

## The Immortal Light of Maestro Singing - Tana-Riri

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### **Abstract:**

History is only about hearsay. It always has input and prejudices of the person who tell or write the facts. We must not rely on the fact by hearing one sided stories. Here through this paper we are trying to place the true story of Tana-Riri. Tana-Riri is now given importance by Government of Gujarat but pure singers like these sisters are hard to find. They were the cultural heritage of our nation. But still in local area there are different sounds and stories are popular some of them are true and some are misleading. Now government has started recognizing & every year as per Hindu calendar in the month of Kartik they celebrate TanaRiri Mahotsav where all great singers gather and play the melodious songs for Tribute.

### **Vadnagar**

Vadnagar is situated 112 Km away from Ahmedabad and it is connected with rail & road transport. It is a Taluka of Mahesana District. Known history of Vadnagar goes back to more than 2500 years. Vadnagar is referred to as Anartapur (आनर्तपुर) in Mahabharata. According to the great epic the Anarta warriors, it also describe as in Bhisma Parva, Mahabharata/Book VI Chapter 10 Describes geography and provinces of Bharatavarsha. River Kapila is mentioned in verse 27:

विदिशां कृष्ण वेण्णां च ताम्रां च कपिलाम

अपि

शलुं सुवामां वेदाश्वां हरिस्रावां महापगाम

(Mbt:VI.10.27)

It is also found in various tales that in ancient time Vadnagar was called Chamatkarpur. According to a tale, there was a king named Chamatkar who ruled Anarthdesh, the ancient Vadnagar. It describes us like that he was suffering from leprosy due to a curse from a she-deer. With the advice of sages (herbal leaves), the king did self-apology and took bath in the famous 'Sankh Tirth' situated in Vadnagar, and his leprosy was cured. Thereafter he established the town name Chamatkarpur.

Vadnagar was also known as Anartapur, the capital of the kingdom "Anarta". Anarta is referred in Mahabharata.

It says: warriors from Anarta participated in Kurukshetra war on the side of both the Pandavas and the Karuavas.

Post Mahabharata war, Anartapura was no more remained the capital city and place of power. In its west a new and governing city called Vallabhi became the capital of Gujarat. But Anartapura continued to be a prosperous & wealthy trading city. It remained as a rich cultural Centre and patronized artists, sculptors, musicians, dancers and actors. The city was joyful and happy. By 2nd century AD, it came to be known as the "Ananadapura" - 'the City of Joy'. It attracted monks and followers of Buddhism and Jainism. The city supported hundreds of Buddhist monks. Recent archaeological discoveries of a finely carved Buddha head from a farmland suggest the presence of Buddhism.

It is also said that Vadnagar was the earliest capital of Gujarat. Vadnagar's main city is located inside the walls of a fort which has 6 huge gates namely 1) Arjun Bari, 2) Nadiol, 3) Amarthol, 4) Ghaskol, 5) Pithori and 6) Amarthol in which Amarthol gate area is the oldest existing part of the town. & the River Kapila (as mentioned in slok) used to flow through the town of Vadnagar<sup>1</sup>.

Vadnagar is a place of communal harmony and evidences' are available in the forms of their construction like Left side of the Arjunbari gate, was constructed

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jatland.com/home/Vadnagar>

in old S.1689, chaitra sudi 15, A.H.1042, Ramadan, 15 March 1633 AD. States that Arjunbari gate was rebuilt by Lutfu'llah Baig to ensure the protection of the general public, when Islam Khan was the Kazi of the Suba. It was composed by Jagjiwan Das with the hope to be favored with the darshan of shri SiddhNath. Above the side mihrab of Jami Mosque in Kasba (village) Mohalla, old A.H. 1095= 1683-84 AD, Records the construction of mosque by Sayyad Muhammad son of Sayyad Ni'matu'llah. Text inscribed by Kamal Muhammad (son of) Sharif Muhammad, the central mihrab, Baroti mosque, and old A.H. 1096= 1684-85 AD, dynasty Mughal, King Aurangzeb, states that mosque was constructed by Sayyad 'Ali son of Sayyad Pyara.

