Mihir Trivedi Trailing the apes of India

HI, I AM MIHIR TRIVEDI. I GREW UP IN INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH. AS A KID, I ALWAYS HAD A MILLION QUESTIONS. BUT I WAS ALSO VERY SHY. DESPITE HAVING VERY SUPPORTIVE TEACHERS IN MY SCHOOL, I COULD NOT ASK QUESTIONS IN FRONT OF THE CLASS.





READING ABOUT SCIENCE, WATCHING IT ON TV AND STUDYING LIFE AROUND ME WERE MY WAYS OF SOLVING SOME OF THE ENIGMA OF NATURE. THIS FEELING OF WONDERMENT BROUGHT ME CLOSER TO SCIENCE.

SOME OF THIS MUST BE BECAUSE OF MY FAMILY TOO. MY MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER ARE BOTH TEACHERS. MY GRANDFATHER HAD STUDIED INORGANIC CHEMISTRY AND USED TO WORK IN THE DYEING INDUSTRY. THEY ARE ALL INTERESTED IN KNOWING RECENT ADVANCES IN SCIENCES.



INSTEAD, I FOUND PEACE IN A SECLUDED NOOK OF THE LIBRARY. FINDING ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS HELPED ME ESCAPE FROM REALITY.









PARTIALLY HEEDING TO THEM, I GAVE BOTH PRE-MEDICAL AND PRE-ENGINEERING ENTRANCE EXAMS, BUT UNPREPARED. I WAS SELECTED TO STUDY DENTISTRY AS WELL AS ENGINEERING. BUT I LEFT THOSE TO PURSUE B.SC. AND STUDY SCIENCES. I DID MY BSC FROM A LOCAL COLLEGE, AND THEN SPECIALIZED IN GENETICS DURING MY POST-GRADUATION. I THEN JOINED CSIR-CENTRE FOR CELLULAR AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY. WHILE I WANTED TO STUDY GENETICS, I WAS NOT SURE OF THE EXACT QUESTION I WANTED TO ADDRESS DURING MY PHD. I DID SHORT-TERM STINTS IN MANY LABS FOCUSING ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS SUCH AS STEM CELLS, STRUCTURAL BIOLOGY, NEUROSCIENCE AND DIABETES. AT LAST I LANDED IN DR. G. UMAPATHY'S GROUP AT THE LABORATORY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES (LACONES). HERE I FOUND SOMETHING NEW AND CHALLENGING WHILE I STUDIED EVOLUTIONARY GENETICS.



HOOLOCKS ARE THE ONLY APES FOUND IN INDIA. THEY ARE FOUND IN THE NORTH-EAST OF INDIA, BEYOND WHICH THEY ARE LARGELY UNKNOWN IN THE COUNTRY. THEY ARE MAGNIFICENT BUT ENDANGERED. MY RESEARCH AIMS TO ASSIST IN VARIOUS CONSERVATION EFFORTS THAT ARE UNDERWAY IN THE REGION. ONCE WE UNDERSTAND THE DIVERSITY OF THIS ANIMAL, WE WILL KNOW ABOUT THEIR RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE. THIS WILL ALSO HELP IN THEIR CAPTIVE BREEDING IN VARIOUS ZOOLOGICAL PARKS.

THE FIRST STEP IN MY RESEARCH WORK IS TO COLLECT POOP SAMPLES OF HOOLOCKS. BUT IT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT SOUNDS. SINCE HOOLOCKS ARE FOUND ONLY IN THE NORTH-EAST, I NEED TO TRAVEL THOUSANDS OF KILOMETERS INTO THE FORESTS TO FIND THEM.



THIS IS NO PICNIC!

ONCE I SPOT ONE IN THE HIGH CANOPIES OF TREES, I FOLLOW THE HOOLOCKS AND COLLECT THEIR FECES SAMPLES AS SOON AS IT IS DROPPED. THIS HAPPENS IF IT'S A GOOD DAY.

ON OTHER DAYS, I LEARN OTHER THINGS.





ONCE DURING MY FIELD TRIP I STRUGGLED IN A FOREST FOR ABOUT TEN HOURS. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE LOCAL LANGUAGE.



BUT THERE ARE OTHER PLACES SUCH AS IN MIZORAM, WHERE KNOWING THE LOCAL LANGUAGE CAN BE USEFUL. WITH THE HELP OF LOCALS, ONE CAN ALSO FIND A TRANSLATOR.

PEOPLE HERE CAN HAVE DIFFICULT LIVES. I HAVE ENCOUNTERED INSURGENCY CAMPS DURING MY TRIPS. THOUGH MANY WORRY ABOUT ME DURING THESE TRIPS, I HAVE FOUND THESE PLACES VERY ENRICHING AND HUMBLING.





AT LACONES, MY DAYS LOOK DIFFERENT FROM THE FIELD. I START MY DAY EARLY WITH LIGHT EXERCISE AND BREAKFAST.



AMID THE DEMANDS OF FIELD WORK AND RIGOR OF EXPERIMENTS TO FIND SOMETHING NEW, FIGHTING IMPOSTOR SYNDROME CAN MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT.

THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY DATA.

DO I EVEN DESERVE TO BE HERE?



IT BEGINS WITH SELF-DOUBT, DOUBTING YOUR OWN HARD WORK.

I WILL NEVER SUCCEED. I DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING.



YOU START DOUBTING YOUR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS,THE RIGOROUS PROCESS YOU FOLLOWED TO REACH HERE.

I AM A FRAUD. EVERYTHING I AM DOING IS INCORRECT.



BUT I FIGHT THIS!



YOU START DROWNING IN THE LIES PLANTED BY YOUR SELF-DOUBT. THEN THE DOUBT STARTS BECOMING BIGGER THAN WHO YOU ARE. I REMIND MYSELF THAT I HAVE REACHED THIS FAR, NOT JUST A SWING OF FATE. THE HIGHER WE RISE, THE THINNER THE AIR GETS. IT DOESN'T MEAN WE STOP RISING, WE JUST BATTLE IT OUT. SLOWLY BUT STEADILY AT OUR PACE.





I ALSO TALK ABOUT MY RESEARCH WORK IN VARIOUS NATURE SOCIETIES. THESE DISCUSSIONS HELP ME IN CREATING CONNECTIONS WITH AN ECLECTIC MIX OF PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SCIENCE AND NATURE. MANY OF MY AUDIENCES HEAR ABOUT HOOLOCKS FOR THE FIRST TIME THROUGH MY TALKS. BUT IN THE END WHEN THEY ASK "WHAT CAN WE DO TO SAVE THEM ?", "HOW DO WE SAY THEY ARE RELATED TO HUMANS? WILL THEY BECOME HUMANSZ" THEIR QUESTIONS MAKE ME PONDER ABOUT MY WORK AND ITS IMPACT, AND MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A RESEARCHER TOWARDS PEOPLE AROUND ME.

टेढा – मेढा, भोंडा. फफूंद से ढका हुआ, मृत्युशय्या पर लेटा, या मृत्यु के पार जा चुका, स्थितप्रजो को लजाता, समाधिस्त है, जंगल के बीच पड़ा, वह, ठूंठ।

PHD ALSO LETS ME EXPLORE MYSELF AS A PERSON. I HAVE STARTED WRITING POETRY, AND I PEN THEM ON MY BLOG. THIS HAS ALSO LED ME INTO BOOKS AND CINEMA MORE PASSIONATELY.



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