air pollution caused by factories, home and cars. Bird coughs because of air pollution. “Air gets thin and earth gets very hot and the plants and animals get very sick!” (12). Too much water is coming down from the mountains due to global warming. It causes floods in the villages and towns on the riverbanks. Yet, there is no food in the village. The villagers are displaced. They leave their homes to work in the markets, factories, offices in cities. The message of conservation is stressed. “Do not waste food and water,” warns Birdy. Over- consumption is a crime. Displacement, floods and drought are the results of global warming, caused by the greed of mankind. The book also gives information about the Great Indian Hornbill.

Water pollution, its causes, effects, and possible solutions to the problem are dealt with in detail by R.P. Subramaniam in *A Drop in the Lake*. Kulfi and her brother Momo visit Grandma who lives in the Nilgiris. They learn about the term *shola* from their grandmother who explains, “‘Shola’ is a mixture of woods and meadows” (3). The *shola* is shrinking. Natravati Lake itself is shrinking.” People at the grassroot level are the most affected. The boatman says, “Its water [Lake Natravati’s] makes us sick unless we boil it before drinking. So, our children have to gather more firewood! Times are hard indeed . . .” (3). Due to pollution, there is more energy consumption and further depletion of natural resources. The children have to gather firewood in order to boil the water for drinking and so miss out on their education. The chain reaction is explained clearly. Many birds like flycatchers, cranes, cormorants, wagtails, migratory birds from China and Russia. Kulfi loves the

little brown-and-white bird with a red beak called the lapwing. Unfortunately, these birds are affected by the pollution of the fresh water sources. The surface of Lake Natravati is covered with “great patches of green scum” (3). There is less fish to catch and the fish caught have a bitter taste. The terracing of the hills due to commercialisation is commented upon. Grandma says, “These pretty [tea] plants do bring jobs and **give** us tea, but I miss the shola that used to cover the hills” (3).

The solution to the problem of water pollution appears in an unexpected form. A strange cottage and a jolly time-traveller Ba Um. Ba Um shows the children an inexpensive water filter made of clay, charcoal and bamboo. He explains the use of good bacteria. The common cyanobacteria and useful phytoplankton live on the water surface of the lake. They are called *cybugs*. The children realise that the green slime is bacteria. The bacteria generate oxygen from carbon dioxide. But “Having too much of anything is bad. It upset Nature’s balance,” says Ba Um wisely (17). When Ba Um hears about the shrinking lake and the disappearance of birds, he says, “Surely there’s a problem in the watershed!” (19) and goes on to explain this term from environmental science. He explains that “cybugs’ multiply rapidly in the lake because “The plantations use a lot of fertilizers and pesticides, and the rain washes them into the streams that go into the Lake. . . and because we’ve cut the shola, a lot of soil has been washed into the Lake too . . . and all the nutrients have made the cybugs grow out of control. . . Maybe sewage is getting into the streams as well, adding more nutrients to feed the cybugs” (27).

The insects and underwater plants are dying and so the birds do not come. The solution is to clean up the watershed, plant more trees around the lake, use less fertilizers or better ones, make fertilizer out of sewage, leave the shola alone, and start planting trees again. Grandma says, “You are right. It’s our fault that the lake is polluted. We must act at once to save it” (22). She plans to create an awareness campaign and a clean-up drive: “Every one of us must get involved! Tomorrow, I’ll talk to my friend, who is a member of Chickpur’s Town Council” (22).

In this story, too, it is seen that community action is necessary to solve ecological problems. It is the children who act as initiators, once awareness is created. Understanding of the whole process of pollution is necessary to strike at the root of the problem. That such a complex cause-effect relationship is explained in a clear and interesting manner is to be appreciated.

Utilization of solar energy is the theme of *Sun Magic* by Vijayalakshmi Nagaraj. The children are engaged in a competitive school project on environmental studies. Planting a community garden in school is also one of their activities. The training that they receive in the school to become responsible, ecologically aware citizens is shown. They involve in discussions with the teacher and with themselves regarding energy sources. They find facts about solar energy and about renewable and non-renewable sources of energy in general. How solar panels work to generate energy which can be utilized for streetlights and water heating, is explained.

Tree conservation and community action lies at the heart of *Saving the Gulmohar* by Nandini Oberoi. Zara and her friends have a tree-house in a hundred-year-old gulmohar tree near their house.

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They are shocked to learn that the tree is to be shortly chopped down to make way for an apartment complex. They approach the builder but to no avail. So, they start a tree-hugging “Chipko Movement.” They are joined by the adults in the community. The builder agrees to build the apartment round the tree, naming it “Gulmohar Apartments.” The message is that adjustments to accommodate nature in urban planning can be made. It is significant the children learn about the Chipko movement from Zara’s mother who is a lepidopterist, which is explained as a person who studies butterflies. By asking, “What about the birds, and monkeys who live in the tree?” Zara’s mother creates fosters awareness about ecology in her daughter. The children are shown to adopt eco-friendly practices. They collect the gorgeous orange flowers of the tree to make greeting cards. They also use the flowers to prepare a natural dye for Holi. Thus, conservation of the tree is shown to benefit the community in many ways.

The Weather and I is a simple narrative in rhyme form which depicts a child enjoying the various weather conditions. She does not complain about the rain. She loves watching the raindrops and seeks shelter. When the rain stops, she looks for a rainbow and jumps over puddles. “I think I like the rain!” she muses (5). When it is cold, she wisely wears warm clothes, and lies in bed with a book. “I think I like the cold,” she says. In windy weather, she watches the leaves fly round. The wind seems to call out to her: “Come, let me play with you!” (13). “I think I like him too” she says (13). In hot weather, she eats delicious fruit and sits in the shady garden. She plays all day since she has her vacation in summer, “I think I like the sun,” she says happily (16). The attitude of acceptance and enjoyment is worthy of emulation.

Walk in the Rainforest with Niwupatt by Aparajita Dutta and Nima Manjrekar and *Walk the Grasslands with Takuri* by Nima Manjrekar and Nandita Hazarika, both superbly illustrated by Maya Ramasamy are books which authentically describe, with the help of accurate and attractive drawings, the ecosystems and biodiversity of rainforests and grasslands, respectively. The books have a ‘fact’ section after the story, followed by suggestions for conservation, quizzes and activities. Each number circle in the page is related to a message on the last page. Further, there is a fact box on each page, giving information about flora, fauna and forest produce.

Geetha Dharmarajan’s *Ma Ganga and the Razai Box* combines mythology and contemporary environmental issues in a delightful manner. Yasho of the Hill People worries that trees would not grow because Ma Ganga carries away the mud accumulated over the ages when there is a flood following heavy rain. Ma Ganga retorts: “I don’t want your soil. Do you think I want to look all muddy? And don’t I know the top few inches of soil are important to the village? But if you don’t care about it, why should I?” She hides inside Yasho’s *razai* box and refuses to come out unless the matted locks of Shiva are restored to her. The Hill people are puzzled, and it is Yasho who understands. “Let’s plant trees everywhere. The roots and plants of trees are like Shiva’s hair. They will hold the soil. They will make Ma Ganga happy!” In a few years’ time, the barren villages become green again, and Ma Ganga comes out, much to the delight of the villagers. Afforestation and soil erosion are some environment-related criteria to be found in the book. A ‘fact’ section about

soil erosion follow the story The later pages have beautiful borders of seedlings to reinforce the message.

Malli by Jeeva Ragunath is a bilingual book which depicts the simple pleasures of village life and the effective system of barter which avoids wastage and over-consumption.

Kamakshi Balasubramanian's *Waiting for the Rain* is the story of Velu, a hard-working farmer who is worried about the future when the rains fail. His old mother hints that just as he is over-worked, the land has been cultivated too much. It needs some rest. "When the rains don't come you are dejected. But in that way the land is left alone. The land lies undisturbed, staring at the sky, resting. . . And when the rains come, it will spring back into activity, fresh and ready for your crop."

The lives of traditional communities feature in Zai Whitaker's *Kali and the Rat Snake* and Mahaswetha Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*. Kali belongs to the Irula community, who are traditional snake-catchers. Kali's father takes the cobras he catches to the snake cooperative where they are milked for their poison. He earns a living this way, adapting his traditional skills to modern needs. Kali has to go through a long forest path to school. There, he is considered an alien. He does not have any friends. He eats apart from the other children because his mother often sends him fried termites for lunch. The other children would not understand his culinary tastes. The turning-point of the story comes when a huge rat-snake enters the classroom. The other children flee. Even the teacher hides under the desk. This astonishes Kali. "His community, the Irulas, always went towards snakes, not away from them." Kali happily catches the snake, meaning to take it to Vandalur Zoo, near Chennai, and making a good sum of money. He is surprised to find that he has become the hero of the school. From then on, he has plenty of friends.

Mahasweta Devi's *The Why-Why Girl*, her first picture book for children, is now available in six regional languages. The book relates the heartwarming tale of the ten-year old Moyna who belongs to the Shabar tribe, an exploited and marginalized hill people. They own no land and are practically slaves to the local landlords. Moyna is burdened with the triple handicap of being a child, a female and a tribal. Yet, unlike her passive companions, Moyna raises new and troubling questions. These questions reveal the plight of the forest-dwellers, and the casual way in which their hardships are accepted. The opening "scene" of the book is shocking. "But why?" asks the small tribal girl, and the reader gets to know that the question is in response to Mahasweta Devi's urgent call not to catch a large snake which is passing that way. Devi explains that it is a dangerous cobra, but the girl Moyna is not perturbed. To her, a cobra means food and money, "We eat snakes, you know," Moyna said, "The head you chop off, the skin you sell, the meat you cook." The innocent girl's words bring out the harsh reality of her existence. She persists in her attempt but is finally distracted through her love for questioning. "But why?" she asks again.

Devi drags Moyna to the *Samiti* office, where Moyna's mother Khiri sits weaving a basket. Moyna refuses to take any rest, denying that she is tired. Her life is one continuous stream of activity and she does not regret one moment of it. She has plenty of work to do. If she rests, "Who will bring

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the goats home? And collect firewood and fetch water and lay traps for the birds?” she demands. It is revealed that the Shabars did not usually send their daughters to work. Moyna has to earn because her mother has a bad leg and cannot walk properly. Moyna’s father has gone off to Jamshedpur in search of work. Her elder brother, Goro, collects firewood in the forest. Theirs is a difficult and thankless existence. But they live close to nature and are by temperament cheerful people.

Moyna is happy, but she is so very intelligent that she cannot help questioning the unfairness of her life. She asks uncomfortable questions such as, “Why do I have to walk so far to the river to fetch water? Why do we live in a leaf hut? Why can’t we eat rice twice a day?” These innocent and sensible interrogatives show how easily the hardships of the downtrodden are taken for granted. The Shabars are deprived of what people in the mainstream of society enjoy as a right.

Socio-economic inequalities are rampant in the tribal belts, with the *babus* or landowners expecting drudgery from the poor people. In return for their labour, the *babus* bestow upon the tribals a few crumbs of their leftover food. By tradition, the *adivasis* are expected to accept these with profound and abject gratitude. Through Moyna’s questions, Mahasweta Devi asks the reader whether the tribals are entitled to fundamental human dignity. Moyna asks questions not just about society, but also about the world of nature, for which she has a true love. Moyna asks, looking up at the sky, “Why do stars look so small if many of them are bigger than the sun?” This question is evocative of the tribal people’s existence. Their lives are rich and their contribution to the economy of the nation is huge, but they are ignored and belittled because they live far away from the political and economic centres of the country.

Devi’s reading habit fascinates the child. Soon, she learns that books hold the key to all her questions - they have the answers to her “whys”! Necessity propels her to become literate. Moyna applies her quick brain to learning and soon becomes an avid reader. She starts to share her new-found knowledge about the universe, good habits and so on with the other children, including her siblings. At the end of the story, Moyna is eighteen. She is a teacher at the Samiti. Moyna trains her young pupils to ask questions and so become well-informed and assertive human beings. Moyna’s determination to get educated enriches her life as well as that of her people. She is able to find the answers to her many questions and to prepare the next generation to take their rightful place in society.

Geetha Dharmarajan’s *A Jungle Safari* is set in the Mudumalai Forest at the foothills of the Western Ghats in South India. Two children, accompanied by their guide, take a ride through a wildlife sanctuary on the elephant, Bhama. They see various species like the sambar deer, the Malabar giant squirrel and the huge Nilgiri gaur. They come across a “rock” which turns out to be an elephant which is endowed with natural camouflage. The charcoal sketches add charm to the narrative and the ‘fact’ section about the Mudumalai Sanctuary and the Nilgiri Gaur add further value.

My Garden by Sigrun Srivatsava introduces the pleasure of cultivating a garden, while *The Kite Tree* by Avanti Mehta introduces the child to the small ecosystem of the tree with its dependent birds and insects. *Stripes in the Jungle* by Geetika Jain has pictures of different varieties of tigers and describes the lives of tiger cubs. The ‘fact’ section at the back says:

Did you know that tigers are called the protectors of the forest? . . . Since we prey on plant eating animals, we keep their numbers in check. This way, there aren’t too many animals eating up the forest vegetation. A healthy forest acts like a sponge and soaks up extra rain water, releasing it slowly as needed . . . keeping nature’s eco-system in balance. Humans should be happy to see us thrive . . .

The tiger goes on to say that humans are making their homes shrink by cutting down trees and poachers kill one tiger a day on the average. A map marks India’s tiger reserves.

Sanjiv Jaiswal’s *Rain*. *Rain* recalls the nursery rhyme in its title but contains the message that rain is essential and enjoyable. *An Ancient Tale from Andaman* retold by Anvita Abbi gives the reader insight into the lives of the Andamanese people. *Susheela’s Kolams* by Sidala Swami contains pictures of the traditional kolam patterns drawn by the women of Tamil Nadu. There is an explanatory note on this traditional art which is practised every day, and with enhanced vigour on festivals. *The Toy Horse* by Deepa Agarwal is about traditional crafts. It narrates the story of a gypsy girl, Rami, whose mother practices the traditional craft of making decorative, embroidered toy horses from cloth. Her father is an ironsmith who makes strong tongs and hammers.

A Baby Hornbill Learns to Fly by Dilip Kumar Barua, translated by Deepa Sarika, is an authentically researched and illustrated book that gives information, in fictional form, of the nesting habits of this endangered species. It also describes in detail how the parent birds bring up their young and wisely force them to fly on their own. The pictures, by Partha Sengupta, while being endearing, are also true to life.

The Village Fair by Radhika Meganathan, with illustrations by Nancy Raj, is a bilingual book. It is the story of Meenu who is unable to go to the village fair on her birthday because she breaks her leg. But all the vendors come to her house to sell her things, which are the work of traditional artisans - handwoven garments, coloured with vegetable dyes, puppets and mud-baked dolls. Meenu has great fun riding on a hand-operated swing roundabout and watching a performance of a traditional tiger dance.

In *Getting Granny’s Sari* by Asha Nehemiah Anu’s grandmother’s sari reminds her of the beauties of nature. It had a picture of a forest, with spotted deer, lions, a silvery stream, bears, fish, monkeys and parrots.” When Granny wore her sari, it would seem that all the animals printed on it were alive and moving as she walked.” Similarly, Sandhya Rao’s *My Mother’s Sari* is an evocative tale in which the sari takes on the role of nature.

The Seventh Sun, a tribal tale from Odisha is a bilingual book published by Pratham Books, 2011. The Mundas are a tribe of people who live far away from India's cities in Jharkhand, Odisha Bihar and other states. The language they speak is called Munari. Their surnames suggest their closeness to nature-Topno (from tree ants), Kongari (a rare bird), Jojo (Tamarind) and Bhuinya (earth). The book emerged from a weeklong workshop for children, held in Bhubaneswar in December 2010. The images in the book have been created using the drawings made by the children.

My Mother by Jaya Jaitley and illustrated by Bahadur Chitrakar is a bilingual book from Pratham Books 2012. The exquisite paintings in the Kalighat Patachitra style capture the young boy's love for his mother and her untiring spirit and the many facets of her work.

Where's the Sun? by Janu Bhiva Ravate and Niveditha Subramaniam is a story inspired by a painting by a Warli artist. The story is strung together from portions of a large painting full of details, the whole of which is given as a folder in a pocket on the inside cover of the book. The story is nature oriented. A mother and child go in search of the sun. "Their journey comes alive in a vast dotted landscape where lively birds, quick-footed animals and busy humans meet and share the forest, the river and the mountains," says the blurb.

Anushka Ravishankar, "India's Dr. Suess," blends humour with the unique use of visuals to produce intelligent picture books that carry ecological messages. Three picture books- *Tiger on a Tree*, *Catch that Crocodile!* And *Elephants Never Forget!* have been examined here.

Tiger on a Tree won the BIB Plaque Biennial of Illustrations, Bratislava, New York Book Show Award Anderson Award, Italy, Star of Excellence, French Union of Culture and Libraries, An American Library Association Notable Children's Book award.

In *Tiger on a Tree*, a tiger which crosses a river in a forest and unknowingly enters human habitation. It is found stranded on a tree and the villagers are alarmed. They frighten him into a net and debate on what to do. Mercifully, they decide to set him free. The tiger, unharmed and unharmed, goes happily back into the forest. This is in contrast to the usual practice of killing or maiming a trapped beast. A "live and let live" policy is adopted here.

Elephants Never Forget! is about the identity crisis of an elephant which is brought up by a herd of buffalo after losing its way in the jungle.

Catch that Crocodile! is again about human-animal encounter. A crocodile is stranded in a ditch in a town. A policeman, doctor and a wrestler try to make it move, but do not succeed. At last, a girl selling fish lures it away to the river and it swims away, to the great relief of the townspeople. Like *The Milkman's Cow*, the story shows that patience coaxing, and not force, is effective in dealing with animals.

All three stories depend on picture and layout as such as text for their meaning. Font size and the positioning of words are used effectively to convey emotion. The tiger looks small, helpless and innocent, while the crocodile looks frightened and puzzled. The animals are relatively calm, whereas the humans are agitated.

Tulika has brought out several photobooks of animal stories that are authored by people who are actively involved with wildlife conservation. Shekar Dattatri, author of *Lai-Lai the Baby Elephant* is a Chennai-based wildlife filmmaker with a special fondness for elephants. He spends a lot of time observing and filming them in the jungle. Lai-Lai and his mother live in a big jungle in South India. The blurb on the back cover warns: “If Lai-Lai and other elephants are to survive in the wild, we must make sure that there is enough jungle left for them.” The narrative is based on a series of photographs of a baby elephant. The reader meets Lai-Lai when he is just one day old, weighing a hundred kilos. He is curious and playful but must stay by his mother’s side until he can manage on his own. At the end of the book. Lai-Lai is a seven-year-old, all set to grow up into a grand ten-foot tall tusker, weighing 4000 kg.

The book is rich with facts about elephants and has a few pages after the narrative devoted entirely to information. The young reader is able to gather from both the fact and the fiction part about how the baby elephant can walk even when he is just a day old. Grown female elephants constitute the main portion of the herd. Females head and guard herds of Asian elephants. Lai-Lai loves to play in the water. Elephants swim well, keeping their trunks out of the water. The popular misconception that elephants foolishly throw mud on themselves immediately after bathing is dispelled – it is explained that they do so in order to repel insects. The biggest mother elephant is the leader of the group. Elephants need a lot of jungle space and so deforestation affects their movements. Among Asian elephants, only the male has big tusks and therefore they are called “tuskers.”

Takdir the Tiger Cub is an attractive photobook by Latika Nath Rana, popularly known as “The Tiger Princess of India.” She is a wildlife conservationist who does a lot of work with tigers in an erstwhile princely state in present Madhya Pradesh and is the first person to earn a doctorate on tiger conservation from Oxford University. The photographs in the book are by her husband, Nanda Bahadur Rana, a wildlife photographer. Nanda and Latika studied tigress Sita and her family for ten years. Therefore, the story is based on an actual tiger cub and its activities. Takdir the little tiger lives in the forest with his mother Sita and two sisters, Choti and Badi. They live in a cave home curtained with bamboo. The cubs are child-like, wandering around their home with curiosity. Takdir meets other denizens of the jungle like the friendly baby cheetahs, Bindi the dancing peacock, Baloo Bhai the bear, langurs and a big not-so-friendly leopard. Scared of the leopard, Takdir runs a long distance into the jungle to hide. He is hungry, thirsty and lost. This is real danger for a small and inexperienced cub, which cannot survive on its own. Fortunately, Sita hears his call and taking him home, comforts him. Children can relate to and appreciate the naughty disobedience of the cub and the family attachments of the big cats. The picture of the small, helpless Takdir and his caring mother will help them learn to accept tigers without stereotyping them as terrible predators.

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Deepa Balsaver's *Beboo Baby Bear* is the story of a baby sloth bear. It condemns the infamous bear dancing trade. Bears are caught by humans and made to dance in the street for entertainment. Beboo and his brother romp in the jungle and play in the water with their mother. Mamma Bear teaches them how to catch crunchy termites, climb trees, find honeycombs and jungle bananas. Bear food habits and survival skills taught. Mother bears are solely responsible for the upbringing and education of their children. Mamma Bear is terribly scared of men who come at nights with sticks and nets to steal her babies. Baby bears are put into sacks and sold to entertainers. They are separated from their families, muzzled and mutilated. Since their teeth and claws are removed, they cannot eat properly or dig for the termites they love so much. "The bears that are caught look very sad," the author comments. The book is a call to end trapping and exploitation of bears and to preserve dignity of the wild animals. It seeks to explain to children that such entertainment is not harmless but can be classified as rank cruelty.

Dinaben and the Lions of Gir by Meera Sriram and Praba Ram portrays the peaceful co-existence of animals and traditional communities. Lions are not perceived as a threat by the local people of the Gir region. Traditional wisdom enables them to avoid conflicts with lions. The way of life led by our ancestors helps them preserve the environment. The books capture the lives of the Maldhari tribe in an interesting and exciting manner. Their lifestyle is a lesson in conservation. The Maldharis, who have been co-existing with lions for centuries, follow a "live and let live" policy with regards to the lions of Gir. "If the forest is not protected, neither the Maldharis and their way of life, nor the lions will survive for long," states the author, emphasising the inter-relatedness of all living organisms in an ecosystem.

The reader is introduced to Dinaben, a woman belonging to the Maldhari community in the middle of the thick, green Gir forest. The animals and birds inhabiting the forest are named. The Maldharis raise cows and buffaloes. The women prepare dairy products which the men sell in nearby villages and markets. Thus, the emphasis is on local produce- an eco-friendly practice. It is noteworthy that they still walk to the village market. The milk is not transported in trucks as in the cities. Their life is far removed from today's commercialization. Dinaben is industrious-she works on traditional embroidery in her spare time. "The Maldharis do not trouble the animals in the forest. They are busy with their work," points out the author. Firewood is used for cooking. Cattle grazing is the traditional occupation of the Maldharis. "The Gir is Dinaben's home. It also belongs to the lions. So, let us help protect the forest," says the narrator. The story ends on this note of wisdom. Human-animal co-existence by sensible habitat-sharing, avoidance of conflict by adopting the non-interference policy that the animals themselves follow, use of locally grown produce, localised economy and no indulgence in commercialization or over-consumption are some of the ecologically friendly habits one can learn from the indigenous community. A list of facts about the Asiatic lion is appended. The book reminds the reader that only 350 lions are left in Gir, the last resort of the Asiatic Lion. Beautiful photographs of the forest and the tribal people enrich the book.

Vriksha: Original Tree Stories and Real Tree Facts by Vinitha Ramchandani is an interesting combination of fact followed by fiction. *Vriksha* started as a workshop to help children identify trees

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that surround them. The narrative pattern of the book is, myth or folktale about the tree, followed by descriptions and scientific facts about common Indian trees such as the rain tree, the mango, the neem, the Indian laburnum, tamarind, banana plant, the beach hibiscus, the jackfruit and so on. Even the 'story' portions of the book are interspersed with facts about the tree, brought in casually and integrated into the fabric of the narrative. One learns that the rain tree spreads out its branches and so the trees under it do not get sufficient sunlight. When the trees fade, the birds and insects leave. In the story "How Kanee was Rewarded," Kanee, the poor village woman gathers herbs in the forest to make medicine. She loves the earth and everything that grows on it. "She plucked leaves, uprooted plants, scraped the bark of trees but she did so gently, never injuring them" (13). The village belles of yore reddened their lips with beetroot juice, thus favouring natural cosmetics. "In Between Heaven and Earth: The Story of Coconut" gives a fanciful explanation for the great height of the coconut tree. The tree was originally Coconna, a girl from heaven, but due to a curse, she was sent away from *Devalok*, the abode of the gods. "Away from heaven but nowhere close to earth, it stands covered in green. Coconna was sent away from heaven, but remained closely in touch with the sky, hanging by a long stalk, high on a tree. If you finally get through the green and brown husk, there is a bit of *amrut* inside to make you feel energetic and beautiful" (54). This is a reference to the many health-giving properties of the coconut. In "Why the Neem Grew Bitter," the war of the gods deprived the earth of water and almost all the trees "bent forward and dried out" (59). The neem is happy in any conditions, even when there is no rain. "Mother Earth is also another uncomplaining, quiet god. So, the neem tree sent her roots deep into earth with a message to the heart of Mother Earth, 'Mother, we need water: Please send some up'" (60). When there is a battle, water, germs, worms, bugs and parasites multiply. This angers the neem tree. In the past, it was the neem that gave shelter to the gods who were attacked by the demons. Though it was a mere tree, it was able to drive away the demons of disease because it became poisonous. So the gods blessed her: "Your bitterness will be medicine to the good and poison to the bad" (62). This is a reference to the anti-bacterial and anti-microbial properties of the neem, which are greatly appreciated by medical science today:

And to this date, the neem tree which never needs too much of anything, either water or sun, is considered to be a powerful tree. Every part of the neem tree, the roots, the bark and the leaves are used as medicine. Most people in India treat the neem tree as a holy tree and to date, the demons-pests and germs-are warded off by the extracts from neem. (62)

In the non-fiction portion of the story, it is mentioned that "Neem infusion is so powerful that when ploughed into the soil, it protects plant roots from nematodes, worms that live on others like parasites and white ants" (65).

"Tamara Learns Her Lesson" is about the tamarind tree. Tamara, who is unhappy and therefore sour. In an effort to sensitizing children to nature, the story also asserts that "trees are powerful beings. They know when a person is mean, or nice or happy or sad" (67).

The Autobiography of a Tree by Saroj Mukherjee, translated by Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan, is narrated in first person by a tree which lives in a forest. The tree begins by saying, “I am merely an ordinary tree, one of millions” (5). This makes it representative. The tree describes the soil or earth as his mother and the sun as his father. It was given sanctuary and nourished by the earth. The light of the sun gave him strength and helped him grow tall. He was born in a forest and considered the animals, birds and people from nearby villages as his family. Like all children, he looked forward to growing up. When he was frightened at night, he took courage from his bigger fellow trees who taught him to bend his branches in the direction of the wind to withstand storms. Shedding his old leaves was like discarding old clothes and acquiring new ones. The old leaves fertilise the soil and build the reserves of the earth. A little girl called Bansuri lived in a nearby village. She would go to the river, fill a little cup with water and water tiny plants with it. Bansuri tells her grandmother that the plants “are thirsty, grandma, but they cannot tell us because they cannot speak” (16). The tree recalls softly: “Sometimes she would gently shake my branches with her little hands as though she was extending a hand of friendship” (17). Once, the tree listens to a conversation among the sparrows seated on one of its branches. A sparrow sorrowfully wonders why some people catch and kill birds. “Does it please them to make us unhappy?” (17). This makes the tree reflect on the plight of the caged birds which were accustomed to the open skies. The residents of a tree are as diverse as that of a multi-storeyed building. Some birds and animals burrow into the trunk of the tree to live. When the young tree complains to his brothers about it, the other trees respond: “No, brother, these holes and pits bring air to you and make your roots and your branches stronger by shifting the ground beneath” (19).

A tree spends its entire life in the service of others. Its branches and leaves are of use to so many. And when its leaves fall to the earth, they compost into the soil and strengthen it. The roots of the tree lovingly hold the earth in place. In view of all its service to humanity, the tree asks:

Our breath cleanses the atmosphere and when we are chopped down, we are of great help and use to those who kill us. Yet, how many people think of us with affection or gratitude and stroke our trunks with care? And when people rest in the coolness of our shade and the breeze of our fluttering leaves, how many think to thank us? . . . If there were no trees, the earth would be dry and fallow.” (23)

The tree remembers the boy Hariya with affection. He prevents his friends from stealing baby birds from their nests. The tree is grateful: “I knew the mother bird would be grief-stricken and would die” (25).

The tree is philosophical in its thoughts about human nature. In its wisdom it remarks:

I used to wonder all the time why people go to war. If one has food in one’s stomach and a place to call home, then what else does one need? My trunk had grown tall and my branches were high and when I looked around, the world seemed to be an expansive, beautiful place. If people lived joyfully on earth, how good it would be!