### **Sufism which brought Hindus and Muslims Together**

Islam in India was spread much less by the sword then by the Sufis. After all Sufism with its holy men, visions and miracles, and its emphasis on individual search for union with god, has always borne remarkable similarities' to the mystical side of Hinduism. Under Sufi influence it was particularly at the level of village folk worship that the two religions fused into one, with many ordinary Hindus visiting the graves of Sufi Pirs, while Muslim villagers would leave offering at temples to ensure the birth of children and good harvests.

### **History of Hatkeshwar Temple**

This generously carved 17th century temple just outside town enshrines Hatkeshwar Mahadev, the family deity of Nagar Brahmins, who were once a prominent community in Vadnagar.

The temple's inner chamber houses a Shiva linga said to have self-emerged (swayambhu). From the roof of the sanctum a gigantic shikhar soars high into the sky. Facing east, the temple is enclosed by a high wall topped by three circular domes interspersed with flat stretches in the Indo-Saracenic tradition.

The exterior of the temple is exquisitely ornamented with figures of the nine planets, musicians, evocative dancing Apsaras, regent deities, the chief gods of the Hindu pantheon, scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and varied animal and floral motifs. The premises also have an ancient Kashivishveshvara Shiva temple, a Swaminarayan temple and two Jain temples.

### **History of Kirti Toran**

The town Vadnagar is also famous for its Torans, The 'Toran', called the 'Kirti Stambha' (Temple Arch) in other regions, is a semi-religious or civic form that flourished under the Solanki rule in Gujarat. A pair of 12th century columns supporting an arch; about 40 feet tall built in red and yellow sandstone, just north of the walled town. They stand majestically on the bank of Sharmistha Talav, on a road going down from Arjun Bari. Two of the

finest examples are at Vadnagar. At one time, both must have been connected with a temple, not a trace of which now remains. They are among the few surviving examples of the entrance gates, once a regular feature of the architecture of Gujarat in Solanki period. The carving style is similar to the Rudra Mahalaya at Sidhpur.

Perhaps erected after a war victory, the architecture is embellished with carvings of battle and hunting scenes. The one to the east is in better condition and has been used as a symbol of Gujarat in recent times. The Torans might have served as an entrance to a large temple complex, but there are no remains found here.

### **The Design of the Pillars**

The pillars are designed with an upper storey or attic, between which is thrown an ornamental cusped (pointed) arch, making the effect of an archway more noticeable. All the parts forming the 'Toran' are devised on the same principles as those used in the temple design.

### **Tana-Riri**

Tana Riri was closely related with Narsinh Mehta. These twin sisters Tana & Riri are great granddaughter of Bhakt Kavi Narshinh Mehta. Daughter of Narshinh Mehta, Kunvar Bai was married in City Vadnagar, & her Daughter Sarmistha was the Mother of Tana & Riri. These two girls were divinely blessed as their great grandfather, and also blessed with melodious voice. They were

belonging to Nagar Brahmin Families of Vadnagar. Nagar Brahmin community was considered as highly learned community at that time. They use to offer song worship to the Lord Shiva. And the same tradition was followed by this two twin girls Tana & Riri they were doing daily practice (Riyaaz) for hours and all villagers' were always being eager to start their day with the melodious voice of this twins. Everybody live in Vadnagar love them and also shower their blessings for them. But the story turns somewhere in 1600 AD.

### **At King Akbar's Court**

On one beautiful evening in Shahenshah-e-Hind Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar under the influence of his few court members king Akbar was excited to hear great music in the presence of his Navratnas at Deewan-e-Khaas. This is the place where Queens of King Akbar along with Mistresses & Daasis.

