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NATURE CENTERED LITERARY WORKS AND GLOBAL ISSUE ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

FLYING WITH MOON ON THEIR WINGS

Bird Migration is the regular seasonal journey undertaken by many species of birds. At a particular season thousands of birds travel from one place to another. One of the greatest mysteries of bird life is migration or travelling. Every year, during autumn and early winter, birds travel from their breeding haunts in the northern regions of Asia, Europe and America to the southern, warmer lands. They make the return journey again during spring and early summer. They are very punctual too, unless they are delayed by the weather. We may calculate almost to a day when we may expect our bird friends to return, carrying winter on their backs. Some species also move out of one area into another, not very far away. All birds have a certain amount of local movements, caused by the stresses of living and the variations in food supply. This kind of movement is particularly noticeable in North India where the seasons are well defined.

Birds which spend the summer in the higher reaches of mountains come down during the winter to the lower foothills or even the plains. This type is very common within India where the mighty Himalayas lie close to the Indo-Gangetic plain.

The brave little voyagers face many dangers and hardships while travelling long, long distances through the air over hill, forest and plain and over large stretches of water. Sometimes sudden storms arise and drive them far out of their course. Often they are blown right out to sea and they drown in the wild waves. Sometimes at night bright lights attract and confuse the birds.

Migrating birds do not fly at their fastest. The migration speed is usually from 48 to 64 km an hour and rarely exceeds 80 km per hour. Small birds seldom exceed 48 km per hour, most shore birds fly between 64 and 80 km per hour, while many

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ducks travel at 80 to 96 km per hour. Migrants generally fly at a distance under 900 meters, but some travellers have been found sometimes at greater heights.

Some birds make the long journey in easy states, stopping to rest on the way. Others fly great distances without pausing to rest and feed. Some fly by day, some both by day and by night, but most of them speed on their way through darkness after the sun has set.

Birds usually travel in flocks. The 'V' shaped formation of cranes and geese attracts much attention as the birds speed across the sky. Swallows, flycatchers, warblers, shorebirds and water birds begin to gather in flocks, each with its own kind and after a great deal of excited fluttering, twittering and calling, they rise up into the air and away they go.

Birds were seen moving from one place to another with the change in seasons from the earliest times, but people had strange ideas as to why the birds travelled or where they went. To explain their absence from a place in a particular season, they said that the birds buried themselves in the mud and slept there throughout the winter.

Later, detailed studies of migration started. Information was gained by directly observing the habits of birds, and also by ringing. Bird movements are also studied by creating artificial conditions and studying their effects on birds.

Today, most of the information on migration has come from ringing young and adult birds. Ringing is done by capturing a bird and placing on its leg a light band of metal or plastic. The band bears a number, date, Identification mark and the address to which the finder is requested to return the ring. The bird is then set free. The place where such a bird is shot, captured or found dead, gives a clue to the direction and locality to which the birds has migrated.

Ringing has proved that birds cover large distances. There is some evidence to believe that the woodcock on its winter movements flies the Himalayas to the Nilgiris without a pause, a distance of 2,400 km. The wild duck comes to our lakes from Central Asia and Siberia flying 3,200 to 4,800 km over the Himalayas. The rosy pastor comes from Eastern Europe or Central Asia. The wagtail, about the size of a sparrow, comes from the Himalayan regions and Central Asia to the plains. Smallest of all, the willow warbler, half the size of a sparrow, covers as many as 3,200 km to reach us every winter.

Why do birds migrate in spite of heavy loss of life on the way? Primarily to escape the bitter cold and a restricted food supply. In the case of water birds, the

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food supply disappears altogether, when the water freezes and the fish and other seafood are difficult to obtain. The main reason for the spring movement is the availability of nesting sites and the need to escape summer heat.

The migration of birds is a fascinating study indeed, and there are many unsolved problems which lie ahead. For example, how do the birds know when to start? How do they know their way over the sea without any landmarks? How do they manage to return year after year to the same locality? How do the young cuckoos join the adult birds without previous experience, and without any guidance from adult cuckoos which fly to India and Africa several weeks before the young cuckoos are ready to leave their foster parents? These and many more such interesting questions lie ahead of you to solve!

WILL THIRST BECOME –UNQUENCHABLE?

