



WOMEN , ADIVASIS , THE WILD , PHOTOZONE • MARCH 8, 2017

<https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/articles/when-jayamma-spotted-the-leopard/>

When Jayamma spotted the leopard

Jayamma Belliah, an Adivasi from Ananjihundi village in Karnataka, documents her life in a forest with a camera. An outstanding photo essay on PARI to commemorate March 8, International Women's Day

Jayamma Belliah, 35, is a Jenu Kuruba Adivasi from Ananjihundi village in Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka. What follows is her photo essay about life in a forest where both humans and animals have the potential to kill and also be killed, by one another. Over the course of six months, Jayamma took photographs of her daily life on the fringes of Bandipur National Park, one of India's premier tiger reserves. Her photo essay is part of a larger collaborative photography project about living with wildlife. This was the first time she learned to use a camera (a FujifinePix S8630).



Her photo essay highlights the usually invisible gendered dynamics embedded in human-wildlife relations. It implicitly questions prescriptive approaches to wildlife conservation that largely ignore the socio-economic realities of the rural poor. In addition to the photos presented here Jayamma took many beautiful photographs of birds. "My family was surprised I could learn to take such good pictures," she said, in Kannada.



Cows on the trench: “These scrub cows [nondescript local cattle, seen mostly as dung producers] belong to my family, and my sister and sister-in-law are taking them to graze in the fields. We have to cross the [Bandipur] forest to reach our village. Two years ago, one of our calves was killed by a leopard inside the forest.”



Sheep going home: “My sisters here are taking our sheep back home. My sister is also carrying firewood which she collected. Some of us got LPG [cooking gas] from the government, but others didn't take it. They thought that they would have to pay to get it, so that's why they didn't take it.”



Women and goats: “These goats also belong to my family. My brother, sister and sister-in-law take care of them. We have about 50 goats, and graze in the forest. We get them back every day early in the evening, otherwise there are chances of them being killed by wild animals. In case we haven't earned enough money or if something else happens, then we will sell one or two of these goats.”



Tiger's pug mark: "I saw this pug mark one morning when I was going to work [as a domestic worker in nearby homes]. There are many tigers around here, they kill our cows and goats, they keep coming and going. People here say that there are more tigers now than leopards."



Two girls: "My nieces have to walk through the forest to reach their school; they walk three kilometres from our village everyday. My first niece completed her 8th standard, but there is no high school here, so she will have to go to one which is 10 kilometres from here. She will either stay at the hostel there or travel every day from here. Because she is leaving now, her younger sister has to go to school alone. She is scared of walking alone because of the forest animals, so sometimes she skips school. She might drop out. In my village, seven or eight children went to school and most of them dropped out. Only my nieces have gone up to this stage of schooling."



The leopard tree: "This is the *kaaludaari* [footpath] that passes through the forest. I walk to work every day this way, and my nieces walk to school along with me in the morning. Three months ago, an old woman went to graze her goats in the morning in the forest. Later, I was going back home after work when I saw many people had gathered at this tree. Her goats had all gone back home earlier, none of them were injured or attacked. So others went looking for her when she did not come home and found her lying near this tree. She wasn't eaten by the animal, there were or

two bite marks on either side of her forehead. I don't know if it was a leopard or a tiger. After being taken to hospital, the woman died the next day. She was my aunt. I walk along the same route every day. We are frightened to walk, but we can't do much about it. We can't sit at home fearing this. We all sent a signed application for a bus facility for the school children, but nothing happened."



The leopard: "The leopard was sitting on the rock on the slope of the hill behind the place where I work. I was going back home in the evening when I spotted it. It was very close to me, maybe a distance of 4-5 metres. My husband had come to pick me up, so I wasn't very scared. If the leopard comes close, we cannot do much. I took this photo because I wanted to take a picture of the leopard. I would have taken it even if my husband wasn't there. I am scared of the leopards and tigers. When I took the picture, the leopard saw us and lowered its head slowly behind rock."



Machan: When people grow groundnuts, *ragi* and *avarekaayi*, they go to their farms by seven in the evening and stay there until six the next morning. They climb up the tree and guard their fields against animals the whole night with no sleep. They try to protect their crops from elephants and wild boars. When the animals come, they burst firecrackers. Sometimes they can't do anything. They do this for six months during the harvest season, otherwise all is wasted."



Dead vulture: “The vulture didn't know about the live electrical wire and died after sitting on it. This was after a rain. What do these animals know about the current passing through these wires? It fell on the *rojada gida* (*lantana camara*) hedge below. There were many vultures earlier in this area, but now their numbers have reduced. Earlier there wasn't as much *lantana* as there is now, but for the last 10 years it has been growing a lot, and nobody knows how it grew so quickly. There is not much use for it, but chairs can be made from the branches. Now it is growing even in the forest. It comes up where the grass grows and the grass is now becoming less. Because of this, the cows and goats have less to eat.”

This work was facilitated by Jared Margulies, in coordination with the Mariamma Charitable Trust, located in Mangala village, Karnataka. It was made possible with the support of a 2015-2016 Fulbright Nehru Student Research Grant, a Graduate Student Association Research Grant from University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in-kind support from the Mariamma Charitable Trust, and above all, the participation, enthusiasm and efforts of the photographers themselves. B.R. Rajeev's help in the translation of the text was invaluable too. All copyrights for the photos are by the photographers alone in accordance with PARI's Creative Commons policies. Any questions about their use or reproduction should be directed to PARI.

Related stories:

'We have hills and forests and we live here'

Home with the harvest in Bandipur

Close encounters with the Prince of Bandipur

'That is where the leopard and tiger attack'

'This calf went missing after I took this photo'

Jayamma Belliah

Jayamma Belliah is a Jenu Kuruba Adivasi who lives in Ananjihundi village on the fringes of Bandipur National Park, one of India's premier tiger reserves. She earns a living as a domestic worker.

Text Editor : Sharmila Joshi

Sharmila Joshi is former Executive Editor, People's Archive of Rural India, and a writer and occasional teacher.