



## A Memorable Picnic: Joys of Childhood

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It was July and not a single holiday we had in the month. But unexpectedly we got one. In the morning of 8 o'clock, when we were on the way to school as usual, we saw Raju coming reverse from the school. We were surprised and doubtful too, 'How this Damon going back to home?'

But Raju, the chubby boy, merrily drew close to us, started dancing and screamed, "Yeah, Shakal has declared holiday today. Don't go ahead. Back home instead." "Unbelievable! We

can't expect holiday from damned Shakal." the only words came through our mouth.

But, it was true our headmaster whom we used to call, of course behind his back, by the name 'Shakal' for being so strict had really declared holiday on that day because of the sad demise, the popular way of describing death, of the founder of our school.

As soon we turned homewards, an idea sparked in my mind. "What about a picnic to Bembalapat? We have a great chance in hand!" I said. The word picnic unleashed a feeling of joy in us. "Oh yes!" Adesh was overjoyed and said, "I am ready." "I am ready too" Raju replied.

"Don't forget, for that we have to take permission from home." Sumit made us conscious of our parents. "If we ask, our parents will never give us permission. They fear the place." Aniket told us.

It was true. Parents feared the place. Only last year a boy of our town named Gajja who was missing from many days was found dead in the Bembalapat pond. Naturally, expecting permission from parents was a useless idea.

I wasn't in a mood to go back home, and asked my friends, "Tell me, if you come or not. Rather I will go alone. "O really, have you any daring?" Raju argued. "Motu, what I decide, I do." I declared Raju. Finally Raju, Sumit, Adesh and I decided to visit Bembalapat anyway, without taking parents' permission. Aniket however failed to garner courage and went back home. We were in our early teen and not wayward children. Nevertheless, on that day we decided to do something on our own, of course independently.

No sooner did we cross the Vesh (fortress) of the town, fear engulfed us because the area was new to us and lonely one. "I think we should return home." Sumit's courage seemed to have failed. "Darpok! (Coward)" Adesh said and we laughed. "Finally our dream of seeing.

Bembalapat is coming true." I tried to somehow boost up Sumit.

Now the tar road was over and we were in the fields. The way to Bembalapat was through the track passing along the paddy fields. A ramshackle board, somehow fixed there, was showing direction to the spot. Grass grown around was making the pathway invisible somewhere, but we managed to find way through it.

As the pathway ended, a densely green canvas opened before our eyes comforting our senses.

With trees abound, the place was terrific. Beyond a big banyan tree, a huge pond of water came to our sight. "Bembalapat!" we shouted happily pointing at it and cheered.

I am sure; Columbus wouldn't have experienced the extent happiness on the discovery of America that we experienced that day! We, for the first time in our life, had broken down the rule of parents on us. Amazing was the feeling.

Everyone was shouting at the top of his voice and Raju out of excitement took out his school shirt and whirled it around roaring, "Shakal, Shakal... thank you, thank you!" The pond was close, and we were marching towards it.

"Ah! What a beautiful scene it is!" I said as we neared the pond. Water of the pond was totally invisible and still due to the gathering of tiny leaves on its surface. The leaves fallen from the huge tamarind trees which were around the pond had covered its water. The cover of leaves gathered on the pond was looking like a blanket spread on an even surface.

We squatted on the land above and gossiped. Adesh picked up small stones and started throwing into the pond. As a stone dropped into the pond, the green cover over the water was dispersing and a weird sound of 'bood-bood' was coming out. It was exciting! Tiny butterflies were flying around. Who may be challenging us to run after them?

Crawling insects were making their way through our legs. Wind was blowing calmly.

We were rejoicing the moment. But as soon we realized a deep silence around, fear engulfed us. Sumit told us, "Do you know guys, a demon lives under the pond, my father says." "You are absolutely right, Sumit! My father also says so" Adesh supported Sumit. "Every one year a person dies in the pond." I said. "You are right. Last year only a boy of our town Gajja was found drowned in the pond." Raju joined more information.

"Was he drowned or murdered?" Sumit asked. "Who knows? Rather he might have committed suicide, but Gajja's body was in found in rotten state." I said. "May be he was sitting right here and the demon of the pond might have slipped him in." Adesh demonstrated what might have happened making weird actions. Our speculations about Gajja's death knew no bounds.

As our talk switched over to topics of drowning, death and suicide, we saw some movements taking place inside the pond. I suddenly felt convulsions in my body due to fear. So I moved backwards a little. The green cover of tamarind leaves started dispersing around slowly and slowly; and soon a decomposed body appeared on the surface of the pond. Horrible! That scene held our breath. Whose is it? Animal's or human being's? Don't know. We were clueless.

We were so scared that we shouted at the top of our voice in that empty silence and took to our heels fast.

"Hey boys, what are you doing?" someone was shouting from behind. It was a farmer from a nearby field who was calling us.

Our parents thanked the farmer for bringing us back to home safely. It was an exciting day, nay, a memorable one because our parents whipping made it so!

## **Ashok Vinayak Kulthe**

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