

Editorial

Food! We all love it, cannot do without it. Stories and recipes of foods are everywhere – spreading colours and forms and tastes.

And yet how many of us know where different foods come from? How are they grown or made; cooked and prepared?

And importantly today, what is climate change doing to our foods? What is industrial farming doing to our soils and water?

In this issue, we explore some aspects of food -

- Using the ancient practice of foraging to get food from our surroundings
- Understanding Nature's way to secure our food and farming
- Sharing without wasting, so all creatures have enough food

Happy reading and keep connected!

Write to us at

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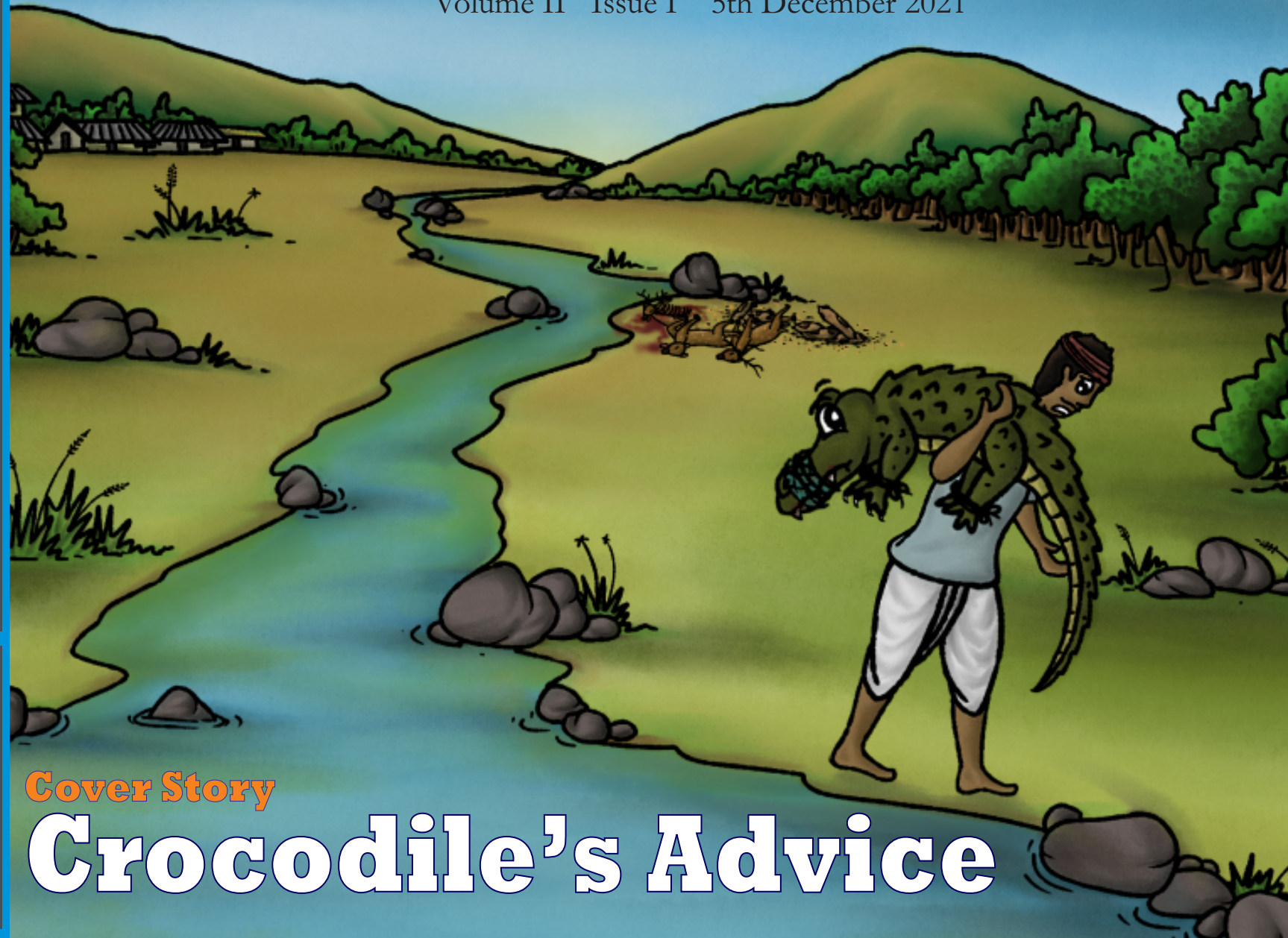
Barnamala Roy

