



TRIBAL MENSA NURTURING PROGRAM

MENSA INDIA PUNE CHAPTER

Sita- Wildflower in Tribal Niche

Monthly Report: February- March 2008

Durga Workshop (22nd Feb to 25th Feb 2008)

Goddess Durga is a form of Prakriti or Nature. She is the Divine Mother. The February Tribal Mensa Nurturing workshop took inspiration from the forms of Durga i.e. nature and centered around exploring nature, generating curiosity to understand it and creating an atmosphere to nurture it.

On February 22nd when Sachindada came to take us to the Nishta Kendra, we were all holding bags of seeds. They were of various indigenous trees *Pongamia pinnata* (Karanj) , *Terminalia* spp. (Hirada, Beheda etc), *Acacia* spp (Babhool), etc. which we had collected from Sacred Groves near our villages. Some of us had brought them from nearby forest lands and river banks. We took over a month to make our collections – dried and sorted. We could name most of the trees from which we had made the collection. We found that it was a lot of fun to be in the forest. We watched birds and insects. We tried to find some fruits and berries to eat too.

I found that to watch and enjoy Nature, I need to open my eyes and my mind. The more curious I was, the more I saw, the more I understood. After my exams, which is in March, I think I will spend more time exploring the Sacred Grove near my home.

The journey from my school to the Kendra was tiring this time. It was partly due to the heat and partly because I missed few of my friends. They had gone for their village festivals and were not going to attend the workshop. But as the Kendra came closer, the excitement grew. What was to be done with all these seeds? What activities will be there this time?

The excitement suddenly transformed to tremendous curiosity as I saw two very new people in the Nishta Kendra, who welcomed us in. Narayandada then introduced us to them. They were Richard Scott from England (Landlife trust, Liverpool) and Madhav (Mathieu, Krishna Devotee from France) from Udupi. Both of them were going to help us set up a plant nursery from the seeds that we had brought. Now everything fell into place.



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As afternoon drew on, we took time to settle down. We tried to interact with Richard and Madhav. We had so much to talk with our friends this time. We talked about our collection, about our village festivals. Some of us had also been to small excursions with their classmates. We also spent some time playing carom board.

In the evening, Richard and Madhav gave us boxes of paints and brushes. How thrilled we were! We had wished to paint the walls of Nishta Kendra and had told Narayandada in the Pongal workshop about it, and our wish was coming true. We all went wild. in a creative way. Sashitai, Anjalitai, Varshatai also joined us as we painted flowers, mountains, and rivers. I drew a painting of Lord Ganesh. Some made signs of 'Welcome' and some drew symbols like 'Trishul', 'Swastika' etc. Now ,we felt we were in our own Maherghar. A place which spoke to us, inspired us, and a place where we have left our permanent visible mark on.

While we were engrossed in our activity, Narayandada brought in a truck full of soil. It was unloaded in the garden. I knew immediately that tomorrow was our day of gardening. I wondered what all we could do. We needed a good place to sow the seeds and they will need to be watered. I started planning in my head remembering what all I do in the farm back home.

Evening came, and we had to stop our painting as the lights went out. But today we were enlightened very differently in our minds. Madhav played devotional songs on his flute. It was a very different kind of music than what I get to hear at school or in my village. I enjoyed it a lot. It made me very calm and it showed on my face.

We were woken up by Madhav's flute and after drinking *madhpaani* we were all ears to listen to Narayandada. He asked us to return the books we had taken from the library last time. Most of us had read the books more than one time! I am looking forward to reading a lot more.

Then Narayandada spoke to us about our activity for the day – Plant nursery. We were to remove stones and gravel from the soil he had got yesterday. Small pots were to be filled with soil and manure, and seeds were to be sorted out. Richard and Madhav were going to help us do all that. We divided ourselves in groups by afternoon we had filled over 150 pots, and sorted out about 50 types of seeds. Shiekhatiai, an MSc student from the Pune University also helped us in doing so.