Jungle animals kill other animals for their food. But they only kill what they need and what they can consume. So why do humans have arguments and wars? (28)

The tree is worried when a cheetah that is accused of stealing goats is chased by the villagers. So far, there had been no man-animal conflicts in the area. When he asks his friend the kite about the animal's fate, the kite enquires:

Are you asking about the animal who has an injured paw and limps? . . . A hunter shot him and although he did not die, he was badly injured and was unable to move for a few days. He had to forage and eat off the discards of other animals. . . . it was hard for him to hunt forest animals. And how long would other cheetahs allow him to share their kill? That is why he begun to encroach on the farms in the villages for easy prey. I'm sure that he will be caught and killed soon. (30)

If he had not been shot by the hunter in the first instance, he would have not intruded on village property. The cheetah kept away from human habitation for four to five days. But hunger forces him to return to the village and attack the goats. He is shot and killed by the hunter who had committed the original crime. "I learn that many jungle animals were injured by hunters and as a result became dangerous to farm animals and villagers," says the tree and bitterly concludes: "No one really considered who was actually at fault" (33).

The autobiography of the tree comes to an end when loggers start chopping down the forest. Their advent is signalled by the raucous birds that fill the sky in alarm. They have been deprived of their homes in the trees. The loggers are cutting down the trees on the other side of the mountain. Soon, they would cut him down, too. The tree who once says: "Think of us as soldiers of the forest. We safeguard mother earth" (39) now muses sadly: "Today we stand tall and proud. But tomorrow so many of us will be pieces on the forest floor. Has anyone considered our pain and sorrow?" (50).

The tree has a last request to make to the reader: "I may not remain but remember me and think of me. When you pass by trees, imagine them to be your friends and stroke their trunks with affection. Remember, that like you, they too experience sadness, joy and pain" (50-51).

Tara Tambe, Forest Friend by Anita Vachharajani is the amusing story of a typical urbanite girl who wants to go to an amusement park for her holidays. But her parents have other ideas. They want to spend their vacation at Bamhagarh Forest Reserve. Tara's father tells her, "It is a beautiful, dense forest, full of trees, animals, birds and flowers and plants . . ." Her mother says enthusiastically that it would be wonderful to spend three days in the middle of the forest. Tara is shocked. She protests: "A silly forest full of dumb animals is just borrr-ing!" (6-7). In spite of the tantrums she stages, her parents take her to the sanctuary as planned. Tara does not enjoy the beauty of the valley. She thinks only of candyfloss and roller coaster rides. The forest officer, Neena Shetty, takes them around. She warns them: "Now, I must ask you all to be on your best behaviour in the forest."

Remember, the forest belongs to the animals who live in it, and we humans are just guests. So please, please be a Forest Friend – don't scare the animals by shouting or playing loud music." She also asks them not leave food wrappers lying around since animals can choke on the bits of plastic. Tara is determined to do the opposite. She loudly pops gum, deliberately plucks leaves and breaks branches, throws her candy wrappers around, scares away a herd of deer by jumping on dry leaves and whistles loudly. She trails behind, playing a video game while the others observe nature with interest. When the holiday is over, the family returns to Pune. Tara's parents report back to work and the young girl sits at home watching television. Suddenly, fantastic things begin to happen. A tiger arrives by parcel post. Various birds and animals join it. They plan to have a party at her house. They litter the place, make it extremely dirty, and generally wreak havoc in order to punish her for invading their area. The rhinoceros complains that unlike the forest, the city is too hot. The python, making itself comfortable on the living-room sofa says, "Hmm. I HATE cities, . . . the roads make my belly itch" (24-25). This mirrors Tara's dislike of the forest. Two monkeys which break a precious vase justify the act saying, "We're rare and precious too" (22). When Tara calls to the animals to stop, the bear tells her in a growly voice, "Do you remember Bamhagarh forest? We certainly remember your visit there! I have a list of all the horrible things you said and did there. Since you dirtied our forest when you threw garbage, broke branches and tore leaves, we thought we'd do the same to your house!" (26). Tara protests thoughtlessly: "B-but that was a silly, dirty forest! This is my home!" Soon, The bear growls down at her, "The forest is our home, Tara, just as this is yours." (26).

Tara's attitude changes and she begins to enjoy the animal party. The python helps by getting rid of the rats in the garden. The animals clean up the house when they leave. They have to visit a boy in Dibrugarh. Tara is sad to lose her new friends. She learns a lesson and becomes Tara Tambe, Forest Friend.

A Wild Elephant at Camp by Anupama Moharkar follows the approved pattern of fiction followed by fact. The story follows trained elephants working in a forest camp. It features the rescue of a wild elephant calf, based on a real-life incident. Illustrations in gavage colour along with photographs of elephants and tribal villages add value to the narrative.

The narrative voice is that of twelve-year-old boy, Kutti, a character adapted from real life. The young female elephant Tulasi is in his charge. She lives at the elephant camp in the wildlife sanctuary. Kutti's village is inside the sanctuary, amidst thick forest. Kutti enumerates the wildlife in the sanctuary - elephants, sloth bears, snakes, bison, panther, deer, monkeys and wild dogs. Tame camp elephants are in charge of their *mahouts*, or keepers and are involved in the heavy work of logging. Most are born and bred in the sanctuary, as in the case of Tulasi, who is the daughter of the camp elephant Bama. The story shows how Tulasi is weaned after one year. Tulasi is well cared for. She is regularly scrubbed with hark bark and fed with oats and bran.

One day, a wild baby elephant is found abandoned in a pit. It is rescued and named 'Ramu.' Tulasi is sad because she does not get as much attention as before and experiences sibling rivalry.

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Ramu is trapped in river slush. Tulasi is made to help the panic- stricken pachyderm. Tulasi becomes a heroine. She is happy and becomes Ramu's friend.

My Friend, the Sea by Sandhya Rao was awarded the Ambitious Children's Book Project prize in Germany and has been translated into several languages. The story, about the lives of fisherfolk, is told from the perspective of a young boy. His family is affected by the tsunami, but they slowly re-build their lives. They show acceptance for nature, embodied in the sea – Kadalamma – the Sea Mother.

One Night in the Sunderbans by Tannaz Daver is the story of an eight-year-old Diya, who lives in a village in the Sunderbans- with its mangroves, waterways and dense forests. The girl and her ogat go through a series of adventures that bring them face to face with some of the most deaded creatures of the area- the King Cobra, the crocodile and the majestic Royal Bengal Tiger. The story carries the message about the laws of nature and the endangered environment. The tiger tells Diya that before Man came, all the animals lived in harmony, since they took only what they needed. "But unlike the other animals, your race is greedy. . . Men broke the laws of the forest and then the forest started to punish them." Man-animal conflict increased. The tiger has an important task for Diya: "Tell them about the forest and its laws. Tel them we need to respect each others' space and lives!" he urges. Diya and the great beast develop a kind of affinity that carries hope for the future.

The narrative is followed by photographs of the real Kutti and his elephant and by authentic information about elephants in the Mudumalai sanctuary on the foothills of the Western Ghats- their camp, food and training methods. The elephants at Mudumalai understand Tamil and the Kurumba language and also many words in Hindi. They are taught sixty basic commands. The approved method of progression from fiction to fact is followed in the book.

Today, due to the impact of the visual media, picture books and graphic novels have a special appeal and significance for children, who can be led towards reading only with the help of pictures. These books are popular with adults also and may so be considered "crossover fiction." It is seen from the study that picture books provide a healthy, balanced diet for the Indian child with their eco-conscious narratives, innovative designs, and colourful, appealing and accurate drawings.

Chapter IV Books for Young Readers

Books for younger children who are beginning to read on their own, and have progressed beyond the picture-book stage, have, for a long time been fed on a diet of folktales, legends, mythological stories, fables and highly didactic short stories. Children of today soon get bored with repetitive fare and turns to the electronic media, thus losing the habit of reading. Now, the scenario has changed with writers of Indian fiction for children putting in their creative efforts to provide the young with appealing reading matter which entertains and also educates without offending the sensibilities of the self-respecting child.

Books published by the Children's Book Trust and the National Book Trust which have collections of short stories and very short novels, and the output of the newer publishing houses such as Tulika, Pratham Books, Katha and Duckbill appeal to this age-group. Even comparatively longer novels like *Younguncle in the Himalayas* and *Andamans Boy* are popular with young children above ten. Zai Whitaker told the author (Whitaker "Interview") that she exclaimed, "How can you have a novel for children? It must be short stories," when approached by Sandhya Rao, Editor, Tulika for a book. She was, however, persuaded to write *Andamans Boy*. The eco-consciousness that was created in picture books must be evoked and developed at this stage.

Children in the younger age-group are attracted towards animals and plants, particularly domestic animals and gardens. Mystery and adventure stories, family relationships, school life, holidays, pet animals, gardens, the seasons, humour, identifying birds, animals, trees, plants, flowers have their place in their reading. Animals are depicted as lovable and in humorous situations. Children in this age-group want to feel the security of a world which is within the control of themselves or friendly adults.

Some of the books under consideration are: Nilima Sinha's *Mystery of the Falling Mountains*, Vandana Singh's *Younguncle in Town* and *Younguncle in the Himalayas*, Suniti Namjoshi's *Aditi and the Thames Dragon*, Zai Whitaker's *Andamans Boy* Shamim Padamsee's *Rebels in Rajasthan* *The Story-Catcher* by Varsha Seshan, *24 Short Stories* published by Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, *The Carpenter's Apprentice* edited by Rosalind Wilson, *The Banyan Tree: 15 Value-Based Stories* published by Children's Book Trust, Priya Nagarajan's *Nona and the Rain*, Geetha Dharmarajan's *Days with Thathu*, Geetha Jain's *On a Tiger's Trail*, Uma Anand's *The Pool in the Jungle*, Seema Chatterjee's *The Chattering Forest*, *The Puffin Book of Animal Stories for 6-year olds* edited by Chatura Rao, *The Green Civilizations* series by Benita Sen, *Getting Granny's Glasses*, *A Long Walk for Bina* and *The Blue Umbrella* by Ruskin Bond.

In Nilima Sinha's *Mystery of the Falling Mountains*, the children Dipak, Richa, Ajay and Rustom battle against a very powerful group of people who are out to exploit natural resources to fulfil their greed. As their jeep travels up the winding mountain road at night, they hear mysterious crashing and roaring noises. The jeep loses its balance. "The whole mountain seemed to be crashing

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down on them” (9). They had narrowly escaped a landslide. Dipak explains that since there was not enough vegetation on the hillside anymore, landslides occur when there was heavy rain. “Landslides are more frequent in areas where there are no plants to hold the soil together” (12).

The denudation of the mountainside is made more poignant by describing its natural beauty. Ajay exclaims: “Oh look, a sight fit for gods!” . . . “snow shimmering on distant peaks . . . range upon range of green hills . . . and the ribbon of blue down below in the valley” (17). Thickly wooded ranges, lush green valleys and rolling meadows covered with yellow daisies delight the children. But they soon learn that commercialization of nature begins to spoil the idyll. Mr. Lall and his wife, who are Indians settled in the United States offer to buy Mrs. Pant’s house and the surrounding land. “I take it as my sacred duty to preserve this place in all its pristine beauty,” Mrs. Pant replies. She is attached to her husband’s property and is against the Lalls’ ideas of building a tourist resort to “develop the place” (34). “This place is not just a legacy from my husband. It is a gift from nature” (36), she goes on to say.

Dipak enjoys walking in the hills, “stepping on the crunchy pine needles” “I love the cool damp feeling you get when you walk under the shady oaks. I can hunt for pinecones, pluck fat mushrooms, discover new wildflowers Sometimes, if I am lucky, I can see a beautiful rare bird. It is fun to find new shortcuts” (35), he says enthusiastically. Commercialization would replace the mountain-paths with cement roads and the lovely old houses with shopping malls and restaurants.

Illegal logging is a continuous process in the remote mountains. The exploiters of nature break all laws with impunity since there is no control over them. Richa hears a “thuck-thuck” sound of tree- cutting throughout the night. The children see logs floating downstream.

Dipak’s mother had been upset about this and had reported it to the authorities several times but to no avail. The villagers probably know who the culprits are but are too scared to reveal their identity. Many formerly wooded areas are now bare. It is because of Mrs. Pant’s presence that illegal logging is somewhat controlled near the farm. Moti the dog’s milk is poisoned. Someone sets the farmhouse on fire. However, nature showers rain on the burning house and saves it. The children suspect that the landslide is not wholly due to natural causes.

A cave with lovely coloured rocks is discovered. Shivnath the tree thief wants to blow up the mountains and use the stone as building material. All the natural resources of the area are open to exploitation. “First trees then the mountains itself? Is there no end to man’s greed?” asks Mrs Pant (99).

The Lalls, who are at heart not wicked people, only mislead, change their minds about building a resort there. Hari Lall realizes, “Look at all the beauty spread around us, look at the mountains, the trees, the people. . . . There is no sense in building luxury hotels here. To enjoy the beauty of the mountains you must be prepared to live close to nature” (99-100),

Mrs. Pant's suggestion of introducing adventure trekking in the area is a viable alternative. Ecotourism blends commercial interests with ecological sensitivity and presents a practical solution, something that Nilima Sinha offers in her books. "But remember not to throw trash around,' laughs Mrs. Pant" (101).

About the landslide, Richa wonders, "Did the men really cause the landslide. Or was it a natural phenomenon?" "Both," answered Ajay, "It is a natural calamity. Human beings are responsible too. They remove the vegetation and expose the soil. They blast the mountains with dynamite, they make deep holes to mine rocks. They disturb nature in so many different ways and disturb the ecological balance." "No wonder the mountains start to fall,' said Richa (102).

Thus, Nilima Sinha's *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* brings to the fore the problems of illegal logging and quarrying, deforestation and its consequences, intimidation of protestors, the despoiling of natural beauty by commercial tourism and also offers a solution to the latter in the form of ecotourism.

Young Uncle Comes to Town, a collection of short stories by Indian-born author of children's fiction, Vandana Singh, reflects her life-long interest in ecology and the natural environment. All the five stories in this collection, especially the title story, "Younguncle Comes to Town," and also "Younguncle and the Monkey Summer" and "Younguncle's Village Visit" contain descriptions of trees, birds and animals, though they mostly have a small-town setting. The Wodehousian humour of the author ensures that ecological wisdom blends well with the text, avoiding platitudes and the overt moralizing tone that were the drawbacks of children's fiction in previous times.

Even in the introductory story, the reader gets the impression that Younguncle, "a grownup with the heart of a kid," as Sangeetha Barooah puts it, is a person who lives in harmony with his environment. He does not get irritated because he is rain-soaked. Younguncle "was looking about him with eyes full of approval, as though the rainstorm had been just the thing he had ordered with his lunch" (4). He deliberately lets raindrops fall into the earthen teacup that has brought back from his train journey and scratches a nearby buffalo's head in a friendly manner. Younguncle's intrinsic love of nature perhaps springs from his experiences of living close to nature in his native village. Thus, character is influenced by setting.

Younguncle definitely displays eco-friendly behaviour. Coming to stay with his brother and his family, he appears with an odd tin plate on his head. Younguncle explains that he had exchanged his umbrella for the tinplate to feed birds. He is not afraid to appear ridiculous, when he knows that what he is doing is good. "A mere umbrella for this antique plate in which three generations of bird-sellers have fed their stock and fended off the rain . . ." He does not bring his things in plastic suitcases, but in "wooden cases covered with soggy newspaper" (6,7).

The reader learns that he had bought a number of birds imprisoned in "small, crude cages made of wire and wood" (5) at the railway station. They are not gifts for his nephew and nieces. He

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had bought them in order to release them, and he does so in front of the children, teaching them an invaluable lesson. The birds fly away in “a great flurry of wings and colours” (5).

Younguncle brings the children small gifts that are definitely eco-friendly and are meant to inculcate in them the love of nature. His suitcase “was filled to the brim with the most unusual things .An enormous conch shell he had found on the shores of the Arabian Sea, a fragile piece of coral that had been washed up on the beach in the Andaman islands, a sculpture of twisted vines that been given to him by an artistically inclined monkey from the forests of Assam . . .” (7). It is to be noted that it is “washed up coral,” which has not been deliberately broken off from a reef by humans. By acknowledging the artistic tendencies of monkeys, Younguncle endows them with the right to be treated on par with mankind. Indeed, the children hear that “He had been kidnapped as a child by the monkeys of Govindpur temple and returned safely to his family after a wild joy-ride among the trees” (35).

“Younguncle and the Monkey Summer” deals with the problem of animal-human encounters that take place during times of scarcity. The scorching summer had deprived the monkeys in the forest of water. The cause could be that human habitations had invaded monkey territory. This is implied by the semi-urban small-town setting of the stories. The monkeys, upset by lack of food and water in their home territory, are forced to seek the same in the town. Troupes of thirsty monkeys come into town to eat fruit and steal whatever little water was used for vegetable gardens” (35). Though people were afraid of monkeys, they considered them to be sacred, so they were left undisturbed. Thus, traditional beliefs help in the conservation of nature.

The monkeys play havoc in all the gardens, except that of Younguncle’s brother This is probably due to Younguncle’s friendship with the monkeys and also due to his precaution. He provides drinking water and gives them small presents of fruits, instead of driving them away, which would have been a futile effort. He shows that humans and their animal neighbours can live in harmony, each helping the other in times of need. It is seen that elephants who invade human habitations do not harm people who have a supply of water ready for them. The children and their uncle play ball with the simians. This helps Younguncle to lead the monkeys to the rescue of the cow, Janaki, who had been stolen by the avaricious Paytu Lal.

The monkeys do not stay all summer. Yusuf, Younguncle’s friend, who is a wildlife expert, begins an innovative project to restore water supply to the forest. In a small clearing in the camp, Yusuf had a well dug and topped it with a hand-pump. “The monkeys learned to use this in no time and shared the water with “creatures not blessed with opposable thumbs” (50).

Vandana Singh names a number of birds, animals, trees and fruits in her short stories. In the first story, for example, Younguncle’s benevolence extends to “green and yellow parakeets, tiny multi-coloured munias, dove and pigeons with iridescent wings (6). The neem, banyan, shishum and guava trees feature in the stories. Younguncle’s friend Yusuf “could make the most amazing animal

noises” to entertain the children. Notable are his imitations of a “dyspeptic water buffalo” and “a hoolock gibbon in full howl” (53). He brings them a picture book full of all kinds of animals.

The stories contain exceptional descriptions of nature. Younguncle, on entering his brother’s gate sees the “Lush, rain-soaked garden and the dripping trees” (3). Seasonal change is described poetically: “Summer had been washed away by the monsoons, and after a month of steady rain, the clouds receded to make way for the cooler season” (50). During the bus-ride to his native village, Younguncle sees that “The fields were yellow with mustard flowers as far as eye could see and here and there were dark smudges of mango groves. Water gleamed in nearby creeks where children bathed and splashed, and little thatched-hut villages appeared like mushrooms in the midst of the fields” (54). In the Neelamgiri Sanctuary, “The forest rose up into the distant blue hills, and the birds anticipated the dawn with a cacophony of sound” (75). Bakvasnaath, the family ghost, makes his feelings known by sending down “a gentle shower of leaves.” (90). It is to be noted that though the story has a small-town setting, the charms of the countryside lie within it, as seen in the descriptions of bullock-carts and muddy roads and in the near-rustic simplicity of the household. As Kamala Platt observes, “In an Indian home, nature is not separate from home” (195).

Younguncle becomes a hero when, in “Younguncle’s Village Visit,” he saves the Neelamgiri Wildlife Sanctuary and its pride, a grand old tiger, from the clutches of the Gobarmal clan, who had been terrorizing the area for generations. Yusuf shares with Younguncle his concern for the safety of the Neelamgiri national Sanctuary. It is a small, protected forest, “one of the last resorts of the Indian tiger” (54). But all the forest rangers he appoints leave after a week or so without putting forth any reason. He requests his friend to look into the mystery.

Younguncle leaves for his father’s village where he had “spent memorable summers as a schoolboy” (50). His great-uncle and great aunt, Ancient Uncle and Ancient Aunty live there. Younguncle is met on the way by Ancient Uncle driving a bullock cart. Bira, his bullock goes very fast because of his friendship with Hira, the horse. “Bira moved like a great, humped mountain, streaks of dust and sweat gathering on his white flanks” (60). The bullock-cart overtakes the bus with ease! Due to his friendship with Hira, Bira runs much faster than the average bullock. Vandana Singh’s domestic animals be these Ramu’s cow, Janaki who produces the “best, tastiest, richest milk in town” (50), or Hira and Bira, leave a mark on the mind.

Gobarmal the Younger and his family, the local landlords, had been terrorizing the area for generations. They regularly violate the Neelamgiri Sanctuary. “Sanctuary-banctuary!” Ancient Uncle said scornfully, “It is used by the Gobarmal clan as their private hunting ground, and nobody can stop them” (65). There was a room in their mansion filled with the heads of all the animals they had killed in the forest. “Deer, bears, panthers, and probably a tiger or two” (65).

Ancient Uncle says that there was an old tiger there that Gobarmal had been trying unsuccessfully to hunt for years unsuccessfully. Younguncle cleverly learns when the next tiger-hunt

is to take place and goes to the Neelamgiri forest. He feels the irony in the sign which says, “Neelamgiri Wildlife Sanctuary: No Hunting” (73).

Younguncle finds that Gobarmal’s men had dug a huge pit to entrap the beast. He waits for old Gobarmal and his foolish young son to come. Knowing jungle etiquette, Younguncle does not make any sudden moves and so does not frighten of the ducks in the pond. He is also able to get into close proximity with the tiger that comes to the pond to drink water. In contrast, Gobarmal and son do not care to be quiet. They bring with them a donkey as bait and also a huge quantity of food for themselves.

Younguncle quietly departs with the food Younguncle pays obeisance to the old tiger when he meets him and places the food on a platform as offering. The old tiger relishes the spread, feeling that “all that he had before this banquet seemed crude by comparison” (80). Younguncle’s action of feeding the tiger human food, could, off course be construed as unwise ecologically, but seen in the context of the plot, makes good sense. Thanks to Younguncle’s efforts, the grand old tiger escapes falling victim to Gobarmal. The erring duo is humiliated in public and the people lose their fear of the erstwhile tyrants.

After the defeat of Gobarmal, the new park ranger had no trouble. Yusuf says, “Nobody hunts in the forest anymore” (92). However, the ranger soon finds work of a different kind on his hands. The old tiger, unable to hunt, raids his kitchen and comes there regularly for meals, having developed a taste for fine cuisine. The ranger becomes the tiger’s cook. The tiger has a surprising partiality to spinach paneer. But Vandana Singh implies that it is better that the tiger becomes a spinach (rather than a man) eater.

Simplicity marks “good” character such as Younguncle and Ancient Uncle, whereas the “bad” ones such as Gobarmal and Paytu Lal are huge consumers. Gobarmal steals Hira the horse has a huge mansion, hunts for trophies and is a glutton, Paytu Lal maintains a luxurious garden of fruit trees behind his high walls even when the village and the nearby forest reel under water scarcity He steals Janaki the cow. It is seen that the villains are rich and powerful, displaying Vandana Singh’s eco-Marxist leanings.

That Vandana Singh’s *Younguncle Comes To Town* justifies ecocritical examination is seen that in the interaction between character and setting, descriptions of the landscape, fauna and flora; in the attitudes displayed; portrayal of eco-friendly and eco-activist behaviour as well as in representation of ecological problems such as animal-human encounters and poaching, The success of the stories led the author to write *Younguncle in the Himalayas*, which deals with deforestation and a Chipko-like resistance movement.

In *Younguncle in the Himalayas*, the sequel to *Younguncle Comes to Town*, Vandana Singh continues to deal with environmental issues. Deforestation and land-grabbing are some of the serious problems which form the core of the whimsically humorous tale.

Younguncle continues to converse with the monkeys. His closeness to nature is reflected in the attitude of his young nephew and nieces. Three children, Saritha, ten, Ravi, eight and the Baby were quite proud to have a monkey for an uncle. “In India it is common for children to call their relatives’ male friends “Uncle” as well, so by the logic, the monkey was also an Uncle” (1). Man-animal non-dualism is emphasised here.

The family decides to beat the summer heat of Rampur by retreating to Hotel Pine-Away in the Himalayas. The mountain landscape is described accurately and economically: “Great pines and firs rose up like temple spires” (10) . . . “Great jagged peaks of snow and ice” (20) are in the background. Typically, black-faced Himalayan langurs are the first fauna they come across.

The villain of the piece is Pradeep Daalmakhani of the Grabbit and Runn International Realty. He is a loud-mouthed and flashily dressed individual who has no compunction in resorting to land-grabbing and illegal tree-felling. The denudation of the forest is described vividly: “As they walked, their feet crunching on pine-needles, they noticed that the trees often thinned out into barren little clearings from which muddy tracks led off in various directions” (32). “A forest with a balding problem,” Younguncle comments. “I’m going to take some pictures Sarita said, ‘I’m going to write a report on tree-cutting in the Himalayas for school’” (33), exemplifying ecological awareness in children.

Regarding monkey raids, a frequent source of man-animal conflict, Younguncle observes, “The law has been: monkeys pilfer a banana or two from humans, and humans worship them. Now humans are not only pilfering from monkeys, they are destroying them by destroying their homes” (41).

They hear a loud, buzzing sound, “as though there were a giant bee loose in the woods. It is followed by a horrible groaning, a ripping, tearing cry of pain that freezes them in their tracks followed by the crash of falling trees” (33). Near two fallen pine trees, a tall man with an electric saw is seen intimidating a crowd of old women in shawls and long skirts. One of the women, Dhanpati Devi, rightly claims that the land belongs to her, but is told arrogantly that it belonged to the government and that Mr. Daalmakhani had later bought it. Her bold friend, demands: “So tell me, were will we get wood and water, and fodder for our cattle, if you keep cutting down the trees?” (35). The tree-feller coolly informs her that Dhanpati Devi and her husband had both been killed in an accident and as they had no descendants, the land reverted to the government. The man, Chaturi Lal pretends not to recognize her. “Those of you who did not give up your land papers might find yourselves and your descendants declared dead!” (36). The old woman refuses to be intimidated. The other women, adopting a Chipko-like stance, fling their arms protectively around the trees and glare defiantly at the men over their shoulders.

The problems arising through environmental degradation lead to chain reaction. The men of the village have to work in towns near the plains. They used to be farmers, the old postman says, but the crops failed two years in a row, after the tree-cutting began, and they had to leave the land to the

women and find work. Now they labour in factories, or run tea stalls, or sell newspapers in far-off cities. About the village forest, he recalls, “Many years ago the villagers themselves had nearly destroyed it by over-cutting. Soon the streams in the forest dried up and the women had to walk miles to another hill to get their water” (56). But under the leadership of Sapna Devi, the bold old lady they saw the day before, the villagers began to take care of their forest. They decided to collect only deadwood and not harm living trees, and they appointed a guardian to make sure everyone obeyed the rules. It took some years, but the forest began to come back and turn green again, and the streams began to flow” (56).

The ‘lower-caste’ people like the little orphan Rat-girl, Dulari were the most exploited. Soon, when agriculture began to fail all the castes came together to save their land. They managed to prevent many trees from being cut. Tricks like cutting trees in the evenings and forging fake death certificates are adopted by the land-grabbers. Corruption and friends in high places such as Pakora Lal, the representative in the state assembly, had stood Dhaalmakhani in good stead. “Very likely they will prevail in the end,” says the postman sadly (57).

The mindless arrogance of Dhaalmakhani is obvious in his speech: “. . . they keep complaining that the soil is being washed away because of the tree-cutting. . . I’ve already suggested to them that they cover the hillsides with aluminium foil, but they won’t listen . . . yaas, they make things difficult for me, don’t realize how important I am . . .” (60). Driving rashly on the mountain roads, the realtor is a menace to the environment in more than one way. Tanuja, his reluctant bride-to-be comments on his appearance in terms of pollution: “Ugh! The man is a walking oil spill!” (85).

Dhaalmakhani tries to make a deal with the unsuspecting guru of the Quantum Banana Spiritualists. He wants to build a “wonderful and luxurious spiritual retreat for the Great Keladas and his followers.” In fact, several Keladas complexes: “It will have the razz-ma-tazz that all the foreign retreats have!” (106). Dhaalmakhani detests all things Indian and natural. The proliferation of ashram complexes pandering mainly to foreigners cropping over the pristine landscape is a problem in itself.

The children play an active role in the prevention of deforestation. Ravi notes down the number of the lorry used to take away illegally felled trees. The expose occurs at the meeting of the Quantum Banana spiritualists and Dhaalmakhani, an event well covered by the press. Sapna Devi tells reporters about the life of the villagers which depended upon the trees and how tree-cutting had destroyed their livelihood. She spoke about their menfolk struggling to survive in the cities, sending money back when they could, and how their children were growing up without their fathers. She talks about how the villagers had once over-cut their forest and how they had slowly, over years, nurtured the forest back to life. But now, within the two years since Dhaalmakhani had arrived, their land was turning dry and cracked, the crops withering on their stalks, and the streams slowly drying up. The women had to walk farther and farther every day to gather food and fodder from what was left of the forest. Sapna Devi speaks about the days when no food was available, and how the children couldn’t sleep for the hunger gnawing their stomachs, and how they would cry when fed the thin gruel made from grain husk and bitter tree bark, but they would eat because that was all they

had (112). The audience, which includes a sizeable number of foreigners, is visibly moved. Sapna Devi provides documentary evidence in support of her claim. The papers are grabbed by Daalmakhani, but ultimately recovered.

The leader of the Quantum Banana Spiritualists, in a parting gesture, probably symbolic of human-animal symbiosis, indicates that the chief monkey is the Appointed One. Younguncle interprets: “The Appointed One says that he accepts your allegiance. The spiritual retreat, he says, need not be built, for it is already here. In the deep silence of the forests, in the majesty of trees, in the aroma of ripe bananas there is true wisdom. For what are spas, air-conditioning and high-definition TV but illusions of the deepest kind?” (130).

