

# *Spirit of the Forest*



A COMIC BOOK



# *Spirit of the Forest*

Story  
Bhaskar Vira & Rukmini Sekhar

Art  
Jayanto Banerjee

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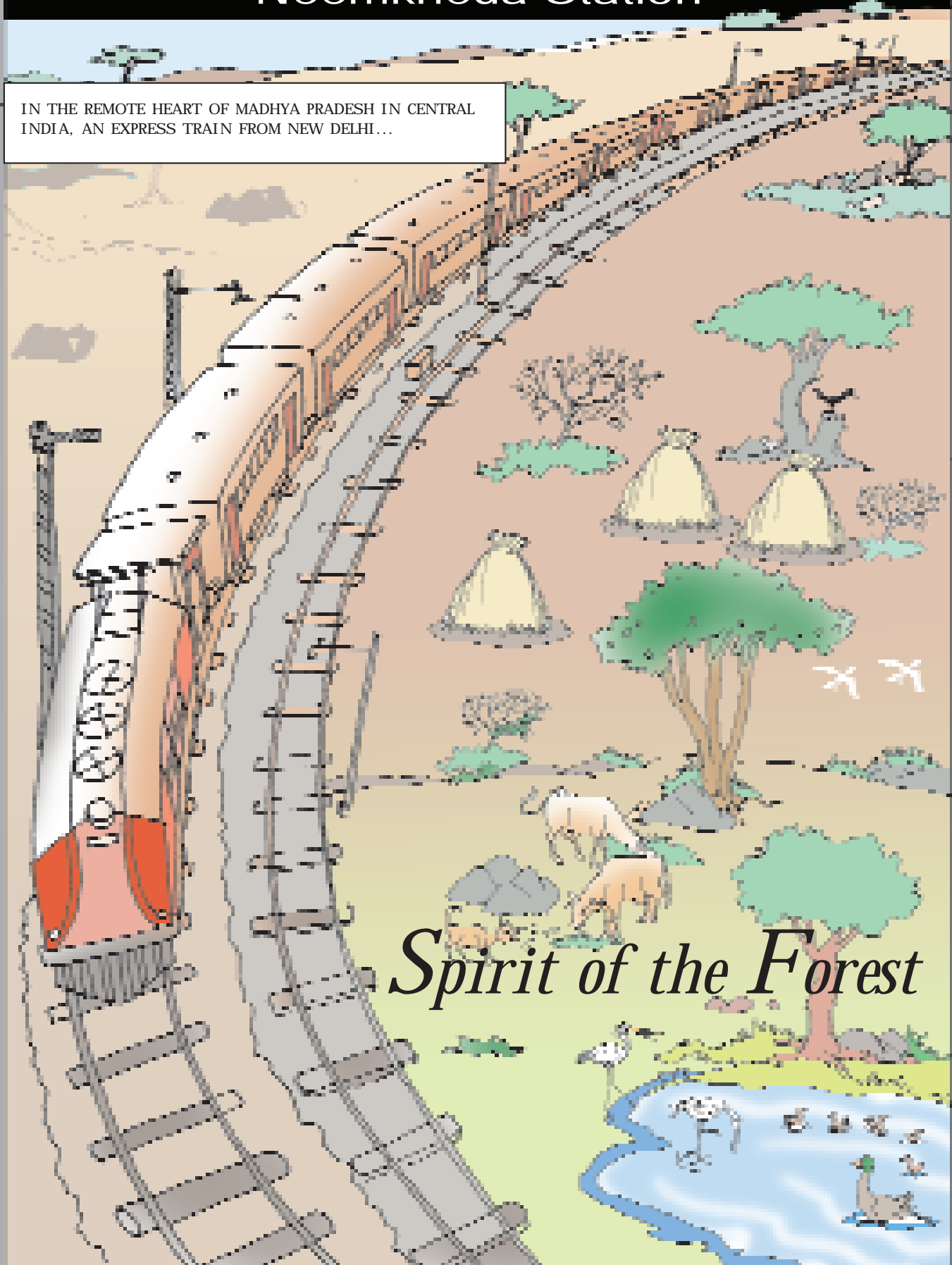


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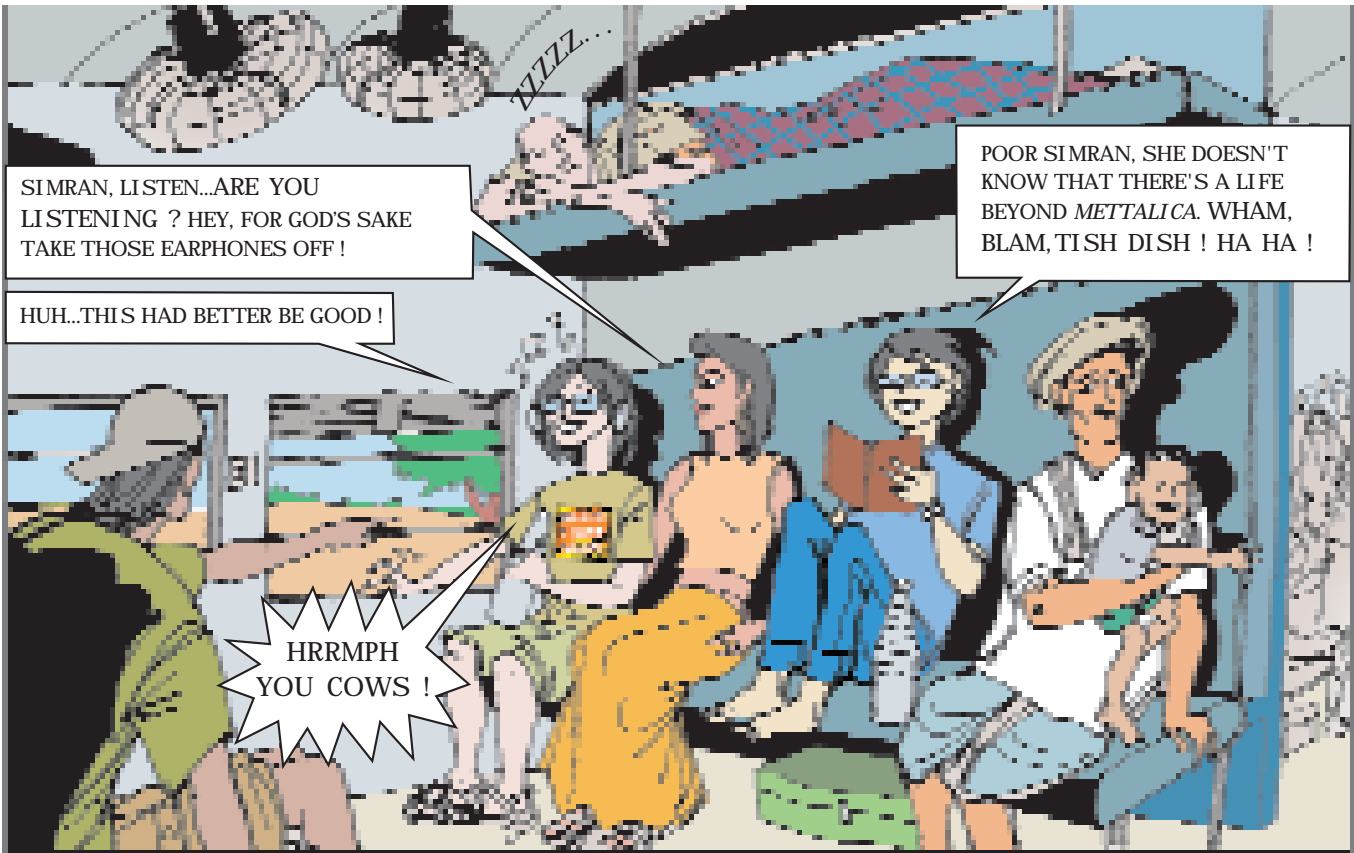


# Neemkheda Station

IN THE REMOTE HEART OF MADHYA PRADESH IN CENTRAL INDIA, AN EXPRESS TRAIN FROM NEW DELHI...



*Spirit of the Forest*

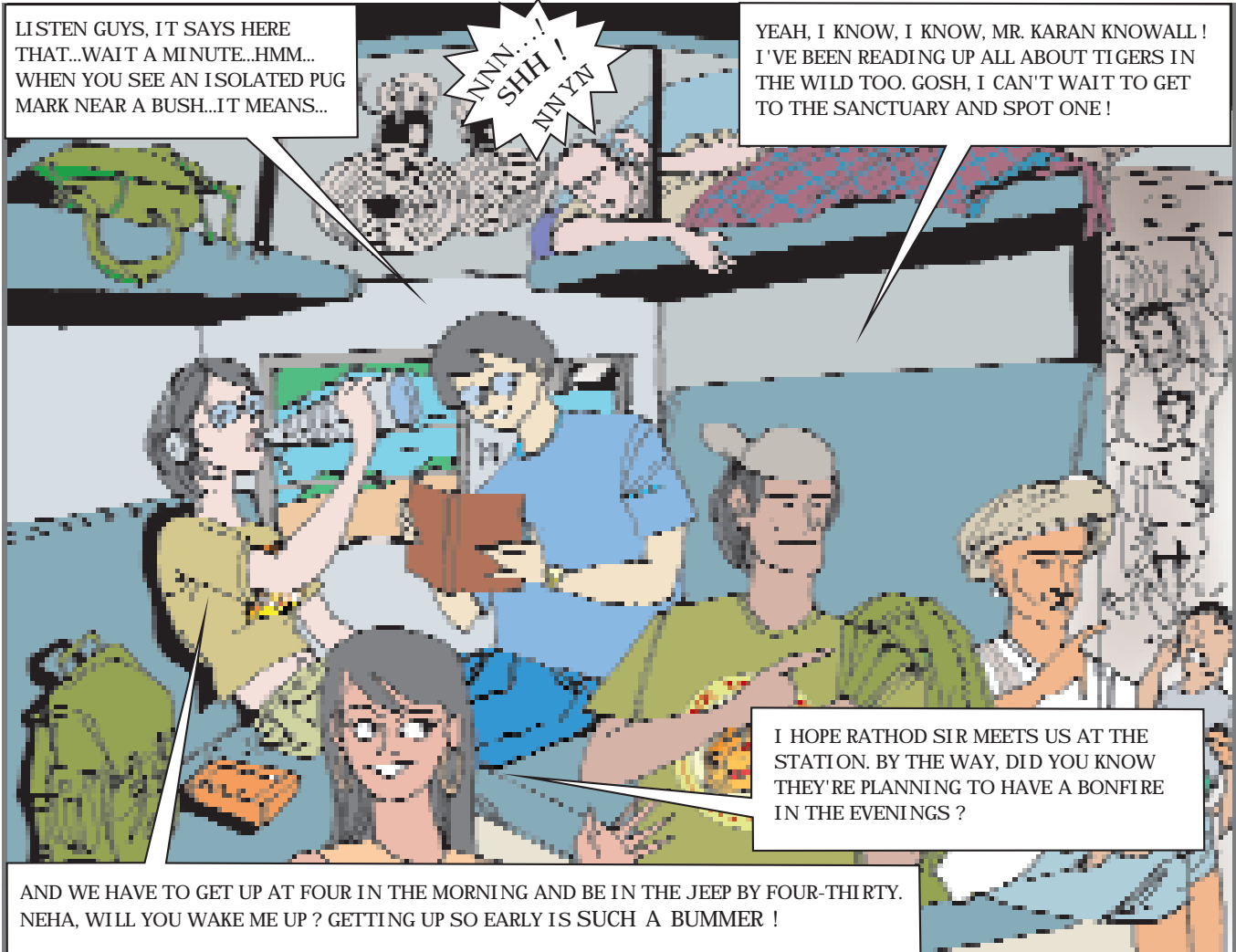


SIMRAN, LISTEN...ARE YOU LISTENING ? HEY, FOR GOD'S SAKE TAKE THOSE EARPHONES OFF !

POOR SIMRAN, SHE DOESN'T KNOW THAT THERE'S A LIFE BEYOND METTALICA. WHAM, BLAM, TISH DISH ! HA HA !

HUH...THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD !

HRRMPH YOU COWS !



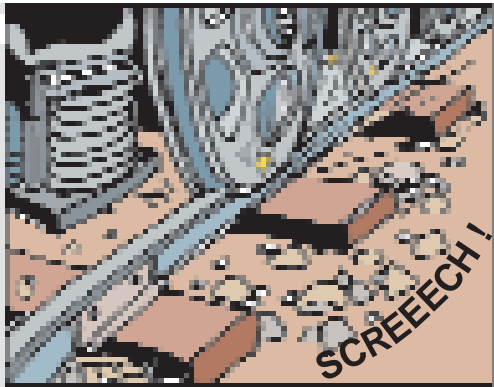
LISTEN GUYS, IT SAYS HERE THAT...WAIT A MINUTE...HMM... WHEN YOU SEE AN ISOLATED PUG MARK NEAR A BUSH...IT MEANS...

NNN...! SHH! NNNYN

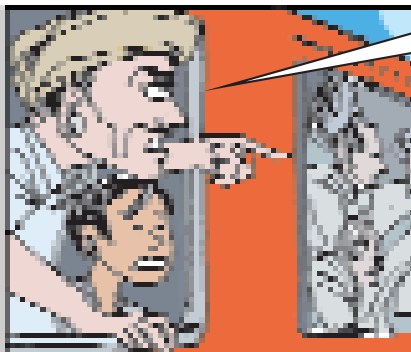
YEAH, I KNOW, I KNOW, MR. KARAN KNOWALL ! I'VE BEEN READING UP ALL ABOUT TIGERS IN THE WILD TOO. GOSH, I CAN'T WAIT TO GET TO THE SANCTUARY AND SPOT ONE !

I HOPE RATHOD SIR MEETS US AT THE STATION. BY THE WAY, DID YOU KNOW THEY'RE PLANNING TO HAVE A BONFIRE IN THE EVENINGS ?

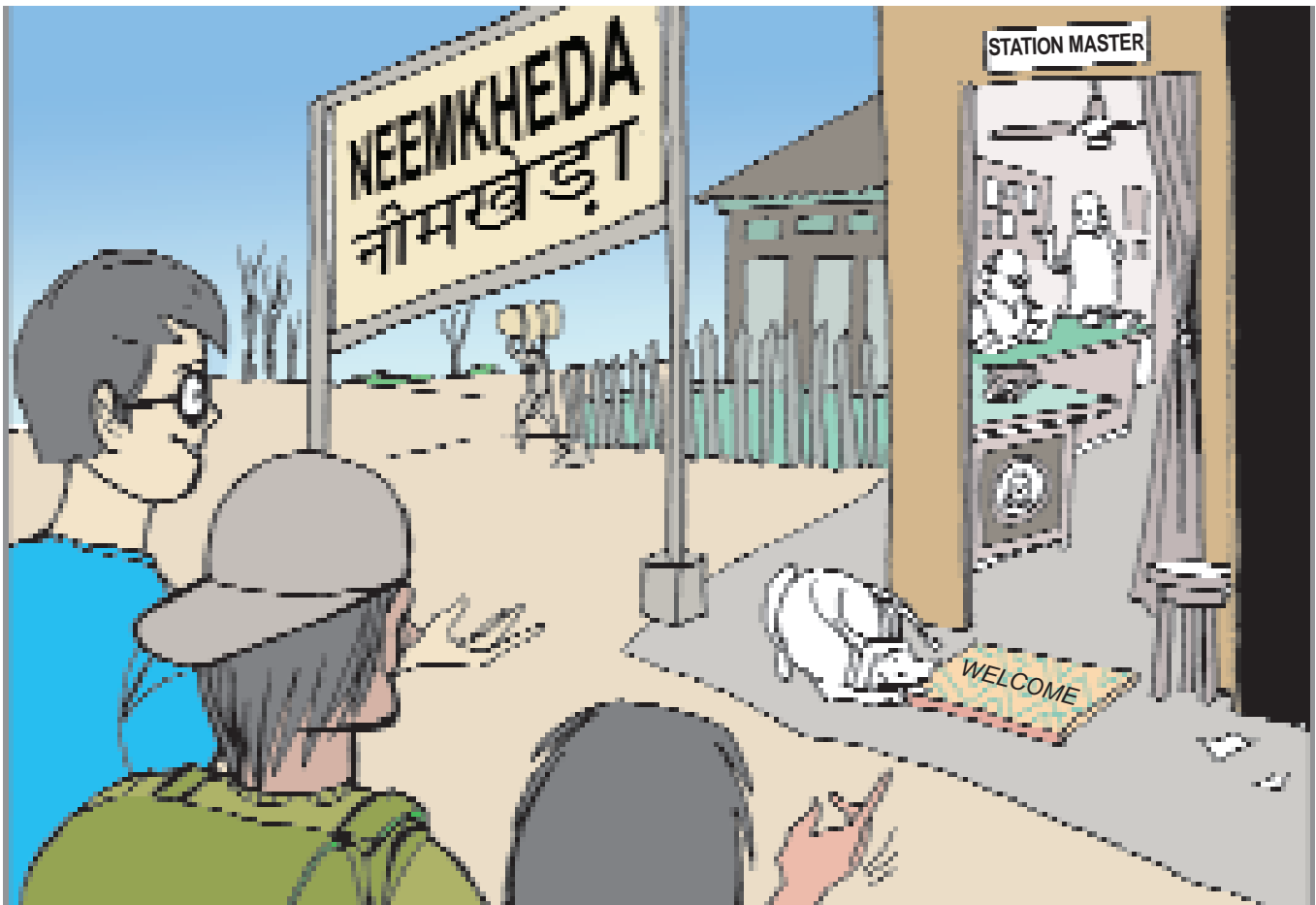
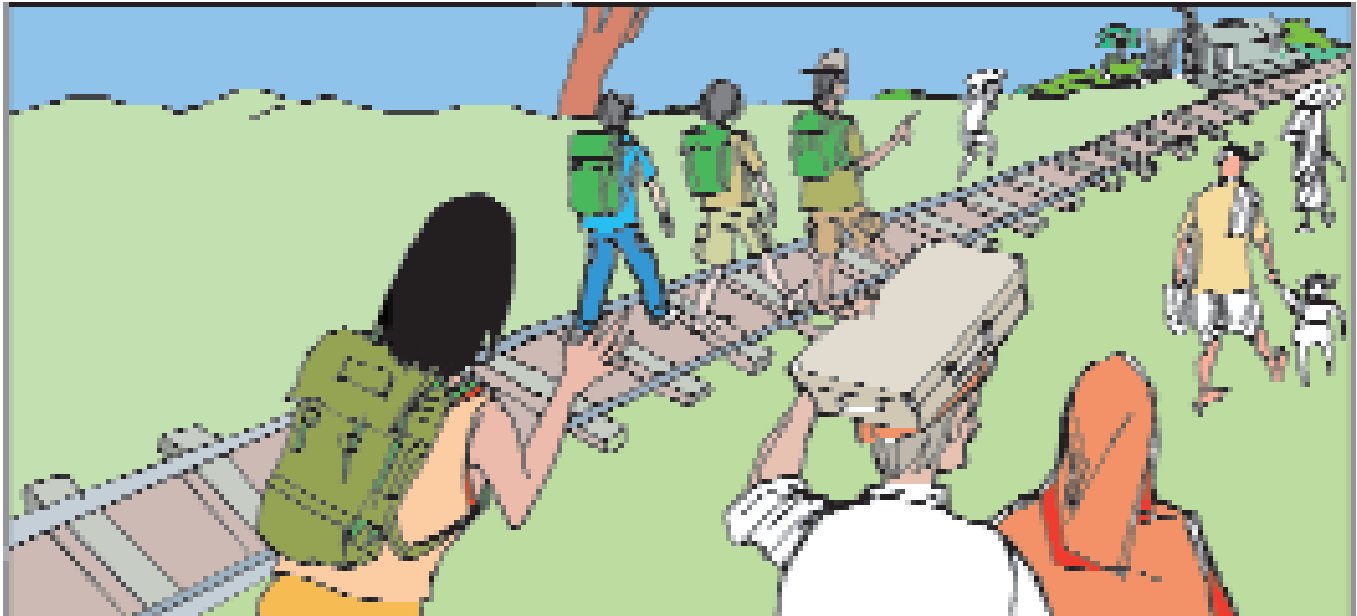
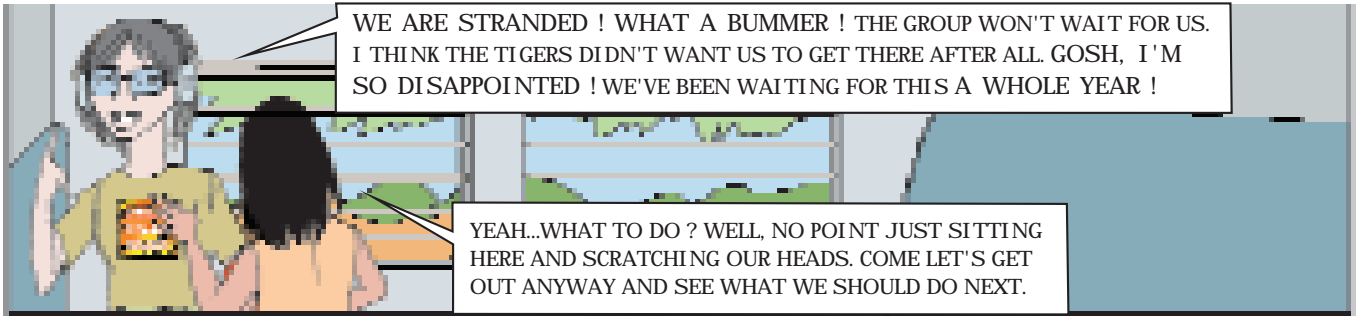
AND WE HAVE TO GET UP AT FOUR IN THE MORNING AND BE IN THE JEEP BY FOUR-THIRTY. NEHA, WILL YOU WAKE ME UP ? GETTING UP SO EARLY IS SUCH A BUMMER !



