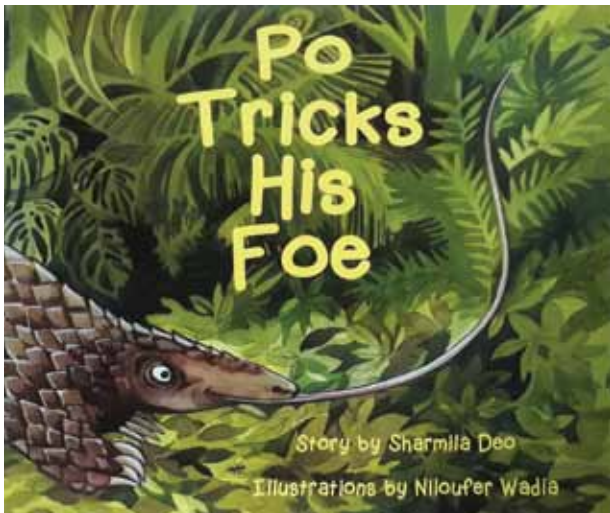


# Entertaining, educating, enriching

Geetha Iyer

In the late 1980s, my husband and I used to search for books on plants and animals for our children, when they were young. All the books that were exciting and interesting to read were mostly publications from countries other than India except an odd one here or there. This was the thought that first came to my mind as I looked at the four books that Kalpavriksh had brought out for young children. It has filled that important niche for books set in the Indian context. Now parents and teachers will not need to search like we had to. These four books I have reviewed below are a sample from about 15 books on the natural world that have been published by them. There are two books brought out in Hindi too. All of them a delight to read – quietly or aloud to children.

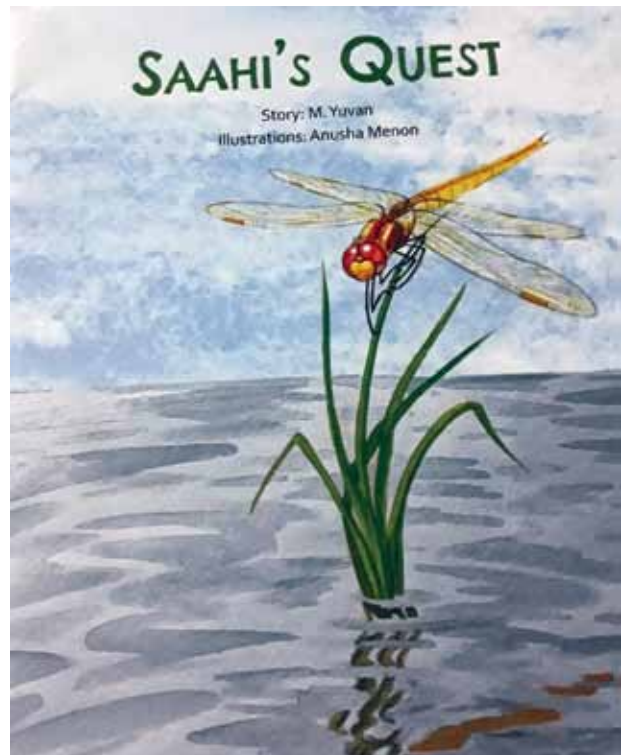
Although all the four books shared with me for this review are equally interesting, my favourite was the story of Po the pangolin. **Po Tricks His Foe** is all about the way of life of a pangolin. I particularly liked the choice of animal for the book. In school, it is always



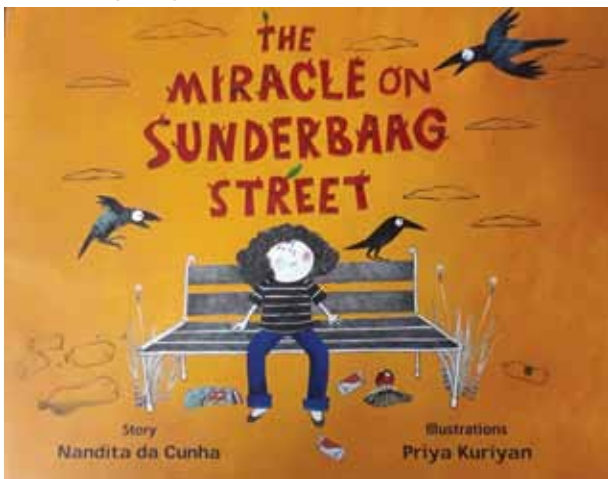
tigers, lions, elephants, peacocks, or monkeys that children are introduced to. A pangolin may find a mention more as an anteater than the quaint little animal it is. The author's narration in simple and the uncluttered language will allow the child to learn not only about the lifestyle of a pangolin but also about the forest. The words used will surely kindle the imagination and despite the illustrations create one's own idea of the forest and its denizens. This book can serve more than one purpose in a classroom. It can

be used in a language class or a science class. A math teacher can use the book to create interesting word problems. The art teacher can read out the story and then ask students to sketch, colour or paint the pangolin from their imagination. It's a book parents can use to read out loud to their children to kindle a love for reading. Priced at Rs 75, it's a steal! Makes a great gift for birthdays.