After months of struggle, legal headaches and national publicity, the villagers get their forest back from the politician Pakora Lal’s greedy clutches. Their greatest hurdle is convincing the officials that they were not, in fact, dead: (137). Tanuja, no longer under compulsion to marry Dhaalmakhani, arranges for legal help and thus Dulari gets back her land.

The author says in a note: “Although the characters and events in the novel are fictional, environmental degradation in the Himalayas is all too real. There are real-life movements for environmental conservation and social change, often led by village women, such as the famous Chipko Andolan of the Himalayas.” It is noteworthy that Vandana Singh was formerly part of a student environment group called Kalpavriksh.

Suniti Namjoshi’s *Aditi* series began in informal story-telling sessions to her young students in London. The books have feminist and ecocritical overtones, the latter best being represented in the novelette under consideration. Though, as in traditional fables, the animals in her tales speak, they are not anthromorphic. Most retain the characteristics of their species. For example, it is shown how the ant, despite its size, is useful. It climbs into the cabinet through a crack and opens the page containing information about River Dragons. “For their size, ants are quite extraordinarily strong” explains Roshan (40).

Aditi and the Thames Dragon deals with the problem of water pollution. Aditi and her friends receive a letter appealing for help from Roshan and Rohit in London who fear that the River Thames would overflow. Something was making the river dragon angry, causing it to lash out with its tail. The dragon, a metaphor for nature, is an unseen force in which adults do not believe. The friends fly to the rescue on their dragon friend, Goldie.

In London, the elephant enquires of Rohit, when told that though their destination was near, reaching it would take a very long time because of the traffic, “Why is it slow?” “Too many cars,” replies Rohit, to which the elephant goes on to ask, “But why do people use motor cars?” Rohit does not know what to say. “Because they think it would be faster?” he ventures (25) and is immediately aware of the contradiction in his statement. The elephant wonders why there were no cows or elephants in the city, only motor cars.

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They offer the hand of friendship to the reclusive River Dragon and she rises sluggishly out of an island of junk and debris in the middle of the river. When asked to cease threatening people with her tantrums, she replies weakly, “I threaten no one. . . . I was in pain. Soon it will be over” (33). To the elephant’s alarmed reaction, she explains, “Poison. The river has been poisoned.” They rescue the dragon from the river and put the magically reduced dragon into a bowl of fresh water. “Her removal from the poisoned water of the river seemed to have done her some good” (38). They nurse the river dragon, whose name is Opal, back to health. But Opal says that she has to return to the river, because she is a part of it. She reminisces that the water was once sparkling and clear, but the things that people had thrown into the river over the years had made the water polluted.

Aditi and her friends realise that in order to save Opal, they had to rejuvenate the river. The organism and its habitat could not be separated. Habitat is explained as “place where the animal lives” (280). The story abounds in ecological terms. The terrible nature of the pollution is examined:

The ant had calculated that . . . if each of them spent seven hours a day for seventy years pulling rubbish out of the river, it would still not make very much difference. “You see, he had explained, “all the time that we were pulling rubbish out, people would be throwing more rubbish in. And then, of course, there’s the problem of chemicals, the poisonous substances that have dissolved in the water and are hard to remove” (50).

The enormity of the problem slowly sinks in. They understand that when the river flowed into the sea, it, too would be poisoned. The sea dragons would be affected. Due to the contamination of ground water, the dragons who live in wells would suffer. Fish, whales, dolphins and shellfish would die, as would the seaweeds and the plants in the rivers and the seas. Goldie comes to the conclusion, “We’ve got to stop people from throwing rubbish.” “How?” the practical Rohit asks. The monkey suggests, “We could explain it all to them” Roshan voices the doubts of the reader: “People don’t listen” (51).

Since people pay no heed to the urgency of the problem, the friends decide to bring it to their attention through a sensational demonstration. They manage to enter the television station but the people there were sceptical. That the river was polluted was not news. The dragon Opal has to be restored to her normal size before people accept the fact that the river and its inhabitants were in danger. The cleaning-up process begins. The story ends on a note of optimism, with Opal anticipating her return to her river home in the near future. The protagonists prove effective activists and their campaign to prevent water pollution and to restore the former purity of water resources is a success.

One of the central tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism has been to contest western ideas of development (Huggan and Tiffin 27). These ideas, based on occidental consumerism, took root during colonization and continued thereafter in the new avatar of neocolonization, resulting in the

wiping out of the traditional societies by the dominant culture. Concern for indigenous people and the dangers to their environment has also pervaded the area of children's literature.

Zai Whitaker, niece of Dr. Salim Ali, *The Birdman of India*, is one of the foremost writers of Indian children's fiction today. She has dealt extensively with ecological and environmental issues in her works. *Andamans Boy* portrays the life of the reclusive Jarawa tribe of the Andaman Islands, who lead a symbiotic existence with their surroundings.

Through the eyes of the ten-year old orphan boy Arif, the reader gets to know about the attempts made by unscrupulous land developers and timber merchants to influence government officials and, in the name of tribal welfare, to lure them away to settlements. Deliberate misinformation about the tribe's fierceness and alleged atrocities is spread in order to garner public support for their transportation.

The ten-year-old rich but ill-treated orphan boy, Arif, runs away from his foster parents in crowded Mumbai. He takes a train to Chennai and thereafter manages to board a ship heading towards the Andaman and Nicobar islands. He is excited by the prospect of going there, since his school textbooks have taught him about the "coral reefs, mangrove forests, incredible numbers and varieties of fish and other strange marine animals and plants. And absolutely the best, there were tribes who had never been contacted by outside people" (28). But nothing prepares him for the actual contact with the stunning biodiversity of the region which he experiences on arrival.

On board the ship, Arif witnesses the adaptive behaviour of the seagulls who relish the south Indian snacks brought by the travellers. He is surprised because "in science books birds always picked up worms and insects. . . they had changed their habits to survive in their new environment of crowds and garbage" (38).

Arif is mistaken for the boy who is in charge of looking after the goats which are to be ceremoniously handed over to the tribal people as part of the TUS (Tribal Upliftment Scheme). He learns that this is done as part of a publicity campaign. It is a well-known fact that introduction of new species into an ecosystem disrupts the food chain and ultimately leads to the destruction of the habitat. So, trying to befriend and "tame" the Jarawa by making them bring up livestock goes against the laws of ecology.

Nature plays the role of a surrogate mother to Arif, in the absence of his real one. "From now on, he told himself, I will look for comfort and love in these things: the ocean, the trees, the antics of gulls and terns. These things never go away, never let you down" (39).

The talk on the ship turns to the Jarawa tribe, the original inhabitants of the islands. The sea near the Jarawa Reserve is rich in fish, but anyone who ventures there is met with a shower of arrows. The Jarawa, which meant "The Other," like to lead exclusive lives and avoid contact with outsiders. Some of the people on the ship call them "barbarians" and say that they should be wiped

out with machine guns. But Uncle, Arif's mentor asks, "Whose land is it please? Who broke the law and trespassed?" (44). Shomitra, one of the passengers agrees: "It's their land, and they're dependent on it for food, water, medicines, everything. After all, when the Pakistanis cross into our territory we fight them don't we?" (44).

The Jarawa stories seem like fairy tales to Arif, who wonders whether there were still people who had never seen or used money, bread, butter, shoes, books, rice or sugar. The northernmost group, which still refused contact with outsiders, shot arrows at the sacks of gifts sent by the government as gestures of goodwill, and dumped them into the sea. "They didn't want trash like cloth and buckets. Instinctively, they seemed to know that their survival depended on being left alone" (45). Yet one group, the Friendly Jarawa as they were called, had started accepting gifts. Hence, they were in danger. Quite insensitive to the greatness of tribal society, a passenger callously remarks that they had to adapt since "they can't go on living like jungles forever" (45).

Arif first works in a zoo but later escapes to Twin Island because there is a nation-wide search for him. He builds a hut there and spends his days among the coral reefs, getting familiarized with his new habitat. He meets the Jarawa boy Eetha Aleho while swimming in the water. To his surprise he finds that he is rescued from drowning by "the hostile, uncivilized" Jarawas (Whitaker 108). Despite their ignorance of each other's language, the boys communicate and soon they become friends. The Jarawa boy offers Arif a piece of sweet honeycomb and introduces his friend to some marine life. But very soon an arrow hits Arif. Eetha protects Arif and introduces him to his parents. He tells his father that it was Arif who saved him from drowning. His suspicious father does not believe this story and demands to know whether Arif had won Eetha's friendship with gifts of food. He is also worried that Arif is not alone and that others have used him to get access to their closed community.

After much discussion, they decided that the boy is harmless and decide to take him along to their forest. Their caution is well-founded because the Andamanese, who had mingled with the mainland people, had fallen prey to alcohol and diseases. Their population had fallen from 4,000 to practically zero in fifty years, after the misery and confusion of losing their land, culture and identity.

Arif enjoys living in the Jarawa homeland. The people there eat natural, locally grown food without salt. There are heated discussions among the women about the pros and cons of life before the "outside things came" (120). Huwaned ame, a wise old woman says that one had to beware of things that were too easy. They call the intruders "ghost people." "Our grandfathers and fathers talked of a time when there were no ghost people. Only our type of people. The suddenly there were ghost people everywhere and the forest people disappeared" (121). Gifts such as red plastic buckets and red cloth have won the hearts of some tribal women and their unity has been disrupted. "Our minds have broken wings," says Natalang waye (121). The outsiders offend the dignity of the indigenous people. Kaye says, "They tell us to dance, and laugh at us They look at us as we look at some rare kind of sea creature. ... hmm, interesting, the way it moves . . ." (121). Arif recalls how

the Onge tribe of Little Andaman island, were wiped out once they started adopting the ‘civilized’ way of life.

Whitaker shows that the Jarawa have sensible habits. They cleanse their hands with a purifying mud before eating. Local produce ensures a balanced diet. They carefully clean their pearly-white teeth with fishbones. Pregnant women are given nutritious food. There is a peaceful social order. They depend on consensus; rarely is there any split among them because of differences of opinion. Whenever one of them is in danger, there is an unspoken law that all the other members of the tribe follow him to help. Yet, European culture and those who fall under its influence view indigenous cultures as “primitive” (Huggan and Tiffin 5).

A big launch called the M.Y. Nicobar comes close offshore. The Jarawa swim to it to receive their gifts. Some of the manners of the tribal girls are embarrassing to the mainland people. Even Arif thinks that the tribals behave like beggars, but soon reasons that they have no idea about possessions and take what they like, just as they would pick fruit from a tree in the forest. One of the mainlanders, a government official, comments: “See how shamelessly they snatch up everything! Sharmaji [a higher government official] will be pleased” (Whitaker 123). The official is happy that there has been an improvement from the previous year, when the gift-dropping did not elicit much response His remark shows that the Jarawa are weakening in their resolve to remain independent.

The government officials, who had no idea that Arif could overhear them, talk to each other about their plans. They would give some of the tribal children a ride on their boats and whisk them away to the Jarawa home in Port Blair. This would aid in the promotion of Sharmaji because then his minister could fly down and be photographed with the children. The Jarawa children would not be sent back but would be given gifts of red cloth and plastic buckets and so would “soon appreciate the conveniences of modern life – electricity, running water, proper clothes” (Whitaker 125). A man, whose name is Rahul, remarks sarcastically, “Oh yes. So, they can be like us. And we, of course, are the best!” (125). The older man does not like this attitude. He asserts that the Jarawa are living on the Government of India’s land. Rahul, defending the rights of the indigenous people retorts, “They were here much before the Government of India was even dreamed of” (Whitaker 125). Rahul’s superior warns him that he would not get promoted if he “talks like a revolutionary.” But Rahul says that the new prime Minister is against the exploitation of the tribals. The government official says, “The Government is going to make over a hundred crores from these forests. We will have 700 square kilometers to parcel out to settlers. Don’t you think that’s more important than 300 jungles who can’t even read and write?” (126). Here, the ethical and legal rights of tribals as well as the efforts of the dominant society to absorb them and thereby lay claim to their land is seen. Whitaker’s views are in keeping with postcolonial ecocriticism which is “morally attuned to the continuing abuses of authority that operate in humanity’s name’ (Huggan and Tiffin 13).

Arif’s attempts to explain to the Jarawa the perfidy of the government officials is at first met with disbelief since the latter have no idea what hypocrisy and betrayal are. They also cannot grasp the concept of money and the greed that it engenders. But after great effort and much discussion,

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they decide to defy the officials and to refuse their gifts. The Jarawa men, including Arif, who has been accepted into the tribe, hide in the trees and shoot arrows at the huge mound of worthless “gifts” brought by the “ghost people” Arif recognizes the Prime Minister of India (whose description fits that of the late A.K. Gujral) among those who land. The Prime Minister is under the impression the Jarawa have voluntarily agreed to leave for the Jarawa home. When he finds that they are being lured away by gifts, he categorically states that he does not want any of his citizens to be kidnapped. He orders the officials not to send any more gift boats, but to leave the Jarawa in peace. His calm bearing and fearless attitude win the admiration of the Jarawa chieftain, who comes down from his tree and presents the delighted Prime Minister with his bow and arrows.

Arif is happy that his warning has been heeded by the tribe. He had previously been confused as to whether his call for ignoring the gift boats was justified. But the pieces of conversation he overhears at Port Blair about the proposed tourism to the Jarawa Reserve the next year after it was “cleared,” the value of the land as real estate and the profits to be derived from the sale of timber, convince him that the forest people and with them, their environment, are in grave danger. Arif’s action saves the whole ecosphere. He continues to live as one of the Jarawa, turning his back to “civilization,” and the enormous fortune awaiting him at Mumbai. Arif’s decision is not a romantic celebration of “the noble savage.” but a mature choice based on experienced reality.

Thus, in *Andamans Boy*, Whitaker exposes myths of development – “amenity,” “benefit,” “improvement” (Huggan and Tiffin 71) for what they are- masks of exploitation by the dominant majority. The descriptions of the flora and fauna of the land, as well as the Jarawa way of life is realistic, since it is based on actual first-hand research by the author. This mingling of fact and fiction has the desired effect of instilling ecological and sociological values in young minds.

In Shamim Padamsee’s *Rebels in Rajasthan*, an adventure tale, the children Vayu and Deeya escape through the Rajasthan desert on camels. They come across a herd of indigenous blackbuck and Vayu informs Deeya about the different kinds of species that live in the desert, such as the wild ass, foxes, desert cats, and a variety of reptiles and birds, which had all adapted to the harsh desert conditions. He also explains that the camel had extra-long lashes to prevent the sand from getting into its eyes and an extra pair of eyelids to brush the sand away.

The Story-Catcher by Varsha Seshan, published by the relatively new publishing house, Happy Squirrel, Mumbai, is a collection of short stories, many of which have nature as their background. Set in a forest, “Coco’s Holiday” is the story is about Coco who is half-deer, half-man. His father, though a human, looks like a wild man. Coco loves the forest because ‘It was much less complicated than the human world, and so much cleaner’ (21). He knows how to survive there. The deer in him made him shun meat and so he eats plants. He hates food that is cooked because he felt that cooking completely destroyed the natural taste of food. He finally discovers a friendly community of humans who accept him. He loves his sylvan home, but is filled occasionally with wanderlust.

In the short story, “The Windy Valley,” young Kavitha lives in a house which is situated on the outskirts of a city. ‘Windy Valley’ is the name of a protected territory near her home. “Protected” meant that “people were not allowed to cut trees that are there,” her father explains (98). It was not exactly a forest, but a “lovely, in-between place” that was neither a farm nor part of a village.

Kavitha is able to sense the magical power of trees, which urge her, in whispers, to share with them her secret fears and worries. The lonesome girl gets comfort through communion with nature.

The short story “The Lake” contains descriptions of scenery and its effect on the protagonist. Harshil and his parents go on a holiday to a hill station “Both sides of the road had trees covered with flowers- laburnum, jacranda, even a few early gulmohar. Harshi, the urban boy looks out of the car window and sighs, saying, “Nature is breathtaking” (133). They go in search of a lake that somebody had told them about. “The drive in itself was worth it, even if they didn’t find the lake. The hills weren’t green, and the waterfalls didn’t weave their way down, it was too early for that. Yet, there was a sense of anticipation in the air- the sun was behind a cloud and everything smelt as if it was waiting for rain” (130). Harshil goes for a swim in the lake and helps restore the eyesight of a dragon. He is rewarded with a precious stone by the grateful beast, signifying that rewards lie in one’s attitude towards nature.

24 Short Stories published by Children’s Book Trust, New Delhi, is to be appreciated for its sensitive portrayal of child-nature relationships. Even some of the descriptions of mundane objects are similes and metaphors related to nature. For instance, in “The Blue Bike” by Kavary Bhatt (, the motorbike belonging to Ranjan’s uncle is “a magic, kingfisher-blue” (5).

“Revathi’s Musical Plants” by Andal Ananthanarayanan, brings out the scientific fact that plants are attracted towards music. Revathi, a young girl, plays the violin near her flowerpots. She notes that the potted plants were healthier than the ones in the courtyard. One day, she sees a movement in her plants when she plays her favourite *raga*. They slowly and slightly bend towards her, though there is no breeze. The same thing happens the next day, too. This time she plays a different tune, one with a quick rhythm. The plants turn away as though they did not like what she is playing. She keeps her knowledge secret. Her balsam plant has beautiful flowers and she decides to enter it for the ‘Best Plant’ contest which was to be held in her colony. The plant is stolen by a neighbour who wins the coveted prize. However, Revathi is able to convince the judges by playing music and making the plants bend towards her. Everyone is astonished at the plants’ response. Revathi’s wrong is set right and she proudly carries home the prize and her pot of plants.

“Pecky the Woodpecker” by E.R.C. Davidar portrays the habits of birds, emphasises the interrelatedness of nature, and shows how nature’s balance can be upset. The woodpecker family lives in a wild mango tree. Pecky the lazy young woodpecker does not want to fly. He just watches the wildlife come to drink in the pond. The habits of woodpeckers are given in detail. A woodpecker, unlike most birds, can go in “reverse gear” (27). Woodpeckers locate insects or larvae lying hidden below the surface of trees. They listen for a hollow sound while they are pecking, which

is an indicator that there is some insect beneath the surface. “We have short, strong legs, sharp claws and our toes are directed forward and backwards to give us a good grip for clinging to tree trunk,” the mother woodpecker tells her son. “Why should we bore holes in wood?” Pecky asks. ‘It is a case of adaptation. Every part of our body is adapted for this way of life, to hunt for insects in tree trunks’”(28), replies the mother bird. Woodpeckers have special absorbent muscles and spongy bones around their brain to save them from shock. They roll their long, barbed tongues, sticky with saliva, over the fat larvae inside the tree trunks. “Son, we have our place in nature. A very important place. Many of the trees you see here would have died, had we not dug out wood-boring beetles and other insects that were damaging them” (29), the mother bird tells her son proudly. Pecky wants an easy life, Too lazy to peck for insects, he tries to eat fruits, but finds that they do not agree with him. He finds that he cannot catch flying insects like flycatchers do. “Every bird has a tail to suit its mode of life. A tail is only slightly less important to a bird than its wings. . . . Pecky’s tail being short and stiff does not help him at all when he tried to twist and turn in the air like a flycatcher” (32). He sees a jungle hen teaching her chicks to find food. She opens a termite nest by scratching. But when Pecky tries to eat termites, his beak picks up more earth than insects. Further, he is exposed to a passing hawk, which is delighted because it rarely sees woodpeckers, which are generally hidden in the foliage of trees. The hawk dives, but fortunately a squirrel sounds the alarm. Pecky stands little chance since he is a weak flier. He seeks shelter in a bush, where the hawk could not follow. He realizes that he is safest in the trees, were the branches and leaves protect him from attack from above. Even if he were to be attacked from the side, he could always slip behind the trunk, faster than any hawk could fly.

When his parents return to see how he is faring, Pecky’s mother remarks that his tree looks sick because wood-boring insects were sapping its strength. “Unless you do something quickly they will kill the tree,” (34), she warns. Pecky begins his task and soon pulls out a borer eating into the tree. To him, it was very tasty, better than any other insect. Pecky reconciles to his woodpecker status and realises his former foolishness. The story shows how Adaptation and interdependence are part of nature and that biodiversity maintains a healthy natural environment.

“Guns on the Hillside’ by Prathiba Nath shows the harm done by the habit of hunting as a pastime. During harvest time there were lots of partridges in the wheat, feeding on the grain that had dropped. Bishnu, a boy working on Col.Dutta’s farm comes across poachers trying to kill them. The hunters had injured a partridge and Bishnu takes it to the colonel who tells him to feed it with wheat germ. It needs a few drops of juice from the marigold leaf to heal the wound. But since it would never fly properly, he would have to keep it like a pet. Bishnu knows how to imitate the call of the partridge- “Kabeel ka ka ka” (41). Col.Dutta admonishes the hunters: “If you hunt for the table, the least that you can do is not to kill any more than you need” (41).

In “Two Little Sparrows” by Nilima Sinha, Nandita finds a sparrow couple perched above the window curtain in her room. Nandita’s mother considers them pests since they litter the room with nest- building materials. She sweeps away the heap of dry grass, twigs and leaves. When Nandita protests, her mother says, “What do you mean? Do you want the house to get dirty?” (55). Nandita

pities the birds: “Each time they build their home, we just sweep it away. Where will they live?” She has a brilliant idea. She decides to use her old doll’s house as a place for the sparrows to build their nest. But the sparrows stubbornly continue to sit on the pelmet. She tries sprinkling lentils and rice grains on the floor of the doll’s house and spreads a newspaper on the table so it would not get dirty. But the same thing continues. Mother removes the big pile of building material the two birds bring. Nandita arranges the material inside the house. However, the birds continue to prefer the curtain rod. Deepak, the boy next door, throws stones at crows and dogs. When he hits one of the sparrows, he says, obviously proud of his ‘achievement, “Now I know what hunters feel! Great!” (58), The bird is in a state of shock. Nandita places it on top of the straw in the doll’s house. The other sparrow joins it. The injured bird is very soon ready to fly. The sparrows fortunately accept the doll’s house as a nesting place. So Nandita’s mother does not have to clean the room. The female sparrow lays eggs and her mate serves all her meals in ‘bed.’ Soon, nestlings hatch. “Three scrawny necks were raised upwards. Three small beaks, wide open, shrieked hungrily for food” (60). Deepak too grows fond of the birds and no longer tries to hit them with stones.

“The Song of the River” by Nita Berry is the story of the little river Ghungroo which skips lightly over the mighty mountain boulders humming. “The tall chinars rustled as she sped past, bowing a farewell” (69). She trips down the gentle slopes, past apple orchards, swifter and swifter until she reaches the wide plains where “cattle grazed lazily” (71). She leaves behind the big rocks and also the smaller pebbles and sandy bits. The young Ghungroo is now an old woman and she slowly flows down to the sea.” Her wavy tresses were smooth and streaked with silver” (71). The little pebbles she carried had long been ground into fine silt, but even this was too heavy for her feeble arms. Little by little they sank heavily to the ground. Ghungroo groans, for she does not have the strength to move over the mounds the silt created. “Reluctantly her waters split into small branches” (72). At last, her waters merge with the ocean and she is at rest. “She had reached her final destination” (72). The course of the river is described in terms of human existence, relating nature and human beings in a web of life.

In “A Wisp of Straw” Prathiba Nath comments on the indifference shown by adults towards nature. The little girl Pinky sees a small bird fly past. It is black and brown, with a patch of pure, dazzling white on the wings. Pinky tries to draw the attention of her grandmother towards it. But the latter admonishes her by saying, “We have no time to stand around watching birds” (81).

“The Friend who Came from the Sky” by Padma Rao, shows the beneficial relationship between nature and humanity. Mini, confined to a wheelchair, watches children play in the park from her balcony. A little bird falls down into her lap in a state of shock. It is a duck, “a shoveller, a yearly visitor to India from the cold North” (92). It has lost its way migrating back to its native land with its flock. The beautiful wild duck had hurt its wings. It has soft and velvety down and “a beak as broad like a shovel” (93). Its feathers glint blue, white and brown. Quite exhausted, the bird takes refuge in a corner of the room. Mini’s mother feeds it with mashed milk and rice with an ink filler. The other children who had not cared to invite Mini to take part in their games get attracted by the bird. But

now, through the bird's suffering caused by loneliness, they understand Mini's unhappiness. They ask Mini's mother to allow her to play with them. The duck is released into a nearby lake.

"Kalindi" is an evocative story of a black cat with friendly green eyes. The children, Samir and Meeta like her. She is graceful and understanding. But she is disliked by the children's superstitious grandmother. Kalindi instinctively saves Meeta from being run over by a motorcycle. An intelligent animal, Kalindi prevents Samir from striking Meeta. One New Year's day, which is also Samir's birthday, Granny makes special arrangements for *puja*. Kalindi sleeps in the *puja* room, not disturbing any arrangement. She does not touch the sweets. Granny sees her when she opens her eyes after prayer and has a change of heart. She picks up the animal and says, "Kalindi is my birthday gift for Samir" (102). The enriching nature of human-domestic animal relationships is brought out through this story.

In "A Fight Unto Death" by W.E.Sohannlal, Bhai Ali who has recently returned from the Himalayas, narrates his story to Ram Singh's children, Neelam and Arjun. Bhai Ali is a traveller, who loves to observe nature. He goes from village to village and from town to town in the mountains, on foot, selling dried apricots, herbs and medicines, and precious stones he had collected. He narrates the story of a fight he had witnessed between a bear and a mother leopard a few miles away from the border of India and Tibet. To his delight, he came across two beautiful, tiny snow leopard cubs, whose fluffy, snow-white, furry coats blended perfectly with the snow. "Their green shining eyes looked like small bright lamps" (104). He watched the cubs playing and practising the hunting lesson given to them by their mother. But he was worried because a mother snow leopard is very ferocious because has to protect her cubs in caves until they are old enough to fight and defend themselves. Food is scarce and wild cats, foxes and bears could attack them. He himself is afraid that the smell of his food and his own scent would be carried by the strong breeze and could give offence to bears. He is nearly attacked by a mountain bear, but it is distracted by the mother snow-leopard. There is a terrible ten-minute duel between a marauding bear and the big cat. The feline is too quick for the slow and bumbling bear and at last it leaves, badly mauled. The mother leopard's return saves the man as well as the cubs.

In "Grandmother" by Indira Ananthakrishnan, the young girl Dhriti notices a thin and frail old lady who can scarcely walk. She uses rice powder, probably in the form of a traditional *rangoli*, to feed the birds and insects in the morning. Though she is poor, she manages to do at least this little act of mercy. She tells the girl, "If I feed God's little creatures, He will help me to feed myself, helpless as I am," (132). The old woman represents traditional practices which ensure the survival of creatures great and small. Dhriti remembers the old woman's words when she sees a pair of squirrels sitting on the parapet. She leaves rice powder for them on the wall, thus continuing the healthy ecological practice handed down to her by the older generation. Dhriti later adopts the old lady as her grandmother.

"Radha's Prize" Andal Ananthanarayanan gives hints about how to grow potted plants and bring nature into the home even in the urban jungle. Radha decides to participate in the 'Grow a

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Plant and Win a Prize' contest. She collects a few balsam seeds from the nearby park and puts them in the soil, adds a little water and keeps the pot in a dark corner inside the house. The seedlings appear thin, spineless and pale. Her elder sister tells her to put the plant in the sunlight. She places the pot on the windowsill, but the plants grow crookedly. She is then told to put them in the courtyard, where they could get sufficient sunlight. The plants grow fresh and have beautifully shaped leaves. She finds that some of the leaves have been eaten and detects a small green caterpillar chewing a leaf. Her elder sister Rekha brings some white powder and sprays it on the leaves. Radha asks her neighbour's gardener for advice. He gives her some fertilizer and tells her what quantity to use. He also warns her to be careful and wash her hands immediately after sprinkling the fertilizer on the plants. All her loving care pays off and she walks away with the first prize.

The Carpenter's Apprentice edited by Rosalind Wilson and published by Katha is a collection of short stories many of which contain eco-messages. One of the stories in the collection is "The Little World of Sadananda" by Satyajit Ray. The hero is Sadananda Chakraborty, a thirteen-year-old boy. Ray narrates a humorous tale about his observation and love for ants. "But if you ask me what gives me the most fun, I would say- watching ants" (71) says Sadananda to the reader. When he lies ill in bed with fever, the boy happens to see a little black ant struggling in a drop of water on the windowsill. "As I watched intently, it suddenly seemed as if the ant was not an ant anymore but a man" (72). He rescues the insect with a piece of blotting paper. He tries feeding the ant with sugar. He notices that an ant "seemed startled and stopped in its tracks. Then it cautiously approaches the sugar and prods it with its head from all sides. Then it suddenly made for the drainpipe and disappeared into it" (73). The boy thinks its behaviour odd until he sees that the ant brings its fellows. "All the ants now banded together to push the grain towards the drainpipe" (74). In history class, the children learn about Hannibal's army. Sadananda notices a long line of black ants marching along the classroom wall and thinks that it is "exactly like a mighty army on the way to battle" (75). Later, Sadananda traces the "army" to their anthill and observes the "countless small chambers inside the mound, and a maze of passages leading from one chamber to another" (75). The boy feels that the place is their castle: "How very strange! How could ants build such a castle with their tiny arms and legs? How could they be so clever? Do they have schools where they are taught?" (75). Sadananda further wonders: "How is it that they can build their own house while tigers, elephants, bears, horses can't?" (75). Though it was true that birds build nests, those structures were not intricate. When the school bully Chikku destroys the anthill, thereby killing at least five hundred ants, Sadananda compares the disaster to a recent train accident in which three hundred people were killed. When Sadananda's mother kills an ant, its friends carry it away in what seems to the boy to be a funeral procession. The story contains close observation of insects, their likeness to human nature and relates the love of the boy for the tiny insects which is in contrast to the callousness of adults.

