

A reflection on time & timeless

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meanwhile

Earth Witness deciphers the ABC of climate change in a comprehensive manner. It does not preach or blame, it simply tells a story of people.

International leaders and diplomats, passionate rows over treaties, global conferences in exotic locations, activists protesting outside Z-security zones are instances that flash when climate change is mentioned these days. Amidst the high adrenalin frenzy, *Earth Witness*, a documentary by filmmaker Akanksha Joshi, reflects on the climate change through common people with a warm place for earth in their hearts. She trains her lens on the lives of people who are least responsible for the negative changes on earth but facing its direct consequences.

A father, a teacher, a

shepherd and a farmer — find themselves on the front line of earth's biggest, most complex crisis: "climate change".

Belonging to India's ancient tribes, they bear witness to the changes that affect their day-to-day life. Living in diverse climatic regions — the mountains of Nagaland, the grasslands of Kutch, the Gangetic delta and the forests of Central India — they have learnt how to be one with nature and survive. Their lives journey through the dark labyrinth of the multidimensional crisis, reflecting upon the stories of our times — of trees, mining, monkeys, logging, rivers, seeds, waterfalls, flowers — and the spirit of the timeless.

For Joshi, whose work ranges from short telefilms to documentaries, *Earth Witness* is an attempt to come closer to nature. "I really wanted to connect with earth, but had no clue how to. I can't immediately stare at a river and talk. I knew there are certain people who live as a part of it. I knew their relation with the earth is from within. What we call an ecosystem is their home."



A still from the documentary *Earth Witness*.

The film, which won awards at CMS Vatavaran Environment and Wildlife Film Festival 2011, explores various ecosystems to narrate its tale of nature.

The opening shot zooms into a forest ecosystem in Chhattisgarh where the father, Shikari Baiga lives. The ancient tribe of Baigas has always been a part of the Central highlands of India. This protagonist reveals how he has been witness to massive soil erosion and decreasing-level of water in a short-span of 10 years. Choosing lucidity over jargon, he says, "In

Daldali 75 villages have been removed to make way for the bauxite mines [the not needed]. Due to the blasting, the water level has gone down further." Shikari, who is planning to create a collective seed bank for climate emergencies and future generations, points out at various indigenous seeds which can be grown even in unfavourable weather conditions.

The next character, a teacher, brings alive the magic of a mountain ecosystem. Seno Tshuhaa of Nagaland shares the slow changes she observed in

her land over the past few years. The peaceful lush green backdrop tries hard but cannot cover the fear of unknown on Seno's face. She highlights that traditional seed varieties are disappearing and along with them the farmer's ability to innovate and survive. The concept of packet seed from some other place is alien to this teacher. She believes what is gifted by nature is best suited to the place and humans should not create confusion among various ecosystems.

Dryland ecosystem's Doongra Rabari, a shep-



Akanksha Joshi

herd, appears on the storyline with herds of sheep in a village near Rann of Kutch. This young boy of a semi-nomadic tribe shares a piece from his "not very old past" — the time when he would go back home early after his animals would graze. This was the time when rains would quench the thirst of mother earth without delay and the Rabbaris and their animals were invited by farmers to their fields over lush grass. This was the time when they did not pay the farmers to stay in their lands, or run on tar roads for a number of hours in search of forest lands.

The fourth character, Sukdev Mondal, shares his wisdom on the screen from the coastal ecosystem of Sunderbans. Mondal, the farmer, believes that

through storms, earthquakes and floods, the nature is giving signals to humans to give back her jungles. He has been observing the high frequency with which the Ganga is continuously pushing back humans from its shores. Mondal, who depends on natural resources for farming and surviving, is training other farmers of his area for sustainable farming to save the soul of earth.

Earth Witness deciphers the ABC of climate change in a comprehensive manner for common people. It does not preach or blame. It simply tells a story of people and their journeys with nature. Joshi strikes a perfect balance between the hardfacts of documentary movies and a creative style of storytelling.