

*Editorial*

Many Bengalis have heard of 'Lobtulua', since Bibhutibhushan Banerjee's popular novel, Aranyak was published. Nature Mates' first magazine was lovingly named 'Lobtulua' by my late father. Our readers liked it, but as NatureMates' work increased, sadly we could not continue the magazine.

Today- we are restarting with Young Lobtulua, for friends aged 9 to 14. But we welcome all readers, of any age.

For now, Young Lobtulua is online, published in English and Bengali.

We look forward to your feedback on the stories and articles. Do write to us at the email address below, with your views and suggestions.

Young Lobtulua will tell you about the beauty and crisis of Nature today - the health of our skies and land, our seas and forests affect our health and future. By destroying nature, we destroy ourselves.

Come let's befriend nature and be her mate ... again.

Happy reading and keep connected!



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# YOUNG LOBTULUA

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## Cover Story



## Aranyani - Spirit of the forest



## Aranyani – Spirit of the forest

**Anupa Roy**

The wind swooped into the forest clearing blowing away Raj's cap.

Just before the forest edge, he snatched it up. Thinking he heard a tinkle of laughter, Raj peered behind the dusk-laden trees - tall, their leaves all shades of green.

'No harm no harm.' whispered Raj, and hurried back to camp.

They had started at dawn with Guide Sagru. In the forest, Sagru spoke softly, pointed out trees and landmarks around the trail. Raj followed last. Like Sagru he knew the forest.

Avi broke a branch, the sudden noise startling everyone.

'Don't.' said Raj.

'You said no animals here.'

'No big animals.' Raj glanced at a rat-snake slithering away, unseen.

'What happened?'

'Aranyani took them away, say some.' said Guide Sagru

Avi laughed, 'Superstition.'

No harm, no harm, Raj muttered again.

Sagru glanced up, 'Hurry. Must reach the clearing before nightfall.'

But the sense of being followed did not leave Raj.

The fire sputtered. Raj replaced the wet twigs with dry ones and fanned gently. Soon the fire was knee-high.

Under the guide's instructions, the scouts had gathered roots, mushrooms and wild onions on their way; Raj

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had some potatoes. They cooked a stew. Sagru provided bread.

Afterwards, everyone sat around the fire. The moon was rising.

'Tell us of Aranyani.' Asked Avi.

Raj nodded at Sagru.

'Aranyani is wind at dawn and dew at dusk.' Said Sagru.

Tall grass around the thick tree-trunks swayed.

'She is soul of the forest.' Raj pulled his cap tight.

'Once, in a village nearby lived Raghu, a young hunter, proud of his skills with the arrow.' Sagru continued.

An owl hooted in the dark forest.

'Once he killed a hind and her calf.'

Elders of the village were upset. 'It's Aranyani's law - mother and child are not to be hunted.'

'Superstition.' mocked Raghu.



That night a leopard prowled around the village-fence.  
'You've made Aranyani angry.' muttered his father.  
'There's no Aranyani.' he said.  
Next afternoon Raghu returned dragging a large tree trunk.  
'Now we have both fuel and food.'  
'Fool! You take without giving,' said his parents.  
They hurried to the forest edge and begged Aranyani's forgiveness.  
Not a bird sang or leaf move.  
'A storm is coming.' muttered Raghu's mother.  
But Raghu laughed at them, 'Next I'll get that leopard.'  
'That's Aranyani. Hush!' No harm, no harm, she chanted.  
Aranyani was known to take a leopard's form.  
The fire crackled. The wind sighed. The boys listened.  
'That afternoon a strong wind from the hills blew off roofs.  
Villagers tied down doors and windows; locked in their goats and hens; and prayed.  
The forest below and the trees on the hill-slopes thrashed about. It rained till there was only water and forest. The villagers feared a land-slide.  
Raghu caught a fever - he moaned and coughed. The village vaid came, he left some herbs.  
The wind roared down the hills. The leopard growled in the forest.  
The old vaid fell ill; he couldn't breathe. His assistant tried his best. But the vaid died. Many others were ill. They coughed and prayed and couldn't breathe.  
'Send him away,' angry villagers told his frightened parents.  
Before dawn, Raghu's mother took food and a chicken and went out to the forest.  
'Aranyani, my son is foolish. Spare us. I promise to look after this forest.'

