

# **LIFE**

**Telangana Short Stories**

Author

**B.S.RAMULU**

English Translation  
from Telugu

**D.Ranga Rao**

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## About the Author

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English Translation from Telugu

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## A MISSION

B.S. Ramulu is a writer with a mission. He has a message to convey. He is deeply concerned with life, particularly with the life of the people of Telangana and the language they speak. The Telangana village is world, also the world as a global village. The village is the scene of action and the characters, the common folk. His characters are the real living beings. The good earth, the friendly soil, the loompit and the jowar field are the forums from which his characters talk and act, who are the past, present and future representatives of the society. Ramulu's literary web is woven around these people, their traditions, trades and travails; their births, education, love, marriage, ill-health, sickness, poverty, prosperity, old age and death. His men and women are the oppressed, the downtrodden, the greedy and the jealous. The lives he depicts reveal the struggles and failures, the achievements and successes, the happy moments and sad situations of life. His characters "fall upon the thorns of life and bleed". They talk of their sorrow, tears, sweat and blood mingled with merriment, smiles, music and dance and the bonds that relationships forge. But the journey of their life is not a 'primrose path'. The people who populate his world suffer oppression, humiliation and exploitation by the heartless landlords and the lustful 'chiefs', officers, money lenders and the like from among their own people and from those from outside.

The story teller takes us back to ancient times, back to hundreds of years, tracing the genealogy and the heritage of his people about whom he writes, detailing the customs and manners of the simple men and women, the farmer and the weaver, the labourer and the coolie, the teacher and the businessman. The writer develops his themes around these common folks depicting how their lives are evolved and evaluated. The author takes us from the loom pit through

jowar fields to globalisation and privatisation and the effects of the modern world on the characters he creates. The story teller brings in the impact of Buddhism and the other eastern and western philosophies in the conversation of the characters. At the same time the local Batukamma festivals and the worship of the village deity Pochamma, garden feasts and marriage celebrations are described. The women characters, mostly unlettered and uneducated, opt for feminism in their own way while the youth prefer revolution and freedom from bondage. The educated youth, both boys and girls, look forward for opportunities higher and technical education offers them and some achieve their goal.

His characters - the Mallayyas and Gangadharies, the Rajeshams and Babus, the Dubbavas and Saravvas and many others are you, me and the author himself. His stories Nagashala, Dakshayagnam, Real Estate, The Neem Tree, Commonwealth, to name a few and the others attain a quality of writing that take the author to world class writing.

The elderly characters speak the native tongue falling into a reverie and a reminiscent mood, reviewing and recapitulating, comparing and contrasting the old and the new, thus educating the youngsters to appreciate modern times and praise the virtues of the good old times.

There is no exaggeration in the narration, no embellishments, no images but truth, nothing but the simple truth put bluntly with free in the spoken language which breathes of honesty and sincerity. The author holds the mirror of life to the reader. The mirror does not hide the defects of the viewer but tells the viewer to correct and improve his own image. The stories of Ramulu make the reader think.

The story teller, like a painter working on a vast and wide canvas, depicts the lives of the people, the simple colours providing a stupendous 3D effect, deep and poignant, each stroke hrobbing with life.

This is heavy and courageous writing, free and frank, written with a strength of conviction coming of deep reading, study and

research. His stories are meaty chunks of life, bitter and sweet. The stories are not just stories written to entertain. They are forceful pleadings for a better treatment - politically, economically, and socially- for the people he represents. These stories deserve to be read beyond the borders of the state, beyond the shores of the country. I am happy I have been provided with an opportunity by the author towards achieving this goal. The translator has to be doubly careful as the narrative sometimes runs into the psychological stream, the workings of the mind being spoken out by the characters. I hope I could manage to bring out the mind of the author in the English version. Translating the stories of Ramulu has been altogether a different endeavour and experience for me compared with the translations I made earlier of other authors.

*- D.Ranga Rao*

## **ABOUT TRANSLATOR**

## **FORWARDS**







## I

## FLOWERS OF THE NIGHT

Annaiah! You lost much in your life because of your ideas. The light of your life seems to be moving towards the west. Your friends stopped away long ago. They are enjoying benefits more than they deserve. What you have done so far is enough. It is the youth who have to do what you have yet to do. The youth will do it. You know that I do not live long. Won't you fulfil my last wish?" Prameela was sobbing....

Ramesh felt heavy at heart ... His voice stuck.

There was silence in the hospital room.... Prameela was on the bed. Ramesh was sitting on a stool by her bed.

Ramesh wiped his sister's eyes.

"Prameela! Don't say so. You will certainly live. Despondency is not good. Self-confidence has the ability to cure diseases also."

"*Annyya*! Don't change the topic. I know what all the doctor told me. I am not worried about myself. It is about you. You have sacrificed for me and for our family. You must stop your sacrifices..."

"Pramee! Do you know that some stars show the way by their brightness when there is no moonlight? When there is moonlight the stars are not seen. In the same manner some flowers

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\*Annaiah in telugu means elder brother. It is an affectionate way of address.

blossom in the night and wither away and drop off by dawn. Some blossom in the morning and wither by afternoon. You don't know how much I feel pained at your life, which lighted three lives, getting snuffed out.... I don't have time to think about myself. I wish that time should pass off without bothering me."

"*Annayya!* I have known what death is by being confined to this bed for two months. I don't have any worry about my- self. My mind is very calm and serene now. I am far younger than you. Yet I will ask you a question. Suppose you learn that you were going to die this minute. What will you do? Do that something now. The sacrifices you made and the ideas you cherished should not punish you. That's what you think!"

"Pramee! What's meant by life? What's the use of asking this question when the entire life has been lived? This question does not face us so long as we are alive. Is it not strange?"

"Pramee! Why do you feel sorry that I lost much in my life and that my life went waste? That's your idea ... I received more than what I lost in life. Your love for me is many times more than what I did. Give me the chance to feel satisfied that I did not get defeated in life but that I gained high place in life."

"*Annayya!* If you utter such expressions I will not ask you anything." She stared into her brother's eyes. Her eyes became brimful with tears. Her eyelids dropped. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Past memories flashed in her mind....

Will man envy the sacrifices which he does not like? Will that envy manifest itself in pity and sympathy!

For the first time Prameela entertained a doubt. Her brother Ramesh had done much for the family. He did much for the society also. He took part in different types of movements. He led many movements being at the forefront.

As soon as a movement took a constructive shape he would

quietly get out of the competition for leadership.

It was not his nature to fight for a place in leadership. It was most natural for him to quit from the arena. He would then make a path for himself to his own liking.

He did not like to win Rajyam in a contest. He felt it infradig to win her hand by contesting for her love. He converted his love and liking for her into old indifference. Rajyam could not express her love. On the other hand she murmured that 'annayya' stopped loving her. She found fault with him. She said that she loved Lakshman who competed with Praveen. She married Lakshman.

From then Ramesh lost all interest towards any competition including competitive examinations. He was satisfied with the unexpected job he got and brought them up to a decent level.



Her brother's words were echoing again and again in the depths of her heart. She slept off for a long time.

It was night. She opened her eyes slowly.

Her brother was looking at her. He smiled on observing his sister open her eyes. She picked up courage.

"Annayya ..... you said you wouldn't marry till I got married. I got married. You again said that the younger sister also should get married. She too got married. She has now two children. Everyone is afraid to ask you. Tell me, annaiah, why you are not marrying at all"

"Pramee! I don't think that marriage is the most important thing in life."

"You gave up marrying talking of the marriages of your sisters, the dowries, their deliveries and other expenses."

"It's not like that"

"Are you disappointed that Rajyam whom you loved did n't

love you?"

"In the beginning I felt so. But now I am not angry with Rajyam."

"Rajyam is feeling bad that you haven't married so far."

"It will not my idea to pain her. But that doesn't mean I cannot marry to make her feel happy."

"What do you want to achieve? Whom do you want to tease?"

"What did you all think of achieving by marrying? What did you achieve? In nature, all animals, birds and fish, every living creature is giving birth to their off spring. Is that what you achieved?"

"Annayya!... There is no world without births. You won't be there. I too."

"Is that only the world?"

"No"

"If so, let me live according to my choice and liking."

Prameela became silent.

"Pramee! My ideas are keeping me alive. What you think I am doing for the society, is all being done for myself in fact. That is my happiness. Asking me to give up my ideas and ideals is to wish my death and nothing else."

It was the first time for Prameela to argue so long with her brother. Perhaps it was also the last time! thought Prameela. She turned her eyes away.

The stars seen through the window were shining brightly like the flowers of the night.

"Annayya! I achieved motherhood in my life. That's enough for this life."

Prameela closed her eyes with satisfaction. Ramesh gently passed his hand on her head with great affection. □

## EDUCATION

"I will not study." Gangadhari said crying uncontrollably as tears ran down his eyes.

"If you say that again, I'll kill you, you brute."

Yellaiah, his father, raised the stick to beat his son again. Latchaiah, the teacher of the village, did not like such a scene to take place before his house. He stopped Yellaiah from beating his son and comforted Gangadhari by hugging him. Latchaiah observed the lashes on the dark tender body of Gangadhari. The previous day he had told Yellaiah that his son was not attending the school regularly. Latchaiah felt very much agonized as if he instigated Yellaiah to beat Gangadhari.

Latchaiah had great love for Gangadhari. When he took charge of the school, Gangadhari's name was registered as Gangaiah. Latchaiah got the name changed to Gangadhari. Gangadhari had showed great interest in studies earlier and scored good marks. But he lost interest in studies in the present year.

"The water is getting cold," said Mallavva, the wife of Latchaiah as she brought tea for the three. His wife was named Mallavva by her parents, but he called her Malleswari.

Ever since they came to that village, Yellaiah grew close to Malleswari. If she wanted any article for the household, say firewood, she would tell Yellaiah and he would arrange to send them by bargaining for a lower price. Gangadhari also was liked by the family.

Gangadhari did not drink the tea. "What harm did the chai do to you, son! Drink it," cajoled Malleswari. Gangadhari put aside the tea, crying. Latchaiah drank his tea and walked towards the bathroom. The walls were made of hedge thattis.

Latchaiah finished his bath and was combing his hair. "Even if you kill me, I will not study at all" said Gangadhari suddenly and ran away. His foot hit the tea glass and it rolled away. Yellaiah could not catch hold of the boy.

Latchaiah ran towards Yellaiah. "Don't shout at him. I will bring him round in four or five days." Yellaiah left consoled.

Gangadhari suffered from fever many times during the year. He had loose motions. He was not taken to a good doctor. The boy could not attend the school. He had the talent to make up lost time. Perhaps he thought that the books and the notes were a hindrance to his freedom. Moreover, the lessons seemed to be written keeping in mind the average boys belonging to upper classes. They did not create any interest in the minds of the village boys and those belonging to depressed classes. He himself had faced this problem when he was young. The remedy for this problem was not in his hands. If Gangadhari could manage somehow to study upto the Intermediate class, he could reach any heights later in his educational career.

Latchaiah, the teacher, had faced problems like Gangadhari when he was a boy. But the problems faced were those of his elder brother Narasanna. Narasanna did exactly like Gangadhari when he was of Gangadhari's age. Narasanna's parents behaved exactly like this boy's parents. They too were worried and distressed.

When Narasanna said, "I will not go to school," they put him to torture. They converted the house into a police lock-up room. His thighs were pinched. He was hung upside down and beaten. They starved him. The entire village put him to shame.

Imagining that he was under the influence of tantrics, efforts were made to drive away the evil forces. His head was shaved and shampooed with lemon juice. The more they 'treated' him in this manner the more stubborn he grew. As a result he would wander about and go home to eat when there were no one in the house. He slept out. Perhaps he went to school, afraid of receiving the blows like his elder brother. Why should there be such torture for giving education? It is said the universal poet, Ravindrabath Tagore, freely moved about without education for fourteen years! Perhaps he became the universal poet as there was no pressure on him regarding studies. That might be the reason he established Shantiniketan advocating freedom in studies. If only Narasanna had opportunities, he would have become a greater poet than Tagore. Narasanna was an adept in telling stories and answering riddles. He attracted many children with his talents. His brother was fond of nature, trees, bushes, lakes and canals and the like. His father forced Narasanna to learn the family trade. His father's behaviour made him decide that he should do nothing advised by his father. He preferred to cry saying "Kill me," than to study or learn the community profession.

Narasanna was a dare-devil. He would collect strange things walking along the fields. He would bring fruits of many varieties. He would fell trees and bring firewood. Also fishes. He would make the top whirl on his palms in different ways. We were afraid of snakes in lakes and the tendrils of water plants. But he would dive into the waters of lakes and bring lotus and other such water flowers and sell them.

One day Narasanna's father tied him to a stake and asked him to learn the profession of their community beating him. He was not given food. He lost consciousness. In the night his mother fed him, freed him and prayed him to go to the house of some relation and begged him not to go away from them. His father beat his mother and she was bed-ridden for three days. Narasanna

had no interest either in studies or their family profession.

Narasanna's whereabouts were not known. He was not with any of their relatives. People said he would have run away. They thought that he might have died having jumped into a well or a tank. His mother searched for him all over crying. He was not found. No one could tell where he was.

Some people said that he was seen in Nizamabad after some time. He was said to be working as a bearer in a hotel. Pressed by his wife, Narasanna's father collected money for the bus fare and went to Nizamabad. He was told that the boy had left the job. Some said he was seen in Jalna, some others that he was seen in Bhivandi. Others said he was working in Bombay helping the mill workers. Yet others said he was weaving powerlooms. He was stated to have become a good mechanic. Rumours were heard but there was no letter from him.

Narasanna had earned the name that he did not fit into any work and cannot get on with anyone. But no one brought the news that he had deceived them, or had borrowed money or had not paid them back. He could not tolerate anyone's authority and so could not stay on with anyone for a long period.

Oneday he came home and told us that he would not leave the place. They got him married. He thought that a wife was a burden. He left his wife and went away. Later it was rumoured that he took a Marathi woman as his mistress and that he left her too. After that someone reported that he eloped with the wife of another person. Someone said he was murdered in Bombay, that he was seen in Pandaripur in the Shirdi Sai area. Some said he was working in Surat. Later nothing was heard of him. Brother, who desired freedom, ended his life like that. It is not known why some people hate social bondage. Will there be freedom beyond social bonds? Perhaps people hate social bonds as in some cases freedom produces strain and as in some cases the other person's presence takes the form of a burden for them. That may

be the reason for people to hate social bonds.

People called him a madcap. If only there was a little compassion, a little joy and happiness in his life, with education imparted in a free atmosphere or even the profession of the community, these things would have helped my brother to grow to great heights. The sadistic behaviour of the teachers, the stubbornness of the society and the superstitions of people, together played a havoc with persons like Narasanna who had not yet developed ability to express themselves about their craving for freedom, their creative talents, their ambitions and their yearnings. Was there no chance of improving even in the present times the nature and behavioural pattern of Narasanna that were being observed in Gangadhari? Could he not do anything to prevent Gangadhari getting changed into someone like his brother?

Gangadhari was sensitive. He would get upset easily. He did not speak out. Gangadhari had started loving trees and bushes. Like his brother he walked along canals and tanks. He brought fish. He took the three goats to the hillocks and moved around trees purposefully. He sang songs by composing poems. He had signs of becoming a poet. But how does it help if he did not study? It was different for Tagore in becoming a poet. Does Gangadhari have those opportunities?

Latchaiah got disturbed in mind remembering Narasanna and grew sad. As it was late to go to school he sent his leave letter. He gulped down something and walked aimlessly along the fields. Women were singing songs here and there. The beautiful gardens, the fields and the Bengal gram crop attracted him with their fragrances. He was tempted to pluck a few cornheads, but stopped doing so as his refined culture came in the way. The chrysanthemums had blossomed forth in all their glory along the tank bunds. He did not know how long he kept wandering. By evening he saw Gangadhari singing songs and

cajoling his goats to drink water on the sub-canal bund of Sriram Sagar. Latchaiah reached home before nightfall hiding behind the bushes unseen by Gangadhari.

Will man derive so much happiness and joy in the loneliness of nature? How light he felt in body and mind! Was Gangadhari refusing to study thinking that it would increase the distance with nature from him? The boy had love of nature but had no lands or fields of his own. Will this drive him to become an agricultural labourer? Will agricultural labourers and others be able to exchange so much of freedom and joy with nature? Latchaiah entertained vague thoughts as he ate his meal and slept off in the night.

Next morning Gangadhari's mother Boodavva met Latchaiah with a sad face. "O sir! My son did not return home last night. The goats came home. He did not turn up during the day also. I did not lock the door thinking he would come anytime and eat his food. What happened to my son? He was doing whatever he was asked to do. He has been active and enthusiastic in whatever he did. Please see that his father does not beat him. Kindly see that he does not run away. I remain your slave, ever," she said with tears.

"Don't feel pained about him. Forget your responsibility for a while. Don't abuse and scold him even if he does not go to school for some days. What happens if he doesn't attend school? He can pass any examination, tenth, Inter or even degree, by taking the exam privately after paying the fee. If he gets interested in studies he can study whatever be his age," Latchaiah told her giving her encouragement. The boy became a free person from then on.

Latchaiah bought books in Telugu and English on the educational system when he visited Hyderabad and started reading them. His doubts increased as he read more and more. He began to suspect that more than parents the 'Narasanna-Gangadhari factor' was responsible for only one or two students

reaching the tenth class among those who joined schools in the first class. Gradually this opinion got confirmed in him. He raised the same topic at the seminar conducted during the District Educational Training Centre.

When Latchaiah met his old friend Lakshmaiah, a lecturer working in a B.Ed. college during a marriage, he opened this topic again. Many of the invitees showed interest in the discussion. The discussion was on the possibility of learning by self-effort without the need for the educational institutes like schools as opined by Jiddu Krishnamurthy or others. Will the students be more enlightened if they were left to themselves till they attain twenty years without going to school and were allowed free movement like Rabindranath Tagore? Will the parents, though rich, agree to this system?

As on one side the guests were eating their food, on the other side this discussion was going on in an excited manner.

"To tell the fact, the present day educational system has not been giving importance to the children's imaginative and inventive talents, to their freedom, to their likes and dislikes. It does not give them a chance to express freely their individual ideas and is turning them into a relay centre. We are making them mere tape-recorders, a radio or a T.V. relay station. They are to repeat what you told them, answering questions taking them from books. This amounts to suppressing their interest and yearning towards learning. In order to learn to write the language one need not spend so many years studying books. The present day system of education calls the dalit by-stander only to tell him that his brain is dud," said Lakshmaiah, a little harshly.

"You mean that whatever is learnt in the school is not of use in the actual life. Is that so?"

"I don't say so. According to this system what is written in the lesson the children have to explain and express. In this

educational system there is no opportunity given to children to express new ideas after reading a lesson. Secondly, some understand the text but cannot express it freely. The third point is some children feel like keeping to themselves some ideas they had learnt in the lesson. This method of forcing the children to vomit out what they have learnt is not proper. The child keeps to himself what he learnt and yet responds fully like a flowing rivulet. What is wrong in it? His individuality has its full identity! I cite the example of the mutes. How can we call the system educative when you expect the child to recite what he has learnt by rote? You are only turning the children into machines in accordance with the lesson. Nothing is more absurd to expect the child to recite from memory by force. As a matter of fact, children can express themselves freely when they 'accept' the ideas of the text as their own thoughts. Are not your ideas or the ideas of the lesson being forced on the children wrongly against their own ideas?"

Lakshmaiah delivered almost a lecture by the time he concluded. Latchaiah then narrated the case of Gangadhari to him.

"Poverty is an obstacle for everything. Tagore, Jiddu Krishnamurthy and the Buddha grew up without poverty and so they could grow to the level of expressing freely about the values of freedom and convince others. Perhaps, because of the community in which he was born or because of poverty, Gangadhari did not get the opportunity," said Lakshmaiah.

"It would have been indeed wonderful if only the educational system could cater to the tastes and the children's individual requirements" replied Latchaiah with some anguish.

"I agree with you," said Lakshmaiah and the discussion ended there. Any discussion ends when there is agreement. What remains is putting the ideas into practice.

Latchaiah arranged assemblies inviting young children in his school. He encouraged Gangadhari. He made Gangadhari sing songs during dharnas by teachers and other protest programmes. Gangadhari earned a good name with his talent. Latchaiah took this boy to his place during holidays where the boy learnt band music making friends with the bandsmen. He learnt tailoring by being friendly with the tailor. He worked as a labourer carrying bricks and digging wells not desiring to ask his teacher for his pocket money. He became a good friend of the men who guard mango groves and the shepherds. They liked his songs very dearly.

When the schools opened in the rainy season, Latchaiah was transferred to another school. Gangadhari did not feel like going to school as Latchaiah left the school. Learning of this, Latchaiah took Gangadhari with him to his new place. After his return the boy refused to go to school. So he was taken to Venkat Rao dora to work as a cattle herd and attend to household duties at home. Haritha, the grand daughter of Venkat Rao, was attracted by this boy's songs and such activities and began following him out cutting classes at school. Venkat Rao gave a few blows to the boy not being able to punish his grand daughter. Gangadhari bore the punishment to seek Haritha's company. Later Venkat Rao removed Gangadhari from work as matters did not improve. Gangadhari revolted against his father also and after some time, he ran back to Latchaiah.

Latchaiah tried to fix the boy in a machinery workshop but he managed to find the job of a shepherd refusing Latchaiah's help. Some people heard Gangadhari's songs and took him to their place to sing the songs of their group. As they forced him to sing only particular songs, he left them and returned only to find his old job of herding sheep gone.

He started as a labour hand at house construction spots. He liked the job as he could give it up as and when he liked. He

learnt masonry in course of time.

One day a group of sanyasis visited the village. There was an elderly person with a flowing white beard, his wife and some disciples. The old guru had many disciples in many places. The guru was constantly on the move meeting his disciples.

The name of the guru was Poornananda Swamy. The villagers called him simply Swamy or Aiah garu. The guru would eat food at the house of one of the disciples of that place, sing devotional songs and give spiritual discourses. "These physical bonds are a myth, an illusion. The joys and sorrows of life are an illusion. The human body is only a leather bag. Why should we develop ego taking a look at this physical frame? Everyone should be dust one day. It is our goodness that we leave behind. That is the only truth." These words of the guru were liked by Gangadhari.

That evening Gangadhari sang his songs in the assembly and asked the guru many questions. The guru was astonished at the boy's intelligence and asked him to stay with him.

Gangadhari visited many places in the company of the spiritual guru and gained a lot of experience. When the wife of the guru passed away owing to ill-health, this boy occupied an important place in the entourage. Whenever the guru was unwell, he sent Gangadhari with his disciples. He visited many mutts, met other spiritual leaders and gained more experience.

Now Gangadhari learnt some Sanskrit slokas, some Hindi and Marathi songs and some English. He started singing the songs of Kabirdas and Ravidas melodiously. Ratna, who met Ganagadhari at one of the International ashrams began to worship him. He did not observe this development. Ratna who belonged to a Telugu family settled in Maharashtra, She had lost her husband in an accident. Her parents did everything possible to help her regain peace of mind.

Ratna invited Gangadhari to visit her place. Her parents also wished that it would be good if Gangadhari provided the needed light in her life. Gangadhari had not turned his mind towards marriage. His thoughts turned to his first guru Poornananda Swamy. He did not know where his guru was. He took leave of Ratna and left alone in search of his guru and went around many places.

In a village, naxalites confronted him. Gangadhari refused to tell them about himself. They suspected that he belonged to the secret service of the police. They thrashed him and left him there. He lost consciousness while singing spiritual songs. After the naxalites left, the villagers gave him shelter pitying him.

Later the police suspected him in another village.

"Who are you?"

"I am a living being."

"Your name?"

"Don't know it yet."

"Which place?"

"I am searching for it."

