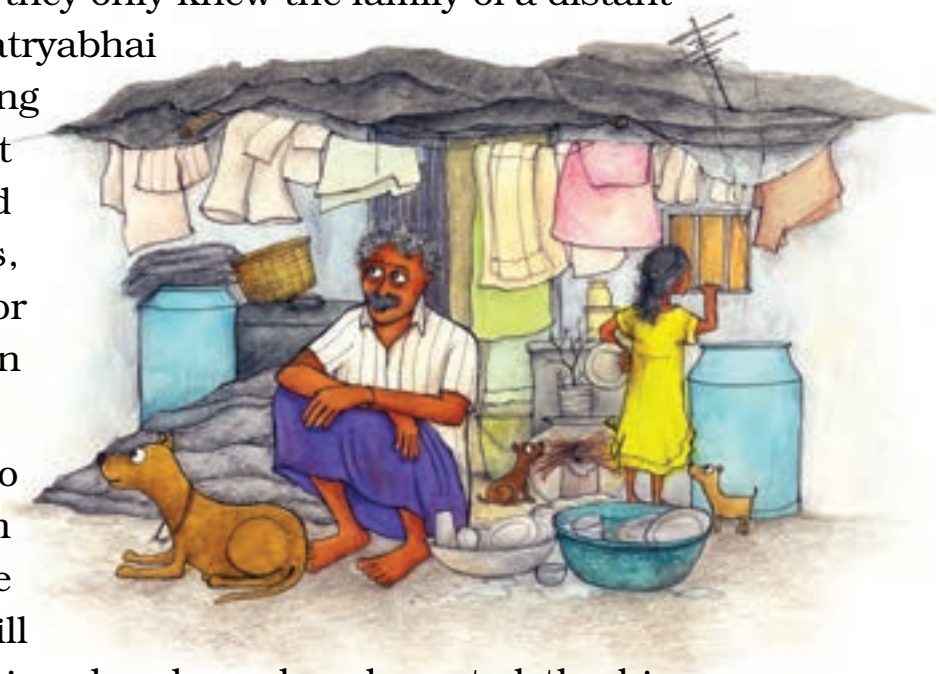
18. No Place for Us?

Jatryabhai

Jatryabhai was sitting at the door with his daughter Jhimli. They were waiting for Sidya. It was almost night but Sidya had not come home. Two years back Jatrya's family came to Mumbai from Sinduri village. Here, they only knew the family of a distant relative. With their help, Jatryabhai began to repair torn fishing nets. But the money he got was not enough. They had to pay for the medicines, food, school fees and rent for the house. Here, they even had to buy water.



Young Sidya also had to work in the nearby fish factory to earn some money. From four o'clock till seven o'clock in the morning, he cleaned and sorted the big and small fish. Then he would come home, take a nap, and go to school in the afternoon. In the evening he would wander around the vegetable market. He would help some *memsahib* (lady) to carry her bags, or go to the railway station to pick up empty bottles and newspapers to sell to the *kabadiwalla* (junk seller). Somehow they were managing their life in the city.

It was night, but Sidya had not come home. Jhimli was watching a dance on TV, through the neighbour's window. But Jatrya did not like watching TV. Here, everything was so



different. The day would pass running around for work, but the evening brought back old memories.



Think and tell

- Jatrya felt alone, even in a crowd of people. Have you ever felt like this?
- Imagine how it feels to leave one's own place and go far away to live in a new place?
- Why do you think families like that of Jatrya's are coming to big cities?
- Have you seen any children (in your school or neighbourhood) who also go to work?
- What kind of work do they do? Why do they have to work?

Remembering old days

Jatrya was born in Khedi village, in the middle of thick green jungles and hills. His people had been living here for many years – even before his grandfather was born.

