



## In the company of books

### Ped ka Pta (Address of a Tree)

Reviewer: Prabhat

When Sushil Shukla, the author of this storybook, writes that 'A tree on earth is my address', it means that the address of a tree is also the address of us humans on earth. The day the address of trees disappears from the earth, the address of us humans will also disappear.

This slim book of just 26 pages contains 19 short pieces of prose. If dates were also written on these pieces of prose, then we could have called this book a writer's diary, because there is a deep internal dialogue in them. How a person sees their surroundings, how they feel about it, and what they think while seeing and feeling, is described in this book in a way that the reader may wish that they, too, could write like this.

Each piece of prose in the book has a title. Translated into English, some of these would be: *Those Three Trees, Name Plate, The Diary of a Cow, The Diary of a Ghost, A Single Shoe*, to name a few. These titles are such that if a teacher wants, they can write these on slips of paper and give one to each child in the class and ask them to write a few paragraphs on whatever comes to their mind after reading it. Then whatever each child has written, all the children in the class can listen to it. After that, they can read what the author has written. This activity can do wonders in the class.

These are pieces of prose written by a person who is filled with awe on seeing nature. 'Where that big furniture shop is, there used to be three trees. Two tamarind and one neem.' One day, he climbs up two floors in this four-storey shop, just like climbing on a tamarind tree. And after coming out of the shop, he thinks—'When I make a green sun, the teacher scolds me. It is strange that when someone makes a furniture shop from a tree, no one scolds them.'

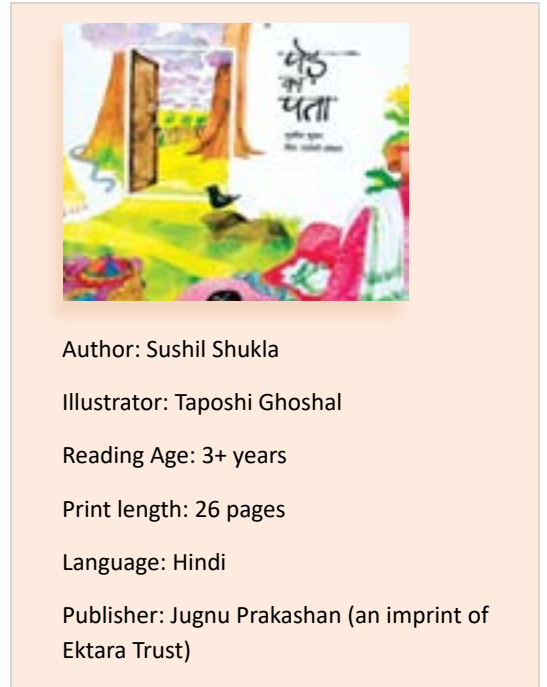
The furniture shop is the address of three lost trees. The forests are being cut, which also means that the tribals living in the forest are being made to disappear from the earth. On the one hand, we dream of creating an egalitarian society where everyone has equal rights to live; on the other hand, the greed of some people is never satiated, even if trees, forests, and people have to be made to disappear. *Karachi Ka Chaisa, Seth Aur Uska Aadmi, Name Plate*, etc., are such pieces of prose from which questions can be discussed in the class. The human aspects between the two countries, inequality, the tragedy of migration, etc., can be discussed.

Neither language nor life can escape the author's imagination. 'When flowers bloom on the tree, the shadow of the tree also blooms.... The poignancy of some of the pieces is truly felt, such as 'Name Plate', in which he writes of a demolished house. Of the fan under which we sit, he asks, 'Who is running this fan?' And in search of the answer, he reaches the workers working in the mine who are extracting coal that produces electricity.

Taposhi Ghoshal's illustrations are equally unique. What is written for the word can be considered as written for the pictures as well.

Translated from Hindi. Translator: Bansi Vetter: Sonam Kumari

Prabhat has been working independently in the field of education. He has published several books of poetry and many stories for children. For his outstanding literary contributions, he has received several awards.