They thought he was a courier of the naxalites and beat him. He lost consciousness singing his spiritual songs. A policeman who had heard such songs said, "This fellow looks like a spiritual guru. Let us leave him alone." With that, Gangadhari could save his life.

One evening he was drinking water at a bore well singing songs to himself. An officer of the Girijan Welfare Board heard his songs when the jeep stopped for water to fill the radiator. The officer suggested that it would be good if he sang for the upliftment of the people and offered to give him money for his services. Gangadhari sang songs when they organized

programmes. But he felt that he was a coolie who lost his freedom and left them in search of his guru.

One morning he met a group of naxalites. One of the members identified him. "Aren't you Gangadhari anna? Don't think otherwise. I had a classmate very much like you. I saw him long, long ago. I do not know whether he is alive or dead," said he.

Gangadhari could not recognise him. His boyhood days became vague like the experiences of a previous birth. He kept quiet, not being able to say 'yes' or 'no'. After a while he started to sing a song and the naxalite was sure he was Gangadhari. As he finished his song, the naxalite hugged Gangadhari.

"Gangadhari I am Sudhakar. We both moved around the hillocks and trees and tank bunds as boys," exclaimed he with tears in his eyes.

Gangadhari learnt many things about his house and people. His father had died two years ago. Mother always talked of Gangadhari. His younger sister had been married. She had two children. Her husband had left for Arab countries for his livelihood. Latchaiah had been promoted as a lecturer. His wife Malleswari was elected as the president of the Mandal in the women's reserved seat. Latchaiah remembered Gangadhari now and then. A Shirdi Sai Baba temple had been constructed in their village. Rajaiah, Gangadhari's close friend had become an important contractor and was now the Sarpanch of the village. Venkat Rao dora died long ago. His granddaughter Haritha had two children. Her husband was killed by the naxals. She now ran a private school in her grandmother's house. She remembered Gangadhari and referred to him now and then. Sudhakar wanted to marry Haritha under the widow marriage act but the party did not allow it though Haritha agreed for the marriage.

When Haritha's reference was made, Gangadhari recollected

Ratna.

"Are you not fed up with this lonely life which does not belong to anyone? How are you able to lead such a lonely life? Why don't you do something good to the people living amongst people?" asked Sudhakar.

Gangadhari smiled. It was not sadness. It did not hint at irony. It expressed serenity.

"Is the revolutionary struggle you make intended for the people? If so, what is the place of the likes and dislikes of the people in it?" asked Gangadhari his direct question to Sudhakar. He continued speaking.

"Revolution is your desire. The struggle of your theory is to change the desires of the people into your own desire. Don't you agree? You are forcing your desires and ideas on the people. Because some people accept your ideas, you are under the false impression that it is people's wish. What is meant by working for the people? When do you reach that stage? When you do not exertion desires for yourself then it will become possible for you to work for the people. That means, did you or have you vanquished your desires? Did you manage to win against yourself? Are you experiencing the joy of having won over your mind, over your desires? What is meant by joy and sorrow? Does joy mean craving for things? You will be happy if I and others behave as you wish us to behave. That will be your happiness. How will it give me joy? Did you read the preachings of Lord Buddha? As a matter of fact, what is meant by freedom, love and mercy?"

Sudhakar faltered a little and spoke of what all he knew. He stressed that there was nothing better than the physical life of man.

"I didn't contradict you! I also discussed the physical life. I am talking about man," replied Gangadhari.

As the discussion was interesting the group wanted Gangadhari to stay with them for a week as there was no time for further discussion then. Gangadhari followed them.

Within a week, every member of that group was bothered in their minds about the questions: "Did you win over your mind? What is meant by mind? what is freedom? What is meant by society? What are the bonds of life? Is it possible to achieve freedom and deliverence without first getting rid of the mental and physical bonds of man?" Gangadhari did not attempt to give them answers of any sort. The commander of the group dismissed the discussion as belonging to the thought process.

"When mind is activated, from this activity perspectives, theories and desires generate. Then how can a discussion on the mind be called discussion of the thought process?" questioned Gangadhari.

On one occasion the Area Division Secretary took part in the discussion. No one could find a satisfactory definition. Gangadhari did not reveal it. The naxals wondered whether these persons who looked like sanyasis who are seekers of the eternal truth were capable of such deep discussion. Gangadhari took leave of them when their secretary told him that there was a meeting at the level of the Divisional area. He again started his search for his guru, the tatwik Poornananda Swamy.

In a town, he heard about his guru who had gone there the previous year. The guru had talked about Gangadhari. The guru's health had deteriorated. The guru had expressed his doubt whether he would be able to visit them again. Gangadhari learnt that the disciples of the guru from all over had built an ashram at some place. Gangadhari could locate the ashram. The guru had become emancipated and had grown very old. The guru shed tears on seeing Gangadhari. He was happy that his child came searching for him and shed tears of joy.

There were about ten members in the ashram. The ashram had a pleasant atmosphere. There were trees all round. The ashram had all facilities with rooms and a hall. It was a model ashram. In the evening someone started to sing devotional songs but the guru asked that person to desist from singing them.

"Where does God exist, my son? Why do you search for the God who does not exist? God is an illusion. Those who could not conquer their minds created God and appealed to him to satisfy their desires. Your God is born in your desires. Your mind is your God. Your mind is your Satan. These two exist nowhere else but in your mind, my son."

Gangadhari felt happy at the change he observed in the thinking of his guru. Lord Buddha had also said the same. Gangadhari sang the songs written in this vein of thought playing the musical instrument kanjeera to beat time.

Days were rolling by. The disciples were coming and going. His guru was happy to hear Gangadhari discuss with the disciples the problems of life and mind. Gangadhari had reached great heights in attaining enlightenment. He woke up early and did gardening and cleaned the premises. He cooked, he felled trees and brought firewood. He cleaned the toilets and bathrooms. Why, he carried on many such chores. The guru's health improved observing Gangadhari's jest and spirit. The guru was worried that he had no heir all these days. Now he was rid of that worry.

One morning, the disciples gathered around their guru drinking warm porridge. Someone raised the topic of family and sanyasa.

"The difference between chastisement and lust is the difference between sanyasa and family," said one of them.

"Managing family life like a sanyasi is the essence of real life," said someone else.

"If that really happens, this world will be filled with infinite love," averred another.

The discussion went on as the guru heard them all silently. Gangadhari spoke his mind when the opportunity arose.

"I want that I and Ratna should live together. What is your opinion?"

"If Ratna can leave her children with her parents she can become one of us here."

"What about the bramhacharya talked about by Buddhism?" asked someone. "Sanyasa is the family life led by the living being in order to allow the being to live. Samsara or the family life is nothing but living for the sake of the illusory bonds of life. The sanyasa suggested by Buddhism is great. To live the life of sanyasi while leading a family life is greater still. That is the reason why Buddhism declined and Hindu dharma managed to survive and grow."

There was again a discussion on this issue. They could not decide anything with specificity. The discussion was left undecided as it was thought that taking a decision would make a partial and unfair conclusion.

Gangadhari brought Ratna. With the arrival of Ratna there was a glow in the ashram. If his mother learnt that he was alive, she would feel happy. Gangadhari put before his guru his proposal to visit his mother along with Ratna.

"If you go there, many of your friends and relatives will meet you. It may take a long time for you to return. I cannot bear your separation. Why should not your mother stay here in her old age? If a letter is written she will come flying. Or it is better still if we send one of the disciples to bring her," suggested the guru.

Gangadhari's mother Boodavva came to the ashram and turned into an ashramite. Haritha who had heard of Gangadhari,

made a couple of visits to the ashram. Latchaiah and Laksmiah also met Gangadhari and complemented the guru.

A senior disciple who was as old as the guru asked the guru, "how do you want to run the ashram after your demise?"

"It is a matter left to your discretion," said the guru, politely escaping from a discussion on the topic. Yet there was a discussion for some time. Gangadhari who came that way spoke his mind.

"Human beings are craving for true freedom. Shall we start a school that will be like a world where true freedom, pious humanity and mercy would prosper?" asked Gangadhari keeping in mind his life.

"Will those who enjoyed and experienced true freedom, love and mercy here be able to live in the world outside?" doubted one of the disciples.

Gangadhari was surprised that the thought never occurred to him. He appealed to the guru for his message.

"Son, the system you have in mind is not the proper answer. This world is the truth. Selfishness, jealousy, the bonds, the craving for superiority, the state and government - all these are truths. But all these are an illusion. Getting lost in one's selfishness in all these aspects is the illusion. To get free from selfishness while living in all these aspects and yet lead the life of a sanyasi is the real emancipation from illusion. That is true freedom, love and mercy.

This is called, by some, as the life of a rajayogi. It is selfishness to run ashrama and mutts developing one's beliefs, increasing the properties of the ashramas and squeezing money from the disciples. Deriving happiness from work is the supreme joy. Guru Ravidas was a very great philosopher who sought truth but he lived mending shoes and moved about begging and had not an iota of pride. Eternal knowledge is not something available with

some person. It is not available somewhere else. It is available in the lowest of the low classes of people. What is 'brahma gnana?' It is the happiness derived from creating something. It is the lower class people that create all things and wealth. That is why the people of the lower classes should be called as 'brahma gnanis.' No one else knows better what is meant by supreme happiness.

"What is the meaning of the statement that those who have attained brahma gnana are to be called brahmins?" a disciple asked.

"That is wrong, son. It is the shudras, the lowest class, that attained brahma gnana and other sundry communities. How is it possible for the Brahmins who do not carry any profession that becomes one with nature to attain brahmagnana and brhmananda? These two keep far away from them. It is possible for those who get rid of authority and haughtiness. That is brahmagnana. That is the way of escaping from this illusion. The real eternal happiness lies in getting out of the illusion of selfishness, hatred, physical bonds, the feelings of 'mine', 'not mine', 'I am great', etc.. while living in the midst of these qualities. That is true sanyasa. That is what a true rajayogi does. That is the life as depicted by the Buddha. When nothing is yours, all becomes yours. This statement of the Buddha is a great statement. What Gangadhari desires is an ideal world that is separate from the ordinary world. That is not easily attainable. We have to stress on winning over the mind while being part of the life, doing things for the welfare of the world and at the same time remembering that nothing belongs to us. The families, husbands wives, children, the properties, power, name and fame, religion and community, this body and the feelings and opinions that are formed along with it -getting released from all these is meant by freedom from illusion. It is then that true freedom, unsullied love, mercy, an ideal world and true socialism come into being. The Buddha, Kabir, guru Ravidas and others have stressed on this essence,

son! That is the message this kartika full moon day gives you."

Discussion took place. They came to the conclusion that the correct and natural educational system is that which encourages students to depend for themselves freely by themselves and create in them the interest and taste to learn more and act accordingly. The disciples gave their word to co-operate in starting such a school. The guru blessed them to commence the work soon.

All the disciples gathered on Buddha pournami day at the ashram. The school was inaugurated by Boodavva. The guru lighted the lamp. The school was named "Educational Research Centre" on the suggestion of Latchaiah and Lakshmaiah.

The school, which was meant for the poor students, ran well. Latchaiah got the mess charges released from the social welfare department for the hostel students. The officials complimented the school. After sometime Boodavva passed away, having lived happily.

A seminar for seven days was organized with the encouragement of Latchaiah and Lakshmaiah. As Lakshmaiah had become the Registrar of a University, he managed to get different types of grants for the seminar and the programme was co-sponsored by the University.

During the seminar Russel, Pavel, Mendel, Marks, J.K., Ericfam, Tagore, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Mao, Gijubai, the Buddha, the gurukulams of the present day, the caste system, from Phoolle to the railway train, children's literature and many such topics were discussed.

The students of the ashram, their parents and the disciples of the ashram took part in the discussions. Many experiences... many experiments, many responses. The participants had a clear idea of what a school should be.

Gangadhari visited a number of educational institutes in

the country, met many eminent teachers and collected contributions from those who had regard for the ashram. A dry land of forty acres adjacent to the ashram was purchased. The ryots lowered the prices as it was for a good cause. A fence was raised around the land. Fruit, vegetable, and flower gardens were raised by the students of the ashram. The ashram grew into a natural garden.

The games and songs, which were a part of the education, made the students feel that life was a happy sport. They learnt to do any work as part of a game.

Gangadhari who had spent the whole day with the children, felt tired and retired earlier than usual. He felt a kind of satisfaction in that tiredness. He experienced the flow of some energy throughout his body. He suddenly realised that the fire of investigation mingled with dissatisfaction was propelling him forward all these days. A new question began to bother him. Will not people be able to achieve something without some deep, secret dissatisfaction in the form of a desire rage from the depths of the heart and push them into action? The Buddha, Kabir, Rabindranath Tagore, Vemana, Pothuluri, J.K. Phoolle, Ambedkar were they all fired by such a glow? Did they discover the ways of changing this flame of dissatisfaction into a glow of satisfaction? Into a new attitude? That night, Gangadhari remained thinking for how long, no one knows. No one knew when he went to sleep.... And when he passed away in that sleep. Some said it was a heart attack. Some said it was brain hemorrhage. Ratna who tried to wake him up went pale. The last rites were conducted with his favourite songs being rendered by the disciples and students.

“The man who was to have given light to the world left when the world was in darkness” said the guru paying tribute to Gangadhari with tear filled eyes. Latchaiah and lakshmaiah felt sad that Gangadhari left the school as an institution when he

should have developed it into a University.

The guru did not live long who pined for Gangadhari. The old disciples came together and constructed a tomb for their guru. Ramakrishna and Sai bhajans started in course of time. Ratna felt lonely. She understood that unless they all held together, it was difficult to run the school.

Ratna invited Haritha to come and help her. Haritha expressed her inability to do so. The school she was running now had a strength of three hundred students offering instructions upto the seventh class. She did not like to come out of the bounds of her school for the sake of ideals.

Ratna requested Latchaiah and Lakshmaiah to take voluntary retirement and offer their services to the ashram. They could not rise to the occasion. Ideals are one thing. Implementing them is another. Ratna was disappointed that they could not separate themselves from happiness and identity which they enjoyed in the society.

She left the ashram, unable to swallow the sharp remarks of the old disciples who taunted her constantly.

The ashram got delapidated after some time.

The board with the words “Educational Research Centre” had fallen by the side of the gate as if waiting for someone to resurrect it. The students left the ashram and went their ways. The garden went dry.

Now the ashram shows itself as ruins to the passers by. Once a while the old disciples of the guru go to that place to visit the tomb. On such occasions, people hear inaudibly some religious songs being sung there.

## THE SPRING THUNDER

Your question is clear enough. I do not have a clear answer. It is proper that you should decide the way of life for yourself. So, though the answer is known it is not proper that it should be told. I have come across some such situations and I will place them before you. It is better for you to decide taking into account all aspects.

If you lose in the battle of life you should not throw the blame on others but overcome the shock and be the victor again. This is possible when you have the self-confidence that the decision was yours. If you sow seeds at the first showers, for want of rain the crop may dry up later.

You should stop discussing on Chalam\* everytime. The society has gone much forward since Chalam. If you hold on to Chalam for everything, how will it be your decision and your experience? In a way it speaks of a slave mentality that depends on others.

Lakshmi! spring clouds, spring, lightnings and thunders are beautiful to look at and hear. The more the sunshines brightly, the more the clouds look beautiful with silver linings and black borders. But if it rains in spring it is dangerous. Because of winds and hail storms the crop that has come to harvest gets destroyed. People call spring rains the destroying rains.

Lakshmi! The spring cloud has filled your heart. I am in the chill winter. When I tell you something you may understand it in

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\* A noted Telugu writer of the early twentieth century who fought for the liberation of women giving them freedom in all aspects of life.

a different way. The reason for this rests on the two different situations we are placed in. I lost all interest on the spring seasons of life. I feel the rainy season is the mother of all seasons.

I belong to the old generation. You belong to the new. Between you and me there is a gap of many generations. You are a girl. I grew up like a boy. Because of this too there may be a lot of difference in our thinking processes. Psch! Why did you shrink at the expression I made as though I made it to belittle you?

That means you are also attributing the meaning of the old traditions for the expression 'a girl'. In that case there is nothing new in your attitude towards women. If not, you may say you are not the girl that would agree with the other girls who accept that expression.

Why do you say that all other girls are one and that you are different? Are you not separating yourself from womankind and becoming lonely and isolated? So your fight is a lone struggle connected with your single self.

Apart from the confidence that the society is with you, you do not have the faith that all girls think like you. Does it not look as though you feel happy if you lose the battle for want of confidence in your daring .....? Rangavva is far better than you.....



Your question is not something new. It will not fit into the frameworks of theories. That is why all theories are putting the question aside. That is the reason why though many have been facing it, the society has been pretending and expressing surprise as if it is a new problem never faced before. That means life and society have not decided to record that history and culture. My life is an example for it. Rangavva's life too.....

..... At the time I got appointed as a teacher in a village in 1960 on the Dharmapuri route, the local chiefs called 'doras' were

ruling the roost. I was a teacher only by designation but in reality I was an educated tenant to the chief of the village Rajeswara Rao, doing him free service receiving a salary from the government. To give my position respectability. I was his personal secretary.

My job was to follow him wherever he went, carry his suit cases ..... nod my head to whatever he said..... to give two versions of the answers taking care to make him believe that both versions were correct.... The chief used to leave me alone when he had to attend to things which I should not know. During those free times I used to run the school. I used to spend time drinking toddy in toddy topes. That is the reason why no one could get any education in that village. The Dora also wanted it that way.

Rajeswara Rao Dora was a good man. We must call a spade a spade. He fed me with what he ate. When we went to Karimnagar on work we were put up in the same room. When we went to Jagityala he never diminished my importance or respect. Once when we caught a wild pig, he gave me two kilos of that curry and asked me to take it home. We ate the curry for three days.

In summer Dora used to get 'neera'. My chief should have a companion by him even at twelve O' clock in the night. We used to drink 'neera' munching mutton. Perhaps you do not know. In those days in the houses of the chiefs pickles with the mutton of wild pigs, sheep and deer were prepared and preserved. Those pickles taste fresh even after six months as though they were fried and cooked just then. These chutnies and pickles tasted great.

The chief had three bed rooms in his house. One was for him and his wife. The second was a rest room for one individual. The third was by the side of the verandah. When officials or relatives came, he would show them his respect by talking to them and sleeping in that room giving them his company.

That room would get converted into a bed room for officers now and then. Unless the chief had to get important things done by them, that room would not be used. If that room was allotted to some one it meant that the chief had arranged non-veg food, toddy and a woman for the guest.

The chief had another bed room. That was the husk storage room in the cattle shed. Generally it was used as a bed room during day time only. In that village there was a woman called Rangavva. She used to visit him whenever he wanted her. She was acquainted with of all other rooms except the bedroom of his wife.....

Whenever she came to meet the chief I used to leave them alone... and go on my work. I do not know whether she felt pity for me leaving them... or it might be love for me..... I do not know.

I am not sure whether the chief had an idea about our relationship. When I expressed fear, she would say that the chief knew about our affair and that nothing would come of it. By then I had a son. I wanted to get my wife and set up family but I was afraid that the chief may be enamoured of my wife. When the chief visited our house at Jagityala I took every precaution to keep my wife away from his eyes. When Rangavva told me about a particular incident, my fears grew ten fold.

Earlier a woman called Buchchavva used to visit the chief as Rangavva does now. It appears Buchchavva resisted in the beginning. He got her to his house telling her father-in-law and mother-in-law that he had some important work.

He repeated it three or four times on different occasions. Then Buchchavva told her people that she would live only with the chief and not with her husband.

Her in-laws finally appealed to him to leave her alone. But she told her in-laws, come what may, she would live only as his 'keep'.

She left her two sons with her in-laws.

After many years her dead body was retrieved from a well.

Some said that the chief himself killed her.

Some others said her husband killed her and threw her body in the well and that the chief had no need to do all that.

But no one knows the truth.

How could she enjoy the comforts she had with the chief at her in-laws house?

All of them have to sleep in the same hut. Her husband stood no comparison with the chief.

Any bedroom in the chief's house gave her a lot of comfort and rest.

What he ate and drank, the chief gave her. How could the rickety rope cot of her house give the comfort the chief's tape cot gave? Whenever the chief called her, it was like a joyous festival.

She used to make herself up for the occasion. Perhaps the most memorable and the sweetest moments in her life were those she spent with the chief.

Buchchavva's husband married another woman and left the village.

Four years later when Buchchavva died no one accused him. They said she might have committed suicide as her life had no support....

The chief used to dress in dhotis then. Rangavva loved me as I was wearing pants and shirts and looked handsome.... Rajaiah, Rangavva's husband knew about the activities of his wife with me also.

Yet he could not accuse Rangavva, me or anyone else. Rajaiah was cultivating two acres of the chief's land by a written agreement.

He behaved as though it was something great if she cooked food for him. Now and then Rangavva used to take home stealthily some mutton and toddy for her husband.

At times Rajaiah used to quarrel with his wife. She then questioned him in what way she neglected him.

As a matter of fact there was nothing wanting in Rangavva's individuality.

You should believe me when I say that I learnt from Rangavva how a man should derive pleasure from a woman.

Rangavva had a great heart. She loved the chief or me, or her husband with all her heart. If she was sent to any officer she treated him also with great love.

The officers never forgot her. She never, for a moment, believed that she was doing something wrong.

She never expressed a feeling that her life was a waste and a disaster. She was full of enthusiasm and behaved as though what she did was normal and natural.

There existed once a caste of kalavanthula or bogam. They lived in this manner always with some man. They used to make money and buy gold for their children as also some land from the men with whom they kept company. In course of time this culture of keeping a woman as a concubine was looked down with contempt.

Now this caste is not to be found in our area. They all got merged with yellapu munnuru kapu and padma sali castes. If the women appealed to the men, their children were found some employment with the patwari or the police patel.

A little land was also given to them.

The chiefs knew that the children of the women were their progeny but did not permit the children to call them 'father'.

The children should call them 'dora'. If the children of the

concubines had to be married, some poor people of some other caste used to come forward for the alliance.

The prostitutes were accepted as members of their caste if the women provided toddy to all the members of their community. Now after these fifty years it is difficult to find them out as they got merged with other castes. For some time they were called kotha kapulu and kotha saleelu. In course of time even this distinction got lost.

Rangavva was not born in the prostitute caste. I will not tell you, to which caste she belonged. If it is revealed a number of problems crop up. There were women like Rangava in all castes. In whatever caste she was born she was as cultured as one born in the prostitute caste.

I think you know the character of Vasanthasena in Mrichakatika, and Madhuravani in the play 'Kanyasulkam' of Gurajada. Also that you know about the prostitute woman called Amrapali of the Buddhist monk. These women had grown cultured in the company of wealthy persons. They had won the love and admiration of the worshippers of love. But Rangavva was not educated. She had no talent in any art. She could only sing some folk songs melodiously.

Lakshmi..... if you do not feel surprised. I have to tell you that Rangavva had two children. Two others died. She used to live with at least three men.... with her husband, with the chief and with me.... she used to behave very pleasantly with any officer to whom the chief sent her.

I know all these facts... how nice it would have been if Rangavva had been my wife!... If only the society agreed.. I used to yearn greatly to make her my second wife... But it does not mean she was a beauty. She was a little dark but glowed all over her body... I was very much attracted by her individuality.

Perhaps Rajaiah liked her for this reason.... That was why

he did not go astray like his wife. Or perhaps even if he had gone astray, he could not have got pleasure as much as from Rangavva. To tell the truth, even the chief loved Rangavva more than his wife.

Rajeswara Rao, the chief was a dual personality. One side of him was the individuality to attain his desires cruelly as a chief. The second was to respond to problems with a human touch. In the case of Rangavva he behaved as a man of heart and treated her with respect.

Ratnavva, the wife of Rajeswara Rao Dora was envious of the love he showed towards Rangavva. She used to taunt her husband but he ignored her taunts. If she still raised her voice he would declare that half the land would be given away to Rangavva and that she would become his second wife.