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YOUNG

LOBTULIA

Volume II Issue I 5th December 2021



Cover Story

Crocodile's Advice

Crocodile's Advice

Anupa Roy

Once, in a small village by a river there lived few farmers and hunters. They grew rice and vegetables in the fields and hunted deer in the forests. Sometimes they caught fish in the river. Life was good.

But then the villagers began to complain - it rained too much or it did not rain at all. They said growing rice was very hard work. Many went off to the city to make money.

One day, strange men came to the village. They gave the villagers shiny rice-seeds.

'Plant these seeds, and use this magic powder,' they said. 'You will have a great harvest. In return, we want as much deer meat as possible.'

So, the villagers planted the new seeds and used the magic powder. But it didn't rain. They cut a channel from the river to their fields to water them.

Soon the crop was as high as their waists. But all the birds and the insects disappeared. And nothing else grew in the fields. Not a weed.

'Wonderful. We've much less work,' the villagers said.

Then they set large traps in the forest. They caught many deer— old, young, buck and doe. It took all night to kill them. The forest-floor turned red.

Next morning, the strange men took away the deer meat in large trucks. Leaving a few for the villagers.

They skinned and cooked a deer and feasted for a week. They harvested the large rice crop. But there was so much! Meat and grain began to rot.

'Oh, soon we'll have more,' so saying, they threw the rotting meat and grains into the river.

But the days were long and hot. The ground cracked, ponds dried. Nothing grew in the fields. The deer had vanished. The villagers starved.

One day villager went to fish, but the river had only a trickle of water and no fish.

'Surely Nature is against us,' he moaned.

'Oh no, not Nature,' said a gruff voice.

Startled, he saw Crocodile panting on the dry riverbank.

'Come closer, man,' said Crocodile.

'Oh no! You'll eat me.'

'I've no strength to eat you. Besides those rotting deer you threw – gave me a stomach-ache,' he grumbled.

'No.'

'Tie my mouth with that net. Then I cannot eat you. Please take me to the deep river or I'll die.' Crocodile begged.

'How can you help us?'



'I'll teach you how not to go hungry.'

Very carefully, the villager threw his net over the crocodile's jaws; then quickly tied his mouth.

'MMph, mmph!' said Crocodile.

Tearing thick vines from a tree, he tied the crocodile's legs too.

Huffing and puffing he walked downstream. Crocodile was very heavy and scratchy. On reaching the deep river, he dropped Crocodile and untied his legs; with a long branch he pried the net off his mouth.

And ran.

'Don't run kind man! Let me get into the water, then I'll tell you the secret to food.'

Crocodile crawled into the river. 'Ah!' he sighed.

'Listen man. Watch the sky and the river. You must sow at the right time. Grow many things. Do I eat only big fish? Oh, how I wish I didn't eat that rotting meat!'

The man nodded.

'You killed so many deer! None came to the river. I got no fresh meat.' he glared.

The villager stepped backwards.

'Hunt, but spare the young, for they'll grow up and have deer children. And don't kill the mother deer - her young will die without her. Take only what you need.'

'Harvest your rice but leave a bit for birds and insects. For without their

help you cannot grow anything. And please! That evil powder! It killed all the fishes.'

'Be too greedy, your children will starve; be too lazy you will all die! For when your children grow up, they too need deer in the forest, fish in the river and crops in the fields. And crocodiles.'

'Now go – I'm getting hungry and may forget my promise.'

Crocodile opened his jaws wide and the villager ran as fast as he could.

