

I am **Sita**: Wildflower in Tribal Niche
Looking for **Disha** (Direction)
To experience **Santosh** (Happiness) in My Life

Do you remember Sashi *tai*, Sachin *dada*, Sameena *tai* and the white car that had come to my school? I met them yet again on a very special occasion. It was a day when one should celebrate Mother Nature's birthday. The Tribal Mensa Nurturing Program (TMNP) team came to me on that day with Gifts and Blessings from Mother Nature.

Before I begin to tell you about the occasion I would like to tell you about all the work that has been done by the TMNP team last month.

The way I work in the school, the TMNP team works **in Pune**. They have established their office at B-2 Sulochan Park, Kothrud.

For the project to run smoothly and get support from the government the TMNP team met **Project Head, Mr. Kapse** of the Integrated Tribal Development Project (3rd May,07). Mr. Kapse extended his support to the project and has authorized the running of this project in the schools of the four talukas of Pune district. The team visited his office (14th May, 2007) at **Ghodegaon** where they were able to access information about the school. The staff at Ghodegaon was helpful and shared with the team the maps of the four talukas which will help them to find the route easily to my school.

With all the above information and some of which was earlier collected from the schools, the **School Profile Formats** were thus completed and filed for database.

The team has also been successful in creating a **Blogspot** of Tribal Mensa Nurturing Program. The blog (www.tribalmensa.blogspot.com) displays my story as well as all information regarding TMNP. With the use of the blogspot my story has reached people across the world. So many people have shown an interest in TMNP and have contacted the team for further information. A lot of people are curious about my story and want to

interact with me. They want to talk to me, know more about me, be able to see me, hear me.

The **Niteingale Charitable Trust** has extended their support for the project as well as other individuals (**Mr. Shroff**) who have sent material for the program (CD's, books). The **Abhinav Pustak Mandir** has also given material like pencils, erasers and books in discounted prices for children like me.

When I spoke to **Narayan** (Principal Investigator for TMNP) he told me that what has given him so much clarity about TMNP is the detailed **Project Proposal** conceptualized by his team. The proposal contains detailed steps with time lines as well as a list of requirements for the program, thus making its execution very clear.

The upcoming phase of the project is **Identification** which involves identifying children who are Gifted. This involves playing games and puzzles that Sashi *tai* had told me about. For this she is preparing **testing material** and packing it. Also other friends of Sashi *tai* (**Test Administrator**) who will come to our school with her are getting trained. Like we prepare for our exams they are preparing for visits to our schools. For this **Dr. Usha Khire** (National Supervisory Psychologist) and **Dr. Sujala Watve** (Head, Jnana Prabodhini Institute of Psychology) have been utmost helpful.

The TMNP team has simultaneously been preparing for the second phase of the project which is the **Nurturing Program**. For this several meetings with **Dr. Gore** (Sevadharm trust) have been held and gathering of material and building infra structural facilities for the Nurturing program have set in motion. Visits to the **Nishta Arogya Kendra** at Kamshet (14th May/ 11th June, 07) which will be the **centre** for **Nurturing program** have been made and work like cleaning, fencing and roofing of the centre is in progress.

Let me come back to the day when I once again met those people who had come to my school. The special occasion was on **5th June** at **Ghodegaon**. I had come there with my

Aba (father) for some work and was surprised and excited when I saw some familiar faces there.

There was an unusual hustle bustle at the office. There was a huge banner with 'TRIBAL MENSA NURTURING PROGRAM' written in English in blue colour as well as names of people who are supporting this project (Integrated Tribal Development Program and Sevadham trust) and those who are sponsoring the event and the project (Disha Foundation and Niteingale Charitable Trust).

There were some unfamiliar people as well. I got to know about **Anand dada** who has recently joined the TMNP team. Narayan was saying that Anand *dada* has stood first in his class (M. A. Psychology) in the University. Everyone clapped for him and looked at him with admiration. This really inspired me. Even I would like to stand first and get the recognition from so many big people.

