

THE MAGIC OF THE SEASONS

Gijubhai

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Preface

This book gives a glimpse of how Nature changes with the change in seasons. The author shares his joy in experiencing these changes through the letters that he writes to children every Wednesday. This is one of the dishes served every Wednesday in *Budhwariyu*, the handwritten weekly.

This covers the nature notes for the months from January to July. The rest in the next book.

Gijubhai

[1]

Bhavnagar

2-1-36

Vahala children!

This is my first letter in *Budhvariya*. I will surely write a letter to you every week. I love writing to you. I will enjoy it if you write to me.

It is winter now.

Have you read this poem before? It is written by our poet Dalpatram Dahyabhai.

Cold winds blow in the winter, Leaves fall and wheat ripens.
Shiyale sheetal vaa vaay, pan khare, ghau paida thaay.

In the winter will grow wheat and chana. There will be many vegetables like *baingan*, cabbage, *papdi*, *mooli*, and drumstick.

People will make sweets like *methipak*, *adadiyo pak* and *golpapdi*.

Everyone will feel cold and will wear warm clothes, they will warn themselves beside a *sagdi* and sit in the sun.
In the winter the skin on your hands and feet will crack. People will put *kokum* butter, Vaseline or ghee.

See this is winter. Is everything not as I have written?

Blessings from your
Gijubhai

[2]

Bhavnagar
26-1-36

Priya children!

The last time I addressed you as *vahala*; this time I call you *priya*. There is no difference between *vahala* and *priya*.(dear). Some like *vahala* and some like *priya*. What do you like?

I don't really have to tell you that it is still winter. It is very cold, your feet and mine have cracks; the water in the *matka* feels like ice water, so we know that it is winter. Just as we know when it is summer, when the sun is so hot. No one needs to tell us it is summer. And who doesn't know that when the rain falls from the sky, it is monsoon. We know without being told.

There is another way to tell that winter has started. After Diwali comes winter and also the *diwalighodo* (white wagtail). You may have seen this but may not know its name. Have you seen that black and white bird in the yard running around with its tail going up and down? That bird is the *diwalighodo*. Do you know where this bird comes from? All the way from south Europe—from Italy. Why does it come here from so far away? Many birds come to India when it is too cold for them in Europe. For us this winter is cold, but not for the birds. They like the sun and warmth here. When summer comes for us, and it is spring in Europe the birds will go back.

We call this bird *diwalighodo* because it comes around Diwali. It is also called *khanjan*. In English it is called wagtail because it keeps wagging its tail all day.

There is a lot I can write about this bird, but enough for now.

But why don't you do something? Observe the *diwalighodo*. Watch how it flies, what it eats, and its call. Once you have studied it, I will tell you more. That is all for now.

Yours
Gijubhai

[3]

Balmandir: Bhavnagar
2-2-36

Dear children,

It is still winter is it not? It is the month of *Maah*. Four months are said to be the winter months: *Kartak*, *Maagsar*, *Posh* and *Maah*. But it is not as cold in *Maah*, and sometimes not cold at all. And sometimes it is cold right up to the full moon in *Fagun*. People believe that the cold will go only after warming itself in the Holi bonfire of *Fagun*.

Last week it was not so cold, so it was enjoyable to work. Yet it has not started getting warmer. It was quite windy for two-three days and the children did not come for music but played in the playground. Children love the sun in this season. They refuse

to move from the playground. They jump and run and slide and swing or go on the roundabout. They do not come inside so all of us go and stand in the playground. Who says that studies can happen only within a room? All this playing in the ground is also studying!

Winter, summer and monsoon: you know which season you like best from among these. But it is true that summer is for the poor and winter is for the rich. Winter needs warm clothes and covering, and one also feels more hungry. The poor do not have enough to wear and cover, nor nice things to eat. The rich in the winter? If they are cold they warm themselves near a *sagdi* (coal stove); they wear warm socks, cover themselves with shawls and sleep under *rajais*. The poor shiver in the cold. They do not have enough to wear or cover. And how can they warm themselves in the sun or by the fire? They have to work and earn, even when it is freezing cold. When summer comes, the poor are relieved. It is alright even if their clothes are ragged and they can even sleep without bedding. In the cities, hundreds of people live like this on the footpaths. Do not think that they like to live like this. They are in this state because they do not have money, nor house, nor beds and bedding.

Well this will all change. For now let us spend our winter. Are you eating the fresh green *chanas*? You must also be eating *undhiyu* with *papdi* and *tuver*. And also *baingan bharta*, these days we are getting a lot of big black *baingans*. There are so many winter vegetables: *papdi*, *nolkol*, *methi*, *valol*, cabbage, *baingan*, cauliflower, *mogri*, and more. Tell me, which vegetables do you like?

You do know that you should eat vegetables? Eating green vegetables gives your body energy. Sweet potato, carrots, *mooli*, *mogri*, tomatoes, cabbage are vegetables that are very good for you, you should chew these well. Red tomatoes have many benefits. They can be made into salad, soup and even *murrabba* (jam). Ask your mother to make some for you if she knows how.

You are also getting *amrud* (guava) and *ber* (berries) these days; don't forget to eat these. Do not ever get so busy with your studies that you forget to eat and drink. If that happens, all your education is a waste.

If you sprinkle a bit of salt on the *amrud*, it will taste less sour and bring out the sweetness. *Amrud* can also be made into *murrabba*, not just mangoes. You are lucky that you get to eat all this. Where will the children of the poor get *murrabba*? The vendors sell them *amrud* that are half raw and half ripe, even if they give full money for them.

Don't stay indoors this winter. Go out. It will be fun to go out when it is a bit misty. You won't be able to see even nearby houses, nor the sky and sun. It is fun to see everything looking hazy. In the high mountains the mist is so thick that even if two people are walking together they cannot see each other. The mist envelops us and nothing can be seen.

If you go to the villages, do go to see the wheat fields. You know that wheat grows in the winter? Those who study books like you, may not know this. Your eyes will feel rested when you see the green wheat fields. I am sure you do not recognise the plants with yellow flowers that grow amidst the wheat.

These are mustard plants. They look beautiful when the yellow flowers bloom. They yellow clusters stand out in the greenery. In Bengal there are fields of mustard plants. So the whole field looks like it is covered with a yellow carpet. It is difficult to describe how beautiful this looks.

