

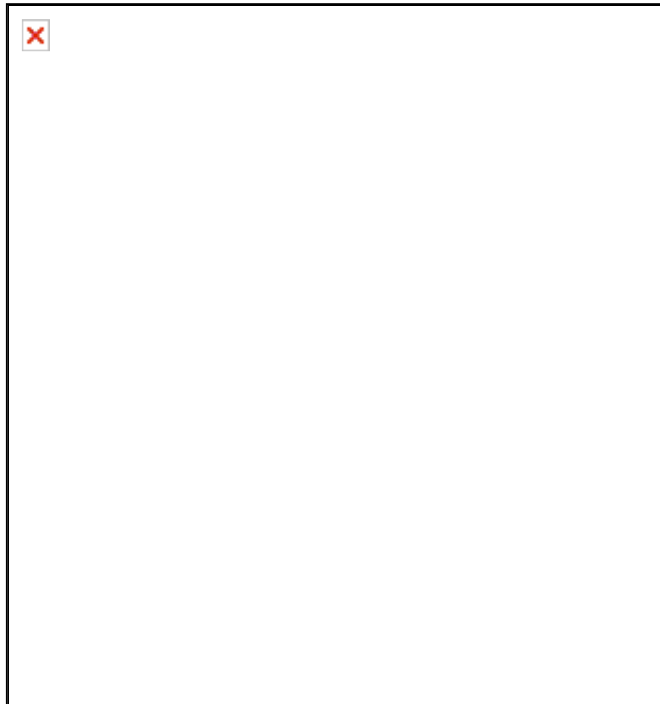
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[Back Young World](#)

Let's hug a tree for life

ROHINI RAMAKRISHNAN

Meera loved her trees. And then, one day, she heard something awful...



Don't you enjoy sitting under a tree or just looking at trees? There is something beautiful in the graceful swaying, the gentle rustling of the leaves and the blissful shade that trees give isn't it?

Here is a beautiful story that shows the bond between trees and a little girl. In a tiny village called Uliana, nestling in the shadow of the Himalayas, lived Meera. She didn't go to school, instead she learnt all her lessons from nature. And her best friends were the trees. She saw each one of them as a different being. "There was Naani tree who was the old gnarled one with the giant curved lap into which Meera fitted perfectly. There was Bhaloo tree who was big and black and who, if you rounded a corner without concentrating, could be mistaken for being a grizzly bear. There was Chottu tree..."

Life was perfect, till one day she heard her parents speaking of a group of men who were coming from the city to cut down her beloved trees. The situation seemed hopeless as her father said, "We little people have no powers to stop them."

But when the dreaded day arrived, this little girl dared to take action that helped the

whole village save their trees. This is a story of courage and was in fact inspired by the chipko movement.

Have you heard of it?

The 'Chipko movement' or 'Chipko Andolan' (is a socio-ecological movement that followed the Gandhian methods of satyagraha and non-violent resistance, through the act of hugging trees to protect them from being felled. The modern Chipko movement started in the early 1970s in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand with growing awareness about the rapid deforestation. The landmark event in this struggle took place on March 26, 1974, when a group of female peasants in Reni village, Hemwalghati, in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, India, acted to prevent the cutting of trees and reclaim their traditional forest rights.

The first recorded event of Chipko took place in a village called Khejarli in Jodhpur district, in 1730 A.D., when 363 Bishnois, led by Amrita Devi sacrificed their lives while protecting the green Khejri trees, considered sacred by the community, by hugging them, and braved the axes of the loggers sent by the local ruler.

A must mention are the beautiful illustrations done by R.K. Raji, which heighten a story that is simply and sensitively told. Meera's Friend's, The Trees is a book that has to be read and looked upon as an inspiration as trees even today face the danger of indiscriminate cutting.

MEERA'S FRIENDS, THE TREES, Geethika Jain and Jaishree Misra, DC Books

An excerpt:

But her father just shook his head and said sadly, " Who can stop the men from the city? They'll come with their big machines and government papers and that will be that. We little people have no powers to stop them."

For Meera, it was as though the world had suddenly stopped. An awful coldness swept through her body, making her shake. It was only later, when she lay next to her mother at night, that she could ask, "What do they want our trees for?"

Her mother tried to explain, "They need wood for so many things, the city people. Houses, tables, chairs...that sort of thing."

"But why don't they just use the wood that the trees don't need any more? Like the sticks that we pick up from the forest floor to build our roofs and cooking fires?"

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