

The Edakkal hair

I shot up high, breathing freely as soon as spattering rainwater touched my roots. Why? Because its time someone heard my mime voice. My name is Itchy H. where H stands for hair. I live with my brothers and sisters on my master's hot scalp.

Well I received my name because I always feel itchy. It's a tricky question if you ask me how do I differentiate my brothers from sisters but my answer would be quite stereotypical- all of us aim high, standing up and pointing towards the sky; me and my brothers are quite rough and tough, our master always complains that we can't be tamed and our sisters who are soft and delicate, sway away with grace when they taste the refreshing air. Our master didn't particularly care about us as we grew wild until one event that changed his life - the *Last one*.

Our master was strong and wild as a child; he even grew much worse as he aged. He was mighty! Our master grew up in the realms of steep rocks on high hills to protect himself from the animals, till the day he found Edakkal. He found Edakkal while he was just wandering about drawing and scratching on the rocks. Our master being a child was dazed with the scenic beauty of the caves, he didn't quite understand why his elders were mesmerized by the huge rock that was stuck between the walls of the cave as he simply believed that it was the act of god- the *earthquake* and nobody questions the God. He was often sent to hunt small animals like squirrels and rabbits depending on his size at the foot of the hills and also to fetch water sources to quench their thirst. But master was taught to thank the hunted animals that satisfied our hunger. Our master's family called themselves 'cavemen' and spoke Brahmī or Tamil; nobody knows how the language emerged because nobody questioned. But for myself as I descended from master's scalp I was bound to know master's language and I learnt with him as we both grew together. Understanding the animals and birds language was difficult but often we would understand what they wanted to speak by sharing eye contact. The cavemen were very systematic as they managed to make and maintain a drainage system.

Edakkal was special, one day master found cool water seeping between the rocks in the dark corners of the caves- it tasted sweet and refreshing. This solved his problem of searching for water. Edakkal sheltered us from the scorching heat with their huge rocks high above our heads; protected us from wild animals as it was difficult to climb up the peak of the hills. Master loved the rain too; he would drink fresh dews that were collected in large leaves. On one thunderous night, he saw lightning flashes in the sky. It was beautiful. He decided to make a dagger that looked like the lightning flash. He began scrapping and carving the ivory bone of the dead animal whose name he couldn't pronounce ('mam ooth' or mammoth) which he found after the storm at the foothills. He spent years to bring out perfection in his creation. But at last as he reached his middle age he completed it.

During those past few years, there was a rise of lion attacks. He suffered a great loss when he lost his cousin in the attack. One fearful night, while he was singing his daughter to sleep, he heard a deafening silence. He found the silence very ominous. He went outside the Edakkal, to check the perimeter. He saw flashy red eyes amongst the thorny bushes in the dark corner of the forest. He estimated that there were at least three lions that were ready to attack. His instincts drove him to be tactful. He calmly walked towards his cave and made sure his family was safe. I was sweaty myself in this cold night but I trusted my master. Master then climbed a tall tree and held on to a strong branch. Now he could see the lions vividly, there was one lion that limped and other two were moving towards the cave. He carefully pulled out his poisonous dart and aimed at the limping lion. The lion swayed for few seconds while master waited patiently. Thump! The lion dropped dead. Master crept into the shadows whilst the first lion entered the cave, the second lion sensed dread. He slowed down at the entrance and looked right at me. My master knew if he had to attack, he would have to attack now. He pulled out another dart and aimed at his eye. Spot! It went through it. The lion wailed.

Master charged at him at a lightning speed pulling out his dagger in the process. Master sliced his neck

with one swift move and entered the cave. The last lion was waiting for him. As soon as master entered *the Last one* pounced on him. Master struggled with the lion, balancing his weight whilst the lion kept gnashing his teeth at master's arm. His daughter wailed with horror distracting the *last one*.

Master found the opportunity and pierced the dagger straight through the last one's heart. The lion writhed in pain and slowly succumbed to death beside my master. I was drenched in master's sweat but was relieved he saved us. The next day, the cavemen dressed me, allowing me and my master to have my own wardrobe. The cavemen wrote stories about master on Edakkal wall. I grew longer with pride.