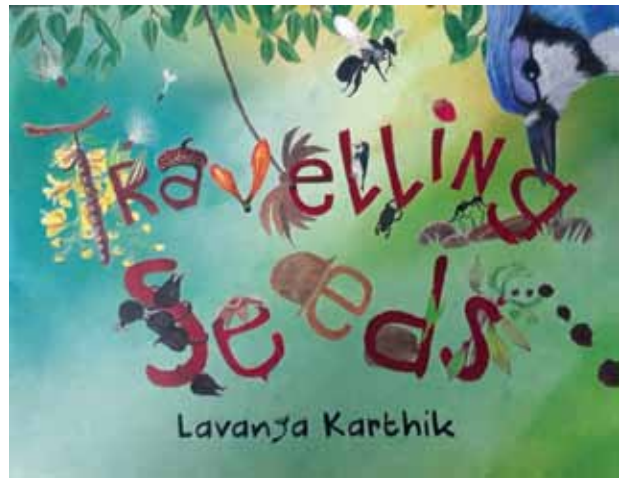
**Sahi's Quest** introduces a child to the world of insects. An early inroad into ensuring that a child will be able to resist the loathing image of insects that adults seed in them. A teacher himself, Yuvan, the author knows the pulse of young kids and is able to narrate the life of a dragonfly in a casual and friendly way. It's also a crisp and fast paced narration that will hold the attention of the child and introduce him/her to common insects. As a classroom resource, this book would serve a teacher well when he/she takes children for a nature walk. The illustrations generally follow the style one sees in most books. I felt that it could have been different with stronger strokes and bolder colours which would have made the insects look more attractive. A lovely book that parents could use to read aloud at bedtime.



**The Miracle on Sunderbaag Street** has a positive message for children (and adults). It's a story about how a place that was a garden became a dump yard and how the efforts of people led by a young girl help convert the dump yard back into a garden brimming with flowers, creatures and humans. A very touching story of hope and optimism. This story has a subtle message. Rather than cribbing and complaining about the degradation of the environment, initiatives by individuals can bring together people to move in a positive direction and slow down the degradation. The illustrations amply highlight the spirit of young Zara and other characters. This is a book that can be read aloud in a classroom, for it holds the potential to develop and nurture values without lecturing about them. Taking responsibility, working together, listening to others, etc., are some of the thoughts that will get seeded in the impressionable mind of a young child.



**Travelling seeds** is a book that provides information about seeds. This is an engaging resource that can be used by teachers in primary classes. It talks about how seeds are dispersed by wind, water, animals, etc. On a nature walk, which every teacher of primary classes must undertake, this book would serve as a useful material to be read before the walk and to be taken along during the walk. It will help children look out for seeds, may be even want to grow them which is the first step to introducing children to conservation. Several bits and pieces of information given can be used to create nature games and even a treasure hunt. The book will serve to help kids build knowledge of the natural world through observation. I only wish there were more examples from the Indian context. Since this is a book filled with information on plants and animals, it would be exciting for a child to learn how similar plants and animals are found both in South America and Asia/India. Like for example, the weta, which most people think is found in Australia and New Zealand is, in fact, found in India too. More examples from the Indian context would have made this book a more complete resource for teachers.



To these four books I would also add another I have bought for my grandson. Published by Kalpavriksh, it's called "The Poop Book". A charming and amusing book about animal dung. To the young mind it will be an eye-opener and a pleasing read. From the well-known elephant dung to the scarcely known poop of a jelly fish, kids get introduced to animals in a very novel manner. Quite a unique idea. Did you know that jewellery could be made from a moose's poop or paper from the rhinoceros dung? The book is a "gem of a poo" with more such enjoyable information. Waste will take on a new meaning in the young child's mind.

All the books mentioned above have both educational and recreational value, more of the latter which is why it will be a great hit with kids. Each with a different theme, they are a series of thoughtfully produced books for children. The language used is simple and yet elegant in ways that will help improve their language. The thoroughly enjoyable stories are touching in some ways. All of them not only introduce children to the natural world but hold the potential to spur kids into wanting to read, see and explore more. What is more heartening is that these stories bring to fore lesser heard-about creatures.

The books are also not expensive and hence multiple copies can be procured for the library. A set of these five, along with other similar books that Kalpavriksh has published, can be given away as prizes during various events. Personally speaking, I am waiting to read these stories out to my grandson. Why kids, even adults will love to read them for they manage to connect with that lingering child that is present inside all adults.

**Note:** These books can be ordered from the Kalpavriksh website, [www.kalpavriksh.org](http://www.kalpavriksh.org) or by writing to Kalpavriksh at [kvbooks@gmail.com](mailto:kvbooks@gmail.com).

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