

**Mensa India Pune Chapter
Tribal Mensa Nurturing Program 2007**

I am **Sita**: Wildflower in Tribal Niche

Looking for **Disha** (Direction)

To experience **Santosh** (Happiness) in My Life

Sita is a religious and mythological name, very common but very much appropriate as far as I am concerned. Well you know Sita as the wife of Rama but another meaning of Sita is a land which is suitable for tilling that is, a cultivable land.

This is my journey, from potential cultivable land to productive, cultivated land. I am going to narrate my experiences to you, how I was **identified** and **nurtured** for my capabilities by mentors and psychologists.

I live in the village, Jambhure. I am 10 years old and have a younger sister, Shilpa and brother Harish who study in the village school, which is up to class 4.

There is a river that flows near my village. Even in the hot summer the water is cool and I like to go and sit on the banks of the river with the other girls. There are lots of fields in my village. My *Aba's* (father's) field is right next to the river, so we have enough water. This year I have become as tall as the *bajra* crop in my father's field. My field is surrounded by four *Peppal* (*Ficus* spp.) trees and one Mango tree. I climb the mango tree in the afternoon and sit there. I like to sit alone and listen to the *koyal*, (bird) or see the squirrels running up and down the trees.

Last year in the rains, the river overflowed. The buses couldn't reach up to my village. A lot of work needed to be done on the fields. I went to school a month late. This year they are building a new dam there, so maybe the fields will not have excess water and the bus will come and I will reach school on time.

At home, my *ajji* (grandmother) tells me a lot of stories. At night I sleep next to her with Harish and Shilpa. *Ajoba* (grandfather) sits with the other elders all day near the huge *banyan* tree outside the village. He is always telling us to do 'the right thing' and 'to be a good person'.

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After passing class 4 in my village school I came to the **Tribal Ashram Shala** at Aasane. The teachers from the tribal residential school had come to my village and convinced my parents to send me there. My parents agreed as I would get to stay here free, free food would be given; clothes and books would be free too.

The Ashram school is very far away from my house and any human settlement. So we all go home only during long holidays. My school is surrounded by mountains called Western Ghats which is one of the major biodiversity hotspot of the world, with rare and endemic flora and fauna.

We have an open ground in the centre which is surrounded by classrooms. Unlike in my village, there is only empty land around my school. It looks all green after rains but in summers it is all brown and the ground becomes very hot. When it rains the water makes a rhythmic sound on the tin roofs and sometimes it leaks too.

We sit on mats in the classroom and all the girls sleep in that same room at night. In winters it gets very cold and the wind from the mountains is chilly. The roads here are like the ones in my village bumpy and with stones. Our school has toilets only for girls as they must not go out in the open.

Our *Maushi* (residential school lady cook) makes good food and when there is something sweet to eat, we know that it is a festival that day. Recently, we have got some computers in school; I have seen them in our office. I don't know what they are as only children in the 8th, 9th or 10th Std. can use it. Those children also have benches in their classroom. I wonder how it would feel to sit on the bench. It would be easier to write, and especially in the winters it would keep us away from the cold ground.

Only two government buses pass my school everyday Once when the school starts and the other at sun set and of course few vehicles such as Milk collecting van, jeeps where people are sitting on each others lap and private landlord vehicles. My *Aba* sometimes comes in the jeep to meet me on Sundays. He always brings me some *god khau* (sweets). I share these sweets with my friends who are in class 7. We sleep together in

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the same class. Sushma is from my village but Amruta is from Kolewadi and Manisha from Ushire. I have not been to their house as it is too far away.

Sometimes I play with the girls in my class, though they don't talk about things that interest me. They don't listen to what I say. **I don't know why? Am I different? Why do my interests differ from others?** *Aai* says I always say things too old for my age and I shouldn't ask so many questions.

It was **April 2007**, my examinations were over, and I was eager to go home. I would go home and teach my brother and sister what I had learnt in school that year. I hope *Aba* would send them to my Ashram Shala after they finished their 4th class like me.

While I was sitting out on the playground of the school, waiting for my *Aba* to come and take me home, I was looking at the deciduous *Palash* (*Butea monosperma*) tree, and suddenly my eyes saw a moving object at a far distance. I saw a white car come winding up the road to the tribal school.

The car approached towards my school and stopped at the place where I was sitting. **Three people** climbed down the car. I had never seen them before, they looked like government officials, and they had some papers in their hands. They seemed to be coming from the city. I was able to figure it out from their dress and their language. One *tai* had worn a red color band in her hair. My hair is long and I also like to tie them with a red ribbon.

