



Chapter 4

The Story of Amrita

This is a true story from long long ago. Almost three hundred years ago, in a village called Khejadli, lived Amrita. Khejadli village is near Jodhpur in Rajasthan. The village got its name because of the many *Khejadi* trees that grew there.

The people of this village took great care of the plants, trees and animals. Goats, deers, hares and peacocks roamed fearlessly there. The people of the village remembered what their elders used to tell them. They used to say, “*Agar perh hain to hum hain.* Plants and animals can survive without us, but we can not survive without them.”

For the teacher: Encourage children to locate Rajasthan on the map of India.



Amrita's Friends

Amrita would get up early every morning and greet her friends – the trees. She would choose a special tree for the day. She would put her arms around the tree trunk and whisper to the tree, “Friend, you are strong and beautiful. You care for us. Thank you tree. I love you very much. Give your strength to me also.”

Like Amrita, the other children also had their special trees. They would play for hours in the shade of the trees.

- Is there a place near your house, school or along the road side, where trees have been planted?
- Why were they planted there?

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- Have you seen anyone taking care of the trees? Who does this?

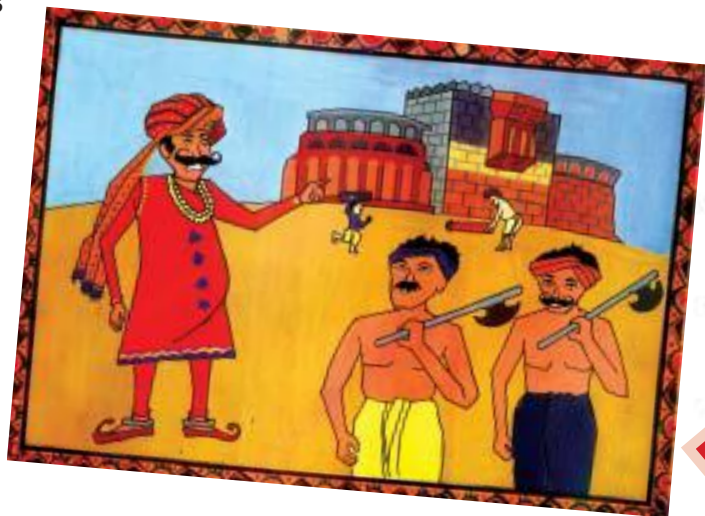
- Have you seen fruits on any of the trees? Who eats these fruits?

- Lalita feels that grass and small plants growing near her school wall have not been planted by anyone. Do you know of any place where grass, small plants or trees are growing on their own without being planted?

- Why do you feel they are growing on their own?

Trees in Danger

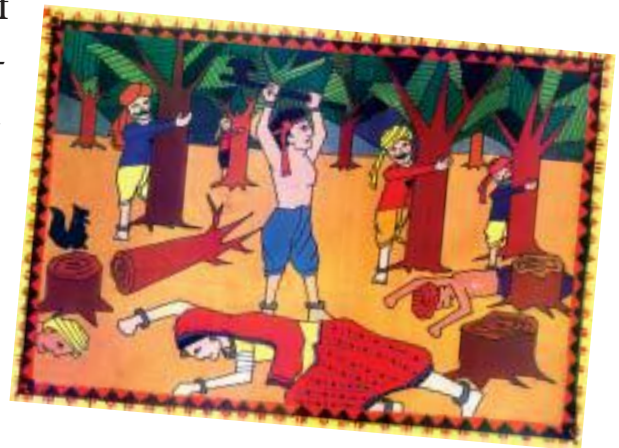
Time went by. Amrita was now grown up. One day she went to greet her trees. She saw that there were some strangers in her village. They had axes with them. They said that the King had sent them to cut trees for wood. The wood was needed for building the King's palace.





Amrita was shocked. She went to the tree that the men were about to cut. She put her arms around the tree and hugged it tightly. The men shouted and threatened her, but Amrita did not let go of the tree.

The King's men had to follow his order. They had to cut the tree. On seeing this, Amrita's daughters and hundreds of villagers—old and young—hugged the trees to protect them. Many people including Amrita and her daughters died to save the trees.