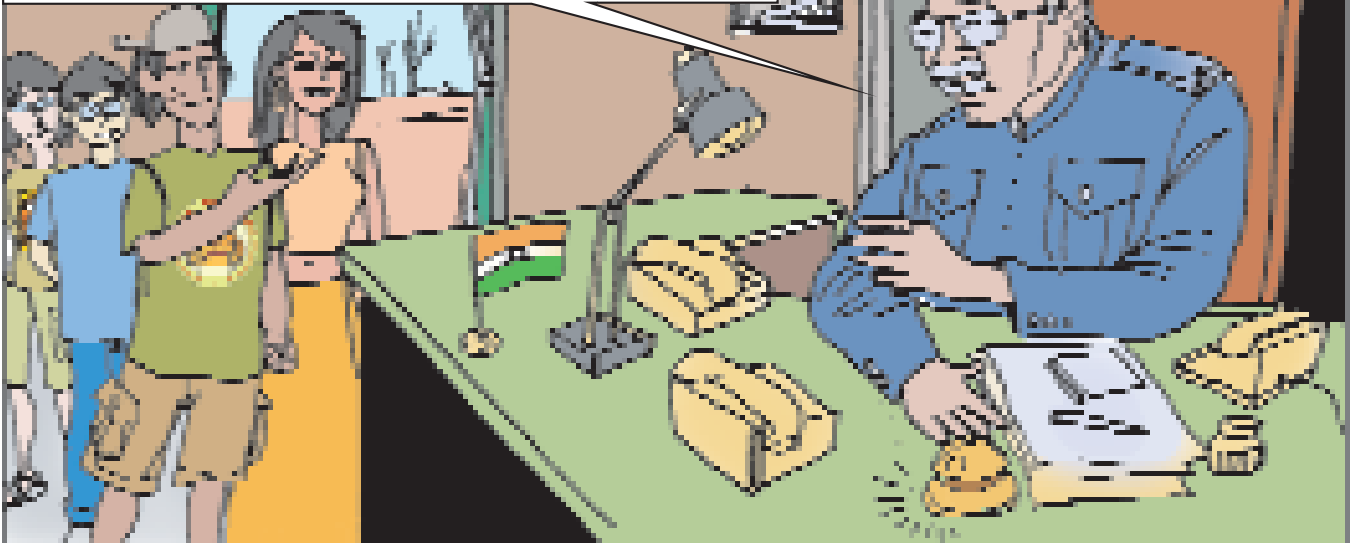
KARAN, PICK UP THE WATER BOTTLES. NOW WHAT NEXT !!! ??



I'M AFRAID THE NEWS IS NOT GOOD. A TRAIN HAS JUST DERAILED AND THERE'S NO SAYING WHEN WE'LL BE ALLOWED TO PASS. COULD BE A DAY OR TWO OR EVEN LONGER. THE AUTHORITIES HAVE TO COME ALL THE WAY FROM BHOPAL. YOU KIDS HAD BETTER GET OFF HERE. NEEMKHEDA TOWN IS JUST HALF A KILOMETRE FROM HERE. YOU SHOULD GET THERE AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO.



NO, I CAN'T SAY WHEN THE TRACKS WILL BE CLEARED. BUT DON'T WORRY, THERE'S A DECENT FOREST RESTHOUSE WHERE YOU CAN STAY TILL THINGS GET BETTER. I'LL SEND WORD TO THEM. RAMU, OH, RAMU ! TAKE THEM TO THE FOREST RESTHOUSE !

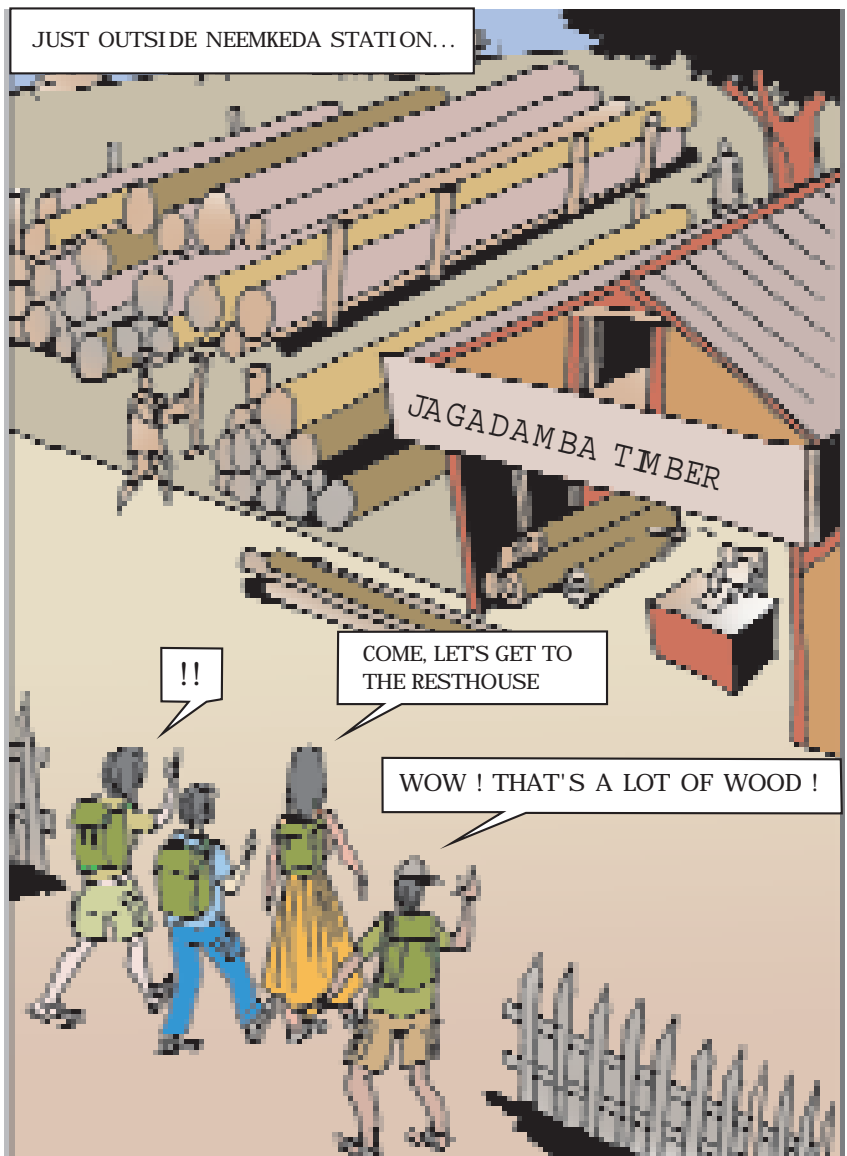


MA, DON'T WORRY. WE'VE FOUND A FOREST RESTHOUSE WHERE WE CAN STAY. RAHUL, KARAN AND NEHA ARE WITH ME. NO, I DON'T THINK THE TRACKS WILL BE CLEARED TILL TOMORROW. THERE'LL BE NO NETWORK FROM NOW ON, SO I'LL CALL LATER OK, BYE !

YES, DAD !

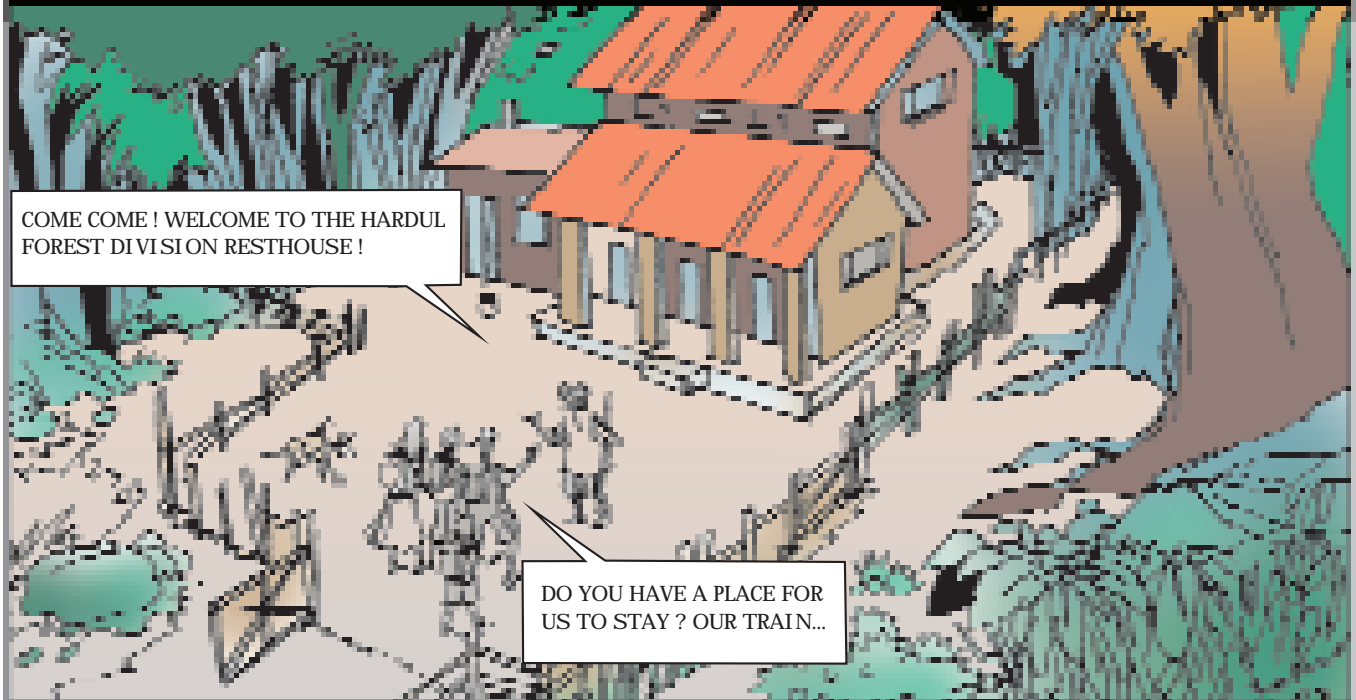


JUST OUTSIDE NEEMKEDA STATION...





# Spirit of The Forest



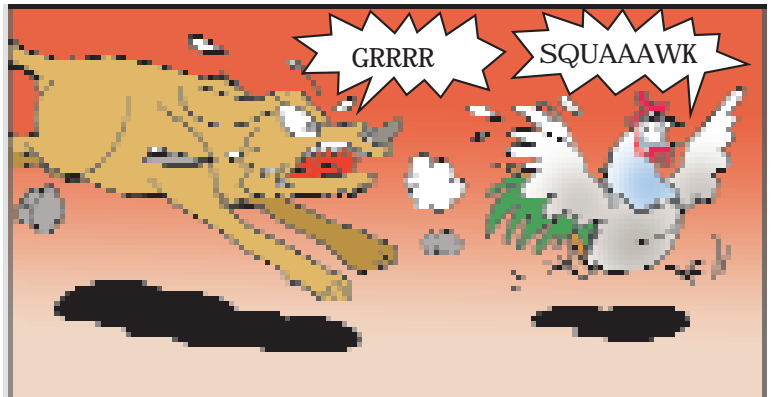
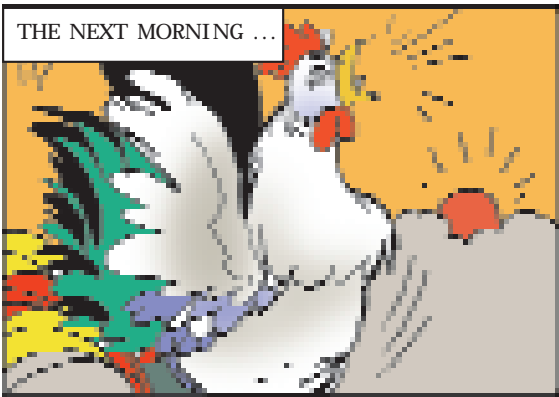
COME COME ! WELCOME TO THE HARDUL FOREST DIVISION RESTHOUSE !

DO YOU HAVE A PLACE FOR US TO STAY ? OUR TRAIN...



YES, YES...I KNOW. I GOT THE NEWS FROM THE STATION MASTER. HAAN, WE HAVE ONE SPARE DORMITORY WITH SIX BEDS WITH MOSQUITO NETS. IT'S TWENTY-FIVE RUPEES A NIGHT FOR A BED. I'LL MAKE SOME FOOD. WILL *DAL-CHAWAL* DO ? TCH... TCH... TERRIBLE NEWS ABOUT THE TRAIN ACCIDENT. HOPE NOT TOO MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HURT. HAI RAM !





BY THE WAY, RAHUL, DID YOU NOTICE ALL THAT WOOD PILED UP JUST OUTSIDE NEEMKHEDA STATION ?



YEAH...I SURE DID, KARAN. I WAS WONDERING WHY ALL THAT WOOD WAS CHOPPED UP...I MEAN, WE HEAR SO MUCH ABOUT THE IMPACT OF DEFORESTATION ON FOREST HABITATS INCLUDING THAT OF THE TIGER.



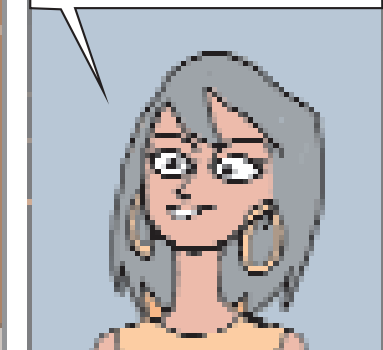
SIMRAN, DID YOU SEE ALL THAT WOOD... ?



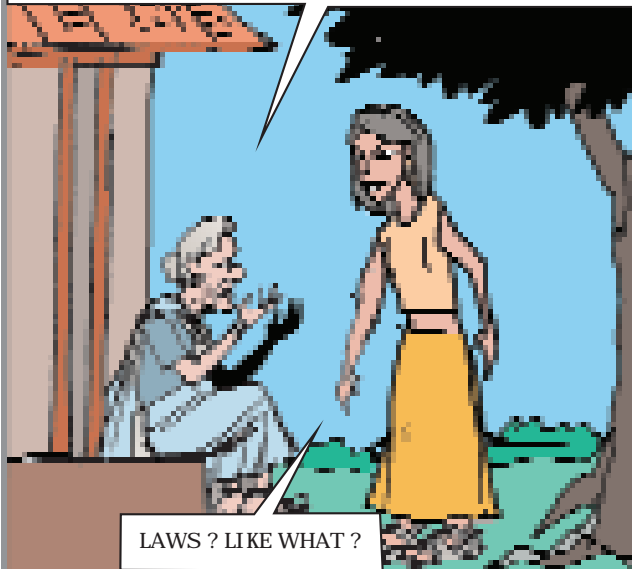
THAT'S A *NISTAR* DEPOT, KIDS. *NISTAR* MEANS THE FOREST PRODUCE THAT IS MADE AVAILABLE FOR US TRIBALS BY THE GOVERNMENT AT CONCESSIONAL RATES. YOU SEE, UNLIKE YOU PEOPLE FROM THE CITIES, WE DEPEND ON THE FOREST FOR ALMOST EVERYTHING – FODDER, GRASS, GREEN MANURE, LEAVES, FUELWOOD AND SO ON. AFTER ALL, WE'VE BEEN CONNECTED TO THE FOREST FOR GENERATIONS AND HAVE STRONG TIES WITH IT.



BUT THE TIMBER LOOKED OLD AND WE DIDN'T SEE ANY PEOPLE AROUND THE DEPOT.

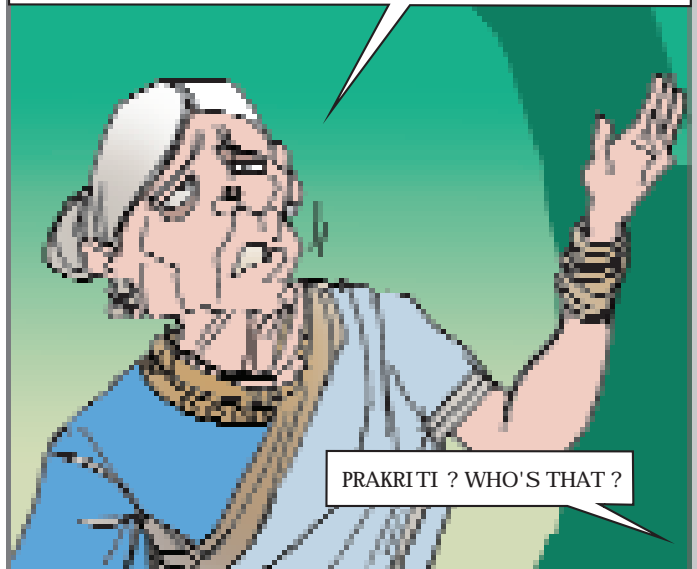


YOU'RE RIGHT, BETI. THE DEPOT IS TOO FAR AWAY FROM OUR VILLAGE, JAMUNIYA, WHICH IS DEEP INSIDE THE FOREST. IT'S MUCH TOO DIFFICULT TO GET WOOD FROM THERE. SO WE JUST WALK INTO THE FOREST AND PICK UP WHAT WE NEED. THE FOREST NEVER SAID NO TO US, BUT NOW WITH ALL THESE LAWS...OUR NEEDS ARE SIMPLE, YET WE ARE SO POOR.



