

A Tactful Tiger: Reeka



(Written and Published by ANAND DHAR DWIVEDI)

In the year 1976, deep within the Kundam range of Jabalpur's forest division, nestled in the heart of the dense wilderness, lay the small Adivasi hamlet of Manera.

Fifty-five souls lived there in ten modest families, bound together by the rhythms of the forest.

Bhoora was eighteen then—young, eager, and the youngest among his siblings. His elder sister Aayara had already taken on many household responsibilities, while little Chinka, only nine, still carried the carefree laughter of childhood.



Their father, Bheeka, was a seasoned forest survivor, and their mother, Nauri, matched him step for step—gathering firewood, herbs, and tending the home with quiet strength.

The village had five work groups. The young men hunted.

The young women collected mahua flowers, tendu leaves, medicinal roots, and fuelwood. The elders stayed behind, watching over children and passing down the ancient knowledge of living lightly on the land.

The oldest among them was Laimoo, the revered grandfather of the village—and of Bhoora.

One early summer morning, before the first light had touched the canopy, Nauri called out from the doorway:

“Bhoora! Fill the water gourd and sharpen your tool properly before you leave.”

“Yes, Ma!” he answered, already moving.



That day the hunting party consisted of six young men: Chhaapi, Kalliya, Hoshu, Bhoora, and two others.

Hoshu, the eldest and most experienced, was their natural leader.

They packed dried roti, onion, salt, a little mahua liquor for courage, ropes, axes, and spears, then set off while the world was still wrapped in pre-dawn grey.

As they walked the narrow forest path, Chhaapi asked, "Should we take the old road to Zatura today? We might get a chance at a wild buffalo."

Kalliya's eyes lit up. "And maybe a junglee suar too!"

Hoshu shook his head firmly. "Not yet. Early summer. The place isn't safe."



Bhoora spoke softly, almost reverently:

“Reeka still rules Zatura. He is not only the greatest hunter of the forest—he is also our shield. Whenever bhalu, hyena, or leopard trouble comes near the village, Reeka’s roar sends them away. The elders have always said: respect his territory. Do not disturb his peace.”



Everyone nodded in quiet agreement. They chose another path.

They returned empty-handed that evening, tired but unharmed.

As soon as Bhoora stepped inside the house, he sensed something was terribly wrong.

Chinka lay on the mat, burning with fever, cheeks flushed, breath shallow. Nauri's face was etched with worry.



"The medicine man is in Tilaya village," Bheeka said gravely.

"The long way around the forest is safer... but it will take the whole night and most of tomorrow."

"And the short way?" Bhoora asked, though he already knew.

"Through Zatura," his father answered.



"Through Reeka's domain. At night."

There was a long silence.

Then Bhoora said quietly, "I'll go. The short way."

His mother clutched his arm. "Beta..."

"I have to, Ma. Chinka cannot wait."

He left within the hour, carrying only a small cloth bag, a lathi, and a flickering torch made of sal resin.

The moon was almost full that night—bright silver light poured through the leaves, turning the forest floor into a mosaic of light and shadow.



When he reached the narrow saddle of Zatura, his heart stopped.

There, sitting calmly in the very middle of the path, was Reeka.

Massive. Amber eyes glowing softly in the moonlight.

The stripes looked painted by the night itself.

Bhoora froze fifty feet away. His pulse thundered in his ears.

The medicine for Chinka was tied tightly against his chest.

He thought of turning back.

He thought of running.

Then he thought of Chinka's small burning body.

Slowly, he lowered himself to his knees, placed both palms on the earth, and spoke—half to the forest, half to the tiger.



“O Lord of the jungle... forgive me for walking your path at this hour. I carry no weapon against you. I carry only medicine for my little sister. She is only nine... she will die if the fever is not broken tonight.”

He raised his voice just a little, trembling but clear:

"Reeka... brother of the forest... please let me pass."

For several heartbeats nothing happened.

Then the great tiger rose—slowly, deliberately, like a king shifting on his throne.



He turned his huge head and looked straight at Bhoora.

Sixteen long seconds passed. Man and tiger regarded each other under the moon.

Then, without hurry, Reeka stepped off the path to the right.

One measured step... two... three... until he melted into the dark wall of sal and bamboo.

A few moments later came the soft thump-thump of paws—moving away.



Bhoora remained kneeling, tears running silently down his cheeks.

“Thank you...” he whispered.

He stood up, wiped his face, and ran.

Half an hour later he burst into the house in Tilaya.

The medicine man, startled awake, gave him the precious powder and strict instructions.

Bhoora ran the entire way back.

By the time the first grey of dawn appeared, Chinka had swallowed the medicine.

