

CARING FOR NATURE

tagore

AND THE SONG OF THE CRAZY WIND

Subhadra Sen Gupta
Illustrations by Tapas Guha



From the desk of Dr R K Pachauri

Today, as a nation, India has reached a stage of prosperity, which perhaps exceeds our aspirations set just a few decades ago. However, this "progress" has come at a price – in terms of destruction of our natural resources and other serious problems resulting from global climate change – melting glaciers, heat waves, floods, droughts, and so on.

All this provides a valid reason for us to re-examine our present. An effective way to do that is to learn from our past. Flipping through the pages of our rich history, it doesn't take us long to come across individuals who had realized the importance of caring for nature. From sowing the seeds of a minimal-waste lifestyle and growing gardens of medicinal herbs to spreading the message of protecting biodiversity through poems and plays, people from various walks of life, at different times in the past, have left behind important lessons about conserving our environment.

The world is now in the hands of the next generation. It is up to them to bring about a change in the general outlook towards the environment. The first step towards that goal is to make them understand the importance of nature and nurturing it.

Caring for Nature is aimed at providing readers with precious knowledge and wisdom from the pages of our history. I hope that those who read these books will not only enjoy them, but also feel inspired by the historical figures mentioned herein to take care of the environment today so that we can have a beautiful, clean and peaceful tomorrow.



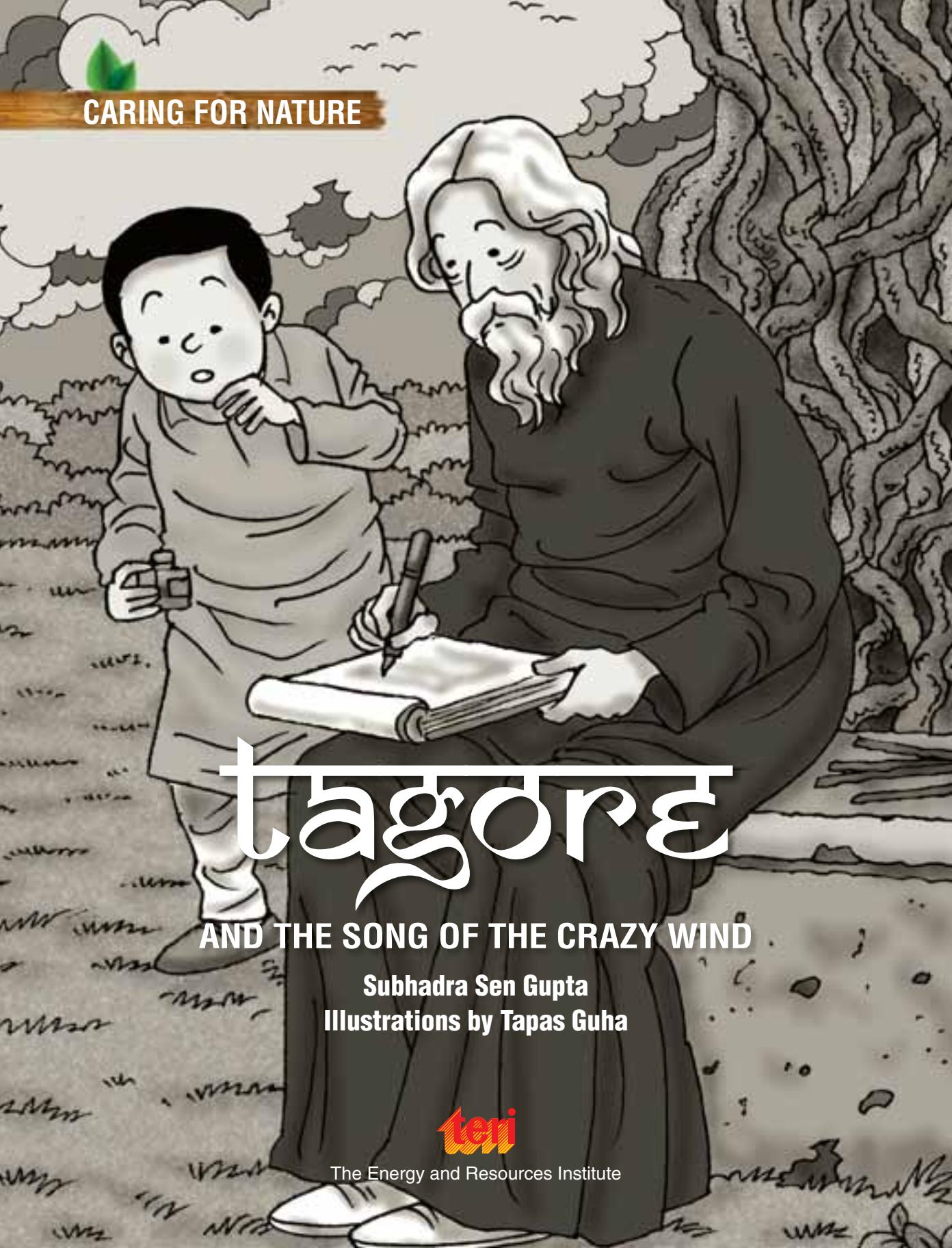
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The Energy and Resources Institute



