

Beyond Imlee and Mahuaa

- Glimpses of Balenga Para,
India



We started Imlee in August 2007 in the front yard of our hut in Balenga Para...



a little rural school...Anamika and
Hiralal were our first students...
and Kantilal our first friend...



Both children love art



and in their very first year...



participated enthusiastically in
an inter-school workshop



They were shy at first, ...



they were venturing outside
their village for the first time
ever!



But once they were with their
crayons...



it was a different story
altogether...



they were very much at
home...



they needed no moral
support...



they did their work with gay
abandon...



and soon came out with
flying colours!

Besides art, Anamika and Hiralal learn yoga, semi-classical music, English and Hindi conversation, arithmetic, poetry and reading at school...A year after they joined Imlee Mahuaa, thirteen new children and three new teachers have joined them...With them they continue to joyfully explore the environment around them, studying under the shade of trees and thatched roofs, on long walks into the nearby forests plunging into deep pools without fear and playing hide and seek as the woods resonate with the sound of their laughter...



Our neighbours are Muriya
Gond tribals...



a community of farmers and
forest gatherers...



virtually untouched by modern
technology...



they make their own tools and
work with their hands...



be it building roads or digging
ponds...



smiling young women and
men...



old women and...



old men...



even little children...work...
with their little hands in the
scorching heat ...



tending to their younger siblings while their mums work through the long days...



or just learning the ropes as they watch their elders work...



Only a select few are spared
the tough life...for they have
been to school...



and have learnt (or are learning) to read and write...



The Gonds worship the earth and make offerings to it before they start using it...



say for building mud houses...
excavating the earth after
watering it for a few days...



carrying large handfuls of
sticky soil...



to the recently cleared
site...



they heap handfuls of wet
earth ...



one on top of another and
shape them...



into thick walls for their
mud houses...



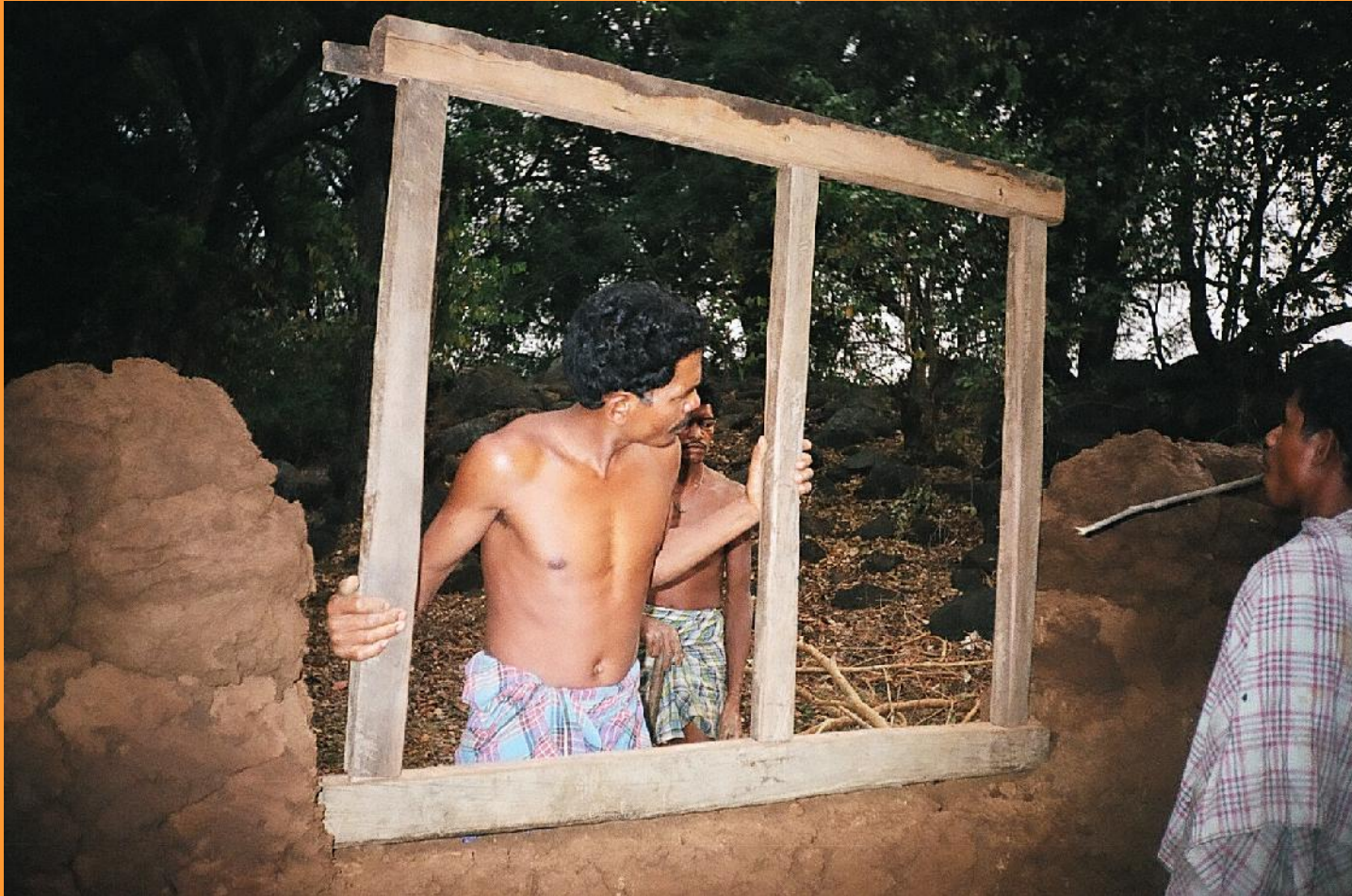
hewing rough window
frames...



and door frames made of
wood from the forest...



using rough and ready
techniques



to fit the frames in their
places...



And before the rains come...



it is usual to take the roof
down!



and relay it over a sheet of
polythene if they can afford
it...



Here life is tough for
animals too...like these
cattle...



that were struck by lightning...
during unseasonal rains last
year...



Despite the tough life,
people find the time...to
dance...



and to make merry...



on religious occasions such
as this one...



when the 'gifted' invoke the
spirits!....



or during festivals such as
'holi'...



when the young...



and old alike...



join hands to rejoice...



and celebrate...



in the splendour of life...

Balenga Para is a little village of 55 houses in the heart of Bastar, one of the most 'backward' districts in India. The village has no electricity, no doctor within a range of 15 kms, and no telephone. Most children in the village depend on the mid-day meal scheme of the government for their lunch, and would go hungry otherwise. The people are subsistence farmers and depend heavily on government infrastructure projects such as construction of roads and ponds for their livelihood. While death due to lack of medical attention is a regular occurrence here, there is rarely a resident of this village who doesn't sport a smile when you meet her or him!