Ratnavva left to her parents for sometime. Her action did not produce any result for Ratnavva.

During that time Rangavva started acting as his wife. Realising her folly, she returned to her husband.

I do not think that she loved me and developed a relationship with me. She came close to me only with a feeling of envy.

When I was afraid to satisfy her, she threatened that I should imagine what my fate would be if she reported to her husband, my chief, that I tried to seduce her.

In that way the lady of the house made me close to herself.

I could learn within a short time why the chief disliked her. The lady had the same defect my wife had. The lady took nearly two years to make herself acceptable to her husband.

I could tell the lady a way out but did not guess that it would create problems to Rangavva later. The chief gradually grew cool towards Rangavva. Perhaps a person's enthusiasm cools down after he fulfils his desire.....

The love a man has for a woman before he realises his desire, will not be in the same measure once he wins her favour.

If the love has to sustain, a man must possess a great lot of culture of the mind. So long as a man entertains the feeling that he triumphed over his woman, his marriage and life with her may not run smoothly.

There is only the egoistic pleasure that he won but not true love for the woman whom he loved.

Perhaps the reason why love marriages fail is because of the fact that the man loves his triumph more than the object of his triumph - his wife. True love does not proclaim that 'I loved that woman'. If you boast that you could trap the woman it means that you loved not the girl but your talent in winning her.

That is the reason why, I think, Rajeswara Rao chief never boasted about Rangavva. He never kept quiet if anyone spoke ill of her. I too did not feel anytime that I should proclaim that I was close to Rangavva.

I used to feel that I would be insulting and dishonouring Rangavva if I boasted about my relationship with her.

I tell this only to you about her and for the first time too. If love is carefully hidden in the heart how much stimulation it gives!

But the stimulation gets diluted and loses its spirit if I proclaim that this stimulation was usual and habitual with me .....

Rajaiah loved Rangavva with all his heart .....

In course of time he got deeply involved in thinking she was one with him. He never spoke ill of her and never tolerated others speaking ill of her.

How much Rangavva helped me in bettering my life! .....  
"You are not the person to live in these villages.....you are an

innocent person... why don't you study well and like the chief's brother become a teacher in the city?"

Rangavva used to ask me. I am not related to her in any way. I did not help her financially also. But yet she had great love for me. She had love for my wife also. She used to bring personally to my house eats and seasonal vegetables, or she would send them through her husband... All this because I was teaching her son.

I used to feel bad for not being able to teach in the school. I was pained that poor children were not able to gain knowledge. But I had no courage to oppose the chief. It was also not possible to work in the village having been born in Jagityala. Yet my spirit used to revolt.

I could not reconcile myself fully like Rangavva.

After some time I got myself transferred from that place. It was dangerous if the chief came to know that I managed to get the shift. He would ask "what is it you lack here?"

He would feel that he had been insulted... If he decided, he could get me ousted from service. I made him believe that I was transferred because I was working there for a long time.

I did not give up my association with the chief. He used to take me along with him on his work. In that manner my connection with Ratnavva also continued. When I had union with Rangavva I used to feel a new energy running into my veins. No one found fault with our relationships calling it prostitution. No one discussed it as a problem at all.

The entire village behaved as if all that was very natural. That made me feel astonished.

How many illegal relationships were there in that village! There was no one who had not an illegal connection in that village. That is the reason why I am not telling you the name of that village. The attitudes then were different from now. The society then was

different. No one considered such relationships wrong.

In olden days there were not many restrictions. Until the advent of cinemas no one attributed so much sacredness to the mangalasutra and its greatness or to chastity and fidelity. In those days the pouranic epics were presented like stage plays. The characters indulged in jokes on sex.

But of course they were attributed to heavenly beings, gods and goddesses.

One day a very interesting episode took place. I cannot but laugh remembering it. One night the play "Pramelarjuneeyam" was being presented by the wandering street players.

The story of Prameela is called Allirani story by the villages. Rajeswara Rao wanted stubbornly the woman who played Allirani to be sent to him in that costume.

Somehow after great persuasion she was sent into his bedroom. Rajeswara Rao chief was fully drunk and was in a stupor. Allirani also could not control herself with the advances made by the chief. The stage team escaped and ran away from the village the same night.

The interesting part of this episode was that the person who played the role of Allirani was a man, a young and energetic fellow. This funny story of the play was on the lips of the villagers for many, many years and generations. But no one talked of it in the presence of the chief.

The chief saw to it that bus service facility was not made available for the village. He prevented a road being laid. But he got power supply to his house and also a telephone.

He tried to stop the opening of a school but could not succeed. Perhaps he thought that the teachers will be of help to him.

Now the school has grown and there are four teachers.

Sangampedda Linga Reddy came into limelight on the model of the chief. Linga Reddy had an eye on Rangavva and was waiting for an opportunity to possess her.

Annalu, Naxalites came existence. They established their Sanghams. Rajeswara Rao lost his hegemony. With the chief losing some importance, Linga Reddy tried to call for the Panchayati against Rangavva.

Rangavva learnt of this and went to him dressed well. He was in his field. He did not expect that Rangavva would yield to him so soon.

He was over-joyed.

After he had satisfied his passion she came away abusing him harshly.

Do you know what she said to him, Lakshmi? "Are you really a man? Is this all you can do? I expected a great lot of enjoyment from you.

Linga Reddy! Heed my word. Don't think I am a prostitute.

I too have a heart. If you like me with all your heart I have no objection. If you try to arrange a Panchayati to bend me to yield to you calling me a prostitute and a whore I will urinate in your mouth. I'll make you lick my arse," threatened Rangavva.

With that Linga Reddy came to his senses and his pride as the chief after Rajeswara Rao lost its sheen of authority. He acted as a cat before Rangavva.

She kept up good relations with him.

But she informed to 'annalu, naxals' all about him. Linga Reddy committed a few other follies like this and the party broke one of his legs and threw him out of the party.

Rangavva could not get rid of the connection with 'annalu' because of Linga Reddy. She did a lot of service to the party and

the movement. When she learnt that they wanted to do away with his life she informed him about it.

He ran away and escaped death. Rangavva did not misuse the regard he and others had for her. In the old chief's house, when Ratnavva had left him and went away to her parents, Rangavva acted as the mistress of the chief but never once proclaimed proudly that she was the queen of the house. She behaved as a servant maid and not as the lady of the house.

Srinivas, Rangavva's son, joined hands with 'annalu'. I used to feel sad for him whenever I met him. If I had given him education in the proper manner he would have studied well and would have got a job. He could not get educated as I spent time drinking toddy and knocking about gossiping.

He settled as a farm hand.

After some time he started cultivating the chief's land on lease. If he could get that land he could overcome his problems. Why should his mother go to the chief? His mother had go to the chief because he was wealthy.

Srinivas was placed in a peculiar situation. Sometimes he felt proud that the blood of the chief was running in his veins. For the same reason he used to feel depressed that his blood was polluted.

He would feel agonised that his existence was a miserable one.

It is difficult to divine how deeply his mother loved him. Srinivas did not doubt the love his mother had for him and his father.

But he was in a dilemma as to how he should understand his mother. Time saved the situation for him.

All the chiefs, doras convened a meeting one day and decided to thrash all unwanted elements with the help of goondas.

Rangavva had a scent of this plan and brought Srinivas to my house on some pretext.

She requested me to keep her son with me for some days as he was in need of medical help. How could I lose the chance of helping Rangavva when I got an opportunity?

Srinivas came to know of the help his mother rendered him after about fifteen days. From then on he stopped suspecting his mother's character and her individuality. He realised that his mother was a unique being. He decided never to cause pain to his mother.

In order to safeguard his determination he had to change the course of his life. The party branded his mother as an informer and wanted him to sever his connections with his mother. How to break off with his mother who had loved him so deeply? Once he says 'no' to his mother, her heart would break.

His mother had done no harm to anyone at any time. She had served the movement also.

Srinivas broke down questioning 'annalu' how they could brand her an informer having been fed by her and having themselves called her 'mother'. As they did not change inspite of his appeals, he left the party remaining as a sympathiser.

Rangavva is alive. Srinivas could not face the restrictions in the village and left it. After some time both the parents left the village in search of him and went round places. Not finding him anywhere they settled down in Jagityala.

Srinivas is running a machine shop.

Rangavva celebrated his marriage.

I learnt that Rajeswar Rao helped Rangavva financially for his marriage and also for opening a mechanic shop.

Rajeswar Rao is now the main partner in a big courier

company. He lives in the city. His son looks after the company.

Rangavva keeps going there even now. His son does not like to see her there. Ratnavva tries to convince him saying Rangavva was his mother's younger sister.

She was anxious to tell him that Rangavva was the great woman who saved him and his father, that he should not fret and fume at her presence and treat her contemptuously.

She wants to tell him that if Rangavva feels hurt they would suffer.

But her son would not understand all these aspects. He is a man of money who believes that if tempted with money the monkey on the mountain would also climb down.

Ratnavva's son, Chandrakantha Rao was of that nature. So Ratnavva could not speak her mind to her son.

Lakshmi! The world knows about men who had managed three wives. That is an affair which is known openly to all. The man also used to feel proud that he was the husband of three wives and proclaimed it to all.

But Rangavva never boasted like that. Nor did she feel proud of the fact. Neither did she feel sorry for it.

Rangavva took every defeat as her triumph. Perhaps this statement by me is not correct. Because if we consider the entry of 'other' persons into her life as a defeat, I would have spoken a lie that she lived a life of chastity and respected fidelity.

I feel that those who respect chastity and fidelity suffer in their lives. They take such occasions as insults on their character. But she never felt so at any time.

Who do you think helped my wife when her uterus was removed surgically?

It was Rangavva.

Rangavva is the queen of my heart even today. I am revealing my mind to you for the first time after so long an acquaintance. But Rangavva did not proclaim to the world that she loved all her three husbands whole heartedly. She cannot say it in words. She did not say it also.

Lakshmi! It is not just Rangavva alone... Many women..... loved the men that came into their lives with all their hearts. But their history was not recorded anywhere. Once, long ago.... Like Droupadi who lived with five husbands... such women were described as 'muthaidivas'.

Such a situation was known as 'Aidavathanamu' in Telugu - which meant that the wife could manage all her five husbands satisfying every husband and managed the family without the husbands falling out with each other. Some one told me about this meaning.

If the truth of this interpretation is to be known we have to go back to the culture of Mesopotamia and tie it down with Mysamma and Pochamma\* and delve deep into the Indus Valley Civilisation.

I think that the concept of one man, one wife, 'our' children, chastity and fidelity came into being after the joint family broke up and individual families came into being. Before all this it was a culture confined to royal families and ruling classes. Because in those days the idea that their own children should enjoy the property and the kingdom was prevalent .

The common people did not enjoy much wealth or property. There were no deep aspirations also. Each community or caste lived a life of true love and these bonds connecting them together. It will be an insult to history to call the old word "relationships" as prostitution and illicit living applying the present day definition. That was the social attitude then.

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\* Local village mother goddesses.

In olden days if a guest arrived, he was provided with all comforts including the lady of the house. We should look at those traditions through the eyes of the present day attitudes. Perhaps these traditions were followed in order to inculcate the feeling that nothing belonged to the kings as 'mine' and 'me' and to make him lead a selfless life.

So in those days men performed yagas and vratams and gave their wife as a 'dana', as a gift. But Satyabhama gave her husband Lord Sri Krishna as 'dana' to some one else. As a matter of fact that 'dana' should have been given to a woman.

In those days any person who was called a Somayaji used to gift his wife to a man. You know something about our Sankranthi and Kanumu festivals. They belong to this category. The blouses of all women were heaped at a place and the person used to have a gay time with the owner of the blouse picked up by him. That is the festival called Kanumu.

Thinking of all this we feel that the situation is far better now. The idea of 'woman's property' is strong now. You have a job now. You have the freedom to choose your gender.

Did Rangavva enjoy the freedom to choose her gender? More than Rangavva, Ratnavva and my wife..... Your life is far brighter when compared with them.....

Perhaps with the advent of the middle class woman who depended on her husband's earnings, the concepts of chastity and one husband gained great value. You are now observing the results - dowries, dowry deaths, pouring kerosene on the woman who shared her body and heart and setting her aflame.... oh how cruel all this sounds, Lakshmi! The middle class woman desires now her slavery and death in the name of safety for her life.

Lakshmi! I placed before you some of my experiences. I appeal to you not to reveal this to others as the persons about whom I have told you are all alive.

Do you want to meet Rangavva? She lives in this place.

If you want to meet Ratnavva, I will take you to the city, Read their lives. Read about the villages. Take out the history of women's lib movement.

Why rack your brains about the theories of foreign countries? You can just sit in the library here and feel that you have known everything! that you can frighten others!

Lakshmi.... Your question is clear enough. The answer is not clear with me. It is but proper that you should decide about your life. Your present life is far better and brighter than the lives of those of the earlier times.

If you understand the relationship between desire, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, your question will not be a point of discussion at all. It is your desire that makes you move forward. When your desire gets destroyed, you will not get destroyed. Your sex and freedom for sexual desires will also disappear. If you suppress your desires they do not perish. The desire grows. Desire subsides when it is satisfied.

You are placed in a far better situation than me. I was already married by the time I developed desire. By the time I satisfied my desire my life almost ended.

You are now in a far better position to solve both things being in youth... what you told me was about the son and daughter of Rangavva.

That boy is Rangavva's grandson. The C.K. Rao about whom you spoke is Ratnavva's son, Chandrakantha Rao. That is the matter... why do you smile and walk away without saying anything....? Keep teleporting to me now and then....."

## REAL ESTATE

It was raining. The sky was heavily overcast after many days of eager waiting. Perhaps there is a kind of happiness even in expectation. Mallayya was very happy. As a matter of fact Mallayya's family had planned a 'garden dinner' programme for the day. Mallayya sent his son the previous evening to fetch his son-in-law, Sudhakar, in this connection. In all probability the programme would get postponed. Yet Mallayya was happy.

Mallayya glanced at his beautiful garden from the window. Dark clouds had covered the sky. It was still dark at eight as it was at six in the morning.

Mallayya brushed his teeth with paste and came out into the verandah gargling sun-flower oil in his mouth.

The house of Mallayya was constructed beautifully. There were eight coconut palms which had grown more than eighteen feet tall. A grilled frame in semi-circle over the gate with jasmine creepers. A variety of different types of plants brought from the government agriculture farm, a green lawn. Different types of gourds spreading over the supporting frames, ladies-fingers, coriander and other vegetable plants. Gora the atheist would wonder whether it was possible to grow a vegetable and a flower garden together so beautifully. His garden symbolized the culture of an educated man who was an agriculturist. The house and the garden lent a beauty to that street.

Mallayya was a common looking person. There was a glow in his dark face. Calmness and gentleness were characteristics of his personality. He was in his fifties. Born in a poor agricultural

family he came up in life by studying hard. His wife Yellamma had done B.Ed and was working as a school assistant. They had four children. Mallayya also worked as a school assistant for some years. Later he took the master's degree in economics and in literature. He was working as a lecturer in economics.

Mallayya had three brothers and a sister. A hut and half an acre of land was all their property held jointly. After he got employed he bought two acres adjoining his land. His brother who had studied upto the degree ran a private school and looked after the land. Mallayya got a pump set connection fixed for that land.

Mallayya had all the qualities of those who come up in life the hard way. After he became a teacher also he used to water the land both in the mornings and evenings by drawing it from the step-well walking up the ramp. He told the students that doing so was an ideal. Work gave him delight. He would be in a good mood when he worked. Work gave him great thoughts. Work was meditation for him. That was also one of the reasons for the garden to take a beautiful shape.

He respected and loved work. When he was young it was necessary for him to work while he studied. Now the habit turned into a hobby as work gave him pleasure. It was this work habit that shaped his good manners and culture. How many know that there is happiness in the work habit?

Mallayya had great admiration for Mao. He felt that Mao should have been born in India as a friend of Ambedkar. He admired the educational programmes and the communes introduced by Mao in China. The great ideal of Mao was 'work in one session and study in another session'. Mallayya believed that poverty and inequality imposed by the caste system could be solved by this 'work-study' shift system. He was sure that when the compulsory primary education succeeded, higher education would be within the reach of all in India. As a result poverty,

laziness, disrespect for work and the feeling of inequalities among castes and religions would disappear. It was only then India would grow as an ideal country in the world. He explained the same point to the students in the classes. He took part in many movements in keeping with his ideals.

Mallayya's children imbibed his ideals. They showed equal dedication for work and study. They were never proud that they scored higher marks than others. That was the reason why everyone liked his children.

Mallayya's eldest son Sandeep secured a lecturer's job in a private engineering college. Yet he had set his aim on becoming an R.D.O. or a C.T.O of the rank of a Group-I officer. His daughter Pawani was doing her medical course in Kakatiya Medical College. Kranti, next to her, was studying the degree course. The youngest of them all, Shravya, secured a rank in the district at the Intermediate examination. Sandeep and Pawani telephoned that they would not be able to attend the 'garden dinner' programme.

There were some who did call Mallayya a miser. But that was not the truth. It was a fact that he would not indulge in wasteful expenditure. He brought up Sudha, the daughter of his younger brother who was an attender, as his own daughter. He celebrated her marriage during the summer holidays in his house when she was in her second year degree course, as a good alliance was suggested for her.

Sudha went to her mother's place from her in-law's to spend the Ashadha month. She stayed with her mother for a week and went to her uncle's house. The bridegroom was experiencing the pangs of separation from his wife. Sudha was standing in the rain with a towel tied to her head after bath and was plucking jasmine flowers. Mallayya smiled at the thought that Sudha too liked to drench in the rain like him.

On seeing her he recollected the friendly discussion Sudha and her husband had during dinner in the night. Though they discussed cheerfully, the topic was of a serious nature. Sudha said that she would complete her degree staying in her uncle's house for the year. The young man had not yet got over the joys of married bliss. He kept talking something evading the point raised by Sudha. Mallayya did not interfere in the discussion and smiled it off. But in the night he was preoccupied thinking of it.

Sudhakar came from a very poor family. He was the eldest of the children. He secured a teacher's job in the interview held by the Zilla Parishat. He had to stop his M.Sc. course midway for the sake of the job. During the engagement session discussion took place in general without going deep into particulars.

Sudha desired to do M.Sc. and wanted that Sudhakar should get his Ph.D. For Sudha her uncle was the ideal and the model. Her aim was to work like her aunty. Sudha's younger sister Bhavitha failed the tenth class four times and decided stubbornly to stop her studies. Naturally when the girl stops her studies, the next thing for the parents to do is celebrating her marriage. The younger sister getting married first leads to whispers, rumours and other problems. So her father was in a hurry to celebrate the marriage of Sudha as early as possible. Mallayya understood his brother's predicament. In such an unavoidable situation, Sudha had to agree for her marriage. She gave her consent to marry only after she got an assurance that her marriage would not come in the way of her studies.

Yellamma and Shravya were busily engaged in the preparation for the garden party. Drenched in rain, Kranthi was seen bringing in mutton and a broiler cock. Mallayya came out of the house, 'pulling' oil in his mouth. He had folded up his lungi and was holding a long oar-like wooden rod as though to clear the drain running in front of his house. His aim was to get drenched in the rain, of course.

Suddenly an awful smell greeted Mallayya. Someone had thrown a dead cat or a dog in the vacant open site beside his house. Mallayya's happy mood got disturbed. He had thought of forgetting the problems of his street but could not because of the smell. He was angry with the owner of the vacant site.

He had thought of buying that plot himself twelve years ago. Ravinder brought his close friends and embarrassed him. He assured that he would construct his house within a year. Mallayya was happy that he would have a neighbour and helped Ravinder in the transaction. Mallayya realized that Ravinder had different plans. He had no mind to construct a house in the site. He bought plots at four or five different places. Mallayya had unwittingly helped Ravinder in buying the plot. Ravinder would buy plots, keep them vacant and when houses came up all round sell them when the price shot up. This was a business tactic followed by some.

Mallayya faced many problems as the plot was left vacant. He had to build a compound wall on that side spending his money. The owners of the plots on other sides built walls and Ravinder's plot looked like a protected fort now. Twelve years ago a gunta of land consisting of 121 square yards was priced at rupees ten thousand. Now a gunta cost sixty thousand rupees. Unsatisfied with the rate Ravinder wanted a lakh for each gunta.

The 'real estate' business is one in which a person earns without doing anything. People buy sites or land which look desolate, far away from the town or city. Some build houses who need them. Later a cinema hall or a college, a bus-stage or a market or even a nursing home may come up there. And then one should observe how the price of land rises. Persons like Ravi make the best use of the situation. The new house is built a foot higher than the neighbouring house. As a result the house built earlier looks as though the earth had sunk there. What is the use even if a house is constructed by raising the foundation thinking that

the road level would rise? After twenty or thirty years the road level rises very high and the house remains far below it. The vacant plot owners are benefited in this manner while those who build houses are at a disadvantage. If Mallayya and others had not built their houses, the price of Ravinder's plot would not have exceeded twenty thousand rupees a gunta.

These persons do not come forward to help in meeting the municipal authorities for the erection of electric poles. They will not pay a single pie to bear expenses. They are least bothered about the efforts made to force the municipality to take up the construction of drains. They escape saying they cannot be considered citizens of the locality. They feel that the need is not theirs. They would pay when they construct their house, they say. The area where Mallayya lived was one of the important centres in the town now. There was the effort of twenty five years behind the present situation. Mallayya was the unelected secretary who helped the growth and development of the colony. But the time-serving people will be ready to sell the plots when the prices go up as a result of the efforts of persons like Mallayya.

Mallayya was good at making such calculations. He wished that such persons who made profits easily should be done away with. If he had the forethought of Ravinder at that time the plot would have been his now. In what way did his broad-mindedness benefit him? Was it only to help the neighbour to make profits easily?

Many people think that real estate business deals only with buying and selling of houses and plots. But it means converting human relations into a business enterprise. There will be an increase of population where there are people and where human relationships exist. The cost of plots increase keeping in view the caste, religion, group, status and conveniences available.

Different varieties of real estate business flourished now in the world. If one variety is connected with education and

knowledge, the other has something to do with economic relations. Yet another deals with officials and with political authority. Economic status – culture – caste – perspective – male superiority and allied things are also some of them. Media – newspapers – radio – T.V. and the like as well as sports and cinema are also the areas. Art and literature also play their part in the game.

The real estate business enjoys the importance which a minister who is in power enjoys. This business improves its value of authority, movable and immovable property in relation to the exchange it can workup with other such business houses. Real estate in other forms is possible in accordance with the limitations. All these are real estates which depend on mutual co-operation. Yet each one has its special features. That is the reason why each group, caste, race, country and family tries to achieve growth to the extent possible individually.

When the values in different wings of real estate are equal the individuals and the institutions indulge in mutual give and take exercise, respect each other and outwardly appear to be one. When inequalities arise among them, the one with higher value exhibits its superiority and looks down on the others slighting them, says Mallayya.

Education is by itself a 'real-estate'. So long as a person has the real-estate called education, people also give him respect. Will they respect his attendant brother equally with him? The honour he enjoys is because of his growing up in the real estate called education. Once he loses it he falls back into square one. Getting respected in one field because of the value one enjoys in another field is purely temporary. Then the solution lies in making special efforts in every field. If such a thing does not happen, Achyuta Rao who was so close to him will also distance himself from him and it would happen naturally.

Mallayya had helped Achyuta Rao who was a civil contractor.

If Achyuta Rao could consolidate himself as a contractor, it was because of Mallayya. Achyuta Rao also did not deny this fact. Lakshman Rao, Achyuta Rao's son and Sandeep, Mallayya's son were classmates. The two families were very close to each other. Sandhya, Achyuta Rao's daughter was treated by Yellamma as her own daughter.