A lot of wheat grows in the *bhaal* (flat land) of our Kathiawad. These days the *bhaal* must be lush green. In the summer this area is blazing hot without even a single shrub. One can only see the mirages and be fooled by them. The wheat must be growing in Punjab also at this time.

Alright then. This letter has become a bit long. I will write when I have time.

Blessing from your
Gijubhai

[4]

Bhavnagar
12-2-36

Dear children!

Winter continues. It will not go in a hurry. The cold will warm itself in the Holi bonfire before it departs, after one last cold spell.

Yes, the breeze is a little warmer these days. Gijubhai has taken off his warm *bandi* (sleeveless jacket). Gijubhai feels

very cold; so when Gijubhai takes off his *bandi* you know that summer is coming.

But still the winter winds also blow. The winter birds are still here. The *tharthara* (a kind of Red Start) which comes here to spend the winter is still hopping from one pillar to another, it sits on the ground and then flies up. Its stomach and lower part is brick red and the upper part is black. You can recognise this if you look carefully, but it may not sit still long enough for you.

Now that it is getting warmer the *tuktuk* is also seen. You can see it sitting on the wooden post near our compound. It will now use its beak to make a hole in the post and make nest in it.

Tuktuk is a colourful bird. The part above its beak is red, and its feathers are green. As it gets warmer the *tuktuk* will call, moving its head from side to side—*tuk, tuk, tuk*. If we do not know we will wonder who is making this sound, you could not imagine that it was a bird. As the heat increases it will sound as if a coppersmith is working on his vessels—*tning, tning, tning*. In English tis bird is called a coppersmith.

With winter going the poor will be happy.

Nice *amruds* these days. These are of two kinds—white and red. Which one do you like?

I like both. The other winter fruit is *ber*, you must have had your fill of these. Remember we had once brought *amrud* and carrots to the Balmandir? Carrot is not a fruit but a root vegetable. You can eat carrots! They have vitamins. When we were young we used to munch a lot of carrots. Do not eat the

central part; it tastes a little bitter. Eat carrots and *mooli*; eat *baingan* and *papdi*; eat all these winter vegetables. Do eat *chana-baingan* vegetable too.

And then eat the *paaks* (winter sweets using warming spices and ingredients) and that have been made at your home like *adadiyo*, *gadadiyo*, and *gundariyu*; also *badam paak* and *saalam paak*. The children of the poor eat *rotla*, you eat your *paak*.

This is winter; now summer will come. And you will forget how cold it was that made your chin rattle. And you will ask—how was it in the winter? Winter will come again and again, and you will forget again and again. That's how it is!

Your
Gijubhai

[5]

Bhavnagar
19-2-36

Dear children!

So these days is it winter or summer? It is a strange season. It is misty in the morning. The sun does not rise red and clear. But it is head-hurting strong in the afternoon. And at night (at least today) it is very windy and it feels cold. People call this season the meeting of seasons. Neither the dry cold of winter nor the severe heat of summer. These days there is humidity in

the air and the sun appears now and then among the clouds. This is also a season of illnesses. Chicken pox, measles, cough, influenza, colds are common at this time.

Today even the children were confused. They felt hot outside so they came in and started working; but they felt cold indoors so came back to the playground. Children know well the changes in the seasons. When the sun is out the children are in the music room and when it is cold almost the whole room is empty. Birds and animals can also sense the change in weather, especially the birds. We can tell which season it is by the way the birds sing, dance, make nests and lay eggs.

Now that winter is on the way out, and spring is setting in the birds are joyous. The sunbird dons such beautiful colours. Its song sounds as if there were tiny bells in its throat and it flits from flower to flower sipping nectar. Its animation and vibrant colours are because of this season.

The mango trees are starting to blossom and the songs are beginning to swell in the throats of the *koels*. The *kuhu kuhu kuhu* call of the *koel* will endure through the summer. But the *tuk tuk*/coppersmith seems to be in hiding, it is not to be heard. Maybe because the air is cooler again. The *tuk tuk* loves the summer heat.

And have you seen the *kesudo* (flame of the forest) tree? In Bengali this tree is called *Palash*. Can you see its flowers? How beautiful they look from afar? A poet has described this as the flame of the forest. Are they not as red as the flames of a fire? People dry the flowers and make with them saffron water that they play with to celebrate *holi/dhuleti/ hutashani*.

The water is a beautiful colour. When the hot winds blow in the summer, mothers will bathe babies with this cooling water.

You can see now that people have put aside their warm coverings, we also see less of warm jackets and dresses. You too must have stopped wearing your warm clothes, and warming yourself by the *sagdi*.

You must carefully experience the change in the breeze. Now the chill winds do not blow. The breeze is gentler. In a few days it will be soft and fragrant. But once summer sets in the *loo* will blow hot and fierce; but not for a while yet.

One can even see some flowers on the mango tree. It is just the beginning, but it is a sign that winter is departing and the arrival of spring.

Now people will not feel as energetic. Soon one will feel tired and lethargic when one works. The days are growing longer. It used to start getting dark around 5-5.30. It around 6.30 now, and it will be light till around 7. The sun rises earlier. So that is the way it is. Winter goes and summer is on its way. But there is still time before the peak of summer. The water in the *matka* is cold. Towards dawn, one still feels like covering with a *rajai*. And there is not a bit of humidity. So then, Ram Ram.

Your
Gijubhai

[6]

Bhavnagar
25-2-36

Dear children!

Now I will not be able to say that it is the middle of winter. Now spring and autumn are stepping side-by-side. Autumn is shedding the leaves of the *neem*, *peepar*, *buch* and *oomra* trees, as spring has bestowed fresh tender leaves on the *neem* and *oomro*. The fresh shoots of the *neem* look beautiful as they shine in the sunlight. In just a short time the *neem* will shed all its old leaves and will be covered in new leaves. These will sway greenly even in the hot winds of summer.

See now the signs of proper summer are getting closer. The *mogra* will bloom fragrantly in the summer. It appeared to be dormant till now. Just as animals like hedgehogs and frogs spend the winter sleeping, perhaps, it seems, so does the *mogra*. All winter we watered it, but it did not send out any shoots or leaves. This week it has started sprouting new leaves. Soon it will be completely clad in leaves and then there will be buds everywhere.