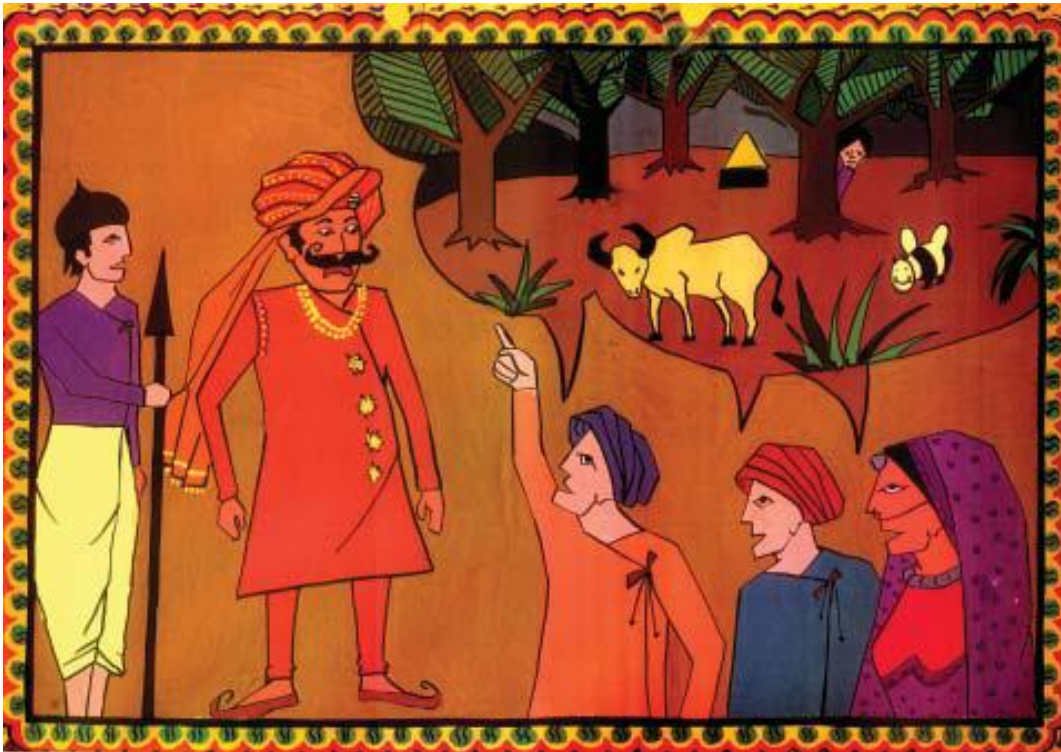


When the King heard of this, he could not believe that people gave up their lives for trees. He visited the village himself. There he learned about villagers' respect for trees and animals.

- Do you remember what the elders of this village used to say?
- Do you think we could survive if there were no trees and no animals? Discuss this in your class.

The Village is Protected

The villagers' strong feelings for trees affected the King greatly. He ordered that from then on, no tree would be cut and no animal harmed in that area. Even today, almost three hundred years later, the people of this area, called Bishnois, continue to



protect plants and animals. Even though in the middle of the desert, this area is green and animals roam freely without fear.

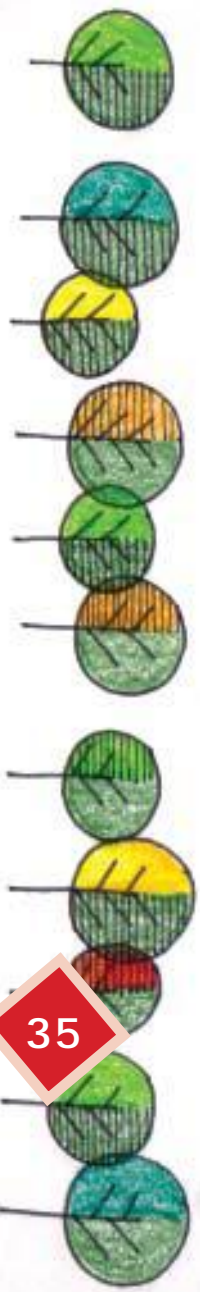
- Do you remember that in Class III, you had made a tree your friend? How is your friend now?
 - Why don't you make a new friend this year? Have you seen how your friends—the trees, change in some ways, in different months of a year.

Write about any one tree.

- Does the tree flower?

- Do the flowers remain on the tree throughout the year?

- In which month do their leaves fall?



- Do fruits grow on the tree?

- In which months do they grow?

- Have you eaten these fruits?

Sometime back you have read in the newspapers or seen on TV how some film actors had to face legal action for hunting a blackbuck.

Discuss

- Why do people hunt?
- There are rules against hunting of some animals. People can be punished for hunting. Why do you think there is this punishment?

Talk to your grandparents and find out –

- Which birds did they see around them when they were of your age?

- Have the number of some of these birds become less?

- Are there some birds or animals which they can not see any more?

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- Shanti's grandfather told her that when he was a small child he saw more birds like sparrows and *mynah* than he sees today. Can you make two guesses why their numbers have become less?

The *Khejadi* tree was the most common tree that grew in Amrita's village. Which kind of trees can you see a lot of, in your area? Name two such trees.

- Find out more about these trees from your elders.

The *Khejadi* tree is found mainly in desert areas. It can grow without much water. Its bark is used for making medicines. People cook and eat its fruits (beans). Its wood is such that it will not be affected by insects. Animals in this area eat the leaves of the *Khejadi*. And children like you, play in its shade.

For the teacher: Encourage children to ask their elders about animals and insects. Discuss with the children about the reducing number of birds due to changes in the environment.