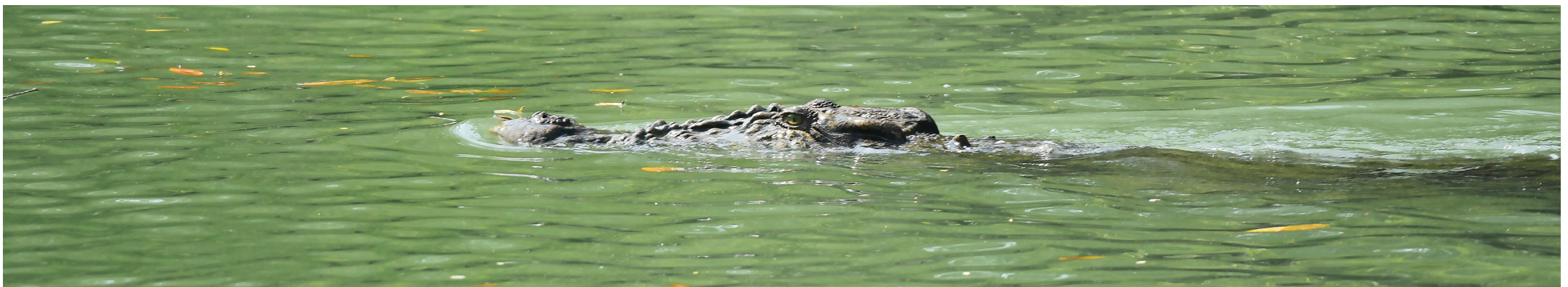
Back at the village he told the others. Most laughed, but some believed him.

The villagers began to watch sun and sky carefully – learning to sow and harvest at the right times; and they never used the evil-magic powder again. It was a hard and hungry year.

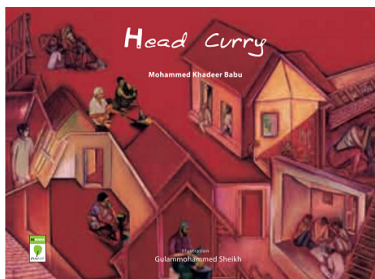
They stopped throwing rubbish in the rivers and soon the water was clean - the fish returned.

When the strange men came again to give them rice-seeds and ask for deer meat, they chased them away.

And slowly the land healed. Deer came again to the forest. And there was enough food for villagers and animals and Crocodile.



BOOK REVIEWS



Head Curry

Mohammed Khadeer Babu,
tr. from Telugu by A. Suneetha. --
Mango, D C Books, 2008.

Age 10+

Rs. 45

<http://mangobooks.dcbbooks.com/ourbooks/head-curry/>

Do you want to know how young Khadeer's father's favourite dish – the curry of a ram's head – is made? Khadeer is ready to tell you the whole process in this story that is as delicious as the dish!

Whenever his father longs for head curry for lunch, Khadeer gets ready for a long, long day. After all, there's so much to be done – the meat has to be booked the previous evening, bought early in the morning, and then smoked, broken, and cooked with a mix of spices. It's so special that even Khadeer's aunt has to be brought in for help! But what makes the process memorable for the adult author even after many years are all the sights, smells, and conversations along the way.

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Khadeer leaves out no details. The brightly illustrated houses with roofs, windows, staircases and courtyards bring the community alive for his listeners.

A heart-warming read; the book makes for a perfect (literary) meal!

Reviewer: Anagha Gopal

Anagha Gopal is pursuing her M.Phil in English at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research interests lie in the fields of Children's and Young Adult Literature.

Co-Editor for this review: Titus Bose

Titus is a PhD student at University of Chicago, working on post-independent Bengali children's fiction. She completed her M.Phil from Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2018, which was a study of Bengali folktale anthologies for children in the twentieth century. She has worked as an English teacher in Cambridge School, Srinivaspuri and then as a Critical Writing Preceptor at Ashoka University. She is the co-founder of the Delek Archives and the editor of its blog.