The Mahefil of Deewan-e-Khaas was started with Swagat Nritya it was awesome start for the evening and it was the time for Special event. it was a long awaited demand of King Akbar. He called upon the famous musician Tansen one of the Ratna from Navratnas. Daasis Bring his Taanpura to play. Now King Akbar placed his demand to sing Mystic Raag Deepak. Tansen got in deep stuck and the great Tansen got nerves. King Akbar said “Dear Tansen, I am glad that you are going to satiate my wish to listen Raag Deepak from you. I am sure your maestro *riaz* and

*Sur* is definitely going to enlighten the court and spread the pure light of divinity. Go on my dear friend.” In the reply He nervously responded his king “Jahanpanah, your wish is my command. I will definitely try to give my best today. I hope my god of music supports me.”

All the live lights were burnt off and atmosphere turned to dim and dark. After hearing the heavy and nervous voice king asks to his jewel, is everything okay? Due to darkness no one can read the worry of Tansen. Hence he gathered the courage and asks permission to begin the Mystic Raag Deepak. Tansen closed his eyes and quietly chanted some mantras and prayed to his god. He, then began the mighty and mystic Raag *Deepak*. As the singing progressed, it started with its first effect by lighting up a small Diya besides the throne of Queen. Mariam-Uz-Zamani was happy and delighted. Her happiness was acknowledged and gradually all the lamps started burning. At the same time due to the heat of the Raag the body and soul of the great Tansen started burning. King Akbar came to know reason of the nervousness of Tansen. He eagerly called Birbal to bring the best Vaidh ji. Tansen calmed down to King Akbar's worry and said vaidh ji will not be able to help in this situation.

Tansen was not only Navratna of court but also very good friend of King Akbar. After taking the position Tansen said none of the medicine in this entire world can heal the heat of the Raag but

only solution of this burn is Raag Megh Malhaar. Quickly King Akbar order to Birbal & all the court members to find the persons who can sing Raag Megh Malhaar. He ordered his Music Mandali to sing Raag Soon. They all were unable to perform. Birbal searched in all of his possible area but no one has that expertise as only Tansen had for Raag Megh Malhaar. King Akbar sent his many teams in many different directions to find the person who can sing the Raag and can heal the burn of Raag Deepak.

### **Searching the Pure Mystic Voice**

On one divine day, team of King Akbar reached to Vadnagar in search of the mystic singer by following the order of king. Here, they come to know about the two young girls named Tana & Riri.

One day Sarmisthaben Mother of Tana & Riri called the sisters for regular pray at Hatkeshwar Temple. Pujariji was waiting for them as by ritual they always offer their mystic Raag to Lord Shiva. They get ready and were moved to Temple for worship. The team of King Akbar listened the mystic and pure singing of these twin sisters. They quickly went and shared the truth and Tansen was taken to Vadnagar. Tansen said his full story to the mother and twin sisters. But they were singing only for the god no one else. It was just a pledge of their ancestors. They hear all things and said to Tansen after internal discussion that they don't sing for anyone else but as it is a matter of someone's life they said "Yes".

Next day early morning Tana & Riri got ready as per their daily routine and went to Hatkeshwar Temple. It was early that day and the great musician Tansen was already waiting for them. They had words of intellectual between them and girls said why you sing this Raag when you know the results? Tansen said my king was waiting for long to hear the Raag Deepak he wish to witness the burning lights with the power of music. He curiously ask Tana – Riri do you sing Raag Deepak? They said yes but when Tana sing Raag Deepak Riri never join but Riri sing Raag Megh Malhaar to stop the burn and vice-versa so that they can learn and practice both the Raag.

### **Healing the Burn**

Now time has arisen and citizens started gathering for the divine moment. After the prayer & worship they gathered at porch (chowk) of Temple, peoples were all around them. Twin sisters firstly introduced the Great Tansen to all and after taking permission of parents & villagers, taking their consent that it is not against the law but they are trying to just heal the burn of Tansen. Tana & Riri started the mystic Raag Megh Malhaar and just after few minutes the drops of Megh (Rain) started falling and with each drop of rain Wounds of Tansen due to burn started healing. Gradually he started recover and came back to normal at the end of Raag Megh Malhaar.