Sandhya used to like Sandeep. He had no other avocation but studying. The neighbours envied the two. Achyuta Rao and Mallayya themselves felt that the two would make an ideal pair. One day a near relative spoke it out with Sandhya's mother. But this development pained Achyuta Rao who was in debts. He felt as though the suggestion meant that as he was not in a position to celebrate his daughter's marriage, he could think of giving her away to a groom who belonged to a lower caste. The thought made him angry. When Sandeep secured a seat in M.Tech through GATE Sandhya felt very happy. The three youngsters went to a movie that night. Achyuta Rao flared up saying why his daughter should be so friendly with a boy who belonged to a lower caste.

"Are you not friendly with them?" shouted Lakshman Rao and silenced his father. Strangely the outburst of Achyuta Rao changed everyone in the family within a year. Achyuta Rao himself forgot what he had said. He got ready mentally to give his consent if Sandeep expressed his desire to marry Sandhya. But his ego came in the way to make the proposal. He felt that there was a great need for elders to play the role of middlemen so that his ego would not take a dent and other necessities like dowry and gifts would be taken care of in inter-caste marriages. Achyuta Rao was worried that many marriages were not taking place for want of such a system.

Sandhya and her mother cut short their visits to Yellamma afraid of the society. They kept up appearances saying that their castes were not the same. Anyway, what was wrong if Sandeep married Sandhya? Was he deformed or lame? If they had come

out openly saying that he was a handsome boy, what would have been the response? Yellamma's thinking was different in this affair.

Yellamma had a keen eye on dowry. She forgot that she did not carry any dowry to her in-laws. If anyone reminded her of it she answered back that she was earning well. She did not mind if Sandeep married a girl of any caste. But he should be given a sum almost equal or a little this way or that to the amount that is given to a boy like Sandeep in their caste. She also said if the girl was highly educated like Sandeep and earned an equally high salary like him, she would not mind to whatever caste the girl belonged and would not take a pie as dowry. Indirectly she meant that Sandeep would marry the girl whom his mother liked and approved!

A person who thinks that his caste is higher than a particular caste is like a lazy person who thinks he should earn well without doing any work as in the real-estate business. If in that business people get a higher price for a plot, here people try to gain profit through the caste in which they were born and through connections. The solution was in recognizing the fact that higher self evaluation of one's caste does not work. Yellamma used to get terribly upset whenever she thought of Gayathri who lived seven houses away. Yellamma guessed that Gayathri was afraid that Sandeep might be in love with her daughter Uma. Did it not amount to expressing her desire through her fear it would be good if Sandeep loved her daughter? Who will love the girl who had been failing the intermediate exam consecutively for three years? Once it was Achyuta Rao's daughter. Now was it Gayathri? His sending the books needed for external exams with his money to her on her request has been made a crime! How ambitious was Gayathri, who belonged to a caste that was not fit to be mentioned also? Would Gayathri seek an alliance for her son from a higher caste? But she was ready to trap youngmen who were highly qualified. People knock away educated youngmen without giving

dowry and then talk of ideals and principles and talk deridingly of caste and religion. Was it said for nothing that a girl should be given in marriage into a higher family and a girl taken from a poor family as one's daughter-in-law by our elders? Had not Kodavakanti Kutumba Rao narrated in his work "Parvathi Parinayam" how hellish it was if a girl of a higher caste was made one's daughter-in-law? There are mean minds who say 'what would you bring to us if you visit us and what will you give us if we visit your house!' That is how these small minds express their love. Yellamma spoke out her mind like that. She was afraid that parents of girls may take away her grown up sons without giving dowry.

Mallayya's mind was pre-occupied with thoughts. He removed the dead cat and threw it into the drain. If any had done such a deed in the past he would have lectured for half an hour.

Of late Mallayya was trying to be generous only when needed. The unexpected blows made him act like that. There was the long period of social evolution behind this. There will be always a clash between individual selfishness and social responsibility. During the thirty years that passed by individual freedom won the victory. Mallayya lost the battle. His social service outlook made it easy for individual selfishness to win.

Mallayya belonged to the first generation of educated persons after winning independence. He was one of the poor students who acquired higher education after a lapse of hundreds of years. He was a model for those who left the professions of their castes and earned a job because of his education. He easily won the hearts of people by his hard work at studies as well as by his humility and obedience. His humility helped him in securing a job soon.

Though Yellamma was not a beauty Mallayya married her without taking dowry as she was educated and cultured and was

also in a job. After marriage he gave an advance to buy the land by the side of his house and bought the house plot in the second year. Yellamma was of the opinion that their earnings should be enjoyed by them. In the early days of their marriage there were quarrels between them on Mallayya buying lands for the joint family and other expenditure he incurred. Mallayya argued that their prosperity would enhance the prestige of their family. But in course of time Mallayya lost the battle and Yellamma won. From then on there were no misunderstandings between them. Mallayya could not but come to terms with the line of thought between social responsibility and individual freedom which was not his. He had the satisfaction that he had purified himself by educating Sudha and celebrating her marriage. Perhaps Yellamma too had a similar feeling.

Yellamma's ambition in life was that she should possess a house of her own. After her wish was fulfilled she changed a great lot. It is women who face bitter experiences in a rented house. The house owners decide what vegetables should be cooked, how many friends and relatives could visit and during what timings they should not come and other such things. If the caste is an additional qualification in the case of some, for Yellamma it became a minus point. She felt that even her enemies should not face such problems. The difficulties one experienced in rented houses strengthened her desire to own a house.

Mallayya differed with his wife on this issue. He felt sad that the poverty he experienced before he secured a job, the insecurity he felt because of caste suppression and the disrespect shown to him by the society hastened the construction of his house. When he recollected the saying that fools build houses and wise men live in them, it made him smile that they both were an example.

Mallayya mused that if he had bought more lands then, they would have fetched him a lot of money. If he had done so his

younger brother need not have worked as an attender. What did he gain after working hard for twenty five years – except possess the old house?

Mallayya actively thought of selling the house. The reasons behind the thought of selling such a beautiful house were different. On the day he made a mention of his thought, Yellamma shed tears. She applied leave for school that day and did not eat food because of grief.

But as street quarrels and teasing of girls increased day by day, Yellamma also started entertaining her husband's thought. They both went round on a scooter searching for a good plot. They did not find any plot that compared well with their plot. The love and the bond one has on one's own house is such. They realized that they took the decision late when they learnt of the rates at which plots were sold. Even if they went in for not so good a locality, they would be able to buy only the plot after selling the house.

Their present house would not fetch the price they expected. Those who wanted to buy it said it was an old house built in an old model and wondered how long it would last. They started bargaining by taking the pros and cons into consideration. Moreover people had fallen a prey to Vasthu of late. Mallayya had no particular interest in Vasthu. Yellamma came to know that a vacant plot had a greater value than a house in the real estate field.

The person who bought a vacant plot can build a house according to his plan in stages. He can take loans from L.I.C. and other agencies. Such facilities were few in buying a ready made house.

Mallayya was pained that his house will not fetch the amount he expected. Raja Reddy who bought a bus with his help prospered. The comparison between them depressed him. He felt

disgusted saying that all their earnings turned into dead capital. Yellamma was very much upset at what her husband said. "We were treated as human beings only after we built this house. Have you forgotten so soon the great self-confidence the house has given us and our attachment with the house?" She accused him angrily.

For their children the house was like their mother. Perhaps a little more so too. Their mother sometimes chided them. But the house gave them cool shelter always and ever. To the children protecting the house was like protecting their mother. They fought like revolutionary soldiers for their right on the house and the street.

Twenty five years ago they had bought the plot with great hopes and ideals. Compared with the present the past was happier. Things do not happen according to man's preferences. History also has an order. History moves forward following the order of events. The ideal of the socialist society imagined by Mallayya falling behind may be a part of this order. Perhaps his notion that economic theory was the deciding factor was defective. The socialist struggles of revolution fell into the background and lost their strength.

Mallayya had the habit of saying that every small incident that took place in his house or the street was a part of national and international situation. The colony in which he lived got divided into two groups when Pavani was studying intermediate. She was now doing medicine. His group became weak gradually and the other group strengthened. This brought about a feeling of frustration in Mallayya.

Pavani was returning after visiting her friend Suneetha. Then lights went off. A vagabond took the opportunity to pull the plait of Suneetha. She slapped him with her slipper. He bit her cheek and ran away. Mallayya's children attacked the house of that fellow that night and destroyed whatever they could get at. He was admitted as an inpatient in the hospital. His parents filed a

case in the police station that their house was attacked by Mallayya's children. Mallayya tried to discourage them taking further action describing it as part of the poisonous international bourgeoisie culture. But his children lodged a case of physical molestation and attempted rape.

Then commenced the actual warfare. People started talking as they liked. Will any father openly make fuss saying that his daughter was raped? Will people of low caste have a sense of shame at all? they said. In that colony people belonging to the roudi's caste were more in number. All the rumour mongering was theirs. Mallayya's ideals, the broad world, socialist society and the like were all blown off as if in a dust storm.

Mallayya spat out the oil as if he remembered some thing. He washed his mouth with water and cleaned his teeth with paste.

The rain abated a little. All the members in the house were getting ready to go to the garden dinner. The aroma of boiling mutton and condiments filled the air.

Sudhakar lazily got up from bed stretching his limbs and glanced at Sudha who was making a flower garland. Sudha signalled towards her uncle. The new bridegroom quickly pretended great respect for the uncle of Sudha. Sudha laughed heartily at her trick. Sudhakar went into the bathroom in a huff.

Mallayya walked into the garden as if he did not observe the young couple's playful romance. He started arranging the vegetable creepers properly which had slipped from the supporting frames. He recollected the time when the quarrel between him and the street commenced.

The house was always full of women of that street who used to come for the flowers or receive the vegetables free of cost. Once all the roses of different colours were plucked and taken away by someone. Pavani did not eat food that day. How can they keep watch on all things? Mallayya stopped giving saplings of plants

to those who had no interest in tending them. Yellamma began to sell the vegetables to the push cart vendor to save time and to desist from the necessity of being pleasant with those that came for the free distribution of vegetables. The seeds of jealousy were sown from then on.

The women of the colony called Mallayya an ideal person. Their husbands felt hurt at this. Every mother wanted her children to take Yellamma's children as their ideal and model. References to Yellamma's children were made frequently in their talks. Yellamma's children were the inspiration for the children of that colony. At the time of examinations there was a competition among the parents to invite Yellamma's children to sleep in their houses so that their children would study well in the nights. The children were treated with affection by offering them refreshments and tea. Yellamma's children were brilliant. Other children could not match them. The mothers developed jealousy towards Yellamma's children in course of time. There was no knowing when it would spark a fire. This ill-feeling helped in widening the distance between the other children and Mallayya's children.

The court struck off both the cases for want of evidence and witnesses. Those who filed the cases learnt the bitter lesson that they should not meddle with stubborn people. Mallayya had to suffer getting a bad name. His opponents would rake up every now and then the issue and irritate Mallayya. He was pained that his education had gone a waste. He could not bear criticism bringing in his caste. In what way was he inferior to others in the colony? What had caste to do with other problems? He fell into deep contemplation.

He had deeply read in world economics and forgot the part caste plays even in such a science as economics. Mallayya remembered the Telugu saying "the more one is put to study the more one loses his intelligence" in this context.

Having understood the problem his mind underwent a change in its attitude towards new thinking. A new light got focused on the aspects which he did not understand earlier or on the truths of life which he wanted to forget. He understood now why Ambedkar, a great economist, turned into a philosopher who championed the cause of eradicating class and caste distinctions. Mallayya felt excited as though he was the first to discover the reason for the change in Ambedkar's career. Mallayya believed that no one could become an economist without first championing the cause of caste eradication. The reason being the institution of caste itself is a science of economics.

Caste accords a value to human relationships and converts it into a business proposition. Every person who imagines that his caste is superior to the other man's caste is a real estate businessman. The economist who propounded this principle was Manu. Why should we be angry with Manu who put down in writing what was in practice? He should be studied as we read Plato or Aristotle. Some Sudra classes that studied him could enhance the values and importance attached to their castes. Kamma, Reddy, Velama and other such castes did it. The other castes also have to take recourse to this action. Mallayya cannot but suffer till his caste gets greater respect. He has now to play a historical role in helping his caste. All castes should get merged through some process. When all castes enjoy equal status there will be no problem of castes. He felt it strange that he who was thinking of changing the society which was thousands of years old in his country should now take up the struggle for his caste.

Mallayya's father had told him many times: "Son, do not dismiss my words as those of an uneducated man. If we live in our house among the people of our caste we will enjoy honour – our caste also gets the respect. If we build a house amidst those of other castes, we will suffer in future. For good or for bad, it is proper for us to live among the people of our caste. Don't live in

a place where no one of our caste lives. Perhaps you imagine that they will honour you if you live in their midst. If so it is only your illusion. They will respect you till they know details about your caste, the poverty of your relatives and friends. Those who respect you truly will show you respect even if you live among our own people". How true were the words of the old man who was dead and gone! Having been under the influence of socialist ideology how much he lost in the name of class distinction!

The communists could not eradicate among people the distinctions of groups, classes and religions though they brought together millions of people into their organizations. They could not inculcate into the minds of people that all classes are equal. That was why among the farmers, workers, teachers and the employed marriages did not take place without the caste playing its role. The people of this country think of their caste first and make this point very clear in every context at every place at any time. These castes have been under the illusion that their culture is the same as the culture of the upper classes who could not set aside their caste. Being under this impression they eagerly read the stories, poems, the difficulties, the problems and the tears as their own. Now these people have to establish a middle class group of farmers, teachers and the employed category who are prepared to shed their caste. It is then the real estate business called superior caste disappears. Mallayya felt ashamed that it took him a life experience of twenty five years to realize the truth which had been existing for hundreds of years.

Mallayya realized what he lost all these years. If he had carried on the movement for his people, his father would have felt happy. The process of love, friendship, culture, respect, sacrifice, the organization of movements etc. taken up by him had all been a form of bonded labour in a new form. That is why, whatever the sacrifices, the policy deciding leadership is not being captured by the labour classes. That may also be the reason they

fail to remove the feeling of belonging to a higher class in others in spite of the sacrifices and comradeship. On the other hand their caste ego was increasing, Achyuta Rao and Raja Reddy who grew in stature taking his help ..... in each generation ..... if the reform was put into practice, the feeling of caste superiority and caste distinction would have disappeared long ago. Mallayya could only sigh.

Mallayya came to a decision about his son-in-law Sudhakar and his daughter Sudha. Though it would be a financial burden, he would encourage them to continue their studies. That was important. If necessary his son-in-law should reject the job offer he got. He must tell his son-in-law his decision. Whatever difficulties they face, they should possess the real-estate called "education – knowledge" which was within their reach. They should consider this as their primary duty. This thought made Mallayya feel light as though the clouds of doubt and uncertainty had cleared.

"Everything is ready, father! Get ready quickly" said Shravya. Her words brought him back into this world. He took the towel and rushed into the bathroom saying he would be ready within five minutes. "Send for the autos" he said.

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## II

## MOONLIGHT IN THE FOREST

The pouring rain stopped that morning and the sky looked clear.

The leaves on the branches of the teak trees moved in the breeze. The rain water caught in the rough leaves, shaped like elephant ears, were dropping down.

The rain drops which fell on the well-grown blades of grass were shining like pearls. Goats stood up and stretched their limbs. Nature looked beautiful all around. The kids, the younglings of the goats, rushed to their mothers to suckle at their udders. The dried leaves spread on the ground to give them warmth got scattered by the hoofs of the kids.

The nearby fire smouldered into ash which was still hot. A kid, eager to suckle at his mother's udder cried in pain when She landed on a burning piece of stick. The kids started bleating one after the other as if they had learnt to bleat just then. Isru Talandi, startled awake at the bleating of the kids. His daughter Moti was sleeping by his side. He adjusted the old cloth which Moti had used to cover herself.

Isru stretched his arms and limbs and looked at the sheep pen. He then piled up the scattered pieces of sticks and turned towards his son who was in deep sleep.

The jowar crop was ripening then. The crop had to be carefully guarded till it was harvested and brought home. He kept watch over the field till midnight, awakened Esu and asked him to guard the crop. Esu started snoring even before he got up.

The heep were in the shed next to him. What will happen if a tiger smelt them, attacked and killed them? What will happen if the bears and the wild boars devoured the corn heads? Tut, tut. Though his son had come of age, he had not learnt to be responsible minded. What should be done to make him feel responsible? Yes, he should be got married. He will then have a separate hut, a separate family and a separate farming and cultivation. Till then he will not come to his senses.

'By the by, this fellow follows me to collect flowers and suddenly disappears. When I search for him he is seen by the side of Lakshmi Bai smiling. On seeing me he walks behind me as if he did not leave me at all. Perhaps he imagines that I do not know all about his mischief' thought Isru.

'Lakshmi Bai is a good looking girl. The tattoo marks on her eyebrows, forehead, cheeks and neck increase her beauty.

That girl started wearing blouses of late. She is the right choice for my son. I hope that the girl would enter my house as my son's wife. If that happens there might ensue a great conflict with Babu Rao Made', Esru continued to think.

Babu Rao Made was rich. He carried on cultivation with two pairs of he buffaloes. He had exchanged his two young bulls for two grown up buffaloes.

Babu Rao Made had ten goats. Also two acres of paddy field. In the village he was next in importance to Namdev Gayikal, the village elder.

What did he himself have except the jowar field and an acre of horse-gram? Of course he had five goats. One of them will anyway be killed for the festival celebrated before the harvesting of the crop. He had to offer a goat to Ahari Maharaj during the Dasara. The rest of them might be lost anytime if the forest officers saw them or if the goats were seen by bears.

Moti woke up rubbing her eyes. She had to be tattooed. How beautiful she would look if her face was tattooed! Also on her arms. On else who would marry her?

Esru stood before his hut and stretched again his arms and limbs. He glanced at the jowar field which was most dear to his heart.

The jowar crop had come up green and strong with heavy corn heads. The corn heads were ripening fast. Their stalks looked green having drenched and got cleaned in the rain. The water drops which settled on the blades of grass looked like the moon-beam fish that shimmer in the pools.

Isru's mouth watered at the thought of the fish. As it rained well the pools were overflowing with water. Fish may be available in those pools. He should catch fish by all means.

Why was it so chill? Drinking steaming hot jawar gruel and biting roasted fish.....? What a tasty treat it would be!

People called him a fish hunter. As a matter of fact there was nobody in the gudem who did not like fish, meat and toddy. They would very much like to eat them if only they could get them.

The thought of fish reminded him what happened once when he was young. At that time the gudem was not where it was now. It was to the east of the present place. The Pranahita river was flowing nearby. There was a thick forest all round. In those days there was no place without a dense cluster of trees or green pastures. The forest extended on all sides as far as one could see.

How large was their goat herd then! One day he took the goats to the water pools. There he saw fish and forgot himself fishing them. The goats entered the forest and were seen by the forest officials. They impounded the lot. His father entreated them to return the goats by holding their feet. They kept four fattened

goats for themselves and released the rest with some mercy.

When he remembered the goats he shouted to Moti asking her to take care of the goats.

He looked at his son wondering whether he would wake up soon. His son had tied the tall, twisted horns of a stag to the cot and covered it with deer skin. He had hung an empty shell of a bottlegourd to the horn.

Esru took away the bottlegourd shell saying to himself that he had forgotten to collect it. He cautioned Moti once again about the goats and stepped out.

The forest was all round him. A jowar field in the forest. A hut in the middle of the field. A thatched shed by the side of the hut. There was a compfire between the huts.

In that hut there were two cots. Four forked posts were fixed in the ground. Rafters were made to rest on the forks and were tied with *modugu* plant fibre. Thin sticks were run across the bars tied with fibre again to keep them firm. Dried grass was spread over the sticks and were covered with an old, torn dhoti. Beneath this cot were the pots used for cooking gruel.

Jowar flour was tied in a cloth into a bundle and it was hung from one of the crossbars. The hut was covered by dry grass and it stood isolated. There was another field belonging to someone else. A similar hut in that field also.

The inhabitants of the same gudem had built their huts in an area covering nearly two miles in radius to keep watch on their fields. Their gudem was the centre of their fields.

This gudem remains deserted for six months in a year. The owners have to live in these huts for nearly six months to take care of their crops.

At a distance of two miles there would be another gudem. There exist about eight gudems in a radius of ten to twelve miles.

Isru belonged to one of the gond families that lead an innocent life in the lap of mother forest.

The sun started to peep through the hills in the east. The sky was warm with the rays of the sun like the jowar cake baked well on the earthen pan. Morning glow began to spread like the fragrance of the mahuva flowers blossoming forth.

Look! Dawn was offering its obeisance to the god of the east with unbroken regularity even if the east was covered with clouds! Esru also offered his respects to sun god silently.

Esru walked ahead along the familiar path. Strangers would not know the way among the tall grass bushes. The foot of Esru which walked on habitually got stuck suddenly.

Once earlier a pointed stone, sharp as a knife, had hurt his wound twice and he had plucked the stone out. Now his left foot got stuck in the soft earth. Little pebbles in the loose earth pricked his wound and he writhed in pain. He lifted his wounded foot slowly and stepped forward squirming with pain.

His wife had died of a similar wound exactly three years ago.

During the winter three years ago many others had died. Like the ripe cotton pod breaking open, like the bamboo splitting in the hot sun, the human body cracked for the cold of that winter.

In winter the women suffered badly. They drape themselves in sarees above the knee and cover their bosoms with the other end of the saree going down their shoulders behind. They do not have any other covering on their body. The chill cold cuts their skin like a saw during winter.

When his wife's body was burning hot with high fever, like a fire-place, should she get her period! She could not help it. She had to stay in a separate hut. All tribal women go to a separate hut during their periods.

They had only coarse clothing. The shopkeeper had taken a pot full of honey and had given them two pieces of cloth thin as a lonicloth. The shivering during this malaria fever will not be controlled even if many such sheets were covered over the body. On the fourth day she should have come back home but she was dead and lying stiff as a corpse.

She must of died sometime in the night. She must have shivered and struggled at the biting cold. She was a strong woman. How hard she used to work!

Perhaps he too may die with the wound that was troubling him. Though medication was being done using leaves and their essence and juices the wound was not yielding to treatment.

He cleared the mud carefully from the wound. Pus was oozing out from the wound. But his temptation to eat the fish had the better of the pain. He reached the pools.

The water was flowing in thin sheets, in the pools like thinly made jawar gruel. There was the sound of water flowing down on stones from above at some distance.

The stream, with its birth place somewhere in the hills to the North, runs through the forest before joining the river Pranahita and gets converted into a big pool.

He placed his foot in the water and the mud around the wound cleared off. He felt something biting his foot and lifted his foot. A fish jumped back into the water.

Expressing disappointment at missing to catch the fish, he walked into the knee deep water. He again felt something biting his foot. This time without moving the foot he bent down and caught the fish in a flash. He slapped it hard on the bank. Its head hit the ground and it died moving its tail.

Something shining was moving fast in the water. He thought it was a big fish and reached it in two leaps, caught it and threw

it on the bank. It was a poisonous snake and it got lost crawling fast in the grass. He was not afraid of it though he knew it was a snake and its bite was fatal. Dangers of this kind in their lives are many and common. He felt upset that it was not a big fish as he had thought it to be.

The cat-fish cut into his wound with their fangs. Yet he did not mind the pain he suffered. He caught sufficient number of fish and put them into the bottlegourd shell.

The wound was stinking with pus. It looked like the brain taken out of the skull just then. The wound appeared raw with streaks of blood.

He had to empty his bowels and rested his body on the right leg stretching his left leg because of the wound. He cleaned his bottom with leaves, wrapped up his limicloth and started off with the fish.

