

SNAILING WITH FRIENDS

EXPLORING THE FASCINATING WORLD OF SNAILS

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IT was on a wintery morning that I got off the flight in my hometown in Assam and took a deep breath. It felt good to be home. I had returned after more than a year. During that time, I had enrolled in a PhD programme as part of a DBT project (Department of Biotechnology, Government of India) focused on the molluscan species inventory of Northeast India. The programme was based at a research institution in Bengaluru, i.e., Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE). I was eager to reunite with my family and friends. In the evening, I visited a computer shop in our village owned by a childhood friend. There, my friends Harish and Diya were animatedly discussing upcoming village events, such as the local cricket tournament and Bihu celebrations. When they spotted me, they greeted me with wide grins and invited me to join them. It had been a couple of years since I had seen them.

“Hey, what have you been up to lately? Have you found a job?” Harish inquired.

“No, I’m actually pursuing a PhD,” I replied.

“What does that entail? Are you going to treat diseases?” he asked curiously, chuckling.

“Oh, no. It’s quite different from a medical degree,” I explained. “It involves conducting research on a topic of interest. For instance, I focus on studying snails.”

Upon hearing about my research topic, both of them burst into laughter. “Snails?” Diya scoffed. “There are plenty of snails in the nearby pond. We collect them and prepare various dishes with vegetables, black dal, and more. They actually taste delicious!” he added.

“I’ve never tried that,” I replied. “While some land snails are consumed in various Southeast Asian countries, their consumption isn’t as widely known in India as freshwater snails. However, there are many other fascinating aspects about snails! They have been used in traditional medicine to treat eye problems and joint diseases. Did you know snails can be classified into two types based on their habitat? There are