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Tigers, Tribals & Volleyball: Melghat Is Hosting A Sports Event Unlike Any Other!

In the tribal villages spread out across the forest regions of the Melghat Tiger Reserve, which is nestled in the Satpuda hill range of Maharashtra, the tiger is not a wild, fearsome beast but instead, is referred to as one's maternal uncle, or 'Mama.'

In fact, Kula Mama is the name that the Korku tribal community from the region adoringly uses for tigers, where 'Kula' is the regional moniker for the feline predator.

Inspired by this respectful attribution, the forest officials of the Tiger Reserve organise a volleyball tournament every year, which sees enthusiastic participation from as many as 100 teams from various tribes in the region!

And guess what is the name of the tournament – Kula Kishor Volleyball Trophy!

What makes the event unlike any other

sports tournament is a prerequisite that each team must follow to qualify – one forest department staffer is required to be a team member.



Kula Kishor Volleyball Trophy . Courtesy: Melghat Forest Reserve.



Flagging off the matches. Courtesy: Melghat Forest Reserve.

“The idea behind this condition is to offer a unique opportunity for both the tribal population and the forest department to collaborate and establish a good rapport through sports. Not only does the event help both parties to rise above the inherent antagonism between them but it helps them to become more accepting of each other through matches,” Anirudh Chaoji, an

ecologist working at the Tiger Reserve, says to **The Better India**.

Since the inception of the tournament in 2014, the forest department has noticed a visibly more tolerant and amicable exchange between forest guards and villagers, even to the extent of the officials being invited to the latter's communal spaces and the villagers in turn, helping the officials with information on dubious activities in the forest range.

Anirudh also shares that amidst various sports played across the country, it is volleyball, which is the favourite amidst the tribal communities in Melghat, even more than cricket!



Ongoing matches. Courtesy: Melghat Forest Reserve.



Participating teams fighting it off. Courtesy: Melghat Forest Reserve.

“It is quite fascinating to watch these players, mostly aged between 18–25, engage in the game with such passion and vigour. Every single team’s performance is impressive in its own way and works really hard to up their game. The tournament only gets more engrossing as the race to the trophy closes in,” he adds excitedly.

This year’s tournament, which was flagged off on March 11 and witnessed a participation of about 80 teams, is currently going on and will conclude on Saturday.

Amidst various forward projects initiated by the Melghat Tiger Reserve to make way for a harmonious coexistence between the forest officials and tribal communities, the volleyball tournament is a flagship initiative that is providing a platform for the tribal youngsters to hone their sporting prowess.

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