

In Sahyadri Hills, a Lesson in Humility

A SYNOPSIS

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The narrator is fond of travelling and is a frequent traveller to different places of varying topography across the globe. On one such occasion, she was on a journey to an interior village in the forests of Sahyadri Hills in Karnataka. It was during the rainy season when the forest casts an exotic charm on the sensitive traveller. However one has to face some minor threats like blood sucking leeches and all. The author, on behalf of a charitable trust wanted to improve the facilities in a tribal school. So she undertook the journey through the forest on a rainy day. As she walked to reach the school she came across the local men and women with whom she had difficulty in communicating. Possibly, language along with difference of social standing created barriers between them. Finally she reached the school and found it to be nothing more than a one room building with a shutterless window, housing a blackboard, two chairs, two tables and a pot of water. There was nobody around. After a while, an elderly man appeared who happened to be the live-in watchman-cum-peon of the school. He served the school without any remuneration as the school provided for the free education of his grandson. The author struck up a conversation with him and asked him about the difficulties they face in running the school. Instead of answering the question she took her to the Thandappa, the headman of the Thanda i.e. the local tribal group. The Thandappa pointed out that during monsoon commuting to school becomes difficult for children and their rain-drenched clothes take much time for drying. Acquiring a fair understanding of the people, their lives, their problems and their practical requirements she came back.

The narrator revisited the Thandappa in the following winter with some umbrellas and clothes for children. She offered them to the Thandappa. After a few moments of hesitation,

the Thandappa walked into his hut. In the meantime, the author asked the children who were standing nearby, what they wanted to learn. Penetrating their shyness she ultimately got successful in eliciting some response from them. They expressed their keen interest in learning about computers. But no book on the subject was available in Kannada. Their interest in modern technology cheered up the narrator and she promised them that once she got back to Bangalore, she would look for suitable books on computers written in Kannada and if there were not any she herself would write one for them. In the meantime, the Thandappa appeared with a bottle of red drink and presented it to the narrator as a return gift. He explained that the drink is a salubrious one and is extracted during summer from a wild red fruit and it remains fresh for at least two years. The narrator was vacillating as she thought it was not proper to receive anything from people she has come to help. But the Thandappa was adamant. He explained to the narrator that in their culture nothing can be received without giving something in return. If she did not accept his return gift, he would also refuse hers otherwise it would amount to breach of their hereditary cultural practice. The narrator understood the significance of the Thandappa's return gift and respectfully accepted it as the he pointed out that there is a grace in accepting also.