With the coming of spring also have come the tiny winged insects; there will also be butterflies. The *neelkanths* (Indian rollers) are seen feeding on the flying insects. If one stopped to watch one can see the birds catching something in the air.

Now snakes will start coming out, so will the hedgehogs, who were hiding in their burrows till now. Several animals sleep in

their burrows right through the cold season to stay warm. Now that the weather is getting warmer they will come out to hunt for food. It is remarkable that they can survive for long winter months without food and water, although they do get lose weight.

Holi will be here in another 8-10 days. As they say, the cold will go after warming itself in the Holi bonfire. I feel that there will still be a cold spell. The children in the villages must have already started collecting cow dung cakes and wood. But I won't talk about Holi yet; let it come first.

Among the foreign winter-summer flowers, the *sonsali* flowers are blooming. They add beauty to the garden and the flower vases. The *tagar* (crape jasmine/pinwheel) flower has started sprouting and there are a couple of flowers also. The roses continue to bloom red and fragrant. Now slowly the *jui* (jasmine) will blossom.

The honey bees seem to be busy round the year. Even now they fly around looking for flowers to sip nectar to make honey, and also make their bee hives. They have just made a small hive in a bucket.

Now the big black *baingans* will stop. There will be fewer vegetables available in the villages, and in the summer there will be none. It is better in the cities, we still get something or the other.

Alright then. I am in a hurry today, so more later.

Blessings from your
Gijubhai

[7]

Bhavnagar
4-3-36

Dear children!

So is it summer or winter now? Did I not tell you that winter will go out wagging its tail, it will warm itself on the Holi bonfire before it departs? Hasn't it turned cold again? What cold winds blow these days. It is like winter is back in full form. But this will not stay for long. This is the last spell.

Now the *khakhra* tree (flame of the forest) is in full bloom. Today we brought two branches with flowers to the Balmandir and arranged them in a pot. Have you looked at the colour of the flowers? What a lovely brilliant red they are. Have you seen how the flowers are shaped like a parrot's beak? Wherever you all may be in the summer do remember the *kesuda* flowers. This tree is also called *Palash*.

The *bhurva* winds are blowing these days. These are necessary to dry the wheat grains on their stalks. Is not Nature amazing? It sends the right kind of sunlight, air and water when they are needed. The winter winds are harsh. They dry the soil and make it crack. No matter how much you water the trees it does not seem to be enough. Our skin also becomes dry. When these winds blow strong the leaves will start to fall. The dry leaves will fall everywhere—on the roads, in the gardens. While these leaves fall, fresh leaves will start to appear. We have a small saying or poem on this.

પીપળપાન ખરંતા,
હસતી ફૂંપળીઆ,
અમ વીતી તમ વીતશે,
ઘીરી બાપૂડીયા.

Seeing the old dry leaves of the *peepal* tree rapidly dropping down the newly emerging leaves started laughing. The old leaves told them “my dears; do not laugh. Just like us, your turn too will come. Be patient.” And that is the law of nature. The new comes, the old goes. If that did not happen there would be no place on earth for all the trees and plants, insects, animals and birds as well as humans. It is only when it sheds its leaves that the tree becomes new again.

This happens with birds also. They also shed their old feathers and grow new ones. But as it happens with some trees, birds do not shed all their feathers at one time. But just like trees birds also look drab when the feathers are shedding. At this time they do not sing nor generally do they lay eggs. There does not seem to be a fixed season for this.

Do not think that only trees and birds shed leaves and feathers. Do you know that snakes shed their skin? This is called moulting. Nature has arranged the seasons for their shedding and moulting so that they are renewed. How amazing!

* * * * *

When I started this letter, it was cold. Now at four o'clock it has warmed up. There is no set pattern nowadays. In the morning the temperature was 60-65 degrees, now it is 88-90 degrees (Fahrenheit). The extreme fluctuations in the temperature causes coughs and colds and other illnesses.

Holi will be here soon. Get ready to eat *fafda* and *suvaali*. Eat your fill of dates and *daliya (chana)* and *dhaani* (popcorn). The market is full of dates from Arabia. You must have started enjoying these; eat these with some ghee, they will be easy to digest.

Now I can't help but give you some advice for Holi. If the boys in the street use bad language you should not have to do the same. Play with colours, but do not use mud and dirty things on each other. Play with your friends but do not put colour on passers-by. And please do not steal someone else's cow dung cakes for your Holi bonfire. The coming Saturday 7-6-36 is the day of Holi. Alright then, Ram Ram for now.

Jay Bharat from your well wisher
Gijubhai



[8]

Bhavnagar
11-3-36

Dear children!

Today I am officially welcoming spring. Just get out of the Balmandir and look around. Look there are flowers on our mango tree. Gopalbhai's, Nanabhai's and Mastrambhai's mango trees are also in full bloom. Soon these trees will be laden with flowers. Look at the *neem* and the *peepar*, see the new leaves sprouting. Trees are bursting with new leaves and birds are bursting with song. Melodious jingling bells ring in the sunbird's throat. The tailorbird's *twee twee* fills the tree canopies, the *tuk tuk* has started its steady metallic call, and you can hear the *kuhu kuhu* of the *koels*.

Its spring and the birds are joyous. The dove hoots, and the mynas share their varied calls, the pigeons call from under the roofs, alcoves in houses, and wells. And the sparrows are busy with the business of making nests. In the hedge near the Kalamandir chowk, a dove has laid two eggs; one of these has already hatched, and the second one should hatch any day now. Most of the birds will start laying their eggs now.

Holi has come and gone. The cold weather too seems to be going, but with a sigh. There is a strong breeze these days. The cold doesn't like to go away, but it does not have a choice; having been in one place for three-four months, why would it like to leave?

Now the sun will shine strong and the soil will get heated, the moisture will go and the soil will get energy. Following the footsteps of the fresh spring will come the blazing summer which will spread the hot loo winds. But not yet.

We can enjoy the weather for some days before the sun starts burning hot. The morning sun will be orange and the evening clouds colourful. The Indian rollers will be chasing the butterflies in the gardens.

The dogs are not panting as much these days, and lie outside as they enjoy the gentle spring sunshine.

The bark of the *neem* trees is cracking, it seems like it will peel away and there will be new bark underneath. The bark from the branches of the *oomra* (*ficus glomerata*) trees is also flaking and falling and fresh green bark is glittering through.