She heard the distant growl of the leopard. Shaking with fear, she released the chicken and returned.  
For months the villagers suffered - some recovered, many died.  
One day, Raghu's mother said, 'We must protect the forest always, for I have promised.' Everyday they left food on the tree stump Raghu had cut.  
Since then Raghu's family looked after the forest. But the deer had vanished.  
The fire was low.  
'Did Raghu live?' asked a boy.  
Sagru looked at Raj.  
'Yes, but he was changed – then on, he helped to protect this forest.' Raj paused, 'he was my great-grandfather.'  
A sudden gust of wind made the fire crackle.  
A tinkle of laughter floated in.  
Only Raj heard it.

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#### **NOTE**

All over the world people believed in spirits of the forests. In India, there are many beliefs and names too. Aranyani is mentioned in the ancient Hindu text Rig Veda.

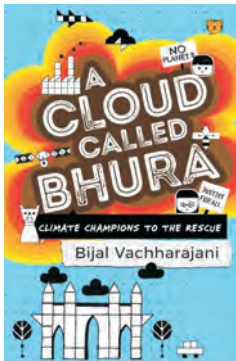
All such folklore says that the spirit of the forest protects all creatures in it – big and small, plant and animal. Angering the spirit of the forest is to anger Nature and evoke a punishment.

Scientists say the COVID pandemic is from a virus released from a wild animal which has jumped to humans. Our body does not know how to fight this virus because it is new.

When we protect forests, we allow the local ecosystem of plants, animals, insects and microscopic life to flourish in it. This is healthy for the planet as well as for humans as unknown pathogens remain within their ecosystem.  
Our mindless destruction of forests and eating of wild animals has released the wrath of Nature on us – Aranyani is angry.



## BOOK REVIEWS



### **A Cloud Called Bhura: Climate Champions to the Rescue**

Bijal Vachharajani.

Speaking Tiger, 2019.

Age 9+

Rs. 299

<https://www.speakingtigerbooks.com/shop/childrens/a-cloud-called-bhura/>

A brown cloud casts a shadow on the lives of Mumbai's citizens. A doctor warns that it is time every Mumbaian bought masks to save themselves. A street vendor will soon have to close his thela because how will people eat with masks? Scientists declare it is a sign of climate change; political leaders deny it. It is a classic case which divides friends and family members into two groups- climate change believers and non-believers. Then there are those who are sitting on the fence- aware of

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the dangers of climate change but not sure whether to believe it yet. Which group do you belong to?

Bijal Vachharajani's book A Cloud called Bhura talks about important issues- climate change, global warming and much more through the story of four children who are caught up in the strange turn of events in their city. The author makes us laugh with her little descriptions of how journalists, climatologists, politicians, astrologers, advertisement firms and the tourism industry respond to Cloud Bhura. This visual, engaging and informative book is like a forecast of a world in which we cannot do without masks.

### **One Lonely Tiger**

Benita Sen

Puffin Books, 2019.

Age 4+

Rs. 250

<https://penguin.co.in/book/one-lonely-tiger-2/>

The tiger in Benita Sen's One Lonely Tiger is learning to count numbers. He is also exploring the woods and meeting new animals and birds. The

tiger is curious, playful and a little confused. But his sixth sense tells him that his den in the forest will soon be gone. Humans are after his home. We do not meet the humans in Sen's story told in rhymes but Sekhar Mukherjee's lively illustrations gives us a hint that humans are closing in on the tiger's home. So the tiger escapes to Mars and looks down sadly at his home on earth which has vanished.

No time like the present to learn about the dangers of deforestation and the need to protect biodiversity. So gift your little one this book to sow the seeds of awareness and compassion early. Then see him/her turn into a passionate environmentalist- all set to plant trees around your home to cheer their friend- the lonely tiger.