There was peace in Jatrya's village, but not silence. There were so many soothing sounds – the gurgle of the flowing river, the murmur of trees and the chirping of birds. People did farming. They would go to the nearby forest, chatting and singing together, to collect wild fruits, roots and dried wood. While working with elders, children also learnt many things – to dance together, to play flute and *dhol*, to make pots of clay and bamboo, to recognise birds and imitate their sounds, etc. People collected

things from the forest for their use. Some of those they would sell in the town across the river. With that money they would buy salt, oil, rice and some clothes.

It was a village, but people here lived together like a big family. Jatrya's sister was married in the same village. People helped each other, in good and bad times. The elders would arrange weddings, and settle quarrels.

Jatrya was now a strong young man. He worked hard in the fields and caught fish from the big river. He and his friends would go to the forest to collect fruits, roots and plants for medicines, and fish from the river, to sell these in the town. During festival time, Jatrya would dance and play the drum, with boys and girls of his age.





Tell

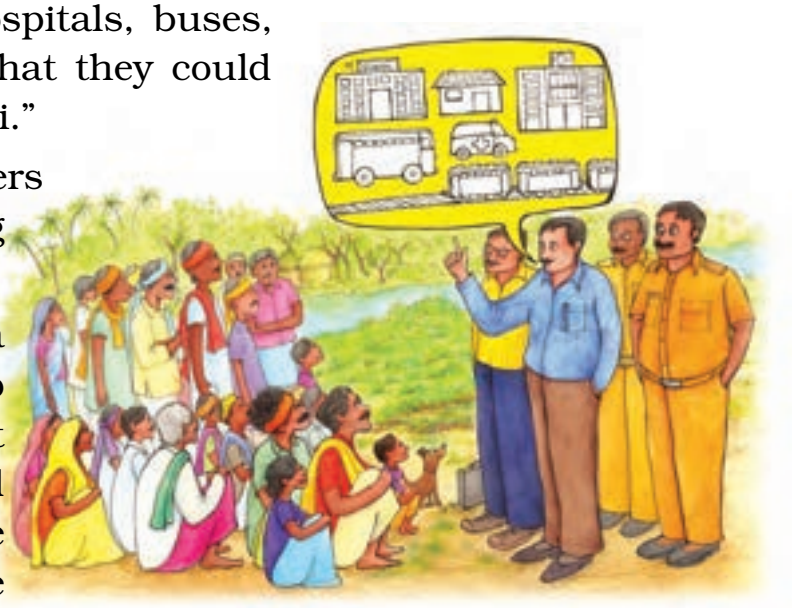
- In Khedi village what all did children learn?
- What do you learn from your elders?
- Jatrya learnt so many things in Khedi. How many of those would be useful for him in Mumbai?
- Do you hear the sounds of birds everyday? Which ones?
- Can you imitate the sound of any bird? Show how.
- What are some of the sounds that you hear everyday, but the people of Khedi may not be hearing?
- Have you experienced silence? When and where?

Teacher's Note : Children can be made sensitive to the experience of 'calm' or 'peace' as clearly different from 'silence'. They can do this through the activity of listening to sounds with their eyes closed. When they are calm and the class becomes quiet, they can still hear many sounds. So there can be peace, but there need not be silence.

Across the river

One day the people of Khedi heard that a big dam was to be built on the river. For this, a big wall would be built to stop the flow of the river. Khedi and many nearby villages in that area would be drowned under water. The people would have to leave their villages and their lands, on which their forefathers had lived for centuries.

After a few days, government officials along with the police started visiting these villages. Small children of the village saw the police for the first time. Some children would run after them, and some would get scared and start crying. The officials measured the width and length of the river, the fields, forests and houses. They called meetings with the elders of the village. They said, "Villages on the bank of the river would have to be removed. People having land at Khedi will be given land far away, on the other side of the river. They will have everything there – a school, electricity, hospitals, buses, trains, etc. They will have all that they could not even dream of here in Khedi."



Jatrya's parents and most elders were not happy about leaving their village.