As winter has gone small children no longer sleep all huddled up. The *sagdis* and bonfires have long stopped. We have started to enjoy the cool water from the *matka*.

With winter gone, the lethargy of the lazy ones will also start to evaporate. There is a saying that in the *Fagun* month the dirt of the lazybones will go.

Well then enjoy the spring breezes. Today you all are going on a trip aren't you? Do look all around for spring.

Your well wisher
Gijubhai

[9]

Bhavnagar
18-3-36

Dear children!

You must be waiting for my weekly letter. This time it is one day late. Do excuse me.

I had expected that the cold will go away after warming itself on the Holi bonfire, but it is still here. It seems that it goes ahead a little and decides to return; in the end it will wag its tail three or four times before it departs. These days it is 70 degrees F (21 degrees C) in the morning and over 90 degrees (32 degree C) in the afternoon. It feels like a touch of winter in the morning, summer in the afternoon, and neither summer nor winter in the evening. Generally this period is said to be one of mixed seasons.

See, I wear my warm *bundi* in the morning, but in the afternoon I even feel like taking off my shirt, and late in the night one needs to cover with a *rajai*. This is the season when the mosquitoes are busy humming their song. The mosquitoes usually hide or die when it is too cold or too hot. This is also a season when there are many illnesses. Cough, chicken pox and measles are common these days. Not long ago there was an outbreak of pox among cattle and many cattle in the villages died.

It is also a combination of spring and autumn. You will see a lot if you look around as you walk. Look at the *gulmohar* tree. Can you see a single leaf on it? Does it not look like the bare trees in foreign countries when it snows? It really looks like a foreign tree. Most of our *desi* (indigenous) trees are not like this. Their new leaves are appearing even as they shed their old leaves. How bare the *gulmohar* looks now, but when its leaves come it will become completely clad in green. And we will not even remember that it looked like this.

As the heat is increasing the ice cream machines (*sancha*) in town have started churning. Today there is ice cream for the Balmandir. You children love ice cream don't you? You also love ice. You eat lumps of it. Don't your teeth ache when you go crunch crunch on the ice?

When summer comes people will enjoy sherbets, ice cream, cold drinks and kulfi. Isn't that fun. In the winter people eat winter sweets (*paak*), and in the summer drink cold drinks and have *shrikhand*. Almost as if people work all day just in order to eat and drink, imagine!

Some people will now start putting some *vaalo* (fragrant grass) in their water matka or pitchers. Some will put up the screens made from this grass outside their windows and enjoy the fragrance when they wet these. Some will tie a wet cloth around tier head and some will paste black mud on their forehead. Summer is advancing and its staff bearers have been announcing its arrival for some time now. The *neem* trees have flowered, there are flowers on the *kerda* (*Capparis decidua*), there are blossoms on the mango trees and the

waters in rivers and lakes have started heating up. These are all harbingers of summer. Let summer come, we need it too.

The sunbird is looking beautiful these days, like a groom going to wed. That is in fact true. It is in the summer that the birds will wear their brightest feathers, sing the sweetest, build nests and lay their eggs from which chicks will hatch in the monsoon. The sunbird has started making a nest in the peeper (*Piper dichotomum*) that covers the net fence along the street. It has collected tiny soft feathers, bits of string and twine to make this. It has finished making more than half. The Tailorbird is going *twee twee* and one of these days it will make its nest in the *laram* or *mogra* shrub. The Tailorbird is amazing. Just like a tailor it will put leaves together and stitch them together to make a small pouch and then make its nest in it. Every bird has a different kind of nest, and the way to make and the materials and tools are also different. If you look at a crow's nest you will find bits of iron wire and wood in it. A pigeon's nest is messy. In a dove's nest you will find neem twigs, coconut shavings and bits and rags. You would be amazed to see a weaver bird's nest. It is so beautifully woven from blades of grass. Almost all birds make nests in this season. Some on the ground, some in sand or in walls, some on the tree tops and some on the window sill; some in wells and some in thorny shrubs. They will select the place that suits them, and also one that is safe from enemies. The weaver bird's nest hangs high from the thorny acacia, it would be difficult for us to reach it. In our compound the dove has made its nest in the cactus hedge. It is not easy for us to put our hands through the thorns and for other birds to reach the nest. Birds have a natural sense about such things.

In a few days the *Chaitra* month will start. In the south this month marks the New Year. The first day of *Chaitra* (*sud ekam*) is celebrated as Gudi Padwa. On this day people bring some *neem* flowers, mix these with salt and eat them, as well as offer to others. You do know that *neem* flowers are very healthy, they are bitter but help to fight diseases.

The *neem* has just started to blossom but when it is full of flowers their sweet fragrance will fill the night air. The cool shade of the *neem*, the sweet smell of its flowers, cold water and the call of the *koel*: we can feast on these in the summer without spending any money, these are all the free treats of summer.

Soon we will be able to see mirages. For this you should go to the outskirts of the village in mid-afternoon. If you look across the fields it will look as if there is a lake stretching as far as the eyes can see. You will even see trees reflected in this. But this is not real. It is fun to see this in the summer from the edge of the fields. If you travel to the *bhaal* look out for these mirages on the way. Thirsty deer go running towards this sight, but as they get closer, the water seems to go further away. Finally they get tired and fall down. It is from this that we have the saying "like a mirage" to describe something that looks real but is not real, but just an illusion.

Let summer come. There will be a lot like this to see.

That's all for now.

Your
Gijubhai's blessings

[10]

Balmandir: Bhavnagar
13-4-36

Dear children!

It is three o'clock in the afternoon. The temperature is reading 100 degree F (about 38 degree C). The air is warm. The sky is cloudless and the strong sun is beating down. The metal equipment in the playground has become hot and the sand in the ground is also hot. Even dust on the road is hot. The crows and pigeons have gathered in the shade of the Balmandir gallery. The pigeons are cooing on the window frames and breaking the silence. The cawing of the crows adds to the irritation of the heat. The chatter of the mynas is also not a welcome sound. They have all taken shelter here from the sun. I don't feel like chasing them away. Let them be.

The labourers in the grain market must be panting as they lift the heavy sacks; the *sheths* (owners) must be panting as they lie under the fan on their mattresses and eat ice cream; the dogs must be panting with their tongue hanging out as they crouch in some cool place.