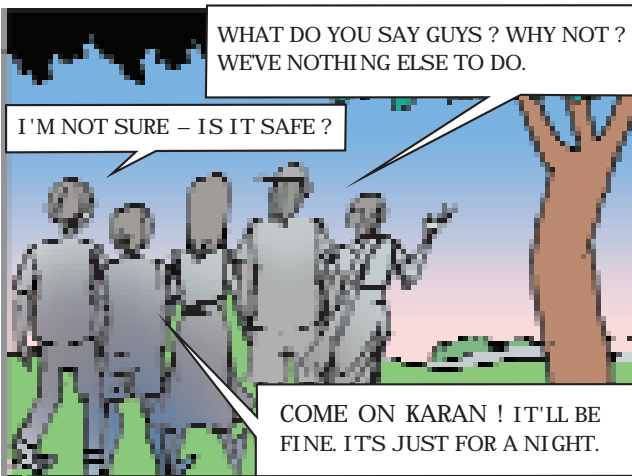
LAWS ? LIKE WHAT ?

OH, TOO MANY TO RECOUNT. I KNOW BETI, IT'S ALL SO CONFUSING. BUT NOW THAT YOU'RE STRANDED HERE, WHY DON'T YOU COME TO JAMUNIYA ? HAVE YOUR LUNCH HERE, REST AWHILE TILL I FINISH MY WORK AND WE'LL LEAVE EARLY EVENING. YOU CAN STAY IN MY HOUSE. YOU'LL GET TO KNOW THE REAL STORY OF THE FOREST AND MAYBE MEET PRAKRITI TOO.



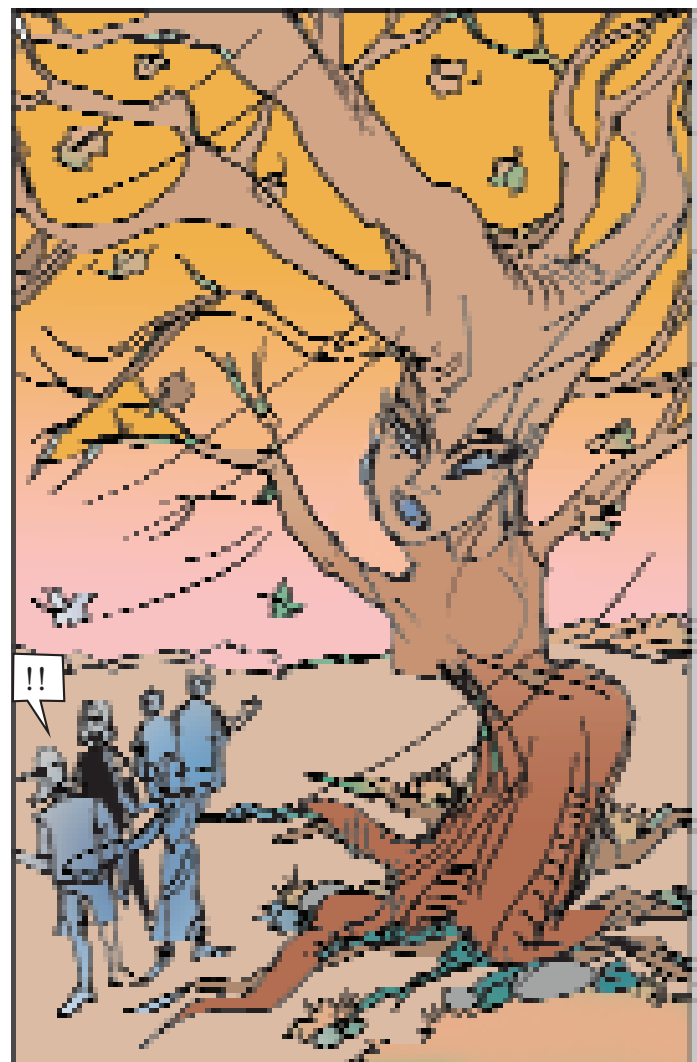
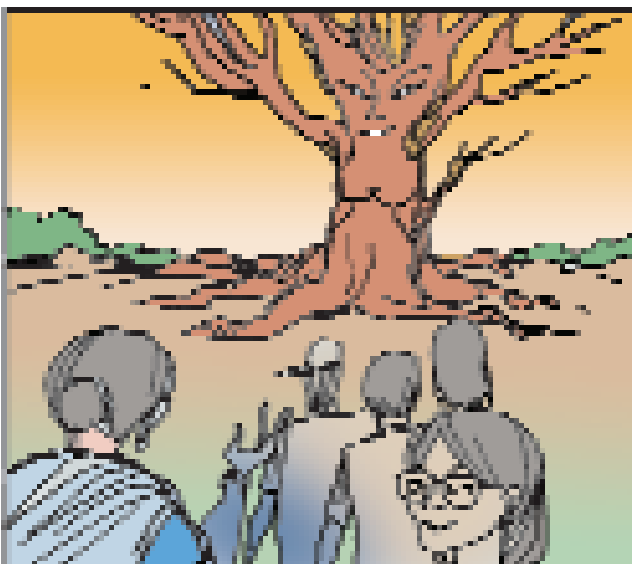
PRAKRITI ? WHO'S THAT ?

WHAT DO YOU SAY GUYS ? WHY NOT ? WE'VE NOTHING ELSE TO DO.



I'M NOT SURE - IS IT SAFE ?

COME ON KARAN ! IT'LL BE FINE. IT'S JUST FOR A NIGHT.





SHHH...LISTEN, CAN YOU HEAR HER? IF YOU LISTEN WELL, YOU CAN HEAR HER SPEAK.

WHO ? WHAT ?

HUH...ER...SPEAK ?

SHE IS PRAKRITI, THE SPIRIT OF THE FOREST. BUT COME, PERHAPS YOU'LL HEAR HER WHISPER ON YOUR WAY BACK.



COME CHILDREN, PUT YOUR THINGS DOWN. I'LL GET YOU SOME WATER AND THEN I'LL COOK SOME DAL AND ROTI FOR ALL OF US.

AT AMMA'S HUT...

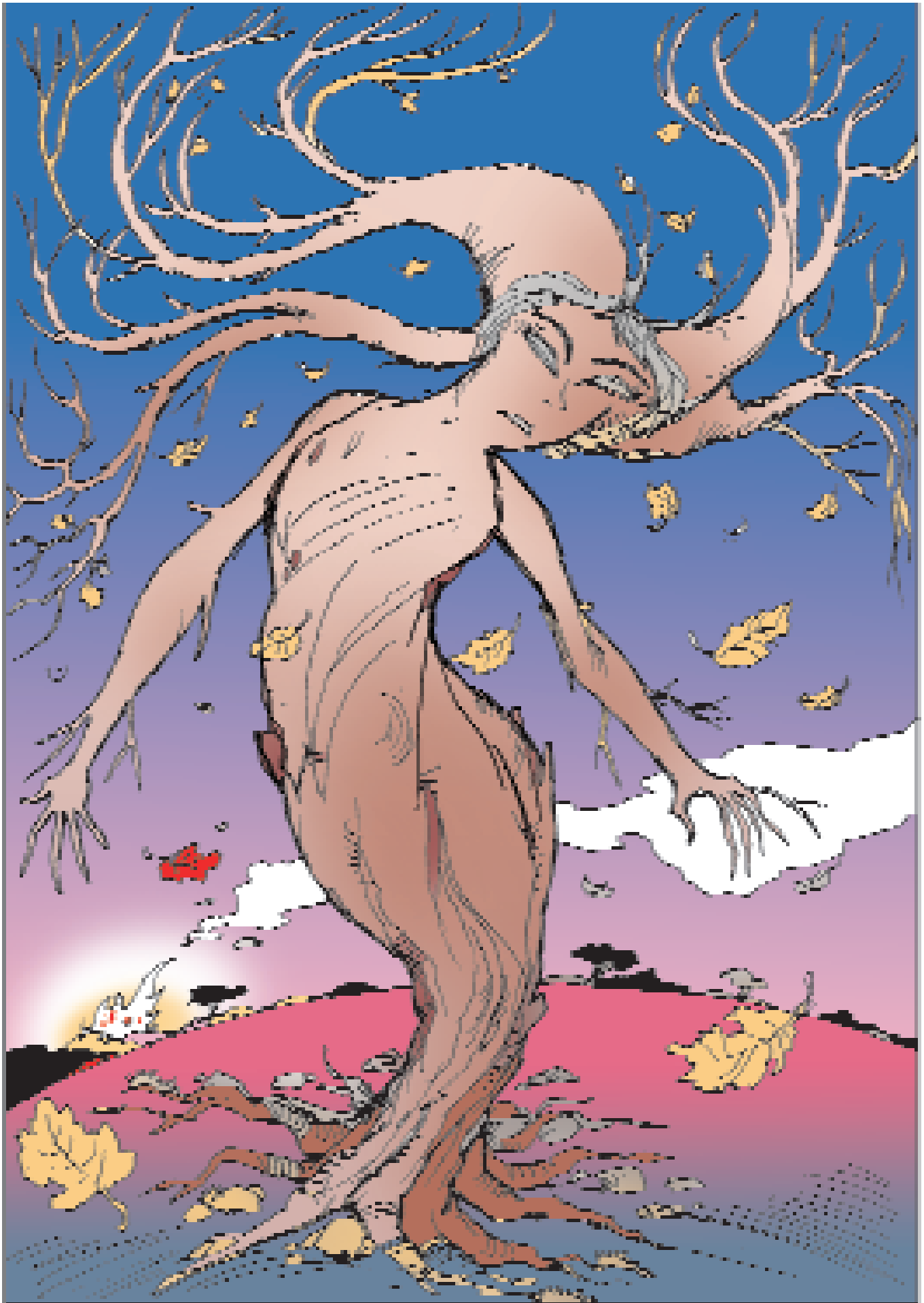
WHEW ! THIS IS QUITE AN ADVENTURE, ISN'T IT ? WONDER WHAT OUR PARENTS WOULD SAY !!

THIS IS SUCH FUN !

I'LL BE DREAMING ABOUT THE TIGERS THOUGH !

SHUT UP, KARAN ! THIS IS FAR BETTER THAN THE TIGERS !





# The Many-layered Cake

EARLY NEXT MORNING...

CHILDREN, WAKE UP !

HUH...WHERE ARE WE,  
WHAT TIME IS IT ?

ZZZ

ZZZ

I DON'T KNOW, BUT THE SUN IS ABOUT TO RISE. KAMLI AND BHOLA ARE HERE FROM NEXT DOOR. THEY'RE GOING TO FETCH WATER. WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO WITH THEM ?

YES, SURE

NAMASTE !

HERE, GET SOME WATER FOR ME AS WELL.

SURE, AMMA.

HOW FAR DO YOU GO TO FETCH WATER ?

IT'S ABOUT TWO HOURS TO OUR LITTLE FOREST STREAM.

TWO HOURS !! ??  
JUST FOR A POT OF WATER ! THAT'S ABSURD !

YES, ISN'T IT ?  
EARLIER, WE DIDN'T HAVE TO WALK SO FAR, BUT NOW THE LOCAL STREAMS ARE DRYING UP...

BECAUSE OF DEFORESTATION. ALSO, THE RAINS HAVE BEEN POOR FOR TWO YEARS AND THE WELLS HAVE BEEN DRYING UP.

WHY DON'T YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT ? FANCY HAVING TO WALK SO FAR TO FETCH WATER !

WHAT CAN WE DO ? THE JUNGLE IS NOT IN OUR HANDS ANY MORE.



THESE FIELDS LOOK VERY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE SAW ON OUR WAY. THERE WERE SOME LUSH GREEN FIELDS NOT TOO FAR FROM NEEMKHEDA.

OH SURE, THAT'S BECAUSE OF THE CANAL WHICH HELPS IRRIGATE THE LAND. IT MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE. THE FARMERS IN THAT AREA ARE QUITE WELL OFF. SOMETIMES, WE GO THERE TO GET WORK DURING THE SOWING AND HARVEST SEASONS BECAUSE THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO EARN MONEY HERE.



BUT HOW COME IT'S SO DRY HERE ? ARE THERE NO CANALS ?

WHO CARES ABOUT US POOR TRIBALS ? WE'RE TOO FAR AWAY, AND NOBODY REALLY COMES HERE, EXCEPT WHEN THEY WANT OUR VOTES. A CHECK DAM WAS BUILT TO STOP THE RAINWATER SOME YEARS AGO BUT IT HAS FALLEN INTO DISUSE BECAUSE IT WAS IN THE WRONG PLACE ANYWAY. ISN'T IT TRUE, BHOLA ?



YES... BUT, SOME TRIBAL VILLAGES HAVE DONE WELL IN JUNAPANI, FOR INSTANCE, THEY ARE ABLE TO LIFT WATER FROM THE RIVER, SO THEIR LAND IS PRODUCTIVE.

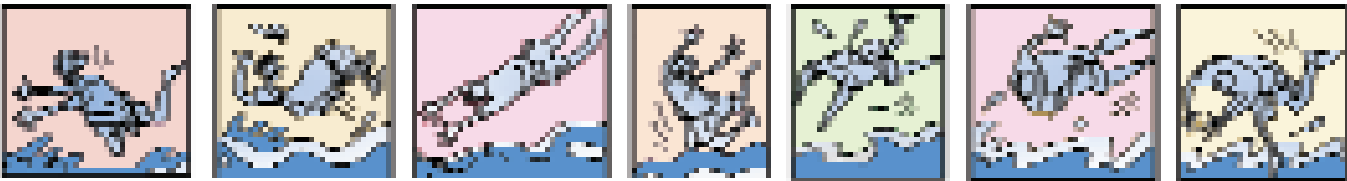
INCIDENTALLY, I OVERHEARD AMMA TELLING ANOTHER LADY THAT THERE WAS A FOREST FIRE LAST NIGHT. DID YOU SEE IT ?



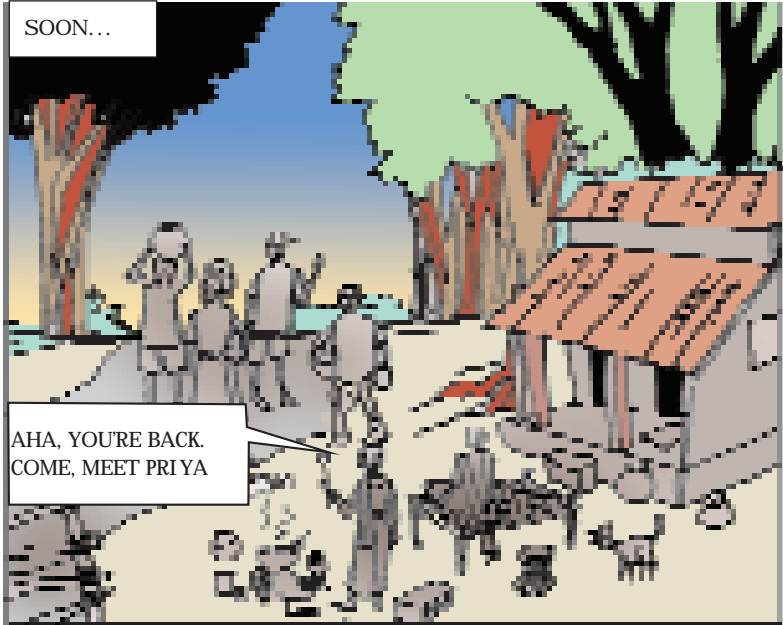
WE DON'T BOTHER ANY MORE WITH THESE FIRES OR FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM AS WE USED TO. THE GOVERNMENT AND THEIR PAID WATCHERS ARE THERE TO PROTECT THE FOREST.

AT THE STREAM...

HEY, GUYS LOOK AT THAT ! ITS A KINGFISHER !! BEAUTIFUL !







SOON...

AHA, YOU'RE BACK. COME, MEET PRIYA

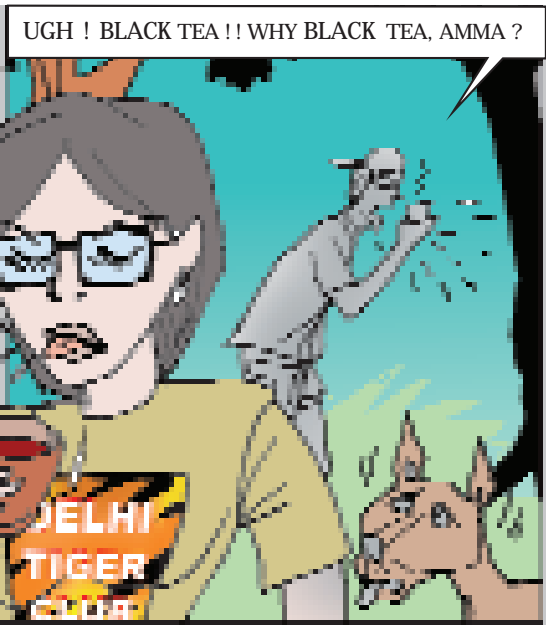


HELLO ! I 'M PRIYA FROM GRAM VIKAS SANSTHA, AN NGO BASED IN BHOPAL. AMMA HAS ALREADY TOLD ME ABOUT YOU.

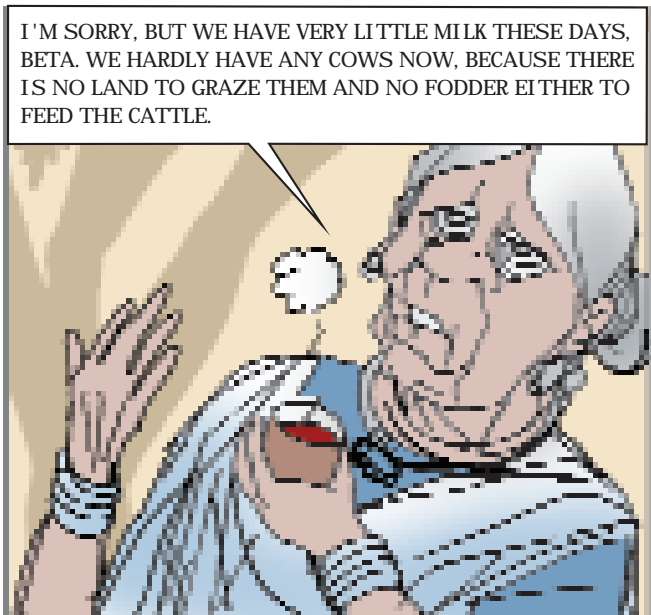
NAMASTE, PRIYA DIDI.



