



Banganga Tank is a 33-foot profound ancient water tank within the expansive Walkeshwar Temple complex, constructed using cut stones. It features a set of steps granted by the Silhara dynasty in 1127 as an offering to the deity Shiva. Temples and ghats surround the tank, and an underground spring supplies sweetwater.

The story of the origin of the tank is narrated with tales from ancient Indian mythology. In Ramayana, the ancient epic, Rama, searching for his abducted wife, reaches a coastal place with no fresh water. Faced with the challenge of quenching his thirst, Rama, using his divine bow, shoots an arrow into the parched earth. Piercing deep into Patal, beneath the Earth's surface, the river Bhogavati surges upwards through the opening created by the arrow. The name 'Banganga' comes from the special ban or arrow Rama shot into the ground and the holy water similar to the Ganga river that surged upwards. Since Rama shot the arrow in Patal, Banganga is also known as 'Patalganga' (Raghunathji 1895, 4). Another version of the origin of Banganga Tank narrates the story of Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. Legend has it that Parashuram shot fourteen arrows into the Sahyadri range, and one of them descended to the location where the tank now exists. This particular arrow, striking the ground, is said to have given rise to the sacred water found at Banganga (Raghunathji 1895, 5).

While various versions of the origin story exist, these few accounts that attribute the creation of the tank to divine figures add layers of mystique to the origins of Banganga. It is certain, however, that the history of the tank is connected to the Malabar Hill area. The place we now call Malabar Hill Point was named Shrigundi. Malabar Point got its name because of pirates from Dharmapatan, near Tellichery, like Kotta and Porka, along the Malabar Coast. When the British started ruling Bombay, these pirates hid in the calm waters at the north end of Back Bay, waiting for the northern fleet. Shrigundi, the original name, means the Lucky Stone. At the very end of Malabar Point, there is a split rock that looks like a special symbol, and many people visit it for spiritual renewal by passing through it. The ritual involves going down some steps on rough rocks, headfirst through the opening, with hands extended in front.



It is believed that Rama stopped on his journey at Srigundi, the old name for Malabar Hill Point, where the Banganga Tank emerged (Maddy 2011). Since Srigundi was a pilgrimage destination, its notable pilgrims were the Maratha chiefs such as Kanhoji Angre and Raghunath Rao. These leaders engaged in this ritual, believing it would liberate them from any lingering sense of guilt (David 1995, 177).



Following the destruction of the temple during Portuguese rule, a restoration effort took place in 1715, during which the Banganga Tank was incorporated into the reconstructed temple complex (Gowd Saraswat Brahmins Konkani).

Before the development of Walkeshwar Road, the ancient communities surrounding the revered Banganga Tank and Walkeshwar temples on Malabar Hill would visit from Chowpatty through the irregular steps of Siri or Shidi (ladder) Road (Mehrotra and Dwivedi 1995, 79-80).

The earliest historical reference to Malabar Hill can be traced back to Fryer in 1673. Notably, this documentation occurred eleven years after the Britishers arrived on the Island of Bombay. The question naturally arises – why the name ‘Malabar’? A potential clue is found in Fryer’s account when describing a tank at the hill’s end. He suggests that the significance lies in the fact that ‘the Malabars visit it most’, indicating it as a pilgrimage site. People from the coastal regions of South Bombay were collectively referred to as Malabars. The Banganga Tank adds a layer of cultural and geographical context to the nomenclature of Malabar Hill (Douglas 1893, 231).

A colonial text attributes the construction of the Banganga Tank as ‘funded through subscriptions’. Subsequently, in 1885-86, a significant improvement occurred when the stagnant water in the tank was cleared and replaced with fresh water, facilitated by the introduction of a Vehar pipe (Maclean 1889, 303). In 1860, Vehar achieved the milestone of being Mumbai’s inaugural piped water supply scheme (Somaiya Capacity Development Programme in Environment Management 2016).

The Sahayadri Khanda recognises Banganga as one of the sacred pilgrimage spots in western India (Mehrotra and Dwivedi 1995, 79). As the Bhogavati waters formed the tank, people considered it a holy site. Bathing in the Banganga is akin to immersing oneself in the sacred Bhagirathi river. As a result, people visit it on significant occasions such as Somavati Amavasya, Mahashivratri, eclipse days, Kartiki, Ashadhi Ekadashi, and Pithori Amavasya to fulfil their spiritual rituals and seek purification (Raghunathji 1895, 5). Banganga is also a prominent location for the immersion of the ashes of the dead. Families of the deceased who can’t travel to Kashi (Banaras/Varanasi), where the River Ganga flows, often choose Banganga to conduct rituals for their departed loved ones.

An aerial view of the layout of the tank combined with surrounding areas creates a visual impression of a dolphin. The Banganga Tank exhibits an intriguing resemblance to the dolphin-shaped tip of Mumbai. This natural formation adds a layer of fascination to the mystical significance of the Banganga Tank, making it a captivating spectacle.

The annual Banganga Festival in Mumbai is a musical homage to Lord Ram. It was initiated in 1992, celebrated over two days in January, and organised collaboratively by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) and the Indian Heritage Society Mumbai. The festival showcases live classical music performances by renowned artists, including stalwarts like Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, Veena Sahasrabudhe, and Ustad Zakir Hussain. Beyond its musical allure, the festival is also a step towards heritage protection, instilling a sense of responsibility among the people (Maharashtra Tourism).

The restoration project for Banganga Tank commenced with Bhoomi Poojan, held on December 18 2023 (Pinto 2023). Intertwining history, mythology and spirituality, Banganga has a timeless aura. An ancient water tank harbouring stories of Bombay and its origin acts not just as a water reservoir but a ‘cultural reservoir,’ preserving centuries of rituals and the everyday life of the devotees, who have revered and utilised it.



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