With the help of these girls Tansen got great relief. He showered his gratitude

and conveyed thanks for many times and they returned to King Akbar's Court. There, they disclosed all the facts and pleased this girls. King was too happy to see his friend completely heal and after hearing the facts of girl King just place the wish to hear the twin sisters' mystic pure singing.

### **Army Entered Vadnagar to bring Tana-Riri to King's Court**

King placed order to request the parents & ask pleasantly to proceed to King's court and King will shower them with blessings and wealth. One team departed to bring Tana-Riri to King's Court. One team of army walked into Vadnagar to call the twin girls.

That was the time when King Akbar was considered as Rude Ruler and the entire citizen were living under the threat. It was also assumed bad if army of king surround the city. Army of King Akbar was tend as harsh and it was belief that if one don't follow the order of King they will be killed or harshly punished even it was observed often they harm or burn entire city for not fulfilling Kings Desire.

The day arrived when army entered Vadnagar with the message of King Akbar to bring the twin girls Tana & Riri to the King's court. The Subedar knocked the door of Sarmisthaben. She opened the door and received the official letter of King Akbar. It was written in it that King wish to hear Melodious and mystic voice of young girls. He wanted to

feel the power of the mystic pure voice which has healed his friend Tansen. Further, he will shower blessings and will give precious price to the girls for their purity and will appreciate the Raag and power of music. He was so happy that he couldn't wait long to meet the two pure souls.

Sarmisthaben read the letter with the presence of the family and simultaneously she remembered the oath of their father & forefathers as per ritual Nagar Brahmin are allowed to sing only for their Estdev, (God) Hatkeshwar Mahadev. Now it is the situation which worried entire family. Tana & Riri can feel the situation of the family, now biggest Question is “What to do?” if they deny the order it would considered as disloyal and if they go with order it is against ritual of Nagar Families.

### **Lost the Jewel:**

Tana took the bold step and said to parents “please pardon us we both sisters wish to worship our god Hatkeshwar Mahadev.” On her demand family allowed them both to leave. The sisters went to the lake of city (Now it is called as Sarmistha lake) and dwell into deep thought. Both the sisters had deep discussion about the middle way. As if they go with army entire village will get disappointed and it would be against the ritual and if they deny, the army will harm or destroy the village (As it was belief that one must not oppose the command of king). Both the sisters got tensed. It was

the last time when they sang the mystic song in worship. They hugged each other and to safeguard the village from army and to procure the ritual of family they Jumped into Lake and sacrifice their life and India lost the pure souls of music.

After this event there was a dark of sadness in village and when king come to know about the fact he felt himself as guilty. As he just wanted to appreciate and due to his past image it as a great loss to the society.

### Conclusion

Always in history we generally paint the image of King as a worrier but always it is not so. King Akbar was Art lover and he has appreciated all the artists in direct or indirect way during his tenure India has emerged with many new creations, architectures and many more.

In the case of Tana-Riri, still there are beliefs that King Akbar was bad and due to his feared Girls has sacrificed their lives. But in fact King wanted to meet the pure singers who healed his friend's burn. He wishes to witness the purity he wanted to offer appreciation. Not only this he never wish to force girls to go beyond the family rituals and sing for him but he was not aware about the fact. Rather than sacrificing if they could have gathered the courage and told to king about the Oath he must not has forced and India could have the two Jewels alive.

In the memory of Tana-Riri to give them real musical tribute later on Tansen has introduced “Tarana” form of music to

the world. It was a real appreciation and two temples (Deri) are constructed in remembrance of Tana-Riri at the nearing garden of Sarmistha Lake (named on the mother's name). We may conclude that often what we see is not always right.

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