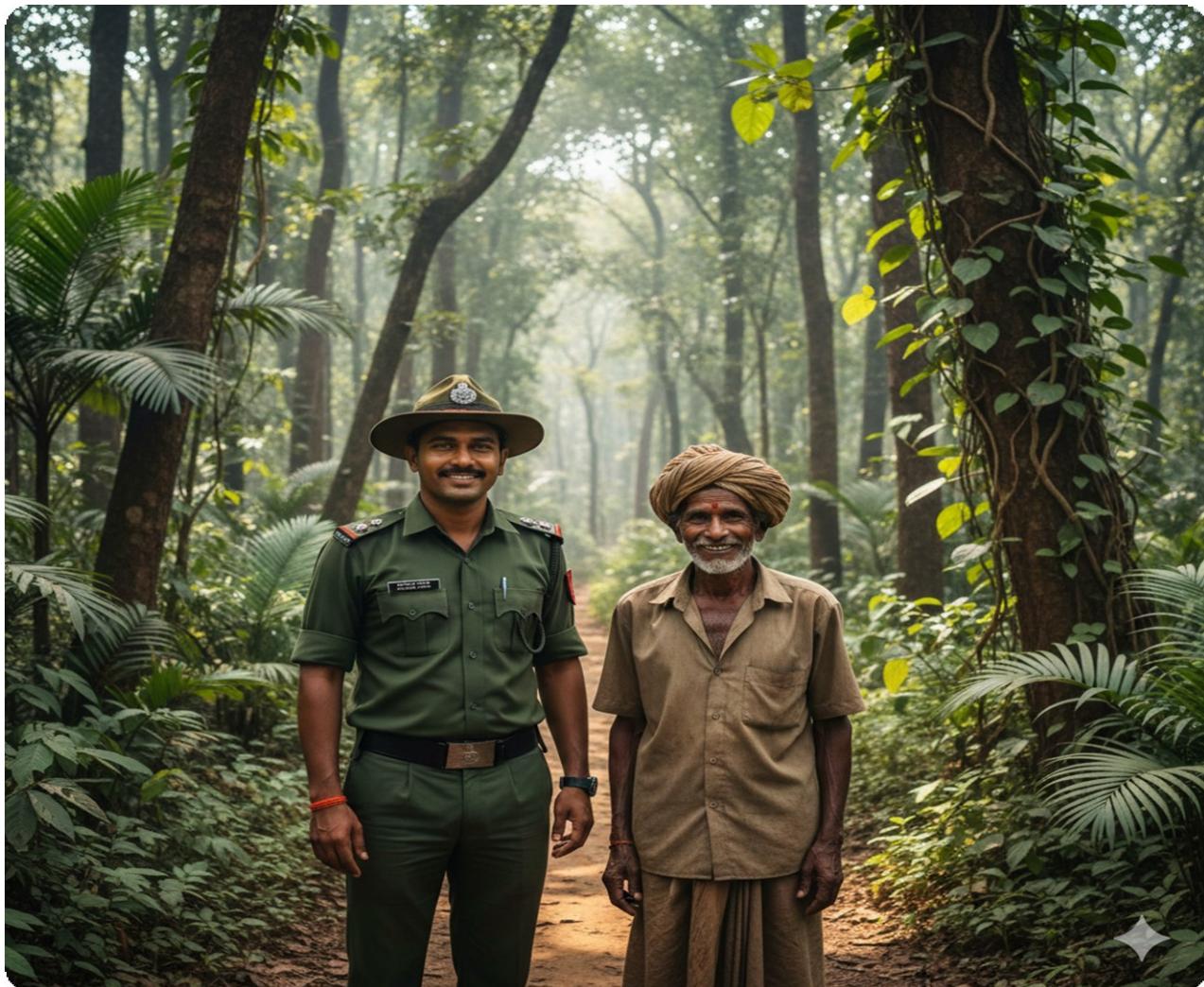
By noon the fever had broken.

She lived.

Many years passed.

In 2016, when Anand Dhar Dwivedi joined the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department as a Vanrakshak, he was posted in that very region.

One day, while patrolling the Zatura beat, he met Bhoora—now a Forest Protector himself, a respected member of the department, and his good assistant.



Over tea at the forest chowki, Bhoora told him the story exactly as it had happened forty years earlier.

Later, when Anand visited the now slightly modernized village of Manera, he met Chinka—

middle-aged, dignified, her eyes still bright with the wonder of that night.

She smiled and said simply:



“Reeka didn’t just let my brother pass. He gave me back my life.”

Then she added, with quiet pride:

“Tigers are hunters, yes. But sometimes... they are also kind. Tactful. Understanding.”

Anand never forgot that night under the moon, that silent conversation between a frightened young man and an old tiger.

Because in the deep heart of the forest, on a narrow path lit by moonlight, respect had once answered respect.

And a life was spared.



Reeka.....A Tactful Tiger.

Thanks!