

THINK LABOR

To keep up with everything skilling and employment



Akka, ooruku epidi poradu? (Akka, how do we go to this village?)

My senior colleague Nandita ma'am and I were on our way to one of the villages in Perambalur, a district in Tamil Nadu. We had just finished monitoring a survey in the West of the district, now we were at the Main bus station under the scorching afternoon heat in Perambalur, searching for a bus heading to its villages in the East. Just as ma'am and I were enquiring about the timings of the bus and its whereabouts, I overheard someone mention the village's name. I instantly went up to her and asked for help. This person was also going to the same village as we were. She was heading to the village with her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren to visit some of her relatives.



On one hand she carried a big tote bag with clothes and daily necessities and on the other hand she held small yellow-coloured bags filled with fruits and homemade goodies. Her grandchildren diligently followed her foot trail with smaller things to carry in their tiny hands. As she hurried her grandchildren who were behind us, to keep up with her pace, she asked me the purpose of my visit.

I gave her the elevator speech about the "Beyond Basics" survey which I had been using for the past week. I went on and on enthusiastically ranting about my newly gained knowledge, just then I noticed that half-way through my little speech, she had lost interest. We were now walking through a bustling market place which was filled with people, push-carts, share-autos, and buses who were all trying to navigate through the chaos. We then reached a small bus stand in the opposite direction from where we had started and waited there patiently for the bus to come.

As we waited, ma'am and I decided to call and check on the surveyors who we were going to monitor. We were just curious to know the status of the survey. The surveyors we had called were college students and we were heading to their village on a Sunday, the only day when the frequency of buses is known to be low. My mind was speeding through thoughts and was calculating the approximate time it would take for us to reach the village and to commute back and all the other 101 things that I was thinking at that time. Just then the bus arrived, ma'am and I got on the bus following the lady and her family. Little did we know that, it was the only bus going to that village and it was the only one coming back.



(pink tickets – free for females)

While on the bus Nandita ma'am and I occasionally looked over our shoulders to confirm that the lady was on the bus. For which she smiled gently and reassured us that she would make sure that we got down the right stop. Traveling through villages in a bus was a very pleasant experience, as I looked out the window, the cool breeze swept across on my sweaty face letting me know that evening was coming. Moreover, the setting sun's reflection looked gorgeous on the water standing on paddy fields.

After an hour and a half, we had finally reached our village. One of our surveyors was waiting for us to guide us to the household that they were surveying. After a short walk we reached the household. We immediately started checking dates, serial numbers and the sequence of the survey. Nandita ma'am was conversing and cross-checking the booklets with the log sheet, while I was translating her questions and explaining their replies in English back to her. After a brief check we realised that these volunteers like many others were keen on keeping a rough copy and then "fairing" the pencil ticks to

pen. The volunteers were worried about the neatness of the survey booklets and more on the presentation of their entries.

After a lot of convincing and dialogue with the volunteers we made them understand that any tick will do as long as it is done in pen. We reinforced that we accepted all kinds of ticks, any colour, any size and that we were fine with any tick until and unless it was in pen. On our way back it made me think, Why? Why “rough and fair”? Why isn’t the first attempt at something always looked down on? What was it that made the girls think that a simple tick needed to be perfect?



Nandita ma’am and I chatted about this on our only bus back. We spoke about gender, her different experiences with surveyors in other surveys, and our takes on intersectionalities of gender.

We then reached the Main bus station and decided to eat our dinner well before crashing to sleep. Overall, it was a good day. That day, we monitored two villages, met some amazing people, had light-hearted moments with *akkas* and *patties* (aunties and grannies) who casually opened conversations and travelled through some of the most picturesque landscapes, that day we experienced all of its beauty all at once.

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