The visitors appeared tired and thirsty. They could have been traveling a long distance and really appeared cooked up in the hot April summer. They asked me about the principal's cabin and went straight into the office. Why were they here? School was already over now. I was curious so, I followed them.

They told the principal that they had come from **Pune**; they were working on a project for **Mensa India Pune Chapter**. Hmm, so I was right about that. They asked the principal a lot of questions about the **number of classes** in the school, the **number of children** in each class, the **facilities the school** had for us like free textbooks, uniforms, when our exams were, etc.

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After they came out they looked around the school and kept writing on their papers.

I asked one of the *tai's*, "What are you writing?"

She turned around and asked my name. I told her "Sita" then I asked her who she was.

She said "My name is **Sashi** and I am a **Psychologist**". I am just filling this form, we are noting down some information about your school".

The form had different blocks and lots of blank space to write. *Tai* had already written down the name of my school, the address, the name of the principal, information about teachers, transportation available to reach my school and much more.

She then pointed to the other *tai* and said, "She is **Sameena** and she is also a **Psychologist.**"

I also got to know that the third person in their team was **Sachin dada** and he was the **Coordinator** for their project. Then I asked them if they work for the school inspector.

They told me, "No, we don't work for the government. But we work with the government. Like you must know **Mr. Kapse**, (Project Officer, Ghodegaon) he is giving us guidance for our project.

She said that all three of them were working on a project for children like me who study in Ashram schools around Pune.

"Which other schools?" I asked.

Sameena *tai* said, "We have been to **15 Tribal Schools** like in Malegaon, the school run by **Sevadharm Trust**, Phulwade, Rajpur and have met many children like you. Would you like to do some interesting new things, Sita?"

I smiled and nodded my head. She said that they would be coming back to the school in **June** after the school had started and would bring with them some interesting games.

And if I wanted I could play with them.

Then Sashi *tai* said, "Sita if you play those games thoughtfully there will be special teachers and special classes for you."

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“How will that be?” I asked.

She said, “We have completed **four visits** to Tribal schools in **Maval, Ambegaon, Khed** and **Junnar** talukas of Pune covering **1,500 Kilometers**. From **2000 children** who are between **10 to 15 years** of age, some would be selected. If you are selected, Sita, you will get to meet all the other children.”

“Would you like that Sita?” asked Sameena *tai*.

“That would be fun!” I said.

I asked them if they had some new books for us. They said they would get some the next time. I wondered who would give them the books.

They said, “There are a lot of people in the cities who want to provide more resources to children studying at Ashram schools. A person (**Mr. Santosh Naik**) in Mumbai from **Disha Foundation** has provided us help to come here and meet you. There are others like **Kartik dada** who is working in the U.S.A and **Viren dada** in Muscat. They are working outside the country but are eager to give funds for our project so that we can come here the next time and bring those games for you.”

Sachin *dada* said, “There are going to be others who want to come and talk to you and teach you new things. And you could **meet them once a month.**”

“So many people are waiting to meet me! I hope you come in June, I will wait for you. And I will prepare myself for those games”, I exclaimed.

Sachin *dada* said, “You know the best part about those games is that you don’t have to prepare yourself or study for it like exams (Mensa Testing Requirements). You just need to be attentive and thoughtful to do it.”

Sashi *tai* was telling Sachin *dada* how difficult it was to find this school. They kept looking for boards or signs but there weren’t any. I told Sashi *tai*, “It’s simple to remember my school, you should look for the “S” shaped Neem (*Melia spp.*) tree, and 10 minutes in the bus after that one can see the Tribal school gate. Did you see it on the way?” She said she hadn’t but she will remember it the next time she comes to my school.

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They said they would come back later with a lot of different new things. I wonder what they would bring. Just another set of books that we keep locked in the cupboard or more benches? These people seemed different. They wanted to look inside me, to know me. Shall I let them take a glimpse inside? Even I will have to look inside to see what there is. They seemed to know and understand the thirst inside me.

“The thirst of curiosity, the thirst to know, the desire to free myself, to get out of my own mind!”

Will these people take me there, a journey to tread, a path to be led.

Well if you want to talk to me, please write to me at nd1675@yahoo.com

Yours,

Sita (Wildflower in Tribal Niche, Looking for **Disha**, to experience **Santosh** in My Life)

(Monthly Report, April 2007)

Written by: Sameena Manasawala

The format for Monthly Reports for this project is drawn on the Concept of Sita, a girl from the Tribal school who will experience the nurturing program and narrate it to us as her story. Hope this creative endeavor keeps up your interest in our venture.