

Living a Rustic Life

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There was no tap. No running water to wash my hands. Water was poured on my hands while I washed it, and the dirty water was collected in a bucket underneath. This dirty water was used to flush the toilets, which were built for use by campers. I had come for an adventure camping at a village named Yelavli near Bhimashankar.

Yelavli is a **hidden** village which is inaccessible by any modes of transport. To reach the village you need to hike up a 3 km distance uphill. While we hiked up Yelavli and were panting over the last few meters which were quite steep, a young boy chased us up. He was carrying a school bag on his back. He reached the top and quickly glanced down at us. We were amazed at his fitness!

"There is no school in Yelavli. There is one school in the village at the base of this hill", said Subhash. "But that school is only up to 6th grade. After that the kids need to travel another 40 mins to another village to attend a bigger school!"

Yelavli is a part of the wild life sanctuary area near Bhimashankar. Geographically it lies to the back side of the Bhimashankar temple. The population of the village is 80. "It includes the 2 babies that were delivered recently", said Subhash proudly.

Subhash heads the **tourism department** of Yelavli. Yes, tourism! There were people who discovered this little village and thought of setting up a secondary means of livelihood for the villagers. An NGO named **Kalpavriksh** trained Subhash and a couple of others to cater to the needs of the **city campers**. They helped them setup 2 toilets and 2 concrete rooms. "It took 3 years to get this simple construction completed. Every brick that was used for this construction, every cement block (weighing 50 kg each), every metal rods - it all was lifted on backs and carried by people of the village up the hill!", said Subhash, who is the most learned in the village, who studied B.A. and returned back to the village. To help the people survive, to help them in their farming by imparting his knowledge about crops, to help them interact with city campers like us.

Three kids from that village named Vishal, Ganesh and Naresh showed us around. They spoke with us in a typical **village-marathi** dialect which we found hard to follow. Just like our kids are, these kids too were fascinated by binoculars and mobiles and cameras! But we hesitated letting them handle these gadgets! We thought they lacked basic hygiene. We thought they were unclean. And yet the 4 **city** kids from our group played with these 3 **village** kids without any bias. These kids would eventually learn to differentiate between the 2 classes...

The village has 2 electric poles, operated by solar power. The only other source of light for us was battery operated torches! The village women cooked all meals for us. It was a simple but very tasty menu! Bajri bhakri, pithla, potato bhaji, thecha, loncha, rice, dahi, varan... Some of the items like bajri, rice, potato was home grown. And some items were fetched by these women from the hill base. The women also carried lots of clean water for us from the hill base.

We enjoyed the stay. We loved the beauty and nature of the surroundings. We cleansed our lungs with clean air. We paid a meagre fare for the services the villagers offered us. We did our bit to carry back all our waste and plastic; we did not litter around.

No doubt the camping trip was awesome. What makes me wonder is - why I am more fortunate than others in this world? I have always believed that we are responsible in creating our own destiny, in shaping our future. But what about Vishal, Naresh and Ganesh? Who will be responsible in giving them a life which can be compared with what my children will get? Yes, there will be some people like Subhash from that village who stand out and act like God's secret agent. Subhash would help these kids grow well too. But what about other undiscovered villages in India?

These villages have nature and love in abundance. In our cities we have hygiene in abundance. Cant we have the perfect balance where we **progress** but live in harmony with nature? Cant we have that ideal eco system where we live in a world full of knowledge, awareness, hygiene and yet preserve the nature's blessings on us?

