



SAALUMARADA THIMMAKKA - MOTHER OF TREES

Dr. A. Srinivasacharlu

Assistant Professor, New Horizon College of Education,
Indiranagar, Bangalore, Karnataka.



ABSTRACT

Saalumarada Thimmakka is an environmentalist from Karnataka State of India. Her life has earned a spot in the esteemed BBC's '100 Most Prominent Women List in 2016, which is substantiation to the principle that women can brave the status quo in order to be the change that they wish to see. The name word Saalumarada (means 'a row of trees' in Kannada language) is given to her because of her monumental work in planting and nurturing 384 banyan trees (scientifically known as Ficus benghalensis) in 1948 along the highway covering a distance of four kilometers between Hulikal and Kudur in Karnataka State. At the last count, she said to have planted and raised more than 8,000 trees. Environmentalists estimate the value of Thimmakka's contribution, as anything not less than Rs.150 crores. Due to this people also call fondly her as 'Vruksha Mathe' (Mother of trees). The paper is a tribute to the Saalumarada Thimmakka who has become a prodigy of her own order in environmentalism in modern India.

KEY WORDS: Saalumarada Thimmakka, Banyan Trees, Initiatives, Honours, Implications.

INTRODUCTION

Saalumarada Thimmakka is an environmentalist from Karnataka State of India. Her life has earned a spot in the esteemed BBC's '100 Most Prominent Women List in 2016, which is substantiation to the principle that women can brave the status quo in order to be the change that they wish to see. The name word Saalumarada (means 'a row of trees' in Kannada language) is given to her because of her monumental work in planting and nurturing 384 banyan trees (scientifically known as Ficus benghalensis) in 1948 along the highway covering a distance of four kilometers between Hulikal and Kudur in Karnataka State. At the last count, she said to have planted and raised more than 8,000 trees. Environmentalists estimate the value of Thimmakka's contribution, as anything not less than Rs.150 crores. Due to this people also call fondly her as 'Vruksha Mathe' (Mother of trees).

PERSONAL DETAILS

Thimmakka was born in Gubbi Taluk, Tumakuru District in Karnataka. Her parents were Vijayamma and Chikkarangayya. She could never go to school because of utter poverty and lack of facilities. She had not received any kind of formal education. She started working at an early age as a labourer in a nearby quarry. In 1928, she was married to Bikkala Chikkayya who was also a labourer. He was hailed from Hulikal village which is situated in Magadi taluk in Ramanagar district. The couple could not have children even after several years of marriage. Then they decided to plant banyan trees and raise them as their children to fill the void in their life. Thimmakka's husband passed away in 1991. Having crossed 100 years of age a couple of years ago, Thimmakka is now living under the care of Umesh, her adopted son. He has a bachelor of education degree. He is a president of Saalumarada Thimmakka International Foundation trust which was founded in 14th February 2014. He is keenly involved in the environmental conservation. He has been taking

intensive efforts in planting and nurturing trees beside the roads, in the public places, in the vicinity of schools and also on mountain and hill tops. Recognizing his contributions to the preservation of the environment, he has been bestowed upon the Rashtriya Yuva Sadhaka Puraskar by the government of India and Karnataka State Environment Award by Karnataka State Government.

INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY THIMMAKKA

Planting and Nurturing of more than 8,000 Trees

Thimmakka along with her husband used to work hard in the field in the mornings and would be found digging holes to plant banyan trees in the afternoon. It was said that the couple took all the pains carry water for plants for a distance of 4 kilometers. By fencing with thorny shrubs, they ensured that plants were protected from grazing animals. In total, around 384 trees were planted. Thimmakka could plant and nurture 8,000 trees over the next 80 years. The saplings that the couple planted long back have grown to be big trees and provide shade to the passerby, and the view of this line of trees is a regal view to the eyes which is why thimmakka is called as 'Saalumarada Thimmakka' by the localities. This shows the enormous respect they have for her incredible work. The management of these trees has now been taken over by the Karnataka State.

Involvement in Campaigns

Saalumarada Thimmakka is actively involved in the state and national environmental protection campaigns. She has been an active campaigner in circulating the message of afforestation. She believes every human being on earth should plant trees.