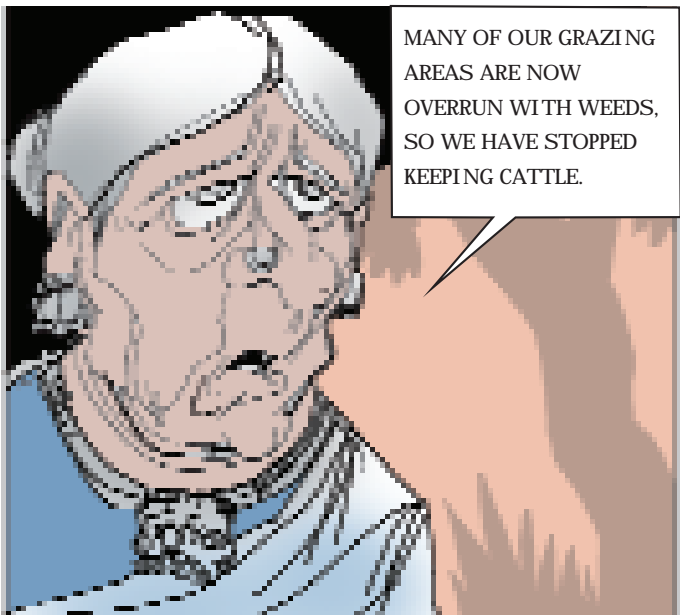
COME CHILDREN, I 'VE MADE SOME TEA FOR YOU.



UGH ! BLACK TEA !! WHY BLACK TEA, AMMA ?



I 'M SORRY, BUT WE HAVE VERY LITTLE MILK THESE DAYS, BETA. WE HARDLY HAVE ANY COWS NOW, BECAUSE THERE IS NO LAND TO GRAZE THEM AND NO FODDER EITHER TO FEED THE CATTLE.



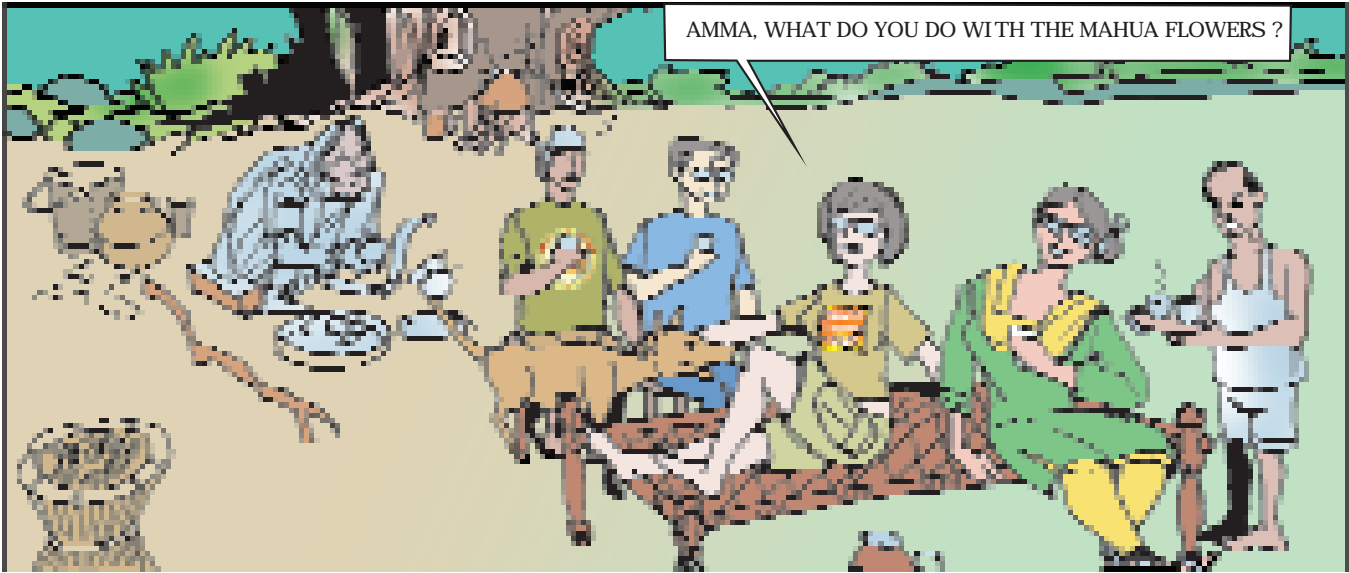
MANY OF OUR GRAZING AREAS ARE NOW OVERRUN WITH WEEDS, SO WE HAVE STOPPED KEEPING CATTLE.



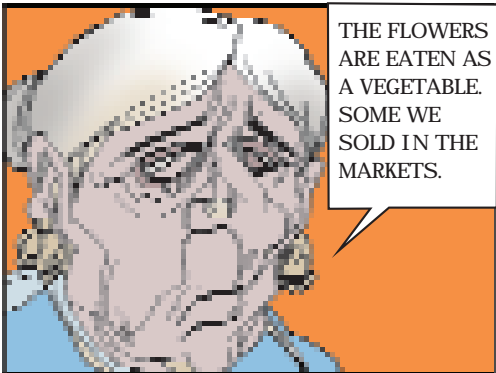
LIFE HAS CHANGED AROUND HERE SINCE WHEN I WAS A CHILD.



I REMEMBER HOW MY MOTHER USED TO PUT SOME ROTIS INTO A CLOTH BUNDLE AND WE USED TO GO OUT EARLY MORNING TO COLLECT MAHUA FLOWERS. NOBODY ASKED US ANYTHING AND WE CAME BACK HOME LADEN WITH FLOWERS, TIRED BUT HAPPY.



AMMA, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE MAHUA FLOWERS ?



THE FLOWERS ARE EATEN AS A VEGETABLE. SOME WE SOLD IN THE MARKETS.



AND, OF COURSE, IT ALSO MAKES A POTENT DRINK. HA HA !!

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM NOW ? DON'T YOU STILL SELL IT ?

YES, WHEN THERE'S A GOOD HARVEST. BUT WE DON'T GET A GOOD PRICE FROM THE TRADERS UNLESS WE TAKE THE PRODUCE DIRECTLY TO THE MARKET, WHICH TAKES A LOT OF TIME.

AND, WHEN THE MAHUA IS NOT IN SEASON, THEY ALSO BUY IT BACK FROM THEM, USUALLY AT A HIGHER PRICE. SO THE TRADERS MAKE A GOOD PROFIT.

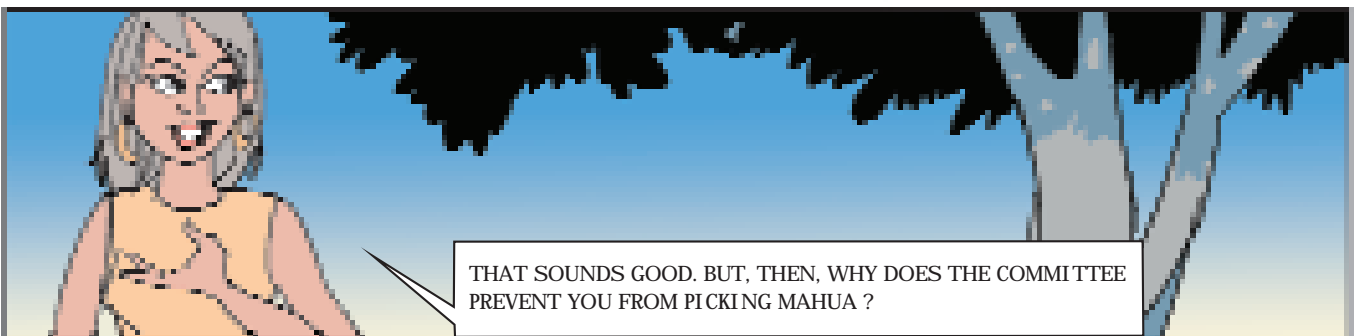
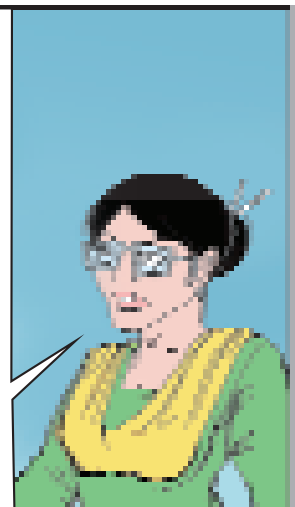


THESE DAYS, THERE IS NOT AS MUCH MAHUA IN THE FOREST AS THERE USED TO BE. WE ALSO CAN'T GO ANYWHERE WE LIKE BECAUSE THE COMMITTEES STOP US.

COMMITTEES ??



THE GOVERNMENT HAS COME UP WITH A SCHEME CALLED JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT (JFM). UNDER THIS SCHEME THEY HAVE CONSTITUTED VILLAGE FOREST COMMITTEES (VFCS) WHICH ARE MEANT TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE FOREST DEPARTMENT. YOU SEE, THESE DAYS, EVERYONE WANTS TO INCLUDE LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS. SINCE THEY ARE SO CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH THE FOREST, THEY ACT AS WATCHDOGS TO CHECK ILLEGAL FELLING OF TREES, POACHING AND PREVENTION OF FOREST FIRES. THEY ARE ALSO ABLE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS FROM THE FORESTS WHICH THEY HELP TO PROTECT.



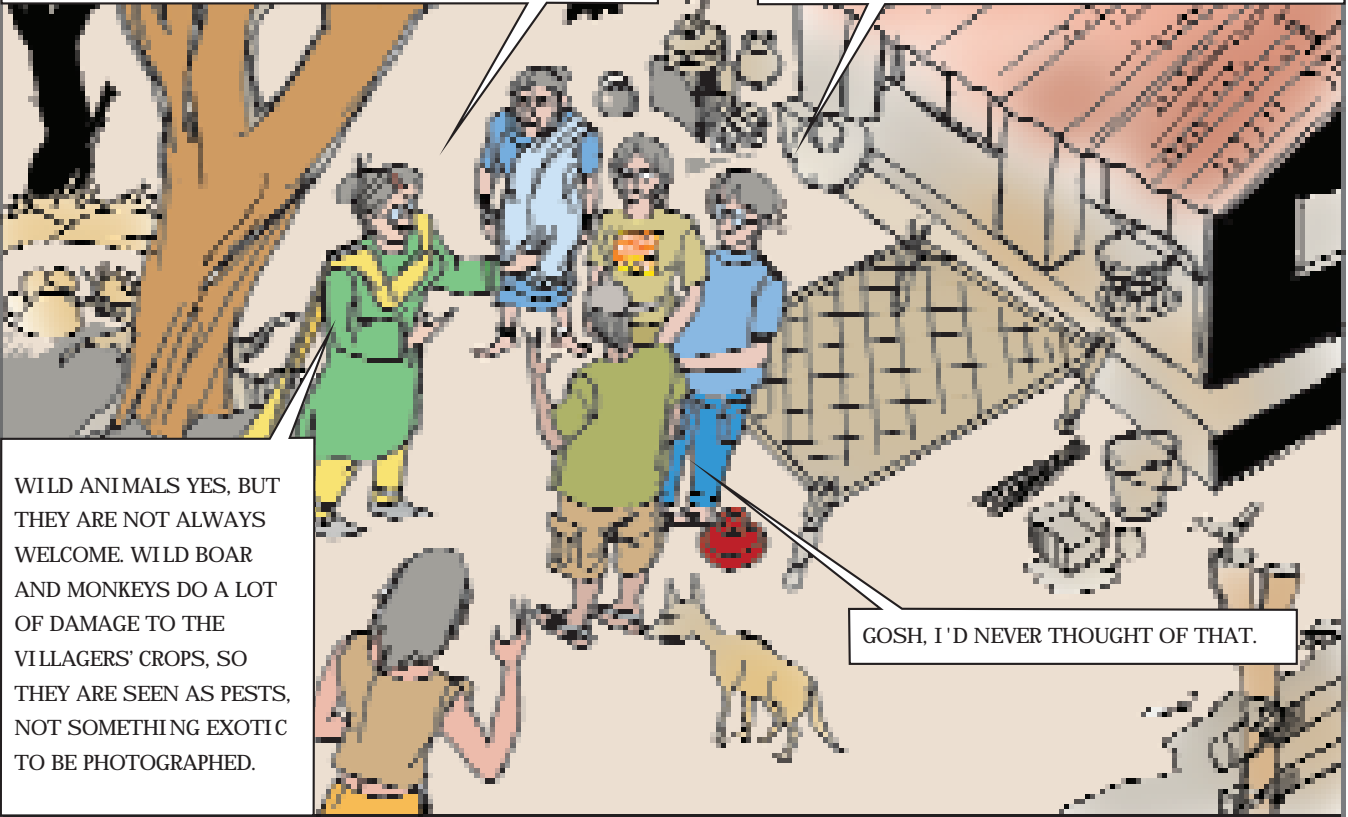
THAT SOUNDS GOOD. BUT, THEN, WHY DOES THE COMMITTEE PREVENT YOU FROM PICKING MAHUA ?



OUR VILLAGE HAS BEEN GIVEN JUST ONE AREA WHERE WE CAN COLLECT FLOWERS FROM. IF WE GO BEYOND THAT, WE ARE IN THE AREA THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO OUR NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE, TALANG, AND THE COMMITTEE THERE STOPS US.

SO, YOU SEE, EVEN THOUGH JFM HELPS THE VILLAGERS, IT HAS ALSO CREATED SOME NEW PROBLEMS FOR THEM.

WHAT ABOUT WILDLIFE ? ARE THERE ANY ANIMALS HERE ? WE SAW A KINGFISHER NEAR THE RIVER.



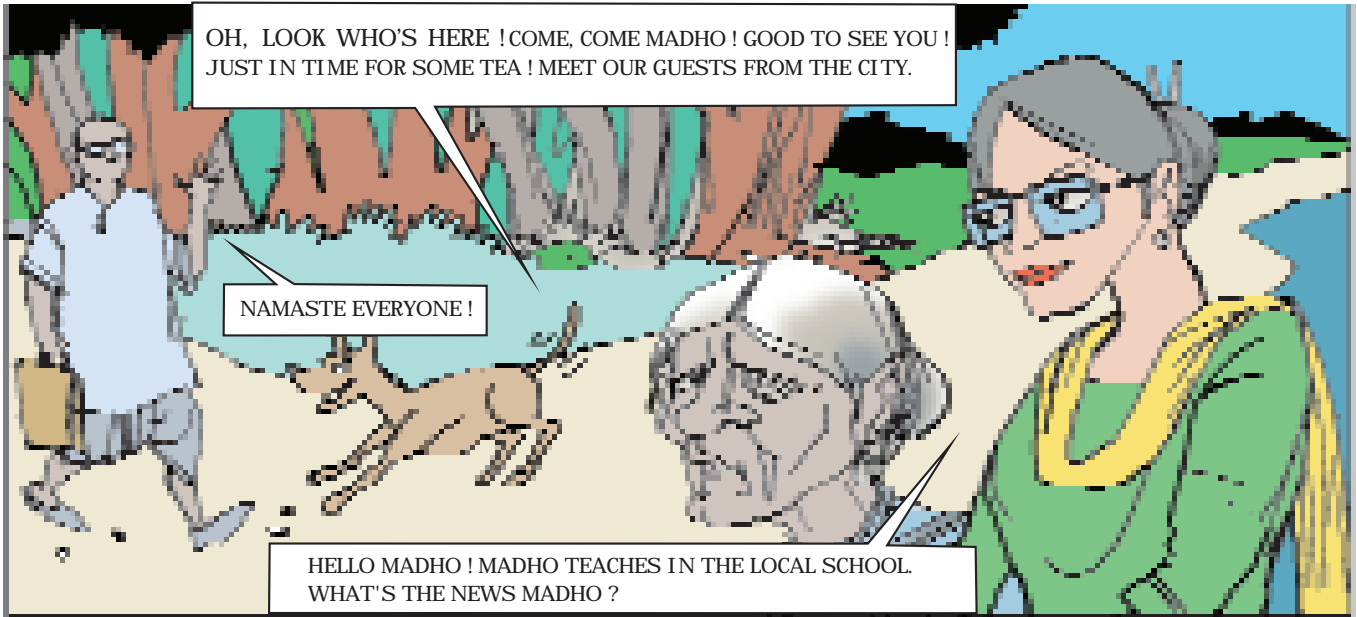
WILD ANIMALS YES, BUT THEY ARE NOT ALWAYS WELCOME. WILD BOAR AND MONKEYS DO A LOT OF DAMAGE TO THE VILLAGERS' CROPS, SO THEY ARE SEEN AS PESTS, NOT SOMETHING EXOTIC TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED.

GOSH, I'D NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT.

YES, AS I WAS SAYING EARLIER, WE ARE ALL AGREED THAT WE NEED TO SAVE OUR FORESTS AND WILDLIFE. BUT SIDE BY SIDE, THERE IS ALSO THE ISSUE OF TAKING CARE OF THE LIVELIHOODS OF FOREST-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES, LIKE THESE GOND TRIBALS WHO LIVE IN THIS VILLAGE. SO HOW TO BALANCE THE TWO ?

HMMMM..THAT'S A TRICKY ONE !

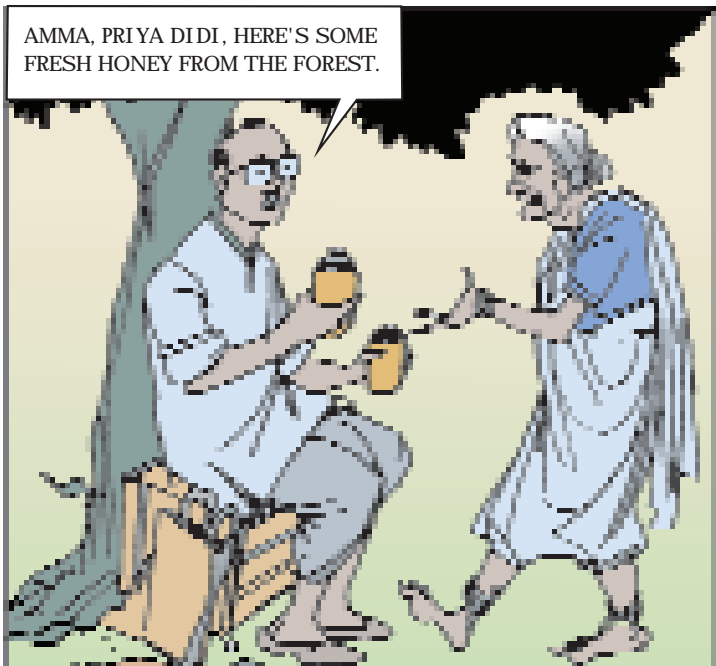
THERE ARE SO MANY DEMANDS UPON OUR FORESTS THESE DAYS - YOU KIDS USE PAPER AT SCHOOL, AND I'M SURE YOUR HOUSES HAVE A LOT OF WOOD. THAT REDUCES THE AMOUNT OF FOREST THAT IS AVAILABLE FOR PEOPLE IN THESE PARTS FOR THEIR OWN NEEDS. WE ALSO NEED TO PROTECT AREAS FOR ECOLOGICAL REASONS, INCLUDING WILDLIFE PRESERVATION. AND, IT'S NOT EASY BECAUSE WE'VE LOST A LOT OF FOREST AREA IN THE PAST BECAUSE OF MINING, AGRICULTURE AND OTHER ACTIVITIES. THE MAIN CHALLENGE TODAY IS TO GET EVERYONE TO FEEL THAT THE FOREST IS THEIR OWN, AND TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS PROTECTION.



