



Research Paper

RAO Sahib: The Legacy of a Legend

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Hailed from a small temple town in the Vizianagaram Empire of current day Andhra Pradesh was our Rao sahib. Born to a father who wielded power and affluence as the karnam a title traditionally used for the tax collectors, and a cherishing mother who single handedly handled a household filled with seven children, Rao sahib who was the fourth child out of the seven children that his parents had lived an initial life of comfort and sustenance.

The temple town was a vaishnava agrahara and Rao sahib's ancestral home was right in front of the age old Rama temple that carried the old world charm in its sheer elegance, the house was shadowed by a steep hill top on whose peak a hot water spring existed. The affluence and glory of the family lasted many years but things took a steep turn and things started going downhill by the time Rao Sahib was a teenager.

The eldest son left the house alongside his wife after securing a job leaving behind six of his younger sibling with an old ailing father who was already in his sixties. Though on the exterior the family looked stable, internally the finances dwindled, but worse was about to hit, as though stars aligned against the family, devastation hit the family in the worst way possible and the matriarch of the family left the mortal world for her heavenly abode.

Though the old charm of the family was all but lost the aspiration to provide good education to his son made the patriarch seek a favor from a relative who was a union leader with a substantial amount of wealth, Rao Sahib shifted to the affluent relative's house in Vijayanagaram but soon things turned a steep turn and some relations turned sour, Rao Sahib though never uttering a single negative word against any left the comforts of home and moved in to an orphanage run by the raja. The once glorious realms old riches and the kings coffers had taken a blow the orphanage was trying its best to provide for the kids but funds were scarce.

Though Rao Sahib never revisited his days of struggle on a later date a friend of his revealed the wretched condition of the orphanage, the meals were usually mere morsels and only served once a day because of the ever sinking economy of the realm. The patriarch of the family once in a while would send a couple of dimes but Rao Sahib instead of spending them on himself would find ways to take back gifts to his five sisters.

Days turned into years and in these years three of his sisters were married off, each of them started having their own family, one had five kids before she was widowed and had to move back in with her maternal family again, the other two who were married off to men in the railways and they proceeded to have families of their own, one had eight children and the other three.

As if life wasn't traumatic enough for Rao Sahib a sudden onset of disease took away the patriarch of the family, even after the mightiest efforts that Rao Sahib put into getting the doctor to the village on a borrowed cycle through hard and rocky terrains. The doctor unfortunately could not save him and he finally succumbed to the disease that was plaguing him leaving behind Rao sahib with his two sisters and an empty bank.

Somehow Rao Sahib managed to muster up a job in the state electricity board and things changed for better just a little bit. And a little more light shone at the end of the tunnel as yet another sister was married off into a good family and had three children of her own.

Another debacle hit the family as his sister who had eight children fell gravely ill with problems of the spine, his brother-in-law who had recently quit his railway job to establish a business was having a hard time juggling the brood of children and the every taxing business, hence he beseeched Rao Sahib to temporarily come over along with his youngest sister so that they could take care of the brood of children and his ailing wife.

The temporary arrangement turned into a permanent settlement as the sister's health worsened, the well-paying job at the state electricity board was a no go as he had to shift and hence he had to quit the job and move almost a thousand kilometers away to take care of his family. The trajectory of events was steep, from comforts of a loving home he had to go to an orphanage and then as if life wasn't sour enough already he had to sleep on

metal chairs under tin roof of his brother-in laws shop all-round the year even under the harshest of conditions may it be pouring rains or harsh winters. Of course there was a deep found love in Rao Sahibs heart for his sister that made him resigned to the almost inhuman conditions.

The money influx was low as the brother-in-law only gave him a small portion of money that he use to initially earn from the decent paying job in the electricity board, so to earn money enough for his expenditure he resorted to writing the accounts of the local fruit merchants because, the brass local fruit vendors though absolutely crass were immensely polite to Rao Sahib because of his charismatic personality.

Mighty was our Rao Sahiband its hard to believe that a young chap barely in his teens could travel over 136 kilometers by train with ice filled buckets that held blood which was essential for the transfusion that was necessary for his sister to survive. Rao Sahibwho was barely ateen, had the burden to travel to across the city and get fresh blood for transfusion, the part that astounded me 60 years later while living in the luxury of modern medicine was that throughout the journey he was not allowed to put the heavy ice filled buckets down. He is the living example that of only utmost devotion and love can give a man strength of Hercules himself, what he has done was no less than a miracle.