Social Service

Saalumarada Thimmakka beside contribution to environment has also taken many initiatives for the benefit of the local community. She has built a rainwater storage tank in her village. She has also set up a trust for building up a hospital in her village.

Saalumarada Thimmakka International Foundation, Bangalore

Saalumarada Thimmakka founded a trust by name Saalumarada Thimmakka International Foundation on 14th February 2014 with the main intention to create awareness among community towards preserving nature. Apart from environment, the trust also intends to address the educational needs of the local community, provide medical relief to the people and also serve poor people.

Pruthvi Bachao (Save Earth)

Saalumarada Thimmakka has inspired her adopted son Umesh to start a movement called 'Pruthvi Bachao' (Save Earth) movement. He is also running a nursery and distributes plants to people. So far he has distributed more than 5 lakh saplings. He has inspired students and local community to take a pledge to conserve environment. He has given awareness talks on environment conservation. All his environmental initiatives prove that, Umesh has proved himself to be a worthy son of mother.

SHOT INTO LIMELIGHT

In 1958, two village headmen, who were on their way to the Sugganahalli cattle fair in Magadi Taluk, Ramanagara District, spotted the couple Saalumarada Thimmakka and Bikkala Chikkayya watering the trees. They felicitated them with a silver medal at the fair, which is cited as a prized possession to date by Thimmakka

Shamanuru Shivashankarappa, a political leader in Karnataka State mentioned the efforts of Saalumarada Thimmakka in his public speech at Ramanagara in 1994 and gave cash prize to her. This

brought Thimmakka to the limelight. The media and the public started visiting her. Since that day, though Thimmakka was illiterate, she started getting plenty of fan mail and media reports.

HONOURS RECEIVED

Saalumarada Thimmakka has received many honours, awards, recognitions and citations for her contributions towards conservation of nature.

National Citizen's Award

Sachidanandaswamy, a Rajya Sabha member, who read an article in a Newspaper about Thimmakka's eco-friendly endeavours in 1996 referred her name to Justice P.N. Bhagwati, who was heading the selection committee for the National Citizen's Award. The then Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda gave Thimmakka the award on December 23, 1996. The citation of this award describes Thimmakka as a "living monument of our times".

Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra Award

Saalumarada Thimmakka has received Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra (Friend of Trees) Award from Ministry of Environment and Forests of Government of India in 1997 for commendable work in the field of afforestation. A cash award of Rupees Two lakh fifty thousand was presented to her.

Nadoja Award

Saalumarada Thimmakka received Nadoja award from Kannada University, Hampi, Karnataka in 2010 for her stupendous work in the field of environment. The award is equivalent to the Honorary D.Litt degree.

Biography

The biography on Thimmakka named as "Saalumarada Saradaarini" was written by Indiramma Belur which was published in 2015. The book carries all the incidents that Saalumarada Thimmakka has faced in her life.

'100 Most Prominent Women List' by BBC in 2016

Saalumarada Thimmakka was listed as one of the most prominent and inspirational women of the contemporary world in the year 2016 by BBC. According to the BBC, she has planted over 8,000 trees in 80 years.

Saalumarada Thimmakka Shade Plan

Karnataka Government announced funds for the 'Saalumarada Thimmakka Shade Plan' in 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 as part of the mission to plant trees along 3000 kms stretch and nurturing it for five years.

Poem on Thimmakka

Indian Government has taken the initiative to include a poem composed on Saalumarada Thimmakka in the text books following CBSE syllabus. This affirms that government has recognized her priceless contribution to the environment.

Chapter on Thimmakka

Saalumarada Thimmakka who had never attended school, now has a poem dedicated to her in Indian National curriculum.

Titles Received

Saalumarada Thimmakka has received numerous titles for her exemplary work in the field of environment. The titles include Vanamitra, Nisargaratna, Vrikshasri and Vrikshapremi have been conferred on her.

Certificates Received

Saalumarada Thimmakka has received Honour Certificate from the Women and Child Welfare Department, Government of Karnataka; Certificate of Appreciation from the Indian Institute of Wood Science and Technology, Bangalore.