OH, LOOK WHO'S HERE !COME, COME MADHO ! GOOD TO SEE YOU ! JUST IN TIME FOR SOME TEA ! MEET OUR GUESTS FROM THE CITY.

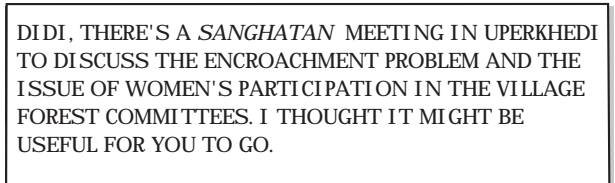
NAMASTE EVERYONE !

HELLO MADHO ! MADHO TEACHES IN THE LOCAL SCHOOL. WHAT'S THE NEWS MADHO ?



AMMA, PRIYA DIDI, HERE'S SOME FRESH HONEY FROM THE FOREST.

WHY, THAT'S NICE. THANK YOU ! THE FOREST ALWAYS GIVES US SUCH TASTY HONEY ! I WAS JUST TELLING OUR GUESTS HERE ABOUT ALL THE PROBLEMS REGARDING FORESTS.



DIDI, THERE'S A SANGHATAN MEETING IN UPERKHEDI TO DISCUSS THE ENCROACHMENT PROBLEM AND THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE VILLAGE FOREST COMMITTEES. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR YOU TO GO.



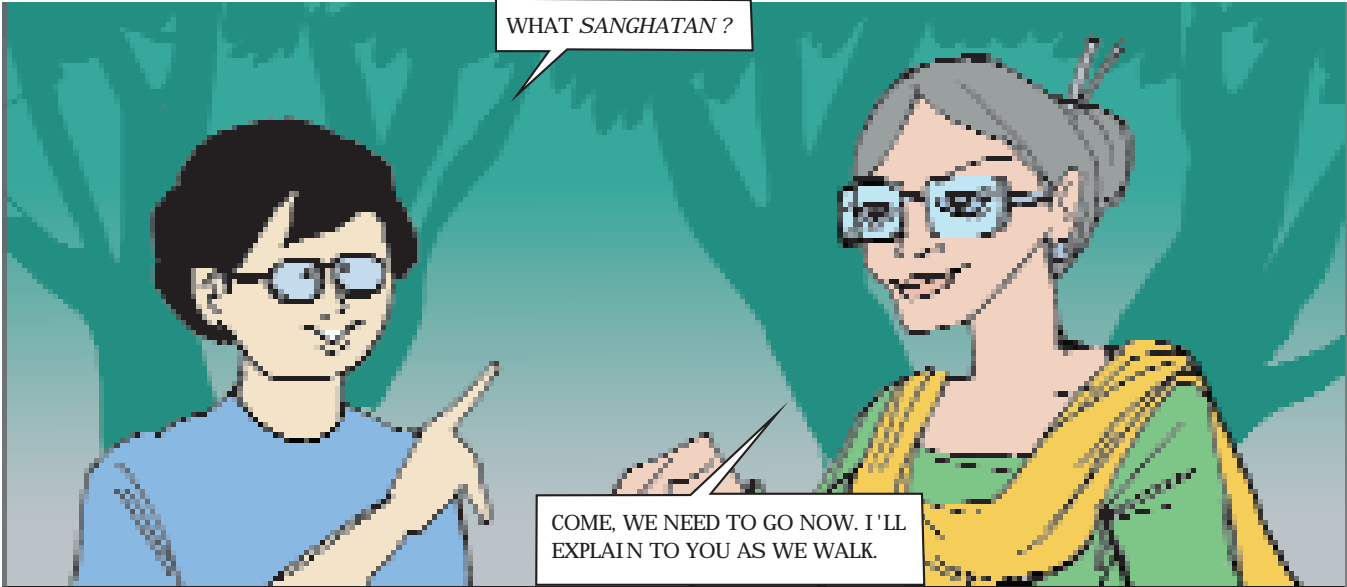
YES.

WOULD RENUKA BE THERE ?



NOT TOO CONFUSING, I HOPE ! HA HA !



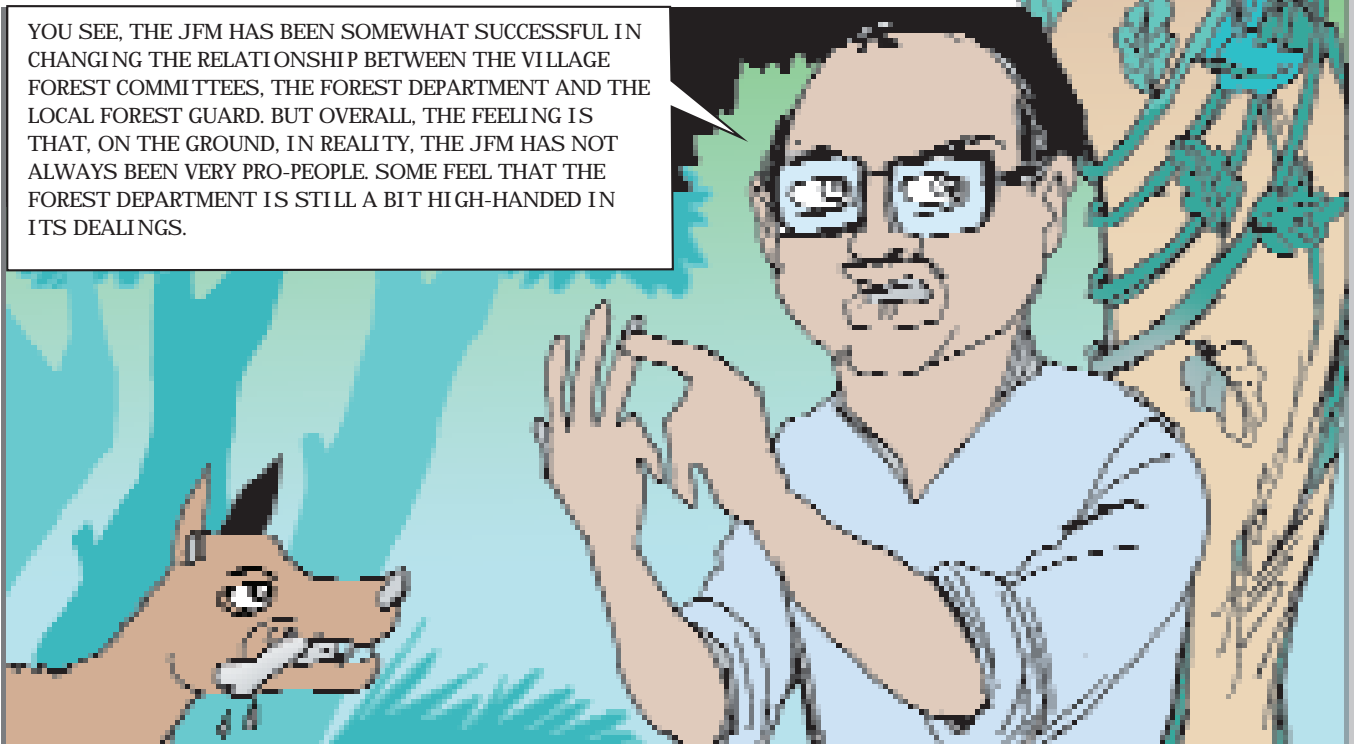


RENUKA IS THE LEADER OF A MASS TRIBAL ORGANISATION, ONE OF THE MANY PEOPLES' MOVEMENTS OR *SANGHATANS* FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS OF TRIBALS. BY MOBILISING THE VILLAGERS TO BE POLITICALLY INVOLVED, THEY HOPE TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO CHANGE THEIR POLICIES. YOU CAN CALL THEM ACTIVISTS.

BUT I THOUGHT THAT THE JFM IS MEANT FOR THE PEOPLE.

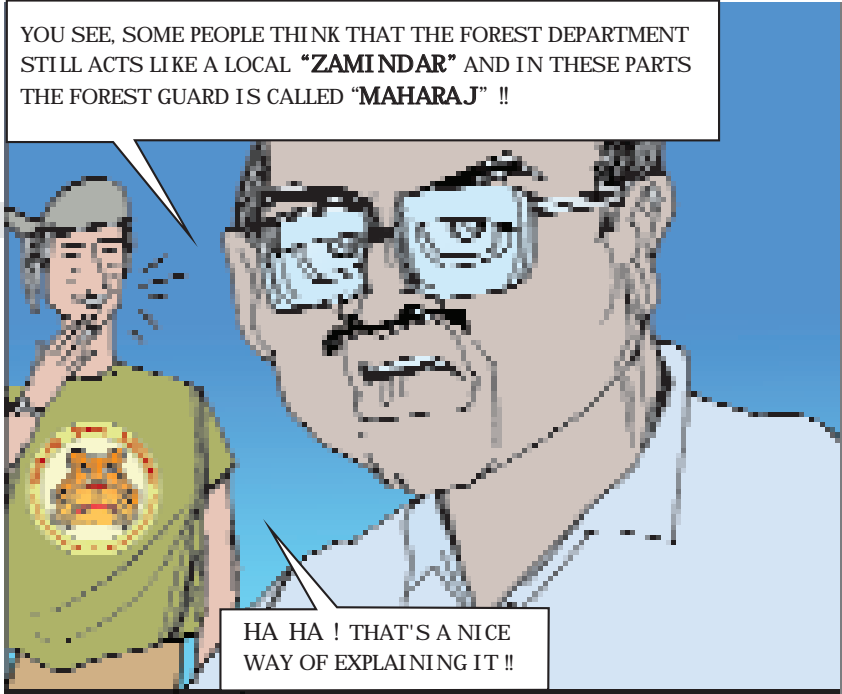


YOU SEE, THE JFM HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL IN CHANGING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VILLAGE FOREST COMMITTEES, THE FOREST DEPARTMENT AND THE LOCAL FOREST GUARD. BUT OVERALL, THE FEELING IS THAT, ON THE GROUND, IN REALITY, THE JFM HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN VERY PRO-PEOPLE. SOME FEEL THAT THE FOREST DEPARTMENT IS STILL A BIT HIGH-HANDED IN ITS DEALINGS.





LIKE WHAT ? CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE ?



YOU SEE, SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT THE FOREST DEPARTMENT STILL ACTS LIKE A LOCAL "ZAMINDAR" AND IN THESE PARTS THE FOREST GUARD IS CALLED "MAHARAJ" !!

HA HA ! THAT'S A NICE WAY OF EXPLAINING IT !!

WELL, WHEN IT SUITS HIM HE SAYS THAT HE HAS NO POWER TO DO ANYTHING, BUT WHEN HE WANTS TO, HE CAN MAKE ANYTHING HAPPEN ! FOR INSTANCE, WHEN THE VILLAGERS NEED FUELWOOD THEY ARE RESTRICTED. BUT WHEN SO MUCH ILLEGAL FELLING TAKES PLACE, MAHARAJ SAYS THAT HE IS POWERLESS !



THAT'S SO UNJUST !

THE VILLAGERS FEEL EXPLOITED AND THAT'S WHY WE HAVE ALL THESE CONFLICTS. OF COURSE, ALL THE DEPARTMENTS HAVE THEIR OWN POINT OF VIEW AND NO ONE CAN SEE EYE TO EYE.





SOON...

THERE'S RENUKA, AS DYNAMIC AS EVER !

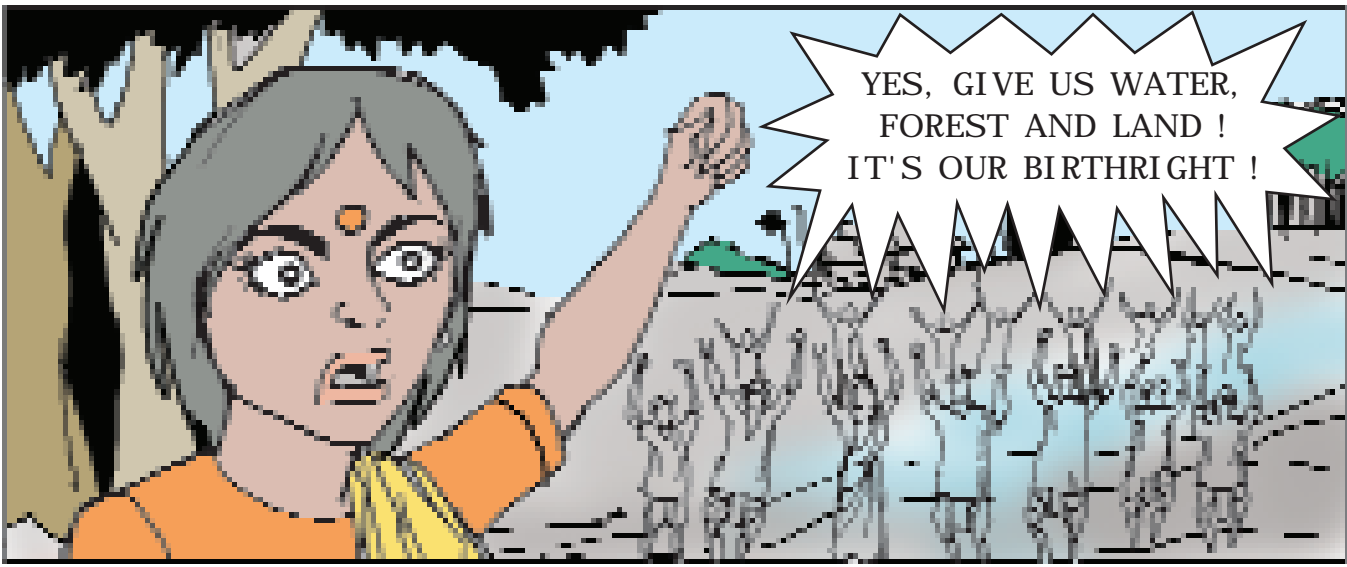
WOW ! SO MANY PEOPLE ! IS THIS A RALLY ?

YOU COULD SAY THAT.

**JAL, JUNGLE, ZAMIN !  
THAT'S OUR RIGHT !**

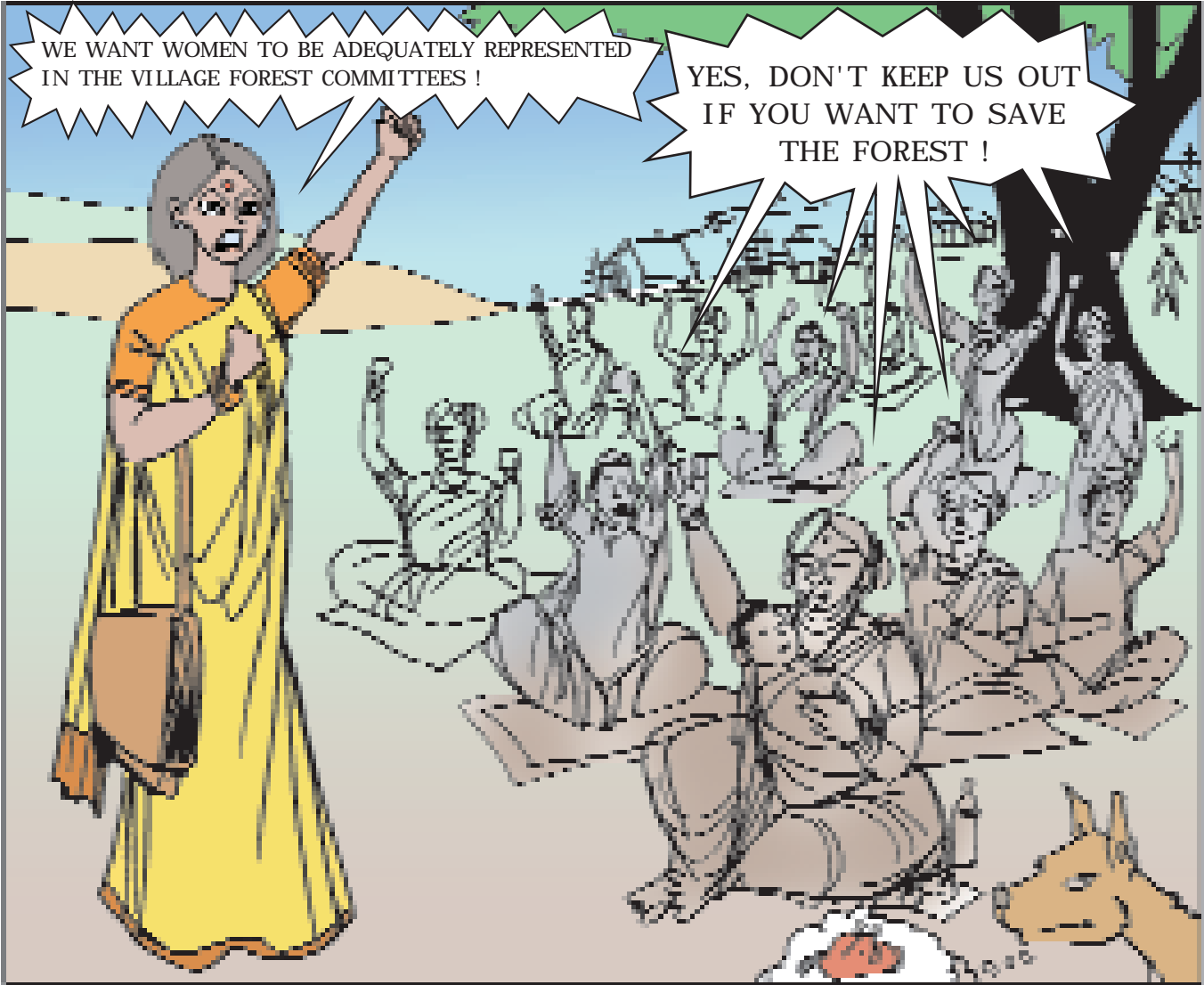
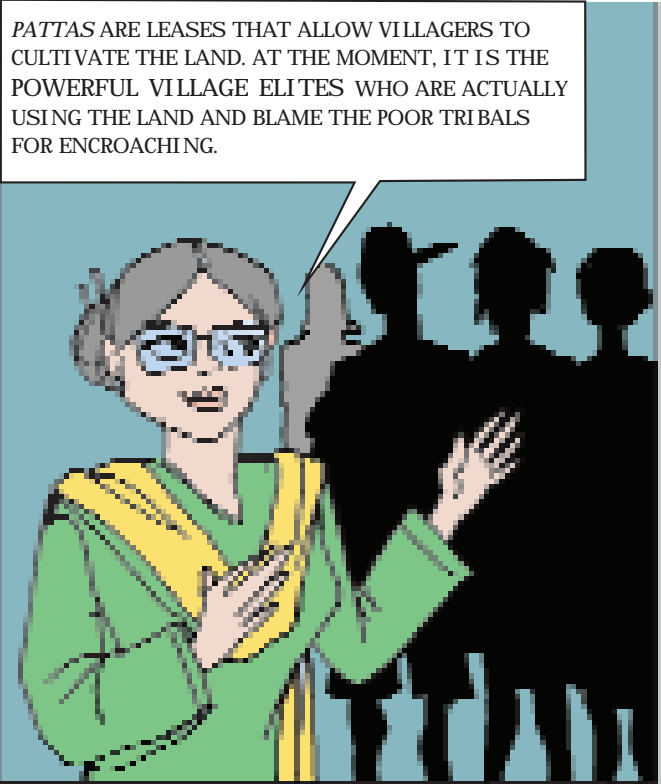


THE FOREST LAND BELONGS TO THE TRIBALS, SO THERE IS NO QUESTION OF ENCROACHMENT ! REGULARISE ALL THESE SO-CALLED ENCROACHED LANDS WITH **PATTAS**. GIVE FIVE ACRES OF LAND TO EVERYONE ABOVE THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN !



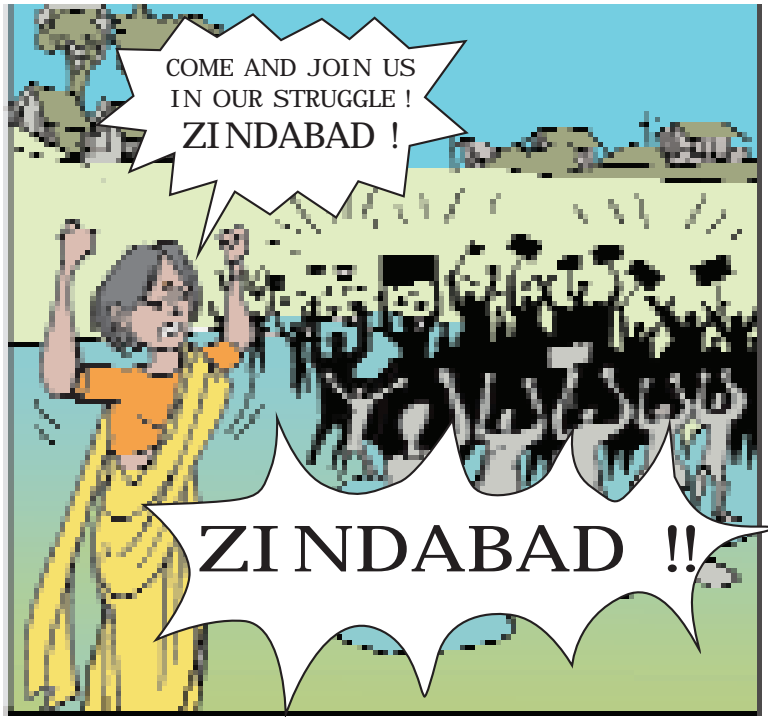
YES, GIVE US WATER, FOREST AND LAND ! IT'S OUR BIRTHRIGHT !





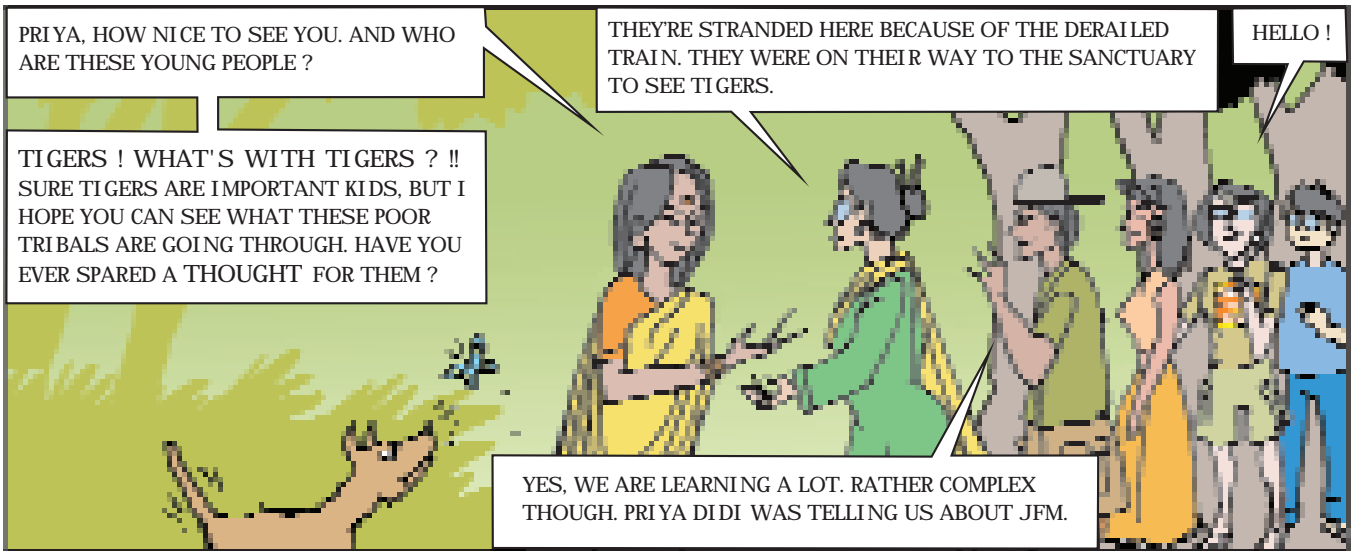


NEXT WEEK, THERE'S GOING TO BE A BIG MEETING AT THE FOREST DIVISION OFFICE IN NEEMKHEDA. WE'LL PLACE OUR DEMANDS BEFORE THE OFFICIALS !



COME AND JOIN US IN OUR STRUGGLE ! ZINDABAD !

ZINDABAD !!



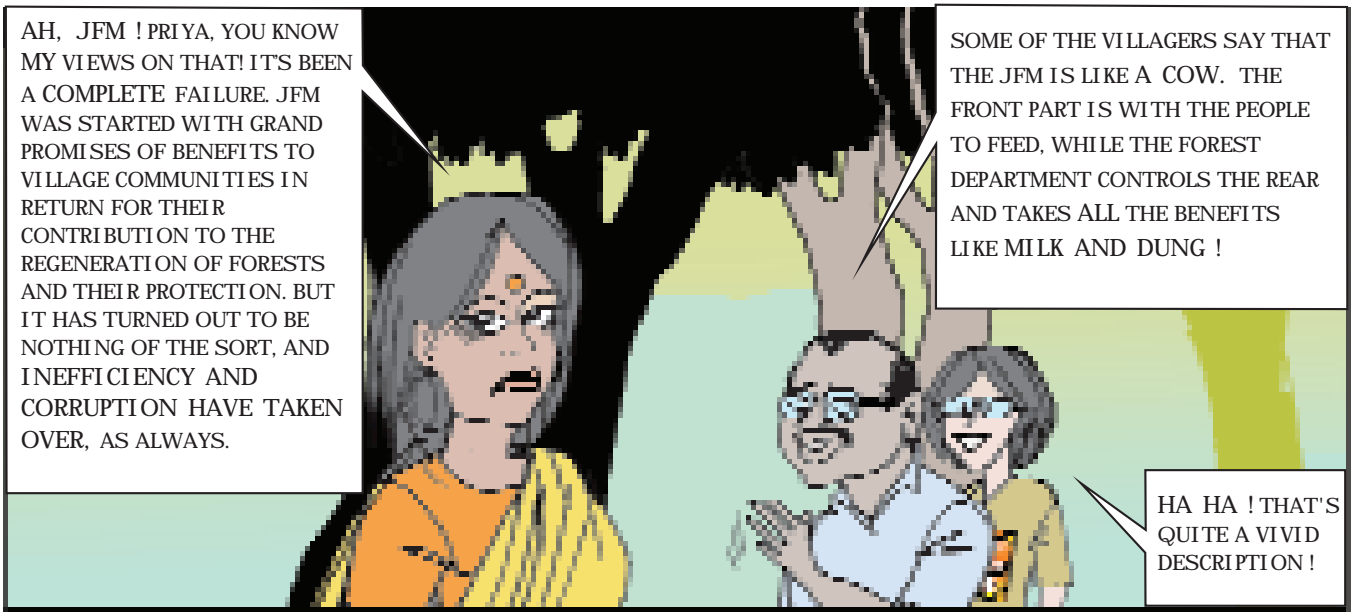
PRIYA, HOW NICE TO SEE YOU. AND WHO ARE THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ?

THEY'RE STRANDED HERE BECAUSE OF THE DERAILED TRAIN. THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY TO THE SANCTUARY TO SEE TIGERS.

HELLO !

TIGERS ! WHAT'S WITH TIGERS ? !! SURE TIGERS ARE IMPORTANT KIDS, BUT I HOPE YOU CAN SEE WHAT THESE POOR TRIBALS ARE GOING THROUGH. HAVE YOU EVER SPARED A THOUGHT FOR THEM ?

YES, WE ARE LEARNING A LOT. RATHER COMPLEX THOUGH. PRIYA DIDI WAS TELLING US ABOUT JFM.



AH, JFM ! PRIYA, YOU KNOW MY VIEWS ON THAT! IT'S BEEN A COMPLETE FAILURE. JFM WAS STARTED WITH GRAND PROMISES OF BENEFITS TO VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN RETURN FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGENERATION OF FORESTS AND THEIR PROTECTION. BUT IT HAS TURNED OUT TO BE NOTHING OF THE SORT, AND INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION HAVE TAKEN OVER, AS ALWAYS.

SOME OF THE VILLAGERS SAY THAT THE JFM IS LIKE A COW. THE FRONT PART IS WITH THE PEOPLE TO FEED, WHILE THE FOREST DEPARTMENT CONTROLS THE REAR AND TAKES ALL THE BENEFITS LIKE MILK AND DUNG !

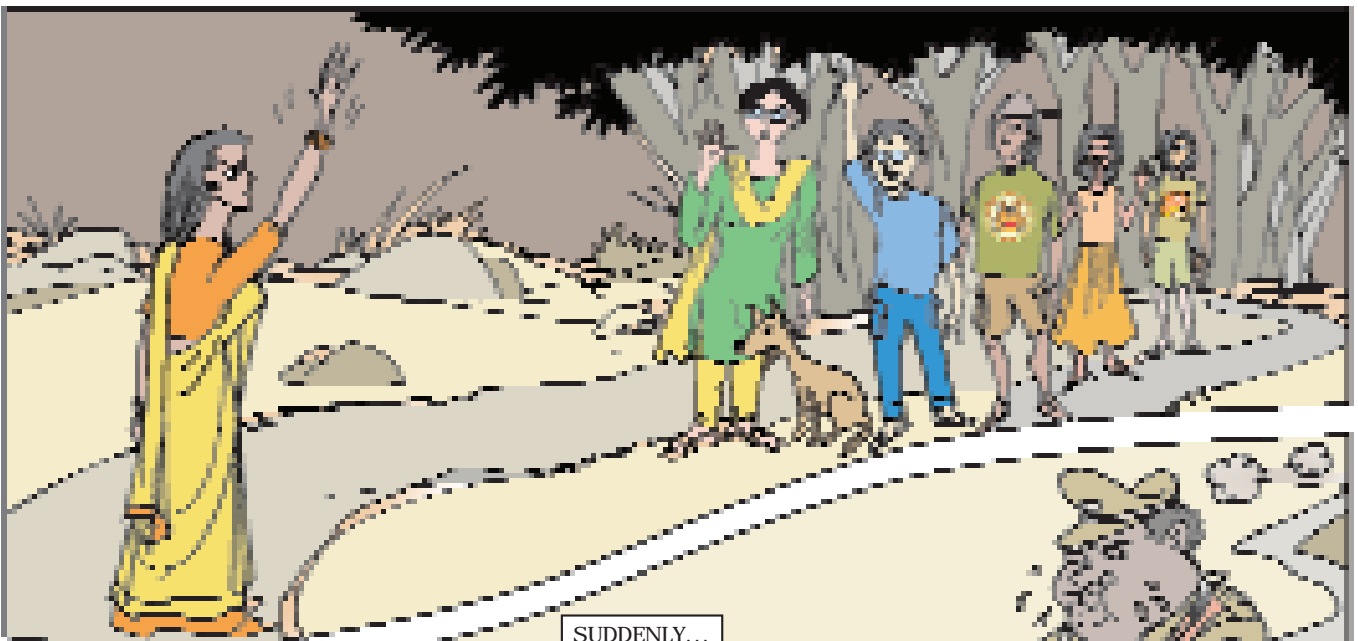
HA HA ! THAT'S QUITE A VIVID DESCRIPTION !

RENUKA, WE MUST THINK OF GOING NOW. WE HAVE A LONG WALK. BESIDES, OUR FRIENDS HERE HAVE A LOT TO DIGEST !

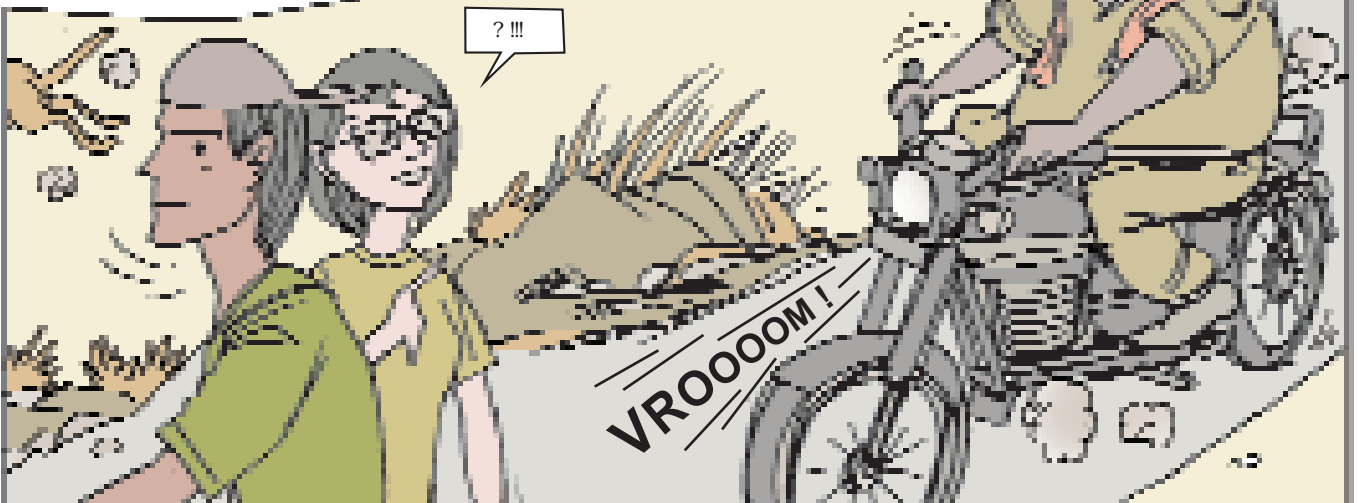
YES, ITS A DIFFERENT WORLD HERE. WE'VE LEARNED SO MUCH IN ONE DAY.

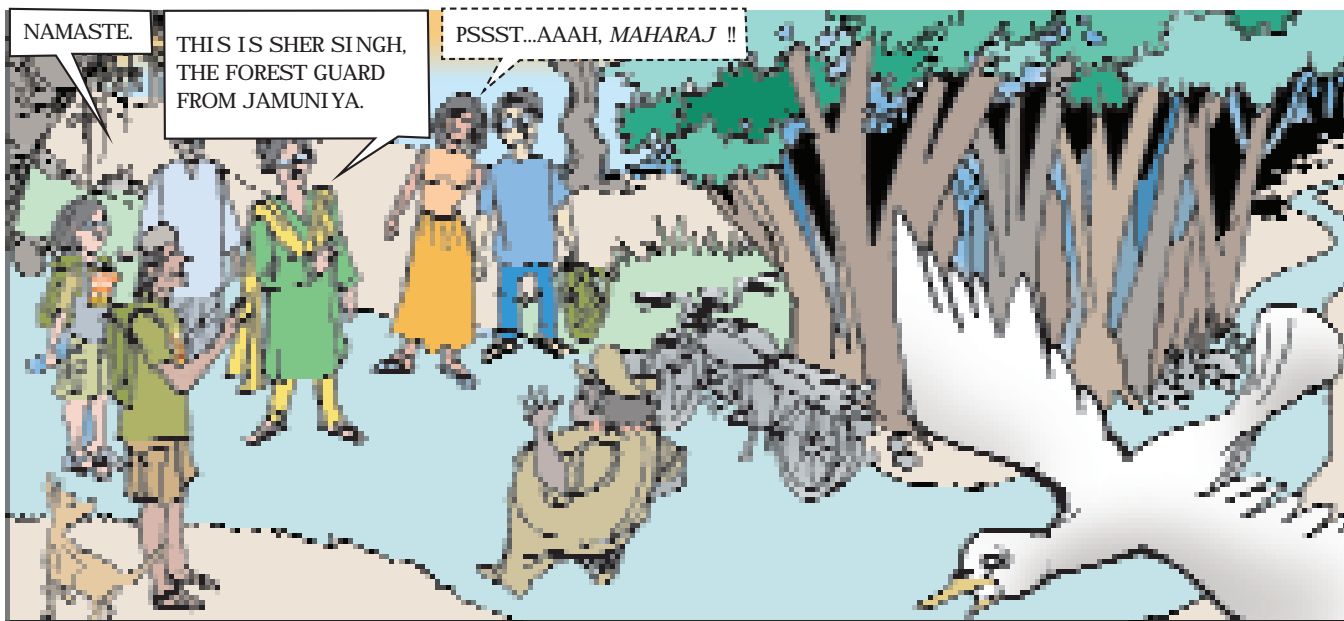
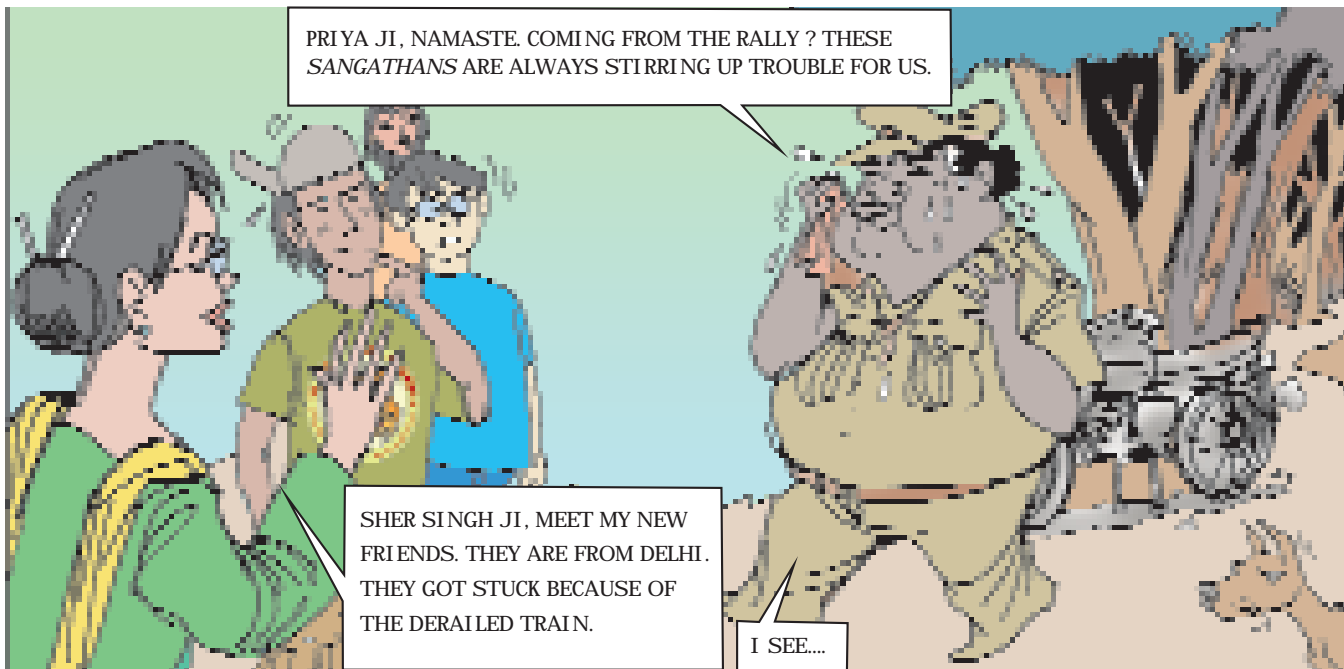
I'M GLAD THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO SHOW THEM AROUND. THEY ARE SO REMOVED FROM THESE ISSUES IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES.

