

+ SCRAPBOOK | COVER STORY | NEAR AND DEAR

gobar times

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A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS

INDIA@75...

Celebrating 75 years of our Independence with
a brief tale of our people and environment.



'Adorable Moments' by Manika Singh, a class 12 student of the Subodh Public School, Jaipur.

This photograph was received as an entry for the Window Lights—Mobile Photo Contest organised by the Young Environmentalist website in June 2021.

Digits speak

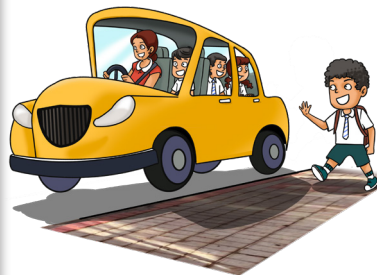
The Stockholm Conference, 1972 had put environmental issues on the global agenda for the first time. As the world celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, let us look at a few historic climate negotiations below.

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm	1972	United Nations Environment Programme
Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone layer	1972	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit), Rio de Janeiro	1973	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
Kyoto Protocol	1987	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
	1989	Paris Agreement
	1992	Stockholm + 50 Convention
	1992	
	1997	
	2015	
	2022	

Eco-Advertising

France passed a new law that mandates car advertisements to dissuade people from using more cars. This regulation is implemented with the aim of curbing global warming. French car commercials have to display messages encouraging alternate means of transport. For example, 'Consider carpooling,' 'For day-to-day use, take public transportation,' and 'For short



trips, opt for walking or cycling.' This ruling will impact over all media, including print, TV, radio, and Internet. Unsurprisingly, automobile companies find this

legislation discriminatory as it is counterproductive to the promotion of electric and zero-emission vehicles. Nonetheless, such ethical advertising is one step in the right direction.

Compiled by Sanvi Madan



A CHATTING ROCKSTAR

A chirpy pitter-patter about the Brown Rock Chat

Gargi Mishra

Knock-knock, who's there? The holy Brown Rock Chat. A holy who???... That's how a timid bird perplexed me at 3:30am in the dark of dawn.

It was February 2019 and I was calming the anxieties of my daughter, who was fearing her imminent exams. Persistently knocking my door—I hesitated to investigate any such visitor at an ungodly hour. So, I peeped out from an adjacent window to survey my doorway and was delightfully surprised to find a beautiful, winged creature.

"Mama, look who's come to wish me luck!" My doll whispered in ecstasy. A sweet, tiny female Indian Robin, I assumed, considering its modest cover and typical mannerisms. The bowing of its head and flickering of its tail were recognizable; though its distinct posture and traits seemed a little awkward. Plus, its size, chestnut vent, and rounded tail also appeared unusual.

Gradually, this almost-Robin gathered our attention every night as it diligently fed upon the insects piled under our porch's tube light. This was a mound of dead flies, forced out of their hideouts by untimely rains and buzzing throughout the night around our artificial lamps.

Finally, it was this early-riser's vivid avian call—melodious songs with multiple notes like those of a thrush—which left us spellbound.

It could even flawlessly imitate the calls of about eight of its fellows, including the Yellow-eyed Babbler, Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike, and Tickell's

Blue Flycatcher. Hence, we were compelled to rediscover this special guest—the quintessential Brown Rock Chat or, simply, the Indian Chat.

Belonging to the chat sub-family, this resident bird is endemic to the northwest and central India. Found in ravines, ruins,



PHOTO: ATHIYA MAHAPATRA

and rock clefts, it loves nesting in bungalow compounds and holes in walls. Its chocolate fudgy appearance is owing to its brown upper body, rusty underbelly, dark wings, and blackish tail. Its dark wood plumage conceals it at night, protecting it from the preying eyes of predators. Both the husband and wife wear these unassuming identical attires yet they appear outstanding in their natural setting.

Rock Chats are diurnal but often feed until midnight. We observed our visitant active from about 3am in twilight till 9pm late evening! This evolution of nocturnal foraging over long undisturbed hours has increased its success rate of capturing insects at night manifold compared to the daytime. In addition to behavioural adaptations, its slender bill, slightly curved at the tip, also helps it feed efficiently. During monsoons, when they nurture their chicks, their nutritional requirements are quite high. No wonder our companion gorged upon mounds of food as if there were no tomorrow!

The author is an amateur ornithologist and closely follows the avian world.

Near and Dear



A Short Story of Environment in India@ +75 years



Anubhuti
Sharma

Commemorating the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav with a brief tale of our peoples and environment from c. 1872–2022, spanning about 75 years before and after our tryst with destiny.



