

Tania's School Picnic

A Cave Adventure



By Kanika G & Pell G

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Website:

www.kanikag.com

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The children in Tania's class at school were chattering excitedly. The soft spoken and mild tempered Miss Gupta had to bang her desk rather violently to get their attention. She said, "I am glad you are all so excited about the picnic at Kanheri caves. However, the picnic is next week, and you can discuss it after class. Right now, we need to get back to work."



Work was quite interesting and soon everyone was engrossed in it. The class was supposed to design a cover for a book. The book had been read to them in the previous story time session. The children discussed various ideas with Miss Gupta and came up with three that really captured the essence of the story. Miss Gupta then divided the class into three groups of five each and had them work together to make the covers.



After class, Tania, Sonali and Tanisha discussed the picnic. The previous year, they were taken to the lovely park where Tania had learned to ride a bike. That was a lot of fun, but caves just sounded so much more exciting!



Tania was getting impatient. The week dragged by really slowly, as time always does when you are waiting. Finally, the day of the picnic arrived. All fifteen children had gathered together in the school courtyard. Miss Gupta carefully checked off their names on a list as they got into the school bus. By 9:00 a.m. everyone was in the bus.



Miss John the art teacher and Miss Gupta were accompanying the children. The bus ride was forty-five minutes long because of traffic, but the kids had a great time singing *The Wheels of the Bus*, *Do Re Me* and many other cheerful songs.



Finally, the bus arrived at Kanheri caves. The teachers guided the children through the caves, while Miss Gupta talked about its wonderful history.



"These caves were used by Buddhists for living, studying and meditating almost two thousand years ago. This was an important Buddhist settlement at that time," explained Miss Gupta. Miss John commented on the sculptures of Buddha, and the beautiful paintings in some caves.



All that walking made everyone hungry, and they decided to have an early lunch. The children gathered in the main cave near the entrance.

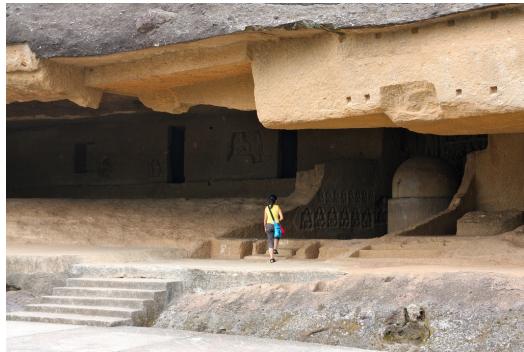


The kids all shared their lunches and had quite a feast. There were chicken, vegetable, egg and jam

sandwiches, *idlis*, *uttapams*, *loo parathas*, fried rice and noodles. For dessert, there were cookies, cakes, pastries and *gulab jamuns*.



After lunch, the teachers told the children that they could explore the caves on their own and play some games. "Stick to the three caves near the main entrance. Otherwise, there are some hundred odd caves here, and you will get lost," cautioned Miss John.



Tania and Tanisha exchanged delighted glances. Ever since they got there, the girls thought the caves were an ideal place to play hide and seek. They announced their intention and six of the others joined them.

Tania went to hide in a little nook she spotted. She was in a great hurry and she tripped over a stone. To steady herself she used the support of the wall. To her great surprise the wall seemed to shake a little. How was that possible? She hit against the same spot again. Yes, it definitely did shake just a little bit. Then she banged the wall a little further away, and it did not shake at all. It was rock solid.

By this time Tanisha arrived. It was her turn to search for everyone. She looked at Tania in surprise and asked, "Why aren't you hiding? I could see you as soon as I opened my eyes."

Tania told Tanisha what she had found out about the wall. Tanisha tested it too, and was amazed. The two girls closely examined the wall. Finally they saw a faint rectangular outline that separated the shaky part from the rest of the wall. They ran their fingers carefully over this part and found two handles of sorts. The handles were well camouflaged jutting out bits of the rock. They each grabbed one and pulled on it. It was hard work but together, sweating and panting, they managed to take off the rectangular piece, revealing a passage.



They turned around and noticed the rest of the kids who had joined their game of hide-and-seek were watching them. Tired of hiding and not being found, they had come to see what was going on. What they saw, made their jaws drop. One of them, Rajiv, went and called the others.

Everyone now wanted to explore this exciting secret passage. However the passage was tiny, so they had to crawl in one at a time. Tania was the first to enter and she emerged into a fairly spacious room. There were some copper plates with inscriptions on the walls and some carvings and cave paintings. There was also a stone hearth with some utensils on it. There was no other obvious entry or exit from the room.



After every one was in, and had looked around, Tania asked, "Miss Gupta, do you suppose this is a new discovery?"

Miss Gupta hesitated, so Miss John said, "Tania this place has been thoroughly explored by professionals, so I doubt it. But it is possible they missed this. I will contact the proper authorities and let them know that you found it. If it is indeed a new discovery, you will surely get credit for it. But I think irrespective of that outcome, this picnic has been much more exciting than we had anticipated thanks to

Tania. Everyone, three cheers to
Tania"

Everyone shouted "Hip hip hooray!"

Epilogue

If the readers really want to know, the discovery was not a new one. The door to the secret passage had been left closed so the contents would be stay good condition. They were not particularly valuable and best left in their "home". None of this however made Tania's cave adventure any less exciting.

Afterword

The facts about Kanheri caves are true to the best of my knowledge and mainly derived from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanheri_Caves, except of course the secret passage and secret room that Tania discovers. That is entirely fictitious.

More information about the caves along with pictures can be found at
<http://www.wondermondo.com/Countries/As/India/Maharashtra/Kanheri.htm>

The various photos of **Kanheri Caves** were taken by
3001london

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Some information about the caves was obtained from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanheri_Caves

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