His life itself resembled the life of the mighty Greek hero Hercules, the tasks he was endorsed with sound inhuman and sometimes even alarming. He was entrusted with the task of carrying silver jewelry to the city and then getting back silver that had been purified after melting the silver and removing the metal mixed in it. This was a regular occurrence and Rao Sahib could not entrust the heavy bags to anyone and had to carry it all the way to the city and back, to think of his struggles from the comforts of my home make me feel privileged and somewhat spoiled.

The things slowly took a turn towards the light as the years passed and his youngest sister was married into a good family. The positivity of life didn't end there Rao Sahib his fortune and goodwill helped him, he finally bought a shop for himself investing every penny he earned into it, the goodwill he earned through the years became his investment and business prospered. It was high time for him to settle down or so the family felt and the hunt for a bride began.

The way my grandfather aka Rao Sahib met my Grandmother was no less than cinematic, initially the prospective bride he thought he was supposed to marry was not the one he was going to be betrothed with. One fine day after the end of a series of ceremonies he was suddenly informed that his bride to be was going off to the station, and he rushed to meet her and catch a glimpse with a basket of mangoes as a gift. The scene even today is so dramatic, a tall dark and handsome man chasing a young girl on the newly constructed over bridge on a bicycle oh!!!! How swooning and romantic, but my poor traditionalist grandma in a hand pull rickshaw was frantic with fear about who was chasing her on a cycle. Even more adorable is the way he just thrusted the basket into her hands and went away not even uttering a single word.

Eventually the entire formalization of the marriage happened and Rao Sahib married my grandmother. The wedding day was a grand affair where both my grandmother and her sister were wedded on the exact same date and time my grandma to my grandfather who was a business man and her sister to an engineer. Eventually time passed and the family grew, and they were blessed with four beautiful children, who survived to adult life, but tragedy was hooked to Rao sahib's family, and they lost the fifth child to troubles of birth and this hit the family hard, breaking the hearts of both the parents beyond repair and leaving behind a void.

Life went on and eventually another catastrophe struck one of the sisters husbands fell prey to mental illness and ultimately succumbed to it leaving behind three kids, Rao sahib had to pull all the strings in an attempt to secure a job for his fatherless nephew.

Eventually Rao Sahib mustered up enough money to buy a house but in a moment of deep affection for his wife he brought it in her name and paid over 70% of the price as down payment. Unfortunately this didn't sit well withmembers of the extend family who in turn ratted him out and he had to give away the house because of the whining and weeping family members at throw away price.

He stayed put with the extended family in the home he shared and steadily the kids grew up, each special and cherished but his daughter who was the second of his four children was the apple of his eye his entire world revolved around her happiness, but the more cherished bond existed between him and his third child who he held close to his heart, he was the only one who was allowed to sit on his lap during meal times which was a great privilege that no other child was bestowed with, the youngest was a lanky reed like kid with zero core strength, oh! It would be an understatement to say that they were worried about him learning the basic motor skills, Rao Sahib would massage and stimulate the nerves of his limbs as he would sit on his broad chest, I know one must be wondering why haven't I been speaking about the eldest son aka my father, my father and my grandfather had a great bond but the journey was eventful, there was a phase of series of choices and ill-fated turns made by him that had caused Rao sahib great heartache.

My father would narrate about his childhood with great nostalgia, my grandfather taught us about selflessness and unbound love, he had never been the one to be biased to his children he would never indulge in partiality towards his own, whatever he bought would be for everyone never one isolated child, his own and of

the extended family was preferred over the others. The fondest of memories my father held was that Rao Sahib would get all three of his sons (my father and his two younger brothers) the exact same attire; I guess he invented twinning before it was a fashion trend. Of course it's completely adorable to see grown men like my father in his fifties and his brothers close by in age still has the same military buzz cut because throughout their lives Rao sahib insisted his kids have clean and sober haircuts. But I guess raising a family of his own alongside his extended family created a lot of tension and toxic energy and hence Rao Sahib and his wife moved to the small three roomed house behind the shop, but as unfortunate as it might be the house wasn't in a condition to raise a family, but my grandma somehow made a home out of that.

Though initially the house wasn't something that could be called a home because of the conditions it was in, later on the same became a spot for social, cultural, political and intellectual debate. The greatest minds from all across town would gather in front of the shop and some of the most intellectual debates were stimulated there, it was these highbrows that started calling him Rao Babu and somehow through time a simple boy from a temple town became Rao Sahib. He was the answer to many questions, may it be the market issues or jobs or education he was the first to help and last to stand in line to take credit for the same.