Other Awards

Saalumarada Thimmakka has also received many other awards like Veerachakra Prashasthi Award in 1997; Karnataka Kalpavalli Award in 2000; Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award in 2006; IGBC Green Champion by The Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), a part of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in 2012; Vishalakshi Award by Art of Living Organization, Bangalore; Green champion award; Vrikshamatha Award; Karnataka Rajyothsava Puraskar/Award; Karnataka Rajya Parisara Award; Women Empowerment Award; The Green Mother Award; Parisara Priyadarshini Puraskar; Mother of Tree Award; Jagajyothi Basavanna Puraskar; Dr B. R. Ambedkar State Award; Green India Puraskar; Sahara India Puraskar; Parisara Rathana Award in 2013; Vishwathma Award by Hoovinahole Foundation in 2015; She's Divine Award by I and You Being Together Foundation in 2017 etc.

PRESENT STATUS

Saalumarada Thimmakka now lives with her adopted son Umesh. Her foundation Saalumarada Thimmakka International Foundation is taking up many initiatives to contribute to the betterment of environment and also serving the needs of local community. She frequently gets invited to tree planting ceremonies all over the country. Her adopted son is also actively assisting his mother in spreading the message of environmentalism.

IMPLICATIONS

Following are few implications drawn from the inspirational life of Saalumarada Thimmakka which matters for everyone concerned with the protection of environment:

Academic Qualification does not Matter

Saalumarada Thimmakka had not received any kind of formal education. This has not deterred her to contribute to environment by planting and nurturing trees which has become folklore in India. This proves again that one need not have academic qualification to contribute to environment.

Lead a Simple Life

Saalumarada Thimmakka has received many awards but she still remains as a person with humility. Fame in the world has not affected her humble nature.

Be an Example

Saalumarada Thimmakka remains one of the idols of environmentalists due to her surmounting work towards planting and nurturing of trees. She is actively involved in the environmental protection campaigns and actively campaigns for afforestation.

Overcome Grief by Taking up Noble Activities

Saalumarada Thimmakka did not have children even after many years. She has overcome this grief by planting and nurturing banyan trees as her children to fill the void in her life. Thus she has left behind a living green heritage this world had never heard of.

Have Will Power and Do Hardwork

Saalumarada Thimmakka, planted and nurtured as many as 8,000 trees. This shows her enormous will power and hardworking nature.

Sustain the Urge

Saalumarada Thimmakka, even today is not satiated in her pursuit of environmental protection. She has a strong urge to contribute further to environmental protection. For this to materialize, she has started a foundation in her name named Saalumarada Thimmakka International Foundation" trust.

Demonstrate Concern for Society

Saalumarada Thimmakka has also taken many initiatives towards the upliftment of local community. She has built a rainwater storage tank and set up a trust for building up a hospital in her village. Her trust is also working for addressing various other needs of local community.

Power of One

Saalumarada Thimmakka has demonstrated that it does not matter how many number of people have collaborated in pursuing a mission. She almost singlehandedly has made difference by planting and nurturing banyan trees along a 4 km stretch of road between Hulikal and Kudur in Karnataka. Now this has resulted into an ecosystem that provides shade and resting places for humans and animals, food and shelter for insects and birds, and green cover that has helped restore the environment in the local area.

Economic Status does not Matter

Saalumarada Thimmakka has contributed significantly towards conservation of her local environment in spite of poverty. This proves that one need not to be wealthy to contribute to the environment or society. In fact she proves the adage that 'where there is a will there is a way'.

CONCLUSION

Saalumarada Thimmakka stands out as a distinctive Indian environmentalist from Karnataka, due to her incredible service to environment by planting and nurturing trees close to 8,000. These magnificent trees are standing as an enduring heritage of Saalumarada Thimmakka's work and have contributed significantly to the local ecosystem. Due to all these contributions, Saalumarada Thimmakka has become a legendary environmentalist in India. Thus she remains as an inspiration to everyone to contribute towards the protection of environment and also serve the society.

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