

The Kochi Kid (part 2)

By Iain Dryden

Laxman strolled down the narrow street, weaving between men rushing backwards and forwards from trucks to warehouses as they unloaded sacks of cardamom. He turned into the yard at the side of his home in Mattancherry and suddenly, just two metres from him, something slithered into a crack in the old wall. ‘The cobra’s about!’ he yelled.

Several women squatting on the ground stopped sorting ginger and looked round nervously.

In his room Laxman switched on his computer. There was a message from Alice who he’d not heard from for two weeks now.

To Laxman

We’ve got problems. Me and Mary are for the new Vypin bridge...but you’re against it. We also want to protect the holy tree. So is this the end of our idea for an internet comic and the TV competition?
enrakalice.

Laxman typed a reply quickly:

To Alice

I'm not completely against the bridge. I also want to help Baba. Maybe the comic is the way, so let's think hard. laximatt.

Mary was weeding the ground around a cardamom bush in the family spice garden when she heard the garden gate open.

'Mary! E-mails for you,' her sister Flowery called out.

Flowery looked tired after her journey back from Willingdon Island where she worked for the spice exporting company owned by Laxman's father.

Mary was excited as she read the printouts. 'Oh Flowery, thanks for all your help – especially with the website,' she said. 'Maybe now we can start to make a difference.'

Mary sat under her favourite mango tree and read through her e-mails. The light was fading so she quickly scribbled replies to take to Vypin's new internet café in the morning.

To Alice and Laxman

I've drawn Kochi-Kid fighting to protect the holy tree and Flowery's done the web site. I'm taking both to the TV station now because the deadline is tonight. Laxman, to make any progress Vypin needs that bridge. OK, eighteen families will lose their homes, but hundreds of thousands will gain so much more. vypinmary

A few days later the children returned to Vypin to see Baba.

‘What a view!’ Alice shouted. She’d climbed Baba’s tree and from her position she could see men working on the new bridge. She imagined trucks full of Vypin’s spices driving over fresh roads to the new deepwater port planned for Vypin’s neighbouring island. ‘This holy tree will be drowned in concrete if we can’t turn the road away.’

Laxman looked serious. ‘Baba, could an internet comic save your tree?’ he asked.

‘Possibly, if it tells the truth,’ the Baba smiled.

A month later the children were at the finals of the competition which was being shown live on TV. They sat nervously listening to the ideas of the other competitors.

Then the presenter announced: ‘This year we have three winners. They will share this laptop.’ Everyone clapped as the presenter continued: ‘Will Laxman, Mary and Alice please come and tell us about their winning project.’

The cameras followed a wobbly Laxman and a blushing Mary up to the stage. But Alice quickly waltzed around them and up to the microphone. She looked like a Bollywood film star as she said: ‘Hello Kochi! Click onto Kochi-Kid and watch how the Kid saves a holy tree.’

The next day Alice and Mary sat down on the large roots of Baba's tree. Laxman handed Baba an open newspaper. Then chuckling, Baba read aloud 'Three children campaign to save holy tree from new bridge.'

A group of workmen were standing nearby, studying a huge plan of the new bridge. 'Do you think you'll succeed?' asked one of them.

'Of course we will,' Mary and Alice said together.

'I wonder,' said the man. 'I doubt if the slip road they want to build here can go anywhere else.' He walked away and started to measure with a tape held to the ground.

'I'm afraid he might be right,' said Laxman, staring blankly at the lovely tree which might soon be buried in concrete.

Baba winked and said only: 'Time changes everything.'

A month later the children found themselves again on the balcony of Alice's home. Alice held up a long printout of emails and began reading out loud:

sueoak@englaweb.co.uk

Kochi-Kid's adventures beat Captain Planet's!

parismillie@bonjour.fr.

I wannabe Kochi-Kid.

simbaboy@kenyasun.com

Best kids' web site in the jungle.

lodid@hollywood.net

You're stars! If you still need it, I'll raise cash to save the Holy Tree.

'The Kochi Kid rules,' they roared together.

Once they'd stopped laughing, Alice said: 'Dad met with the city planners today. They showed him the bridge plans. They told him the road will miss the holy tree by ten metres! And they'll put up a high wall to stop the traffic noise!'

They turned to look over Kochi's lagoon far below, so busy yet so peaceful. Straining their eyes, they could just make out Baba's holy tree in the distance. Then Alice spotted something and pointed to her father's cargo ship drifting slowly away from Willingdon Island and on past Mattancherry. It sailed elegantly out through the channel between Fort Cochin and Vypin Island. The ship, carrying Laxman's father's containers which held spices Mary had watered in her own garden, continued out to the Arabian Sea, heading for wonderful places like Singapore, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Canada and Britain.