BYE FOR NOW ! I'M SURE WE'LL BE BACK !



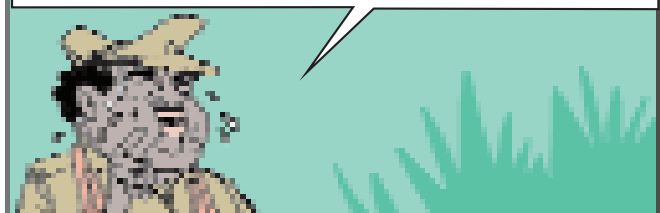
SUDDENLY...





I HEARD THAT ! I'M NOT MAHARAJ, IT'S FAR FROM THE TRUTH. ON THE CONTRARY, WE'RE NOBODY, UNLIKE IN THE OLD DAYS. IN FACT, THE PEOPLE ARE NOW THE KINGS HERE, WITH ALL THESE BENEFITS. THEY GET FIREWOOD AND TIMBER AT SUBSIDISED RATES FROM THE FOREST DEPOTS. THOSE WHO HELP THE DEPARTMENT PROTECT BAMBOO FORESTS ARE GIVEN EIGHT HUNDRED TO TWELVE HUNDRED RUPEES WHILE OTHERS GET JOBS FROM OTHER FOREST WORK. WELLS HAVE BEEN DUG IN MANY VILLAGES, AND WE HAVE TRIED TO BUILD CHECK DAMS TO PROVIDE IRRIGATION AND IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY. THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF CHANGE.

BUT SHER SINGH JI, NOT ENOUGH, I'M SURE YOU'LL AGREE ! ALMOST SIXTY YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE, THESE VILLAGES STILL LACK BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE - ROADS, SCHOOLS, ELECTRICITY, WATER. TODAY, ALL OF US RECOGNIZE THESE ISSUES AND REALIZE THAT SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE. WHAT THEY NEED IS DIGNIFIED LIVES, NOT CHARITY, IF THEY ARE TO HAVE LONG TERM SECURITY. BUT COME, WE MUST GET GOING OR NIGHT WILL BE ON US SOON.



# Goodbye

I'M SO HAPPY THAT YOU CAME TO SPEND A COUPLE OF NIGHTS HERE. THE DERAILMENT MUST'VE GOT SORTED OUT BY NOW. YOU'LL BE GETTING YOUR TRAIN SOON.

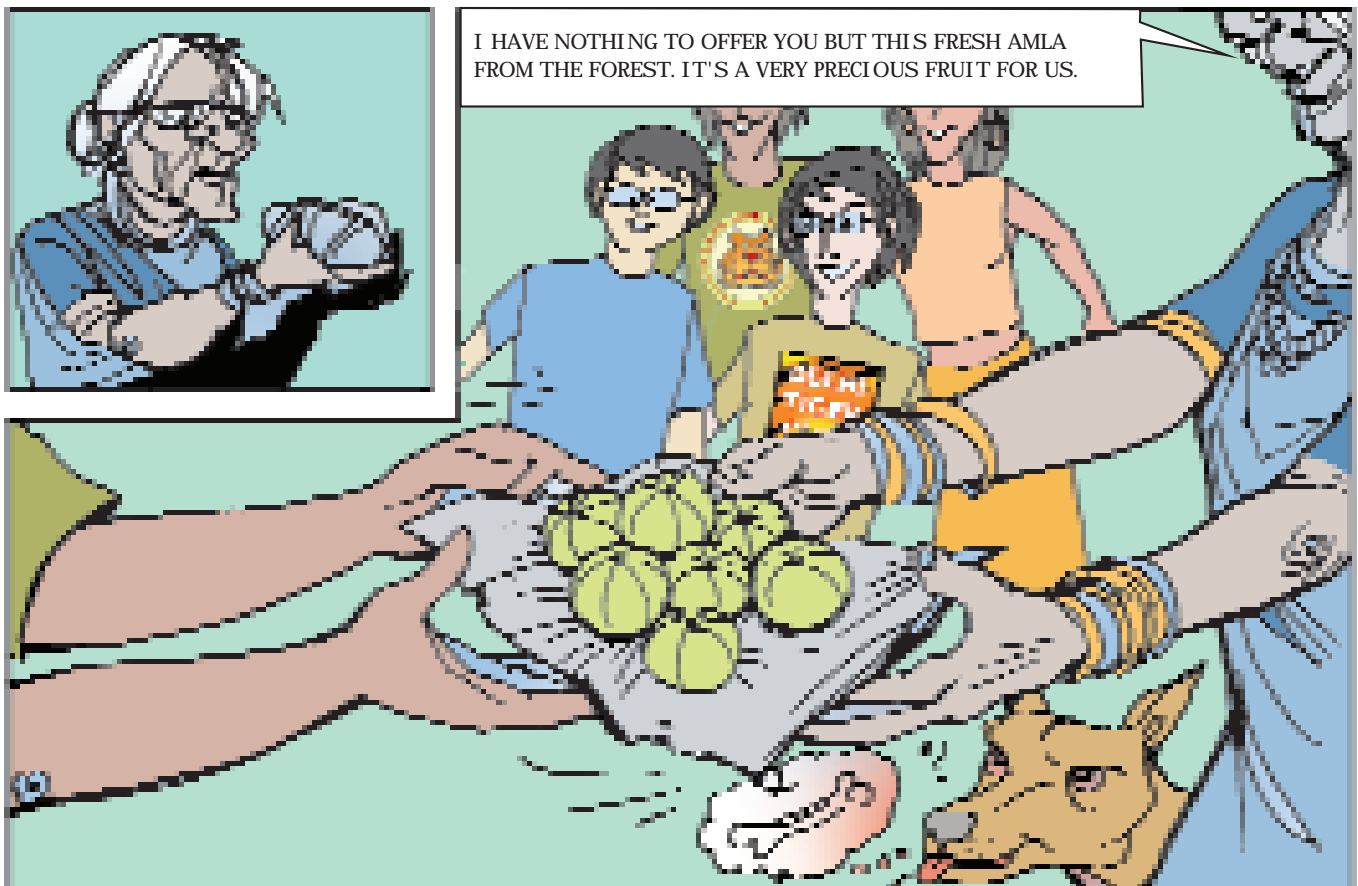
AMMA, YOU'VE LOOKED AFTER US SO WELL. NOW THAT WE KNOW WHERE TO FIND YOU, WE'LL COME AGAIN.

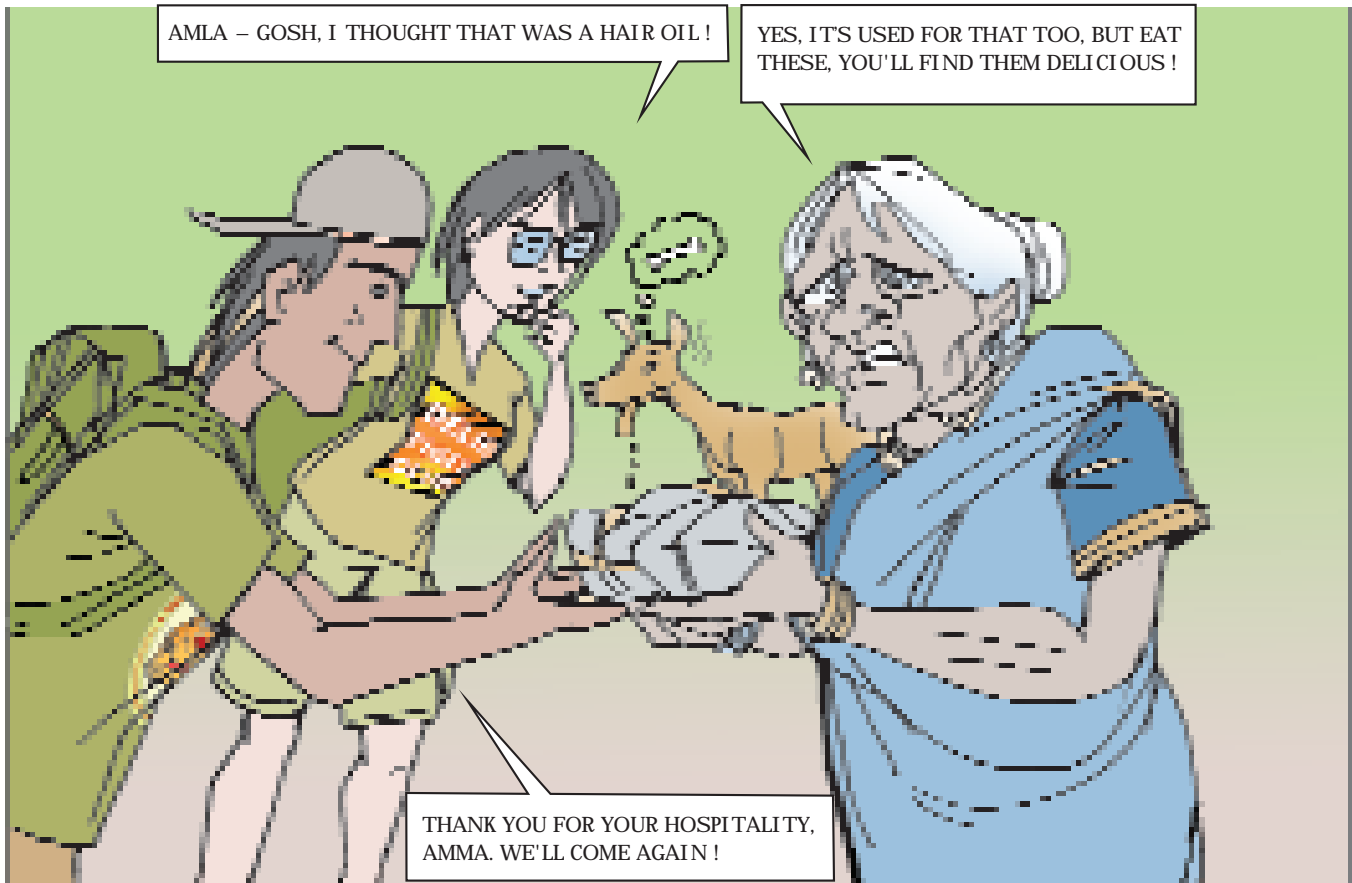
YOU MUST COME AGAIN. I'LL SHOW YOU MY SCHOOL.

WE FEEL THAT WE'VE MADE GOOD FRIENDS HERE.



I HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER YOU BUT THIS FRESH AMLA FROM THE FOREST. IT'S A VERY PRECIOUS FRUIT FOR US.

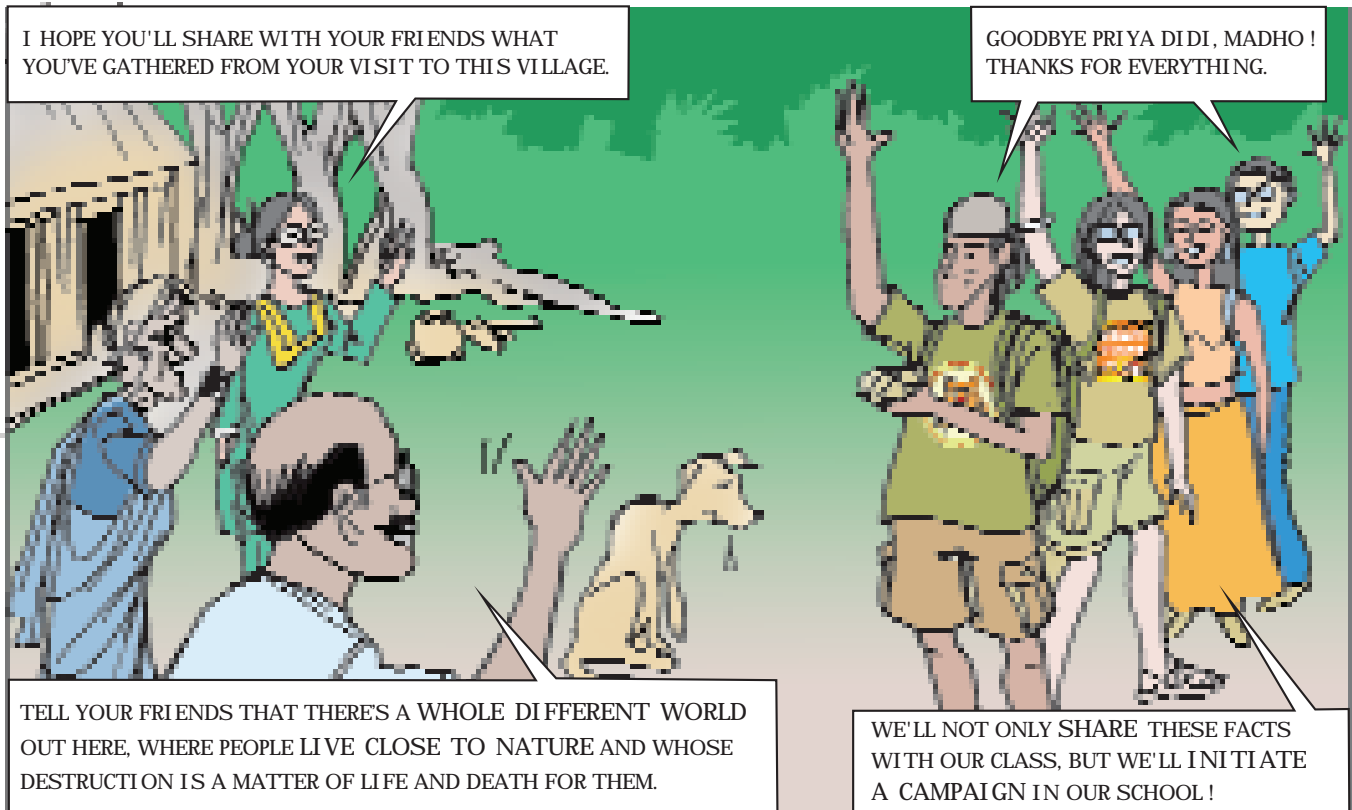




AMLA – GOSH, I THOUGHT THAT WAS A HAIR OIL !

YES, IT'S USED FOR THAT TOO, BUT EAT THESE, YOU'LL FIND THEM DELICIOUS !

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY, AMMA. WE'LL COME AGAIN !

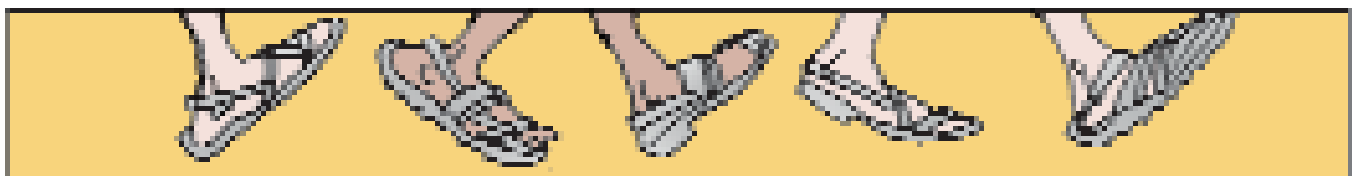


I HOPE YOU'LL SHARE WITH YOUR FRIENDS WHAT YOU'VE GATHERED FROM YOUR VISIT TO THIS VILLAGE.

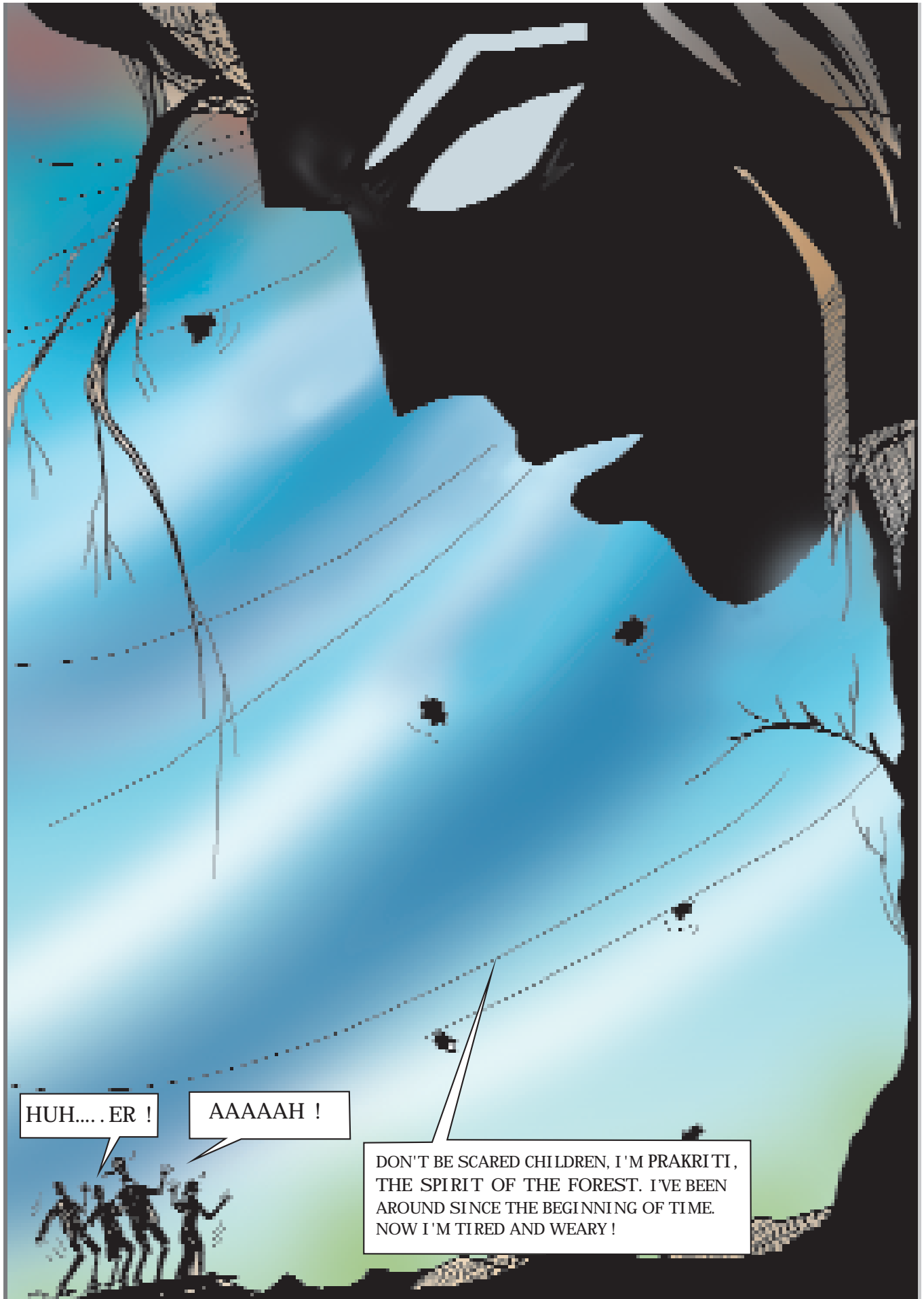
GOODBYE PRIYA DIDI, MADHO ! THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.

