

The Travel to Tirupati.

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Figure 1: Tirupathi

This was the first time I went to Tirupati, the temple town.

It was 2:30 am, my mother woke me with a cup of coffee. After that we got ready for the journey in the next two hours. Meanwhile, our grandparents were ready before us. My grandfather is well known in the family for his briskness especially to go on a trip like this.

My mother and grandmother had prepared lunch and breakfast. It was *upma* for breakfast and *puliogare* for lunch.

We left for the bus stand in about 4:45 am, with my father, who dropped us. The streets were deserted except for some people and cycles roaming on the road. Stray dogs were howling here and there. But when we reached the mainroad, there were some trucks and busses moving and honking around.

The bus arrived after 10 minutes, at 4:55. We boarded the bus by five. I and my sister found our seats in the

front quickly. My mother and grandparents were back of us.

A lady draped in yellow coloured sari and a little aged, urged my mother move front quickly. Even though my mother kept on moving and there was no rush, she was pushing hardly against my mother. My mother could feel some movement in her handbag. She finally lost her patience and screamed at the lady to go first. The lady left my mother the way and got down the bus and ran away, which was surprising. My mother settled and checked her bag. She was right. *The lady had tried to steal stuff from her bag! Thank goodness, my mother's glasses had protected her things.* In a later point of day we realised that pack of chocolates were gone.

We were lucky enough to find a seats in the front itself. The bus started in about five minutes. In the first one hour I was awake in the bus. I was looking out of the window, the world was dark blue colour. The trees, plants and buildings made dark patches in the dark blue sky. The air was gushing through the windows. The feelings was so nice. After enjoying this for a while, eventually I fell asleep.

The bus stopped at main stops, like *Mulbagal, Chittor, Kolar, Palmaner*. I had slept nicely till the bus stopped for a break at Mulbagal. We had our breakfast there. I did not sleep thereafter.

The sun was a perfect circle and orange in colour. The road was surrounded with trees and plants on both sides. It was filled with curves and turns. Now the sky was light blue.

I was sitting with my grandfather. He was advising me to observe everything on the road, especially the green boards with distances for destinations on it.

We reached at *Tirupati* at about 10:30. The first place we visited was *Tiruchanur* the place where the temple of Lakshmi, *Sri Venkateshwara Swamy's wife*, exists. The temple is named as *Alamelu Mangapuram*.

The temple had strict rules. For example, you had to leave your electronic devices and foot wares outside the temple. There were many old people selling many things: cotton candies, toy guns, fruits and sacred items.

After submitting the foot wares and and phones outside the temple, we headed to the main gate, but that was not an easy job. There were multiple queues leading to the main gate. They were of three types of them : two special, that is, paid queues, and a free queue.

We at first thought that everything were same, but it was not. The guy at the special queue stopped us and told us to go to the other queue. My grandfather asked the reason, to that the guy replied that we were supposed to take the ticket before itself. My grandfather thanked him and told "*Never mind,*" and continued moving.

The crowd was irresistible. There were more than 250 people present. The people had no patience at all. I felt like I was squashed like a fruit between them.

The queue led us directly from the main entrance, called *gopuram*, till the main sacred sanctum. I couldn't even see the goddess properly! I just had a glance at her. The people behind me didn't give me enough time to properly look at her.

After seeing the goddess we took a round of the temple. There were many small reliefs on the walls of the temple, but we had no time to even gaze at them. There were two reasons for this, that is,

1. People were rushing and pushing,
2. We only had little time to spend there. We had to go the *Tirumala* temple by two.

After collecting our things, we went to the bus stand.

Now, the temple at Tirupati is divided into two parts : the temple at the base of the hills, called *Tirupati*, and the temple up the hills called the *Tirumala*. Now we were headed to Tirupati. We must go must Tirumala from Tirupati. The temple offered way to those who decided to walk. *It was a stretching distance of 9 kilometres!*

Lucky us, we got a bus without waiting much. As like the last time, we got seats in the front. I sat in the single seat next to the driver. I could see both front and in the sides. The bus travelled for 5 minutes, and

then stopped at the checking station.

Here they check the whole bus, passengers and their luggages. We got down the bus and walked to the metal detector. There were two ways. One for gents and other for ladies. There were men and women before the machines for checking our body. We had to leave our luggage in the conveyor belt, which led to the scanner. This made things easy for the people to check!

What a proper checking system!

After all that checking, we boarded the bus again. The bus started off. For the first one kilometre we travelled on road. After that we began climbing the hills. The roads on the hills were perfectly made. Smooth surface. It was covered with trees and flowers on both sides. It was filled with steep and deep curves.

After going a little up, the beautiful flowers began to decrease. It became more and more mountainous. At certain points the trees on the left side of the bus, where I was sitting, vanished. I could see the houses and roads down below. The houses were like *small boxes made of sand!* The road was like *lines made by children with a stick in sand!*

Like I said before, The turns and curves were many in number. As the driver drove on these, the bus was turning and twisting. I felt, at each turn and curve, that the bus was going to topple off the mountain! The bus travel involved moving around the 7 hills, or *edukondalam* in Telugu. So I could look at the hills we've just passed, back of us! My mother and sister and me too enjoyed it very much.

After 45 minutes of travel, we landed at the *Tirumala*, the main temple. We got refreshed there, had our lunch and started off.

There were many steps to do before going to the temple. First we ordered a jeep to leave us at the *special darshan*. It was pre-booked, by my uncle, costing Rs.300 per head.

