

Where Time is Non-Existent / Sanjiv Bobby Desai



I remember my first learning after starting to live here in the hills. 2010, I think. Those days we were still city slickers who would travel up by the Ranikhet Express after putting in a full day at work. We would head up on a Thursday night and head back down by the Sunday night train to get into work on Monday morning! Gosh! I'm feeling tired just writing about those crazy trips!

During one of those trips, I remember we decided to use the local public transport of the shared Boleros that ply up and down from Ranikhet and stop anywhere they want to pick up or drop off passengers. We had bought some plastic chairs in Ranikhet and had tied them to the carrier of our chariot for the return journey.

After waiting for about 20 minutes for passengers to be rounded up, we set off at around 2 pm. As the vehicle was pretty crowded, Tripti sat in the middle seat and I squeezed

into the extremely intimate back benches where five people and a baby were forced to rub knees and ignore touching thighs and hips! After about five minutes when we had just exited Ranikhet, the baby who was in her mother's arms sitting next to me decided to entertain the bored passengers by evacuating her lunch onto my jeans and shoes. The mother turned a deep shade of red in embarrassment as she profusely started apologising and at the same time asking the driver to pull over.

I sat struck dumb, looking at the child's lunch, trying hard not to react rudely or at all actually, while the driver pulled over on the verge and the rest of the passengers got off and hung around chatting idly. Gently reprimanding the mother for travelling with the little one so soon after her lunch, he pulled out a jerry can of water and came to the back and started cleaning the floor, the seat, my jeans and shoe. I thanked him and got off as well as he diligently finished the clean up operation. The whole operation from barf to boarding took around 15 minutes.

As I waited with Tripti, I looked around at all the rest of the passengers waiting with us. Some were squatting and smoking, some chattering, some busy on their phones, some cooing and chatting with the baby and her mother. 15 minutes of this. Once the driver announced the all clear, we all got back into the jeep and set off again.

And that's when it struck me.

In all the time we had been waiting outside, not one passenger complained about getting late, expressed annoyance at the driver or the mother or in fact, expressed any kind of reaction of any kind whatsoever! This was totally amazing to me, coming as I did from a life where delays like this might mean the collapse of democracy as we know it or the heavens deciding to fall! 15 minutes? And not a peep? What was going on here? And that's when it finally dawned on me. Time was a fictional concept invented by man to make life intolerable!

What the local people knew instinctively was that neither democracy, nor the heavens, nor in fact anything at all of import would ever happen in their life by waiting for a young mother to clean up her baby and make it more comfortable. Patience. Yes, that was my learning that day and I was humbled by it. Truly humbled. And just for that, I am forever indebted to these hills and to its truly human populace.