

**WHEN I SAW
TIRUPATI BALAJI
(Naaham Karta)**

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EMESCO

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HUMBLE OFFERING

The grace of 'guru' and the Lord are absolutely necessary, if any good work is to be started and successfully completed.

With the blessings of my Guru Sri Satya Pramoda Thirtha of Uttaradi Math, who was responsible for my taking an absolute 'U' turn in my lifestyle as well as attitudes, and the blessings of the present Pithadhipathi Sri Satyatma Thirtha, I penned my experiences with the Lord and His work. Through my Gurus, I submit this flower at the feet of Lord Balaji as a humble offering.



(Sri Venkateswara of Tirupati is the advent of Lord Vishnu, who has thousands of names including Balaji, Srinivasa, Lord of the Seven Hills, Tirumalesa, Tirupativasa, Srivaru and so on.)

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WHEN I WAS BROUGHT DOWN TO MY KNEES

One may experience knee pain when one climbs the Seven Hills to have ‘*darshan*’ of Lord Srinivasa at Tirumala. But when knee pain strikes even before one sets out on a journey to Tirumala, it is a mystery. I had to witness the agony when I tried to scotch the very idea of going to Tirumala.

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My postings in the districts, as trainee Assistant Collector in West Godavari district, Sub-Collector, Bhuvanagiri and Project Officer, Small Farmers’ Development Agency, Nalgonda district, and District Collector, Khammam (for three years), had almost ended. In 1977, the Government appointed me Managing Director of the Andhra Pradesh Irrigation Development Corporation with its headquarters at Hyderabad.

With the stints in the districts over, my wife and I had been planning to seek admission for children in good schools and settle down in our own home coming up in Hyderabad. There was a call from the office of the Chief Secretary, Mr. I. J. Naidu. When I called on him, he told me that I should pack up and go back to the districts once again. But this time I should go as Executive Officer of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), as suggested by Chief Minister Dr. M. Channa Reddy.

The tradition of the Chief Minister hand-picking IAS officials for some prestigious positions had just begun. The Chief Minister shortlisted a few candidates from out of those suggested by the Chief Secretary. From among them, I was given the first choice for the TTD position. Explained the Chief Secretary: “For one to work in a religious institution, one should have total faith in the institution and the Lord and one should be eager and willing to work there. The Chief Minister has

selected you. Posting orders will be given only if you give your consent”.

I was not inclined to take a decision on the spot either way. Conflicting emotions crossed my mind. I was not reconciled to leaving Hyderabad so soon after having planned to settle down. But could I say that I was not interested in going as it might mean spurning a call from the Lord? In this context, I was reminded of what a friend of mine had told me: when an IAS official working as West Godavari District Collector declined to be posted as TTD Executive Officer, the Government had to cancel the orders already issued. Two or three weeks later, he got into serious trouble resulting in suspension from service.

I, therefore, felt that my wife and I should seriously consider the pros and cons and resolve the dilemma. The Chief Secretary agreed to grant me two days to make up my mind.

Returning home, I discussed the matter at length with my wife Gopi. We had been on the move in the districts for more than a decade. Daughter Madhavi had already moved from school to school at three different places, even before she entered the first class. The new posting would once again disrupt her studies. I was not too keen on moving out. At the same time, I was in no mood to tell the Chief Secretary that I was not interested as it was a call from the Lord. We, therefore, hit upon the idea of leaving the matter to the Government. We thought it was a clever move on our part. I informed the Chief Secretary accordingly. But Mr. I. J. Naidu was not prepared to accept the proposal. He told me point-blank: “Look Prasad, unless you agree to go there willingly, posting orders cannot be given. The CM is particular that the person posted as EO should be keen to go there and work there willingly”. After a pause, Mr. I. J. Naidu added, “Anyway, I will convey your viewpoint to the Chief Minister. Let us see what he has to say”. I uttered a sigh of relief as I felt the posting would not take place and the issue had been resolved to our satisfaction. But we did not realise then that the decision of not going to Tirumala would end up in my going through a period of agony and anguish. The decision had its fallout that very evening when we went for a movie. - - - -