"The Allowance" by Ramendra Kumar, part of *The Banyan Tree: 15 Value-Based Stories*. New Delhi published by Children's Book Trust, emphasises the importance of agriculture. An old farmer, Dhanpat has two sons, Shiva and Hari. They live in the village of Jeetpur in central India. He is hard-working but his sons are lazy and he finds that he could not persuade them to change their ways. So he makes provision in his will that they had to maintain a garden and also cultivate a piece

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of land. The sons soon quarrel and lose their money. They are then forced to learn to work on their land. Gradually, they start enjoying their work and became united.

In Priya Nagarajan's *Nona and the Rain*, Nona tells her grandfather, "Let's turn off the rain" because she wants to play. The story shows the consequences of human desire to manipulate nature. It points out the dangers of interfering with nature and the importance of maintaining natural balance through adaptation and adjustment. Grandpa and Nona turn off the rain and the children are happy. Then farmer's fields and the village pond get dry. The crops wilt. Sher Khan the tiger in the forest feels thirsty. There are raisins instead of grapes in the bazaar. People are unable to build houses because there is no water to mix with the cement. They appeal to Nona and her grandfather, but the little girl adamantly refuses to turn on the rain tap because the children want to play. The sun gets hotter and soon Nona's well dries up and there is no water to cook, bathe or wash clothes. Nona is hungry and thirsty. She wants to splash about in the water. At last she begs her grandfather to turn on the rain tap. Clouds begin to form. Soon, it drizzles and then begins o rain. Nona sees children playing in the rain and she realizes that her fears were baseless. "We need both sun and rain. Too much of one thing is not good,' advises Grandpa.

Geetha Dharmarajan's *Days with Thathu* is a beautifully evocative story about Malar and her grandfather. When it rains, they go out to play by the seaside. Waves rise and fall. "The moon moves with us. The wind whistles." Thathu and Malar swim with the fish and roll about in the sand. The illustrations show their wild joy. The role played by the older generation in inculcating the love of nature in the young in brought out.

Geetha Jain's *On a Tiger's Trail* explains in a simple manner the causes of and solutions to human-animal conflict. Narrated in folklore style, it tells the story of Maya who lives in a little hut at the edge of the forest. Maya, who lives in close proximity with nature, enjoys the sounds of the forest and also its deep silence. Told in the folktale tradition, the story carries the moral that kindness reaps rewards, even when extended to the animal kingdom. The tiger who carried away Maya's brother does so because he is wounded by a hunter's arrow and wants to avenge himself on human beings. When Maya is kind and wishes that he be cured of his wound, the beast changes his attitude and carries the brother and sister back to the village. Traditional folk wisdom enables the local people to co-exist with animals. "And from that day on, the village-folk stopped fearing the tiger." Though magic is involved, and the animals talk, their plight is real. One comes across a peahen who is separated from her chicks, a monkey stuck on a broken branch, a deer caught in thorns and an old wild boar which has lost it sense of smell and therefore faces starvation since it depends upon smell to locate its food beneath the ground, roots and tubers. When the forest pond becomes dry, the fish are grounded. A tusker is caught by hunters who plot to kill it and rob it of its tusks. The story stresses that the tiger is not a villain but a much-maligned beast. "If you leave the tiger alone, he will not harm us," says Maya

Uma Anand's *The Pool in the Jungle* published by National Book Trust has been beautifully and realistically illustrated by Amena Jayal. This unusual book brings out the cruelty of man who

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hunts down wild animals with guns. The narration is through dialogue between various denizens of a jungle pond such as Dragonfly, Bullfrog and Hoopoe. Though the creatures talk, the author paints an accurate picture of pond life. In the first part of the story, "The Big Ones," Bullfrog recollects that in his grandmother's time the pool was a large lake with dense jungle all around. "Why, even the Big [elephants] lived here." "Once our jungle belonged to the Big Ones." The frog recalls the vast rich forest with "sal trees that stood even higher than the Big Ones themselves." Peepal trees and reeds grew near the stream. The *hullal* was once a stream which joined the great river in the valley. Elephant herds, tigers and leopards roamed the jungle freely, as did *nilgai*, and spotted *cheetal*. The rich biodiversity of the forest ecosystem is described. "Rocks were not blasted and there were no dams. Lakes did not become pools." But now, the rich natural heritage was lost. The big animals were gone. Only the small ones remained.

Bullfrog goes on to relate the story of "the last of the Elephants, the Great One herself. My great grandfather saw her . . . on the last day of her life." The Great One, was an old cow elephant. Indian elephant herds are headed by cows. One by one the herd was caught in the pits "dug by man, the enemy." The elephants left to save their young ones from being caught to be sold to zoos or temples. They went far into the virgin forests, living like ghosts, "moving like a great grey shadow through the trees." But the Great One met with a pitiful end. She was shot, while trying to protect her half-grown calf from poachers.

In "The Haunted Grove," the second part of the story, Tiger comes. He comes down from the hills because he could not hunt his usual prey. So, he becomes a man-eater, taking advantage of the physical weakness of man, who, he knows, is quite helpless without his fire stick. The tiger is shot at but disappears. He appears to be Man's nemesis, a form of terrible justice on nature's part. The story portrays the rich biodiversity of the past, the dwindling of natural resources, of animals deserting their habitat because of the intrusion of man and the trapping and killing elephants and seeks to explain why tigers become man-eaters. The story is poetic, nostalgic and touchingly melancholy.

Seema Chatterjee's *The Chattering Forest* is a collection of short stories for young children and features a number of small creatures such as children love to observe. The book is colourfully illustrated. The pictures are true to life and are not anthropomorphised.

"The Friendly Caterpillar" is another story which relates the lifecycle of the butterfly, while "Taddy the Tadpole" describes the life cycle of a frog. Saby, the caterpillar wishes she was a butterfly, flying about in the warm sunshine, instead of being "a wagon of legs" (8). She has nine more days to turn into one. First, she becomes a jade-green chrysis. Her eating habits, such as feeding on milkweed plants is described. In contrast, butterflies feast on sunflowers. Dan the dragonfly is a predator, with dangerous poison ivy-pincers. He eats moths, flies, gnats and butterflies. Dan the Dragonfly ultimately falls prey to Speedy the Spider. The food chain is brought to the notice of the young reader. The author also names common garden flowers - daffodils, roses, daisies, forget-me-nots sunflowers. Bird migration is mentioned. Sally the swallow ties her babies in a little pouch and holding them in her beak flies to the Savannah.

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“Cal the Chameleon” changes from camouflage green to a welcoming yellow. When he turns brown with yellow stripes, it indicates anger. The habits of chameleons- they are solitary creatures and hate company - is shown through the character of Cal. His reaction when threatened: “Swelling his throat and torso to appear bigger, he clacked, whistled and changed into menacing colours” is well portrayed.

In “Tree Knowledge,” the author names and describes a number of trees. Olive leaves have healing powers. The Giant Pine, with prickly pine needles, the Elf Wood, a dwarf tree which is short and stout, the tall ash and maple trees, giant palms, the white spruce and the fir have a part in the narrative.

The Puffin Book of Animal Stories for 6-year olds, edited by Chatura Rao has a number of ecological messages and nature descriptions. In “when Adil learns that his pet hen, Noor, is to be eaten at Aid, he asks his mother, “How would you like it if Abbu decided to eat *me* at Eid?” (5). Egg-laying saves the hen. “Let’s have a vegetarian feast this Eid,” Ammi said (6).

“Butterfly in the Sun” describes how butterflies die-they “fold their wings and lie down on the grass” (15). “Yelli Makes a Choice” by Zai Whitaker describes the habits of field rats, and how, contrary to popular conception, rats can make good pets. “The Little Thing” by Sudipta Chatterjee is the story of how a baby monkey is restored to its family in the wild.

Three of Ruskin Bond’s stories have been brought out as picture books:

Getting Granny’s Glasses by Ruskin Bond is a beautifully illustrated book, bringing out the scenic beauty of the Himalayan region and perfectly complements Ruskin Bond’s tale set in Mussorie and its surrounding regions. Granny and Mani set off the town from a far-off village. Their bus is forced to stop because debris from a landslide blocks the route. This is a common happening in the Himalayas, mainly due to deforestation. They go on a twelve-mile walk to reach Mussorie. The flowers, birds, berries, the golden eagle which circles overhead, and the dark and gloomy Deodar forest, where they are stalked by food-demanding monkeys are all authentically described. The mountainfolk who are sturdy and healthy because they have adapted to their natural surroundings exemplify the benefits of living in harmony with nature.

The popular story, *The Blue Umbrella*, takes place on the road to Tehri, near Mussoorie. It is based on the real life of ten -year -old Binya, a girl of the mountains. The story has been adapted into a film. Binya grazes her cows, Neelu, and Gori, on the slopes of the Gharwal Himalayas. “Binya loved being on her own, and sometimes she allowed the cows to lead her into some distant valley, and then they would all be late coming home” (7-8). “Dark forests and lonely hilltops held no terrors for her. It was only when she was in the market town, jostled by the crowds in the bazaar, that she felt rather nervous and lost” (8). Their village consisted of small farmers who grew grains and vegetables for their own use, but not enough to sell. Binya looks for porcupine quills near the wild

mushrooms, because she could sell them. She enjoys the monsoon season and the misty season that follows. The descriptions of the mountainside are exceptional.

A Long Walk for Bina features three children, Prakash, Bina and Sonu. They walk to school across the mountains, crossing the jungle where a fierce leopard's territory lies. The story begins with the leopard's reaction on hearing human voices. A spotted forktail, a bird of the mountains, is startled. The little lanes and short-cuts zigzag across the mountains, The children encounter a landslide. On hearing a rumble, the children looked up at the opposite hill and see trees falling. "Earth and rocks bulged out from the mountain, and then came crashing down into the ravine" (50). A new dam is being built. Mountains are being blasted away to make room for it. Bina's teachers argue about it. Miss Romola says that it would bring electricity to the area. Mr. Mani feels that it was a menace, since they were in an earth-quake-prone area. Bina feels concern for the animals in the forest, which would be displaced by the building of the dam. She later learns that the old town would be evacuated, and the people given houses elsewhere. Miss Romola says that this was for the good of thousands of people in the plains. Bina asks if it was all right for the people in the hills to suffer." And it doesn't matter what happens to this place?" (38). Later, they come across the leopard in the forest. It is surprised and makes threatening noises but goes away without attacking them. The next day, they notice the animal standing majestically on a hilltop with her cubs. The leopard has decided that they are harmless and hence takes no notice of them. "'She knows we are here,' said Prakash, 'but she doesn't care. She knows we won't harm them.' . . . 'We are cubs too!' said Sonu.' 'Yes, said Bina, 'And there's still plenty of space for all of us. Even when the dam is ready there will still be room for leopards and humans' "(5).

Smart Green Civilizations: Green Lessons from the Past series from TERI books are illustrated books for the age group 8-12 years. The books are eco-friendly in themselves, being printed on recycled paper. Authored by Benita Sen, respected editor of the children's magazine *Target*, the books are meticulously researched and bring out the lifestyles of ancient civilizations which adapted successfully to living lives of eco-wisdom. The stories comprise the adventures of a little girl, Teri, who travels in her dreams to various ancient civilizations. The stories are filled with facts yet sustain interest because they are seen through the eyes of a child, with whom the young readers can identify. The books are in A4 size, beautifully hard-bound and the lay-out of the pages need special mention.

In *Ancient Egypt*, Teri is shown round by Queen Nefertiti, who explains how Egyptians built with local materials. Monuments were built of stone, while homes were made of mud bricks which would keep the structures much cooler. King Hammurabi conducts Teri through *Ancient Mesopotamia*. Teri learns that ancient Mesopotamians harnessed wind energy successfully, were excellent town planers, building houses with local materials like mud bricks and palm wood. They practiced rainwater harvesting.

In Ancient America, Teri visits the Mayan civilization and learns about their innovative agricultural methods like the raised bed method, where permanent raised fields were connected by

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canals They mixed ash with the soil to make the land more fertile, and caught rainwater in chaltunes, or tanks, lined with plaster. They used local materials like stone and limestone in their buildings. When Teri goes to *Ancient China*, she meets Confucius and finds that the ancient Chinese farmers wasted nothing and used natural manure. They adopted new methods like clay pot auto-irrigation to use water wisely for irrigation. While cooking, portions of food were chopped small to save fuel and time. They wore clothes coloured with plant dyes. Ancient Chinese buildings were built according to the climate – in warm areas, they kept the sun out; in colder areas, they were built to get the most sunshine and keep out the cold breeze.

In *Indus Valley*, Teri finds a toy cart on the road and is transported to the Indus valley civilization. The priest-king of Mohenjo-daro takes her around. She finds that children play with clay toys and that the city is well-planned and cleanly maintained, with airy houses, bathrooms and drains. Rainwater harvesting was an integral part of their lives. Natural products like mud and clay were used to make vessels. Solar energy was used to make bricks. The people worshipped nature for its bounty.

The Greek god Zeus takes Teri around *Ancient Greece*. She finds that the Greeks planned their cities after studying the seasons. Greek homes were built around a courtyard to keep every room bright and airy. The Greeks ate healthy, locally grown produce like wheat and barley, grapes, beans, olives and radish. They knew how to cultivate their crops according to the soil. They also invented the windmill.

Teri is taken around Ancient Rome by the goddess Potina. The Romans knew the art of constructing aqueducts to ensure the supply of fresh, clean water to their cities. They used the wastewater from their baths to wash away their sewage. They thus displayed their knowledge of water conservation. They designed their houses so that there was good air circulation. They were particular about the use of solar energy. There were laws to ensure that one did not block the sunlight from a neighbour's house. They also made use of geothermal energy.

The highlights of the eco-friendly practices of each ancient civilization are summed up on the last page as “Green Lessons.” At the bottom of each page is a strip giving “Green gems”- points of interest.

Myna from Peacock Garden, translated from the Urdu by Sagasree Sengupta, is the firstperson narrative of Kale Khan, who works in the Royal Peacock Garden in Lucknow during the nineteenth century. The Badshah decides to build a Wondrous Cage in the garden to house one hundred hill mynahs. The king is so fond of the mynahs that he personally names them and can identify every one of them. Though the caging of wild birds can be viewed as offensive today, the story has to be seen in its historical context and can be viewed as a display and endorsement of the fondness for nature. The drawings by Premola Ghose reflect the Indian miniature style.

“A River Came Home” is about the trauma of children from displaced communities. Gopala’s teacher is worried about the boy’s withdrawn behaviour and decides to visit his home. Gopala’s mother tells Mani Sir, his teacher, about the reason behind the strange behavior of Gopala and the other children:

They have become like this since we left our homes and came to this place. They told us that we had to move, or the dam would make the river come into our homes and spoil everything. The children feel lost now. They are angry. Our home was beautiful, Sir, on the riverbanks. We had fruit orchards and sugarcane fields. Our houses kept us warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Now it is the other way around. The roof burns in the hot season and in the cold, it is like sleeping under the freezing sky. (97)

The children keep to themselves. They have no sense of belongingness to the school or to their other classmates.

It is seen from this study that several ecological issues have been dealt with in a detailed manner in the books for this age-group. Stories under consideration depict children helping injured birds and animals, caring for their potted plants, taking interest in wildlife, spending time in natural surroundings, learning about environmental problems such as pollution and deforestation, depletion of natural resources, commercialisation of nature, and also about cultivating eco-friendly behaviour. They cater to the desire of the young child eager to learn about different habitats, eco-systems and biodiversity.

Chapter V

Books for Older Children and Young Adults

Though American Library Association defines young adults as between 13-18, in the Indian cultural context, taking into consideration that books in English are in general read later than in English-speaking societies, where only a privileged few have access to good quality English medium education from an early age and so English texts are read much later on, even if their content is for a younger age-group, the author has extended the ‘young adult’ category upto the age of twenty-one. The taboos prevailing in society have made many subjects which are widely discussed in western young adult fiction undesirable in the Indian context, where parental control is more. One of the reasons for clubbing the books for older children together with those for young adults is because the boundaries cannot be easily defined, with some children progressing faster than others. Another is the sad fact that of the books of young adults in India, very few have natural settings, contain ecological messages, or contribute to eco-literacy in any manner.

Adventure, exploration, mystery, history, socio- economic problems, familial problems, peer and family relationships, role models, love and romance, adjusting to new places, the problem of identity and social roles are some of the themes of the stories in this category. Of environmental concern are deforestation, afforestation, pollution prevention, alternative energy sources, disaster management, socially useful productive work, voluntary work such as animal observation, census, trekking, camping, nature walks, fighting for environmental justice, social justice, displaced people, recording folktales and songs, and stories about marginalized sections and their problems.

Books under consideration include Leela Gour Broome’s *Flute in the Forest*, Nilima Sinha’s *Red Blooms in the Forest*, Ira Saxena’s *Curse of Grass*, Deepak Dalal’s Vikram-Aditya adventure series, Ranjit Lal’s *The Small Tigers of Shergarh*, Graeme Macqueen’s *Journey to the City of the Six Gates*, Ruskin Bond’s *Rusty and the Leopard*, Harini Gopalswami Srinivasan’s *The Smile of Vanuvati*, Swati Sengupta’s *Guns on My Red Earth*, Payal Dhar’s , *A Shadow in Eternity Lovetorn*, *Into the Eye of My Mind*, *Sweet Sixteen*, *Confessions of a Listmaniac*, and *Jobless*, *Clueless*, *Reckless*.

Leela Gour Broome, a Pune-based writer and environmentalist whose first published novel for older children, *Flute in the Forest* is based on the author’s personal experiences in the forests of southern India. It is the tale of how a young girl brings about a positive change in the lives of both an embittered old man and a wild elephant through the combined power of love and music.

Thirteen-year-old Atiya Sardare is the physically challenged daughter of Forest Officer Ram Deva Sardare. She is used to various forests and sanctuaries in South India, since her father is transferred to different sanctuaries. Wherever he is posted, her father and his dedicated team considered it “their” forest and would not tolerate poachers. Atiya is taught to respect the forest and its rightful inhabitants. “It is the home of wild animals,” her father had instructed, ‘We are only guests in the jungle. Like a good guest, you must be quiet and respect their space’” (4). Sardare

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introduces Atiya to wildlife - tadpoles, wasps, spiders, even tarantula spiders' army ants, fire ants, paper wasps, harvest spiders and giant mygalomorphs - the great tarantula spiders which tunnel in the mudbanks, and even to the king cobra, "the most intelligent of snakes." "Papa took her everywhere, teaching her all about nature" (6). The local tribes, the Kurumbas, look for honey and wild berries and fruits like the jamun, mango, banana, and dates. The Kurumbas' daily diet consists of termite hill mushrooms, bracket fungi, unfurled leaves of young ferns, tubers of wild yam, wild amla fruits, tamarind fruits and even the sour green leaves of the tamarind tree. The produce of the forest is their prerogative. When the bamboo sprouts fruit and seed once in thirty years, it is festival-time for the Kurumbas who collect and cook bamboo seed. The Kurumbas have a rich music tradition. When Ogre Uncle marries a Kurumba girl, and has a daughter, Mishora, his father-in-law presents him with a bamboo flute on which Ogre Uncle subsequently learns to play beautiful songs celebrating nature. It is noteworthy that Ogre Uncle comes to the area because he is posted there by the anthropology department to find out more about tribal customs, norms and traditions. In course of time, he became an expert in the field.

When Atiya walks in the forest with her classmate, Gopal, she is a mine of information. Gopal is stunned by Atiya's descriptions of her jungle walks. She can imitate the call of the migratory Indian pitta. She tells him that wearing dull-coloured clothes is the norm in a sanctuary, that rangers throw stones to find if an animal is still in its cave, that animals enter their caves around midday and come out in the cool evenings to hunt.

They see yellow butterflies in large numbers assembling on the muddy trunks of trees. Sardare calls it "mudbudding" (88). Through Sardare, Gopal learns that the fig tree is a parasite which strangles healthy trees. The host tree gradually dies, leaving a hollow trunk, which will shelter small creatures and even birds. "Wow! An ecosystem!" exclaims Gopal (53). Sardare says, "Biodiversity" (53). His talk with Atiya's father fuels Gopal's interest in nature. He accompanies Atiya on her walks in the forest. Later, when he goes to school in town, he goes on treks during his vacations.

Atiya hears stories of the rogue elephant, Rangappa, the menace of the sanctuary. Rangappa, who terrorizes the region, is a loner with long tusks. The Kurumba tribespeople avoid him because he is unpredictable. Usually, if the tribal people came across a herd of elephants at night along their usual route, they would collectively yell: "Ayyappa, po! Ayyappa, po!" (God, go!). "Somehow the elephants understood the people's fear. Slowly and quietly the huge animals would walk back into the forest and leave the people alone." (27). However, Rangappa was different. He seemed to enjoy frightening people, as if he had a grudge against mankind. He used to appear suddenly and then make a mock charge, but almost never actually hurting anyone.

However, things take an ugly turn with the death of the German photographer, Mr. Kronhaage who comes too close despite warnings from the animal, who was in *musth*. The angry elephant lifts the photographer and his camera clean off the ground, throws them down and stamps

on them. This is described by the father to the daughter, perhaps to make her realize the very real dangers of the forest, and how respecting the private spaces of animals was a prerequisite to survival.

Rangappa, when provoked, turns into a killer and has nine deaths to his record. Some people were demanding that he be shot: “They were discussing Rangappa as if he was an evil criminal,” Atiya thinks sadly, and wonders quite correctly, “Why do we humans always think we can reason things out better than the animals who share the earth with us? . . . If Kronhaage had given some more space to Rangappa; if he had not invaded it with total disrespect for the animal, things could have been different” (113).

Another example of how human ignorance of animal psychology can prove disastrous is demonstrated through the incident of the encounter of the Atiya’s bus with the rogue elephant. When the inexperienced bus driver comes across Rangappa on the slope of a narrow road, he raises the engine and honks his horn while the passengers scream hysterically, stand up and make more noise. They do not pause to think that wild animals are used to the peace of the forest, are upset by the discordant noises of human habitations.

The infuriated elephant, unable to bear the horrifying racket, mock-charges. This is described vividly in the book: “Then he backs off, ears flapping in fury, his front feet and trunk stirring up the mud on the roadside in a mass of brown dust” (114). Suddenly, the bus passengers who do all the wrong things, hear the most terrifying sound from the animal’s throat. “A deep, menacing, stupefying rumble that kept on and on and on! No sound they had heard was as terrifying as this one!” (114). “He pulled branches and leaves, tufts of grass and bits of sticks and hurled them towards the bus, growling deep in his throat” (115). The sequence of events of this man-animal conflict situation is described by the author with immense realism.

It is the wise young Atiya who takes over by asking the driver to shut off the engine and to keep quiet. The villagers tell the driver to listen to her because she is the forest officer’s daughter and so probably had sound knowledge about the ways of wild animals. Gradually, the elephant calms down, turns back, and walk down a slope. Thus, disaster is averted by using animal psychology.

Atiya uses the same calming technique with ‘Ogre Uncle,’ the aged anthropologist who lives on the edge of the forest. He is old, blind and embittered. He vents his anger, stemming from helplessness, on his daughter, Mishori, who patiently bears his tantrums. The girl, whose late mother was a tribeswoman, has keen insight into the nature of both human and animal, and perceives the similarities between the two.

I think I can see why the elephant is so bad-tempered,” Mishora said with sympathy,

“People probably do no leave him in peace. The jungles are getting smaller all the time, less wild and there are more and more of us around. How can the poor beast stay aloof, when there are so many ‘invasions’ into his private space? (126)

Atiya too understands that Ogre Uncle and Rangappa were “two of a kind,” (133), separated from fellow beings, sick and misunderstood. When she describes the large, lonely animal to her mentor, she deliberately draws parallels in an effort to effect a change in the old man’s attitude. She says that Rangappa is a shrewd and clever animal, who longs for recognition. When he does not get the required attention from his fellow elephants, he tries to attract attention to himself by uprooting trees and terrifying human beings.

The old man plays the flute beautifully, and Atiya becomes a worthy pupil. Soon, the trilling, warbling bird notes of the tribal bamboo instrument fill the clearing. It has a soothing effect on Atiya, who is hurt because of the rude behavior of her classmates who ignore her because of her handicap. It also begins to have the same effect on the isolated Ogre Uncle and, quite unexpectedly, on Rangappa. The music of the wind passing through the bamboo groves in the forest attracts the elephant who has been isolated both from its kind and from the human race. It is revealed that Rangappa was once a domesticated elephant who turned wild due to grief when its keeper died.

Rangappa appears silently and stands on the opposite bank of the river when the music lessons begin. The elephant listens to their voices and smells them from afar with his trunk. “Yes, he is mean and nasty and doesn’t like people,” Atiya informed him [Ogre Uncle] quietly” (131). She speculates that Rangappa could be unwell or old. “Her father had often told her [Atiya] that these mighty animals couldn’t see too well, but they had a very keen hearing and a sense of smell. They also had very good memories” (132).

Ogre Uncle becomes intensely interested in the pachyderm. Atiya wants to teach him, and the elephant, to trust humanity again. “My father once told me that in life, everything is symbiosis, an inner-dependency that is constant and needed for life to be meaningful. We must teach him that he needs us as much as we need him” (134), Atiya tells Ogre Uncle.

When Atiya plays tribal music on her flute, the great elephant flaps his ears in appreciation. He watches them and then silently leaves after the lesson is over. This happens every day. “It was almost a spiritual moment when the Ogre and Rangappa had stared silently and with mutual respect for each other” (138).

Ogre Uncle begins to appreciate Mishora’s loving care and Atiya’s talent. He wants his young pupil to carry on his research on the Kurumba tribe. The author goes on to say, “The elephant now looked a gentle, grey giant cuddly toy, harmless and not menacing at all” (150). The gradual change in his personality is noted by the rangers and the tribals. No one except Atiya knows the reason for his transformation.

Rangappa appears to inform Atiya that Ogre Uncle is dying. The elephant knows this, as he has instinctively sensed this. He comes to the far end of her garden, trumpeting to call attention. Atiya talks to him. Ram Sardare wonders at their communication and closeness. The non-threatening aspect of the killer elephant astonishes the forest officer and he begins to appreciate Atiya’s music.

It is the trauma of loss- of his wife in the case of Ogre Uncle and his mahout in the case of Rangappa, that makes them misfits. Thus, the human and the animal are not so very different. “Recognised as a cornerstone of deep ecological thinking, identification constitutes an awareness that humans are inextricably enmeshed in broader bio-social relations” (Curry 161). It is the healing power of patience, affection and music which brings peace to the hearts of both. Integration with the harmony of nature, signified by the flute, proves that “both are related to a fuller context” (Danby 53). One may conclude with the words of Atiya’s song:

The Breeze blows my song through the ancient Forest, / Hear it, my Friend, oh hear it, then! / Casting a spell over all us Creatures . . . / Peace, it says, is a Friend we all can share, / Join hands . . . and . . . catch the Breeze! (193)

Deepak Dalal is one of the foremost writers of Indian young adult fiction today. A chemical engineer by profession, Deepak Dalal set out to write “Indian tales for Indian children” in 1995. Thus was born the Vikram-Aditya series of adventures, set in some of the most picturesque places in India, with a strong focus on environment and travel. With an idea towards connecting young people with the wilderness, his stories highlight issues of conservation of forests and wildlife. The stories are drawn from his own experience.

In *Ranthamore Adventure*, Dalal addresses the issue of tiger poaching which is rampant in the wildlife sanctuaries of India. He exposes the operational tactics and network of poachers as well as the potential market for tiger bones. Dalal also portrays the noble work of dedicated forest officers.

The story is humanized by following the story of Genghis, the king of the Ranthambore tigers. Mr. Reddy, Chief Forest Officer of Ranthambore National Park, records through photographs a tigress and her cubs. The story opens with the birth of the tiger cub Genghis in the cold season in the valley in between steep cliffs. The care taken by the tigress to ensure the safety and happiness of her offspring is touching. The mother tigress looks after her new-born and teaches them to take their first steps. She takes many great precautions to avoid predators, especially those of the two-legged variety. “She trusted humans seated in vehicles, but humans on foot were another matter altogether” (9). She would be very still until they passed.

Deepak Dalal alternates chapters devoted to the tiger’s narrative to that of youngsters Vikram, Aditya Khan and Aarti. Vikram’s father heads a wildlife conservation organization, Wilderness Conservation India (WCI) where they learn about India’s Tiger Crisis. Tiger bones are valued in Chinese medicine and so poaching is rampant in the sanctuaries. The poacher-smuggler nexus depletes wildlife. Aditya tells Arthi that killing wildlife for meat is forgivable; hunting for fun is unpardonable; but the worst offenders are those who hunt for profit (15). Deepak Dalal includes information about animal behaviour and human-animal conflict supported with statistical data in an ideal combination of fictitious narrative backed with solid facts in order to imbue the minds of his readers with environmental awareness.