1. It is not yet noon in Delhi, Just 180 miles south of the Himalayan glaciers. But in the narrow corridors of Nehru Camp, a slum in this city of 16 million, the blast furnace of the north Indian summer has already sent temperatures soaring past 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Chaya, the 25-year-old wife of a fortune teller, has spent seven hours joining the mad scramble for water that even today defines life in this heaving metropolis and offers a taste of what the depletion of Tibet's water and ice portends.
2. Chaya's day began long before sunrise, when she and her five children fanned out in the darkness, armed with plastic jugs of every size. After day break, the rumour of a tap with running water sent her stumbling in a panic through the slum's narrow corridors. Now, with her containers still empty and the sun blazing overhead, she has returned home for a moment's rest. Asked if she's eaten anything today, she laughs: "We haven't even had any tea yet."
3. Suddenly cries erupt - a water truck has been spotted. Chaya leaps up and joins the human torrent in the street. A dozen boys swarm onto a blue tanker, jamming houses in and siphoning the water out. Below, shouting women jostle for position with their containers. In six minutes the tanker is empty. Chaya arrived too late and must move on to chase the next rumour of water.
4. More than two-thirds of the city's water is drawn from the Yamuna and the Ganges, rivers fed by Himalayan ice. If that ice disappears, the future will almost certainly be worse. "We are facing an unsustainable situation," says Diwan

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- Singh, a Delhi environmental activist. "Soon - not in thirty years but in five to ten - there will be an exodus because of the lack of water."
5. The tension already seethes. In the clogged alleyway around one of Nehru Camp's last functioning taps, which run for one hour a day, a man punches a woman who cut in line, leaving a purple welt on her face.
 6. "We wake up every morning fighting over water," says Kamal Bhate, a local astrologer watching the melee. This one dissolves into shouting and finger-pointing, but the brawls can be deadly. In a nearby slum a teenage boy was recently beaten to death for cutting in line.
 7. Climatic changes and diminishing water supplies could reduce cereal yields in South Asia by 5 percent within three decades. "We're going to see rising tension over shared water resources, including political disputes between farmers, between farmers and cities, and between human and ecological demands for water," says Peter Gleick, a water expert and President of the Pacific Institute in Oakland, California. "And I believe more of these tensions will lead to violence."
 8. For the people in Nehru Camp, geopolitical concerns are lost in the frenzied pursuit of water. In the afternoon, a tap outside the slum is suddenly turned on, and Chaya, smiling triumphantly, hauls back a full, ten-gallon jug on top of her head. The water is dirty and bitter, and there are no means to boil it.
 9. But now, at last, she can give her children their first meal of the day: a place of bread and a few spoonfuls of lentil stew. "They should be studying, but we keep shooing them away to find water," Chaya says. "We have no choice, because who knows if we'll find enough water tomorrow."

GOING FOR WATER

(Refer "Figures Of Speech")

SWEPT AWAY

The young Frenchwoman stepped out of her flooded house
and disappeared beneath the water

"Come on, We've got to get out of here now", Serge urged his partner Celine. Flood water that had poured into their little terraced home was already 30 centimetres deep and rising. The couple had lifted the sofa onto the dining table and stacked as many other possessions as they could out of the reach of the filthy water.

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It was 2:15 pm on Monday, September 22, 2003 and the small town of Lunel in southern France had been battered violent storms since mid-morning.

Council worker Serge, 43 and 32-year old Celine, a home help, had lived most of their lives in Lunel which stands only a few metres above sea level. The flat, marshy area, floods frequently. This was the second time in just over a year that the couple had found the home invaded by water.

Serge and Celine stepped out into the street, now a fast-flowing thigh-high river. They waded across the road and Celine stepped over a low hedge which separated the street from the pavement. Serge was following close behind when he saw Celine fall. In an instant she had disappeared below the water.

“She’s dead”, he thought. “It’s all over. All they’ll find is her body later”. Celine felt herself being pulled under the water. Instinctively, she reached up for Serge’s hand. She felt his grasp but her relief was short-lived as his hand slipped away.

She couldn’t understand what was happening. She was being swept along underwater, helpless and swallowing mouthfuls of the filthy liquid. She couldn’t breathe. “I’m going to die”, she thought. “I’m drowning. There’s no way I can survive this”. Then she found that she could breathe again. In the dim light, she could see that she was about ten metres from the manhole through which she had plunged, but the current made it impossible to swim back.

