



Befriending Nature: The Leaf That Smiles

M.Arif* and Dr. Rehana Arif

**Adjunct Professor in Life Science,
Pemraj Sarda College, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra*

Abstract: We live with trees, are surrounded by them, yet just how often do we stop to consider how important they are to all life on earth? Perhaps it's because they have become such a common element of our lives that we often take them for granted. But doing so is increasingly at our peril. Things like extensive deforestation and invasive species are just some of the many threats to flora across the planet...threats we can neither ignore nor sustain.

If it weren't for plants and trees, the history of Human race would read differently. And yet, we have no reservations about bringing them down. Because they are primeval, they outlive us, they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence.

Keywords: Life, Trees, Deforestation, Renewable natural resource, Aesthetically pleasing, Spiritual existence.

The great poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of trees, "The wonder is, we see these trees and we don't wonder more."

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1. The Grandeur of Trees

A tree is essentially the opposite of the way we breathe. A tree in fact takes what we exhale and use it for its own purpose, and it exhale what we need most- the oxygen. One tree can support ten people, so if you were to put a cover over this tree along with ten other people, you wouldn't need oxygen to be pumped in that would already be taken care of by the tree itself.

This giant that towers 50 feet or more above your head and has a rustling green canopy the size of a circus tent started life as a miniscule seed, a fragile sapling. In almost total silence, over a period of almost 50 years or more, it grew drawing only carbon-di-oxide from the air and sunlight to construct its graceful cathedral like structure. And in the process, sustained a host of other life forms; ants that cruise back and forth like traffic on highways, myriads of beetles, bugs and grubs buried under the bark, birds and mammals that help themselves to succulent leaves, delicious berries, yummy fruits and nutritious seeds. And build homes in them. Bees and wasps busy foraging nectar making honey and splendid job of pollination and generations of children who take joy in swarming up them.

All the while the trees get on with its own business- pumping up water from deep underground, its leaves producing food, starch and sugars, through the magic of photosynthesis—while

emitting oxygen as waste product (a waste product of a plant is life sustainer element of all animals) enabling us to live, its mesh of roots holding the very earth together.

Its flowers, often dazzling and fragrant, attract insects and a wide array of life with treats of nectar and pollen. Fruits, bursting with sweet juice, are dangled enticingly to tempt birds, bats and other animals which in return, scatter its seeds far and wide. On top of that it air conditions and purifies the environment too and provides shade on blistering days.

And nearly every part of it – roots, leaves and bark has some medicinal value. Remember Quinine the drug that saved mankind from the epidemics of malaria or the leaves of Holy basil that takes care of your blood pressure.

2. Environmental Impact

Can any human made factory emulate that? Can we produce anything at all, without making an ungodly din or fouling our surroundings?

The arboreal impact on the rest of environment too is of vital significance. They provide food, help prevent soil erosion and flooding and filter water. The economic footprint on human society is also remarkable. A relatively young tree of 50 years can have a big impact. A tree is an incredible natural resource humanity have inherited.

Even in death, trees provide life for many species of insects and animals. Trees eventually die, they fall down and they decompose. And that makes an environment for, whether it be insects on the ground or debris for animals, they derive food from it, can make their nests and things like that. It just works hand in hand, it's a lot better with trees. If you didn't have trees, you wouldn't have a lot of animals. They are the excellent example of plant animal association, an ecosystem that make possible life to prosper and evolve.

Trees also provide intangibles. They're aesthetically pleasing, just good to be around. This is something that artists and writers have extolled for centuries, the effect on the human soul that a simple walk in the woods can provide. Remember William Wordsworth 'The woods are lovely dark and deep and I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep'. You feel much better, you see in a walk through the woods, you see animals interacting with vegetation, birds you know and things like that. It just makes that a much more peaceful situation, instead of walking through a parking lot and there's nothing there at all."

Trees are a renewable natural resource and on an individual level, it's easy for anyone to plant a tree. This little action alone, just putting a tree that might have a two-inch wide trunk in the ground is a huge, huge thing that you're doing. And you just don't even think of it that way. You think, OK, I put that tree in the ground, some day it will get big, that's great, move on. But what you've just done is you've created an incredible amount of value back to the environment by what you've just done."

So the next time you pass a tree, take pause and consider the deep roots that bind the soil and add fertility to it, the branches reaching the sky saturating the immediate surrounding with oxygen and moisture, the leaves displaying their beauty...and say a little thanks for all they give.

3. Conclusion

We need to look at trees as part of the human element. It shouldn't be a separate situation, where you live your life and the tree lives its life. We have co-existed on this planet since time immemorial and must we co-exist now, and for this we don't need to do anything special, just be benign to it. Trees contribute so much to our lives, we really have to give it something back.

Because they are primeval, they outlive us, they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence.

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Article received: Mar 17, 2016

Article approved: Sept 19, 2016

No of words: 1354

