

# Inga Näkkäljärvi

## - a living example of sustainable development



Go Ingá devddii 85 jagi, muite mánát ja áhkkuhat su.

I first met Inga Näkkäljärvi just before Christmas 1951 at Inari. She had come with her reindeer to fetch the school children and myself from Lisma village to spend Christmas at Heikkilä. The journey by reindeer sleigh from Inari to Heikkilä, lying alongside the River Vaskojoki, took several hours. My mother, now deceased, at that time was a servant girl in the service of Iisakki and Inga Näkkäljärvi's large family. When we reached Heikkilä I

was told that I was to make myself at home there. Those few years which I and my mother spent with Inga and Iisakki Näkkäljärvi's family were revealing, instructive, and increased my awareness of the Saami woman's important and far reaching role in the Saami reindeer farming community.

Inga's family had moved here from Lisma village in the autumn of that year. However, during her lifetime

Inga has seen almost all the phases experienced by the Saami reindeer culture since the closure of the borders (1852 and 1889). She was born in her grandmother's «kota» (a Saami teepee) in Norway in 1912, while her mother was on a trip to the market at Kautokeino and had dropped in to see her own parents. Inga's parents lived at Enontekiö, on the Finnish side.

Inga's parents were nomadic reindeer

herdsmen whose lives revolved around the reindeer, meaning that the animals were kept in a herd, milked, their hides were made into clothes, reindeer meat and hides were sold or exchanged for food, clothing and tools and implements. Keyed to this rhythm, the family remained in the Enontekiö area up to 1931, when Inga got married and her family and that of newly married Iisko Näkkäljärvi departed for Inari in search of greener pastures. In the spring of 1932 they moved to the shore of Lake Kulpakkojärvi, on the eastern side of Hammastunturi. It was in this area, too, that my father Uula Lassi, now deceased, put his own reindeer out to graze.

Inga and Iisakki's oldest child Juhani was born in 1934 during the family's years at Kulpakkojärvi, and he actually spent the first three years of his life in a teepee. In 1936 Inga's folks resettled at the family's first communal home at Lisma. In addition to reindeer, they also began to keep cattle. It was from Lisma that Inga's family was evacuated to Sweden during the war years.

Inga's now dead husband, Iisakki, placed a great deal of importance on his children attending school and he also wished to have some of them trained for a profession, as he predicted that reindeer herding would be unable to support them all. The first journey to school was made on foot from Lisma to Tepasto, in Kittilä.

There was no road to Lisma at that time and the school trip to Inari was a hundred kilometres long! To solve this problem, Iisko and Inga purchased a house for their family along the River Vaskojoki, a considerably shorter dis-

tance from Inari and with easier connections to the school there. It was now possible to make the journey by boat and reindeer. The vital lichen-providing lands in the area at that time were in excellent shape.

On the River Vaskojoki at Heikkilä Inga has, in her own words, spent the happiest years of her life. It resembled the scenery of her childhood on Lake Pöyrisjärvi in Enontekiö. An expanse of water could be seen from the house windows and one could always go fishing in the river when a fish dish was envisaged for the family meal. Although Inga's father was a reindeer herdsman, he was also a fisherman. Inga had learned the secrets of fishing from him. Their new home at Heikkilä also served as a hostelry for passing reindeer herdsman and other wayfarers. During the time I spent with my mother in the Heikkilä house, the place was a hive of activity; there were hired reindeer hands and servant girls, travellers and, in addition to the resident children, the children of relatives and friends from near and far.

In the course of time the children went out into the great world, attended school, and established their own families. Life at Heikkilä became difficult for the two aging people; even the road came to the wrong side of the river. The reindeer pastures were an awkward distance away. Thus, in 1973 Inga and Iisko moved to Inari, and a year later Inga became a widow. Although some of the children went to school, almost all of them are now occupied in one way or another with reindeer husbandry.

Like Saami women in general, Inga is good with her hands and ever since she was little she has joined the men in the reindeer husbandry work. She has helped with the annual roundups, calf marking, herding and milking. The family's staple diet has consisted of reindeer meat and fish. Inga has spoken both Finnish and Saami since childhood. She learned her Finnish from hired Finnish reindeer hands and servant girls. Her father taught her to read and write and later she went to so-called ambulatory school.

Inga Näkkäljärvi's life, from that of a nomadic herdsman to that of a hostess in a home with its roots well entrenched in reindeer herding, is fascinating, having passed through a broad variety of prominent and intriguing stages. For all those people interested in sustainable development, Inga's rich and variable life and its phases continue to provide a fine example of an awareness of, and close familiarity with, both Nature and Mankind that is comparable to any data bank. While circumstances during Inga's life have changed drastically, her spirit continues to obey the reindeer rhythm. Inga is not only «Ahku» to her own descendants, but to all the rest of us Saami as well.

Jouni Kitti



Ingá bártniinnes Ovllain ja su mánáin Heikkilis. Heikkil báikái Faškujot gáttis Ingá lea eanemus liikon.