Why was India lost? asked Mahatma Gandhi in his famous little book of philosophies, the *Hind Swaraj*, in 1909. Without any pun intended, he answered some lines later: 'The English have not taken India; we have given it to them.' As Indian princes indulged in the unfair practises of the Company Bahadur, they lost their kingdoms and India got withered away like a wind blows a castle of cards. So, 'How can India become free?' he pondered some pages later. Just as many other great men and women of his times, he too believed that ours is a great civilization i.e. a *mahaan sabhyata* in Gujarati, in which he originally wrote. Time immemorial, he believed, we have proven our strength with our ability to survive; by remaining *sabhya*, i.e. the nice, decent, and well.

'Survive' is the key word here and so was it, even more so, in 1947. When questioned about our Independence, the celebrated British Prime Minister Winston Churchill rebuffed, "India will fall back... into the barbarism and privations of the Middle Ages." On the prospects of granting us self-rule, Rudyard Kipling, the official and famous writer of the classic *The Jungle Book*, replied, "Oh no! They are 4,000 years old out there, much too old to learn that business..." Having managed our Independence for three-quarters of a century—owing to the *sabhyata* or otherwise—survive, we did, after all.

Of course we made mistakes. Our *azadi* (freedom) hasn't been an *amrit* (elixir) really. Not for all the folks and not all the times. So, where did we goof-up then? For what and when? It's important to investigate this so that we don't repeat the mistakes. For it is in the learnings of our past and concerns of our today, that lies a better future for us all. One way to study the past could be to look at our environment—how it changed us and how we changed it

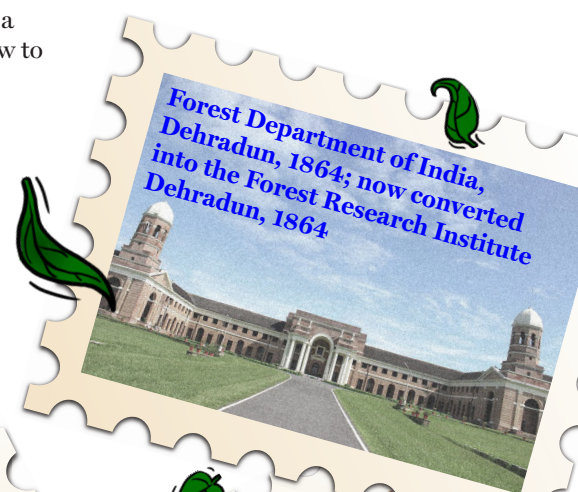
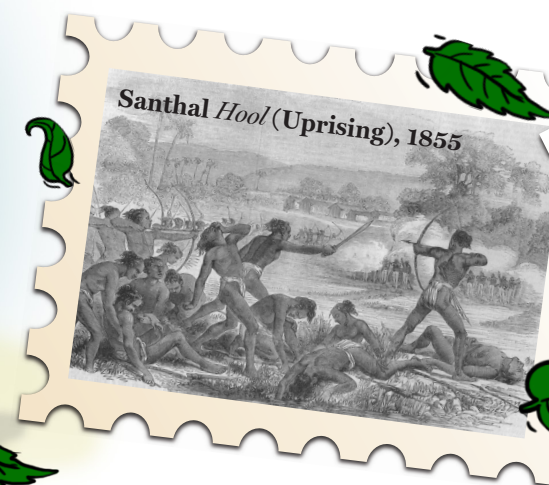
over the 150 odd years, 1872–2022, considering 1947 as the fulcrum. With the planet facing an imminent danger, it is significant how India—a nation with 3% of the world's money and 17% of humanity—can remain evergreen.

Back to Kipling in 1894 when he imagined the *Mowgli* at the Pench National Park, let us look at that India and its people, the *vanas* (forests) and their piousness, and their stories of struggles.

About 75 years before Independence

In 1864, the British established the Indian Forest Department. This best symbolised their interests and approaches—capitalist and imperialist. Simply put, they wanted to reap profits by trading products from our thriving forests—timber, wildlife, and other non-timber items. To secure these profits, they wanted a complete ownership of the forests. But there was a problem: these forests had many *adivasis* for whom the forest was their life. It was only natural for them to hate the British and their tactics to succumb the forests. Some of their frustrations are best captured in the extract below.

"The reservation of vast tracts of forests... was a very serious blow to the tribesman.