Once the shopkeeper who sells oil saw him do that and ridiculed him calling him uncivilized. Esru wondered how it was uncivilized when using the leaves did not allow the waste matter to smear the fingers and the palm while washing with water did it. That was something which Esru never could understand. All the people of his gudem followed the same procedure. While walking back home he collected some tubers that resemble onions.

He stopped hearing Katicidam Nodimek of Nalgu Devarla calling him.

Katicidam Nadimek lived in the gudem next to Esru's. His field was situated a little in the interior. The Nalgu Devarlu have a tradition that they should not eat tortoise. Kati called Esru perhaps to exchange his tortoise for fish.

It was difficult to preserve a tortoise but the fish can easily be fried and eaten. Kati got Esru into conversation.

Dasara was not far off. Dasara is celebrated on a grand scale

by Ahiri Maharaj. The gouds of the nearby talukas gather there.

But everyone should get their provisions. Moreover the visitors have to offer Ahiri Maharaj goats and money themselves. They have to start two days in advance to take part in the two-day festival. Kati had kept aside a goat to offer it to Ahiri Maharaj. Their conversation touched many such topics.

Kati was saving money to buy beads and other such articles for those who would be with him those two days. Kati's wife passed away a little time ago. The inhabitants of the goodem enjoyed sexual freedom during those two days. Kati wanted to know what gifts Esru was taking to be given to Maharaj Ahiri. Esru fell into thought saying "let us see."

He was offering goats every year to Maharaj but Maharaj never bothered about the welfare of the people of the gudem by visiting them even once.

Every time Maharaj said that he was fighting with the government urging the government to increase the wages for bamboo cutting and for picking up tendu leaves. But for five years the wages did not get increased. Maharaj claimed that he too belonged to the gondu tribe like them and that they were all one. Esru felt that meeting him and talking to him had turned casual and mechanical.

Moti had to go without fail. If she did not go, he had to send to Maharaj though Patel Kurdugayital, a fine of ten rupees.

It was all right if men did not go. But women had to go and dance in the court of Maharaj. If they did not go. They had to pay a fine of ten rupees.

If Moti went, Esu would say he too would go. He would be able to meet Lakshmibai there! Now he has the excuse of accompanying his sister! Esu may show himself off there! But how could he guard the field all alone himself? The field was

ready for harvest. Would it not be ruined? He would not allow any of them to go.

Moreover he had no money with him. He had only three rupees. He would not be able to collect money till the harvest reached home and until the bamboo cutting started. What should he do! Let things happen as they should! What would Maharaj feel?

He gave some fish to kati and received the tortoise. He thought of home.

Moti would have prepared the jowar gruel. As soon as he reached home he would drink the gruel taking bites of the fried fish and the roasted tubers. How tasty would the meal be!

Oh! It was long since he ate meat. It was more than a week ago he ate the tom cat that rushed into his field. Of late nothing was available to eat! Abba! It was a week ago he ate meat

Jawar gataka with fish fried in oil was a grand feast for them. Money was required for oil. If they wanted to use oil, they may have to wait for how many days, no one knew! His shirt was torn. He did not know how long he had to wait to get a new shirt made!



Esru reached the jowar field thinking of their lives and the istuation in which they were placed. His thoughts went topsy turvy at what he saw, for his heart almost stopped beating.

Forest officers were in the hut. They had tied down Esu to prevent him from running away. They had beaten him hard for there were marks of thrashning on his body.

The gruel pot had broken into pieces. Ants had collected in rows to sip at the gruel spread on the floor. The gataka in the bundle hung from a rod had emptid itself on the grass covering

the cot. They might have beaten Moti also. Her cheeks showed streaks of tears rolling down as she wept uncontrolably.

That was all a part in the game of their lives. That was the reason why Esru recovered quickly from shock. Oh god! Where were the goats? He quickly glanced at the jowar field. The crop was not destroyed. But where were the goats?

The visitors had drunk the arrack Esru had hidden. The hut was smelling arrack all over. They had pulled down the roof of the hut to some extent. The atmosphere resembled a bull badly mauled by a tiger.

On seing Esru one of the officers pounced on him like a beast without a word with a stick in hand. While Esru tried to protect himself from the blows the bottlegourd shell broke and the fish fell scattered.

Tears welled in the eyes of Isru. He wreathed in great pain as the blows fell on the wound. He shrieked as if his heart would break.

“Where did you go all this while? How long should we wait here for you?” the officers shouted at him and started abusing him.

The goats were impounded as they grazed in the reserve forest. He was fined for cutting wood for his hut. For having raised a crop of jowar in the forest land the usual bribe – all these put together a heavy burden was laid on him. From the curses and abuses of the officers Isru could make out that much.

As the officers exploited them in this manner every year, the people of the gudem collected the money from their wages before the advent of rains and sent it through their chief, Kurdugayital. He also followed the patel. The official who received the money had a flowing beard but no moushtache, and was chewing pan like a goat. He spoke mixing up Urdu, Telugu and gond languages

with gusto.

The present official was fair complexioned and sported a moushtache. That means the earlier officer was transferred! Esru could not come to this decision for a long time as his head had gone numb.

It was Kurdu who could manage on such occasions with his talk. Kurdu knew everything. Isru turned aside to go and was about to shout 'Oya!'.

They were afraid that he was calling someone to attack them and cautioned Isru not to shout.

He fell on his knees and held the feet of the officers but they spurned him away.

"Nanna! (oh father) why are they beating us? What wrong have we done?" asked Isru his father in their gond language, being in great pain.

"Don't talk in your tongue!" shouted an official gnawing his teeth. Esru kept quiet though he wanted to tell something to his son Esu.

"Goat fine, hut fine and the usual bribe – all together fifty rupees as fine. If you don't clear the dues within two days, it is not just fine, your jowar crop also will be ours," cautioned the officers and repeated their order.

Was it easy to collect fifty rupees! Fifty! Where could he find the money that very instant! Even if he paid them fifty rupees, they will knock off one or two goats from those impounded and return only the rest. If he had to save the crop, he had no go but pay them fifty rupees.

"Start cutting the bamboo from tomorrow. We will deduct the fine from your wages. This concession we offer only for this once. Beware!"

They created the problem and solved it. It needed so much hardship to explain the reason for which they came.

They left without waiting for Esru's reply.

Rain would start abating soon. The work of cutting bamboo would commence soon. The mud paths which got washed away would be re-laid. The plight of those living in gudems by the side of roads was worse still. Nearly half the members of their families will have to go for cutting bamboos without fail. It was one of the measures by the forest officers in order to run the paper mills without a break. They would not listen to any amount of complaints and entreaties to save and guard their crops. The bamboo cutting should go on. As their gudems were a little deep inside they were saved. It was Kurdu's elder brother, who had died, that insisted on developing a gudem in the interior, far from the good road.

The bamboo required for the paper mills gets supplied from Esru's place also. But the work starts a few days this way or that before Dasara festival.

On the pretext of improving their industries the Maharashtra government supplied the bamboo cut from its reserve forests at a highly subsidized rate to the paper mill but did not impose any limit on the selling price of the product.

The government started cutting down the forest so that the mill could run for ten or fifteen years later also. After felling the forest and converting it into cultivable land, the forest officials occupy the land taking it away from the gonds without paying a paisa. The government starts bamboo plantations there later.

In that manner cultivation gets increased and plantations get increased. The gonds who become shelterless each time had been driven away into settled agricultural cultivation.

The gonds fell the forest and start agricultural operations

for two or three years, plough the soil and remove pebbles and stones and make it fit for cultivation. Then either the forest officials or the 'chiefs' claim the land as theirs and drive the gonds away again.

The 'chiefs' or landlords are only a class, not a caste. In the Ankina area the Velamas, in Sironchana the Muslims, Patels and Sarpanchs in other places as well as business people called shainkars hold the sway over the gonds.

The grief and tears that welled up in Isru's eyes got dried up. Was that the end of the problem? How many more problems they had to face in their lives! Perhaps they had not propitiated and satisfied the great God and Mother Mahankali sufficiently. They were so unkind and angry with them. During the pre-harvest festival they should make plenty of offerings and fulfil the vows. "Oh God! Save us! O Mother! Hold your patience till then!" was be his prayer.

Esru removed the knots of the rope which tied Esru down to the stake. Moti poured water in the pot used for boiling vegetables. The water was in the colour of the gruel. She started cooking the gruel using that coloured water.

Esu rubbed his limbs and muscles which had got stiffened because of the tight knots. Opposite the hut the machete tied to the top of long bamboo which was used to cut slender branches for the goats was shining black in the rain which was drizzling from the dispersing clouds.

Esu took it into his hand and looked at his father. Were his looks asking his father's permission to cut off the heads of the forest officials, one after the other!

Isru did not observe his son. He was busy spreading a cloth under the cot to collect the gatka that had spilt on the cot. The grass reeds were also falling along with the gatka powder.

Moti was afraid of people dressed in white clothes from her childhood for some unknown reason. Her father also had that fear. Did he not? Kurdu gayathal greeted those in white clothes bending low. He showed great respect to them.

As usual, after making gruel and drinking a little of it, she took the machete in her hand and led the goats on the katcha path for grazing. She expected to find a fruit or some thing. As she saw people wearing white clothes coming on that path, she ran back in fear to the hut.

The moment her brother poured the gruel into his vessel, some men kicked the gruel pot away. Her brother retaliated for kicking off the food which he was about to consume. They were four. Her brother was one and was also alone. They thrashed him and tied him to a wooden pole. They searched the entire hut and scattered things throwing them helter – shelter. They looked under the cot and took out the toddy hidden beneath the grass mound. Their father was guarding it carefully for the festival of the crops. They drank the whole lot of it.

She was terribly afraid of them when they looked at her with their reddened eyes. She thought of running away somewhere. But how would she know if they took her brother to some place? She stayed put in great fear not knowing what to do.

Esru did not observe what was happening there. He was only thinking of the means to recover the loss. He did not ask them how it all happened; or what happened. It had become a part of their lives, something, like that starts and ends like that. Esu did not tell his father because his father did not ask him the details.

The tortoise escaped and disappeared. Moti was searching for the fish.

"Ask Kurdugayathal to come to our gudem to night" Esru directed his son, shaking and collecting the gataka.

Esu looked angrily at his father and walked away with deliberate steps towards the field of Kurdu.



As a matter of convention all the village elders of the family assembled in the gudem. It was usual for them to sit together whenever there was a problem.

The problem was the same for all of them. They received orders to cut bamboo from the next day. At least one from each family should go till the crop came from harvest. Their problem was how to go for cutting when the crop was ready for the harvest. That problem was no new problem. They faced it every year. Yet it appeared a fresh problem each year.

A campfire was lit for light. When the dry sticks were being pushed up, the sparks rose and scattered, dying away.

As no one lived in the gudem for three months, the gudem looked desolate and was in ruins. There were about twenty huts and about twenty people assembled.

They sat around the fire. Should it be the same song every year? Was there no solution? Everyone entertained that same thought in their minds. But no one knew what to do.

“How to make fresh payment to everyone that came this way?” questioned Bhima expressing his resentment.

“What you say is true. Do you think I feel like paying? What shall we do?” Kurdu Patel asked.

He was the chief of the gudem. It was his responsibility to safeguard the honour of the gudem. Whatever that should reach the ‘doras’ and the officers should pass through his hands. It was also his responsibility to arrange the rest house facilities to the officers that came and went. Though they stayed in the guest house only for a few days in a year, they expect it to be spacious

and beautiful. Or else they got angry. That anger burns down their lives into ashes. It was his responsibility to see they did not get angry.

In such circumstances what should be done? No one had the answer. Everyone thought that if they refused the payment it would be very good. But no one dared to speak their mind out.

“If I go to bamboo cutting keeping Esru to guard the field, it will be as good as the crop being lost” said Esru explaining the sleepy nature of his son.

“Then send Esru for bamboo cutting. I will convince them” offered Kurdu Patel.

They all agreed to do coolie work for a token wages. That was not coolie work. It was bonded labour.

Kurdu took up the responsibility of bringing back the goats that were taken away.

“Can’t we get rid of their menace?” someone asked.

“Dasara is fast approaching. This time we should tell Ahiri Maharaj about all our problems,” said Rajaiah with hope.

“Good. You made a timely reminder. Women who are not going to visit Ahiri Maharaj this Dasara have to give ten rupees in a day or two. Let the men folk themselves give it. Or else the gudem will lose its honour.” Kurdu collected information as to who were going and who were not.

“What about you Esru? Are you sending Moti? If you send her the work of watching the crop will suffer. I know it. What will you do?” asked Kurdu.

How could Esru produce ten rupees all of a sudden?

“I will take her. She has to be tattooed” Esru.

“Then how about guarding the crop?” Kurdu.

“All should stop cutting bamboo on those two days.”

Everyone liked the suggestion.

The flame of the fire died down into ashes. Everyone left to their field for the night.



The day of the harvest festival. It was customary to celebrate the festival before the crop reached home after the harvest. Each gudem celebrates the festival separately.

It was night. The fire was kindled two or three times for more light. Some were cooking food. Some were dancing. Some others were consuming local arrack.

Everything was going on smoothly according to schedule.

The priest of the gudem being the important person of the celebrations was giving instructions.

Lakimbai knew through Esu that the festival would be celebrated in the gudem. She reached the gudem by evening. She removed her blouse. She was taking part in the song and dance with Esu enthusiastically.

Privacy in the forest. The green jowar field. The man of her choice. How sweet the situation! Her father, Babu Rao Made, had left for Ahiri for the Dasara. Her mother knew what was happening but pretended ignorance. If father had come to know of it, there would be great fuss.

For Esru, that Dasara produced a bitter experience. A fattened goat was sent to Maharaj as presentation. As during every year, he heard the speech of Maharaj that he would work for the riddance of the forest officers, that he would strive for increase in their wages, that he would go to Delhi and fight with the higher ups there, and as such he should be elected again by casting their votes for him. The speech did not please Esru. Every year Maharaj

had been saying he was fighting for their cause. But there was no change in their lives. Esru was unhappy for having lost a good goat for a mere promise.

On the festival day another goat was killed. Will the mutton be sufficient? If Babu Rao Made returned there might be a lot of rumpus. Babu Rao may accuse him that he encouraged his son to entice his daughter to avoid paying bride money. There might be a big quarrel. If the quarrel was resolved how much arrack was required and how many more goats would be slaughtered?!

Though Esru was drinking the local toddy, his sorrow and pain at the thought did not leave him. To forget his worry, he started drinking more.

Moti brought pieces of meat fried in oil, brought by her on the assurance that the amount would be paid from the profits of the jowar crop. On such a festival day it was the custom of the gondas to eat together sharing their food whether cooked individually or collectively.

Esru looked up affectionately at his daughter. How beautiful Moti looked! He had got her face tattooed the other day with many dots. No one will have any objection to marry her! Why did the girl cry when she was being tattooed? What did she know, silly girl! He had brought some beads from the town. How bright were they shining in the light of the fires!

He made his daughter sit by him and made her drink the arrack by force.

A commotion was felt a little distance away. Everyone turned their heads that way. Babu Rao Made along with Anmanthu, their Patel and two others was approaching them as if for a quarrel.

They realised that they were late. Lakimbai was dancing with Esu without her blouse. They had come to take her away and on seeing her jumping with Esu they got terribly enraged. They

created a big fuss.

The priest of the gudem and Kurdu Patel brought about peace between the parties.

“There is not a bead! There is not a single saree! Nothing doing!” said Babu Rao.

The priest and Kurdu Patel assured Babu Rao that beads and sarees would be bought for Lakimbai after the harvest. It was decided to arrange the wedding feast also the next day.

Isru was very much agitated and worried. “Let us manage it during this festival today. Please ask the people of your gudem to join us to night” he suggested. But no one heeded him. They were fond of festivals. Would they let go such a wonderful opportunity?

Isru happily agreed to build a new hut for the newly weds. But he could not agree happily for the next day’s feast.

Isru had to bear the entire expenditure of the feast the next day. He would have to get two more goats and five measures of cow-gram. His debt with the shopkeeper for oil and salt would increase.

The celebration of the festival was a joyful one for Esu and more distressful to Isru.



It looked as though the entire gudem was fast asleep. Everyone had gone to work.

The jowar crop had reached home to stay for only a day. Much of it would go to the shopkeeper towards clearing the debts. It could be done the next day or a little later. They will not be lost. The hut for Esu should first be erected. Esru was in that task.

Four or five sturdy teak logs were fixed in the ground. The main beam was also of teak. Bamboo stalks were used as rafters.

Bamboo poles were fixed close to each other to make walls.

It was mid day. As the clouds cleared the sun was severe. Esru slumped having got tired and drank water brought to him by Lakimbai.

Moti and Lakimbai kept helping Esru doing this and that and were tired. They too relaxed on the front portion of the hut.

Esu left to cut the bamboos. The jowar stack was piled up beside the hut obstructing visibility.

When the forest officials made their appearance suddenly, Esru started to tremble. He did not know what to do. Lakimbai and Moti stood like statues.

The officials created havoc as usual saying that the trees were felled illegally. Isru fell at their feet.

The officers seized the arrack, drank to their fill, and behaved disrespectfully towards Lakimbai.

Anger, grief, helplessness overwhelmed Isru and the girls. Esru begged the officers to show mercy on him.

They imposed a fine of fifty rupees and gave him time for a few days. They warned him that if he failed to pay the fine within the stipulated time, they would deduct hundred rupees from the wages for bamboo cutting.

Esru collapsed holding his head not knowing what to do. Lakimbai could not bear the humiliation and Moti got stuck with extreme fear.

The wind remained motionless and still with rage. The trees stood still in a dignified silence.

The goats tethered to posts started bleating. The agonized cries of the animals reverberated in the forest.

The chief and landlord Raja Rao came just then with four

policemen as though being welcomed by the cries of the animals.

“The land you tilled is my land,” said Raja Rao and demanded his share of the harvest.

Isru fell into confusion. The forest officials said it was reserve forest and had imposed a fine of fifty rupees. What is this new situation?

He sent Moti away and sent for Kurdu. The shop keeper also came along with Kurdu and Isru’s heart missed a beat.

By evening all the gudem inhabitants gathered there. The chief asserted that the land being cultivated by nearly half of them belonged to him. They too were taken aback. The crop had come for harvest. What should be done? If they did not agree with him he would level a charge against them that they pilfered his crop and file a case in the court. They may have to go round the court for many years. The food that had reached their mouths slipped away. Kurdu also felt very much distressed.

Kurdu acted the mediator and made the chief accept a bag of jowar from each one of them. Raja Rao ordered the shopkeeper to collect the bags.

The shopkeeper measured the bag for the chief, another bag towards the coarse dhotis for the festival and one more towards the price of oil, salt and other sundry items for the marriage.

There were only two bags of jowar left. Some of the jowar had to be saved for seed. How will the rest of the grain be sufficient till the next crop? They could just manage by cooking gruel once a day as meal.

How carefully they had saved the crop from hogs, bears and other animals, from squirrels and birds like the eyelids guarding the eyes! There was no sleep. There was no comfort and happiness. How many hardships they had faced before getting the crop home? The crop was declared as not belonging to him before his

very eyes. He had yet to pay to forest officials fifty rupees. The shahukar, that is the shopkeeper, measured a quantity of grain that satisfied him and gave Isru fifty rupees.

Moti was crying. The shopkeeper shouted that he was not paid for nothing. Esu, in his anger, not able to control himself, pulled and threw things pell-mell in the new hut being built. The shopkeeper ignored all this and attended to his business and left. The jowar crop which he had guarded night and day from wild animals reached Raja Rao and the shopkeeper on carts. The fifty rupees reached the pockets of the forest officers through Kurdu. Isru was not left with tears also in his eyes to cry.



The glowing sun’s in the forest was cool like moonlight. The trees, grown sky high, covered the forest like an umbrella protecting the people from the sun. The entire forest seemed moving in the breeze. The leaves were dropping down now and then. The screeching of the crickets, the twittering of birds and the noise of the running squirrels were being heard here and there. The atmosphere in the forest ... in that breeze, was solemn like the forest itself.

“Stay here comrade”, said the commander to his sentry and walked towards the canal with five other members. The tank was nearby. They cleared the vessels in which they had cooked food. They drank water to their satisfaction and carried some for the sentry.

Their legs were aching. They had been walking for three days. They had each carried bundles weighting 25 kgs and walked fast. Among them Chinnanna had joined the dalam recently. He was strong willed but his body was not co-operating. He had not yet mastered the art of walking long distances. They had eaten food after long starving. They were feeling drowsy and sleepy.

The commander cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Comrades! We have crossed the borders of Andhra Pradesh and are in the forests of Maharashtra. The Ahiri, Sironcha and Yetapalli taluks are on either side.” Then he started describing the geographical and political features of the place.

“Comrade!” he called aloud looking at Chinnanna who was sleeping. Chinnanna woke up startled.

“Paddy, jowar, chillies, tobacco, anumus (cow-gram), green gram are the main crops. Adivasis in Sironcha, Netakamis and Ares are the main inhabitants here. The two castes have been included in the Harijan caste. Gonds and other also live scattered.

Many villages do not have electricity. There are a large number of wild animals also here. They create problems to us along with our enemies. The people living in these parts hesitate to kill the wild animals as they are afraid of the cases the forest officers foist on them. Only human beings have no safety here. If their cattle are killed by the wild animals the officers throw at them ten or twenty rupees and leave them.”

He stopped his narration and looked at Chinna to enquire whether he was listening. Chinnanna sat properly adjusting himself. He was free from the cloud of sleep. The commander started again.

“Cultivation has not yet reached this place. At other places jowar is grown for food.

Among the gonds here there are many tribes. Their life style is almost the same with minor differences. The gonds mainly depend on jowar gataka or jowar gruel.

In Asarelli, Borralagudem and the neighbouring places, along with the gonds, koya, mala, magida and gond castes also live in large numbers.

For all these people there is only one college in Sironcha. In Ankisa there is a school upto tenth class in Asaroli, Maddikunta,

Arada, Janampalli and Ganagamaru upto seventh class only. In other villages there are single teacher schools in records only.

In Ankisa and Sironcha there are hostels for students. In Ahiri there is the free hostel run by Dharmaraj. In Janaganur there is an Ashram school. The commander drew map lines on the earth with a stick showing canals, rivers, villages and roads in a detailed manner.

“The people here worship Pochamma, Mysamma, Ellamma goddess Lakshmi and other such deities. Next in importance to the Dasara celebration at the court of Ahiri Maharaj, the Mahankali Jatara is of note. It takes place in April every year. The celebration of this jatara takes place in Chintalarevu village adjoining Ankira. As the people do not have much work at this time of the year, many people take part in the Jatara.

We must first hit up contacts with Ahiri, Sironcha, Yetapalli, Alapalli, Bhooma Gond, Kishtapuram, Janaganur, Rameshgudem, Kammanuru and other villages around.

In these places though subjects are taught in Marathi medium, Hindi and Telugu are also taught. Many people here speak Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, Gotte, Koya languages along with their mother tongues. But no village has more than one or two literate persons.

The gonds wear their loin clothes tightly wrapped above their knees. They smoke cheroots rolled in tendu leaves filled with tobacco. Some tie scarves around their heads.

If any one wears a dhoti like a half lungi, we can identify them as Gottes. Women wear bead garlands / chains around their necks usually.” The commander described the dress habits and appearance of the people in great detail.

“The gonds have full work on their hands here. In the rainy season they harvest crops. Later they cut bamboo. In February

they collect mahuva flowers. Later they chop the branches of tendu trees and when they sprout leaves, pluck them. Though they have enough work, the wages are low. They are subjected to exploitation by the chiefs and officials. So their lives are no better than the gonds of Adilabad.

The girijans here brew their own mahuva arrack. The police commit atrocities on them making this an excuse. The government reforms and welfare measures do not reach these people. With the exception of Ashram schools and hostels, the controlled goods are knocked off by shopkeepers, chiefs and the sarpanchs.

