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A SIMPLE AMAZING LIFE

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SAI BHASKAR REDDY NAKKA





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# The Eternal Spring

*A Simple Amazing Life*

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*First edition*

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*To my parents for giving me all the freedom*



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## Simple life

I was living in Hyderabad since childhood. A suburban place. This house had a compound wall and with a wooden wicket gate. There were three rooms in a row with Mangalore tiles for the roof.

As per the '*Vastu Shastra*' - a traditional Hindu system of architecture - east facing houses were considered good. Our house was facing East. *Vastu* considers aspects such as space and energy. All the houses in this row were east facing. It was convenient to see the neighbours and have a conversation across the compound wall. Especially for women, you may call it the early social networking - sharing space for all the updates, interaction, and the live sharing network it offered.

Next to the gate in the Northeastern corner, there was an open well. In front of the house, there were lots of plants, including a few castor plants and one cotton plant. In those days, toilets were always farthest from the living rooms. So, the toilet was next to the gate and we need to go all the way even in the dead of night. Nowadays they are attached to the living or bedrooms, so people feel more safer and use it many times.

At the third house, from our house there lived a family. We called it the house of '*Doctoramma*.' A spiritual lady, her husband was a medical doctor. So she has got the prefix Doctor and Amma means mother called as a mark of respect. They had two sons and two daughters and they were very disciplined. Son's heads were always

found shaved. She was strict and does not want her sons to see any girls and also does not want girls get attracted towards them. She was doing yoga regularly and was visiting the Gandhi Gyan Mandir at Koti for attending the sessions.

*Doctoramma* was very compassionate. She regularly read and preached Bhagavad Gita. My mother was influenced by her teachings and became her follower. In her influence, my mother and elder sister both turned vegetarians. Soon my younger sister and I were influenced and turned to vegetarian by my elder sister. She was telling us again and again that we were committing a sin by eating non-vegetarian food, that is unnecessarily killing an animal for eating. We had a feeling that eating non-vegetarian was like having a Kabristhan (burial place) of animals in the stomach.

There was a tin bathtub in the courtyard of their house, a thing to remember. If someone got a fever, she made them lay in that bathtub, with cold water up to the neck. Once my mother had a very high fever, and she was also treated similarly.

In those days my father's earning was just enough. Once it occurred to my mother that, she could shave my head with my father's shaving razor, instead of taking me to a barbers shop for saving money. She always saw my dad shaving and thought it was so simple. When she started shaving, it was uneven at some places and complete hair could not be shaved. When she tried harder, I had cuts and was bleeding. Listening to my cries, Ms Saroja rushed to our house. She was my mothers friend, living in the same street. Was in a shock when she saw my mothers endeavour. For not causing further damage, helped me, by advising my mother to take me to a barber shop for completing the shaving. With the half shaved head, I was taken to the barber shop nearby and got my head shaved completely. Later my mother applied turmeric over the cuts to heal. Sometimes poverty leads to strange experiments

and learning.

During Ganesh Chaturthi (Elephant Headed God festival), there was a traditional belief that if one gets scoldings from others, it is good. Someone told me to break the tiles of our neighbour's house by throwing stones on their roof. This was one of the easiest methods to get scolded, without getting caught and beaten up. I picked up some stones and threw them on our neighbour's roof; it had Mangalore tiles. I broke a few. They came out and started giving all sorts of Galis (scoldings). Although I was outside, they did not expect me doing that. I slowly went into the house fully satisfied with the scoldings, thinking that I will have very good blessings of Lord Ganesha in that year. Probably, this tradition existed as the Ganesh Chaturthi happens during the rainy season - the traditional potters have less work in this period - so as to create additional work opportunity for the potters in making tiles, this was made a tradition.

Behind our house, there was an open space. Lots of white quartz stones were there. The broken pieces of quartz stones were very sharp, like glass. The pieces of these stones tarnished with red soil - some curious patterns appeared when observed closely. The patterns looked like trees, images of gods and goddess, animals, and other life forms. Myself, my elder sister and with few other friends often used to go and collect these curious white quartz stones. By breaking the bigger rocks, we always explored to discover more and more curious figures. Don't know if this curiosity in stones, which I got introduced at an early age attracted me towards pursuing the Geology subject, later in my life.

The responsibilities at this age were nil. Life shapes up. One's interests surface at this age. Early impressions in life last longer.

## Shifting house

In the first house at Ramanthapur, the groundwater table fell drastically, especially during the summers. From the open well, one need to pull water over a pulley using a bucket and rope. To deepen the well, it was tough as the granite bedrock surfaced. We employed people to blast the rock with Burma (Gun-powder). Every summer it became a burden, and it was a costly affair too. So, my father sold the house. For a few months, we stayed in a rented house on the same street. Whenever we saw the house, we had memories of the old house, it was very painful. Soon purchased another house nearby, which was on the foreshore of the water tank called Chinna Cheruvu. The same year it rained very heavily. While shifting the house, we carried all the things to the new house by wading through the knee-deep water. In the new place, the foreshore water of the tank almost touched our back door. There was a single big room with the asbestos roof, in an open plot of 300 square yards. There were very few houses in the area.