Cover Story

Cover Story

He was forbidden to practise his traditional methods of Swidden (read shifting) cultivation. He was ordered to remain in one village and not to wander from place to place. When he had cattle, he was kept in a state of continual anxiety for fear they would stray over the boundary and render him liable to... heavy fines. If he was a forest villager, he became liable at any moment to be called to work by the Forest Department. If he lived elsewhere, he was forced to obtain a licence for almost every kind of forest produce. At every turn, the forestry laws cut across his life, limiting, frustrating, destroying his self-confidence... A forest officer once said: "Our laws are of such a kind that every villager breaks one forest law every day of his life."

hunting restricted and bounties placed over tigers, lions, and leopards. With Indian princes rejoicing the game, no wonder the twilight years of the British Raj saw extinction of the majestic cheetahs. But as the legendary Jim Corbett abandoned guns for cameras and trophy-hunters became conservationists, India's jungles bloomed with hope towards Independence.

About 75 years Since Independence

Jawaharlal Nehru kickstarted young India's glorious march by establishing the 'temples of modern India,' represented by the Bhakra Nangal Dam (1963). A series of Land Reform Acts were promulgated to ameliorate the inherent colonial problems regarding occupancy rights. However,

afford to forget for a moment the grim poverty of large number of people. Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters?"

Mrs Gandhi's deep sensitivity for the environment launched the world's largest wildlife conservation programme—the Project Tiger (1973). Successively were passed a string of legislatives—the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; the landmark Forest Conservation Act, 1980; and the Environment Protection Act, 1981. Her government also upgraded the Department of Environment into a full-fledged Union Ministry and introduced the Green Revolution to boost agricultural productivity. This promoted chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Though many of these measures have been scathingly and

many conscientious environmentalists. Madhav Gadgil offered scientific ecological reasons for protecting the rainforests of Western Ghats. The legendary Salim Ali gave a new flight to our birds and undertook path-breaking restoration efforts for the wetlands of Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur. Anil Agrawal founded our Centre for Science and Environment and with Sunita Narain published the exceptional series of *The State of India's Environment Reports* since 1982. These studies were soon accompanied by India's flagship environment fortnightly, the *Down to Earth*, of which yours truly, the *Gobar Times* magazine and *Young Environmentalist* website are children's champions.

Champan Satyagraha, 1917

Jim Corbett and the slain 'Bachelor of Powalgarh', 1930

20 P. INDIA WHEAT REVOLUTION 1968 Green Revolution, 1968 1951 1968

Indira Gandhi launched the Project Tiger in 1973

Chipko Movement, 1973

Narmada Bachao Andolan, 1985

Therefore, the natives fought bloody battles against the *dikhus* (outsiders) in the Kol Uprising (1831), Santhal Uprising (1855), and Munda Rebellion (1899). 'Private property' in land triggered major confrontations like the Moplah Rebellion (1849), Pabna Rebellion (1873) and Deccan Riots (1875). In similar agrarian revolts, the Company sahibs compelled poor tenants to cultivate commercial crops in vast plantations. Thus, farmers of the Indigo Rebellion (1859) and Champan Satyagraha (1917) not only lamented the non-consumable indigo yields and their miniscule earnings but also the environmental deterioration of their motherland, causing massive famines unknown in Indian history.

A permanent loss was awaiting with tribal

weak laws provoked land-grab movements by Naxalites (1960s). The Bhoodan Movement (1950s) under Vinoba Bhave, encouraging land donations through Gandhian methodology, also faded. Similarly got ignored the Gurudev's ideas from Shantiniketan of integrating our lifestyle with nature, echoing from the pre-1947 era.

An ambitious India's ecstatic energy was accurately exemplified in Indira Gandhi's speech at the UN Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm, 1972: 'The rich look askance at our continuing poverty... on the other they warn against our methods. We do not wish to impoverish the environment... and yet we cannot

validly criticised, India's environmental movement attained a remarkable maturity during her tenure.

Various forestry, anti-dam, and anti-mining agitations—notably, the Chipko Movement (1973), Save Silent Valley (1973), and Niyamgiri Movement (2013), respectively—made Indian environmentalism much more inclusive and participatory. This was witnessed particularly in the demonstrations of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (1980s-90s) comprising peasants, artisans, landlords, workers, students, teachers, professionals, intelligentsias, activists, and even celebrities.

From the 1980s, their concerns were voiced by

India@75 years

The story of India's environment history is about daunting challenges and unexpected achievements. They indicate how much have we benefited from our Independence. Hopefully, our continuing tryst with destiny would someday help us experience the elixir of this freedom.

The author is a Senior Reporter-cum-Sub Editor for the Young Environmentalist programme, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi.

If we don't act NOW there could be...

STRANGER THINGS

According to *The Living Planet Index*, we have lost about 68% of our wildlife and 85% of our wetlands owing to deforestation and agricultural expansion. This index has tracked more than 4,000 species of vertebrates over the last 50 years. It warned that continued loss of natural habitat—as we are expanding our presence and coming into ever closer contact with wild animals—has increased our risk to future pandemics.