The intrusion of people into the sanctuary disturbs its peace. Cattle-grazing is a bane to wild animals. “The presence of humans and their cattle disturbed the forest equilibrium” (72). Since the tiger’s natural prey disappeared when they saw humans, the tiger was forced to hunt domestic cattle, and this caused humans to invade forests to hunt the tiger, which they perceived as the enemy. The vicious circle was initiated by human beings and led to the vilification of a beast which was naturally reclusive.

One of the most pathetic episodes in the book is the discovery by Genghis of his dear mother’s skin and flesh, abandoned near an unused human dwelling in the forest.

On one side of the dwelling, he came upon portions of crumpled tiger skin. The smell of the skin had been unmistakable; the familiar, comforting, all-enveloping odour of his childhood- the scent of his mother Whoever had killed her had sliced her body apart. Her flesh was a bloodied mess on the ground, but her bones were missing. (73)

Two of the tigress’s cubs had been slaughtered along with their mother. The third had possibly escaped, but “the death-dealing humans had ensured its demise. The tiny animal was too young to hunt and there was no mother to provide for it anymore. The cub would die a slow, lingering death by starvation; or, if it were lucky, suffer a quick end at the claws of an opportunistic predator” (73). As Huggan et al warn, “The ultimate concern about species is that they may become extinct due to human activities. . . . The death of an individual is also the death of its kind” (177).

The cruelty of poaching is graphically illustrated by Dalal when he describes how a trap, “a murderous mechanism” (74) slices into Genghis’s leg: “It was as if a million ants were digging pincers within. Blood pumped forth, staining the grass red. The tiger collapsed, his calls of distress shattering the peace of the night” (74).

Early next morning, two men enter the reserve with a sack, a gun and a spear. They follow the blood trail of the wounded tiger. They had been promised Rs.10,000/- for procuring tiger pelt and bones. For this paltry sum, the equivalent of the biblical thirty pieces of silver, they are willing to deprive the country of its national animal.

The encounter with Genghis is something they would never forget. The magnificent terror of the powerful beast stuns them. Still, the tiger does not strike. “Some inner sense-instilled by his mother prevented the tiger from ever attacking humans” (75). The man drops his gun when “the tiger’s flaming eyes were locked with his, reflecting a terrible anger.” He seemed “unable to withstand the animal’s accusing glance” (75).

The enormity of poachers’ perfidy is exposed. Even though Genghis escapes being killed by the greedy men, he cannot fend for himself. Dalal describes the tiger’s plight very accurately through the words of Chief Forest Officer Mr.Reddy: “Can a limping tiger bring down fleet-footed deer and antelope? Even healthy tigers, with four good legs, rarely succeed” (77). The forest officials

had to attempt to capture the tiger and treat him for his injury. But since traps were designed to bring about permanent disability, the tiger's chances of recovery were slim. He would have to be taken to a zoo. A wild tiger who had lost his freedom would not survive long. It would be a delayed death sentence for him.

Meanwhile, Genghis, with the tenacity inherent only in tigers, somehow overcomes his terrible pain and tries to hunt. But he is by and large unsuccessful and has to subsist on very small animals and birds. Nearing starvation, he does not care any more and prepares to die.

The forest officials try to bait him with live prey. It is a difficult task, since, "like all wounded animals, Genghis had sought deep cover" (78). They manage to shoot a tranquillised dart at him. But Genghis disappears, causing the officers much anxiety. The temperature of a tranquillised tiger shoots up abnormally and unless he is caught and treated, he could die. A thrilling encounter with the injured Genghis who has sought refuge in a cave follows. The drugged tiger falls down while in pursuit of a forest official and is examined and treated by a veterinarian before being released into the wild. It is due to Mr. Reddy's intervention that he is not sent to a zoo. Genghis soon regains his position as the king of Ranthambore, but not before inadvertently giving the poacher, Shakar Chand, the shock of a lifetime. The tiger survives to live a life of dignity in the sanctuary.

Deepak Dalal's well-researched book, based on his actual experiences in the sanctuary, carries the message that conservation of the forest depends upon the conservation of the tiger, justifying Rachel Carson's words: "The predator and the preyed upon exist not alone, but as part of a vast web of life, all of which needs to be taken into account" (253).

In Deepak Dalal's *Andaman Adventure: The Jarawa*, Dalal's adventurous duo, Vikram and Aditya, along with the athletic and independent girl Chitra embark on a voyage along the fabulous Andaman coastline. In the introductory letter written by Vikram's father, there is a detailed description of the islands, their fauna and flora as well as the natives. Vikram's father asks them to meet his friend, Dr. Sankaran, an ornithologist who is residing on the islands in order to ensure the survival of a small bird called 'edible nest swiftlet' which surprisingly secretes the material for its nest. Unfortunately, its nest is considered to have medicinal properties by the people in the Far East and hence the nests are stolen. They encounter various types of nest-thieves. The youngsters come across a sea-snake which inhabits the mangrove swamps on the islands. Chitra is excited and picks up the highly poisonous snake fearlessly and explains its distinct characteristics. They cross the mangroves with their spear-sharp ariel roots and where the waters are phosphorus and full of crocodiles. Chitra has plans to pursue research at the Crocodile Bank in Chennai and has already learnt how to move safely among them. For example, she can stun them temporarily with a powerful torchbeam. The highlight of their adventures is their encounter with the Jarawa, who resent outside contact and fiercely protect their culture. However, the Jarawa are friendly towards them after they make it clear that they detest Burmese intruders. However, the outside world has made some impact on their lives in the form of plastic buckets, bottles and nylon fishing nets. Some of the westernized tribesmen sport colourful shorts and hats. Along the coast they see the mighty white-bellied sea

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eagle, the serpent eagle and the brown eagle. Diving underwater, they see stunningly beautiful clownfish, sea anemones, parrotfish, butterfly fish and encounter a sting ray. The food chain and predator-prey relationship is explained with regard to birds and fish.

The book warns the readers about the overwhelming nature of “modern civilization’ which had made the Greater Andamanese extinct and appreciates the valiant efforts of the Jarawa to resist it. The Andaman Trunk Road was built through the forest despite the efforts of the Jarawa to stop its construction. The traffic arouses the curiosity of the tribesmen who, till then, had hidden themselves in the forests. When they began to become visible, “Jarawa tours” were conducted by unscrupulous businessmen. Measles, which was hitherto unknown in the region, attacked the Jarawa and they nearly all died. Dalal’s message to save the Jarawa is: “Leave them alone!”

Andaman Adventure: Barren Island is a continuation of *The Jarawa*. The preface traces the intrusion of the British into the island to build a prison. They cleared the forests and deprived the Andamanese of their livelihood in the name of ‘development.’ The children encounter goats on Barren Island which had learnt to survive on seawater. They see the volcano of Barren Island. Since no vegetation grew among its ashes, the island was known as “barren.” The landscape around the volcano is carefully described. The trio foils the efforts of poachers from Burma who come to steal *trebang* and also other poachers who steal lapwing nests.

Lakshadweep Adventure takes Vikram and Aditya far out into the Arabian Sea to crystal-clear lagoons and coral reefs. They enjoy adventure sports such as windsurfing and scuba diving and encounter sharks and sea turtles. The Author’s Note at the beginning of the story explains the geography of the islands and highlights their unique features. Vikram warns Aditya about the dangers underwater. Any fish more than two feet long can seriously injure a human being. The descriptions are accurate and pleasing: “Vikram could now see that the coral reef was not really a wall, instead it was a complex jumble of various types of exquisitely shaped clumps of coral. In front of them – stretching across their path like a quivering blue curtain – was a shoal of little pale blue fish, each no bigger than Vikram’s little finger” (14). They watch the graceful underwater movements of the great turtles and are fascinated by the ugly and dangerous Moray Eel. Vikram encounters reef sharks, but his knowledge that they do not attack unless they see a weak or injured person, reassures him. The boys learn the to-dos and not-to-dos of scuba diving from Mr. Koya.

Dalal expresses his feelings about the coral reef through Vikram: “The reef was an eerie place. Vikram felt uneasy – as if he were trespassing on a forbidden zone. . . . The reef was not for humans. It belonged to the sea and all its myriad creatures which lived and died within its unique life-sustaining embrace. On the beach surrounding the lagoon, “the sand between them and the water appeared to be alive with creatures” (113). They happened to be hermit crabs, which inhabited different varieties of shells, since they had none of their own. Dalal shows the reader that it is man who interferes with nature; nature rarely does the same to man. “None of the crabs came towards them. They went about their own business, purposely waddling across the sand” (113). Vikram reflects: “It was fascinating how each creature adapts differently to its environment. Each species

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had to develop mechanisms to survive. The clownfish had its sea anemone, the Porcupine Fish had its poisonous spines, Stonefish had its brilliant camouflage and the Hermit Crab stone shells” (114).

Shaukt, who has never set foot on the mainland since he was fifteen, finds a great contrast between the rude behavior of the people on the mainland and the calm, peaceful island life, where crime is unknown. He says that no islander would want to leave. “Our lagoons, our palm trees, the coral sand, the fishes, the reef – it is all part of us. You can never separate them from our souls” (115). The author includes an endnote about volcanic islands and the fragile coral ecosystem.

Ladakh Adventure takes Vikram and Aditya to the land beyond the Himalayas, to the lofty Changthang Plateau. The boys camp with *Meme Chacko*, who is there to observe black-necked cranes. The sheer cold in the hottest month of August strikes Vikram, as does the vastness of the Himalayan landscape, where everything is on a grand scale. Vikram learns that the local Changpa dogs are a menace to the bird population, since each pair has only one chick a year. “The loss of even a single chick has a bearing on the future of the species,” says Meme Chacko” (8). Vikram breathlessly witnesses the miraculous escape of a nestling. Higher on the mountains, they see hundreds of marmots on the slopes. Aditya laughs.” Marmot locomotion is always comical. The animals are fat, squat balls of fur. Their movements are funny indeed: a kind of rolling, twisting motion, more like a frantic waddle” (30). On the high-altitude desert of Tso Kar, they see the magnificent golden eagle, redshanks, greenshanks, sand plovers, river terns, brahmini ducks, and, surprisingly, gulls. They also see bar-headed geese migrating over the Himalayas at an altitude of 25,000 feet, far higher than any other bird could fly. Vikram is mesmerized by the primeval songs of the cranes at sunset, which he remembers a poet describing as ‘the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution’ (36). Vikram sees ‘scree’ slopes, which are covered with a crumbling material which does not fall.

Dalal waxes poetic over the beauty of the Himalayan mountainscape:

In a chameleon-like manner Vikram had never witnessed, the mountains kept changing colours. In some sections they were shaded brown, in others they were purple; sometimes they appeared orange and sometimes golden. It was a grand wilderness they drove through, hostile and inhospitable to the extreme, yet magnificent to behold. Sheer mountainsides; windswept peaks; boulder-strewn slopes; tones of delicately balanced scree; twisting gorges; a frothing river – the images piled one upon the other, moving Vikram deeply, evoking in him a profound sense of desolation. (57)

The group passes through the Indus valley into Leh where they learn that western influence has begun corrupting the youth of the region. Vikram and Aditya encounter the Indo-Japanese smuggler Akira, who is to feature as Dalal’s prominent villain. The boys join Dr.Raghu on his expedition to photograph and document the elusive snow leopard.

In Deepak Dalal's *The Snow Leopard Adventure*, Vikram and Aditya, joining a team of ecologists and explorers, set off on an expedition to the Zaskar Mountains of Ladakh to search for the fabled leopard. The snow leopard is a rare animal of immense beauty, but so elusive that it is called the 'Grey Ghost of the Himalaya.' The book is the result of the author's own experiences as part of ecologist Raghu Raman's annual snow leopard expedition.

The team members are Dr. Raghu Raman, expedition leader and dedicated wildlife scientist, Tina Kuruvilla, second-in command, Julia and Caroline Austin, from the USA, Kathy and Richard Smith, a British couple, both wildlife lovers, Yuan Lee, a computer engineer from Singapore, who loves the mountains, the Australian, Roger Allen, Anders and Eva, a Swedish couple on a bicycle tour, and Tsering Ringmo, young reincarnated Lama.

The company travels along the Indus River. Vikram is aware of the great historical and geographical significance of the region. The landscape, with wide fields of barley and stands of popular trees is striking. "But this was the only visible greenery. Everywhere else the landscape was so stark and barren that it resembled the surface of the moon" (1), says the author. Ladakh is a high-altitude desert. It lies to the north of the mighty Himalaya mountains. Vikram recollects:

My mind boggled at the star scenery about us. It was a fantastic wilderness, so desolate and so strange that I felt threatened by it. Crumbling peaks sprouted amidst vast barren plateaus. Visibility was perfect and we could see for miles, but there was no sign of human habitation. The thundering presence of water seemed at odds with the desert like landscape around us. (2)

They follow the course of the Rumbak, a tributary of the Indus, into the mountains. *Bharal*, or blue sheep, graze in the high altitudes, above the snow line. "Unlike any sheep I have seen they possessed no fleecy wool. They were grey and stood much taller than domestic sheep" (4), says Aditya and continues, "The goat-like creatures were about the same size as Ladakhi ponies and their predominant colour was a greyish-brown which merged well with their surroundings" (41).

They are easily able to negotiate the treacherous mountain paths. Blue sheep are an important prey species of the snow leopard, so there was always a possibility of spotting a leopard when they saw *bharal*. In the summer, blue sheep, *argali* and *urial* the animals which are the natural prey of the snow leopard, move into the higher pastures and the predator follows them. When the mountain sheep sense the presence of the leopard, they go to the edge of the cliff, because the animal would hesitate to spring on them for fear of going over the edge. From the way the sheep watch a pile of boulders nearby, the team understands that a snow leopard is hiding there. They could not see the animal, which "had the talent of melting into the mountainside" (30)."

"The Ladakh Mountains are very different from my Nilgiri ones. There are no trees to soften their edges and their slopes are bare and naked" (34), writes the author, who did his schooling in Uthagamandalam in the Nilgiris. As they travel higher, Vikram and Aditya find glacier-smoothened

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mountainsides. They come across leopard scats or excretions, which they collect in order to analyse the snow leopard's diet. They also meet Anders and Eva, the Swedish couple on a bicycle tour.

The author describes the landscape, recalling his personal experience: "Every peak that soared above the campsite was bathed in sunlight, but lower down the valleys were filled with shadows. Vikram gaped in awe at the scale of the shadows." They were gigantic, some stretching several kilometres" (38)." The level ground they walked across was huge. There was enough space here for fifty cricket grounds, thought Vikram (40). "The valley ahead was crawling with bharal; there were well over a hundred of them" (40)

The positive effect of the huge Himalayan range helps the American girl, Caroline, who accompanies her mother on the expedition. She is the victim of a fragmented family and is so deeply upset that she wants to die. It is her near escape from death that cures her. She later tells her companions:

Crazy things were going on inside my head. But when I found myself dangling on the edge of the cliff and my death wish about to be fulfilled, something snapped inside me. It was a wakeup call. My life, everything I was, everything I wished to be, flashed before my eyes and I discovered that I did not want to die" (63).

The peace of the Himalayas cures her of depression, and she grows to love the place. "At first all I noticed in Leh were the power failures, the crummy hotels, the lousy plumbing and the terrible food. Now I remember the smiles on the peoples' faces, their warmth and their hospitality. The mountains appeared forbidding . . . I was frightened of them then. But the truth is that they are grand, infinitely beautiful . . ." (63).

The tiger bone and shahtoosh trade is rampant in Ladakh. The story begins with a report prepared by the Wildlife Society of India with regard to this. The magnitude of the poaching in the region is seen from the fact that the Tibetan antelope or the Chiru, as it is locally known, once roamed the northern plains in huge herds but their numbers have been dramatically reduced due to hunting for its dense undercoat, called shahtoosh. The wool spun from it is considered the finest in the world. Its name means 'king wool.' The wool is woven into luxurious shawls that are prized the world over. In the past, hunting was minimal, but today the demand from the fashion industry has pushed up the value and killing of the animals has become an extremely profitable venture. Though the trade in shahtoosh has been banned worldwide, it still persists. A barter system exists along the border of Ladakh and Tibet, where shahtoosh wool is exchanged for tiger bones. The bones are from tigers killed in the sanctuaries of India. The nomadic Changpa people carry them on the backs of yaks, across remote Himalayan passes, into Tibet. Besides spurring the slaughter of the antelope, this trade also threatens the survival of the Indian tiger. Mr. Akira Singh, a half-Indian and half-Japanese smuggler is behind the trade. He is the main villain of the story.

Vikram argues with Akira the smuggler in an effort to make him give up his trade. “What right do we have to destroy these species and wipe them off the face of the planet? . . . They too have a right to live!” (79).

Akira contends that he is simply a businessman. The people who want medicines made from tiger bones and those who wear shahtoosh shawls are to blame:

I don't use tiger bone medicines and I personally don't care for shahtoosh shawls. Get it clear in your head that it is not Akira who is driving these animals to extinction. It is those *educated* people with money in their pockets who are responsible. . . . If they catch me, someone else will take my place. You arrest him, and somebody else will take his place. The killing will go on. Tell your precious organisations to focus on the *cause* of the problem. Their money can be better spent on educating people not to use tiger bone medicine and not to aspire for shahtoosh shawls. (79)

The argument between Vikram and Akira forms the crux of the story. It provides the reader with new insights into the problem:

‘Seriously,’ said Akira earnestly, ‘I have always liked animals. I have visited all the sanctuaries in this country. . . . I have been to Kanha, Kazhiranga, Ranthambore and Corbett. Dealing in animal products doesn't mean that I do not appreciate the creatures. I believe that people should be clear about their priorities, like I am. I am fond of animals. But I will not let that override my business instincts. (85)

The highlight of the story is Dalal's descriptions of the snow leopard. Caroline, looking at them from afar with binoculars, calls them “silver ghosts” (115). “The leopards walked in single file, the cubs following in the tracks of their mother” (115). When in danger, they stop. Caroline recalls Raghu, words: “when a snow leopard freezes, it vanishes into the mountainside” (115).

Vikram's encounter with the snow leopard is an almost mystical experience:

It was a silver shadow against a backdrop of glittering stars. It had wonderful fluffy fur. Vikram couldn't help admiring its magnificent coat. The animal wasn't very tall, and it had a long tail, almost as long as itself. The tail was silvery too. Two ears protrude from its head and he saw delicate whiskers on its snout. . . . For a carnivorous cat its face was rather small, much smaller than that of a tiger. . . . It had thick, furry paws and rosettes. The cubs were cute and cuddly, not adjectives usually associated with carnivorous cats. The animals were balls of smoky fur, exquisite and delightful. (109-111).

Deepak Dalal takes immense care to authentically research the environment in which his adventures are set. He has personally travelled to Ladakh, the Andamans, Lakshadweep,

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Ranthambore and to the other places he describes. He meets the locals and brings out the problems and the eco-friendly lifestyles of the traditional communities. He makes a realistic assessment of the impact of ‘civilization’ on their lives and also on the ecosystem of which they are a parts he is keen to expose poaching – the poachers, their markets and their network. Dalal’s heroes are fearless but well-trained nature adventurers who save the ecology of the endangered regions through their sharp wits and timely actions. They also go on expeditions amidst the beauty of nature and indulge in adventure sports. The flora and fauna of the varied ecosystems- be they mountain, high plateau, coral reef, sea, volcanic island, lush forest- is authentically portrayed, with ecological concepts woven seamlessly into the stories.

Red Blooms in the Forest by Nilima Sinha is set in interior Jharkhand, a region of hills, wild forests, swift streams and tiny tribal villages. Champa, the teen-aged village girl leads a traditional pastoral life, tending to their cattle, living in a thatched hut, where meals are cooked on a wood-burning stove. The *sal* trees surround the area, affording it protection from the elements. Sheesham and teak trees also grow in the area. However, the village doors close at sunset. “The village cloistered itself off from the looming forest hovering at the edge” (12). The villagers do not venture into the surrounding forest, considering it an alien place. The canopy of trees, the sudden darkness that falls and the rocky landscape are typical of Jharkhand. Even the Maoists live close to nature. “As they neared the [Maoist] huts, she [Champa] noticed they were made of rocks and boulders sparsely covered with low but thick bushes” (51). Commander Bhaskar takes care to assimilate with his surroundings, living off the land. Manu who is kidnapped “remembered the excitement and romance of the jungles of his childhood, peopled with exotic animals like the lion and the panther as well as the lovable rabbits and bears he knew as characters in storybooks” (101). He thinks: “And now here he was - right inside the tiger’s home, though the animal he had loved and found comfort with no longer existed in its habitat. Instead, human beings, far fiercer and more dangerous than any beast, roamed in the jungles” (101). Through the voice of Manas, the author remarks that the original inhabitant of the forest, the tiger is extinct, and the more ferocious humans have taken over its habitat.

The villagers celebrate the festival of the *karama* tree, which is a symbol of youth, love and fertility. The nature-loving villagers stand for life, whereas the naxals and the factory-owners, who both upset the balance of nature stand for death in the area. The story emphasises the interrelatedness of society, economy and the ecosystem. The happy villagers spend their time singing, dancing and drinking during the festival. Young women wear the red flowers of the *karama* in their hair as they sing their traditional *mahua-patai* (mahu leaf) song. The lines narrate “The song of the monsoon clouds, gathered close and the planting of the *karama* tree” (116).

Even Champa, caught up in serious problems, is able to enjoy the beauty of nature, probably due to her upbringing. “It was a cool clear day, with the fresh morning breeze gently caressing her cheeks. Champa sniffed the bouquet of fresh forest fragrances that wafted in with the breeze- the scent of the wet earth and the crushed leaves combined with the tantalizing fragrance of the

eucalyptus” (127). Nature is symbolic of freedom to the captive Manu who says, “Look, even the moon hides its grieving face behind those dark clouds” (136).

Bhaskar terrorizes humans and pollutes nature. Informers are beheaded and their bodies thrown into a stream, whose muddy green water was coloured a pale pink the next morning. Human intrusion mars the beauty and violates the sanctity of nature. Terrorism leads to shoot-outs and this further disrupts the natural rhythm. It is the naxalites who go deep into the forest. Tribals like Champa do not venture inside. They keep to the fringes. The whole natural balance of the area is destroyed by the introduction of an alien animal, Bhaskar, from Andhra Pradesh into the habitat of Jharkhand. This eco-unfriendly practice is dangerous since it poses a threat to the well-established ecosystem of the land. The tribal way of life is gone. The red that blooms in the forest is unnatural and bodes ill.

The Small Tigers of Shergarh by Ranjit Lal has as its theme the healing power of nature. The description of the sanctuary is authentic, and the atmosphere is well brought out. Two traumatised children are the survivors of a car crash in which they lose their parents. Physically, they are unscathed but mentally they are affected. Shikha keeps hearing loud crashing sounds in her head and her brother, Sunny, is unable to speak and keeps clinging to her. The Shergarh Tiger Reserve and National Park is based on Ranthambore, according to the author.

The protagonists (human) are the teen-aged girl, Shikha, her traumatised five-year-old brother, Sunny, Binoy Chacha, her uncle, field Director Mr. Rana of Shergarh Tiger Reserve, Aslambhai, a retired forest guard. Ali, his mischievous grandson and Veena aunty a.k.a. ‘Snail Snot.’ The tigers are Shahenshah, Sheeba and Shaitan. Ranjit Lal is almost Hemingwayesque in his description of the landscape. On the train journey to Shergarh, “Large birds of prey wheeled and screamed against a blue sky, shimmering in the heat. . . . occasionally the Gypsy sped past the horrid laughing skeleton of some poor cow or buffalo that had just lain down here and died” (8). The landscape reflects Shikha’s state of mind. “There were no proper trees, just thorn bushes and scrub, and sometimes a defiant acacia, as crooked and twisted by the harsh environment, being attacked by rangy looking goats” (2).

Lal uses animal imagery to describe humans: Sunny was “curled tightly like a pangolin” (1). Binoy Chacha looked “like a wild man from the woods” (1). Veena aunty had a “praying mantis embrace.” (63). On their train journey, Sunny clings “like a limpet” to his sister (4). Binoy Chacha “had stormed off to wild places to paint” (5). “A brace of fierce-looking coolies leapt on board like wolves” (7). The gnome-like Aslambhai is close to nature. The trees were “loped and disfigured.” The arid landscape is “like people whose arms and legs had been cut off,” Shikha thinks with a shudder (8). The landscape is humanised, while people are compared to animals. Langurs sit “just like men at the station.” There is a television set “crouching in one dark corner” (12).

Binoy Chacha’s house is built on the edge of a cliff and the view is breath-taking. “In the middle distance, another rugged rocky ridge ran across the horizon. Massive crenulated walls that

ended in a formidable looking fort “that squatted proudly” at its very spur” (12). The children could see the fort, Shergarh Kila, and below it, the palace, Chhota Mahal. “Bush, scrub, scraggy date palms and a series of ravines, tawny, amber and beige” (80) give a foretaste of the tigers that are going to appear. Shiksh listens from her uncle’s house to the call of the tiger in the nearby reserve at night: “Aaoom-aaooooom-aaroom-aaargh” (26). She feels that the tigers are talking to each other. Later, she finds the calls comforting and reassuring.

Initially, when Binoy Chacha suggests taking a pair of binoculars to spot tigers, Shikha is not happy but scared because the tigers in the zoo appeared “so menacing, as if they were biding their time and plotting about what they would do to the visitors who stared and hooted at them once they got out” (17).

They are escorted in a jeep by Aslambhai, a very experienced honorary wildlife warden. The children see animals enjoying themselves in the forest pool. They spot sambhar deer. They come across a tiger pugmark on the road. “Like us, they too like using the road,” explains Asambhai (22). The animal imagery continues inside the sanctuary. They see a banyan tree with “python like roots” (23). Shikha looked around in alarm, rather like the spotted deer had back in the park” (25).

The flora and fauna of the region are enumerated. The list of birds is impressive- the crested serpent eagle. the nightjar, the red-vented bulbul, cocoa brown treepies, scarlet minivets and the partridge which call out “Pateela! Pateela” in shrill tones. Aslambhai stops the vehicle in order to let the children hear the sounds of the jungle waking up and they hear the “cheerful musical call made by the bulbul” (33).

Butterflies with yellow and deep blue with orange markings fly about. The dust of the sanctuary is different from the dust of the roads – it is fine and silvery. Descriptions and behaviour of the jungli soor, the wild boar, sambhar deer, chital and many other animals enrich the narrative with eco-knowledge.

The first appearance of Shahenshah, the king of the sanctuary, is a masterpiece of description: “An absolutely huge tiger was padding down the path, his great paws puffing up little clouds of pale dust as he walked towards them beautifully framed by the whispering golden-green grass fronds bending over him from either side” (39). His fiery rufous coat, with its beautiful black flames shone in the early morning sunlight. His great golden amber eyes stared at them gravely, and just for a second, his eyes looked at them gravely, and just for a second, his ears cocked interrogatively forward, like a gog whose name has been called”” He took care to place his rear paws exactly where his front paws had been, as he walked” (39). The tiger goes on to mark his territory and the children get the sharp, hot animal smell. “That beautiful tiger had just walked past them, minding its own business. . . . Why then did people have to get after this poor animal? How could anyone point a gun at such a beautiful creature? If you left it alone, it left you alone” (42), Shika wonders and says that it was an experience like meeting a prime minister or a king.

The need for tiger conservation is brought out in the form of a local legend told to the children by Sherifa, the wife of Aslambhai. The Maharaja of Shergarh, in the days of yore, organised a tiger hunt which went on for two years. Hundreds of the great beasts were killed. “So many animals died that the forests started themselves to die of grief. The trees began to wither, the waterholes and lakes were parched because the streams simply flowed out or dried up. . . .” (59). The maharaja’s son sickened. A holy man living on the banks of a stream told him that he should find a small tiger cub for the boy to look after and raise. A starving cub that had lost its mother was found and brought to the palace. The royal couple knew that only if the cub lived would the prince live. They then understood the interdependence of all living creatures. The prince recovered to full health and the tiger became his inseparable companion.

The young *rajikumar* persuaded his father to decree that there would be no more tiger hunts in Shergarh. So, Shergarh really did become “the fort of the tiger,” the realm of the tiger.

And to his amazement, in a few years the maharaja found that his kingdom had begun prospering again as never before. There were no droughts, no famines, and food and water was plentiful. You see, the tigers had started looking after the jungles again and you couldn’t have better caretakers of the jungle! The tigers made sure that there were just enough deer and antelope for the forests to support, that they didn’t eat up all the bushes and plants and so the trees grew tall and strong. And the trees ensured that the rainwater was caught between the wide and deep net of their roots in the soil, leaking it out bit by bit all the year round in springs and streams, so that there could never be any drought even if the rains were not good. (62)

Shikha had kept on hearing screeching and clanging noises in her head ever since the accident. Now, the noises were slowly disappearing. Shikha wonders on hearing the story if her brother would recover if they got him a tiger cub.

The Forest Officer’s daughter, Dipti, assigns Shikha to photograph the tigers during her absence. It is an assignment that Shikha does faithfully. Every day she goes to the sanctuary and takes photographs. She takes down notes and builds up an album, a record notebook which is really a treasure.

