

BEING THE CHANGE

THE PROTECTOR: Bishwarup Raha has been a full-time wildlife conservationist for the past 20 years. Today, he is the president for the Nature Conservation Society in Nashik. Raha loved nature even as a child. After graduation, when he had to decide between the family factory and forest conservation, Raha picked the latter.

HIS STORY: Raha's most important project in Maharashtra was the creation of the state's very first conservation reserve. The Borgad Conservation Reserve situated in Nashik currently serves as an open classroom for various tribal kids. How this

happened is actually quite an interesting story.

In 2007 Raha and his friends went on a cycling trip. While crossing the Borgad forest, they saw hyenas, leopards and other animals lazily crossing paths. They observed that over 70 to 80 per cent of trees in the teakwood forest had been hacked by the villagers. This is when Raha took a pledge to restore this once beautiful forest.

At first, with the help of Mahindra and Mahindra's Hariyali Project, Raha planted 5,000 fruit-tree saplings. Raha then roped in various villagers and showed them how the trees, if cared for, will yield fruits. Gradually the villagers became the forest's



Raha and his team talk about nature conservation to tribal children.

guardians. By the year end, this project saw a success rate of 95 per cent. Three years later, Raha and the villagers have planted 75,000 trees in the Borgad Conservation Reserve.

Raha takes tribal kids to the reserve and educates them against using the catapult to kill birds and small animals.

Here kids also begin to connect with nature. Raha aims to convert

them into field guides so that they can continue to live in harmony with nature.

YAISTERS ACT: Take a trip to Nashik. Observe over 500 species of plants. Since it is winter, you might just spot migratory birds too! Pay ₹300 for a one-day trip and visit the forests, wet lands and grasslands around Nashik (food included). Contact: Bishwarup Raha on 09422272059.

Bishwarup Raha,
Nashik, Maharashtra

FOREST WATCH!

STEELING FORESTS

THE PROTECTOR: Abhay Sahoo is the spearhead of the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti. POSCO is a South

Korean steel company who has been trying (since 2005) to set up a \$12 billion dollar steel plant in the forests of Jagatsinghpur, Orissa. Abhay Sahoo, as part of the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS or the anti-POSCO movement), has been working hard to keep them at bay. He says that much of the forest land given to the project is the basis of the villagers' livelihood; and the government has signed it away without consulting them. Sahoo began spreading awareness about POSCO's project across the villages that would

be affected through public speeches and began organising villagers to fight for their land.

HIS STORY: He has faced *lathi* charges, goons and bombs and been arrested twice. All to save the forest lands from POSCO. In 2005, the day the Orissa government was to sign the deal with the Koreans, Sahoo was arrested for the first time. Sahoo says, "As soon as the deal was signed, we were released."

"Out of the 4004 acres of land to be given, almost 3000 acres is coastal forest land," Sahoo reveals, "The locals don't have land of their own. They grow cashew nut, betel nuts etc - crops that are forest-friendly on this forest land.

That is their livelihood. Almost 22,000 villagers and 4,000 families would be displaced and lose their livelihood." In 2006, the government came up with a rehabilitation and resettlement plan for the people, but Sahoo wasn't satisfied. In 2008, Sahoo was imprisoned again for 10 long months, in handcuffs the whole time. "The people and

their cause kept me motivated through it all," claims Sahoo. The fight continues despite the police retaliation, complete with tear gas and *lathis*. A new committee was set up in 2010 to analyse the villagers' perspective. "Now we're waiting for Jairam Ramesh's (Environment Minister) decision on January 31," he concludes.



Abhay Sahoo,
Paradip, Orissa

Villagers carry out an anti-POSCO padyatra