Rupkatha Samagra

Nabanita Debsen

Patra Bharati, 2011

Age: 8+

Price: Rs. 400

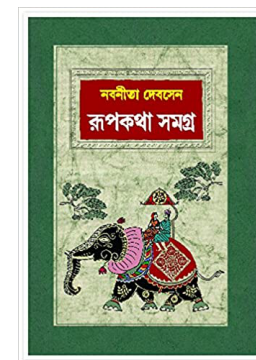
https://www.amazon.in/Rupkathha-Samagra-Nabanita-Debsen/dp/8183741185/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&qid=1616814624&refinements=p_27%3ANabanita+Debsen&s=books&sr=1-1

It is a collection of sixty one fairytales by the renowned writer, poet, academic and beloved storyteller Nabaneeta Debsen. It is written from the point of view of mothers, daughters, old wives and witches. Debsen's fairytales gives the power of

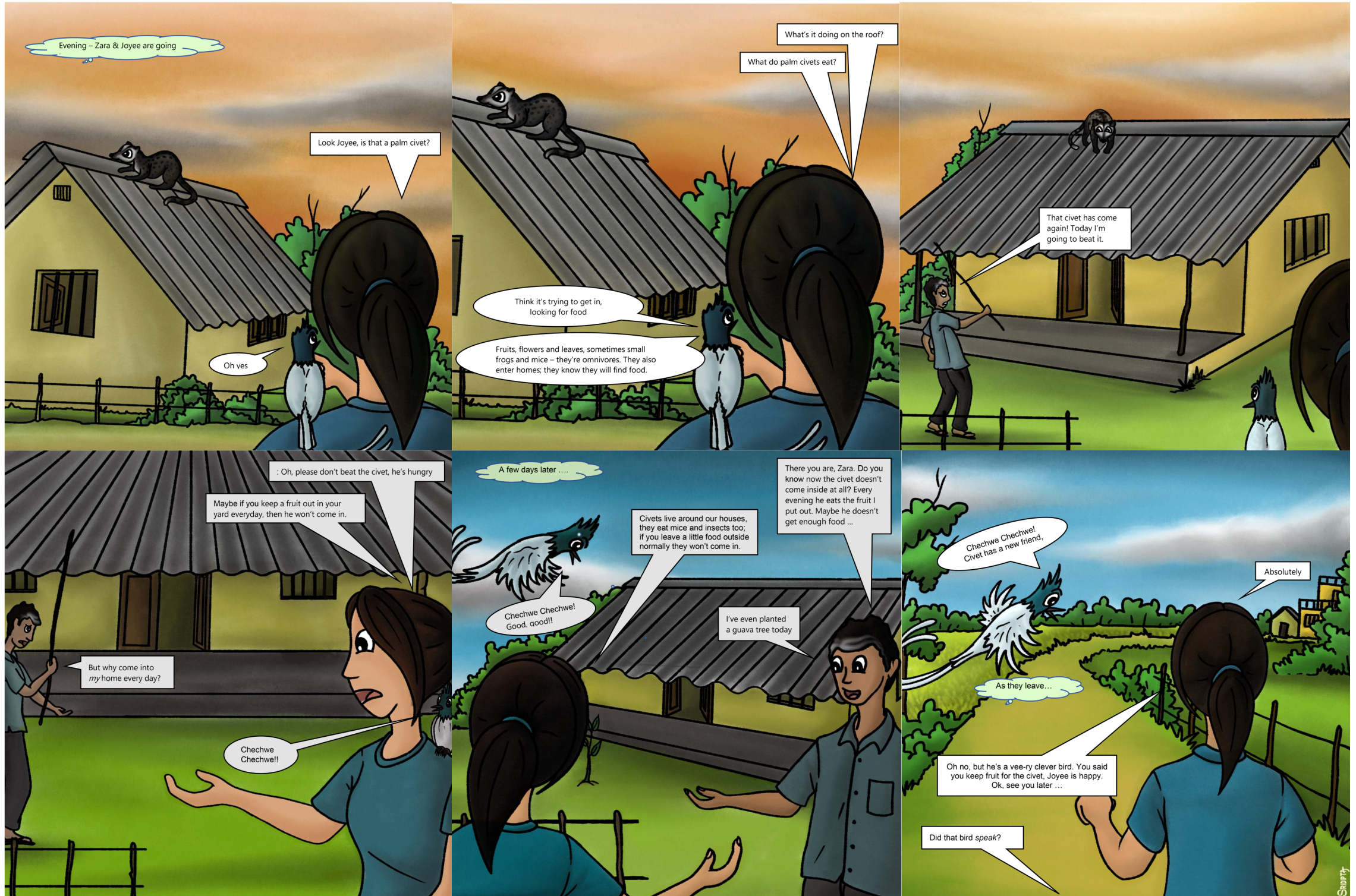
narration to the supporting characters of fairy stories which are otherwise 'androcentric' (meaning they revolve around male characters). The princesses don't wait for the princes to save them in these stories, unlike traditional fairytales. The heroines of these stories save themselves. They solve big problems with their presence of mind, intelligence and friendships with nature, and not through battles and bloodshed. Nature in these stories both punishes and rewards the characters based on their actions. Some of these natural rewards come as Bengal's bountiful orchards and gardens, the warmth of its village kitchens and banquets to come home to as stories end.