Even in this heat, the work of running the trains; teaching children; farmers ploughing, and the *kandoi* making *ganthias* is going on. In this heat the *shethani* (rich lady) will be lying down in her bed, the cat will have stretched out in the store room, and the fakir will be peacefully sleeping in the *otla* (raised platform) of the mosque.

But it is the sun that has brought back the leaves on the bare *gulmohar*, and the *oomro* that looked as if it had been robbed in the jungle, and the *peepar* that seemed as if it had never been clothed in foliage. The *mogra*, *jui*, *raatrani* whose blossoms fill the night with fragrance also owe this to the sun. It is the sun that will heat the soil that will give birth to new crops and wonderful plants. It is the sun that will carry the water of the seas on a trip to the sky and fill the rain clouds with it.

As summer sets in the Brahminy mynas, mynas, koels, drongos and all the other birds are bursting into song. The male birds are singing and dancing to attract the females. The males try to court the females, and the pleased females build nests and lay eggs.

The male and female sparrows, doves and sunbirds have made pairs and are starting to make their nests; some have even completed their nests. In some nests the eggs have hatched and the parents are busy feeding their new chicks with a variety of worms and other titbits.

Here in our courtyard one of the dove's eggs has already hatched. There is one more egg in the nest but it seems as if she has not incubated it. I am thinking of bringing it for the collection. On the way to Gopalbhai's, among the stones on the side of the road, is a fist-sized space, it appears that a *devchakli* (Indian Robin) has laid eggs there. I do not know when this happened, but the day before yesterday Bachubhai showed me the place. I looked at the nest through binoculars. The hollow has grass and on it are spread bits of tender roots, string, hair, cotton wool etc. The *devchakli's* nest is always like this. Sometimes she even brings moulted snake skin from

somewhere, soft and smooth skin. After all, her chicks also need a cozy home and bed! They are not as sturdy as the crows. Crows nests have things like iron wires and pieces of wood. At best for the lining they may have some coconut shell bits.

In the beautiful nest, I saw through the binoculars that there was one chick. It was sitting with its beak wide open. Its parents had gone looking for food. I waited for a while. Then the *devchakli* came with something and put it in the chick's mouth—may be a worm or a couple of insects. Then it got dark and I could not see. The mother got into the nest and sat with her chick.

Close to that is a *peepar* which has a tree guard. The plant is still small and needs the protection. There is a nest hanging from one of the branches of this. Birds are amazing! The crow makes its nest high in the trees; the dove nests among the thorns of the cactus or in the hedges. The sparrow makes its nests wherever it can—in alcoves, behind pictures, on top of cupboards or in hollows in the wall. The small Indian roller makes its nest in a foot or so long tunnel it makes in a wall; the *tuk tuk* makes a hole in a wooden post or dry tree trunk, the Indian robin finds small hollows on the ground, in walls or houses. The Tailorbird, like its name, sews together two leaves and makes a small pouch, and the sunbird makes a hanging nest from the branch of a tree. You know where the weaver bird makes its nest. Birds like humans make their nests in different places, in different styles and from different materials.

That evening we saw a sunbird's nest hanging on a branch of the *peepar*. The nest was oblong, shaped like a guava fruit.

For a distance it looked like a small hanging bag. What must this nest be made from? We would only find out if we could examine it properly. But we could not do that as there was a chick in the nest. But I know that sunbirds make their nest using a mix of different materials such as hair, fine tender grass, thin twigs, dry leaves, cotton wool, bark and rags. This nest was stuck directly on the branch; sometimes they suspend it by a string which is made from rags. Some bird experts say that the sunbird uses spider webs in the nest which is what holds it together.

When I looked through the binoculars I saw a tiny chick in the nest. You must wonder how I could look into such a bag-like nest. Look there is a small opening, just about the thickness of our thumb, in the side of the nest. The chick was sitting at this opening with its beak wide open, waiting for its mother to bring food. What else can a chick do? Eat and sleep! When little children are hungry they cry. Chicks also cry *chee chee* to say that they are hungry.

As I was watching the sunbird came with food. It clung with its feet on to the side of the nest and fed the chick. Then it gently entered the nest and settled down. It was evening, so the mother and chick must have wanted to sleep!

In one of the walls there are a few hollows. The small Indian roller seems to have laid its eggs in one of these. But one can't be sure unless one breaks down the wall. But how can one break its house just to see its eggs?

The birds are very busy as this is the season for building nests and laying eggs. Meanwhile the buffaloes are enjoying lying in

the mud or water. The donkeys like to stand in the shade of a wall and bray. And people like to complain all day saying how hot it is.

Whatever it may be, in the summer our hands and feet don't crack and we do not shiver in the cold. And the fun of having ice cream in the summer! And some people enjoy sitting in the evening near a fountain with the breeze carrying the spray of water. Summer is said to be the season for the poor; they do not have to freeze from the cold at night.

With the increasing heat the mosquitoes will start to die. People will put their cots in the sun and let the bedbugs die in the sun. Other small insects will also die with the sun's heat. On the other hand, creatures that slept in the winter are emerging—snakes, hedgehogs, frogs. And while they fight for space the herons reach the water tank for their breakfast. The *maachhimaar* (osprey) is also happy. Having started the day by gulping down a couple of frogs it stand still while it whistles away.

These are happy days for the crows, squirrels. *kaachanda* (garden lizards), *kherkhatta* (tree pies). They carry off eggs from the nests and destroy the birds' homes. They are uninvited and unwelcome guests. Keep a look out. You will see crows and tree pies fighting with everyone and looking out for nests to rob eggs from. It is very hard work to make a nest and successfully raise two chicks. Do not think that birds are lucky because they just happily fly here and there, they do not have to go to work or to study. Don't you sometimes wish that you were a bird? But really, they have so many enemies—people, as well as other birds; snakes and garden lizards, hawks

(*shakro*) and kites (*baaj*). To stay safe from all these, to find food, make a nest, hatch and raise chicks—birds do not have an easy life. Yet birds are joyful. Despite their hardships they sing and live happily.

You will be happy to know that there was ice cream at the Bal Mandir. You all love ice cream don't you? Not just ice cream you like to eat ice too. Goodness how can you crunch on such cold cold ice? This summer we will feast on ice cream three or four times.

