



Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies (TWB) – Brahma in the Island of Rameshwaram



By Vivekananda Kendra – nardep

Background: Research into mythological texts enabled us to identify the lost and damaged traditional water bodies - Teerthams. The survey maps and interaction with the locals helped in restoring and renovating the Teerthams without damaging environmental/societal norms or antiquity. Renovated Teerthams has been handed over to “Teertha mitras”, a community group after bringing back to its original glory. We have identified 64 traditional water bodies (Teerthams) in and around Rameshwaram Island. Twenty traditional water bodies outside the temple revived and renovated. So far, 8.5 million litres of water storage created to recharge ground water. Twenty thousand villagers and about one lakh tourists are benefitted. This process has enabled to revive Kudimaramathu system for protecting traditional water bodies. In future, it will become a tourist and pilgrim destination generating employment opportunities for the local stakeholders. This note gives an account of renovation efforts of Brahma (Kunda) Teertham relating to location, mythological values, on revival of traditional water bodies for posterity.

Location: Brahma teertham is at Mangad Village of Rameshwaram Island. This newly renovated Teertha has brackish water (salt water). However, in the coming couple of years it will become potable water at least for a period of 6-8 months in a year. This pond will serve people and animals (horses, cows, sheeps) fulfilling their water needs. There are about 200 families with a population of about 1000 in the nearby areas. The uniqueness of Teertha is “Magarnombu thidal” which is held by Ramanathaswamy temple on Vijayadashmi i.e Dasheera.



The Teertham is located around one and the half kilo-meters to the North West of the Ramanathaswamy temple. The Teertham is on the road ahead to the Bhadrakali Amman temple. The GPS coordinates are; East – 79.31721, North -9.29648. The field survey number of the specific area Sr.No.154 and the ward number is 19th of Rameshwaram Municipality.

Mythology:

This Teertha is at Kanthamathanam (Mangadu) of Rameshwaram Island. At this place, Brahma's curse redeemed. The story goes as follows:

An argument erupts between Brahma and Vishnu over who is superior; Shiva appears as an infinite fiery pillar (Linga) in front of the pair. "Brahma and Vishnu were very much surprised to

see the pillar of fire, which was so enormous in size that it reached the sky and penetrated down the earth. They made a vow in front of gods that whoever finds the end of the pillar is superior. Vishnu transformed himself into a boar and went to the 'Patal' (nether world) to find the base of that 'Pillar of fire'. Similarly Brahma transformed himself into a swan and flew up in the sky to find its limit. Vishnu was unsuccessful in his attempt and came back and told the gods. But Brahma who could not see the beginning the pillar told lies (keeping Ketaki flower to give a false witness) before gods and Vishnu to declare his superiority.



Shiva became angry on seeing the conduct of the Brahma and cursed him "You spoke untruth with a desire to become superior and worship-able. It is my curse that, you will not be worshipped by anybody." And pleased with Vishnu for speaking truth, accorded him the same status as that of his own."

Realizing the mistake, Brahma sought pardon from Shiva. Shiva said "You go to Kanthamathanam (Mangadu) and perform yagna where sin you accrued of telling lies will be redeemed". However you will not be worshipped but rituals /actions required by Vedas and Smritis alone will be accorded to you. Later, Brahma went to Kanthamathana and did yagna. Pleased with his actions, Shiva appeared before him and reminded him of the past and told: The place where you did this yagna will be known as Brahma Kunda and the devotees who have these ashes will get over illusions and will be liberated. One who smears these ashes will come out of his crude sins and Brahma on doing the same, went to Satyaloka.

Moral: To get power or show one is great, one should not tell lies. Truthfulness Triumphs.

Reflections:

- a. Why one tell lies?
- b. What happens when one tells lies?
- c. How to overcome telling the lies?



Renovation: Teertham was missing as the entire area was used as a dumping ground by the Municipality for than 25 years. It was covered with the polythene, plastic carry bags, paper, broken bottle glasses, chemicals and clothes etc. The entire garbage was a hip of 4 – 5 feet below the ground and 6 – 8 feet above the ground. More over bushes like juliflora (Odai tree) covered some of the areas. The entire area was cleaned before marking the Teertham area. Earlier, the Teertham was like a huge pond; however, we have only constructed a small portion as a memory to the Brahma Teertham.



The Teertham is oriented in an east to west direction. The dimensions of teertham are its length is around 10 meters, width is around 9.44 meters and depth is around 4.5 meters. Thus the approximate volume of storage is around 425 cubic meters (4,25,000 liters).

JCB machine was used for cleaning the garbage and digging up to 15 ft. A pump was used regularly during the initial construction of the basement area to pump out the water. The area is having full of water even during summer season and so the construction was delayed twice. 15 steps are constructed to fetch the water from the Teertham. We have also raised the wall by 4.5 to 5 feet height to protect the animals like goats / cows from falling inside the Teertham. A gate is also constructed for entry to the Teertham.



Renovated Brahma Teertham



Way Forward: From the community who supported this venture, Teertha mitras are to be selected for regular maintenance and sustainability. The soil and water analysis will be carried out by IIT Chennai and species of Punga and Neem are to be planted in and around the Teertham.

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