Sooner I got older and whiter with age, my brothers and sisters started shedding off. Master got weaker and hence his children took on his legacy. One day master was walking down the hill; he slipped and fell on the ground. Master lost his consciousness immediately, I waited patiently hoping he would stand up again and that I could feel the breeze again. But I heard master taking his last breath and I knew I had to leave my master too. I lay there with master for a long time. Consecutively, the earthy soil besides us started piling up on master's body, decomposing it. I started withering away myself.

I don't know how many years had passed but I could say it was quite long. In those years as I lay still, I saw the world change. Even master's remains were accepted by the Mother Nature. Fewer and fewer animals and birds passed by me every day as they hid in the darkness of the beautiful forest. Over the years, the cavemen family were distributed into tribes. Why I know this is because, the humans started clothing themselves more. I was merely unnoticed as I was turning to dust. But my lineage of hairs told me stories about their masters and tribes as they flew away after they shed now and then; and would halt in their journey to have a little chit chat with me. The tribes have now more distinguished rules and traditions each vaguely common but distinct in their own sense. A sense of hierarchy system was maintained within the tribes. They didn't worship any deity but had faith in God and idolized nature. There were few times that I witnessed wedding ceremonies but not everyone would realise that they had actually witnessed one. The wedding ceremonies were often kept low profile. Once I witnessed a shameful incident of few *higher castes* 'The Kurichiyans' children punishing a lower caste 'The Paniyas' child. They punished him because the Paniyan child touched them by a mere accident. And as untouchability culture was wildly used amongst the Kurichiyans, they had gotten angry that they would have to bathe again. It was sinful, unbearable; didn't they know that their ancestors lived together united and all belonged to the same species. Why doesn't anybody question the essence of 'humanity'?

It was time that I accepted my fate of mutating to dust and flew away. I began flying higher and higher as I grew tinier and tinier. I slowed down as I reached the highest layer of atmosphere. I could almost touch the clouds! For all I could see was the whole of Kerala. I could see how all the settlers from foreign lands crept in my former village. They were tall and fair than the fellow humans I saw. Strange beings all contrast to naïve people in Kerala. Some settlers were good who brought evolving changes to India whereas some exploited our Mother Nature. I could never pinpoint who is who. As years passed by, Kerala lost its *green*. I began to seep into the lower levels of new found atmosphere. The settlers brought ships and factories with them which made the air more blackish- I wondered why? Until one day I could taste it, it tasted like negativity. Not that I needed to but I couldn't breathe for a while. I wonder what would happen to the future if this would continue. Now that the people began to fully clothe themselves- It was amusing to see because this wasn't the case in master's time. The waters and animals were getting depleted. I missed them dearly. During the thunderous storms I would wail, trying to plea the humans to listen to me, to save Mother Nature and themselves. But they simply looked up and smiled ignoring the danger.

During one thunderous storm after the settlers left, I took the help of a lightning and cackled right in the mid forest. I was back to earth. I burnt myself but was willing to take the risk. I had landed right in the midst of Wayanad's bamboo forest. Surely, someone could come and see the ruckus as the forest land was destroyed. And one did after days; a child who reminded me of my master. He looked at me and saw a bamboo shoot in this destroyed land. I failed to see my condition as I prayed for a miracle to come by and hear me. The child cried with happiness to see me. He would often visit me after he visited a place

called *modern school* in present age. He would pour some water from his container that he called bottle and quench me. I grew up healthy with his love and prayed in return for him to be the first step to change the future and help others to save Mother Nature. Oh I wish I could see the consequences of his love as I began to lose consciousness. I had become a full grown bamboo plant. Many bamboo craft industries were coming up to support the income of the Wayanad village. People started changing their occupation of growing staple food to cash crop. Farming as an occupation was facing hardships as there were fewer water and land resources left and fewer labourers. People were often scared to venture out in bamboo forest as they feared that vicious snakes lived amongst us. And I heard some bamboo cutter speak about cutting me after I die. In the consequent time I helped the plants around me to grow up and carry out my legacy of restoring nature so that I leave with peace.

And one fine day I accepted the fate to join my master from my earlier life.