Before we had proper drainage in our Basti (settlement), all the water from washing clothes, cleaning dishes and the water from taking a bath was used for growing plants within the compound. In the kitchen garden, there were Banana plants, Chamagadda plants (Taro / *Colocasia esculenta*), and Pudina plants (*Mentha* also known as mint), all of them survived well in stagnant water too. The other plants in the compound were, Curry leaf plant,

Coconut trees, Indian Gooseberry plants and Neem trees. Climbing the big neem trees was one of my favourite pastimes. Made swings with ropes and enjoyed swinging with my sisters. In the summers, we spent time under the Neem trees in our compound to escape the scorching afternoons. Sometimes, I used to study by sitting on the branches of these trees. The smell of the Neem tree flowers, especially during the summers, was so pleasant. Sometimes we used to brush teeth using the Neem tree stick (twigs) and also sometimes with the charcoal powder made of burnt cow dung cake.

## Living near water body

We bought the new house on the banks of a tank in the year 1980. There was a complex of beautiful granite rock outcrops in the middle of the water tank. During the summer, when the water recedes they were accessible. In the evenings, I and my elder sister used to go there with friends for climbing some of those rocks. As I was small, it was difficult to climb. I was needed to be pushed at my bottom by someone to climb. Over a period, some of the seniors who were regularly climbing taught me to hold some rough places and small crevices with fingers and toes to climb with ease. I still remember the holds, which were critical to grip otherwise I would have fallen on the rocks. It was precarious to climb the rocks and sit on them. Each rock had a name and some of the rocks were my favourite. My mother never stopped us from climbing those rocks. She trusted us and gave freedom.

Initially, as there was no compound wall, the water from the adjoining tank during rainy season used to come and touch our house. We were living just at the edge of full tank level contour of the tank, in the foreshore area. Once it happened that, my elder sister while carrying my younger sister while walking in the water, dropped her. Somehow, she groped in the puddle and lifted the shocked younger sister. Went to the temple nearby so that my younger sisters cloths dried and returned home or else knowing that my mother would have scolded her badly.

The asbestos roof of the new rooms were not appropriately laid by Mr Babu Mestri (Mason), during the rainy days, it used to leak at several points. Many times we need to place pails to catch the drops. Although we had Charminar Brand Asbestos sheets, there was a famous advertisement on the radio, 'Ramayya enduku chinta... Charminar brand rekulu undanga' it means Why do you worry when you have Charminar Brand roof? We were worried whenever it rained. We could easily sense the intensity of the rain with the sound made by the raindrops. Sleeping during heavy rains with the sound was difficult.

There were so many types of fishes in the tank. The high density of small fish was always found close to the shore. They were mainly guppies with colourful tails. By suddenly shoaling them onto the shore with cupped hands, it was easy to catch some of them trying to escape back into the waters. Seeing fish in the water and catching them was one of my favourite pastimes. It was not unusual to see the water snakes basking on the sides of the rocks on the shore. Sometimes they used to sleep on the grass on the tank bed. During the night time, the water snakes used to catch the fish on the shoreline. It was like a dance of snakes with the sound of the splash of water, which I could witness in the dim light.

By lying on the grass on the backside, used to watch the sky. The different shapes of the passing clouds were interesting. Some of the clouds appeared like some of the many Hindu Gods and Goddesses too. Also observed the flocks of cranes returning to their nests. The pattern made by them while flying and the white colour of their feathers was always interesting. By showing our fingernails asked the cranes to give their white colour, and observe that the root of our nails turned white, in the shape of an eye.

It was very common to see almost every alternative year some-

one drowning in the water tank. Especially small children by accident drowned, they were very fond of water. The kids who didn't know swimming playfully entered into the tank and drowned. It is disturbing to see the children's bodies being taken out of the water. I knew some of them as a kid, I played with them too. On a Sunday, Mr Rayanna after having drinks made betting with someone that he would swim to the middle of the tank and return. The bet was for Rs. 100. At that time the tank was full. As all the people watched while he was swimming, in the middle of the tank, suddenly at one point, he drowned. Some people called the Gaja-eethagallu (expert swimmers and divers) to find, but they could not find him. He surfaced floating only after three days. We were tensed not knowing where the body would surface, finally it surfaced close to our house as feared.

In those days' toilets were less frequent. In a house of three to five families, only one toilet was available. So the majority of the men preferred to go out for defecation in the open places. The tank shore was the most preferred place for the basti people. Early in the morning before the sun got brighter the men were seen attending the nature's call. Later with more houses coming up in the area and access to more number of toilets people are not found defecating in the open.



## Dangerous kid

My mother recollects that, when I was around five years old, one day I was sitting on the parapet of the open well with legs hanging inside. It was the rainy season and watertable was very high. This is due to the seepage of water from the nearby water tank called 'Chinna Cheruvu' (Small Tank); it was filled up to the full tank level. My mother's friend Mrs Saroja saw me sitting on the wall of the well. She approached my mom and told her about my precarious position and asked my mom to pull me from behind before I might fall into the well. She instructed my mom to be quiet while approaching me closer, lest out of fear I might jump into the well. My mother walked gingerly from behind and pulled me swiftly holding my shirt. She says my life was saved. Otherwise, I would have fallen in the well.

Another day, while I was studying in a school. I did not return home in time. My mother searched in many houses and asked every passerby. Finally, she found my clothes on the bank of the water tank. I was then trying to swim with friends in the shallow waters of the water tank. She took a very thin stick of a local plant called '*Vailu Chettu Katte*' in her hand and called me to come out of the water. Once I was out of the water tank, she started beating me all the way home about 100 meters away. I began running to the home, crying aloud and without any clothes. She did not even allow me to wear them.

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