When then reached the checking centre, where they check our *Aadhars*, our identification numbers. When the guy there informed us that we must only wear only *veshti* to the temple, not pants, we were very frustrated. Then I remembered some people selling *veshtis* in the front. I had wondered why they were doing so. Now I got the reason!

They had a good business plan!

The guy at the checking centre had informed that I too had to wear a veshti. But when we went to buy it, the man who was selling it, told I needn't. We were in a dilemma, when we again approached the checking centre, lucky us, he was busy in some other work. He didn't notice me wearing a pant. I slipped!

Next we went to the counters where we should submit our *Aadhar*, electronic devices, and foot wares. After submitting those, we went to the metal detectors. My mother had not submitted the power bank in the earlier counter. So, she had to go back and submit it. Due to this, we wasted precious 10 minutes!

The counters directly led to some passages which led to the main gopuram itself. I thought that after one passage, we would find ourselves inside the temple. But I was completely wrong. One passage led to another identical one. It was frustrating in the beginning itself. Even though we were in *special darshan*, there was so much crowd in it too! That too on a Monday! My mother informed that we were lucky on that day because as the godowns were closed, much time was saved.

After 5 passages of the same identical looks, we reached the main gopuram. I thought that it was a good time for us because we reached the gopuram in 35 minutes of time. My mother explained to me that this was good because otherwise we had to be waiting for like one and a half hour there! After entering into the temple, the queue again slowed down.

An uncle, beside me, seemed have got thrilled so much. Suddenly, he screamed, *Govinda! Govinda!* all the others followed him for another 5 times. His voice was becoming louder and louder with each call.

After waiting for about 30 minutes, we were left for the shrine. As soon as the shrine drew nearer, the pushing from the back became more and more harder.

A lady, in particular nearly pushed me off. I felt very bad about the people present there. I did not take good look at the god, for the push behind me was irresistible. My sister being only 6 years old couldn't see the image of the god properly. So, my mother lifted her up for her to see. But the lady at the entrance told that *you must not lift kids up*.

What kind of rules is that?

In fact, there were many things around the temple to explore. But the crowd present was merciless to anyone present there. After seeing the whole temple and going around it, I felt very uneasy. It was due to the different water and the crowds present.

After that, we took a rest near the *kulam* of the temple, where it is considered, that if you take a bath at the holy *kulam*, all your sins will be appeased. It also in which the statues of gods are given a bath. We requested our grandfather to go and collect the *prasadam*, which is considered as a holy food, and given only at temples.

Usually these kulams were natural and clean to bathe in. But as many pilgrims come to Tirupati, they have added much chlorine in the water to make it clean. It was usually green in colour, but now it is in blue!

There were many kids playing where we were taking rest, in particular, two small boys running after one another. The latter, who was doing the catching part, felt very ambitious at the game. He kept running after the other vigorously.

Strangely enough, the heat of the sun was at least *moderate* near the kulam. I kept wondering why. One reason to this was, we were near to the kulam. The other reason, which I figured out later, was that there was a pipe down of the raised platform we were sitting, and there were holes present in it. At fixed point of times, the water would gush out of the holes and to the ground. This made the air more moist. But I was still wondering *where the water came from?* My mother explained to me that, the waters were brought here through pipes for the kulam.

What a nice plan!

As soon as my grandfather came, we chose a shady spot, and let him wear his pant and remove his veshti. We ate some snacks there. There were different peoples selling different things there : uncles asking for photographs, some selling sacred items, some selling snacks, and some asking *us* to sign in to some form at the Tirupati.

We then went collect our items. But it was not in the same place we had submitted earlier. It was farther away outside the temple. We went there by the stairs. Because it was summer and very hot, the steps were like pricking pins into your feet! We had to show our signed ticket to collect our items, which we had previously signed.

Collecting our items we began to look for a bus to go to the base of the temple. At first, we just went there and waited. But there was no use. A conductor informed us to collect a *return ticket* before itself, in order to go down. He also informed us that if we haven't one, we could go and collect it. My grandfather thanked him, and went by himself to collect it. He came after 10 minutes, and we soon boarded a bus.

After waiting for the passengers to board, he finally took off. This journey was too filled with curves. But this driver gave extra *show-off* by steeply turning on those curves. Each time a curve came, the bus would entirely tilt! At these points, my grandmother, who was sitting next to me, would nearly slide off her seat!

One the way, we saw many Conservation of Animals boards. Animals like deer, lions, tigers were there. But we didn't go inside and take a look.

When we reached our destination, we had a small tiffin there and started looking for a bus. At first, no bus was in sight. After waiting like 20 minutes, we finally found a bus that was travelling to Bangalore, and boarded it by seven. But this time, we were in the middle seats.

I didn't get sleep for a long time because my throat was parched. There was no water. But, um, I mean our *sweet home water* not drinking water.

My mother told that she will buy something cold for the thirst, when the bus stops at some point. We waited like one hour, but in vain. Tired of waiting I fell asleep. Finally the bust stooped at ten, we bought our things there and continued on our journey. I was so sleepy, that I couldn't notice the stop we were taking a break.

After that, I didn't get sleep. I kept gazing into the dark and feeling the chill air.

Finally, after two hours, our stop came. We got down the bus, caught an auto, came to home. The streets were same like before, but now I couldn't see any people or cycles roaming around. It was very silent. I enjoyed this trip to Tirupati, and I hope to go to more places during the summer vacation.