In Ankisa, Asarelli, Pentipaka, Amrajam and other such villages there are tanks and pools. Paddy is grown there as a single crop. Borewells are being dug in recent times. Fifty paise for cattle and two rupees for a goat herd is collected as grazing charges. Though the herd is small, a goat has to be given to the person in charge as bribe. Now and then there are raids conducted and fines are collected. The girijans and the poor farm labourers are afraid of the men in white clothes as they are very innocent.

The people are highly superstitious. We may have to mix with them with great care" The commander thus gave them a complete and full picture of the place and the people. His followers listened to him with rapt attention. He gave them more information. Then they packed their belongings and left the place erasing all traces of their having camped there for a while.

They heard the sound of a thunderclap. The sentry looked up. There were no clouds. Perhaps it was the noise made by a lorry carrying bamboo poles on a forest road at a distance.

The commander warned his followers once again: "Comrades! Don't be absent minded thinking that we are in a deep forest where the enemy cannot enter, we should not reveal our presence to the enemy under any circumstances."

They reached a village by evening walking through the

forest.

Cool breeze was to blowing. They lit camp fires here and there. Holding the plate in one hand and eating with the other they started talking with the inmates of the gudem.

The commander could make out where Kurdu lived and met him. They conversed for a long time.

Within a short time Kurdu called all others. They came and sat around the fire in front of Kurdu's house. Kurdu introduced the visitors to the gudem people.

"To increase the wages for cutting bamboo, for the increase in the wages of plucking tendu leaves and to drive away our difficulties the god of gods himself has sent these people to us. They will live with us and eat with us hereafter" said Kurdu to the gathering.

Some looked at the newcomers suspiciously. Someone asked, "Did you meet Ahir Maharaj before coming here?"

Kurdu pacified them. "What did Maharaj say during Dasara a few days ago? "I will make the coolie wages increased by any means. If I cannot do so myself I will send someone," did he not tell us? Maharaj might have sent these people to us. It is not good to suspect people who have come for us from a far off place. Earlier everyone threatened us and lived happily. But these people are begging us. Mark that! Think of it. Can't they find food? Take a look at them. They all appear to be educated. They came to help us."

Esu got up from where he was sitting and sat by the side of one of the 'annas'. Esu looked up at him from top of bottom. He saw the gun in his hand. He looked at it in great excitement. The commander smiled at him in a friendly manner.

The smile of the commander made Esu lose some by his fear. "What is this?" Esu asked with great interest and curiosity. He

had seen such an object with the landlords and the chiefs. He could not believe his eyes seeing it with these people also.

“It is a gun” said the commander. He showed it to Esu. Lakimbai and Moti moved to Esu with curiosity. Everyone of them touched it, held it and turned it this way and that and were overwhelmed with joy.

Esru had covered the wound with leaves and old clothes so that the wound would not open up for the cold. The leaves had made the bandage look swollen and awkward. As the knot loosened, he tied it hard and asked.

“Can the wild hogs and boars be killed with it?”

“Yes. They can be killed. We can kill with this those who come to kill us,” said Chinnanna enthusiastically.

“Oh!”

All those gathered there touched the gun again and passed their hands on it with great love and affection.

On Kurdu’s suggestion each one of them brought some cooked gataka and gave the visitors. The meal for the gudem that night was chillies and gataka.

After eating they all resumed their conversation and went on talking till very late in the night.

Moonlight that covered the forest penetrated through the tree tops and spread itself all over the forest. All the huts in the goodem were bathed in the moonlight.

Esu, who felt he had found a way, could not sleep the whole night imagining strange things.

- *Arunatara Monthly, October, 1984*

## SAARAVVA AND FRIENDS

To

Dear Ramesh.

We discussed many things the other day till late in the night. After you left I began to think. New thoughts came up. How tricky is life! Life thinks differently from our thoughts. Not only in my case, things happening in your life also reveal how strong and powerful are social conditions. We congratulate you on your decision to give a new shape to your life with determination. We compliment you on speaking your mind without hesitation to think of marriage again at your age, whatever people may say. The woman who enters into your life at your age must be able to mix freely with the members of your family and friends and not remain only as a companion. This marriage should give her also a new life. It is not difficult for cultured people like you to find a wife, particularly to men like you. But for women who lost their husbands it is difficult to get a man. Your decision to give to such a woman a place in your life reveals your understanding of life.

..... Before you come to a decision it is my responsibility to give you an idea of their life style. I am placing before you the details you wanted as also their entire life. I thought this was necessary for you to give deep thought, get ready mentally and take a decision. I await your reply.

Yours,

Vidyadhara Rao.



Ramesh garu, I will commence their story from the beginning. His name is Ashayya. You might have seen him. He wears the dhoti above his knees and puts on a white vest. He used to walk about in fields singing songs. He would eat the cold rice he had brought sitting under a tree, drink water from the step-well and collect in his basket dried cow dung for making cakes.

You might have seen his wife's sister Saravva also. She would find some excuse to go to the place where her brother-in-law takes his bath. Ashayya would not feel satisfied unless he dived into the barber's well under the mango tree and swim in it. When he dived into the well from above his loin cloth would fly off his body in the breeze.

"Ptch! Brother-in-law has no shyness!" Saravva would shout on such occasions having seen his nakedness "I lost all shyness when my mother washed my bottom when I was a little boy", he would say and dive again into the well.

He would make fun of her saying "What else will she do, one who cannot swim?" Saravva had a lot of self-respect and pride. "Is it only you who could swim? I learnt it long ago" she would say, tie up her short skirt above her knees and jump into the step-well. Her skirt would open up like an umbrella and expose her thighs which had no undergarment.

"What happened to your shyness, you girl...." Asayya would say clapping. "My shyness too left me when I was a child" she would say, dive into the water, pinch his thigh and run away. She would then fill her mouth with water and spray it on him. He would then splash water on her with his hands. Those who had gone to the well for a bath would look at the two and laugh at them. Then Saravva would quietly leave the place with an innocent face.

As they grew in age their hearts came closer but the distance

increased physically between them. Saravva hesitated lonely meetings with him. But in the company of others she freely indulged in her tricks. She could not compete with him in studies and stopped at the seventh class. Her responsibilities at home increased putting an end to her studies. Ashayya continued his studies while doing all the work he had to perform. He too had his problems and his studies stopped now and then but started again.

Ashayya's father was working as a farm hand with the Patel Ram Reddy. When Ashayya went to the Patel's house along with his father, the young man was entrusted with some work. The Patel did not like Ashayya to be the classmate of his daughter Malathi in the school. He tried to stop away the studies of Ashayya in the fifth class and take him into his work to take care of his cattle. But his father was keen on educating his son.

When Ashayya came up to the ninth class he had to stop his studies. One year passed and Ashayya pestered his parents saying he would study. He was afraid that his studies would not progress if he continued to live in the village. He collected his caste certificate, went to the taluq centre and got admitted in the social welfare hostel. He fell one year behind Malathi in studies.

Ashayya passed the tenth class in the supplementary exam and joined the Intermediate course. By then Malathi was ahead of him by two years. His friends too had failed twice and joined him in the college which gave him some consolation.

As Ashayya failed in the Inter exams. Saravva's father Pochalu suggested that he should marry and Ashayya liked the idea very much. But his father opposed it saying he cannot feed two mouths. Ashayya got disappointed but managed to pass Intermediate and got admitted in the degree college. By then Malathi completed her degree course.

Ashayya used to meet Malathi to take old books from her.

Patel Ram Reddy did not like Ashayya meeting his daughter. So Ashayya went to the Patel's house in his absence. Malathi entertained mischievous thoughts and wanted to tease Ashayya when they were alone and did so with his body and mind in the presence of Saravva.

Since their childhood Malathi had no respect for Ashayya. She looked down on him as the son of their farm hand. She learnt swimming from Ashayya saying that Saravva was teaching her how to swim. In the presence of Saravva Malathi used to treat Ashayya as the son of their farm hand.

Though Ashayya was his nephew. Saravva's father Pochaiiah tried to find a groom for his daughter. Her father was worried that if Ashayya refused to marry Saravva for some reason after his education. where will he find a groom for his grown up girl? But Saravva kept refusing the matches that came her way. "Will you marry Ashayya?" her relatives asked her and she twisted her month.

"Is he only the one available for me to marry? He has no shyness and no manners. He bathes in the presence of women without his shirt on. He does not bother to turn aside when women pass him by as he answers his calls of nature. He does the same when he pisses. He has other habits which I cannot appreciate. I will not marry such a man "she would tell her relatives".

Ashayya had Saravva in his thoughts from his boyhood. When she collected her skirt or saree up her knee and got into work, men also could not match her. She was well-built and good looking. Once Ashayya pulled her by hand when there was none around. She twisted her mouth, looked daggers at him and left the place in a huff. Ashayya was afraid that she would report it to his parents. But she did not reveal it to anyone. Nor did she stop acting as the go-between between Ashayya and Malathi.

Once the three went to the fields. Saravva left them both under a tree and went away. Malathi treated Ashayya with contempt and he got confused and felt shy. She later had her way with him at home when alone and started playing with him as she liked.

Saravva who should have been Ashayya's wife, acted as the go-between and guarded them from taunts from others. She did not reveal to anyone her agony as she was growing in age. She was given in marriage to a stranger. She neither rejected or accepted the offer. She was married to one Venkataiah who was in a similar situation like Saravva.

Ashayya continued his studies. Saravva had two children. Alliances were being considered for Malathi. In the meanwhile she completed M.A. and also B.Ed.,

Ashayya got involved in student union activities. He could manage to get into different courses for the sake of scholarship. He was worried that his time was being wasted in student union activities when he was inclined to study well. But the temptation of the respect student politics gave him could not keep him away from such activities.

His marriage with Lakshmi was celebrated in the year he secured a job. Malathi also secured a job and she too got married. Her husband Raja Reddy was a Sub-Inspector of police

Malathi's father Ram Reddy left his village and settled down in the taluk headquarters. His son, Malathi's brother, was made a toddy contractor as he went on failing in his intermediate. Saravva's husband stopped going to his wife. It was said he joined the Naxals.

On the plea of searching for Venkataiah, Raja Reddy raped Saravva along with other constables. This action created panic in the village. Saravva took her children away to her mother's place.

Malathi could not reconcile to the fact that her husband raped Saravva. Her reaction turned mechanical towards him. He symbolised a blood-stained sickle. His strong grip made her feel she was herself being raped. The feeling continued. Whenever she remembered the days she spent with Ashayya in her early life freely and happily, she felt she had lost something now.

Saravva and Ashayya visited Malathi's house learning that Raja Reddy had arrested Venkataiah. Raja Reddy felt inconvenient when he learnt that his wife Malathi and Saravva were friends. But he could not help as he said the case had gone to the superiors. Venkataiah was jailed. Malathi could only see that Venkataiah was not snuffed out.

Raja Reddy wanted Malathi to give up her job but she refused. Ashayya was encouraging his wife Lakshmi to pass exams and work. Ashayya wanted Saravva also to study and she would say it was not possible with her children and her coolie work. "Educated as you are, if you had married me. I wouldn't have faced these difficulties," she would say with a sad smile.

He was tempted to ask her whether she would agree to live with him but kept quiet as her husband was a naxalite. She could understand the feelings of Ashayya and would answer him with her eyes. "Even if we live together. I would not be your wife. Why think of it then?" she would ask.

Malathi who went to her brother's house for delivery sent for Ashayya. Ram Reddy, her father, was not that haughty now but had not lost his foxy looks. He would talk nicely to Ashayya. "I will sell two acres of my land. Why don't you buy them?" he would ask smiling. Ashayya could not guess what the words meant. The old man would again say "It will help your younger brother to live happily." Ashayya's brother stopped his studies with ninth class and settled as a mason. Saravva's younger sister was given in marriage to him. Narayana was able to live a decent

life of course. Though the suggestion made by Ram Reddy was good the Naxals were obstructing buying or selling the land. Ashayya was happy at the prospect of making a part of the land their own which was taken care of by his father throughout his life. If only the transaction took place he would get the satisfaction of having bought Ram Reddy himself. But he was not sure what share he would get out of it and he postponed the entire issue not willing to get involved with the naxalites.

Malathi opened up her heart to Ashayya when there was no one around. "I want to divorce my husband. I can't get on with him any longer." Ashayya was shocked beyond words. Would she ask him to marry her? Who would invite problems from the police? If he married her will not Raja Reddy shoot him down as he would a bird and call it an 'encounter'? What about Malathi's child to be born? What about his life? What about the society? Ashayya was very much confused and worried.

Malathi looked directly into Ashayya's eyes. She missed the innocence of the earlier times in his eyes. She saw the man in him now. In earlier days she did not find that quality in him. She loved the womanliness in him. In those days she was the manly woman. He was the woman. That was their relationship then. Now she did not see the woman she wanted in his eyes. He was now a man like all men. His job and his experience in life gave him back self-confidence which his caste had usurped. Now he is a manly man. Malathi could not easily accept this change in him. What she had desired from Ashayya was not this manliness. He was no longer the Ashayya of the olden days. She decided that she did not need him any longer. But her heart had given way and the words blurted out.

"Why do you think so? Though your husband draws a little less salary than you, he enjoys a better status in life than you. Money is in plenty, comfort is great." He thought that her husband was stronger than himself but did not express it. But he stressed

the last part of his sentence spoken by him.

"Do you think Saravva enjoyed being raped by him? Was it happiness?" Malathi shouted forgetting herself and her desire to change the topic.

Ashayya startled at Malathi's outburst and looked round wondering whether anyone was near them. He tried to console her but she broke down sobbing when he tried to pacify her.

"Ashayya, I want to call you again 'arai'. I feel that I should have my Asigadu of the earlier times. I thought then of using you for my purpose but now I realise that it was true love. My caste did not permit me to say this to you in those days. Can you become again my Asiga of olden days? I will keep away from my husband or I will try to adjust some how for your sake. I want to give birth to your son. I want my Asigadu of the past. I want those happy and mischievous experiences."

Asigadu experienced passion as well as fear. He sweated. Her remembered the injustice he did to Saravva while he enjoyed life with Malathi. He wondered how much Saravva must have suffered without support from him while Malathi who had everything was herself feeling disappointed and experiencing sorrow. He had done great wrong to Saravva in his innocence and half knowledge. Did he get attracted by Malathi's caste? Did he yield because of her status and job? Or did he love Malathi truly? If he loved Malathi with all his heart, what about Saravva? Ashayya fell into depression and agony again.

"Why did you come to this conclusion at all? Perhaps it may give happiness if one recollected past actions as mere memories of the days of innocence" said Ashayya who had reconciled himself to circumstances.

"Shall I tell you the truth? In the early days of marriage I used to see you in him. I even thought that you were him. But he could not replace you. His individuality was of a different kind.

I do not see you in him any longer. Hearing about the tortures he subjected those in the police lock-up, I was afraid that he would put me also to similar torture if he knew about us. On hearing his sexual assaults on women I felt he was a dog that relished leftovers. I also felt that my body had lost its sanctity because of his promiscuity. Whenever we had union all his women used to be recollected by me. I felt I was also being raped. As a matter of fact those few minutes with him are happy moments indeed. But the feeling does not last long. I cannot live with him."

Ashayya began to wonder for the first time how he would feel if his wife Lakshmi had pre-marital relationship with other men just as Malathi had with him. That thought made him feel confused and worried. He realised that his entertaining hopes on Saravva and Malathi was wrong.

Was his latest thinking messed up? He was thinking that he had done wrong only to feel that his wife was chaste. If he accepted that his wife too might have had similar love affairs like him, then he had done no wrong. His present craving was not also wrong. Was anyone taking a dig at him? Was he seeking their bodies in the name of love?

He was not being deceived by his mind. His heart knew that he was loving all the three. But will the society accept this? Will he be able to believe or accept the idea if Lakshmi, his wife, tells him that she was in love with three men with equal passion like Droupadi? If he believed in her words can he accept her as his wife?

Malathi was delivered of her daughter. She stayed on in her mother's house giving some excuses. Ram Reddy was pestering Ashayya to buy his land, but his brother Narayana was with the naxalites. Ashayya took up the propagation of Ambedkar Associations. His wife Lakshmi was working in a private school.

The raids of the police on the house of Saravva commenced

with the release of Venkataiah from the jail. Venkataiah gradually distanced himself from the party. Saravva shivered at the sight of the police recollecting the tortures and rape by them. She said that they should leave the village and Venkataiah agreed. After they took shelter in the Taluka centre, Raja Reddy located them. Saravva yielded to him. But when he lost face among the police personnel for Saravva being his mistress, he left her. Venkataiah was happy at Raja Reddy's riddance but a head-constable who had taken part in the rape started black-mailing them. Venkataiah used to flee from his house when the constable visited the house, afraid of his life and the tortures. Saravva's life became one of extreme misery as another policeman also joined the head constable. They took her to many places and closed the doors on her with strangers inside. Not able to face these atrocities she threw her children into a well and jumped into it herself. The children died but she survived. She was put in the jail after she recovered.

In the jail, a woman naxalite and a killer woman who had murdered her husband not being able to undergo the torture of her in-laws, were her companions. Venkataiah did not try to obtain bail for his wife. He did not realise that his wife had to suffer because of him. On the other hand he started blaming her saying that she had two children by Ashayya before her marriage with him.

Saravva grew numb hearing the accusation. The two other inmates of the jail tried to console her. She had loved Venkataiah with all her heart. Sharada, the naxalite prisoner revealed that she was arrested and jailed because she refused the advances of a particular person. She wanted that the three of them should join the party and see the end of that person, without being afraid of men whoever they were.

Suseela who killed her husband, laughed at Sharada's narration of the torture by the police. The torture she had

undergone at the hands of her in-laws were worse. If an enemy hits us, we become stone-hearted and forget the beatings. If the man to whom one has given one's heart beats, the heart gets hurt. The enemy can only torture the body but not the heart. But the situation is different when it is the man himself to whom one has given the heart. To Sharada this revelation sounded strange as she had been brought up with great love. Saravva reacted with a sad smile as she had known both kinds of torture.

Ashayya tried to bail out Saravva on the advice of his friends. "What should I do coming out of the jail?" asked Sarvva point blank.

Saravva was all alone in the world now Her husband, whom she loved with loyalty, destroyed her life. She had killed her children to whom she had given birth. She had no support anywhere. The more Ashayya tried to console her, the more she cried.

"It is education that distanced you from me. If you had given up studies, we would have married. If I had been a little educated, we would have been married. If I had been educated would you have been attracted towards Malathi?" sobbed Saravva.

It was not clear to Ashayya whether his closeness with Malathi was because of education. Or was it only Saravva's assessment? He asked Saravva to write to him now and then and left some money in her account in the jail.

Saravva told him that she would study in the jail.

Her jailmates complimented Saravva for her question. They thought that Ashayya might have planned a love affair with her as he had asked her to stay with Malathi.

Raja Reddy decided to marry again after divorcing Malathi. Malathi wanted to meet the girl who was going to marry Raja Reddy. If she met the bride, naturally she might speak out the

truth about her husband and thus destroy the girl's happiness. She dismissed the idea of attending the marriage also for it may create problems in the marriage pandal.

The past will have its influence on our lives without reference to the present. The past of Saravva was haunting her present. Ram Reddy had thought that he could command his future but his past was haunting him now. He was not in a position to guide his son or daughter to lead a particular kind of life. He now became a refugee, living here and there, avoiding the naxals. His son was doing toddy business and he was afraid that he would be attacked if his father was with him. He saw to it that his father did not stay with him by inventing stories. Ram Reddy was afraid of Narayana, Ashayya's younger brother. The old man had distributed dreams thinking that Narayana joined the naxals to take revenge on him.

But Narayana did not create problems for Ram Reddy and lived away from him. After he left the naxals he had to take part in politics as his relations on both sides did not allow him to remain idle. He got elected as a sarpanch. The party did not like it. Narayana wanted to break the family history of Ram Reddy becoming Sarpanchs one after the other. His past good record, even with the naxals, helped Narayana. But the past of Venkataiah made him run away to Arab countries. But, the past of Saravva branded her as a prostitute in the present.

Ashayya was pained at Malathi's lonely life with her daughter, though she was economically independent. He felt guilty that because of him she had to lead such a life. But in the case of Saravva, the society punished her cruelly and tortured her for mistakes she had not committed.

Just as he washed himself clean of his caste to some extent, could he not clean the consequences which resulted from his caste? Narayana, his brother, could mould his past to favour him in the present. Could it be possible for Saravva to bring about

such a change? Was it possible for him also to achieve it?

A life devoid of the quality of forgiveness turns a man into a mean person and makes him cruel. A society that cannot forgive a person who had converted himself into a pious man having been burnished with the flame of repentance and wants to lead a new life, is a cruel society. If the society acts in the opposite way the person would feel that repenting itself was bad. There are no new lives available somewhere for man. Forgiveness and repentance create new lives. If there is a chance for those who erred in life knowingly or unknowingly to start a new life, the people and the society and human relations grow to great heights of human glory. Saravva, Sharada and Suseela will lead a glorious life of rebirth if the society gives them a chance to reconstruct their lives? How many men come forward to help their lives. How many men come forward to help them achieve their goal? It is easy to talk of ideals. When it comes to putting in practice personally the ideals, their guilt covered lives will be exposed. For the three women mentioned above an idle life of gossip and easy food was quite new. The jail appeared to them like paradise. It was a life of glorious achievement for them. Who knows how much the jail life changed and moulded their individuality and personalities? Perhaps a wonderful chapter of a new society was being written by them in the book of their lives in the jail.

Ashayya's new experiences were of a different nature. Saravva, Sharada and Suseela had to win back their lives. But Ashayya was feeling dissatisfied with the life he had won and what he had achieved. As he toured places establishing Ambedkar Associations and agencies to fight for citizens' rights, he was subjected to dejection and disappointment. He felt that the people around him lived a life which did not belong to them just as his own life was not the one that belonged to him. People were craving for a new life. What were the forces that were obstructing the chances to the society to improve – was it selfishness? caste?

economics? A culture that did not like change? or the habits to which lives had got used to? Was it the governmental machine? Was it the party in power and bureaucracy? Or did all these work together? It was a confusing picture for him.

How happy was childhood! How exciting was the period of boyhood when nothing was known with any clarity! Will happiness evaporate as experience grows? Knowledge of things does not allow the enjoyment of happiness. It grows into ego and haunts a person like a shadow. A little knowledge creates ambition as big as a mountain. Ambition changes into disappointment and creates dejection. Disappointment which denies ambition, makes life heavy, as heavy as a mountain. It shrinks and converts the youthful stimulation into old age blues. For dalit women like Saravva the karma theory gave them only unqualified disappointment. For higher castes it gave hopeful disappointment. Ashayya got into the second category of people. The life of Saravva and Suseela in the jail provided them with disappointment which had no hope. The sap in their lives got dried up lacking the fertile soil called forgiveness and mercy and ended up their lives in a dry sand bed.

Despair is like a woman in advanced pregnancy. One should know how to enjoy the experience even in despondency like a pregnant woman. It gives birth to a new life. It gives rise to new happiness. Hope is an imagination. Hope is beautiful. Disappointment is a fact. Disappointment proceeds towards imagination from fact and reveals how imagination cannot be accepted as a fact. Hope reveals the path for the forward movement. Disappointment reveals the distance of the goal. Hope reveals the aim or target to be reached. Disappointment reveals the condition of the inability to reach the target. Disappointment removes the haughtiness involved in reaching the target. It commences the ideal of higher target of life again. The three women discussed among themselves many such

propositions..... haven't many books that enlighten minds been written from jails by prisoners! It is only in a jail one finds the time, concentration and freedom to delve deep into the layers of society, the three women thought. Ashayya did not know that the three women were thinking over matters in the jail which he was himself thinking by being in the outside world. The court disappointed Saravva's desire to live a free and happy life in the jail by releasing her for want of evidence. Sharada also was bailed out by some unknown members of her party, by standing surety. She too moved into the common flow of life. Suseela who first rejected the surety offered by her father accepted it and came out of the jail.