She was in a two-metre wide concrete storm drain which was almost completely filled with water and it was still rising. Across the drain stretched a small plastic pipe. Further on, the tunnel was completely black.

“I’ve got to try to grab that pipe”, Celine thought. “I’ve got to keep myself as high out of the water as I can”.

Slippery though it was, she managed to grasp the pipe. With supreme effort she pulled the upper part of her body out of the water and manoeuvred herself against the wall to stop herself being swept further along the drain.

Above ground, Serge panicked. “Help, help!” he cried, wading as fast as he could to his nearest neighbour’s house. “Quick! Celine’s been sucked down a drain! I’ve got to go back, I’ve got to get her out”.

“No,” said Louise Martinez, who lived opposite the couple. “We’ll ring the fire brigade.”

Drenched and freezing cold, Celine hung on. Thoughts came to her almost like photographs. She could see her daughter Amandine turning to blow her a kiss as she hurried into school. “I’ll never see her again”, she thought. She wouldn’t be

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there to celebrate Amandine's twelfth birthday in two weeks time. "No!" she said to herself. "I've got to be there for her. I've got to survive".

And then there was Serge. She thought of the squabble they'd had that morning. Now all she could think of was that Serge would have to tell Amandine that her mother was dead. How will he tell her? she wondered.

It didn't bear thinking about. She couldn't let it happen. "I've got to fight to the very end".

The firemen finally managed to battle through the floods about an hour after they had received the call alerting them to Celine's disappearance. They shone torches down the manhole and probed with metal rods but there was no sign of the missing woman.

As she hung from the pipe, Celine saw a bright light. It was the firemen, she realized, shining powerful torches down the manhole. She started tapping on the pipe and battering the walls with her hands and arms, "I'm here!" she shouted. "Come and get me out."

She watched as the firemen lowered metal rods, and she tried hard to shout above the noise of the racing water.

Then, to her astonishment and anger, the lights and rods disappeared. It was black now in the drain and she felt objects smashing against her - bags, branches the contents of bins, all swept away in the flood.

Unable to feel her legs, she knew she couldn't hold on to the pipe any longer. "I've got to do something", she thought. The water level had dropped to her chest.

"There's got to be an exit further on", she reckoned. "All this water has got to go somewhere. Perhaps there's a grill". If it was shut she could be smashed to pieces against it, but if it was open she would be free. She had to find out.

After a while, she was able to touch the bottom of the drain with her feet. The pipe had narrowed. Her hopes rose until suddenly her face smashed against something hard protruding from the wall-an iron bar.

Celine lost consciousness for a moment and came round to find herself once more going under the water. At the same time she could feel something above her. It seemed to be pieces of plastic hanging down from the roof. She grabbed one.

Soon the water picked up speed, the current became more and more difficult to resist and Celine could no longer walk. Forced on her back, she once again felt herself being sucked along, out of control.

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She couldn't hold on to the plastic any longer. She felt her body being thrown around by the water, turning over and over in the icy deluge. Her shoulder, then her legs and knees, slammed against the concrete wall. Still being buffeted by the terrifying force of the storm water, Celine did not immediately realise that she was in the open air. Night was falling. Then reality hit her. "I'm outside! I'm outside"! She thought jubilantly.

She was in ditch whose water had over flowed in to a large flooded area, with houses on one side and field on the other. She grabbed some tufts of grass and reeds but, still unable to lift herself out of the torrent, she screamed for help.

Above the roaring of the water, she heard a man's voice. Jack Poderoso, a 45-year old teacher, was standing on concrete platform just above the storm drain exit, checking that his daughter's horse was all right. "Is there someone down there?" he shouted.

"Yes, I'm here, I'm here," Celine yelled back, "What's the time?"

"It's after 7pm", he replied.

Celine was amazed. "Have I been down here for five hours?"

"Ring Serge," She shouted, "Tell him I'm alive. He thinks I'm dead."

Jack could see that the woman was weak and still in danger. "No, calm down" he said, "You've got to get out of that river."

Celine managed to heave herself onto the muddy bank, but there was still no way Jack could reach her.

Jack forced Celine to give him Serge's number, repeating it figure by figure above the water's roar. When nobody answered, Celine managed to recall Serge's brother's number. Celine's head ached but, urged on by Jack, she dragged herself to her feet.