Reviewer: Ahona Das

Ahona graduated from The Centre of English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi in 2020 and is currently pursuing her MPhil in Children's Literature from Delhi University. She has recently interned with CCYSC (The Critical Childhood and Youth Studies Collective) where she developed Project Chatterbox which reimagines the concept of chattering in childhood. She teaches Middle School students in Delhi.



Sridipta Manna Zaraa & Zoyee and the story of the Palm Civet



Finding foods – foraging in the neighbourhood

Arijit Chattopadhyay

Often, I travel to remote villages and outskirts of Bengal for work. On one such trip I stayed in a Santali village, while on a project.

One day, back from work, as I returned on the rope-bed in the courtyard, I saw some villager passing by, their work done in the fields. They carried bunches of raw mangoes and in the cloth tie around their waists, there were the tropical blackberries, I so loved -*Kalojaam*.

I asked where had they got them. They answered that on the dykes of paddy fields there grew a few mango and kalojaam trees. The berries were jut right for eating, I thought.

Another afternoon a group of women walked by talking among themselves. They too carried something – leafy greens and creepers trailed from the bunches they carried. 'are you going to eat them? Where did you get them?' I asked out of curiosity.

'Thee? Oh they grow all over – this is Colocasia – *kachu*, very good to eat.'

'And this – *kolmi* – water spinach. It's a wonderful medicine and tonic. Want some?' she smiled.

I shook my head and smiled back.

I began to notice villagers, even children hardly ever returned from their fields or other work empty-handed. They always found something edible along the way – under trees, on bushes and even ponds.

In cities we buy everything, no one thinks of finding food by the wayside – foraging. Yes, you may say but where are the fields and the ponds are dirty. But if you look carefully you can forage food too.

So many people in the world go hungry. According to the World Hunger Index India ranks 101st amongst 116 countries! Even those who eat two square meals a day buy pesticide tainted, often low-nutrient foods – products of large-scale industrial farming. How wonderful if we too can forage food in our neighbourhoods.

Wherever there is space in between city houses and vacant lots, you will find weeds and plants, sometimes a tree or two. Mango papaya, drumstick etc. often grow on street sides and old unused spaces. If people in a community can come together and plan small foraging trips wouldn't that be fun. It can provide free and nutritious greens and other foods.

Over time we can turn these spaces and our little gardens into wild food forests too. We can plant tomatoes, chillies, ladyfingers, greens all of which grow easily in our climate.

Perhaps we need no longer buy everything from the market – a little bit goes a long way.....

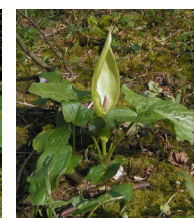
NB: It is necessary to know your local food plants well before you start to forage food. Always learn from someone elder who knows local food plants and greens when you start foraging in the neighbourhood.



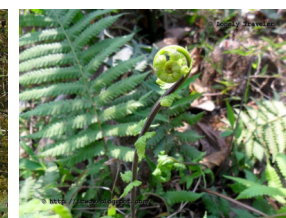
Kolmi *Ipomoea aquatica*



Kochu *Colocasia esculenta*



Kharkol *Triphonium* sp.



Dheki Saak *Diplazium* sp.



A kitchen garden. You can do it in your terrace and courtyard.
Image source <https://www.kelloggsgarden.com/blog/gardening/top-20-garden-vegetables-to-grow/>



be nature's mate...

**Published by: The Secretary, Nature Mates Nature Club
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