An imprint of The Energy and Resources Institute

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First published in 2014 by
The Energy and Resources Institute
TERI Press

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Email: teripress@teri.res.in ■ Website: <http://bookstore.teriin.org>

ISBN 978-81-7993-465-4

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Publishing Head: Anupama Jauhry
Editorial and Production Teams: Rupak Ghosh, Himanshi Sharma;
Aman Sachdeva
Design Team: Santosh Gautam, Vijay Kumar
Image Researcher: Shilpa Mohan

Printed and bound in India

This book is printed on recycled paper.



the champa flower

*Supposing I became a champa flower,
just for fun, and grew on a branch
high up that tree, and shook in the
wind with laughter and danced upon
the newly budded leaves, would you
know me, mother?*

*You would call, "Baby, where are
you?" and I should laugh to
myself and keep quite quiet.*

*I should slyly open my petals and
watch you at your work.*

*When after your bath, with wet hair
spread on your shoulders, you walked
through the shadow of the champa
tree to the little court where you
say your prayers, you would notice
the scent of the flower, but not
know that it came from me.*

*When after the midday meal you sat
at the window reading Ramayana, and
the tree's shadow fell over your hair
and your lap, I should fling my wee
little shadow on to the page of your
book, just where you were reading.
But would you guess that it was the
tiny shadow of your little child?*

*When in the evening you went to the
cowshed with the lighted lamp in
your hand, I should suddenly drop
on to the earth again and be your
baby once more, and beg you to tell
me a story.*

*"Where have you been, you
naughty child?"*

*"I won't tell you, mother." That's
what you and I would say then.*

The Crescent Moon (Child Poems)
By Rabindranath Tagore





Badal thought his new school was strange. In his old school in Calcutta, the classroom had walls, a ceiling, a door, and two windows. There was a row of wooden desks, chairs, and a blackboard in front.

After looking all around, he asked his new teacher Saratda, "Where is my school, Patha Bhavan, sir?"

Saratda's eyes gleamed with amusement behind his glasses. "This is Patha Bhavan, Badal."

"But... where is my classroom? I am in class four!"

"This is your classroom."

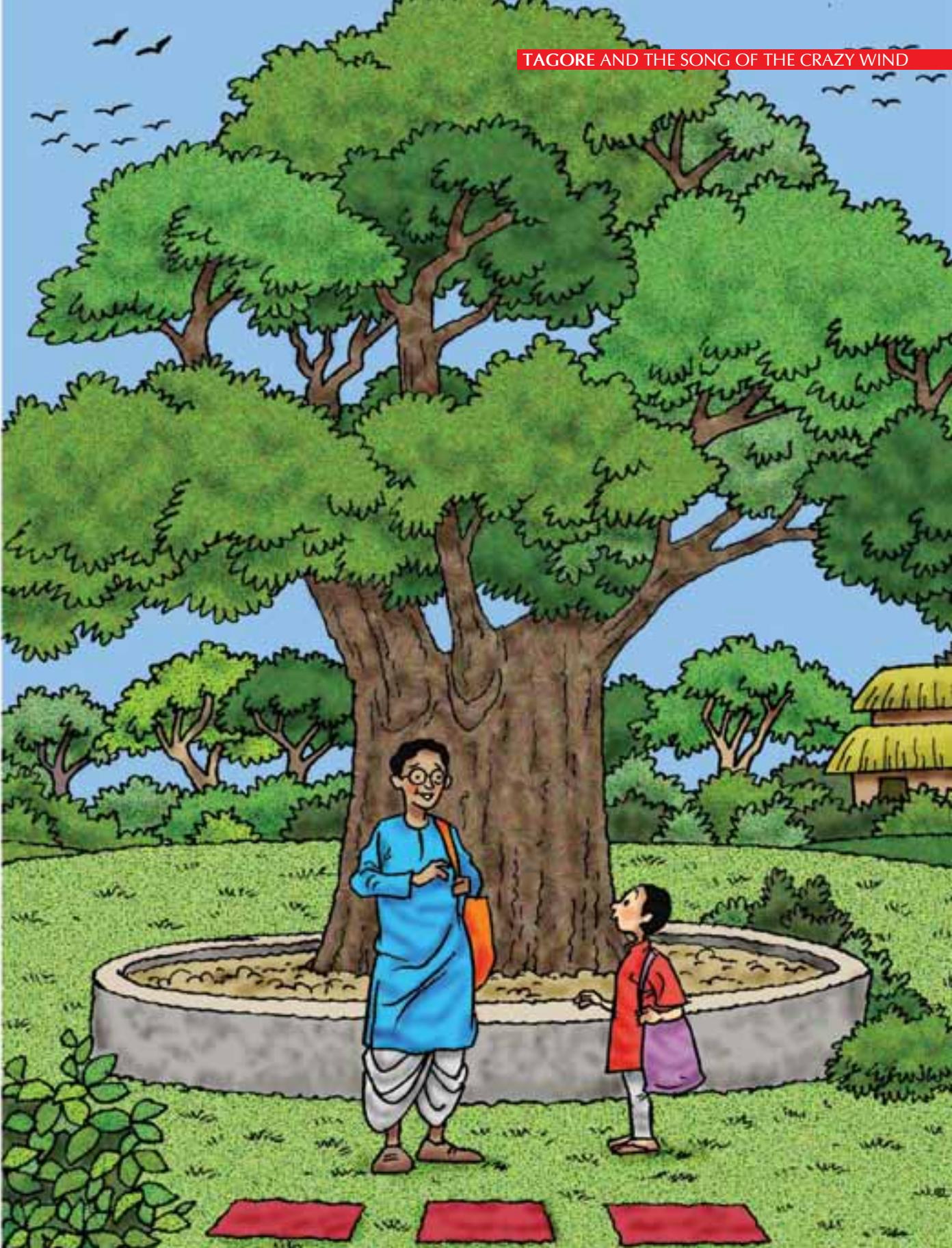
Badal looked up at his teacher, convinced Saratda was joking. "We are standing under a tree, sir! Where is my desk, the blackboard? Where is your chair?"