Once, Shikha and Dipti see a crocodile waiting for a chital. Shikha wants to warn the deer, but Dipti explains that they should not interfere. However, a heron gives the deer warning just in time. Shikha learns that one should not interfere with nature’s food chain. Dipti, too senses the healing power of nature. “And deep inside her, Dipti hoped that the tigers of Shergarh would protect the children she was putting into their fierce care” (85). However, she is worried when Shikha calls Shahenshah an “old doofus” in her letter. She warns her that he is a wild tiger, not a pet.

The relationship of the animals and their environment is explained by Aslambhai who tells Shikha:

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There will be many days when you won't see any tigers. But you will see the places where the tigers live, and the other animals that share the tigers' habitat. Without these beautiful places and without them, the tiger can't live and without the tiger, they can't live either. That is why we must keep these places beautiful and not destroy them and that is why you must photograph them as well as the tiger. (101)

The working of the ecosystem with its biodiversity is expressed by Shikha who likes the sanctuary because "everything seems to know what it has to do. I mean all creatures go on with what they have to do without really getting into each other's way. Sometimes they do, but then they just butt one another politely and get on with things. Not like us, always interfering with one another unnecessarily and getting all upset" (119). Tigers catch the weak animals, ensuring that the fittest survive.

Ranjit Lal introduces several negative characters to bring out undesirable attitudes to nature. Goldie Singh, the non-resident Indian is an example of what a visitor to the sanctuary should not be. He complains of not meeting a tiger. He demands value for money and wants to put in a complaint because he is eager to tell his friends in the States that he had seen a tiger. Ali, Aslambhai's mischievous son gives him a fright by imitating a tiger's roar.

Veena Aunty is an obnoxious woman who encourages villagers to graze their cattle in the sanctuary. She thinks tigers should be killed. She hates wildlife. She believes sanctuaries exist because the government wants to make money through tourism. "I think all these places should be closed down and the people allowed back in. They will be able to look after the environment much better than any tigers!" (134). "If you want to see tigers, you can go to a zoo!" she declares (174). Veena aunty's cousin Randhir uses satanic logic when he contends that allowing tiger hunting will help conservation because rich people would want the tiger population to increase.

The personalities of the tigers are brought out distinctly. While Shahenshah is majestic but rather gentle at heart, his mate Sheba is proud, beautiful and very powerful, overshadowing her sister, Begum. Shaitan the beta male likes frightening people. He makes mock attacks. Like Shikha, Sheba loves the forest pond, Hira Talo. It has deep green waters and is surrounded by ochre cliff faces, steep ravines with rugged date palms and giant bamboo clumps. Kingfishers and lapwings fly around. Sunny begins to gain confidence little by little. He does not cling to his sister but is willing to explore the ruined fort.

Shikha takes Sunny in a jeep to the sanctuary when Veena aunty tries to separate them. The children feel affinity towards the animals. In the sanctuary, they know how to survive. They get the unique opportunity of playing with wild tiger cubs when they hide in a cave while the tigress, Sheba is away hunting. Sheba is a mother figure to the children, whom Aslambhai names the "small tigers of Shergarh" (226).

Sunny begins to regain his speech when he plays with the cubs. After the children leave, Sheba returns and sensing human presence, takes the cubs to another spot she had kept in mind for emergencies. Her behaviour is similar to that of the naxals in *Red Blooms in the Forest*, who shift camp to previously chosen sites under threat of outside presence. Thus, the author's comment in the latter, that they had replaced the tiger as the most dangerous animal in the forest is justified.

Randhir and his friends who are poachers kill and skin the tigress Begum, who had been missing for quite some time. The poachers are caught using jungle tactics, traps with vines, formulated by the clever Ali. Learning a lesson from the tigers, Shikha uses the peculiarly intense look that she had learnt from Sheba and thus successfully asserts herself. Brother and sister gain normalcy in the sanctuary under the benign influence of the presiding felines.

Graeme Macqueen's *Journey to the City of Six Gates* is an adventure fantasy set in ancient India. Macqueen is a Canadian author with a great love of Indian storytelling. He is a university professor and peace activist.

Enemies invade The Land of Gold and abduct the king and queen. Fourteen-year-old Princess Mati and her twelve-year-old brother, Prince Satya, are secretly spirited away by the loyal Jaya Prabhasa, the most accomplished warrior in the land.

The royal children are initially unhappy in the forest, where they survive an attack by wild boar by climbing a tree. This makes Satya determined to learn the art of tree-climbing. They soon learn about herbal medicine. They use willow bark for pain and Vanaraja salve for their wounds. They wear deerskin clothing.

Mati begins hearing the song of the trees, names repeated, "warm and green and full of promise" (26). They come across Roti Baba, a wild holy man, dressed in tattered robes. "His white hair and beard were like tangled vines" (30). His teeth "stuck out like the tusks of a wild boar. . . His hands and feet were tough like the roots of an ancient tree" (30). Roti Baba too chants the names of trees. Mati the mathematician is more interested in the scientific aspects - soil, water, energy, the extent of forest coverage, animal, birds, the forest ecosystem, symbiotic relationships. The *baba* sends her to meditate on the Banyan verses every day, thus introducing her to ecospiritual training. Mati realizes one day: "They [the trees] feel thirst! They feel heat and cold! They feel the wind! Holy One, they are alive as we are!" (50). The trees call themselves the Steady Ones. Roti Baba initiates Mati into this knowledge. Mati is soon able to know intuitively that Sathya is being pursued by his enemies. like a monkey in the trees. Indeed, his enemies think that he is one, since he moves so confidently, having taken training from the *baba* in tree-climbing. He learns from his mentor that man and nature have to work together. The climber and the climbed were "Two dancers dancing" (60). Satya the prince in exile becomes Satya the Dancer. Satya learns how to use the suppleness of branches and to calculate how they would bend.

Later, Satya interprets the group dances of the hill people which symbolize interdependency of man and nature. In the hills, the neighbours rely on each other to survive. Similarly, man and his natural environment are interdependent. “He saw no climber / he saw nothing climbed / he saw two dancers / dancing’ (61). Satya the Dancer dances with death twice. To Satya, tree climbing is an art. The trees are “A crowd of hands” (45), ready to help the climber who understands them. “The strangest thing of all was that the branches stopped being enemies. They seemed to reach out to him as if they were friends” (46).

Mati addresses the trees: “Steady Ones! In the name of the One Whose Roots Hold the Earth Together, I greet you!” “Greetings, Two Foot!” comes the reply from the trees (69). Mati has not yet been bestowed with her true name. The trees warn her that bad men, cutters and destroyers, were ahead.

Trees that grow by a fierce river are honoured as heroes by the other trees because they live there in spite of the danger. When they reach the River of Doubtful Crossing, they have to obtain the permission of the River Trees to cross. They alone hold the authority. Mati cannot impress them by saying that she is a princess, because that is of no consequence to nature. So, she decides to quieten her mind by doing the Banyan meditation. She sits down at the foot of a teak tree. After an hour, she loses herself in the image of the thirsty tree. At the end, the pleased river trees, addressing her as Mati the Green, give her permission to cross over. The party enters the Forest of Many Many Trees.

Their journey takes them to the kingdom of the wicked Puti Mamsa’s. It is a wasteland scarred by the charred remains of conquered villages and stands in contrast to the pristine forest. Puti Mamsa’s archers shoot innocent monkeys. His kingdom stinks with rotting meat. The forest people, when they hear his capital city being mentioned, either cleanse their hands or make cleansing motions. Thus, the enemy is depicted in terms of decay.

For four months the journey through the forest continues. “Most days were simple: they worked hard, travelled far and slept soundly. Other days were not simple at all. There were adventures with tigers and wolves and elephants” (81).

Their food consists of grass seed *chappatis*, weed soup and fruits.

Nature is not without its dangers. The group has to cross the Ticket of Itch which makes people run into the Bog of No Escape. The very lucky and determined ones reach the Mudhole of Relief. They survive because of their friendship with the trees. Once they climb into the trees, the itching became bearable. They make their way across the Ticket of Itch through the trees. But at a certain point, there are no trees.

Mati the Green runs towards the Bog of No Escape. Mati could see the water weeds, smell the rank grasses and perfumed lotuses. Rotting tree trunks twisted from the water. Leaves and stems turned to soup in the ooze (96). An ancient, dying tree, its branches without leaves, its trunk about to

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slip into the bog chants: “Honour . . . “Honour to the One . . .” The ancient tree saves Mati by telling a story. “Many, many rains ago, long before the Two Foot, when all creatures minded their own business and no one took the place that belonged to another, there was a sal tree called Tall For Her Age” (97). She was ready to join the Canopy. “All around her were Steady Ones, and they too grew with joy, and they left room for her and sheltered her and helped her toward the Canopy (97). But cutters and burners and those who make the clean unclean came. She called out: “Can the Canopy fall? Who will grow with joy when the Canopy falls? When the Canopy falls what creature will not fall?”

The resilience of Nature is emphasised:

And a voice deeper than the roots of all mountains replied: For every cutter / I will send a healer. / For every burner / One who cools; / With the unclean I will send / the clean. / For in every age One will arise /who will make the Great Vow; / the Vow to Protect the Canopy./ And others will hear;/ they will join the Keeper of the Vow. (98)

The tree reveals that Mati the Green is the Keeper of the Vow to Protect the Canopy. “Time after time we die and are born again, and even a Keeper forgets a promise. It was my duty to remind you and now my duty is done. Remember, Mati the Green, remember . . .” The tree sinks into the water, repeating: “honour to the One Whose Roots Hold the Earth Together’ (98).

Mati takes the Vow of the Keeper:

On the day the Canopy feels danger; / On the day the Canopy decides / On the day the Canopy sends out word / I will be bark over the sapwood / I will be thorns against blades / I will be water against fire / I will look on the life of the Canopy as my own life./ By the thirst in the root / By the joy in the Worldtree / I make this vow! (99).

Mati now has the power control even deadwood. Therefore, the handles of the axes obey her and do not cut the trees.

The Great Clean City is irony exemplified. It is decorated with The Hundred Thousand Signs, which are carvings depicting the suppression of animals and humans. All living things are ill-treated and consumed: “Lions and tigers, deer and buffalo, bears, wolves, foxes – they were chained together, one after the other. . . . There seemed to be no rhyme or reason for the order of animals. Some were predators, some were prey.” (129). Mati sets the wooden stakes on fire to purify the city. Satya finds that he can speak to the elephants. The tribal people, in disguise as holy men, free the prisoners, human and animal. There is total confusion and Mamsa flees.

Mati, who does not know to use her powers without hurting herself, is brought to the Healer, a wise old woman. She reveals a lot of things. “No one lives life more than the Keeper” (144). She tells her of the “The Sleepwood Spell” and shares her knowledge of herbal medicines. The old

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woman gives her a green cloak with a hood. “When it is time to act, wear this. And may the One Whose Roots Hold the Earth Together protect you!” (146). The reader is informed that the people in the village belong to the Snake tribe. They hear a village woman sing the Wind Song as they leave. The closeness of the tribal people to nature is obvious and in contrast to the lives of the people in the polluted city.

Mati, Satya and Jaya Prabhasa then proceed to King Nanda’s kingdom which lies in the flat, fertile valley of the Sarpana River, between two mountain ranges, a mild, beautiful country. Though seemingly peaceful, the group learns that it is a land where deforestation is practised on a vast scale and animals are mercilessly hunted down. Jaya Prabhasa tells Prince Sthama the story of Dukka Shara. A prince was born with a divine talent for archery. He was trained by a master who taught him not to look into the eyes of a living thing that he wanted to shoot. One day, the prince looks into the eyes of a doe walking with two of her young. “What is the light glowing in the eyes?” he wonders aloud. The doe replies, “It is life.” “Life?” cries Dukka Shara. “I have been shooting the living?” The prince falls unconscious to the ground. When he returns to the palace he declares, “Tonight I vow by the light in the eyes of all things that have life, I will never kill again” (169). A voice from the sky speaks: “A great archer knows not only how to shoot the arrow but how to draw it out. On this day Dukka Shara has drawn the arrow of pain from all creatures, and on this day he has become the greatest archer in the world” (169). “Prince,” says Jaya when he has finished the story, “Our journeys change us. When I set out from the Land of Gold, I was one kind of warrior. Now I am a different kind” (169).

Mati prays for the safety of her companions. She meditates among the trees, clad in plain undyed cotton. “I am a thirsty banyan myself,” she thinks when she does the Banyan meditation (181). She is able to empathise with the trees. The trees do not want to speak of the east because there are cutters there. Satya sees Bala Raja’s men advancing in a wide row through the forest, cutting down all trees. They lift not even a sapling “leaving all around them a treeless land, covered with stumps and the blackened remains of branches” (186). Each armed with a heavy bronze axe, they chanted loudly: “Land for farming, / land for cattle, / down with the trees!” (186). Every few minutes the men would pause and all the trees that had been cut down would be hauled to a cleared space where another group of soldiers would cut off the branches.” The author continues, “Satya had seen the hill nations cut down a few trees, but nothing like this. ‘Land for building, / land for battle. . .’ Satya watched the tops of the trees shake as the axes truck. He watched the slow fall as each tree went down. Tree after tree. He felt a sickness deep inside” (187). Jaya wisely observes: “I’m afraid the evil of this king may be been greater than Puti Mamsa’s” (187).

Back in the palace, Mati feels a stifling silence. The trees do not respond when she speaks. They do not even seem to be talking to each other. At last she could hear whispers of little broken stories, as if they were telling the story to themselves. The stories were getting simpler as she walked eastward. “There once was a Steady One. It climbed and climbed, and it reached the Canopy. Only good things happened. It stayed there forever” (188), said a chillingly sad voice.

Mati is impelled by the force of her Vow to save the trees. She uses the stream to revive herself, as the old woman had advised. She is able to communicate with the trees. “She felt the minds of the trees touch her own mind” (194). She declares herself to be “Mati the Green, Keeper of the Vow to Protect the Canopy” (194). The forest wakes in wonder. The trees ask her to repeat the Vow. She does so after pouring water from her hands ritually back into the stream and putting on her green cloak. Mati chants the Sleepwood Spell. The axes fall from the woodcutters’ hands. A man starts chanting: “Long live the trees!” (202). The elephants come and everybody, except the chanter with the shining eyes, flees. The one who stays back sings: “Forests, earth / and rain and laughter; / down with the King!” (202).

Jaya Prabhasa is relieved because “They [Mati and Satya] had not, as he had feared, become tree spirits and disappeared into the Forest of Many Trees. “But then, if they had not become tree spirits, what had they become? Who was Satya, really? And Mati - who was this woman in the green cloak?” he wonders (228). In the open air, a hawk circled high in the sky over her head, keeping watched. And those who listened closely when she walked past a stand of trees would hear them softly murmuring, as if they were talking about someone they loved (229).

At last, they reach the City of the Six Gates. The King of the City of Six Gates is the money-minded fraud, King Bala. He represents material exploitation. However, they are able to discover the place where Mati and Satya’s parents are imprisoned. Satya is able to rescue them because of the tree-climbing skills he has acquired. The family is reunited, and they regain their lost kingdom. The book emphasises that one should turn to nature and to environmental issues in order to gain lasting happiness.

In Harini Gopalswami Srinivasan’s *The Smile of Vanuvati*, three children, Vittal, Malavika and Chikka helping at an archaeological excavation in Gujarat, uncover the fascinating doll Vanuvati which had been lost in a flood around 2500 BC. The novel has been inspired by a visit to Lothal, an important archaeological site.

Vanuvathi the copper doll survives the ages because she is part of nature. She hums softly to herself: “Let the winds blow, let the rain pour / Let the river flow right through the door; / Let the sky thunder, hurl fire and roar! / We are born of the earth, purified by fire, / Hardened by water; cooled by the air, / And surrounded by space - / The five elements coming together in grace.” (4). In the eight century, two children, Miriam and Harun discover the doll. A local raja considers it a precious idol and demands its return. But Harun has already thrown it into the waters of the river. The doll is related to the river.

When Vanuvathi is re-discovered in the modern era, a fierce debate as to whether she is a child’s doll, or an ancient goddess ensues. Bholu the camel boy’s aunt, an old, half-crazed lady, seems to have spiritual powers and is close to the elemental aspects of nature.

She hates everyone except Sarasvati, the goddess of the river that was supposed to run here long, long ago . . . anyway, she thinks Sarasvati has disappeared because people are wicked but will return one day and save her. Her name is Sarasvati too, so she thinks is the favoured child of the goddess” (61).

Heavy rain comes and fills the creeks with water. The old woman is delighted. She feels that the river has returned and that prosperous days would come to the village again. She stands prophetically “on the very edge of the torrent, with her hands raised to heaven, completely oblivious to the rain:” (131). Vanuvathi is identified with an ancient river goddess and is installed in a shrine at the Mataji temple near the seashore.

Swati Sengupta’s *Guns on My Red Earth* narrates the story of the fourteen-year-old militant boy, Shanto. He escapes from the heavily fortified Lalgarh police station and enters the dense Jhitka forest in Jangalmahal, West Bengal. The forest is dominated by tall sal trees and is ruled by Maoists. The boy walks barefoot on the thick bed of leaves on the ground without making the slightest noise. “Fast cautious steps, like a deer fleeing stealthily from a tiger” (10) on the hot earth. The author stresses the animal-like qualities of Shanto which help him adapt to forest life. Shanto could see even in the dark. “His eyes-deep and expressive-were also like a deer” (2). He has a pet, a little grey squirrel, Chhoto, which he feed with peanuts. Since his parents have left to become part of a Maoist unit, he ekes out a living collecting sal leaves and making plates.

Snakes, sharp thorns and elephant herds are part of the forest landscape. The elephant path winds from the Dalma Hills of Jharkhand right up to the forests of Pursulia, Bankura and Paschim Medinipur. The depiction of Shanto’s surroundings is authentic. Rain makes the ground slippery. The beauty of the dust is described.

The author writes, “Shanto was like the forest, quiet and accepting” (46). Like a wild animal, he does not like confinement. So, he does not to lie in the hospital bed. He “longed to be out in the open” (47). The clear blue sky, the scorching blaze of the sun on his skin, the wind playing in his hair and the birds eating grains from his hands delight him. He wants to take a drive in the cold waters of a pond and swimming for hours, and to spend his nights watching the dark clouds shadow the moon every now and then, or the stars glowing in the dark, amidst the incessant chirping of the crickets. “Oh, when he could go back in the open again, Shanto would sigh and wonder” (16-61). Shanto’s adventures that finally carry him to peace and happiness are enriched by his knowledge and close relationship with nature.

Paro.Anand’s *No Guns at My Son’s Funeral* is a story of militancy in the Kashmir Valley and has, like *Red Blooms in the Forest*, a beautiful setting. Nature’s loveliness is jarred by the violence that takes place. The militant Akram “was a creature of the mountains. He could outwit a snow leopard, if he needed to” (102). Yet, the pristine mountain stream is running with blood. He thinks: “Yes, the river was swift enough to disperse the red and not to leave a condemning trail for his pursuers to follow” (102). The words, “Deep in his lair Akram moved” (71) also likens him to an

animal which is hunted. Nilima Sinha's comment in *The Red Blooms in the Forest* that a more dangerous animal, man, had taken over the territory of the tiger (101), is also applicable here.

Even science fiction such as Payal Dhar's *A Shadow in Eternity* are set against the landscape of nature. Even in the alternate world, there are outdoor adventures and journey among hills, rain and slippery stones. Maya, Noah and Chigu, the protagonists, hike alongside a river, showing the eagerness of the city born to adapt to natural surroundings.

Sampurna Chattarji's *Land of the Well* is a young adult coming of age novel which has, to some extent, nature as its background. The story opens with Goa in the monsoon. "What did you expect, it was beautiful," begins the seventeen-year-old protagonist. The rain and the greenness of the land lead the boy to invent the myth of the Land of the Well, whose guardian deity ensures a fresh and health-giving water supply. The people there did not die of any disease but lived to a very long and healthy old age. The king, who was elected, had a secret, invisible throne under a banyan tree. Local legend had it that he was actually a tiger. The myth goes on to tell the story of the Seven Sisters, daughters of the sky, who were goldfish at night. The River Goddess has an important role to play in the story within the story, which is set with a mythopoeic landscape as the background.

The Wildings by Nilanjana Roy, is an unusual debut book. It is about a small band of cats that live in the alleys of Old Delhi. Beraal, Southpaw, Katar, Mia, Hulo and Mara the Sender, with far-reaching telepathic powers, are some of the feline protagonists. There is a battle between the half-wild stray cats and the feral cats. The book is realistic and celebrates the animal life of the city, including the big cats.

Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan's *Confessions of a Listmaniac*, Sonja Chandrachud's *Pearls of Wisdom*, *The Potion of Eternity* and *Revenge of the Pharaoh*, Payal Kapadia's *Wisha Wozzariter*, Kavitha Daswani's *Lovetorn*, Niveditha Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran's *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet*, Vibha Batra's *Sweet Sixteen*, Mainak Dhar's *Vimana*, Lila Majumdar's *The Burmese Box*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Shadowland*, Sabina 'Anara' Anand's *Forbidden Earth* and Nico Raposo's *Shoot the Falcon* were all briefly examined, but did not contain any significant ecological content.

It is seen that books for older children explore eco problems in a realistic, adult manner. Poaching, encroachment into wildlife territory, biodiversity of various ecosystems, nature tours, expeditions into tough terrain to, the study of wildlife, pollution control and disaster management have their place in the books. Books for young adults mostly depict urban life, with malls, offices, schools and colleges as their setting. Fantasy, science fiction and tales of the supernatural also find their place in this category. Books for young adults need to reflect youthful participation in conservation, pollution prevention, eco-tourism, nature sports and so on. Young adult fiction based on these themes can be written by the talented creators of fiction for the young in India.

Chapter VI

Illustrations- A Brief Glance

A child is sensitive to pictures even before it can speak. Illustrations in picture books attract the child towards reading. The child may first look at the pictures. As Alice says, “What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?” Illustrations develop in the child a life-long love of reading. Pictures are an introduction into the world of books. The child may at first look at the pictures and explore the world of the book. Then, the story may be read out to him/her and later, the child reads for himself/herself. The unique character of picturebooks as an art form is based on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal (Nikolajeva1). Pictures convey meaning and carry information. According to Bodmer, pictures serve to “expand, explain, interpret, or decorate a written text” (72).

Today, due to the impact of the visual media, pictures gain new significance. Graphic novels are read by adults also. For example, some of Agatha Christie’s crime fiction has been published in graphic novel form. Illustrated versions of classics which were immensely popular some years ago introduced children to literature.

Distinction has been made between “illustrated books” or “picture books” where the picture complements the texts and “picturebooks” where the pictures predominate and are essential to the meaning of the text. Picturebooks have little or no verbal content. In reality, it is extremely difficult to separate the books into the said categories and this study makes no attempt to do so. Joseph Schwarcz in his *The Picturebook Comes of Age* does not make any distinction between picturebooks proper and illustrated books.

The chapbooks of the previous age developed into the picture books of the Victorian Age, which used woodcuts. Sometimes, authors themselves were illustrators. For example, Lewis Carroll illustrated *Alice in Wonderland* himself before the official illustrator was selected. J.K. Rowling recalls that she did a series of drawings of her characters and these helped when her books were subsequently published. The popularity of children’s books ensured that illustrations were taken seriously. Even adventure stories for older children, such as Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five* series, which has been the source of inspiration for several Indian children’s authors, have benefitted from illustration. The new edition of these books published by Hachette India has proved disappointing because of the lack of drawings. Some of the best-known picture books are Robert McCloskey’s *Make Way for Ducklings*, Dr. Seuss’s *The Cat in the Hat* and Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*. The Caldecott medal established in 1938 and the Kate Greenway Medal established in 1955 are awarded annually for illustrations in children’s literature.

Picture books have a series of pictures which tell a continuous story. “Picture books are profusely illustrated books in which the illustrations are, to varying degrees, essential to the enjoyment and understanding of the story” (Nodelman qtd. in Fang). The pictorial code is a more direct means of communication than the verbal code. Good illustrations can contribute to the overall

development of the child by stimulating his imagination, arousing his perception and developing his potential. Art can help a young child to discover his own identity and cultural heritage. This is particularly important in countries which have suffered from the effects of colonisation and cultural imperialism. In a similar manner, folktales without illustration may evoke vague images in the minds of children. Good illustrations can also help to correct wrong notions. Humour in illustrations arouses the interest of children.

The functions of pictures are many. Illustrations help the child understand the story's location in time and place, and create a mood, clarify historical background if necessary, provide an antagonist, or emphasize symbolic meaning" (Norton qtd. in Fang). Children, who are in the process or acquiring knowledge, find picture books a good resource. While adults may be familiar with the setting, the needs of the child are different. Picture books help young children understand that words convey meaning, well before they are aware of the text. Pictures can help increase vocabulary, an important building block for reading. Books can help young children identify colours, shapes, numbers, and letters, as well as names of people, places, animals, and everyday objects. The use of colour and shape helps set mood and define character. The emotions of the characters and their actions and reactions help children empathise with them.

Children often associate pictures with their life experiences, to people and objects in their surroundings. Thus, the story becomes "real" to them. As Fang postulates, "Children often come up with unique and creative interpretation of the plot, settings, and characters when they read picture books."

The plot is extended or developed through the help of pictures because the child's attention span is short and he or she will not be attracted to elaborate verbal descriptions. In wordless picture books, the whole plot is unfolded through pictures. In picture books, the plot can be extended or rounded a little by illustrations. Each new re-reading of either words or pictures creates better prerequisites for an adequate interpretation of the whole. Presumably, children know this by intuition when they demand that the same book be read aloud to them over and over again. Actually, they do not read the same book; they go more and more deeply into its meaning. (Nikolajeva 2).

Sometimes, the pictures may tell a slightly different story from the text and provide hidden clues to its real meaning. Young children love to look for hidden objects in pictures. This acts as a challenge to the child and helps his intellectual progress. Pictures help the logical sequencing or ordering of ideas in a text to make sense. They may bring various strands of narrative together. They reinforce the text by giving meaning to the words and help in the expansion of vocabulary.

The books, therefore, cater to their curiosity and love for exploration and help develop perception. Picture books help stimulate creativity. Children learn to use their imagination and go beyond the text. In the fantasy genre, illustrations help children imagine the fantasy world and help concretize it.

Pictures undoubtedly have an aesthetic appeal and help foster interest and appreciation for art in the growing child. They provide a pleasant experience, and act as “a perfect vehicle for opening a child’s eyes to the beauty and power of art” (Jacobs and Tunnel 34).

Children may be introduced to flora and fauna through picture books. For example, in *Vriksha*, published by Mango books, stories of trees are combined with pictures to help the child identify the different types of trees.

Another recent category of picture books uses photographs as illustrations. Examples are *My Friend the Sea*, books from Tulika’s series such as *Takdir the Tiger Cub*, *Beeboo Baby Bear* and *Dinaben and the Lions of Gir*. Photographs appeal to the child who is exposed to television. The use of photographs emphasises the reality of the book’s background and makes the setting authentic.

Books such *Walk in the Grasslands and Walk in the Rainforest*, illustrated by Maya Ramaswamy, have very intricate authentically researched pictures. The pages, in which the pictures spill out into the page without margins, bring the landscape close to the children, giving them a feeling of being in an actual rainforest, desert and so on. Artist Ashok Rajagopalan’s artwork in *The Black Panther* brings alive the thrill of encountering the animal in the wilds of the Anamalai Range.

Framing is an extremely powerful visual element of setting. Frames normally create a sense of detachment between the picture and the reader, while the absence of frames (that is, a picture that covers the whole area of a page or a doublespread) invites the reader into the picture (Nikolojeva 62). It is significant that the above-mentioned picture books do not have frames and thus take the child into the natural setting.

Stylized pictures may be thought to be beyond the grasp of the child. This is a misconception which originated in the westernised tradition of detailed drawings. From experience, parents and educators find that the child is indeed able to stretch his/her power of imagination to grasp the meaning of stylized drawings. These, indeed, help the child “go into the book” through the exercise of the power of imagination. Januka Deshpande, a talented illustrator trained at the National Institute of Design, New Delhi, finds that it is so. In her book, called *Night*, which is bilingual (English/Hindi and English/Tamil), the pictures are entirely in shades of black and white. By clever use of line and spacing, she managed to convey the actual feeling of being inside a forest during night-time, as her protagonists do. When she projected the pictures to a group of children, the response was overwhelming. The children even provided the appropriate sounds to go along with the pictures, thus participating in the text.

Traditional art forms are stylized in nature. Nowadays, there is a strong effort on the part of children’s book illustrators in India to revive traditional art forms. They adapt elements of various tribal and other traditional art forms to suit their needs. Folktales specially benefit from this trend. Artists prefer to use the traditional art form of the particular region from which the story originates.

The relationship between the author and the illustrator is a sensitive one. In the west, there have been several successful author-illustrator teams such as Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake. In India, it is the publisher who predominates. The publishing house may arbitrarily hand over the manuscript to the illustrator, who has no source of communication with the author. But for the most part, authors have stated that they have been satisfied with the picturization of their works. For example, Zai Whitaker expressed her happiness with the way in which Ashok Rajagopalan visualised tribal children, bringing out their exotic appeal in an attractive way, ensuring their acceptability. Author Sreekumar Varma's illustrator is his son, Vinayak Varma, and they form a good team. Sreekumar Vama was particularly happy about the visualisation of his work of fantasy, *The Magic Shop of Nu Chan Wu*.

