



Story of Un-Veiling of Sarvaroga Nivarana Teertham

By

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Down; but not out

That day Saraswati, fondly called akka by thousands, was low in spirits. She and her team members Pakshi Shivarajan, Rajarajan, Kadhiresan, the temple guard Rama and the auto driver Muthu Ramalingam, despite all the hard work for two days, could find nothing resembling a water body in the Ramakrishna puram village, in the forest area in Dhanuskoti Block, that was just 8 km away from the world famous Rameswaram Temple in the Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, India.



Difference between Bhakti and Belief

But, akka was convinced about the existence of Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtham. Because it was mentioned by Sage Ved Vyas in the Skand Purana. And Ved Vyas is the person Lord Krishna has spoken about as “among the munis (Sages) I am Ved Vyas” (Bhagavat Gita X-37). Akka had bhakti (a Sanskrit term that can't be translated as belief or faith) on her Lord that naturally made her take the writings in the Skand Purana as nothing but absolute truth.

Modern historians, the new age tailors

Akka was firmly rooted in her nation's glorious past. Yet, she was well experienced in modern approaches and tools while handling historical issues too. She recalled her reading about of “*Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtha*” in Skand Purana. She also remembered it as a thirtha near to *Jata makuta thirtham* in the forest zone towards Dhanuskoti, in the Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, India. Since *Jata Makuta Thirtham* was already well known among the devout Hindus, akka was convinced that “*Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtha*” though so far unknown to the locals, must also be somewhere near. She wanted to test that hypothesis. Getting consent from the officials of Vivekananda Kendra, she met the villagers and the government officials to brief them about the work ahead. Like river Saraswati River, mocked by the historians till yesterday, has slowly started unveiling, akka was optimistic that one day *Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtha* too will be visible for the public.

The no cost health models of ancient India

Ancient sages of India conceived and applied “a simple, no cost (and therefore affordable by all) and easily accessible 24x7 health care system” to heal not only physical but mental diseases as well. Innumerable holy water bodies known as thirthas in every nook and corner were their

answer to those health issues mankind faces. Thirthas attract only people with positive outlook. This builds upon the already existing positive environment in the place, resulting in lasting benefits to the devout.

Rooted in the past; modern in approach

Teertha also called thirtham, is one of the very important water resources for the rural community in India. Apart from the spiritual needs, it also occupies a significant position in supporting livelihood for the rural poor and safeguarding the local ecosystems. Yet, after independence, the continuous neglect of these unique Teerthams due to various reasons, has resulted in its deterioration and extinction. It has also resulted in encroachments in the common lands in the Teertha complexes.

True to its mission of protecting the traditional water bodies since the 90s, Vivekananda Kendra has been undertaking rehabilitation and restoration of small scale water bodies in coastal island by building social capital and bringing back local management. The programme operates in the three major hydrological contexts where Teerthas exist in South India viz., as the only source of water, as conjunctive use of wells and tanks and as a primary source of recharge for wells.

The criteria for selection of a location is, existence of a Teertha as per literature sources and conclusive proof of its utility in the past supporting the community and livestock needs of the area. The focus of the study is three fold viz., natural conservation of the system, improvement in access/supply of water to animals/other domestic uses and Institution building and incidental benefits of it. The scientific aspect of modern day holy water bodies derives its origin in the form of mythology. The mythology of *Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtha* brings critical parallels between mythology and science.

True leader carries on when the rest falters

Over 40 years of grass root work had taught her that initial set-backs were common and they should not deter one from the conviction she carry. She soon gathered from the villagers that “*Masi Maham*” the village temple festival that comes once in 14 years will be in February 2016. Bidding her time, Akka organised another batch of 50 NSS girl students and 7 teachers from Parvatha Vardhini School for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan of the village prior to the temple festival.

Light at the end of the dark tunnel

Bhagavat Gita (III-14) says that when human beings play out their roles in a spirit of self-sacrifice for a public cause, the Divine showers reward in abundance, as they are interdependent. And that day, it happened so suddenly. Even as the volunteers were getting tired by the 2nd day, one of the girls shouted out pointing to a poisonous snake between two huge banyan trees. Though scared, the rest of the girls soon came rushing in. But, leading from the front, and not disturbing the snake, akka carried out the cleaning. But at the back of her mind, she knew that sighting the snake was signal from the Divine. And in the snake she found a ray of hope, to continue the work.

GPS not new to Indians

She started to make some sense out of sighting a snake and approaching of “*Masi Maham*” temple festival. She wondered why devotees should come all the way to witness a mere festival in an almost dilapidated, un-kept temple, where the installed idol too, unattended by own villagers, seems to be in eternal slumber! She has seen such rare gatherings in places where there was a river or a water body. Time froze in such thoughts and it happened all of a sudden. “Age old GPS equipment fitted into the sub-conscious brains must be bringing the devotees to such places because of existence of a water body” she felt. “Forget about North Indian Kumba Melas in Haridwar, Prayag, Triambak, or Ujjain on the banks of river Ganga or Narmada, we have our own Kumba mela in Kumbakonam in Tamilnadu or T.Narsipura village in Mysore District in Karnataka”, She recalled. And in that thoughts, she found an answer for her search, as she anxiously waited for the day break.

Akka shifts the gear

But the 3rd day started with a bad news. The JCB man entrusted with removing collected waste didn't turn up. And that was the tripling point for genetically restive villagers. Pointing to the team supervisor, Mr.Kadhiresan, they said “This fellow has no work. He is just wasting your precious time, energy and money.” Seeing things taking a new turn, akka decided to change strategy on the 4th day. Bringing a new JCB, she reached the place. The local forest officials were already briefed on a daily basis on the happenings. With the permission from Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) officials, she directed the JCB man to dig the area where the snake was found the other day.

Self-felicitation is the most cherished

As the girls watched with bated breath, the machine did the work of a dozen in minutes. That created excitement for the girls. With wide eyes, they waited for something more to happen soon. And Lo! They heard the gurgling sound of water gushing out from the opening that the JCB made. Soon hell broke out among them making the accumulated tiredness vanish in to the thin air. For the girls, innocent as they were, dancing and shouting naturally followed, celebrating their success in their own way without waiting for any public facilitation.

As the news spread like a wild fire, the sceptical villagers and the forest officials started trooping in hoards. Even as there was celebration all around, the cynics who made fun of the attempts the previous days, were conspicuous by their absence! And by that they also missed a life time opportunity to be witness of un-earthing “*Sarva Roga Nivarana Thirtha*” a historical fact that lay hidden in their midst perhaps by a natural disaster that took place ages ago or by the callous acts of their like-minded ancestors! Hardly did they know that the day, *Thirtha* was re-discovered.. But, some of the girls didn't fail to notice those few tears that strolled down from their akka's cheeks.

Sarvaroga Nivarana Teertham during Revival and Renovation