The three women had made an accord that they should live together once they came out of the jail. They wanted to work as a team. Having faced the bossism of men, they wanted to establish a women's association. They wanted to dedicate themselves to the society creating a new awareness like the Buddhist bikhus of the olden days. But once they came out, their pious resolutions could not be put into practice. Saravva and Suseela went back to their lives. Though they had said 'yes' to Sharada in the jail to her proposal while in confinement, they realised soon that their typical love of life will not leave them free so quickly.

Saravva who wanted to put an end to her life by jumping into a well was now a changed woman. The influence of Sharada made Saravva to join the 'dalam' and die again for it. She felt that it was far better to die for a cause than just die for nothing. But now she differed from the very idea of dying – cause or no cause. Why she should die at all. Hope- disappointment - target - goal - the discussion on these and higher values made her love life than love death.

Those who have been defeated in life may get ready to die with a feeling of scorn and a feeling of self sacrifice. If new hopes and aims assure the winning back of life - then do such people

love life having decided to die or do they love death in the form of disappointment and indifference? Do the people belong to this stage - those who come prepared to sacrifice their life, work for some time and then leave. If that is the case will people retreat from the 'dalam' once the restrictions are removed? Will not this recruitment go on if there are no restrictions? Sharada started entertaining these doubts after she met Saravva and Suseela. She put before the party her doubts hesitatingly. They laughed her doubts away and wanted to know whether she too wanted to leave them and lead her life like Saravva and Suseela. She was hurt to the quick when they ridiculed her. She realised that there would be peace and respect if some ideas were not spoken out. So she took to silence. But she knew that there was some truth hidden in Saravva's contention.

Saravva started thinking of her future life as if moving from her in-laws, village to her sister's, then to Malathi's, and later to Suseela's and to Ashayya's houses. Why should not women lead the life of a Buddhist bickshus and Sanyasins without hopes and disappointments, without marriage and children? Ashayya said that if women turn into Buddhist bikshus mankind will perish. Was not this argument defective? Why should women marry? Why should they give birth to children? Why should they give joy to men? What the society needs now is the new Buddhist revolution as Ambedkar had declared. Ashayya agreed with this contention along with Malathi. But he differed from their idea that this revolution was possible through the association of women Buddhist bikhus, from the angle of women's liberation movement. When they said that he would have known what it was if he had been born a woman, he bowed his head with a smile accepting his defeat. So these two women took Suseela in Ashayya's place. The threesome used to meet and discuss among themselves different aspects and points. Those questions drew Ashayya also into the discussion.

But now why should they be living at all? Malathi has to live looking after her daughter. They two do not have that opportunity now. Anyway what does life mean? Do what they know is life? Should women's life be like theirs in general? In the jail they created for themselves a new society, a new life. How good it would be if they could commence their noble life in the present society?

"Then we have to leave the old known society and commence an unknown new society at a different place. How is it possible for a woman like me who has a job? I will lose my service seniority. The financial problems will pull us down in the new place. It is difficult to earn such a decent salary in a new place, explained Malathi. "It is a wonderful chance for women like you who do not have a secure life," concluded Malathi.

"Why should I enter into a new society at all? That is what Sharada also said - about going into a new society called the party and changing the old society into the new one. I oppose this. Why should I go into a new society? Why should we not try to change the same society by leading a new life being in the old society? Why should not the society change in this manner? I do not know how the new society will accept a woman like me who has none to support her," said Saravva.

"If we had commenced our new life from our childhood itself, I wonder how it would have shaped itself," philosophised Ashayya.

"Then would you have married Saravva or Malathi?" asked Suseela a direct question.

Ashayya got confused. The difficulties of the past look beautiful when remembered. If they face the same difficulties again - "I don't want those difficulties. I don't want that childhood" that is what many would say. Saravva smiled at Ashayya. Saravva there, Malathi here and then Lakshmi - Ashayya was not able to

decide and felt confused. Saravva laughed heartily at his discomfiture. She laughed and laughed. "Even if we start afresh from our childhood, our lives will be no different". Malathi said in all seriousness.

"Why do you say so?" asked Ashayya is surprise. He was happy that the question whom he would have married got side-stepped. Malathi observed this and said, "because this society has not changed we cannot but play our parts. In the society in which we live in the present circumstances none of us can act differently. It is impossible. For example if you had married Saravva, in the family struggle you would not have been able to continue your studies. Even if I had eloped with you, your studies would have got terminated. You would have sold all my jewels and finally would have accused me saying I had brought you all the problems. You would have been doing some odd jobs," said Malathi.

One day Saravva went to meet Malathi and saw Ashayya there. She thought that she had gone there at the wrong time and turned back. Malathi observed this and brought back Saravva scolding her that she should not have suspected her. Malathi managed the situation with skill and the three got into the old spirit. They joked on old memories. Suseela joined them a little later.

"Whatever you say, don't you agree that I sacrificed in giving you away my bava!" said Saravva smiling but in all seriousness.

The feeling that she sacrificed her life for bava and Malathi kept her going as an optimist. Malathi could not guess that Saravva's life would collapse if she knew that it was not true.

"Your caste and your economic condition did not permit you to pursue your studies. My caste did not allow me to elope with Ashayya. It was his education that brought you and me close to him and also distanced us. If your bava had not been so highly

educated and grown in status, you would not have loved him so dearly. Even if you had loved him, you would have forgotten him as you could forget Venkataiah. Perhaps I too. Ashayya's education and his job made us love him dearly and created a great problem for us. You had to sacrifice bava only because of the caste in which you were born. It was a social evil and necessity. The part played by your sacrifice in this case is very little. Even if you had not been there, by taking the help of some other woman, I would have loved your bava - think of it," concluded Malathi.

Saravva felt depressed with this contention. She fainted suddenly. She could not stand the theory explained by Malathi which at one harsh stroke uprooted the tree of her love. Malathi realised late that whether rightly or wrongly the feeling that she sacrificed herself for them both was keeping up Saravva's spirits. Suseela was shocked that Sharada's theory of sacrifice which gave new life to them should have been shattered in Saravva's case.

Faith is stronger than facts. Ashayya wondered that Saravva had such a delicate heart, who externally appeared stubborn. It was her self respect that was keeping her alive though Saravva lost everything in life. Malathi destroyed that self-respect. Saravva suffered from pain in the stomach suddenly again.

She recovered after a week but could not smile happily as before. She could not look directly into Malathi's eyes. Malathi did not reveal to Saravva the information the lady doctor gave that there was some problem with the uterus of Saravva. The doctor expressed fear that it might turn out into cancer. Saravva herself noticed that the white discharge which started in the jail was showing up as pain in the stomach which was growing. Saravva's old ideals and the old plans were blown away as in a storm. Though Malathi did not treat her as a servant maid, that was her position Saravva enjoyed in her house. She held on till she mastered tailoring and Saravva left for the place of her birth, to her sister whose husband was the Sarpanch.

Saravva lived carrying on the job of a tailor, playing and singing with the children forgetting her past. In the meanwhile she was selected as an Anganwadi teacher. Her life got settled now and she started doing justice to her job as also to her profession of tailoring.

Suseela wrote to Saravva that a match was suggested for her and that the man had three children and had undergone vasectomy. Saravva met Suseela. Next day Sharada suddenly made her appearance there. The three had a nice time in the house of Suseela's relatives. Sharada told them that she had come there for some treatment. Her face was glowing and she looked healthy though she had thinned a little.



"Did you marry again?" asked Saravva. Malathi wondered how she could guess the possibility. She nodded in the affirmative with a smile. "I think he is a good man. What more do you want if you get a husband, who accepts your word? Is he highly educated and cultured?" asked Suseela complimenting Malathi.

"He is not an educated man. He belongs to the family of gonds. But as you said he obeys his wife and what else is wanted? He has a good heart but the heart cannot speak..... By the by, shall I find a good husband for you also?" asked Sharada laughing heartily.

Saravva and Suseela kept silent for a few moments Sharada changed the topic and fell into gossip. "The party also felt unhappy for the injustice you suffered after I told them," said Sharada.

"Sharada, don't you know I cannot go in for college education like you? Our elders say we should search where we lost. I lost my life in my caste and village where I was born and bred. I will win back my life there," said Saravva.

"So you want to say that you would be called the Mother

Theresa of your place."

"Don't compare me with such great personalities. Malathi told me that the post of the Sarpanch of our village is being reserved for women. 'Why don't you win the favour and love of the people? she asked. I am giving thought to it.'"

"You may win the hearts of the people and secure a job. But can you find a new husband?"

"My mind got disgusted with that thought. What little hopes I had, Malathi shattered them by telling facts. I am now living comfortably. People respect me and my life forgetting the past. I have nothing to do with forests and other places. Because I am trying to be the winner where I lost. You have lost nothing in your life. If you have any problems like that live with your friends and relatives in the same place like me and win back your life. I don't find a greater revolution than this including life. Because of your mercy, you know that I am no longer a coward."

Sharada could not keep up an argument with Saravva who was by far older than her. She knew the difficulties Saravva had gone through in life and the tears. There must be an iota of truth in her decision. Such was the respect she had for Saravva.

They were in conversation and suddenly Saravva twisted with severe pain in the stomach. She was taken to the doctor and after resting for a week Suseela took Saravva to Malathi's house and left her there. Four days later Sharada left.

Ashayya shed tears at Saravva's condition. Lakshmi, Ashayya's wife, invited Saravva to stay with them. "Let your regard for me remain so," said Saravva with tears in her eyes, though with a smile. "Elope with your bava, sister, I won't misunderstand you" joked Lakshmi to make light the atmosphere. 'Shall we really elope,' Ashayya said for fun. His eyes were moist with tears.

Malathi objected Ashayya's words. "Even if she has no husband and manly help she is happy with her individuality. She has proved how a woman can stand on her own legs and how we can triumph in our lives. Why do you talk as though we need your companionship and your support, as though a woman cannot live without male company.... why do you say that you could elope now? Do you want to pull us down with your male superiority?" asked Malathi smiling.

Saravva looked at Malathi appreciatingly at her words. Suddenly Saravva fell unconscious with her pain in her stomach. When she regained her consciousness, she took Ashayya close to her whispering 'come to me once, bava,' and kissed him with all her heart shedding tears of joy.

"When you are all supporting me, what more do I want? This is enough for my life" she said folding her hands looking at them all.



Saravva's uterus was surgically removed and her life took a fresh start. In course of time there was a change in her name and surname. Now she is called 'Sarpanch Sarekka' with great love.



Ramesh garu! The Ashayya of this story is myself. If you marry Saravva you will be setting an ideal example for many. Saravva can take care of your children as her own children. If you marry Malathi she will quickly get adjusted to your life. If you marry Suseela, you would have made known that all men are not bad. Even though they had faced problems and had their experiences, their hearts are as clear as a white cloth. If you marry anyone of them you would have made their lives also blossom forth. Myself and they await your decision.

Your, Vidyadhara Rao.

- *Andhra Jyoti weekly, October 1997.*

## WAR AND PEACE

### DAKSHA YAGNAM\*

"Sir, I am Pentaiah. Yes, alias Praveen, sir.

"My life is smoke filled. There is no fire in this life now. This body will not be converted into ashes. The hut of my life has completely been smoke filled. The cow-dung cakes used for cooking food have filled the house with smoke. Look at my hands, sir. Look at the holes, sir. For a little light as small as a glow, my entire house has been filled with smoke. My body is not fit for the cremation ground. It is not fit to live in the house. I have lost all desire and hope on this, my life! sir. What has been left in this body, in this life, sir! ...

"You felt pity for me to-day but by the time you could feel pity for me, my heart went dry. My land also went dry. My life itself became dry. My pain has also got dried up. Even if I cry, there are no tears in my eyes. I have no language to speak. You got pity on me now, sir.

"You ask me now to tell you what happened. The mistake is not yours, sir. The mistake was mine. It was a mistake on my part to get caught into your hands. It is a mistake for me to be in a situation to answer you and a mistake for you to be in a position to ask me questions. My heart craved for justice and invited problems and difficulties. That was the mistake. I fell athinking

\* *Daksha had celebrated the marriage of one of his daughters with Lord Shiva. Once Lord Brahma was performing a yagna, a long process involving a religious sacrifice. Daksha went to witness it. Lord Shiva was present there but did not care for Daksha which hurt Daksha. Later Daksha himself performed a yagna. In this story the author hints that the people of Telangana have themselves to act to achieve their goal.*

and got disgusted with life. I wanted to die but could not and fell into your hands. That was the mistake. I could not tell the truth and invited trouble. There was no mistake on your part, sir.

The mistake is not yours. You have many things to do once you wake up in the morning. You have many holidays. You could find time now to listen to my problems. I am not an actor to cry when you want me to cry, sir. Even before you wanted to hear me, feeling pity for me, my cry got dried up, sir.

You could find time to hear my case exactly after two years and three months. In the meanwhile my father wondered what this life was and cried. He cried and cried and died. He died even before you could release me on bail. The dead body of my father got putrified remaining in our house for two days waiting for the cremation and then you passed orders for my bail.

On that day you sent me to the jail without looking at my face. Do you remember that, sir? You did not ask me that day whether I had anything to say. If you had asked me on that day, your dictation papers would have faced the fate a stone gets when thrown into muddy slush. At that time my heart was muddy and slushy and if any one wanted to touch it, it would have splashed mud on them. You know what pain is. You know what life is. If you had not known what the pain of your life was, without asking me then, why do you ask me now, sir?

You know everything sir. Knowing everything you want me to make me talk and reveal everything. You want to hear about my life through my words. You want my life to be narrated again. I cannot create stories. It was true that I wanted to die. If you want me to tell you the reasons, when a man's heart has dried up, if not philosophically, how else one can narrate it with pain and suffering, sir?

The reason is, as time passes the necessities are lost and experiences alone remain, sir. The details of the experiences

disappear but continue as attitudes. It cannot be known now whether those symbols are the correct visions of life. If we want to know them, we may have to go into the details. We may have to convert the thoughts and attitudes into experiences again. It will be like creating again the culture of the ancient times for the sake of making a historical film. It is a difficult proposition, sir.

If you don't mind, I want to ask you a question. You got me taken to your house on that day at half past eight in the night. We were made to stand outside as you were eating your supper. You came out wiping your mouth with a napkin and sat in a sofa. The policeman who took me to you gave you some papers. I do not know whether you read them through or not but you signed them. You saw me from a distance. Then you went in. That night the police took me away and put me in the same lock-up.

That day when I was presented before you, it was half past eight in the night on twenty third September. There was a cold wind blowing. There was no power. It was raining. That night what curry did you eat sir? How many morsels of food did you eat sir? How many steps did you take from the dining table to see me, sir? Did you move the right foot or the left foot first before you walked towards me? At what time in the night did the servant-maid leave your house? At what time did your dog with white fur go to sleep? That night there was cold breeze blowing and it was raining. There was no power supply. When the ceiling fan stopped whirling how many mosquitoes bit you sir?

You may be able to calculate these and tell me but I cannot narrate the problems and difficulties I suffered; sir. I can tell you for how many days I breathed in the smell of urine in the lock up. I can tell you what kind of food was served to me in the lock-up. I can tell you why cases were levelled and on how many people. But I cannot tell you why I wanted to die. When there are umpteen reasons to die every day, which reason and which day can be remembered, sir?

If you want to tell me in one word, I can tell you, sir. My poverty is the reason for my death. It is said that Lord Brahma was tempted to eat a lamb when he saw it. 'Everyone wants to cut me into pieces and eat me thought the lamb'. It appears the lamb requested Lord Brahma to find a way for it to live. Lord Brahma smiled and said to the lamb that on seeing it and observing its mildness, he himself was tempted to eat it. Our lives are like the life of the lambs. It is not only to the tiger but also for fellow men, when they see us, they feel like cutting us into pieces and eat us.

It would be good if we are cut down and eaten away fully. Just as the nerve is cut and left like that... they drain all our blood out... till all our desires are completely lost. Our lives are cut a little and we are left in that condition, sir. You thought you were sending me to the jail to give me life. It looks as though the law has been made that we should not die so that, we can live. But do you know sir, that your merciful and generous heart is killing us keeping us alive?

Why do you think that I was taken to your house in the night after eight keeping me in the lock-up for seven days? Why did they not take me next day to the court? If I had been taken to the court, they were afraid that I would reveal everything in my agony. They subjected me to hellish torture for seven days in the lock-up. They beat me again saying that I should not reveal to you that I wanted to die because of the tortures of the police. My people could not bear the torture of the police and paid them three thousand rupees by borrowing the money. Okay, forget all that sir. I will tell the actual story briefly....



"We are four children for our parents. My elder sister's marriage was celebrated when she was very young. When my younger sister Malachi was three years old mother passed away. Father re-married after some time. My step-mother fell in love

with Ananda Rao who was younger than her. She left the house after two years complaining that she cannot manage a household with so many persons. Ananda Rao lived with her till he married another woman. Later she had to live by herself.

"..... Father brought my elder sister and brother-in-law to stay with us... But they too left as the arrangement did not work well.... We learnt later that Ananda Rao had an eye on sister. Father felt that there should be womanly help in the house. So I got married at a very young age.

".... I was a father of three children by the time I was twenty five. My wife Narsavva was only twenty when she was mother of three children. The entire burden of looking after the house fell on Narsavva from her twelfth year itself. At twenty she looked forty... My younger brother stopped studies with fifth class. The marriageable age for girls started to change my younger sister Malachi's marriage was performed.

"..... Ananda Rao did not spare Narsavva also. He had a beautiful wife. I wonder why he liked my wife who looked skin and bones like a dried fish. More surprising is the fact that Ananda Rao's wife liked me when she had a six foot handsome husband. Any illicit connection with a man or a woman of a higher status gives a lot of self-confidence. I think....

"..... It is said good people die early, sir. Prabhakar was a good man. He died young. He made us know what the world was and left us. He was hardly thirty when he died. He used to call everyone in the house by their names. Though he had studied only upto I.I.T., he had the confidence as if he had read the whole world – with his smile....

".... When I look at him I feel as though I get rid of all my difficulties. I used to get the spirit that I should live a good life even by fighting it out... There was a power in his smile..... in his words... In that manner I was introduced to politics.... I do not

remember the details... meetings .... processions... songs... saluting flags....

“.... The situation changed within a short time later. Prabhakar disappeared. Meeting him became something wonderful and rare. I tried to find him out. How is it possible to filter a huge tank.....?”

“.... Sir, if those people could not be caught, these people do not lose anything. But ‘law’ began to feel impatient that its authority was being lost... The impatience turned into sadism. Cruelty opened its hoods. Beastiless ruled the roost.... He could not be caught... They developed hatred and suspected that some were trying to keep him away from law. As the Telugu proverb goes the anger of the daughter-in-law on her mother-in-law resulted in the pot being smashed....”

“..... In that manner many from their homes to the lock-up... from the lock-up to the courts...from the court to the jail... lessons in the jail... from the jail on bail back home... from the house to the court for the hearing of the case... case after case... from one adjournment to another... and there will be nothing in the records of the change that takes place in our lives... If the details of those who are involved in each of the cases are written down, enquiry commissions established and the way how the laws and acts have been implemented and the defects studied and rectified then and there, there wouldn't be so many problems, sir. I'll ask you one question. Please don't feel upset. Though we come again and again, the case is adjourned. What is it you lose if we don't come here four times? What great pity you have for me sir! Though I came many times, you adjourned the case knowingly, yet when I could not come, you cancelled the bail and sent me to jail again. You are a higher authority than our boss. Your signature is all powerful. The boss would scold if I am late and then forget. But you send us to jail speaking gently. The laws are like gold in your hands. They obey your orders as passed by you, sir.”

“..... I left home not being able to put up with these difficulties... By the time I went into the forest I had three children. My Lachi was growing like a jowhar plant. Brother learnt repairing electric motors and was earning a little.... I was asked to stand for the post of a sarpanch. I too had such a thought... I believed that I could regain my honour which I had lost because I was born in a low caste... but the difficulties you created and the tortures you subjected me to suffer made me feel that the forest was better than the house. After I left home..... how many experiences! How many places I visited! How much of love! If I had contested the elections with all that experience behind me, I would have been elected as the M.L.A.... Prabhakar would have been elected a member of the Parliament, sir.

“..... Honourable judge sir! We thought they were the politics of the ruling party... we did not know then that the ruling party will get the authority to make the laws and gain lawfulness through these elections. We did not know about this till Kanshiram revealed that Ambedkar had said this. Because of this ignorance, Prabhakar who made the Parliament shiver, had to die in an encounter. The authority and the elections which we rejected made us undergo detentions and punishments ... the seeds were sown there for us to get defeated in life... now if a leaf falls from a branch .... We are terrified. That fear made worthy people unworthy. We were afraid of the restrictions created by ourselves for us. Now... after all that... even if a leaf falls from the branch ... we are terrified. We are afraid to talk freely. We are afraid to believe and trust the people, trust close friends... there is a watch on all things... doubt... tension... ulsers... anger... impatience.. wrong information because of secrecy.. everything chaotic..... all this happened in a systematic manner... Those who framed this system are now spending their lives happily with their wives and children and grandchildren after they lost their places in the party... They dared not speak of revolution again! I am one of those who believed such people, was in the forefront

and broke my teeth in the process. sir.”



“... You have no idea of that experience. You do not know anything about the happiness and excitement that is part of it. The happiness one derives and the self-confidence one feels sitting under the trees in the forest and discussing how we can change the world is beyond your imagination... in the villages... in hamlets... in the huts in the light of the oil lamp... when they gain confidence in their lives listening to our words.... when their faces brighten in their bodies, thin and dry as mats.... any person who has humanity in him feels like sacrificing his life for them... I used to feel a little jealous when my wife Narsavva, who was with child, sported a happy smile on her face as if she were carrying the whole world in her belly. The very thought that we were carrying this world and changing this world gave us a lot of self-confidence... the happiness we derived from their revolution made us put up with any number of difficulties.

“..... Saravva belonged to Nukapalli. What a sweet voice she had! How hard I worked to bring her into the party!... she hesitated for a long time. But once she joined us, she grew up very fast. Because of her I felt like marrying again. I started loving her... when you have a wife at home, do you want another wife? Some people asked derisively... in the party also a mental loneliness was experienced because of one’s inability to express one’s feeling to others.. if there is no human companion to whom one can reveal one’s mind such a life is worse than hellish life... in such a condition man craves for the company of another human being, sir!.....”

“... But I could not win Saravva’s love. She loved the district secretary Sudhakar. She married him... I was crest fallen... I could not recover from the set-back... She did not love the man. She loved his position and status in his life.... One year later I

expressed the same feeling to Saravva... she smiled... she cornered me with her questions..... in what respect is he inferior to you? ... was it in education.. in handsomeness... in commitment.. in sacrifice? It was true he was more cultured than me... he was well educated... his education fills his face with an enlightenment which cannot be explained, he has self-confidence... he has the language at his command... he can express what he wants to convey....”

“..... he was the son of a teacher. I am the son of a ryot coolie... I do not know anything about that happiness and culture... I thought of winning her love by providing her needs without asking her... in a way I succeeded also... but she told me she would treat me as her own brother.... as a matter of fact she treated me as a sister would treat a brother, till the end.... how many times I fell ill with malaria in the forest!.... she attended on me calling me “annaiah”, providing me with whatever I wanted.... when I was down with diarrhea having drunk water at everyplace, how sad did Saravva feel for me.... Venkanna the sentry had to sacrifice his life to save me when I slept in the shadow of a tree.... There were many difficulties there but in those difficulties there was happiness .... in that happiness there was a perspective ... that happiness was a part of our attitude.