TELL YOUR FRIENDS THAT THERE'S A WHOLE DIFFERENT WORLD OUT HERE, WHERE PEOPLE LIVE CLOSE TO NATURE AND WHOSE DESTRUCTION IS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH FOR THEM.

WE'LL NOT ONLY SHARE THESE FACTS WITH OUR CLASS, BUT WE'LL INITIATE A CAMPAIGN IN OUR SCHOOL !





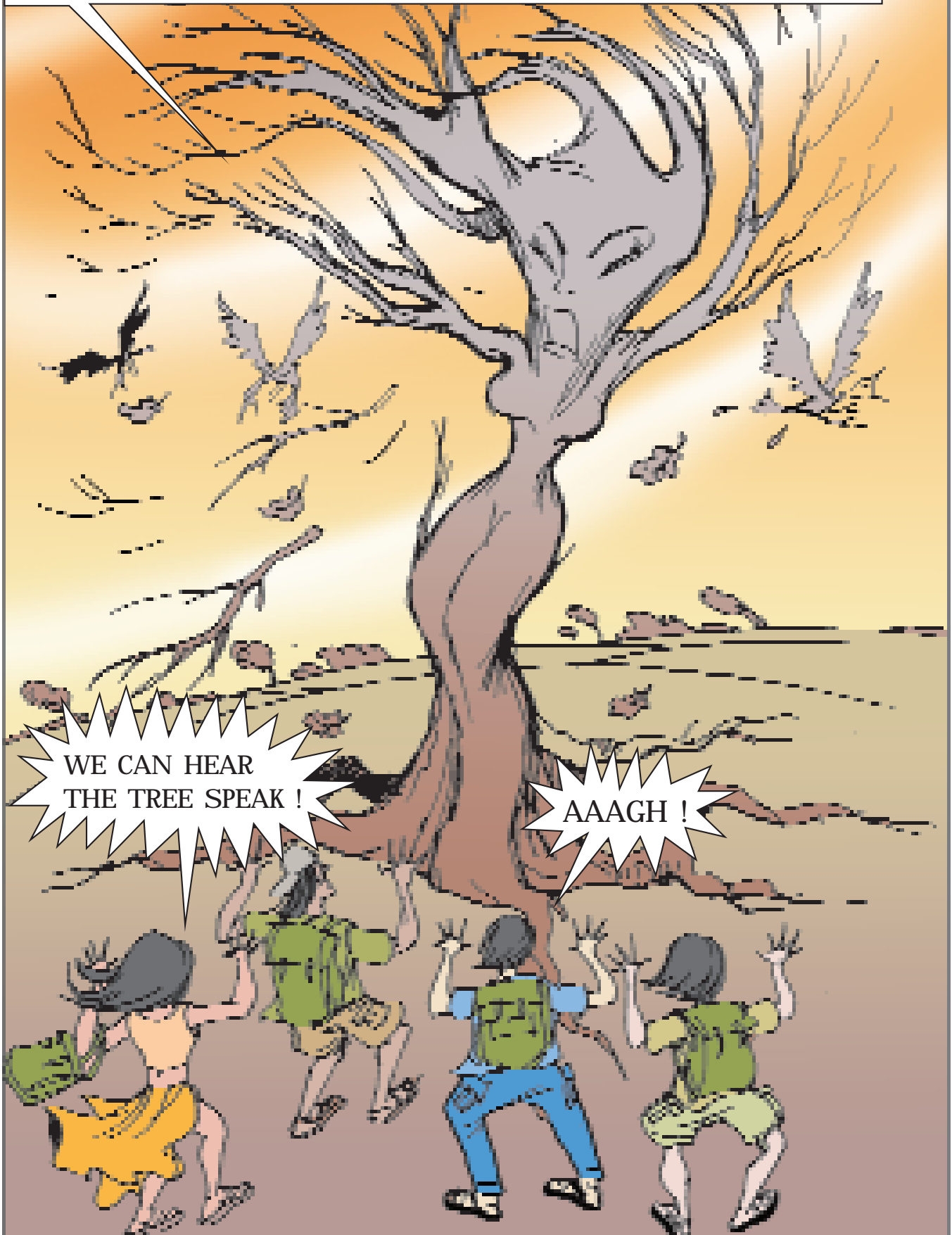


HUH....ER !

AAAAAH !

DON'T BE SCARED CHILDREN, I'M PRAKRITI, THE SPIRIT OF THE FOREST. I'VE BEEN AROUND SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. NOW I'M TIRED AND WEARY !

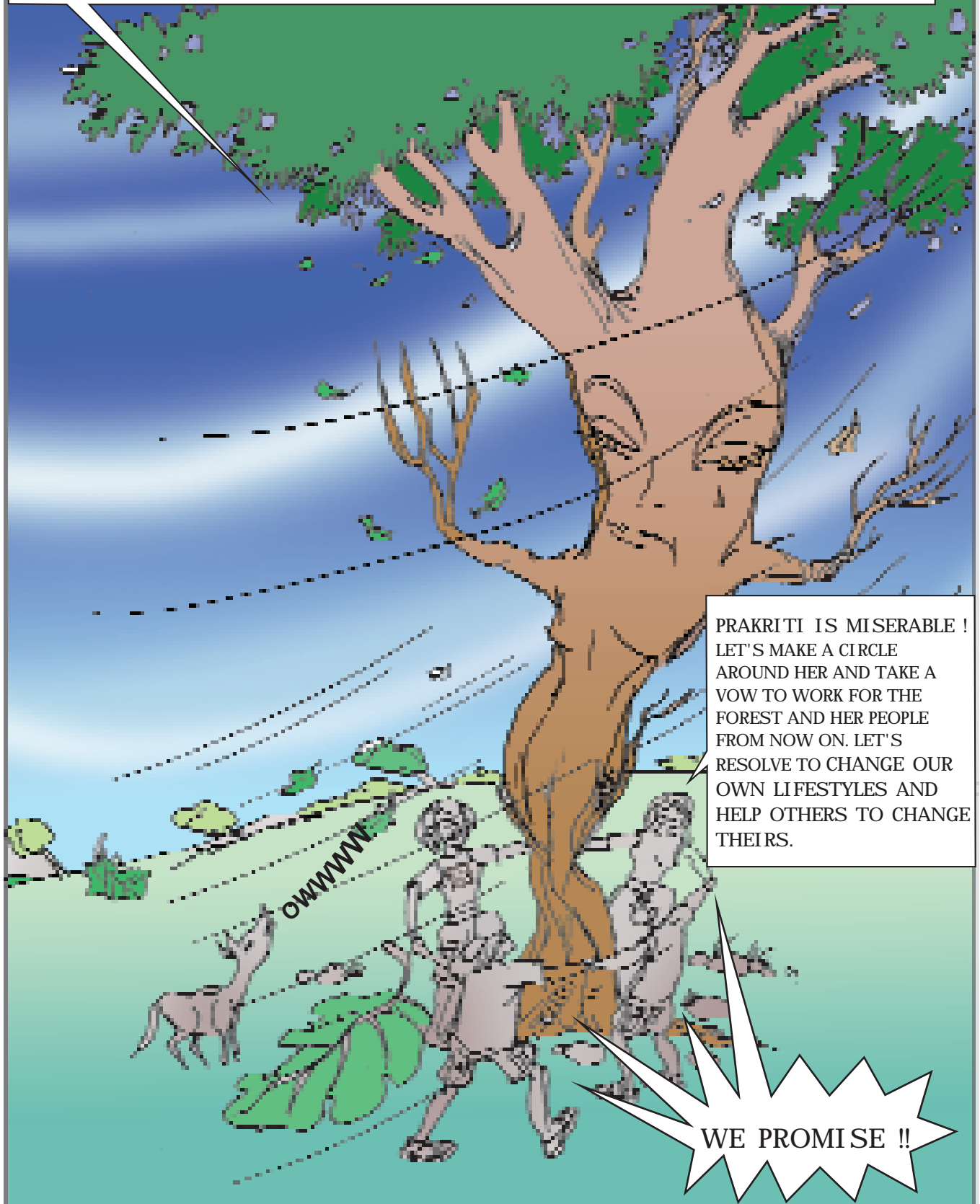
NOBODY SEES THE FOREST AS A LIVING, BREATHING WHOLE...EVERYONE WANTS A PART OF IT FOR THEMSELVES TO FEED THEIR URBAN LIFESTYLE WHICH CONSUMES SO MUCH WOOD, PAPER AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS THAT THE FOREST OFFERS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE POOR TRIBALS. OR EVEN JUST TO SEE WILDLIFE...



WE CAN HEAR  
THE TREE SPEAK !

AAAGH !

WHEN YOU GET BACK TO YOUR CITY, TELL THEM THAT THE FOREST MATTERS IN WAYS THAT THEY HAVE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT. TELL THEM THAT THEIR BELOVED TIGERS WILL DISAPPEAR JUST LIKE THE RIVERS IN THE FOREST. TELL THEM THAT THE SOLUTION LIES IN WORKING WITH THE PEOPLE, NOT ALIENATING THEM FROM THE FOREST. TELL THEM THAT WITHOUT THE PROTECTORS OF THE FOREST, THE LOCAL PEOPLE, HER SPIRIT WILL DIE. TELL THEM WE ALL NEED TO WORK TOGETHER OR ALL WILL BE LOST...



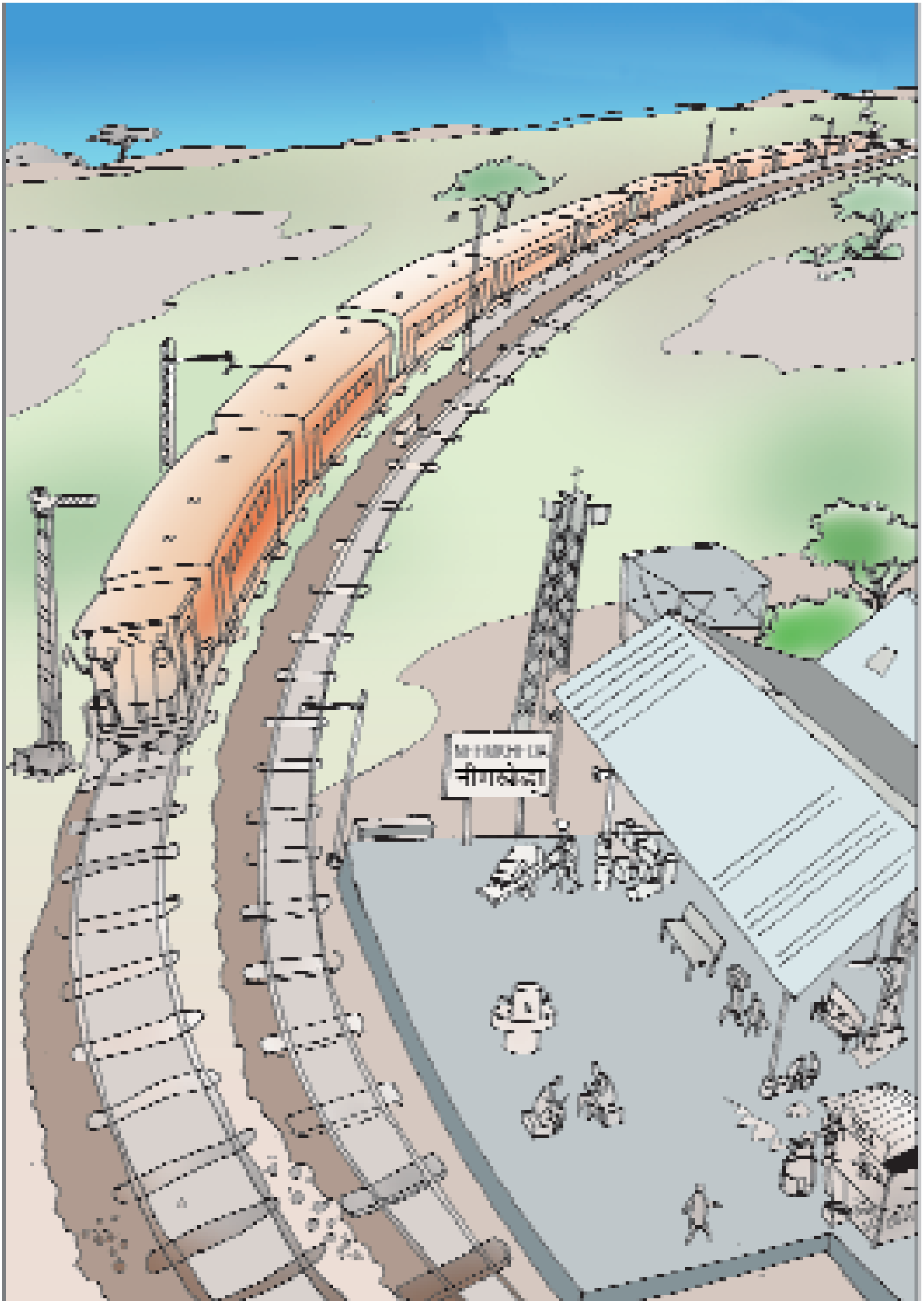
PRAKRITI IS MISERABLE !  
LET'S MAKE A CIRCLE  
AROUND HER AND TAKE A  
VOW TO WORK FOR THE  
FOREST AND HER PEOPLE  
FROM NOW ON. LET'S  
RESOLVE TO CHANGE OUR  
OWN LIFESTYLES AND  
HELP OTHERS TO CHANGE  
THEIRS.

WE PROMISE !!

WE NOW ANNOUNCE THE ARRIVAL OF THE PUNJAB MAIL BOUND FOR NEW DELHI. THE TRAIN WILL HALT FOR TWO MINUTES.

IN JUST ONE NIGHT AND A DAY WE HAVE SEEN A WHOLE NEW WORLD.

YES INDEED. A WORLD WORTH FIGHTING FOR !



## INDIAN FORESTRY - A Brief History

There is a long history of forest management practices in India, but the formalisation of these practices is usually traced to the establishment of the Forest Department under British colonial rule in 1864 and the passing of the Indian Forest Act in 1865. Colonial Forest Acts asserted the monopoly rights of the state over forest produce thus restricting the rights of local communities over access and use of forest resources and thereby setting up a conflict which is still prevalent in forest areas within India. The current Indian Forest Act is still the 1927 Act, enacted under British rule, but applicable in a very different India, almost eighty years later !

Forestry practice, however, has changed considerably since Independence. In the 1950s and 1960s, India made a rapid push towards industrialisation and modernisation, and forests were seen as a vital input in this process. This meant that forest products were supplied to industry (and urban consumers) at heavily subsidised rates which led to the continued marginalisation of the demands of local subsistence users. However, by the mid-1970s, there was concern because of the rapid loss of forest cover - 4.1 million hectares between 1951 and 1976 - and the fear of a perceived crisis in the forestry sector. This led to the adoption of social forestry programmes in the 1970s, initially following a two-pronged strategy to encourage people to plant trees: "farm forestry" on private farmlands, and "community forestry" on community and government-owned lands.

In 1988, India adopted a new Forest Policy Resolution which emphasised the need to meet the requirements of poor people and tribals from forests. In 1990, guidelines were circulated for Joint Forest Management (JFM), calling for partnerships between Forest Departments and local communities at the village level for the management of local forests. The arrangements emphasised the need to share responsibilities for management, as well as share the benefits of improved protection of forest resources. To date, the JFM programme covers an estimated 84,632 groups in 28 states, managing 17.3 million hectares of forests.

As a predominantly rural economy (about 70 percent of the population), India is still dependent on its forest reserves. But, there are competing demands over forests, from local communities to urban consumers, to international needs (for instance, as carbon "sinks" to reduce global warming). Indian forest policy now recognises the need for collaboration between all groups to regenerate degraded forest lands and protect this valuable resource. We all have a responsibility, and it is important that we recognise this.

## SPIRIT OF THE FOREST

*Spirit of the Forest* is produced as an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries, under its Natural Resources Systems Programme. Research for this project was conducted by a collaborative team from the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, UK, Enviro-Legal Defence Firm, Delhi, The Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, The Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, Sanket Information and Research Agency, Bhopal, The Energy and Research Institute, Delhi and Winrock International India, Delhi. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

Further information about the project is available at: <http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/harda/>

For more information on forestry issues, go to the following web sites:

Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India: <http://www.envfor.nic.in>

Resource Unit for Participatory Forestry: <http://www.rupfor.org>

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment: <http://www.atree.org>

International Institute for Environment and Development: <http://www.iied.org/NR/forestry/index.html>

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: <http://www.fao.org/forestry>



Four city teenagers go camping to see tigers in the wild. By a strange quirk of fate, they are thrown into a completely different adventure. One that was to change their lives forever and open their eyes to a whole new way of looking at the forest....

The Spirit of the Forest is a story about the plight of tribals and other communities that depend on the forest for their livelihoods. For generations, forests and they have had an unbroken bond that sustained each other. Suddenly, with today's mad pace of development and the crazy race for urban acquisition, the forest and its people are under severe threat. Realising that India's forest cover needs to be restored, the government has come up with many schemes, such as Joint Forest Management in which people and the government collaborate to protect forests. But how well are these programmes working? Are they helping the underprivileged to sustain themselves? Are they furthering the deep poetical and loving relationship between forest and people? Or are there conflicts? These are some of the questions that this comic asks.

Underlying all this is a lady, profoundly anguished yet offering hope...she is...the spirit of the forest.

This comic is based on research in Madhya Pradesh that was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries under its Natural Resources Systems Programme (project no R8280). The research was coordinated through the University of Cambridge. The Society, Environment and Development Research Cluster in the Department of Geography (<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/sed/>) at the University of Cambridge consists of over thirty academic staff, post-doctoral research staff and graduate students working on issues of institutions, governance and sustainability. Within this cluster, the Political Ecology of Development Group focuses on the politics, management and human ecology of natural resources in the developing world, especially locations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific regions.

The Viveka Foundation is an alternative publishing house affiliated to the global justice movement. It has also been spearheading a "comics movement" in India. Based in New Delhi, India, its publications are committed to influencing personal and social transformation. It upholds living democracy, cultural pluralism, justice, gender parity and ecological and spiritual values. It opposes all forms of political, developmental, economic, linguistic and ethnic hegemony.



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