Barnamala Roy





Sridipta Manna  
**Zaraa & Zoyee**  
*a friendship begins...*



## Outside my window

Arijit Chattopadhyay

I like to travel – to wander outside the city looking at trees and birds, butterflies and beetles. There's so much to see - their colours, shapes, what they eat and how they behave. And so, every holiday I travelled. But since COVID lockdown, I too, like all of you am stuck at home. Unable to travel, I felt miserable within the four walls. I live in the concrete jungle of Calcutta, buildings on all sides, with hardly any green space. Only a window, from which I can see two large trees. Somehow, these have survived in the concrete. One morning when I sat for my breakfast by the window, I heard a birdcall from the jackfruit tree. It was a familiar tune and I peered into the jackfruit's blackish-green foliage. A little black and white bird hopped from branch to branch shaking its long, upright tail – a magpie-robin or doel. What a nice surprise!

Another day, I sat working beside the window, when a white-breasted kingfisher landed on an electric wire outside. Sometimes a white heron sits on top of the mango tree; I think it is watching the humans rushing around below.

I started to watch the trees. Once I saw three sparrow-sized birds hiding inside the mango tree. Very colourful with red foreheads and yellow necks, coppersmith barbets have a loud call – like someone gently hammering a copper plate.

Often, I went up to the terrace in the evenings for some fresh air. One evening a flock of green parrots and some parakeets (chondona) flew above. I wondered where they lived.

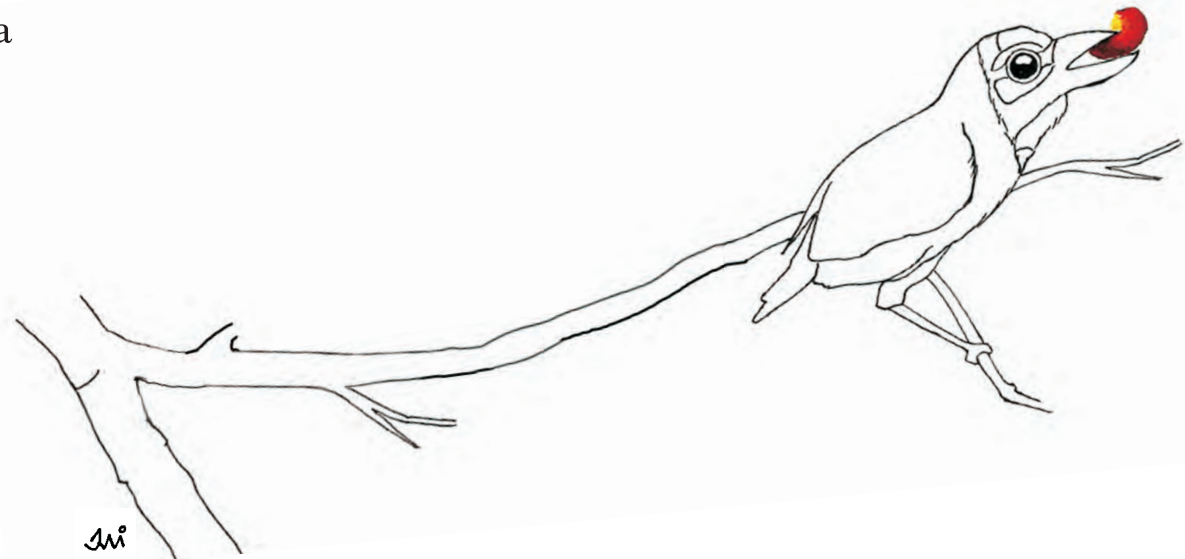
As darkness falls, fruit and insect bats surprise me. They come out of their hidings at night.

We think animals and birds live only in forests, riversides and villages; sometimes in city gardens. But I was happy to see so many creatures from my window and terrace. Even under lockdown, if I was watchful, I saw the city was home to many creatures. Nature is indeed wonderful.

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*Activity Maybe you can watch out from your window.*

*What birds or animals can you see? Do you know their names or what they do?*







A tiger kid from Tadoba Andheri Tiger Reserve





*be nature's mate...*

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