Listening to all this, Jatrya would get a little scared, but also feel excited. He would think that after getting married, he would take his bride to the new house in the new village. A house where he could just press a button for the light and turn on the tap for water. He could go by bus to see the city. When he would have children, he could send them to school. They will not be like him, who had never been to school.



Discuss and tell

- Many people in Jatrya's village did not agree to move away from their land and forest. Why? They had to leave even though they didn't want to. Why?
- In Khedi, how many people were there in Jatrya's family? When he thought about his family who all came to his mind?
- Who all come to your mind when you think about your family?
- Have you heard of people who don't want to be moved from their old place? Talk about them.
- Do you know some people who have never been to school? Do you also know of any place where there is no school?



Imagine

- Think of the kinds of difficulties people have to face where a dam is being built.
- Draw a picture of Khedi village and a picture of Jatrya's dream village. Discuss the differences between them. Also look at the pictures your friends have drawn.

A new place

It was a summer afternoon. Jatrya was feeling faint in the hot sun and wind. His feet were burning on the coal tar of the *pucca* road. There wasn't a single tree to offer some shade. Just a few houses and shops. Jatrya was on his way home after buying medicines. He had an old tyre on his back. These days, he had

Teacher's Note : Discuss with children the different aspects of dams. You can give examples of any dams in your area or nearby. Dam may benefit some, but there are some people for whom dam may bring problems, all these can be discussed in classroom.

to light his stove with just these rubber pieces of old tyres. These caught fire fast, and also saved some firewood. But the smoke and smell of burning tyres were terrible!



In this new Sinduri village, they had to pay money for everything—medicines, food, vegetables, firewood, and fodder for the animals. They could just not afford to buy kerosene. But from where to get the money for all this?

Thinking of all this, Jatrya reached home. The roof made of a tin sheet made the house hot like an oven. Jatrya's wife had high fever. His daughter Jhimli was rocking her little brother Sidya to sleep in her lap. After all, there was no other older person with them. Jatrya's parents had been so sad about leaving Khedi that they had died before he moved here.

In Sinduri there were only eight-ten families he could call his own, those from his old village. The whole village had got scattered and people had gone wherever they had been given land.

This was not like the new village Jatrya had dreamt about. There was electricity, but only for sometime in a day. And then, the electricity bill had also to be paid. There were taps, but no water!

In this village, Jatrya got just one room in a tin shed. It had no place to keep the animals. He also got a small piece of land. But that was not good for farming. It was full of rocks and stones. Still Jatrya and his family worked very hard. But they could not grow much on the field, and could not make enough money even to buy seeds and fertilisers. In Khedi, people did not fall sick often. If someone fell ill there were many people who knew

how to treat them with medicines made from plants. People felt better after taking those medicines. Here in Sinduri, there was a hospital but it was difficult to find doctors, and there were no medicines.

There was a school here, but the teacher did not care much about the children from Khedi village. These children found it difficult to study in a new language. The people of Sinduri did not welcome the newcomers from Khedi. They found their language and way of living strange. They made fun of the Khedi people by calling them 'unwanted guests'. Not much of what he had dreamt had come true!