Then I also met **Amruta tai**. She said she was doing her Ph.D. like Anand *dada* and Sameena *tai*. I didn't understand what it is but I think it's a very high degree especially for a girl, I suppose. She said she was working on **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**. She said it was concerned with how important traditional values can be made a part of the educational syllabus and be taught to us in school. This is one of the most important gifts that has been passed onto us by our ancestors and through our culture and it is important that we not lose it, rather keep it alive and active and make it a part of our lives.

Then they all gathered in the hall upstairs where principals from all the schools run by the government were present. Mr. Kapse spoke to the principals and informed them about TMNP. He mentioned in his speech that the TMNP team would not only work directly with children but also try and work with the teachers for their own growth. So I guess, my teacher would also be going to classes (**Teacher Training Program**) like me and everyone would learn different things and share it with each other, how wonderful!

Everyone seemed interested and waiting to know more from Narayan.

Narayan firstly presented a **set of books and CD's** to Mr. Kapse and all the principals belonging to the four talukas where the project will be running. I am from one of those schools. So my principal also got one set. It contained:

1. Prabodhan Geete containing 60 motivating songs for children
2. Chatra Prabodhan- 11 volumes
3. CD of Prabodhan Geete with 17 songs
4. Parichi Shala (Fairy's School) containing 4 VCD's of 36 songs to help children learn alphabets, 1 booklet and 1 slate.

The principals were also given a **Certificate** for their 'involvement and innovative outlook in the field of education' as a token of appreciation from the TMNP team.

Before beginning his talk Narayan said a shloka. Always begin to do anything with a prayer, my *aaji* (grandmother) tells me. It seems Narayan *dada* like me, listens to his *aaji*. And so I have also begun writing my story by the same shloka.

He then spoke about the importance of 5th June, **Vasundhara Diwas** (Earth Day). Well, who or what is this *Vasundhara*, I wondered. It seemed to me like *Vasundhara* is a beautiful *devi* (Goddess) like *Laxmi devi*. Like we pray to *Laxmiji* who is the Goddess of wealth, **Vasundhara devi** is Mother Nature.

If I imagine *Vasundhara devi* she would be draped in brown and green with roots growing out of her feet and beautiful flowers on her body. With birds sitting on her shoulder and soil in her hand, she would be the *devi* to whom people offer their gratitude for the gifts of Nature. Her hair would be like the flowing water of *Ganga*, and people would be praying to her for the deep blue water of the river and the fertile soil for the crops. Like *Laxmi-ma* is adorned with jewels and has power to bring wealth and prosperity to us, *Vasundhara devi* would have the power to purify the air, to revive dead forest land, to bring back the endangered animals and birds to bring back the harmony with which we used to stay in nature. She has the gifts of the immense potential of our

natural resources but if not taken care of she will have no gifts to give us but the degrading land, the depleting forests and the polluted waters.

Anand *dada* said he would be working with something concerning the environment as well. He would be working on **Naturalistic Intelligence** which people as well as children especially like me who stay closer to nature than people in the cities, have a gift of understanding, adapting and recognizing features in the natural surroundings. He is going to emphasize on such kind of Intelligence and enhance it to prepare leaders of the future who know the importance and the ways in which to achieve the objective of **natural resource management and conservation**.

In this way there have been new additions to the team of TMNP. There is going to be so much to learn from so many people and about so many things.

I am thankful to God for giving me such satiating gifts in the dry summer. Certainly the dancing monsoon will bring with it the rhythm of **Shiva**, the chanting of **Brahma** and the love of **Vasundhara** (Mother Nature).

I, Sita (cultivable land) am waiting for an opportunity to blossom once again in the wilderness.

Should I thank the school, the government, the funders, the TMNP team or the opportunity given to me by Almighty God through them?

It is this question that I carry over with me.....

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

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