These days the children are not playing in the *akhada* (playground); in the winter they did not play indoors. Nowadays the children are present for music time; in the winter they used to be on the merry-go-round in the playground. The children work in the rooms and the honeybees work in the garden. We really feel the strong sun, but not the bees. They fly from flower to flower and carry off the honey to their hive somewhere. The doves too do not feel the sun. They love to gurgle and coo all day. The sunbird also seems unaffected by the heat.

The ants are busy at work. The grasshoppers are also flying here and there; they will not collect food, and will die in the monsoon. The monkeys will jump from branch to branch, eat the fruits as they go *hoop hoop*; but they will shiver when it gets cold. The ants are digging deeper and deeper as they make their home in the soil. They send up tiny balls of soil to the surface. There are little mounds of earth at the mouth of their colony. They are always going back and forth as they collect and store food—a dead butterfly, scorpion, cockroach, bits of *gur* (jaggery), sugar, seeds. They are endlessly industrious in their food gathering, and they keep their store

stocked. Ants do not depend on hunting or looting for food. They collect their own food and consume it when needed. Take a walk in the garden and look closely at the ground; you will be have fun observing the activity of the ants. Sometimes you can even see them carrying their tiny white eggs from one home to another.

As cats can carry their kittens by their neck, tiny ants carry their white eggs, which are smaller than a pinhead, in their mouth and swiftly move them.

It is hot even at night now. Sometimes there is no breeze at all. Now the nights will remain warm, and the humidity will increase and people will start to feel uncomfortable. But as yet it is bearable.

The sky is clear. This is the dark part of the month, so the stars twinkle brightly. I enjoy sitting in my courtyard and looking at the stars. Nowadays I am trying to study about the stars. I will tell you about stars in my next letter. You all start looking at the stars.

The mornings are pleasant; the *koel* is not yet calling in full form. The *kalokoshi* (drongo) is still not sharing a few notes. There is a nip in the early morning air, one needs to cover oneself. But as soon as the sun rises the heat and humidity start to build up. Well, wait until May and June.

Well then, salaam!

Blessings from your
Gijubhai

[11]

Bhavnagar
1-5-36

Dear children!

It is afternoon. The sun is blazing. It is two past noon. A slow *loo* (hot wind) is blowing. The leaves of the trees and plants are drooping. Every thing feels hot to touch, even my *khadi* shirt feels hot.

The crows are going *ca ca* as they look for shade from the heat. One can hear the calls of the Brahminy Myna and mynas, but not the other birds.

The mornings are still cool with a sweet breeze. A *koel* was calling *coo coo* in the rays of the rising sun. This was the male *koel*. In most birds it is the male that calls. Now the *koels* will start calling full-throatedly. The mango orchards will be filled with their chorus.

The Brahminy myna is also calling sweetly. Just as the new leaves sprout on the trees in summer, there is also a burst of bird songs. The Brahminy's beautiful song is a treat to hear. Have you seen this bird? It is a kind of myna, but it has a *choti* on its head.

Yesterday I saw some *munia* chicks. The *munia* is a bird that is slightly bigger than a sparrow. Right now one can see the

small *munias* flying around the hedges. By the monsoon they will have grown and will be seen in many places. Now in the summer it is the time for the chicks to be born and to grow. Most birds hatch and raise their chicks between April and September.

The mynas are preparing to make their nests. They are so busy chattering *kalbal kalbal* that they have to make time for this. Their chicks will be born in the monsoon; in their droppings will develop small insects. If the common myna's nest is near the walls of our houses, these insects will start crawling around on the walls. More about this in the monsoon, for now it is still summer.

Someone has messed up the nest of the *devchakli* (Indian robin) and has taken the eggs or the chicks, either a crow or a snake. Poor little bird, it had worked hard to make its little home and someone has destroyed it. But not to worry. It is still summer. The male Indian robin will dance and sing again for the female, and the pair will make another nest where she will lay eggs again.

The sunbird's nest is swinging from the *peepar* branch, and the chick inside is enjoying itself like a little prince. Its mother is also sitting inside and swinging along with it, perhaps singing lullabies!

I am sky gazing these days. It is half moon and I can see the *saptrishi* to the north.

Why don't you do this much? Keep looking at the night sky; observe the stars and their positions. You will see different

stars in different seasons. It is as if even the stars have their seasons. And you will wonder and ask why this is so, and you will find out about how the earth moves and where and why the stars are placed in the sky. I do not know enough about this, so it is better that I keep quiet.

The gulmohar at Gopalrao's place is full of flowers. Not long ago it did not even have a single leaf and it looked as if it had dried completely. Now it is covered with green leaves and there are red flowers on every branch. It looks like there is a beautiful flowerpot in the courtyard. If we stand below the tree and look up it looks as if we are standing under a roof of flowers. If we look down on the tree from the Balmandir, it looks as if someone has spread out a carpet of flowers. This is the first year that my *gulmohar* has flowered. The flowers are still appearing. Every morning the first thing I do is to see how many new flowers have bloomed.

The tender leaves of many trees appear in the hottest part of summer. In monsoon, the grass comes up, and it dries in the summer, but this is the time for the big trees to bear flowers and fruits. The trees love the sun, it gives them life. The leaves of the trees soak in the sun and obtain nourishment from the soil. If a tree gets water and manure, but no sun, it will not grow. There are tiny holes on the underside of the leaves that help the leaves to take in the sunlight, and the leaves are arranged in a way that each gets the most sun.

It is also the blazing heat of the summer that brings the monsoon.

These days the lizards and garden lizards are also laying their eggs. Crocodiles will lay their eggs in the hot sand. Lizard's eggs are small and round. Dahiben found some in her cupboard day before yesterday. Baby lizards are also running around now. They are busy discovering the new world! But just then a crow or kite may carry them off. You will see little mice around. Scorpions, snakes and centipedes will also be born now and start running for survival.

The mangoes have come on the mango tree. The small fruits of the *neem* are showing, now that the flowers are dropping. The *neem* in my front yard has fairly big fruit. They are lovely in shape and colour. The fruits of the *ber* have already come and gone.

There is a small beehive on the neem tree behind our house. It is covered with bees. All day the bees are flying back and forth collecting nectar and bringing it to the hive. I see them in the morning on the roses. Bees make honey all around the year, but this is the time when there are many fragrant flowers, full of nectar so they are really busy. Bees are always so busy. They do not rest even for a minute. There are many books written about bees and beehives that explain many interesting things about how the bees live and work and make hives and honey.