Innovations in the design of Indian children's books are to be appreciated. An outstanding example is *Let's Plant Trees* published by Tulika. The cover of the book is made from recycled cardboard crates and real seeds are provided for the child to plant. *Where is the Sun?* also from Tulika's stables, has a pocket on the inside back cover where a large, folded reproduction of a traditional painting with plentiful details is kept. However, pop-up books do not seem as popular with Indian publishers as they are with those in the West.

The setting of a picture book establishes the situation and the nature of the world in which the events of the story take place. "The visual text of a picturebook is naturally well suited to the description of spatial dimensions, including both indoor scenes and landscape, the mutual spatial relations of figures and objects, their relative size, position and so on" (Nikolajeva 61).

Pictures define perspective or point of view very economically. For instance, a character gazing from the picture straight at the reader/viewer may be apprehended as an "intrusive' visual narrator (119).

With reference to the cover, Nikolajeva writes:

The titles of picture books naturally appear on covers, and picture book covers always, without exception, display a picture. It can be a picture that is repeated inside the book, or it can be unique. A cover picture that is repeated, even with a slight variation, inside the book anticipates the plot and together with the title . . . provides some information about the book's story, genre and addressee. However, the cover may contradict the story itself. In the layout of the cover, the artist may use different fonts, sizes, and configurations for the title, which occasionally can affect our understanding of the book. The choice of the cover picture reflects the authors or the publisher's idea of the most dramatic or enticing episode in the story. (245-46).

A brief glance at the illustrations reveals that Indian illustrators have progressed far from the stiff imitations of western models and conventional illustration techniques previously used in children's books. The illustrators of today, trained in premier schools of design, have innovated and

experimented, particularly with regard to the induction of folk forms and stylization of the kind acceptable by children. They have brought out award-winning work, gaining recognition in international forums. The following are some of the illustrated books at a glance:

In *Magnolias* Illustrated by Amrita Kanther, who has a Masters' Degree in Design from Industrial Design Centre, IIT, Bombay, the place, the people and their stories come together as in a large painting, in the *Pahari* miniature art style of the region, Himachal Pradesh. The huge white magnolia flowers dominate each page. The artist brings out the softness and even the sense of fragrance in the magnolia flower.

Gulla and the Hangul is illustrated by Proiti Roy who studied fine art at Shantiniketan. The lovely Kashmiri landscape is brought to life through the use of watercolours and pencil stripes for light and shadow effect. The sense of depth has been created with the effective use of foreground and background techniques, giving the reader the "feel" of the Valley.

The Tamarind Tree and *Kali and the Rat Snake* have been illustrated by Srividya Natarajan, a Ph.D. in English from the University of Hyderabad. As Zai Whitaker, the author of *Kali* remarked with appreciation (Whitaker, Interview), the tribal children are depicted with distinctive characteristics, but are still acceptably familiar and loveable. The village children in *The Tamarind Tree* are lovable and lively and typical of the setting of the story, interior Karnataka.

One Night in the Sunderbans has artwork by Ratna Morinaux Rege, who has a degree in Fine Arts from the J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai. She has recently illustrated a children's book in French. As Zai Whitaker remarks in the blurb, "The powerful illustrations complement the message and the plot." The dark mysterious mangrove forest is portrayed by the effective use of black for the foliage. Contrasting bright colours for the humans and animals, against a dark background and the use of silhouette for the main characters, the girl and the tiger, is effective.

The *Smart Green Civilizations* series published by TERI is illustrated by Yatindra Kumar. The positioning of the pictures and text, with the text distributed over the page interspersed with attractive drawings, makes eco-history more easily assimilated. The artist appears to have been inspired by Uderzo of Asterix fame.

In *Colour-Colour Kamini*, the attractive use of colour contrast and the richness of colour bring the world of the chameleon to life. The artwork is by Priya Kuriyan, a highly talented artist who is much in demand by publishers. She has studied animation and film design in New Delhi. The compact size, child- friendly size of the book adds to its attraction. The slightly anthropomorphic animals still retain their characteristics, as Payal B. Molor commented on Maya Ramaswamy's works.

In *A Wild Elephant at Camp* illustrated by the Pondicherry- based artist, Emanuele Scanziani, the artwork is in gravure colour. The pictures have photographic realism. In the annexure, or "fact

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section,” a series of actual black-and-white (monochrome) photographs of Kutti’s village and the elephant camp at Mudumalai remind the reader that the story is based on real life experiences. The technique is to be appreciated for its variety and sense. In another book about the Mudumalai Sanctuary, Geetha Dharmajan’s *A Jungle Safari*, The charcoal sketches add charm to the narrative and the ‘fact’ section about the Mudumalai Sanctuary and the Nilgiri Gaur add further value.

Anushka Ravishankar’s *Elephants Never Forget* has been illustrated by Christiana Pieper, a well-known German illustrator who has worked for some of Germany’s most prestigious publishing houses. She captures moods and movement in her pictures, which reveal as sound sense of humour. Sound words like “Boom!” and “TOOT! TOOT!” have been printed in larger fonts, in bold and sometimes the use of capitalization. These sound words give a sense of the trumpeting of the elephant and so on. Predominant colours used are blue, black and white. The smallness of the elephant calf in contrast to various jungle creatures is brought out. The fleeing buffalo and the appearance of the tiger have been drawn with a sense of movement.

Anushka Ravishankar’s *Catch that Crocodile!* illustrated by Pulak Biswas, gives importance to the arrangement of sound words. For example, the font gets bigger with the fruit seller’s cry. Minimal colours, with bold black brushwork highlight the text. Black and green is used for clothing. The background is a bright white.

The Mystery of Blue has been illustrated by Baski Jain, a graphic design student of the Symbiosis Institute of Design, Pune. It makes use of the techniques of tribal art, particularly Gond art from central India. The bright, bold pictures, the motifs and prints fill the book with the feel of fabric and the sense of colour, since the story is about the dyeing of vibrant blue cloth.

Mugdha Shah illustrating *Magic Vessels* by Vayu Naidu, which comes from *Under the Banyan, Stories from India* by Tulika, bases her art on the clay sculptures that guard villages in Tamil Nadu even today. The inspirations for the characters in the illustrations are from the terracotta figures of Ayyanar, a warrior god and his human and animal friends. They have huge eyes and are painted in bright colours. The Ayyanar horses are said to be the largest terracotta figures in the words.

Night is written and illustrated by Januka Deshpande, who has studied at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. The book is entirely done in black, white and shades of grey. The story is about two children wandering in the forest at night. The illustrations are stylized. As the artist herself told the author in her interview, she creates the impression of fireflies just by using large white dots against a black background. Children and animals are silhouettes against a cloud of leaves.

Katha’s *Leaves*, which won the 12th Noma Concours Picture Book Illustrators Encouragement Prize 2000 is by Colombian illustrators Enrique Lara Robago and Luis Fernando Garcia Guyana. *Leaves* is a picture book with little text, printed on high quality art paper. The

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fascinating the use of colour is the highlight of this child-friendly book. The text begins with: “From the window of my room I see amazing things” and goes on to name various creatures such as a little spider. Insects are accurately depicted, both in line and in colour. The transparent wings of the dragonfly, the leaves in different hues and the “marbelled” effect on some of the pages make it a truly beautiful book.

My Friends in the City has illustrations Biswajit Balasubramaian, a freelance cartoonist and corporate executive. Photographs and cartoons are interspersed. The thought balloons of the animals contain cartoons. Sometimes, it shows the animals wishfully envisaging themselves in natural surroundings such as in forests. It brings out their wishes.

And land was born retold by Sandhya Rao has artwork by Uma Krishnaswamy. The doll-like characters from the folktale have been based on the art form of the Bhil tribe of Madhya Pradesh. In this traditional art form, the walls of the huts are painted with pictures in blues, yellows whites and blacks with a basic *rangoli* structure enhanced with borders.

The publications of the National Book and Children’s Book Trust follow the traditional design of children’s books. Examples of this are *Sunflowers and Butterflies*, illustrated by Sujasha Das Gupta and *Brave Kamala* by Sanjay Sarkar.

However, a recent Children’s Book Trust publication, *A Baby Hornbill Learns to Fly*, illustrated by Partha Sengupta, follows modern trends in that the birds have slightly human expressions to bring out the emotions in the story, but the bird’s characteristics are retained.

Ashok Rajagopalan is an innovative animator, amateur astrologer and master raconteur. His artwork in *The Spider’s Web* approaches near-photograph accuracy. In *The Black Panther*, Ashok Rajagopalan makes beautiful use of oil pastels, creating the atmosphere of the forests. The Anamalai hill range, home of the great Indian hornbill, with its shadowy forest paths and animal life is carefully picturized. The quiet of the forest, the elusive great black cat with mysterious eyes and the general dream-like quality of the narrative have been faithfully brought to life. In his own book, *Gajapathi Kulapati*, which forms the first of a series, Ashok Rajagopalan’s drawings reflect the humour of the narrative. Though one can understand the expressions of the titular hero, he remains an elephant throughout. As the artist says in his interview given to the author, the elephant does not talk.

The drawings in children’s books generally harmonize with the tone of the text and establish its setting. For example, Shamim Padamsee’s *Birdywood Buzz*, is a humorous tale of birds in the forest. The bird drawings are by Ashok Rajagopalan. His depiction is accurate, though at the same time he provides them with appropriate expressions. On the other hand, in *The Great Birdywood Games* by the same author, illustrated by Soumya Menon, the birds are cartoon figures lacking in detail.

Walk in the Grasslands with Takuri with art by Maya Ramaswamy, has been published by Katha in collaboration with World Wildlife Fund, India. The artist paints with accuracy the flora and fauna of the *shola* forests of the Nilgiris. The flow of line and colour is aesthetically done. The positioning of the pictures in a 'V' shape with the text in between takes us into the picture, especially since there are no borders. Maya Ramaswamy has been widely appreciated for her work in portraying nature. It is to be noted that she is part of an NGO named Artists for Conservation in Bangalore.

Putul and the Dolphins contains pictures by Proiti Roy. The use of watercolours and the child-like illustrations is in keeping with the child protagonist. The use of shades of blue to depict the depths of the water and the flow of the river is noteworthy.

Who Will Be Nighthou? a story from Manipur, has been illustrated by A.V. Illango. Line drawings in black and the use of large splashes of red create an impression of tribal art.

Mahaswetha Devi's *The Why-Why Girl* has been illustrated by Kanyika Kini. The use of space and the contrast between Moyna's life in the village and her thoughts regarding the universe has been brought out by the large area devoted to the sky, symbolising the tribal girl's expanding knowledge.

The Curly Tale, a folktale from Bihar retold by Vayu Naidu belongs to the "Under the Banyan" series from Tulika. The illustrator, Mugdha Shah, a graphic designer, uses the Madhubani style. The correct name for the art form is 'Mithila painting' because it is done by women in the region of Mithila in northern Bihar.

Vriksha, illustrated by Lavanya Kathir, is a fact-fiction book and so typically has realistic illustrations with scientific accuracy, to help the child identify various Indian trees. The leaf border of each page is related to the particular tree to which it is devoted. This is an innovative method of reinforcement. The book relates a folktale about each tree and contains a description that helps identify it.

In *Takdir the Tiger Cub*, the photographs are by Nanda Bahadur Rana, husband of the author, Latika Nath Rana. He had recorded the life of Sita and her family of tigers in Bandhavgarh National Park, Madhya Pradesh. Nanda and Latika studied this family of tigers for ten years. The evocative photographs accompany the bilingual text.

Dinaben and the Lions of Gir has cartoons of lovable lion cubs beneath the photographs on each page. The illustrations are by Preeta Suresh. The photographs are about the embroidery, trade, food of the region, houses and villages of the Gir forest area.

Baby Beboo Bear by writer and illustrator Deepa Balsavar contains photographs of Indian sloth bears. Each photograph is accompanied by a cartoon of a bear in a speech balloon which

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explains the plight of the animal which faces captivity by the ruthless bear entertainment trade. A 'fact' section with actual information and photographs follows the story.

Jeejeebhoy and the Birds by Anita Balachandran is illustrated by the author and published by Young Zubaan. "Each illustration in these delightfully detailed evocative books brings to life the wonders of India and the World seen through the eyes of these rather special young girls," says the blurb. The use of vibrant oil paint is breathtaking. The colours interspersed with recurring designs in the background recall Ninamasi's sari. When the children are studying, there are letters and envelopes in the background. Leaves seem to grow out of Tara's hair when the birds gather.

The 'Rituchakra' series of Pratham Books has illustrations by Priya Kuriyan. The drawings are very colourful and attractive, and the pages, following the norm of contemporary children's pictures books, contain practically no borders. The use of colour, which is the main attraction for readers of picture books, appears to be the forte of the artist.

The Seventh Sun is a tribal tale from Odisha, a bilingual book in English and Hindi which emerged from a week-long workshop for children held in Bhubaneswar in December 2010. The images that appear in the book have been created using drawings made by children.

The Village Fair, a bilingual English / Tamil story published by Tulika has illustrations by Nancy Raj. The vibrant, colourful drawing of the crowd in the fair contains a wealth of detail. Movements are well depicted in the child-like drawings, which will appeal to the young reader. Fruit vendors, fish sellers, wooden toys, a cow, traditional *rangoli* powder, a bioscope, a hand-operated roundabout, a woman bargaining and children watching the whole scene are attractively drawn with the use of earthy colours.

Where's the Sun? is a story inspired by a painting by Warli artist Janu Bhira Ravate. The various parts of the original picture have been divided and sequenced in order to build a story. The text by Niveditha Subramaniam is built on the foundation of the pictures. The book has been designed by Roma Singh. The pictures are in white with a vivid red background. A reproduction of the entire picture is in a pocket on the inside cover of the book. Such books enhance the aesthetic capabilities of the children.

In *Room in Your Heart*, the illustrations are by Pema Tshering, founding member of Volunteer Artist Studio, Thimpu (VAST), Bhutan. The story is in the folklore tradition. Characters are realistic and are dressed in traditional clothes. The warmth of the house and hearth are effectively brought out, as is the mountainscape outside, through the use of watercolour.

Miaow! by Alankrita Jain has been illustrated by the author, who is a student of 3 D animation at the Image College of Art, Animation and Technology, Bangalore. It contains stylized black drawings against different coloured backgrounds and is notable for its "night" effects. Though the drawings are stylized, they create a sense of the real.

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The Mountain that Loved a Bird by Alice McLerran has been illustrated by Stephen Aitken, a Canadian artist, biologist and Managing Editor, Biodiversity Journal, who lives in Kulu, Himachal Pradesh. The drawings in this book reflect the luminous colours of the Himalayan skies over India. It has been differently illustrated by various artists since its publication (Eric Carle, 1985, Russian version, 1989, Urdu edition in Pakistan in 2013, with illustrations by Pakistani artist. 2006). The beauty and eloquence of the drawings by Stephen Aitken have been appreciated by the author who hopes these pictures can be used in future editions of the story everywhere. Watercolours depict the towering clouds above the bare mountains, the warmth and brightness associated with the advent of the bird in contrast with the icy blues and greys, the deep roots of the plants and the slow greening of the mountainside. The happy, lively colours of the plants and the tall and with green covered mountain tops and the bird's nest with eggs complete the picture of hope in the end.

My Mother by Jaya Jaitley is a bilingual book illustrated by Bahadur Chitrakar. He hails from a family of traditional *patachitra* artist of West Bengal and practices the well-known *Kalighat* style of painting. The artist participated in the 'Calligraphy project' by Dastkari Haat Samiti and painted the pictures used in the book during the project.

All Free is folktale from Gujarat with art Srividya Natarajan. The pictures have been inspired by the painted paper scrolls used by *Garoda* storytellers in northern Gujarat. Their palette consists of bright colours- typically, a glaring cobalt blue and vermilion red- on a brown background. A gay *bandini* border on the cover, taken from traditional tie-and-dye textiles enhances the attraction of the picture book.

High in the Sky retold by Cathy Spagnoli, is illustrated Jo Hye-Mi. Korean. The bold, colourful illustrations have been inspired from the simple drama of the cards of *kamishibai*, Japanese paper theatre.

Mention should be made of Sonali Biswas, the recipient of the Chitra Katha award 2003 for Outstanding Illustrator, regarding her drawings in *Ma Ganga and the Razai Box* written and published by Geetha Dharmarajan of Katha. The story is about soil erosion and there is a factual note about this problem at the end, bordered with saplings and roots shown growing underground. Blues and browns enhance the story of water and earth.

Granny's Sari by Asha Nehemiah is illustrated by Subir Raj and contains conventional, colourful drawings in the traditional story book format. Granny's sari is a very special one. It had a picture of a forest printed on it. Deer, lions, bear, monkey, squirrel form part of the design.

The more recent *My Mother's Sari* by Sandhy Rao, illustrated by Nina Sabnani, won the Outstanding International Book 2007 by United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) and Children's Book Council USA. "The spare text weaves and winds between this visual interplay of children, colour and text, to create the mood-filled world of *My Mother's Sari*," says the blurb. The sari Mother wears every day is sometimes a train, sometimes a river, or a swing, or a hiding

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place . . . children have a way of seeing things differently! The pictures too break away from conventional depictions of both saris and children, combining photographs and acrylic in a dramatic, original way.

What did Nepo do with a Sari? by Benita Sen is illustrated by Sekhar Mukherjee, an animator, comic book author, illustrator, cartoonist and design educator. Again, the art, with colourful cartoon-like characters, reflects the humour of the text. The pictures contain plenty of detail of traditional interiors and field-filled exteriors. There are educational pages at the back of the story which contain facts about the saree, its ancient history and weavers. Realism marks the art in this section.

Tara Publishers, Chennai, has brought out several picture books which can be considered works of art. Two of them are discussed here. The first is *Waterlife* by Rambharos Jha. The book has been made from recycled, hand-made paper. *Waterlife* features Mithila art, a vibrant and detailed form of folk painting from Bihar. The artist Rambharos Jha grew up on the banks of the Ganga and developed a love of water and water life. In this book he creates an unusual artist's journal, adapting the motifs of the Mithila style to express his own vision. He frames art with a playful text that evokes both childhood memory and folk legend. *Waterlife* is silk-screen printed by hand on handmade paper. "A gloriously attractive, endlessly fascinating book . . . Each of *Waterlife*'s pages deserves to hang on a wall," says The Asian Review of Books, quoted in the blurb.

Various water beasts such as the crocodile with its notorious smile are depicted. The drawings explore the crocodile's movement. The water is green, as the river flowing through a jungle looks green because of the surrounding foliage. A lobster is painted using "a maze of tiny lines and patterns and colour." Sea horses swim vertically through sheltered grass beds. Floating water plants surround them. They alternate with lines of water, so as to give a sense of quiet movement. The tortoise and the frog are painted in their river habitat, resting on small islands.

Mithila art motifs of the madhubani style are incorporated into the book. Women of Mithila traditionally decorate walls and courtyards with paintings in natural colours - orange from the *hanshringar* flower, the green from cotton leaves, yellow from turmeric, brown from tea leaves and black from soot.

The Night Life of Trees is another handmade book from Tara. It is silk-screen printed by hand on black paper. Every page of this book is an original numbered art print. It is handbound and stitched. The pictures have been recreated from original art by Gond tribal artists, Bhajju Shyam, Durga Bai and Singh Urveti. Traditional forest dwellers, the Gonds believe that trees are central to life. During the day, trees work hard, providing shade, shelter and nourishment for all. But at night, when all the daytime visitors are still, the spirit of the trees reveal themselves. It is the luminous spirits that are hauntingly captured in *The Night Life of Trees*.

Each painting is accompanied by text which invites the viewer into the Gond imagination-where the practical, aesthetic and spiritual aspects of the natural world are inseparable. One of the stories is that of a firefly which leads the cowherd to the sabar tree, where he finds his lost cow. Good spirits shelter in the sabar and help lost travellers. In “The Creation of Trees,” the legend relates that Shambu Bhagwan made trees and fruit from his matted hair and holy ash. The peepul, with its blue trunk and branches full of yellow orange flowers, is the home of the Creator, whose form becomes the tree. The holy Dumar tree, whose fruits look like little birds, the silkworm on the banur tree and the dance of the peacocks are all integrated into the pictures of the trees. When a tree bears its first fruit, a marriage ceremony is performed for it. In “The Squirrel’s Dream,” the entire tree takes on the form of a squirrel and its dreams.

Another story is based on the legend that the earth is held in the coils of a snake goddess. The snake motif in art symbolises the earth. Liquour is made from the flowers of the Mahua tree. A little, drunk with herbs, acts as medicine. The Mahalain is the binding tree. A house build with Mahalain bark is said to last a hundred years. The Nyphani tree is full of thorns and its leaves are shaped like the hood of a snake. It has healing powers. Birds shelter in the protective cover provided by the tree of the Khirsali tree. These are all woven intricately into the fabric of the drawings, which need time to be understood and appreciated.

Authors’ comments on illustrators and illustrations

How do you work in tandem with your illustrator to project your ideas? Comment on the illustrations in your books.

Harini Gopalswamu Sreenivasan: This is rather a sore point, so please don’t quote me! I have to say that Indian publishers don’t give authors much say in the way their work is illustrated. In the case of *Zoo Duck*, the first I knew about its publication was when ten copies landed up on my doorstep! However, I am very happy with the illustrator they chose and love her artwork! The cover of *The Smile of Vanuvati* too is quite appropriate, though I had something more mysterious in mind and would have liked to be consulted. In the case of *Gind*, I had quite heated arguments with the publishers. I wanted the book to be pitched as a fantasy, which would have to be represented by a quite different kind of cover. I even made them a collage of various pictures that created the effect I wanted, but the marketing dept insisted on pitching it as a traditional epic-based story. They finally overrode my wishes and came out with an Amar Chitra Katha-like cover. I still think that was a big mistake and killed its chances of reaching the readership that it was aimed at.

Comment on the illustrations in your books.

Shamim Padamsee: Another thing where illustrations are concerned, is the propensity, to mindlessly add a giraffe or a zebra or even a hippo in stories set in the Indian jungles!

How do you work in tandem with your illustrator to project your ideas?

I sometimes offer visual suggestions if I feel strongly about how something should be depicted, I also go through the illustrations once they are done to make sure they match the text. But beyond this, I don’t interfere.

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Comment on the illustrations in your books.

Sowmya Rajendran: I'm happy with them, obviously 😊-

How do you work in tandem with your illustrator to project your ideas?

Benita Sen: Some publishers do not encourage much interaction but for my latest book, *What Did Nepo Do With A Sari?* I selected the illustrator, Sekhar Mukherjee, and interacted extensively with him on my vision.

Comment on the illustrations in your books.

Benita Sen: Since I write a lot for the very young reader, most of my books are heavily illustrated. I wish the stories for older children would also have more illustrations.

Quotes from illustrators:

Ashok Rajagopalan: The relationship between the author and the illustrator is not symbiotic. It is essential. Both text and picture are needed. It is like two parts of a message; one cannot be separated from the other. Pictures also communicate. Child actually spends times a lot of time looking at the pictures. The text is almost a caption for a picture. The child may not understand the text, but can understand the story from the picture. One co-exists with the other. In an ideal situation, pictures and texts are as equal in value. I have no argument with that. A picture takes up some space. A picture also communicates. "This is how a house made of straw looks like."

Maya Ramaswamy: Illustration is very interesting to children because of the human energy visible through the illustrator's efforts. Hand - work captures the imagination in a very vital sense. So yes, Illustration is a creative medium to bring attention to ecological values.

Priya Kurien: Illustrations are especially important in kids' books as a children's book would perhaps be a child's first conscious interaction with something artistic and creative. They encourage children's aesthetic appreciation of art and beauty and there is perhaps no better way to introduce aesthetics to a child than to introduce him or her to the natural aesthetics of our environment. Illustrations in picture books also persuade children to read and interact with text thus improving their vocabulary and also looking for hidden meanings in words. In fact, when kids read picture books that have very little text, they use their heightened imagination to create alternate plots and settings. So, I feel that if picture books have content that talks about nature and has illustrations of the natural environment. Children will definitely be drawn to think about the environment and be interested in it from an early age. Children often associate pictures with their own life experiences. For example, once a kid sees a living breathing, talking, tree in a picture book, he would probably empathize more with all the trees that he sees because of the connect he has now made with the picture book tree. In today's day and age where a lot of children live in gated colonies and flats, the interaction with natural environments has reduced considerably making it doubly important for picture books to include nature in their illustrations. There has to be a conscious role on the part of the parent to encourage the child to go out in the real world and connect with nature.

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In conclusion, one may quote Segun: “Illustrations are literature in their own right, and, whether used by themselves or integrated with written texts, they sharpen the perception of children, stimulate their imagination and increase their sense of observation” (27).

Chapter VII And Miles to Go . . .

The world today is facing an ecological crisis and unless steps are taken to control it, we will be facing the apocalypse prophesied by environmentalists. The children of today are the citizens of tomorrow and unless they develop a love of nature, awareness about the problems facing the environment, develop eco-friendly behaviour and the mindset to become defenders of the environment of which they are the heirs, action taken by adults today will not be sustained and the speed of environmental destruction cannot be stemmed. This is where fiction for the young can play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and inculcating values. “Because children’s literature is one of the earliest ways in which the young encounter stories, it plays a powerful role in shaping how we think about and understand the world” (Reynolds 4).

India has a grand oral tradition with regard to storytelling. Stories originating in India have pervaded the literatures of the world. The *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha* and the *Jataka Tales* are found in different versions in the countries of the west and the far east.

Indian children grew up on a rich fare of tales from mythology, fables, folklore and legends, narrated by their parents, grandparents and other relatives in the extended families of the past. Now, in the age of the nuclear family, books and the electronic media are substitutes for the grandmother. Early books for children in regional languages and then in English were still based on these traditional tales, with a few added ‘moral stories’ in between. There was little creative activity apart from the retelling of the tales. Fairy tales from the west and abridged editions of western classics, as well as original stories by foreign authors featuring foreign children for the most part were the only choices available for the Indian child who read in English.

It was only over the past three decades that original Indian literature in English for the young has developed and has been established as a genre of its own. The authors of this age are aware that purely didactic stories do not appeal to children any longer, who, if bored, would turn to the electronic media. The ‘edutainment’ principle, with subtle messages interwoven into the text, is an effective way of inculcating values, including ecological ones. Another approved method is to tell a story and then add a ‘fact’ section at the end so that the child would be interested in getting the information. These methods have been successfully adopted by the authors under study.

Indian writing in English for children and young adults has come of age, with a plethora of talented and dedicated writers contributing their creative efforts towards the growth of this new field.

From the re-telling of folk tales, mythological stories and classics such as the *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha* and the *Jataka Tales*, Indian writing for the young passed through a phase of western influence and has now emerged with a voice of its own.

Indian fiction in English for children and young adults is realistic and deals with the problems and interest of the day. It is neither sentimental nor overtly didactic but has attained the golden mean. Humour and fantasy, too, have their place, as do mystery and adventure stories, tales of the supernatural, science fiction and historical and mythological creative fiction. Writers for the young have also shown their concern for ecology and the natural environment.

Prominent writers include Nilima Sinha, Ranjit Lal, Deepak Dalal, Ira Saxena, Paro Anand, Devika Rangachari, Anushka Ravishankar, Asha Nehemiah, Monideepa Sahu, Payal Dhar, Zai Whitaker, Harini Gopalswami Sreenivasan, Vandana Singh, Suniti Namjoshi, and Deepa Agarwal, among others. Writers such as Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Nair, Mahaswetha Devi and Sashi Deshpande have also written for the young.

Apart from long-established publishers such as Children's Book Trust and National Book Trust, highly innovative publishing houses such as Tulika, Tara, Katha, Pratham Books, Karadi Tales, Terrapin, Red Turtle, Young Zubaan, Duckbill and India Ink, to name a few, have emerged successfully.

More academic interest in this burgeoning field which has immense possibilities for fresh research is the need of the hour. This collection of research papers is a humble effort towards this worthy end.

I have taken up for study books published in India between 1990 and 2010, which form two decades of publishing history. I have chosen this period, not only because it is contemporary but also because this is the period when original creative writing for the young has emerged and has established itself successfully. I have limited myself to printed books and have not considered audio, electronic or multimedia books or magazines. I have discussed books published in India, preferably, but not exclusively, by writers of Indian origin because that there are quite a few foreign-born writers settled in India who have dedicated themselves to writing about the country, such as Muriel Kakani and Leela Gour Broome. Some, like Dr. Graeme Macqueen (Canada) and Mr. Ken Spillman (Australia), for example, have written excellent stories with Indian characters and settings and these have been exclusively published in India.

As regards the application of the ecocritical theory, I did not want the study to be very 'literary,' but pragmatic. Since ecocriticism itself is an interdisciplinary study, I have taken into consideration keywords of environmental science and have also considered the cultural aspect such as the innate wisdom of traditional communities.