Write

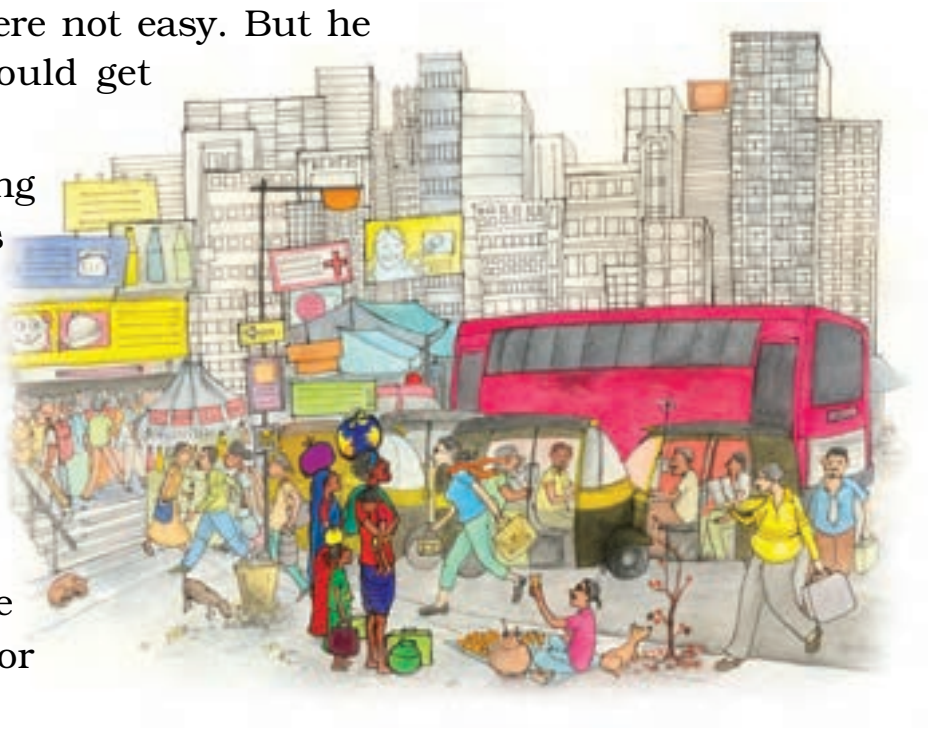
- Was Sinduri like the village of Jatrya's dreams?
- What difference did he find between Sinduri and his dream village?
- Have you ever been to anyone's house as an 'unwanted guest'? How did you feel?
- What all does your family do, when you have guests at home for a few days?

Some years later

Jatrya stayed for a few years in Sinduri. The children were also getting older. But Jatrya's heart was not here in Sinduri. He still missed his old Khedi.

But there was no Khedi now. There was a big dam and a big lake of collected water in and around Khedi. Jatrya thought, "If we are to be called 'unwanted guests', then at least let us go to some place where our dreams can come true." Jatrya sold his land and his animals and came to Mumbai. Here, he started a new life with his family. His only dream was to send his children to school, to give them a better future, a better life.

Here too, things were not easy. But he hoped that things would get better.



Jatrya started saving money to repair his one-room shack. His relatives would tell him, "Don't waste money on this. Who knows, we may have to move from here too. In Mumbai there is no place to stay for outsiders like us."

Jatrya was scared and worried. He thought, "We left Khedi for Sinduri, we then left Sinduri for Mumbai. If we have to move from here too, then where can we go? In this big city, is there not even a small place for my family to stay?"



Think

- What had Jatryabhai thought while moving to Mumbai? Did he find Mumbai as he had imagined?
- What kind of school do you think Jatrya's children would be going to in Mumbai?

Teacher's Note : Discuss with children about the difference between people being 'displaced' or asked to move from a place, and those who go on a 'transfer'. Both situations may cause different kinds of problems and difficulties. Discuss how many big projects like dams, bridges, highways, factories are promoted in the name of development. Do all people benefit from these? These are live issues which can be related to many newspaper reports and ongoing debates.

Find out and write

- Do you know of any family that has come to your town after having moved out of their place? Talk to them and find out:
  - From where have they come? Why did they have to come here?
  - What kind of place did they live in there? How do they find this new place compared to the old one?
  - Is their language and way of living any different from that of the people here? In what ways?
  - Learn some words from their language and write them in your notebook.
  - Do they know how to make some things that you cannot make? What?
- Have you ever read or heard of a city slum being removed? How do you feel about this?
- People also shift from one place to another when they get transferred in their jobs? How do they feel then?

Debate

- Some people say that – "The city people do not create garbage. Cities are dirty because of the slums." How do you feel about this? Discuss and debate between yourselves.



What we have learnt

- Like Jatrya's family, thousands of families come to stay in big cities for many different reasons. Do you think their life may be better in a big city from what it was before? Imagine how they feel in a big city.