Bora showed us a hive in some a hollow among some stones. The bees had flown away and it was empty. We took it down and brought it to our collection library. You can all see how the hive looks from the inside and how it feels like wax to touch. Do not go near a hive if there are bees around, they will sting you all over. There are some people who know how to take honey out of hives. I have seen on person doing this.

Talking about summer, this letter has become one about beehives. So, salaam for now!

The summer is not going away yet. Now there will be a lot of humidity, and we will feel uncomfortable. And then, the rains will come.

Your well wisher
Gijubhai

[12]

Bhavnagar
14-7-36

Dear children!

During the summer I was travelling. So I could not write my seasons letter to you, please forgive me.

Now the monsoon has set in. Who will remember and write about the blazing hot summer? There is a saying that even the fortune teller does not read past dates.

But to write like this would be doing injustice to summer. It is because of summer that today we have the monsoon and its pleasures.

Just a little while ago there was a storm that reached up to the skies. Just as the advance horseman heralds the king's procession, these dark clouds come on ahead to announce the

rains to come. They tell the people “Get ready, get ready, Meghrajā (the rain king) is coming”.

The wise people have cleaned the rooftops and cleared the eaves, and they await the rain.

The one evening the clouds began to gather from all the directions, and it became pitch dark. The sunlight dimmed and it seemed as if evening had fallen. The birds knew that the rain was coming and they flew towards their nests. The women who had gone to fetch water hastily picked up their pots and hurried home. Hasano who was on the roof setting the tiles, quickly covered the openings. Just then the downpour began, and a thousand cannons burst behind the clouds. Streaks of lightning penetrated the dark clouds and rumbling thunder.

In a moment the rain transformed the earth. Roads covered with swirls of dust turned muddy. Small depressions and ruts became ditches and puddles. The trees and leaves that had drooped in the heat were revived and happy. Where just a while ago one felt so hot, there was a cool breeze, and the very sky changed its appearance.

The first rain, the first rain! The water is flowing in the streets, and the culverts are gurgling. The water has filled the fields and is spreading as small rivulets and streams which will flow to meet the river, and the rivers overflow.

The first rain, the first rain! Some roofs have started to leak. The house is full of water. The firewood and cow dung cakes in the courtyard have become wet. Those who had gone out without an umbrella return home drenched. Children released

from school make sure that they jump around and get totally drenched in the pouring rain.

The first rain, the first rain! What a relief from days and days of heat and humidity. After so many days the suspended dust has settled, and the sweet fragrance of wet soil fills the air. After so long the heated earth has cooled. The peacocks dance and call in delight. The *koel* shrieks twice as loudly, the sparrows, mynas and pigeons flap their wings as they take a dip in the puddles and fly off happily.

Monsoon has come, monsoon has come, monsoon has come!
The fields are saturated with water. The water has risen in lakes and wells. The rivers flow from bank to bank.

The monsoon is still setting in. After a few days of heavy rain, there is a lull now. It is humid again. Clouds gather in the sky, but they disperse. These days the days are cloudy, but the night skies are clear and the stars are bright. People say that this is not good, this does not foretell rain.

It has rained once, surely it will come again. It has to come sooner or later, it is the time for rains.

This is good weather to go on outings. Fresh tender grass has sprouted everywhere. It is as if a green carpet covers the earth. The view from the top of the Balmandir hill is so beautiful. One feels like running to the Gadhediya maidan and rolling in green grass, although the donkeys (*gadheda*) would prefer to roll in the dry dust or ash rather than the greenery. When you go out these days look at the cattle grazing, you will see white birds walking behind them or around their hooves.

These are called cattle egrets in English. Do you know why these birds walk close to the cattle? That is because there are a lot of insects in the grass and as the cattle walk, the insects fly out of the grass and the egrets get a meal without too much effort! Is that not a clever way to get food? Birds have their own ways. The white egrets are pretty, and nice to see when they fly.

These days you will be able to spot kingfishers on the hedge or on a wire around puddles. The tiny frogs in the puddles are breakfast, lunch and dinner for the kingfishers. The kingfishers are in good spirits.

The frogs are also in great form. The big frogs have come out of their sleep and are calling loudly. They have huge monsoon concerts every night. They are not concerned whether anyone likes this or not. As the big trombones boom, the smaller trumpets follow suit. Our water tank is teeming with big frogs and tiny frogs, all jumping and leaping around. Before they became frogs, they were like little fishes, and before that these were tiny eggs. Monsoon is the main season for frogs. There are thousands, and thousands also get eaten or die. The ones that remain lay their eggs and new frogs hatch in the monsoon. You must be listening to the song of the frogs every night.

The mynas are also in good spirits these days. The chicks which had hatched are now out of the nest. Now mother and son, and father and son sit together on a branch and enjoy themselves. The mother shrilly explains to her chick how to survive, how to fly, and the chick chirps softly as the lessons progress. The chicks are almost the size of their parents now.

Soon it will be difficult to tell which one is the parent and which is the chick. Unlike humans, the young ones of chicks do not take years to grow up. In a short time the chicks become independent and fly away. Next monsoon, the chicks of today will have chicks of their own and they would be feeding them caterpillars with their beaks, and teaching them life lessons.

Our Shankarbhai has kept some of the little red insects that came out in the first rain. Shankarbhai is doing an experiment. The morning after the first rains, these insects that look like big red beads, and seem as if they are made of red silk suddenly appeared out of nowhere, it seemed. Some people believe that they fall out of the sky when it rains, but that is not true. Scientists think that these insects come out of hibernation as soon as it rains and then we see them running around. It looks as if the ground is covered with red beads. It is a pretty sight to see them on the newly sprouted green grass. Shankarbhai keeps them in a bottle with some soil. They run around and then become very still, as if they are dead. But as soon as it rains they come alive again. Shankarbhai has written an article about these insects in *Shikshan Patrika*. If you want to keep these insects, meet Shankarbhai; he will show you the correct way.

These days there are all kinds of caterpillars to be seen on the different plants. It is like it has rained caterpillars! The caterpillars on the fig tree have eaten away at all the leaves. The caterpillars that fall from the tree have crept into the Balmandir rooms.