The texts have been examined to see whether they contribute to 'ecoliteracy.' Ecological literacy refers to a conscious awareness and understanding of the relationships among people, other organisms, and the environment in which they live. Texts themselves work toward ecological literacy, whether specifically or tacitly (Dobrin 233). He goes on to elaborate:

This point becomes especially important in consideration of children's texts. Texts with implicit agendas of ecological literacy development can be examined not simply for how they teach about environment, for how they project images of environment, but for how they themselves become part of a larger ecological literacy." (24)

The chapter explores the importance of illustrations in children's books, their significance, and the development and present status of illustration in Indian children's literature, from the literary point of view, without going too much into technical detail

The findings from the reading of the texts may be viewed as being based on my search for important concepts of environmental science and also what Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination* calls a "rough checklist of some of the ingredients that might be said to comprise an environmentally oriented work":

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or given is at least implicit in the text (7-8)

What the texts reveal

Many books under study portray young people visiting wildlife sanctuaries. *Younguncle Comes to Town*, *Ranthambore Adventure*, *Small Tigers of Shergarh*, *Flute in the Forest* and *Tara Tambe*, *Forest Friend* are some of the books where sanctuaries form the background. The child of today can meet wildlife either in zoos or in sanctuaries. It is unrealistic to expect encounters in the wild. Zoos and circuses are condemned in books for the very young, thereby instilling the right values at an early age. For example, *Set Me Free*, a picture book helps children empathise with trapped creatures. The exception is *The Zoo Duck*. The fear of her cubs being trapped for zoos haunts the mother bear in *Beboo*, *Baby Bear*. *The Dancing Bear* exposes the child to the cruelty behind making animals perform in the streets. Books such as these are written to ensure that the next generation would avoid such unnecessary cruelty to animals for the sake of entertainment. *Tara Tambe*, *Forest Friend*, gives tips to children how not to behave in a sanctuary, while *Small Tigers of Shergarh* and *Flute in the Forest* are full of intricate details of the sights and sounds of the sanctuary, safe and sensible behaviour based on animal psychology and makes the reader to see animals in the wild and enjoy the peace of the forest.

Ranthambore Adventure as well as *Small Tigers of Shergarh* describes the modus operandi of poachers and wins sympathy for the big cats who are the victims. How a tiger which is injured or tiger cub which is orphaned cannot survive is explained. It is surprising to learn that even tranquilizer guns are dangerous. Deepak Dalal's books, set against the background of nature, deliberately cover

all aspects of the place portrayed. They serve as veritable guide-books and enthuse young people to explore the far corners of India.

Books such as *Our Friends in the City* and several short stories is brought out by Children's Book Trust describe how animals and humans live in close proximity and how birds and animals adapt to human lifestyles. Zai Whitaker's *Andamans Boy* shows the change in the eating habits of seagulls brought about by human intrusion into their environment.

Domestic animals, pets and domestic plants and their care feature in books for young readers, encouraging them to love nature on a small scale. However, this trend seems to be on the decline. In recent books, pet stories feature less, and feeding pigeons and other eco-friendly activities are given prominence. This is in contrast to the stories of Ruskin Bond, for example, where a wide variety of creatures, wild and domestic feature as beloved pets.

Human-animal conflict, their causes and consequences feature in books such as *Pool in the Jungle*, *Flute in the Forest* and *Monkeys Come to Village* and *In Bon Bibi's Forest*, among others. Ruskin Bond has also written about human-animal encounters and how conflicts can be avoided in his *A Long Walk for Bina*. *The Flute in the Forest* draws parallels between human and animal behaviour and paves the way for better understanding. The stories make it clear that it is human intrusion into animal territory that lies at the crux of the problem. The picture book *We Are All Animals* speaks about oneness and understanding. It is noteworthy that the human-animal transformations described in folklore are reflective of the feeling of interdependence and affinity between man and animal.

The Black Panther and *A Long Walk for Bina* emphasise that animals, even the predators, are not ferocious man-eaters. They adopt a "live and let live policy," and for the most part, avoid human beings. This is stressed by Ruskin Bond in several of his stories, such as *Rusty and the Leopard*. *The Small Tigers of Shergarh* also shows that the right attitude towards animals can be fruitful. *Dinaben and the Lions of Gir* by Meera Sriram and Praba Ram portrays the peaceful co-existence of animals and traditional communities.

Tiger on a Tree and *Catch that Crocodile!* feature instances of wildlife straying into human habitation and how they can be released into the wild unharmed. "Two Little Sparrows" and "The Friend who Came from the Sky" are about the need for kindness to creatures which venture into human habitation.

As regards various types of pollution, Air Pollution features in *Flight With Birdy*; Water Pollution in *Anju and the Stream*, *A Drop in the Lake* and *Ma Ganga and the Razai Box* and *Aditi and the Thames Dragon*.

Community action initiated by children lies at the crux of *Saving the Gulmohar* and *Anju and the Stream*, while *Putul and the Dolphins* shows that the initiative taken by the protagonist leads to

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solutions. The lesson of tree conservation through the influence of a child forms the basis of *Who Will Be Ningthou?* while *Gulla and the Hangul* focuses on kindness to animals, natural disasters and adaptation to seasons.

Endemic states are portrayed in Tibetan stories, which dream of a time when man and animal lived in harmony, speaking each other's language. Man is always shown as the betrayer. The origins of animals' features in many folktales, revealing human curiosity for their fellow-beings. "The Magic Wrap" shows human-animal transformation. *And Land was Born* and *The Sky Queen* are creation myths which bear evidence to early man's fascination with nature. In "The Secret Mango Grove," a Jataka Tale, an agreement on sharing resources between man and animal is reached amicably, so that conflicts can be avoided. In *Bon Bibi's Forest* also, the same thing is shown to happen. "Sukhu and Dukhu" is the story of how consideration for nature is rewarded. *U Sie'r Laplang* is a tribal legend which condemns hunting.

The healing power of nature is shown in *The Small Tigers of Shergarh* and *Flute in the Forest*. The feeling of oneness of the natural and human worlds brings joy and self-realisation in *Journey to the City of the Six Gates*, which depicts the spiritual relationship between humans and trees. The **spiritual relationship** with water is seen in *The Smile of Vanuvathi*.

"Enter Mulla Do Piazza" (66-70) is an early story about waste recycling. Disaster management features in *My Friend, the Sea* and "Dark Storm and Bright Pearl." The latter stresses the importance of community work in disaster management as well as the part played by trees in **soil conservation**.

Tree -planting is emphasised in *Magnolias*. In "Tree Knowledge" and *Vriksha: Original Tree Stories and Real Tree Facts*, care is taken to identify different varieties of trees. The need for **conservation of trees** forms the basis of *Saving the Gulmohur*, *Curse of Grass*. *The Mystery of the Falling Mountains*, *Younguncle in the Himalayas*, *Autobiography of a Tree*, "The King and the Tree-Goddess" and *Journey to the City of the Six Gates*. In the last-named book, tree cutting is associated with moral degradation, as in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series.

Deforestation, soil erosion and their impact on the mountains are shown in *The Mystery of the Falling Mountains* and *Younguncle in the Himalayas*. The **dangers of mining and resort-building** also feature in the stories. **Desertification and denudation** and their prevention form the basis of *Curse of Grass*.

Agricultural practices of the past are highlighted in the Smart Green Civilizations series, as does adaptation to nature. Nature's wisdom in aiding agriculture is explained in *Waiting for the Rain*. The *Smart Green Civilisations* series also brings out the **ecosophy of the past** and has lessons for today. *The Mystery of Blue* and *The Village Fair* both feature traditional crafts and the former especially the use of **natural dyes**.

The Sweetest Mango, The Tamarind Tree, Malli, The Village Fair, A Kite Called Under the Neem Tree and *Brave Kamala* relate the everyday experiences of children in the **villages**, who lead a healthy and wholesome existence close to nature. *Kali and the Rat Snake, Andamans Boy, The Andamans Adventure: The Jarawa* and *An Ancient Tale from Andaman. The Why-Why Girl* portray **tribal people** and their traditional way of life.

In “Grandmother,” the message that **traditional practices** which encompass kindness to little creatures is evidenced in the drawing of rice *kolams* in front of houses to feed ants. Rituals and festivals in the lives of traditional communities were based on the cycle of the seasons. “The Legend of the Pipal-Leaf Ritual” and “The Legend of Itu Brata” are examples. The black cat is sacred to Shasti, the goddess of fertility. “Nag Panchami” is a festival honouring snakes, while the medicinal *tulsi* plant is worshipped, Tradition takes care of conservation, in the words of Nilima Sinha.

The need for **healthy adjustment with the seasons** is seen in the *Rituchakra* series of Pratham. *The Weather and I, “On choosing a Bride,” Nona and the Rain, The Kite Tree, and Days with Thathu* also convey this message, in addition to urging the child to enjoy different types of weather.

Facts about **Biodiversity**, the Food Chain and the Web of Life are found in *Small Tigers of Shergarh*, in which the legend of a king who hunted tigers and brought famine to the land is narrated by one of the characters. Children are warned not to disturb the food chain. Shikha is prevented from saving a chital from Sheba, the tigress. *Stripes in the Jungle* has a ‘fact’ section on how tigers help conserve the forests. *Lai-Lai the Baby Elephant, Takdir the Tiger Cub* and “Pecky the Woodpecker” show adaptation to **habitat** and interdependence of animals and their environment.

With regard to **landscapes and natural setting**, Ruskin Bond displays his love of the Gharwal Himalayas in his masterly descriptions of mountainscapes in stories like *Getting Granny’s Glasses, The Blue Umbrella* and *A Long Walk for Bina*. Deepak Dalal’s books describe in detail landscapes of various kinds. The folktales of Gujarat portray pastoral life while the folktales from Himachal Pradesh, North East and Uttarakhand describe mountain villages, stony valleys and agriculture on the heights. The **desert** landscape is the setting of *Rebels in Rajasthan*, while the **sea** is the background of *My Friend the Sea*. The Forest (wilderness) books mentioned and traditional tales, for example, *Stories from Kathasaritsagara* have predominantly forest settings.

The Pool in the Jungle and *A Drop in the Lake* describe **freshwater ecosystems**, that of a pond and a lake respectively, while the ecosystems of the Sunderbans, the high-altitude deserts, tropical forests and coral reefs are described in detail by Deepak Dalal in his Vikram-Aditya series. *Walk in the Rainforest with Niwupatt* and *Walk the Grassland with Takuri* are self-explanatory. The volcanic island ecosystem is described in *Andaman Adventure: Barren Island*. In *The Kite Tree*, the tiny ecosystem of a tree is described. *Sunu-Sunu Snail* describes the eco system of a garden. *The Mountain that Loved a Bird* shows the slow development of an ecosystem.

A Jungle Safari, The Ranthambore Adventure, The Small Tigers of Shergarh, Tara Tambe, Forest Friend, Flute in the Forest, and A Wild Elephant at Camp feature **sanctuaries**, almost the only place where children can enjoy forests and forest life. Wise and undesirable behaviour in sanctuaries are detailed in the stories.

“Radha’s Prize” and several other short stories from the collection *24 Short Stories* encourage **the love of gardening**, as does the picture book, *My Garden. Sunu-sunu Snail: Storm in the Garden, Colour-Colour Kamini, The Little World of Sadananda*” and “Cal the Chameleon” are about **small creatures** bound to appeal to little children. These show how they survive in the big world.

“Taddy the Tadpole” describes the **life cycle** of the frog, while “The Friendly Caterpillar” *Jhimil the Butterfly* and *Brahma’s Butterfly* are about the life cycle of the butterfly. “The “Song of the River” describes the journey of a river from its origin in the mountains till it reaches the sea.

With regard to **renewable energy sources**, *Sun Magic* speaks about the advantages of **solar energy**. *A Long Walk for Bina* discusses the pros and cons of generating **hydro-electric power**. It warns of the consequences to the natural environment.

The displacement of people due to the building of dams features in *Growing Up in Pandupur* and *A Long Walk for Bina*. *Younguncle in the Himalayas* shows land-grabbing and the exploitation of poor and marginalised people.

Dancing Bear exposes the cruelty meted out to performing animals and makes an appeal for **animal rights**. *Beboo Baby Bear, Set Me Free* and *Our Friends in the City* show the plight of animals in captivity.

Interviews

I decided that a study that aimed at creating awareness, assessing the ground situation besides analysing the eco content of the works should involve field work as well as academic research. Accordingly, I established contact with authors, illustrators, publishers and critics to hear their voice their views, comment on the theme and elaborate on their contribution to the field. I found that a surprising number of them had consciously incorporated their love of nature and ecological values into their works and were striving to promote eco-consciousness among their readers. Publishers such as TERI were totally involved in this area, while quite a number of progressive printing houses such as Tulika, Pratham and Karadi Tales had published books of fiction that contributed towards eco-literacy. In fact, I was taken aback when the Kochi-based Mango Books said that they had just started releasing a series of books based on nature. Hence, to my satisfaction, I found that the response was overwhelming.

Some of the noteworthy facts I learnt from my meeting and email and telephonic contact with **authors** (I have provided the transcripts in Part II of my report) are:

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The response was overwhelming. Most had already involved themselves in this area. They also had a deep love for nature and shared their personal experiences. Many were writer-illustrators and were able to visualize.

Nilima Sinha, acclaimed author of children's fiction and President of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) says:

In fact, one of the three main actions of man which has depleted the forests and spoiled the environment, of course, cutting down of trees. The other is mining. And there is something else that I had thought of in that book ("Adventure of the Falling Mountains") which I had written about is, I think, cutting down trees and too much building up of resorts and cutting roads through the mountains. Animals also vanish because of that. What I said in my book, when people go to a mountain resort, they should go as adventurers. Not having beautiful houses with all the amenities. Instead, they should go and work there, go for trekking, camping, adventure sports. Not have spas and huge buildings to take care of all their comforts.

Benita Sen, author, animal rights activist and former editor of *Target*, a children's magazine which published several nature-friendly stories, says:

How do humans forget that they are also animals? . . . Oh yes! They're (the children in her books) responsible citizens, even if they are young. And it is the responsibility of each of us to show concern for other forms of life. Since I have been an environmental educator, wherever I can, I bring in finer nuances like, don't pluck a blade of grass unless you have to. Even my fiction is researched and apart from a little poetic license, I offer my reader facts.

Dr. Ira Saxena, author, child psychologist and Secretary, AWIC, writes:

In my childhood I could not explain my repulsion hearing brave-a-do adventures of my Uncle (a Forest Conservator) describing shooting tigers and going on shikar. I did not find killing of innocent beasts as something heroic. Then some pictures like denudation of trees along the Shivalik range looking like an army of mute, helpless, limbless soldiers stung in my memory shaking me up through and through.

In the words of Deepak Dalal, acknowledged master of Indian eco fiction:

Fiction is the best way of conveying environmental awareness. Stories dig deep into the reader and their message (if given subtly) remains for years to come. The key here is subtle messages. Moralistic material doesn't work. A good story delivered with good pace and plot works very well.

Zai Whitaker, environmentalist and pioneer in children's eco fiction in India says regarding the behaviour of children in her books:

Yeah, they better behave in an eco-friendly manner. Yes, well one of my books *Andamans Boy*, for instance, is about a boy who doesn't start out as a passionate eco-friendly preacher. But it ends up in the Andaman Islands and finally the choice he makes at the end of the novel is to stay on in the Andamans with the Jarawa tribe rather than come back to Mumbai where a huge family legacy and lots of money is waiting for him.

About the effect nature has on the character of her protagonists, author Harini Gopalswami Sreenivasan says:

My protagonists tend to be nature-lovers. Maybe they take nature for granted, as many of us do. In my most recent book, *Gind*, the protagonist is a vanara, a child of the forest, at a time when there were no concerns about ecology. Hopefully his familiarity with, and affection for, the forest and its denizens will rub off on readers. In *Zoo Duck*, the naturalist is the secondary hero, after the duck and his friends!

Commenting on the relationship of her protagonists to the flora and fauna of their land, Radha H.S. says: "My protagonists participate in the cycle of life. E.g. The ant in my book carries seeds home which grow into trees from which fruits and flowers grow."

Regarding the "message" of her books regarding environmental problems, dilemmas and solutions, Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan says:

I have been a "storyteller" and communicator all my life. As a non-profit grant writer working for individuals with disabilities for almost two decades, I used the "power" of words and the stories of people to draw funders to programs that they wished to support. My first published book sprung from my tenure in philanthropy-all three protagonists in *A Pie Surprise and Other Stories* published by Mango Books, came up with creative plans to "give" to another. These stories were later selected for a literary reader as a skill based interactive series for 5th graders in India.

Shyamala S. shares her experiences: "Living in small towns, my association with nature is strong. I read a lot of books on animals and nature, so it seeps into my books. Fiction is an important way of connecting kids with love for nature."

What I learnt from the interviews with **illustrators** is that they believed in observing nature and making details realistic. Many were photographers, too. Most were highly trained and had studied at premier schools of designs. Several had been avid artists since childhood and had incorporated their knowledge of technology with folk-art. Some had been to tribal areas to conduct

studies or to teach. Most had adapted the art to suit children's books and had developed their own unique style. Most illustrations of folktales had incorporated designs from that particular region, thus providing many cultural dimensions. Most illustrators were particular about fidelity and did not provide wrong information to their readers. They were aware and responsible about the environment. Januka Deshande greatly appreciated me because she and her principal (of the Janson's School of Design,), found the questions highly relevant, thought-provoking, full of insight and even inspiring.

Artist Priya Kuriyan expresses her opinion as to the illustrator's role in the child's love and understanding of nature:

Illustrations are especially important in kids' books as a children's book would perhaps be a child's first conscious interaction with something artistic and creative. They encourage children's aesthetic appreciation of art and beauty and there is perhaps no better way to introduce aesthetics to a child than to introduce him or her to the natural aesthetics of our environment. Illustrations in picture books also persuade children to read and interact with text thus improving their vocabulary and also looking for hidden meanings in words. In fact, when kids read picture books that have very little text, they use their heightened imagination to create alternate plots and settings. So, I feel that if picture books have content that talks about nature and has illustrations of the natural environment. Children will definitely be drawn to think about the environment and be interested in it from an early age. Children often associate pictures with their own life experiences. For example, once a kid sees a living breathing, talking tree in a picture book, he would probably empathize more with all the trees that he sees because of the connect he has now made with the picture book tree. In today's day and age where a lot of children live in gated colonies and flats, the interaction with natural environments has reduced considerably making it doubly important for picture books to include nature in their illustrations. However, having said that I would not claim that only by reading picture books can a child connect with the environment. There has to be a conscious role on the part of the parent to encourage the child to go out in the real world and connect with nature.

To the question what more can be done to represent ecology and the natural environment in children's fiction in India, illustrator Maya Ramaswamy replies:

Conservation of natural landscapes is vital. Children need to grow up with nature to be complete. No amount of long-term representation of nature in fiction or illustration will help, if our landscapes are sold off for short-term gain to Global Industrial Markets. We cannot eat cars and televisions. Gold jewelry cannot replace safe, sustainable, fresh water. We need to get our priorities right as a nation.

Ashok Rajagopalan, author and illustrator, says:

An author of children's books cannot look a dignified person. He has to be in touch with children. From the child which still exists in me and childhood of today I select ideas. Tone and a voice are important. A patronizing, older advice- book is ineffective. An author should be a friend who shares – a book should be a friendly talk. Regarding the environment – one can't directly advice them [the children]. Write a good story and somehow, we are in it.

What I learnt from interviews with publishers and editors, is that many had a new line of children's fiction regarding the environment. Some even had recycled or hand-printed books, but these were costly and so many publishers avoided it. Publishers were involved in spreading the reading habit through widespread storytelling and activity-based and entertainment programmes, with audio-visual support. They were optimistic about the future of reading. Pratham and Katha, among others, aimed to bring books within the reach of the ordinary child in the villages and small towns and had trusts to help in the work. Translation was also on the anvil, since they wanted Indian culture to be known to the urban children so they could be cajoled away from western books that do not reflect their own culture.

Sandhya Rao, editor and author, in reply to the question: "Environmental science is part of the curriculum of most schools and colleges. Still, light reading in the form of fiction helps to inculcate values. Do you agree?" says: "I think fiction is VERY important. Not just for inculcating values, but to fire the imagination because without imagination how do we make sense of our lives, the world, how do we live?"

I also decided to interview **environmentalists** who could suggest ideas for future writers and could comment on the books available for children. Author, conservationist and wildlife educator Payal B. Molur details:

When we teach it[conservation] to a child who is story 10,11,12 years old in story form, fiction, not fact, and then I throw in a little fact in between. Then I end in fact. "This gorgeous, so helpful Mr. Froggie goes to the doctor. Frogs are so cute, they go to the doctor. Next time she sees a frog on the road, she says that we must not squash it. She gets the message. My goal is that frogs should not be squashed.

Conservationist Mr. Kalidas of OSAI, an NGO involved in wildlife conservation says that fiction for children in India should portray Indian animals such as the Nilgiri Gaur, rather than foreign animals like the zebra, since most children could not identify local animals and birds. He also suggested highlighting the importance of biodiversity and symbiosis.

Dr. Vijayakumar, amateur wildlife photographer stresses the importance of eating natural, locally grown produce. Mr. Prabhakaran, officer in charge of the Uthagamandalam Lake Purification Plant, says that children should be taught in detail about pollution of water bodies, their causes, consequences and solutions.

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Further, I decided to interview some **parents** and **teachers** as well as **children** from different age-groups and young adults with the twin purposes of assessing the reach of the books by Indian authors and also creating awareness about the wealth of recently published books.

Almost all **parents** were aware of the importance of acquiring knowledge about the environment and about ecological problems and solutions. They stressed the need for “clean, green” practices and followed them at home. They believed in the reading habit and believed that fiction could inculcate values. But many did not seem to differentiate between works of fiction and works of non-fiction. Many were willing to buy books for their children. Almost all accompanied their wards to libraries and book shops and most chose books for them. Some even admitted to reading the books, but a few were against monitoring what their children read. They are firm believers in eco-friendly practices and encouraged these at home. They were aware of the environmental crisis faced by the world. One parent even said he had experienced an earthquake.

Teachers were whole-heartedly in support of reading. They said that their libraries were well-stocked. However, almost none seemed to be aware of current Indian fiction for children.

Librarians (school and also private) appeared to have a sufficient supply of books. About environmental books, they had mostly non-fiction. They did not, for the most part, stock Indian books, but only reprints of works by foreign authors.

Children in the **younger** age-group (below 10 years) expressed their love for picture books. They said that they loved to read, especially about animals. Surprisingly for their age, they seemed very much aware of ecological problems like pollution and the need for adopting eco-friendly practices.

The questionnaire revealed that **older children** (11-16) love adventure books. They like to read books with nature as the setting. Few had knowledge about Indian authors. Deepak Dalal was the only one known to some. Most have read books by foreign nature writers like Jack London. The survey shows that they have a clear picture of environmental problems like deforestation, use of plastics, global warming, and so on. They have expressed their concern regarding conservation of natural resources, the protection of endangered animals, avoidance of plastics, tree-planting and so on. Fantasy fiction seems to be their favourite.

Young adults (17-21) could name very few books of environmental interest. They prefer to read the works of popular authors like Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi and so on, though they were well aware of environmental problems. They wish to plant trees, minimise littering and to go on nature treks, “spending time with greenery.” However, they agree that books are an important vehicle of instilling values, and the majority read regularly. “Instead of mixing romance and action into a good story, it would be better if values and ideals that appeal to the sentiments of the readers are included!” says one teenager. Adventure stories, fiction and non-fiction, as well as detective fiction appeals to this age-group. They named authors Rudyard Kipling, R.L. Stevenson, Steve

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Eruiuin, R.K. Narayan and Zai Whitaker as representing nature in their books. *Down the River* by Edward Abay, *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and *Himalayan Adventure* (author unnamed) were some of the works enumerated. Tribal people and their wisdom were acknowledged. Commenting on the need for books on the environment, one young adult writes: “If people become aware of the bitter truth about our dying nature, they will join hands for its regeneration.”

In the course of my, research, I found to my disappointment that very few children had access to books by Indian authors. These were mostly available online since most bookshops preferred to stock reprints of old favourites by foreign authors. Most schools did stock books about the environment, but these were mostly non-fiction. It was, however, heartening to know that the reading habit is thriving, and almost all parents and teachers encouraged it actively.

In informal interaction with academicians in seminars, conferences, etc., I found that there was increasing interest in fiction for children and young adults, though there was not much awareness about works by Indian authors.

In an email interview, Dr. Kim Reynolds, Professor of Children’s Literature, Newcastle University, U.K. and one of the leading authorities on children’s fiction says:

Since the 1990s British children’s writers have been producing powerful books about environmental issues that have attempted to inform young readers about the consequences and long-term effects of pollution and global warming in particular. Key examples are Lesley Howarth’s 1995 WEATHER EYE and 2001 ULTRAVIOLET and Philip Reeve’s MORTAL ENGINES (2001) series which posit dystopian futures in which human activity has made the Earth barren. Although there are many good examples of eco fiction and at least as many good information books, it would be untrue to say that eco fiction is a dominant theme in current British children’s publishing. Perhaps the greatest area of impact is on children’s publishers themselves, many of whom take care to source paper from sustainable sources and to be as ecologically minded as possible in the production of their books.

The author finds the fact that there is a dearth of books for the age-group 17-21 representing the ecology and the natural environment in the Young Adult category. Books for young adults are not set in natural surroundings but in cities, with school, colleges and offices for a background. Life in the YA scenario seems to take place in malls and other fashionable meeting places for the young. Young people are not shown as going trekking or indulging in adventure sports. They are not even shown as displaying eco-friendly tendencies. This is in contrast to books for young adults available abroad. There seems to be a huge hiatus between books for older children (or young adults) up to the age of sixteen and those above. The ecological consciousness instilled in the young needs to be reinforced at an age when youth can actively contribute to conservation or prevent pollution. Fiction for the age group, which is free to make their own decisions, physically energetic, with its mental

prowess having almost attained maturity, and above all having the the necessary zeal to serve society, should not be neglected.

It is seen that in reality, young adults are highly eco-conscious. They take part in the de-silting of tanks such as in the Siruthuli movement in Coimbatore. They participate in cleaning their campuses, and their cities / towns / villages. They take part in animal census, go on nature trips, trekking expeditions, like walking and cycling, conserve water and electricity and definitely enjoy their time spent against the background of nature. They have the sense not to disturb wildlife and their habitat. They are generous with their time, generally very conservation-oriented and even persuade their family members to use CFL and LED bulbs and do not waste water. Youth, especially in small towns, are avid gardeners. Some are amateur photographers who love to go on expeditions to places like the Nilgiri biosphere to take photographs of the flora and fauna of the land. It is true that there are topics such as romance, the social media, mobile telephones and careers that interest them. But these are certainly not their only interests.

Wildlife educator and author Payal B. Molur, when this problem was put to her, expressed interest and willingness to contribute her expertise to write books for this age-group. In the course of interviews with authors and publishers, this author made it a point to emphasise this lacuna so that books for this age group would better represent ecology and the natural environment. She feels that if this materialises, it would be the greatest contribution of her study.

Some areas that could be explored by writers of eco fiction

Desert ecosystem, soil pollution, dangers of chemical and bio wastes, genetically modified plants, disaster management, use of alternative energy sources (renewable energy sources) such as wind energy, new inventions and discoveries in the eco area, symbiosis, biofuels, dangers of introducing new species into ecosystems, in-situ and ex-situ conservation, plastics-danger to animals, using animals in laboratories, for experiments, animal rights, dangers of consumerism, over-consumption, avoiding wastage and waste recycling are some areas that could be explored by writers of eco fiction.

Indian culture has always emphasised the need to conserve, not to over-consume; avoid wastage, to be in harmony with the seasons the natural way, without artificial means; to show reverence for animals, keeping a respectful distance, not intruding into animal territory unnecessarily; avoid chopping down trees; feeding ants, crows, showing general kindness to even unattractive creatures such as scavengers, wearing naturally dyed natural fabrics and using natural dyes during Holi and for rangoli. These practices have to be renewed through Indian fiction to counter the misconceptions from the west.

Recommendations for writers by writers and conservationists

During the course of the interviews, I learnt that there should be a healthy blend of fact and fiction in books for children. “The recommended pattern is telling a story, say, about an animal, and

then giving actual data about it in a separate section at the end,” says Molur. It is seen that this pattern has been adopted by Katha Books and Tulika.

The child should not be given wrong facts just because the book is a work of fiction. For example, in an ecosystem, animals that are not found naturally should not be featured. For example, a child should not be told a story of an orangutan living in the Anamalais or describe a tiger in of pursuit of a zebra in the Thar desert. Most authors agree that animals who talk are acceptable as long as they retain their typical animal traits. The child has the capacity to understand that talking animals are simply a trope and are in no way connected to reality. Even Zai Whitaker, one of the foremost writers of eco fiction confesses making her animals talk.

However, **anthromorphism**, wherein animals are endowed with predominantly human characteristics, and hence, for all practical purposes, cease to be animals is frowned upon by the writers of today. So is **disnification** or **infantilization** which leads to unrealistic notions about animals and leads to viewing them disrespectfully should be avoided. Writers of children’s and young adult fiction in India today have deep knowledge and awareness about the environment and have successfully avoided using these strategies as an expedient to capture the attention of their reading public. They have also avoided showing children being entertained by performing animals or other animals in captivity.

To counter the anthropocentric view of the universe and to bring about a nature-centric or eco-centric view is the general aim of eco fiction for children and young adults. All books under consideration showed optimism. There was no sign of the apocalypse situation, a favourite scenario in foreign fiction. So, American ecocriticism is which minatory or celebratory in nature, rather the British Green Studies, which is pessimistic, is more appropriate as a critical base for studying the works. However, most books concentrated on localized problems and did not place the problems and solutions in a global perspective, with regard to comparisons and implications.

To conclude, children’s literature in India is a “magic casement” that opens into a “brave new world,’ one to be explored and appreciated. To quote the immortal words of T.S. Eliot, “In my end is my beginning.”

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