Life was a roller coaster for him, He suddenly was the head of the family after an unfortunate demise of his brother in law, and in addition of his own family he suddenly had to shoulder the responsibility of his already ailing sister and her children. My grandparents aka Rao Sahib and my grandma played matchmaker and cherry picked the best brides and grooms for their nieces and nephews, one of the most infamous stories that I heard was about one of my uncles being so mesmerized by one of my grandmothers niece from her maternal side that he insisted on marrying her and no one else, as it was a good match his marriage was solemnized by my grandparents.

Time flew and it was time for his own princess to get married and he found a prince worthy of her and married her in a ceremony worth royalty, but with the light of his life left the light in the family, the fortunes of the family left with the daughter and left a shallow hole. Loans piled up, the wealth was lost and the once wealth worth the kings coffers was all but empty. The struggle was real but the smile never flattered from Rao sahibs face. He stood against the world with unwavering belief in himself and the lord. The things slowly became better the younger two of his three sons were faring well, the middle son was a real a gem he managed to struggle his way through heavy competition and get into an institute which is almost on the same standing as IIT and then got placed in one of the eminent companies and became the financial backbone of the family, my uncle did bring my family a lot of glory and pride. The youngest was the most shielded child of the family who was pampered and beloved to everyone; he sailed through his college life and later on in life took over the business that was established by my grandfather.

My father I guess one of the greatest humans I know was a prodigy but he was also the biblical prodigal son, one might be wondering why I said this, it is because he was one smart man who broke the age old cycle and went to college got a bachelors then got a masters enrolled himself for a MPhil and was on a fast track to getting a PhD, but there were multiple choices not essentially bad but had deep found impact on Rao sahib, the paramount being the fact that he had quit multiple jobs to come back home and my father was and is a man who would go above and beyond his means to help others which in turn led to a slight unhappiness layered underneath the pride of having a compassionate son because it sometimes led them into a fix. Was my father a prodigy or a prodigal son only my grandfather can tell but the bond I have seen them share shows the affection they have for each other, my grandfather forever remains to be the sole hero in my father's life. The hero of my father's life did leave the mortal world for his heavenly abode just a day before my father's birthday leaving behind my family heart broken and father for the last 17 years regrets not being on his side as he breath his last, and hence my father's birthday became a day of mourning and left deep wounds on his heart.

Life was hard for Rao Sahib but death also came in an equally painful manner, cancer had cut his happy life short by a decade, but life was a little fair as he saw three of his four kids get married and held close to his heart three of his grandchildren. The grandfather I know was left hollowed out by the monstrosity of a disease leaving him a mere shadow of his old self, for a man who loved to eat a cancerous growth in his esophagus was just cruel, I now wonder why did the god test him so much, but he was the one who taught us about absolute trust in the almighty. My grandfather was no less than a warrior, he battled through with cancer with great vigor but ultimately the monster that amplified within him consumed him and the battle was lost.

My father wasn't there on that unfaithful day, the reason was equally traumatizing for a five year old me, as my mom was injured and cracked open her skull, and the finances were dwindling thin which crippled my father's hands and unfortunately he wasn't there when my grandfather breath his last. From what I was told much later his last breathe coincided with the aarhi of Sai baba on the day most auspicious to him, I guess it was the almighty that he so believed in that had called him.

My grandfather had unwavering belief in the almighty even when the times were worse, like I remember my grandmother narrating this to my youngest cousin the only one amongst us four who never met our grandfather about how once there was a flame that was suddenly ablaze by a random element in the house and

everyone else was frantic about somehow or the other curbing it but my grandfather firmly stood ground and did nothing, she said narrating his lines fondly and I quote “as long as baba is there nothing will happen” and his words deemed true there wasn’t a catastrophe that happened.

Years went by and I guess today we are fine and have finally embraced his loss, and through the years many things changed, on his first death anniversary my mother got through for a job at IIT and his prediction in the early years of their marriage that his daughter in law would work at IIT became true. My grandfather found the child he dreamed of in my mother and years later shocking us all my mother uttered the same words he used to say in a very unexpected scenario, my grandfather was a firm believer of the lords will and would always say that as long as the sky and earth are exactly where they belong nothing else matters and somehow my mother repeated the same words he said years later, weird I must say the karmic cycle is. The family he brought into this world grew bigger and stronger steadily; his youngest granddaughter who was christened after his name was celebrated since day one. Each of his children and grandchildren set major landmarks in life and I guess his selflessness and singularity in prayer asking only for “Sarvejanasukhinobhavantu” ensured enough goodwill for the entire family for eternity.

Its been 17 years since the legend of a man left this world but the hole he left in our hearts can never be filled, call it a void or a ruthlessly endless chasm but no matter the word the gap can never be bridged by any mortal attempt.