Author: Sushil Shukla

Illustrator: Taposhi Ghoshal

Reading Age: 3+ years

Print length: 26 pages

Language: Hindi

Publisher: Jugnu Prakashan (an imprint of Ektara Trust)

# Jai Bheem

Reviewer: Dinesh Madagaonkar

As the first book to portray Dr B R Ambedkar as a superhero, this unique children's book marks a bold and refreshing departure from traditional storytelling. Framed as part of a children's series, this short yet powerful volume uses a vibrant narrative style to present constitutional values through the lens of heroism and justice.

The author, Vikas R Maurya, envisions Ambedkar not as a historical figure confined to textbooks, but as a living, breathing superhero—clad in blue, armed with a pen, and ever-ready to defend the vulnerable. This concept draws children in by tapping into their fascination with superheroes, like Superman and Spider-Man, while simultaneously introducing them to a real-life figure of immense national importance.

The story unfolds with the phrase 'We the People of India', borrowed from the Preamble of the Constitution, and becomes a rallying cry throughout the book, tying the narrative to the constitutional spirit of justice and equality.

The book's illustrations, brilliantly crafted by Suresh R Arkasali, play a crucial role in bringing the narrative to life. Each image is not only visually striking but emotionally resonant, capturing the intensity and symbolism of every scene. The colour blue plays a dominant role throughout, representing Ambedkar's heroic presence and the ideals of justice. Meanwhile, red and brown are used to symbolically depict the turmoil and struggles created by society's negative forces, adding depth and emotional weight to the unfolding incidents. These colour choices strengthen the overall impact of the story, helping to convey the urgency of the issues being addressed—be it inequality, exploitation, or resistance.

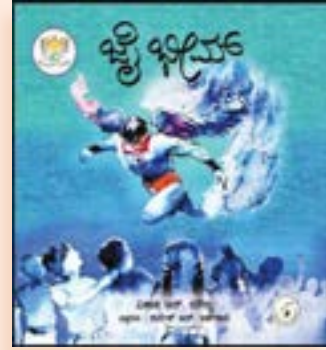
These visuals do more than accompany the text—they expand it. They depict the story with powerful imagery that communicates complex social realities in a way that is immediately understandable to young readers. Whether it is Ambedkar shielding children with the Constitution or confronting injustice face-to-face, every illustration reinforces the core message of empowerment and justice.

The narrative is rich with symbolic scenes, like a private school refusing admission to children from poor families, until the superhero arrives to defend their right to education. In another episode, he halts a bulldozer operated by a wealthy builder and rescues child labourers from a burning warehouse, all the while teaching moral lessons to those who exploit the powerless. His voice echoes with strength and clarity, 'The children of the poor are not the property of your household,' directly challenging entrenched privilege and injustice.

As the story progresses, the antagonist, a wealthy, arrogant man on his mythical 'Maya horse', mockingly declares, 'Even if a hundred people like you were born, I would outsmart you with the brilliance in my head.' Yet this arrogance is met by the united chant, 'We the People of India!'. When bullets fly, children and adults retreat in fear only to discover that they are protected by an invisible shield: the Constitution, held high by Ambedkar and his companions, as the cry of 'Jai Bhim' rises above the chaos.

In this moving and symbolic tale, the author succeeds in conveying a powerful truth: the Constitution is not merely a legal document; it is a living force that stands with the people, especially the oppressed. Through thrilling scenes and vivid characters, he instils in young readers a deep respect for justice, equality, and democratic values.

Few children's books have so effectively conveyed the importance of the Constitution and the vision of Ambedkar. *Jai Bhim* is a book every parent should read with their children, not only for its story, but for the message of courage, compassion, and constitutional awareness that it leaves behind.



Author: Vikas R Maurya

Illustrator: Suresh R. Arkasali

Reading Age: 6 -12 years

Print length: 20 pages

Language: Kannada

Publisher: Navakarnataka Publications

*Dinesh Madagaonkar is a member of the Communications Team at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. He has authored a short story collection, translated children's books into Kannada, and worked as a regional language copywriter.*