It is said that the wasps take the caterpillars and put them in their wasp's nests. When the wasp's eggs hatch into

caterpillars, these will feed on the captive caterpillars and grow.

The caterpillars on the *akda* (*Calotropis*) plants will turn into butterflies. Almost all the children in the Balmandir have come to know this. Butterflies lay their eggs on the underside of the *akda* leaves; when the eggs hatch, the caterpillars feed on the same leaves and grow fat, until they turn into cocoons. After some time butterflies come out from the cocoons. Shankarbhai has kept many of these caterpillars in glass bottles, and these have turned into butterflies.

Monsoon is the season for insects. The flies have laid lakhs of eggs and lakhs of flies have hatched from these. There are too many flies these days. The termites are teeming in swarms. With the first rains, the winged termites flew out of their termite nests and flew up. They flew all day, and for a night, and the next day their wings were strewn all over. Some were carried away by birds, the rest lived out their very short lives. Snails, slugs and centipedes and many other insects come with the monsoon and go with the monsoon.

The tailorbird is very active these days; it calls all day as it makes its nest. The other birds have already hatched their chicks and sent them out of the nest; this tailorbird seems to be late. It must have gone to stitch a customer's clothes! If you want to see its nest, come to my garden. It has made its nest on the mulberry tree. It is rightly called tailorbird. It has stitched two leaves and made a pouch, now it will bring soft hair, cotton and other things to line the nest and then lay its eggs in the soft bed. Yesterday I saw the completed nest of the tailorbird. There were two eggs in it. When I went to take a closer look,

the eggs fell down. Sadly one broke. I put the other one in the nest. It was a beautiful egg, oval in shape, greenish in colour with brown specks. This was the first time I saw a tailorbird's nest.

Do you know that mushrooms grow in monsoon? Just a few days ago there were some in the flower bed. I could smell it as soon as I woke up. I thought, the mushrooms must be out somewhere. I found them and pulled them out and threw them away.

These mushrooms grow in or around dirt. One can see a lot of them around garbage. Some mushrooms are poisonous and some are not. The saheb people eat the ones that are not poisonous, they make curry out of them. These mushrooms do not smell. I have not seen any mushrooms that do not smell, much less taste them! Tell me then, how much I have written about monsoon? Now I will write after a few days. I still have to write about the different plants that are growing these days, I have to write about how the sky looks; I have yet to write about the many other beauties and special features of monsoon. Monsoon is the king of seasons. Naturally its description will be long, won't it?

Well then, Ram Ram.

Your well wisher
Gijubhai

[13]

Balmandir: Bhavnagar
22-7-36

Dear children!

The seasons are really magical. The *ashadh* month has passed, and the rains are in suspension. The rains came once; they drenched the earth, filled the rivers and lakes, and pulled up the sprouts from deep within the soil. But then the rain disappeared, it is not coming back to find out how we are all doing. The sun is out again, but there is a lot of humidity. Everyone is awaiting the return of the rain. The trees, the farmers, and the cattle look skywards. During the day there are some clouds in the sky, but at night the stars are out. Some people say that this foretells famine.

Without the rain, but with so much humidity, cholera is also spreading in some places. The air is still, some people with weak digestion feel uneasy.

The freshly sprouted green grass is starting to wither. It has turned yellow, if this continues it will soon dry up and the cattle will not have fodder.

The sowing has been in the fields but the delay in the rain has put the farmers in worry. Every day they look at the sprouting seeds and sigh with worry. In our country agriculture depends of the rain from the sky, and all is ruined if the rain does not come.

But there is still hope. The clouds still gather and disperse. There is news of some rain in some places. Yesterday there was news of rain in Lathi, and last evening in Botad-Ningala. Surely it will rain here also; there is so much humidity. Day before yesterday, there was a squall at night; it felt as if it would start pouring. But in a while, the stars were out!

So many plants have come up on our hill, many of these have medicinal uses. Many kinds of grasses have also grown. Today Monghiben collected some of these and showed me. I did not know the names of many, but Monghiben could name all of them. A bullock-cart driver once told me that there are almost fifty-six kinds of grasses. I feel there may be many more. I am listing below the names of the grasses that Monghiben told me. God has made all these to feed the cattle. They have grown with the rain; in the summer they will dry and shed their seeds which will sprout again in the next monsoon.

Today we have collected sixteen kinds of grasses, there are many more, but they have not been collected today. Here are the names of the sixteen: *shepu, dharo, ghaunlo, peeli sonsali, peeli makhani, chhaiya, lal makhani, pedu, baakar kayo, oondhifuli alias vaanarpoonchh, kaagdoli, saatodo, magamathi, sheshmool, chakimaki, and chamardoodhli.*

There are also a lot of plants on the hill which are used as medicine. *Keedamari, aghedo, shripankh, takmariya, gokhru, bahufali, khadasaliyo,* and many more. Now when the rain comes back and the grass grows taller, it will fill the stomachs of the cattle. Is not nature full of wonder? The plants that have grown because of the rain will be used to make medicines

worth thousands of rupees, and there will be business worth thousands of rupees.

The plants that grow around here are also valuable. Chewing the roots of *shreepankh* relieves rashes. *Keedamari* helps destroy pests. *Adhedo* is said to be the remover of sins, it is so called because it helps to cure cough and asthma.

The caterpillars are still there. Every leaf of the fig tree seems to be covered with them and they fall from the tree like rain. They have eaten away all the leaves, but they have not yet turned into cocoons. The grass does not have any moths yet. This will happen when the rain comes and the grass grows taller, and the caterpillars, sleep, and emerge as moths. They are all waiting for the rain.

Yesterday it drizzled, but not even enough to wet anything, and then it cleared.

But I think that it must have rained on the sea. There was a beautiful rainbow over the ocean. You must all have seen a rainbow. How lovely it is—a rainbow.

Yesterday was a beautiful evening. The clouds were so formed that the earth seemed to be covered by a dark green carpet. It made me so happy to see it.

The month of *shravan* is on. As the saying goes this is the month for scattered showers. But so no showers. Everyone is so tired of the never-ending humidity. I do not even feel like writing. And there are some flies that keep sitting on my hand and bothering me.

The chicks of the koel have started to fly. They look like baby crows. That is all for now.

Your well-wisher
Gijubhai