"You sit there", Saratda pointed to a row of mats on the grass. "And I will sit here", he waved at the cemented area that encircled the base of the tree. "And before you ask, the blackboard is on its way, and I have lots of chalk in my pockets."

Soon two of Badal's classmates arrived, carrying a small folding blackboard. He noticed that none of them carried a school bag. They just had a few notebooks and books. With a puzzled shake of his head, Badal sat down with them as Saratda began a history lesson.

"Ah, well", he sighed to himself. "It is odd but kind of nice too. Imagine listening to a bird singing, while learning about King Ashoka!"

TAGORE AND THE SONG OF THE CRAZY WIND





Badal's family had recently shifted to Santiniketan. It had a school called "Patha Bhavan" and a college named "Vidya Bhavan". His father taught in the college.

One afternoon, he decided to explore the garden of their small cottage. Their gardener Ramua kaka¹ - a bent old man with a deeply lined face - was working in a corner.

Badal squatted beside him. "What are you doing, Ramua kaka?"

"I'm going to plant a tree."

Badal, who had lived all his life in a first-floor flat on a busy Calcutta street, knew nothing about trees, except a few names.

"Ah! An oak or a pine?"

Ramua stopped digging. "Ook? Pi... what? Are those trees?"

"They grow in England", Badal gave a knowing smile.

"Well, this is Birbhum in Bengal, and I'm planting a mango tree."

"Great! Then we'll eat lots of mangoes next summer, no?"

Ramua began to laugh. "You really know nothing Badlu!

The mango sapling I'll plant is only two-hands high. It has to grow big and tall to bear fruit. That takes years and years."

Badal looked thoughtful. "But... by then I'd be all grown up!"

"Very true! So, you'd better work in Santiniketan like your Baba² and watch your tree grow."

Badal liked the idea. One day, when he will have a moustache like his Baba, he would tell his friends, "Would you like some mangoes from my tree?"

Ramua handed him a spade. "Now, start digging."

¹Kaka: uncle

²Baba: father





Badal never knew gardening could be so much fun. Soon, his hands and knees were muddy, his white *kurta*¹ had brown patches where he had wiped his fingers, and he even had mud in his hair! He loved the cool, soft, grainy feel of the deep-red soil and the earthy smell when they poured water on it.

The mango sapling now sat in a small puddle looking rather droopy and sad. But Ramua kaka said that soon it would be standing straight and sprouting new leaves.

When he strolled happily back home, his mother uttered a loud shriek.

"Ohhh...! Did you fall and hurt yourself, Badal?"

"No, Ma²", he explained patiently. "I was gardening with Ramua kaka. We planted my mango tree." Then, he added proudly, "And he says good gardeners are muddy gardeners".

Meanwhile, his mother's voice was getting louder and louder.

"Mud under your nails! Is that a scratch on your arm? You need a bath right now!"

The noise made his father come out of his room. One look at his son and he began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" his Ma asked angrily. "He's dirty, there's mud everywhere... and he's looking like a village boy!"

"Good! I want my son to know a village."

"Ah", thought Badal. "Here we go again!"

This was an argument he had been listening to, since his Baba decided, against his Ma's wishes, to shift to Santiniketan.

¹Kurta: a long, loose-fitting, full-sleeved, collarless shirt of a style originating in India

²Ma: mother

Caring for Nature : Tagore and the song of the crazy wind (A story that celebrates nature)



Publisher : TERI Press

ISBN : 9788179934654

Author : Subhadra Sen
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Type the URL : <http://www.kopykitab.com/product/8355>



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