



If Trees could Speak

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THE FORESTBORNS by Vardhini Amin Hachette India, 2024, 0.232 pp., ₹ 599.00

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The Forestborns is photographer Vardhini Amin's debut work in the category of fiction for Young Adults that opens with a cliffhanger, generating immediate curiosity, suspense and thrill. A scary-stormy night, a young child on the verge of death, a distraught parent and a woman ascetic constitute the dramatic opening of The Forestborns. At the heart of the story are Siah and Avni who stand for the sisterhood of the human and other-than-human. The world of The Forestborns is densely populated—not so much with humans though. Trees—sandalwood, ashoka, neem, mango—plants, animals and birds are the walking and talking denizens of this world. The vruha, or souls, of plants and trees emerge from their deha, or body, at night making the forest come alive. 'Some vruha slithered, some floated and some flew with wings just like him. Some danced humming merry tunes, some played happily while some flocked together for their usual tittle-tattle' (pp. 23-24).

The story circles around a hidden sandalwood grove near the Sahyadri Range. The sandalwood trees are in the middle of a change of guard with the young Siah taking over from her mentor Bhuja when they come under the shadow of traffickers. To