Then she heard another voice, inquiring "Where's the body?" It was a fireman bearing a bag. It was after 8 pm when Serge arrived at Lunel's fire station.

A fire engine pulled up outside. The doors opened. Inside sat Celine, her hair wet and bedraggled, her face battered. She had no voice left. She could only collapse weeping into Serge's arms.

No one can understand how Celine survived. She has her own theory. "When I want something, I'm very determined. I wanted to be there for my daughter and for Serge."

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GAIA TELLS HER TALES

I'm Gaia, the personification of the primordial mother Earth. I am known by many names in different languages and in different places. The Greeks call me Gala, the Indians call me Bhoomi Matha and the English call me Earth. I am a huge ball in space spinning at a rapid pace while revolving round the Sun. Do you know how old I am? I was a part of the sun, millions of years ago. Following the big bang that occurred in the cosmos, I fell apart.

In the early years of my life, I was a land mass called Pangea and a big water mass called Panthalassa, which covers two-thirds of my surface. Due to gravity, I am able to hold everything in its place! I am the only life supporting planet in the universe. Scientists are peering through their telescopes even as I am speaking; checking to see whether there is any other planet with life in it. Research is still on! In the beginning when there were just plants growing and animals wandering all over me, life was very peaceful. There existed a natural rhythm that bound the entire species of life. There was peace and there was abundance, assuring the survival of every creature.

Of Course, I was very happy when man arrived, I was proud that a superior creature had come to protect and care for me. He not only admired me but also worshipped me with utmost reverence. Even when your tribe increased, I had no problem because the ecosystem was still well-balanced and intact. I have a large heart-large enough to accommodate all of you. However when you became greedy and under the pretext of development exploited all the natural resources indiscriminately, my trouble began. I am deeply concerned about the way my resources are being ravaged. You do not replenish what you consume.

You all know it is getting hotter by the day and as a result my glaciers are melting, my forests burning, my rivers drying up and my animals dying. You are indifferent to your own actions. You have also turned a deaf ear to the cry of my creatures. Where have your warmth and your love for nature disappeared?

You read the newspapers and journals and watch documentaries about environmental pollution. Many of the rarest of species have become extinct and some are on the verge of extinction! Who is to be held responsible for this pathetic state of affairs? The ozone gas that acts like a canopy, protecting you all from the harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun is depleting. The use of aerosol sprays has led to the increase of CFC content in the atmosphere and has eroded the ozone layer at the

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poles. As a result, an expanding hole has been created in the ozone layer. Many deadly diseases such as cancer are caused due to this damage.

My forests are very important for your survival. The trees bind the soil and preserve it. They bring about rain filling up lakes, ponds and rivers. You cut down trees mindlessly to meet your immediate needs. The act of deforestation has reduced the forest area to a considerable extent. The animals which inhabited these forests have been rendered homeless.

How are you planning to address these problems? Do you think that nature will regenerate all by herself? Are you going to turn a blind eye to these dangers? Are you going to surrender to the circumstances in despair? Don't you have the wherewithal to bring back the glorious past? Nothing is impossible for you, but the choice is yours. As a mother it is my duty to warn you of the impending dangers of neglecting me. Even your own scientists concur with my views. How can I put up with the sight of my own children being poisoned and their safety being threatened? You may be careless, but how can a mother afford to be indifferent?

You have to put a stop to this slide for your own welfare. To begin with, I shall suggest certain measures that you can easily implement in your everyday life.

- ✓ Use eco-friendly vehicles such as bicycles and solar cars. Prefer public transport to private conveyance. Adopt car pooling system.
- ✓ Plant saplings to commemorate any celebration.
- ✓ Choose bio-degradable products over synthetic ones.
- ✓ Maximise the use of natural light. Conserve power by switching off electrical and electronic and electronic appliances when not in use.
- ✓ Do not waste water. Harvest rain water. Recycle bathroom water for your kitchen garden.

My dear little children, I love you so much as I loved your parents in the past. That is the reason I'm here, narrating my tale. Also I remind you of your responsibility of protecting your own sweet home-your only abode in the immense universe! Seek to restore the harmony of the bygone days.

I'm not mere ball of mud, water and minerals. I too possess a body and mind, a heart and soul-just like you. It is you who keep me alive. I live in you; I live with you; I live for you!