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Some of the boys from Bagicha gat made rangoli designs from the seeds. It was a picture of a man who was stopped by a girl from cutting a tree. We had a lot of fun. We got to talk with

Richard and even with friends. We found that teamwork makes a difficult task easier to achieve. We were tired after the activities and we got some free time. In the afternoon, me and my friends from the Annapurna Gat found some old clothes in the cupboard. We used them to decorate our room. We hung sarees on the wall like curtains. Some made designs out of dupattas and stuck them on the walls. I knew I would have a nice sleep in this cozy, friendly room.

Shri. Vishwasrao Kher and Mrs. Sonavi Desai from the Kher Foundation had come to the Nishta Kendra during this time. Narayandada showed them all the work that we had done, our paintings, our boards, our pots, seeds and even our activity files. They seemed to be happy about all that we were doing. The Kher Foundation, we were told, will be looking after the maintenance cost of our Maherghar. I am thankful to them for their help. Anjalitai family too came from Pune to watch our work in the evening. Its nice to be appreciated by people and getting to know them too.

In the night, we saw a movie about two tigers, born in the zoo and then taken to the wild. I was so tired; I could hardly keep my eyes open. But, not everyone is tired like me. Some of my friends stay up till late night to read the story books given to us. Some of them read even in torch lights stealthily when Narayandada puts the lights out.

When I went to sleep, I thought of how I will sow the seeds the next day. I thought if the seeds know that they were handpicked from the Sacred Grove to come here and grow , like I was. I wondered..

In the morning, Narayan spoke to us about 'Swadeshi'. He spoke about taking pride in being Indian, in following its traditions. He spoke about how culture changes from country to country, and why we are special in our own way. He spoke to us what is a modern outlook and what is a western outlook. He showed us that people from different cultures can work in harmony, and still maintain their own perspective. We saw that when we saw him talking to Richard and Madhav.



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When I came out in the garden, I found the seeds soaking in warm water, ready to be planted. Shiekhatai, Richard, Anujatai and few a few of us, sowed the seeds of *Cassia fistula*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Tamarindus indica* etc. As I planted them, I wished that each one would grow into a big tree. I took care that they were sowed properly, that its roots may grow strong. I watered them and hoped that one day I could take them back into the wild – in their Sacred Grove, just like last nights movie.

Afternoon time was for the workshop activity. We played an old game, called 'Antakshari' , but the twist was that we could sing only those songs which had questions. Annapurna Gat was sure to win... we knew all the songs by heart. Then Narayandada told us why we played this game. It was to raise questions. The key to curiosity, the key to all the answers in the world. Questions,

Jidnyasa! We sat down in our Kaksha and raised 150 questions! 'why, when , where, how, from where, till where.....' It was so much fun. What if I start asking so many questions to Abba? I am sure he will be baffled trying to answer them. Oh! But thats what this exercise was all about. I no longer need to ask questions to anyone. I can generate more questions and more and more.. to find my own answers!

After the gruelling session of exercising the brain, Dr. Tanuja Oak and her team arrived for stretching our body. It was time for Yoga. Like last time, we stretched and flexed, twisted and turned. I found that now it is much easier than the first time we did Yoga. All the practicing at school is helping I guess.

In the evening, we had a fun session with Narayandada. We played Antakshari again, this time of Bhajans and patriotic songs. Madhav also played his flute for us. We listened to it with all our heart and soul, as today was the last day of the workshop.

Narayandada then told us about the next workshop. He said he will try to organize it in May, after our exams and holidays. He even promised to take us for an ecotour to the coast! I am so excited



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already. What all things we will see?!

Then we scurried back to our respective Kaksha, as we had to prepare for the 'Manoranjan' activities of the last day. The boys from Paani gat had put up a drama for everyone. Some sang devotional songs, some sang gavlans, patriotic songs etc. And then, it was time to sleep. Before sleeping, I once again prayed, for my seeds to grow well.

When I woke up, I was told that Richard had already left for England, Madhav would be leaving for Varanasi soon. It was time for Narayandada and the Mensa team to return back to Pune and me to my school. This time when I left the Maherghar, I left a part of me still living there. I am sure that my song will echo there till I return.

In our journey back home, I realized that we had truly lived the spirit of Goddess Durga during the workshop. I had been Prakruti, as I had walked in the forest. I had been a Mother as I sowed the seeds, and I will be the Protector, as I help them grow and blossom into trees. And I wonder if this Goddess Durga will reside in my village, in my Sacred Grove.....