



## Journey to the Valley under the Stars .....

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*Adventure, Nightmare, Endurance, Destination*

*~Antony Kagoo*

# Journey to the Valley under the Stars

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Endurance, Destination...

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# Contents

The Fear . . . . .	1
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# The Fear

We walked into the farm that was in front of the dimly lit house, there was a small path and which led to the entrance of the house. We turned back and realized, there was no other way around and the house was the dead-end, which meant we had get through it or enquire if there was another way we could use.

The entire crowd traveled in a single file so Avinash and I reached at the farm 1st, we called out for people in the house. A guy with a vest and traditional south Indian panche turned up in the balcony, I guess he was having his food - his hand was a little messed up and he was holding it still and waving to us with his other hand. By that time another 3 from our crowd turned up, the person in balcony went in and turned up with 3 more people. It almost a game where we tried to match the number of people on both sides, by the end of it when all 11 of us were standing together the balcony had 8 and then the unthinkable happened.

One of them went inside from the balcony and got

a rifle, we froze and did not understand the reason for him to have a rifle and point it to us. It took us a couple of seconds to realise that we looked like dacoits - we had our huge backpacks on our back and huge trekking sticks in our hand, anyone in the dark of night would assume lot many things. We threw our stick down, removed our backpacks and stood in silence, the rifle pointed away from us.

Avinash raised his voice and spoke, his voice echoed in the isolated farm land. He mentioned we are college students and lost our way while trekking to Nandi Hills. There was a sense of relief on the balcony and we could hear them gasp, we also on the other hand felt “Wow! We are still alive...”. They were very nice people who showed us another way around the house and also warned us to tell anyone first before we told anything that we are students, well we should have said the same in this situation also as it was the only thing we had to say and everything could’ve been alright.

And the journey continued, we walked out of the farm lands and into a broken road. It looked like a road leading to the wilderness. We walked another kilometer and saw a small hamlet in the distance under the moon lit darkness. As we inched closer

and closer, the hamlet started to expand into something from the “Malgudi Days”. There were lots of vineyards, what attracted me was the way they were grown. The soil itself stood almost five to six feet above the ground supported by the huge stone cut pieces which surrounded each and every farm. The stones looked like they would explode anytime as the massive thrust by the soil which occupied hundreds of cubic meter were trying to break out the stone’s hold.

As we walked in absolute stillness and silence watching the high and overgrown vineyard we saw something in the middle of the hamlet that stood a good fifteen to twenty feet high. When we inched close out of curiosity we could not fathom the magnificence of this beautiful old, yet strong banyan tree. Like the moves, yes it did lie in the middle of the hamlet as if the houses were built around it with distance measure to the micron. It had a circular sitting area around the tree made of concrete. I thought - maybe this is where the panchayat would hold their meetings and punishes people or arranges a marriage or maybe even decides if an honour killing is required.

I was lost in my imagination trying to create scenes from a hamlet during the day when the panchayat

head would be arguing or giving sentences to the village folks. Then there was this very mild sound like a whisper approaching us from far away. We got together to check what was it and could not see a thing in the distance. We turned towards the banyan tree and could see a hand of black shadow trying to hold on to the trunk from behind. I froze and could not move a step forward or backward or sideward. It was a crazy night after all, but not that crazy to be chased by goons, almost short with a bird gun and now ghosts!!!! No no, I thought to myself it cannot be happening, this cannot be happening to me now.....

The whispers got louder and mild voice from the back of my ear whispering do not run. I almost, almost wanted to run. I turn back with all the courage I had and found my friend very close to me and whispering continuously - "do not run", "do not run"..... His eyes were closed and face expressionless, his body was in stillness. I had to snap him out of his fear, I thought how crazy a night can get and what was the worst possible thing that could happen.

As a kid and being brought up in a catholic family I was taken to church most Sundays and sometimes at odd hours of the night as someone would

persuade my mom to tag along with them. Those nights were always freaky as most of the time the mass would conclude in exorcism by the priest, the priest from my parish was a staunch believer and one of the best I have seen through my years. Even if he did childish magic, people would believe he did a miracle such was the belief we had on him. I still remember one night which is like a frame from a Japanese horror movie, I was seated on the 5th bench from the altar on the right. Then on the left side, same fifth row there was an old couple sitting with hands held together. Between us was the path that was used by everyone to reach the altar.

The church was an old one and a beloved one for many including me as I did my initial schooling there. The entire setup was very humble yet grandeur with beautiful wood work inside the church. Any noise made inside reverberated across the entire church, sometimes wondered if that was the reason we all felt comfortable and blessed when the songs were sung by the choir.

I think I was around ten to twelve years old, I dozed of on the bench. All of a sudden there was noise propagating through the crowd present in the church. I was woken up with my mom pulling

me closer in fear. I could not control but come closer to the edge of the bench to take notice on what was going on. At the entrance door there was something crawling on the floor coming towards the altar. I was taken a back in utter shock and just could not take my eyes out of it. As it inched closer and closer the entire thing looked larger and larger. To hell and back in a

Jiffy, thought some one had brought a demon back, the crawling thing was not a snake, but a lady who was dressed in proper south Indian attire. She just passed me in a whip's second and all I could hear was the hiss sound. I still can imagine that night and immediately, goosebumps!!

With such and many more experiences to think about I could not help but bring the fear of exorcism and demons back into my mind. The shadow grew taller and whispers louder.....