“..... my perspective was connected with the lives of our people .... the intellectuals and writers were leading happy lives in cities and in the coastal area talking of revolution ..... in the villages too our people should lead free and good lives taking part in the revolution .... peacefully ... with an understanding ... and change their tactics with strategies and plans ... my caste ... my birth ... my childhood ... and my experiences made me think like that ... why I felt like that can be understood only if we go into the past history, sir....”

“you would have known .... In the times before history made its presence ... the girijan tribes gave up migrating and settled

down permanently at some place ... when they learnt cultivation and agriculture they had to live at a place ... it is all an old story that they felled forests for the sake of agriculture and that professions developed depending on agriculture...

“... those who were excommunicated from old villages and those who lost sustenance went to the forests and established small hamlets and felled the new forest and cultivated land. The girijans who migrated in this manner, the malas, the madigas and the yanadis established new villages ... they constructed tanks and water holes ... as time progressed those who lost their livelihood in the old villages, the young professionals of handicrafts reached the new villages ... vaisyas for the sake of business and Patwaris as account clerks and Jegirdars ... the Brahmins for these people .... And in course of time the village became theirs ... in the name of taxes, for mortgage and loans, the fields went into their hands ... so from there some girijans – the malas, the madigas and yanadis used to migrate to other forests in order to cultivate ....

“... perhaps about a hundred and fifty or hundred years ago, because of the famine elsewhere, some people came to Karimnagar ... those famines might have occurred before Sir Arthur Cotton\* built the project .... my great grandfather used to tell me ... those who came had hardly a loin cloth around their waist and very little things .... Thus the migration took place following their relatives....”

“... in those days an acre of good land was available for fifty rupees ... in my grandfather's time the price was between a hundred and fifty to three hundred rupees an acre .... those who came from elsewhere grew rich at the expence of the innocence of the locals ... in course of time some of them grew into 'doras' or chiefs. They won Nizam's grace and became jagirdars collecting taxes for the Nizam ... Ananda Rao was the eighth in succession among these jagiradars .... by the time his father Ram Rao dora

took charge, four generations of our family had been plundered.

“..... as time passed .... by the time our generation started ... a small area was available ... my grandfather gave up forty acres which had been cultivated as he could not pay taxes during the famine that raged eighty years ago .... The 'doras' and patwaris together knocked off such lands getting them transferred on their names ... and became masters of hundreds and thousands of acres of land ....”

“ ... when Prabhakar came and suggested that a meeting should be held, I too felt happy like others .... they came first into the village and sang songs playing the drum ... they spoke some words .... increasing wages for coolies and farm hands .... banning bonded labour ... returning the amounts and lands taken by force ... till then non-cooperation ... and social boycott ... we celebrated the victory march consisting of the people belonging to three hundred villages at Jagityala ... with that Ram Rao ran away to the city ... but got a police picket established in the town ....

“..... when Ram Rao came to collect taxes we surrounded him and arranged a Panchayati ... he stooped low and held our feet ... he promised to get the police camp removed ... and committed on paper that he would pay back the amount of thirty five thousand rupees which we had to spend on going round the courts for the false cases which he had foisted on us ....”

“ ..... he heard everything and finally left the village permanently ... the education of his sons and children was in the city ... he earned a lot in the business of buying and selling house plots ... he later started a courier service also ... Tukka Rao dora became a distributor in some agency in my mother-in-law's place ....”

“ .... we imagined that with the departure of doras all our difficulties would disappear .... we thought we were the rulers

... we thought that the lands snatched away from us could be cultivated by us again .... we were sure we could live freely ... the grama panchayati ... the panchayati sraithi .... C.C. Bank ... Assemblies ... all are ours ... we thought we will be present in all these institutions ... if only we knew that things would happen in their present manner, we would not have acted like that .... perhaps ... our plan was to overcome the problems of the day ... Prabhakar said that we should fix flags in his land after Ram Rao left .... I stayed on with the fear that they may fix the flags in our land ....

“ ... I was kicked along with all others ... we were jailed ... I got angry for receiving kicks and blows for no fault of mine ... yes ... from then on after coming out on bail ... I moved freely with ‘annas’ ... it was true .... Narsavva fed us all night and day ... that was also true ... myself, my sister and children ... we all handed them letters .... it was also true that we caught hold of doras in four villages and broke their arms and legs ... it was also true that one of them died in the hospital ... after Reddy was encountered, it was also true we went round villages in a group ... it was also true that we re-established the association ... it was also true we moved about with guns ... also true that we became Naxalistes .... it was also true that Prabhakar was behind all these activities .... it was also true when Prabhakar went up in his grade, his vacancy was also filled...”

“ ... yes .... it is also true that the doras and the police trembled on hearing my name Gurrala Pentaiah alias Praveen .... it is also true that we collected lakhs of rupees as party funds from toddy contractors while getting toddy prohibited ... it is also true we got many things got done with their help ... it is also true that they pretended fear before us and later gave information about us to the police ... it is also true we robbed the houses of doras in the name of money auction ... also true that we could stand in that manner for nearly five years ....”

“ ... but the police grazed the cattle in our backyards ... they tortured Narsavva asking her whether her husband was frequently visiting the village ... my brother Lachchiraju ran away to Arab countries not being able to put up with the torture and lock-up restrictions ... they demolished my house ... my sister who was to be married, Malachi, my father and my sister-in-law were tied to stakes and they were raped by the S.I. and five others before my father ... my father got bed-ridden ... my sister suffered bleeding ... the life of my family and my children ... suffered hellish torture ....”



I did not know then ... But now it turns my stomach, sir. For having given us some food, after we left, the police used to come and subject our women to dishonour. Men can run away to escape the police. How and where will women, children, old people and the cattle go, sir? How much cruelty is there in our love of revolution, sir? For having believed that some good was being done and encouraged them... how cruel it is sir, that those who do not know what principles are, what the strategies of revolution are should become targets for torture? Did we plan the revolution strategy by asking their help? As the elderly ‘annas’ said something, we believed it as true ... the people also believed them. The children were beaten black and blue because of us. Their lands became arid lands. We made the lands of doras arid. Thousands of acres of land was made arid. Agricultural labourers left the villages in search of livelihood. You know that we suffer because we had done evil deeds in our previous births. Because we are born poor, you think we have no character and that we should not entertain ambition and desires. If you do not know, ask the Bhagavad Gita which you use to extract a promise from the accused. Or ask the constitution and the police. If they don't tell you, ask my wife, sir. If my wife does not tell you, my sister will tell you sir ... where she was pinched, by whom, what they

did. There is no place on her body for further torture. It was not blood that flowed down but it was the tears of joy of her torturers. When I was in the jail also she was not spared, sir.

... I cannot bear these tortures ... I cannot run this family ... how long can we live holding our lives in our hands with fear, day in and day out, how to live dying every minute ... take me also away into the party ... appealed Narsavva many times ... she put her proposal before Prabhakar finding out his whereabouts ... we women are not cowards ... but what is all this trouble about the family? ... let it go anywhere ... coming to know of this problem, for the first time in his life Prabhakar wilted. If Prabhakar himself did not know what to tell Narsavva, and console her, what is possible for me?

We wanted to put our children in government hostels in different districts ... we also thought of giving them away on adoption ... we tried to take sister Malachi into the party ... but she said she would not come away leaving father who was bed-ridden ... the children cried their hearts out to live without their mother ... moreover our children are all dark in complexion ... who will take care of them ... if they were born with a fair complexion and in a good house, these problems can be solved easily ... there is not so much of restriction on children of that sort ... who will take into their fold the children of madigas, and old people ... though the young men are in the party? ... then there is the fear of the problems and restrictions one has to face for having protected them ... when we two were there, there was nothing possible ... how is it possible for a single person ... please tell me, sir ... Is not your wife living on your salary, sir ... don't you know that if we are thrown into the lock-up, the police would beat us ... don't you know that they extract money from us ... don't you know that the police threaten saying that if you don't keep quiet we will kill your husband in an encounter and then seek pleasure from her as a routine ... don't you know that they

keep the husband on the pial as guard and inside the house what they do with the women, drinking toddy!?

Will there be a heart that will not suffer agony when the house and the family is being demolished? ... If there is one such heart ... it is no heart at all ... I do not know which way my journey takes which was begun for the welfare of my family and children. There are no families that benefited from such sacrifices as these ... everyone is getting bogged down in horrible difficulties with every day restrictions ... when we sought a little comfort and happiness why did we suffer difficulties as large as a mountain .. my mind is confused and disillusioned ... there has been no satisfaction that some work was being done.

“... how long can we manage to move about without being caught ... our whereabouts and our ways have been known by the police ... a revolution is a perennial flow that has no end or a shore. One has to swim constantly and continuously. Revolution has no shores on either side one has to get carried away by it ... it was felt that it was not human to leave the family. I decided that such a life for all time was not for me. I wanted to live my life ... there was none to console me ... Prabhakar having been encountered and others known to me having got transferred to other parts ... the saying that those who stay on will stay on and those who go will go away hurt me like spears.....I could not digest such a mechanical understanding of life, such hard-heartedness ... in that state of mind I loved Saravva ... though she rejected my love she shared my agony till the end as a sister ...

“... some naxalites who came out of the party were given jeeps. Some opened shops. Some became contractors. I established a hotel in a busy centre and I had good business ... but the police visited me everyday ... ate ... when asked to pay they were implicating me in new cases ... if any bandh was announced, I was taken away and put in the lock-up ... to whom should I complain? ... who was there to support me ... if a person was

good and nice he was called a bourgeois I called caste elders by names that they suffered from the itch called caste itch .... those who were in politics. I said theirs was ruling party politics ... I said they should be beaten with chappals if they came seeking votes .... I organized meetings exhorting people not to vote for them ... in this manner I became an enemy to everyone ... I had no good word to say about anyone ... why will they help me, sir?

“... When I came out many of them faced a new problem. They were afraid that I would stand as an opponent and rival in politics, their status and prestige, they wished that I should be killed in an encounter, they were surprised why I was not taken away and killed ... more than the police these people wanted me to be sent into lock-up with the fear that I may reveal all their secrets ... how do such people help me, sir...”

“... the police were taking me away again and again ... how can the hotel run ... I closed the hotel, took some loan and bought an auto. They came in the nights, took me away in the auto saying they had some work and pressed me to reveal the whereabouts of ‘annas’ .... of the eighteen cases foisted on me eleven were struck off ... some friends who were in the party saw to it that there was no evidence ... so the police think that I have still some connections with ‘annalu’.”



.... here .... varieties of difficulties ... when we killed their father, there were some who witnessed it ... why do they show pity on me though they know that I left the party ... they concocted strong evidence against me ... the party came to my rescue and threatened them ... so they planned to kill me in an accident ...

“... sir, if I had not got into this bog, I would have become a sarpanch long ago. I would have easily defeated the dora. When the whole village was enthusiastic about me, I gave up all posts

and contests ... it resulted in the good-for- nothing Purushotham Reddy becoming the sarpanch. Now he has become all powerful and I have to hold the feet of that coward ...

“ .... Nalemuchu Raji Reddy who was my sub-ordinate became a surpanch then ... now he became the mandal president ... as soon as Raji Reddy surrendered his brothers-in-law rushed to him just as people rush to the plane and garland a chief minister ... and invited him to join their party ... some grew up like that after they surrendered ... now the Collector and the S.P. also show respect and honour to Raji Reddy ... his caste also helped him to come up ... my caste helped me to be suppressed.

If a man belongs to high caste, even if he is caught, he will be sent to jail ... if the caste is low, even if the person offers to surrender they kill him in an encounter making him believe that he would be let free ... if a naxalite belongs to a high caste, as soon as he surrenders, though he is a non-entity, he is made an important naxalite ... though they changed their lives, they did not change their castes ... they changed parties, their power did not change ... Raji Reddy who has a poultry farm with five thousand birds is now a mandal president ... Rameswara Reddy who rejected naxalism and opened a chicken centre became a minister twice ... my life has turned into this mess ... those naxalites who have relatives and friends in the ruling party are leading happy lives as naxals ... though they are caught by the police they talk like doras ... they speak in a good language ... they can make people call them intellectuals in all admiration ... we do not have such a language ... we have no propositions and theories ... if only I had command over the language I would have said I got separated from them and would have started a new party ...

“... those who worked with me left to the four corners ... Venugopala Sastry is a sub-editor of a daily ... Viswarupa Rao is a now a contractor ... Tirupathi Reddy who is the brother-in-law

of a MLA did M.Sc and became the Principal of a private college ... in this manner their lives got shaped on their castes ... they were victors in life even after surrendering ... their salaries got fixed ... what did I get ... my life has become the dinner leaf torn by dogs ....”

“ .... not that I do not have noted personalities .. there is Achyuta Sarma Rao who was born in our grandmother’s village ... he has a name in the revolution ... he lives in the city having purchased an apartment for four lakh rupees .... No one else knows better how to save his skin ... he strives to earn a name ... he cares for those who have a name ... he arranges a meeting ... for people like me and he just brushes us aside. If the police knock at the door they raise a hue and cry and take the matter to the chief minister and the Governor ... they have relatives in all parties ... if arrested they get the arrested person released immediately ...”

“... if we die they start writing poetry ... people like me feel that we get a great name if a poem is written on me and get into the party .. in olden days kings used to fight battles and made ministers sing the heroic deeds and attracted young men into the army ... the heroic songs rendered on the battles of Palnad and Bobbili were used only for this purpose ... what they want is that we should join their army ... or else who will care for us if we are alive ... will the citizens’ rights organizations or the revolutionary writers care for us if we are alive ...

“... when I was jailed no one went to my house to console my people. They will urinate at the mention of uneducated naxals like me ... if we meet them on the road they ask us not to talk to them ... if we go to their houses they ask why we met them ... if I go to their houses they feel and say that restrictions on them would be imposed ... they do not meet me or talk to me ... but they say their mind is only on revolution ... though they talk of revolution, their lives should be happy ones ... their jobs ... their four figure

salaries ... the education of their children ... their comforts ... their honour ... should all be safe ... that is also what I too desire ... that in our village also the lives of our people should run smoothly ... they call this desire unprincipled ... those who said so are pursuing their jobs and profession as soon as they lost their places in the party ... but they do not care for the people even as a leader of the ruling party or a member of the citizens’ rights forum care for the people ... they behave as very important people as long as they enjoy leadership in the party ... as the saying goes .. if it is not your bottom, creep along till you reach Kasi ... this saying applies to them ... if the tortures, blows and sacrifices are not his or his families’ that is enough ... they approve all strategies and plans saying they are correct ... give me your food today, I will give you a medicine to mitigate your hunger, they say ... they make good all the developments for themselves today and promise to you the developments of the future ... to achieve this they want revolution ... they get highly educated and do their jobs and follow their professions, they send their children to English medium schools away from revolutions, enjoy life with their wives ... and say that a fellow like me who has worked for five or six years in the party has lost all his principles, the jaw bones of such asses should be broken ... they will know what it is, those who criticise without doing sacrifices, when their wives and daughters are raped ...

“ ... they build houses and lead happy lives with their wives and children ... they need good jobs, name and fame. Our deaths and our arrests should be the causes for their glory ... when did they think of us that we should lead lives like them? I got spoiled listening to their lectures and songs and their writings ... Sureedu in hiding, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah ... P.V. Rao ... Mukku Subba Reddy, Chenchaiyah, Kalyan Rao ... all these and Revu Ganpathi ... Adi Reddy ... also ... it is like listening to the words of the teacher, the results being – he in the temple and I outside in the cold ... their daughters, sisters and sisters-in-law get married

without dowries ... but what about us ... they are all like elephants ... dead or alive the elephant costs ten thousand rupees ... if they work in the party, or if they come out ... if they die in an encounter they lose nothing ... they get a great name in the country ... the entire country comes to the rescue and help their wives and children, sir”

“A person built a house on his grand daughter’s name spending twenty lakh rupees. I too want to lead a very common and normal life like Sureedu, Mukku Subba Reddy and even Kondapalli Seetharamaiah ... a man who lived a revolutionary life for forty years and was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people has a right to lead a normal life ... but having spent four years in it without proper knowledge and return home, why don’t we have the same right to lead a normal life?

“ ... I joined the revolution and got defeated in life ... when I joined the revolution to win back my life ... the revolution gave me the life that faces defeat, sir ...”



“ ... each person has his own reasons for the restrictions increasing ... the party is afraid that the recruitment stops if there is no restriction .. there is hardly ten percent recruitment from the areas where there is no restriction on groups and castes .. on one side – where is the possibility of swallowing lakhs and crores without audit if the demon of naxals is not shown? ... if there are no encounters how will they make square old scores? ... how else will they get promotions? How can they rob or rape if they had no provisions for restrictions? ... if the naxal problem is not there how can the government divert the attention of the people from their corruption and ineffective administration? ....”

“ ... On this side .... Not even one has become a whole timer from the lakhs that moved from the coastal districts ... if they had no problems why did they attend the meetings? ... they do

have problems ... also opportunities to live well .... So workers could not come up as cadets during these twenty years ... they came only as leaders ... and each leader wanted the revolution to run according to his wishes and no one bothered about the people, sir ...

“ ... the ruling party helped us in many ways to prevent us from contesting elections for fear they would get defeated ... it is not known to how many gods they prayed ... the gods alone should know .. if anyone questions the social inequalities loudly, if they should be punished, how is it possible to put them down saying they are connected with naxals if there are no restrictions on naxals? ... in this manner there are reasons and reasons for people to desire for restrictions ...

“Five lakh people attended Kanshi Ram’s meeting. Six months later the candidates could not poll even five thousand votes ... should there be a restrictions on the naxals when ten lakh people attended their meeting, sir? ... if they are given a chance for five years it will get settled in its proper place .. you are converting innocent people into naxals by promoting and encouraging them, sir .. if there is freedom all parties will be questioned ... so every party has its reasons fearing opposition from within ...

“ ... having entered into the fray of the cows, we calves got our legs broken ... what did we gain .. I went round places and borrowed money for my sister Lachi’s marriage. No one came forward to marry my sister without dowry though I was in the revolution ... I asked some young students .. there is a girl ..... her brother is a revolutionary ..... she has to be married ... she has a little limp ..... she is dark ..... she was raped by the police .... this I did not reveal, of course ..... I did not mention her caste also ..... I told them that she was beautiful ..... also that she had a good idea about the revolution ..... will any of you marry her, I asked ..... their ideas are restricted to meetings only ..... they have

no desire to shape their lives in accordance with their ideas ..... they want girls who are well educated and those in jobs as their wives ..... they both talk of revolution continuing in their jobs ..... but they do not want to marry the wives, daughters and sisters of those who sacrificed their lives for the revolution ..... how is it possible for our people to study when economic problems have also to be faced along with restrictions imposed on a fellow like me for joining the revolution ..... though educated how is it possible to secure a job? ..... those jobs and the education have been taken away by others ..... they are leading happy lives without any connections with the revolution .....

“..... when a young man came forward to marry my sister though he knew she was raped, I felt happy. He had no parents. I thought that human quality was still alive ..... but then he opened a shop with the dowry amount and when he earned well and became respectable, he tried to get rid of our Lachi ..... he enquired about the rape by the police by pointedly asking her again and again and started torturing her ..... she jumped into a well, not being able to bear the suffering ..... she survived but became lame ..... he then left her ..... she surrendered herself to appease her hunger ..... I could do nothing but cry after learning about her condition because I could not think of performing her marriage again ..... the man whom she believed deceived her ..... now she is called a prostitute ..... though we could organize lakhs of students into a group we could not change their culture ..... if atleast one of them had married my sister, her life would have been of a different kind ..... the young men of our caste were afraid to marry my sister who was part of the revolution, feeding everyone and obeying whatever she was asked to do ..... they were also afraid that if they married a girl who was so intelligent, she would not obey them and also the restrictions we bear may have to be shared by them too ..... all these negative points coming together my sister's life suffered finally.



“..... If I look back what is it I have achieved, sir ..... Narsavva went away to her mother not being able to bear the restrictions ..... my Lachi ran away to her relatives ..... for want of medicines and care my father passed away ..... the money sent by my brother from the Arab countries for the visa was not sufficient to clear the debts ..... though my brother had nothing to do with the revolution, as soon as he returned from the Arab countries, he was thrown into the lock-up, tortured and they knocked off half the money he had earned ..... because of me, my single self, my people and many families were destroyed ..... what is that we gained, myself, the people of my caste, as a result of the revolution? .....

“..... my children stopped obeying me ..... they took to their own ways of living ..... Ram Rao dora died of heart attack ..... his people accused me saying that I appeared to him in a dream and as a result he died of heart failure. Ananda Rao's brothers moved about with the same associations when they were studying –thus they knew all important 'annas' ..... they won the sympathy of the powers with the plea whether they should suffer now for the sins of their forefathers as doras ..... they asked why they should not sell their lands, not for their benefit but for the education and marriages of their children ..... the party fund reached the party through the middlemen ..... some land was appropriated to the sangam as a gift ..... and they used to get the permission .....

“..... now Ananda Rao and his brothers feel happy that 'annalu' not allowing them to sell the land was beneficial and they pay their grateful thanks to 'annalu' ..... I learn that Ananda Rao's brothers praise us before our Lachi ..... your brother saved us from those slushy fields, cattle mess and that horrible life exposed to sun and rain by being in the revolution ..... yes, don't they? They now move about in A.C. cars without placing

their feet on the ground ..... our struggle for a new way of life showed them a new world for them .... whereas like the frog in the well, our lives and attitudes got shrunk into nothing ..... in olden days, after the teacher – taught ‘gurukula’ education, the son of the king was sent out with the son of the minister to go round the country for two years to know the world on the condition that the son of the minister should not reveal his identity ..... but the young prince returned by waging a war winning over countries ..... in the same manner the doras became wealthy seths after leaving the villages ..... they became industrialists, contractors, leaders of the state, doctors, engineers, owners of private colleges, government officers, and all those who ran away from villages are living happily now ..... there was never any problem faced by them with regard to their power or prestige ..... there was no loss on any account for them ..... Ananda Rao’s brother Hari Gopala Rao is now a Reader in the University and is playing an important role in the Citizen’s Rights Committee by shedding his haughtiness and learning a little humility ..... the price of the land which they wanted to sell then was priced at Rs. Five thousand an acre ..... now that land costs one lakh an acre ..... even if they give party fund and even if they allot ‘annas’ a little land, what is it they lose? .....

Maddunuru Tejeswara Rao dora breaks coconuts and offers them to gods praying that the revolution should be a success. He ran away from forests and earned hundred crores by coming to the city. He says he would have earned thousand crores if the revolution had started ten years earlier. Many people do not know that because he asked his people why they continue as landlords living in villages instead of becoming industrialists. As a result the old class people disappeared and the new class of industrialist is flourishing. That means the villages of Jagityala have changed into the villages of Gudivada with the help of the struggle and the project waters. Now the landlords are not being killed but the killing of those other than landlords by shooting them down

makes this clear ..... but the culture of the revolution is preventing caste wars.

There is great truth in what Tejeswara Rao dora says ..... if the revolution had started ten years earlier ..... to be more precise ..... if it had commenced twenty years earlier ..... the share of Telengana to Telanganites in the political, economic, cultural and social areas would have been in their hands ..... the doras of this area would have established institutions like Andhra Sugars ..... Nagarjuna Fertilizers etc and would have prevented the loot by the coastal people ..... our people would have done better than them and moved forward ..... education would have flourished twenty years earlier and the jobs in Telangana would have been got by the people of this region ..... agriculture would have taken the lead twenty years earlier. Then the advent of ‘Guntur villages’ in Telangana districts would not have come into existence at all. .... if the land lords prospered like industrialists there would not have been these struggles. The expansion of the coastal people and others prevented the development of the landlords of Telangana. As a result armed struggle against the landlords of this area had to be taken up.

“..... sir, you may belong to the coastal area ..... as you are a judge, think in terms of justice ..... Tell me truly ..... if in 1956 Telangana had been formed as a separate state would this situation have arisen at all? Just as in the coastal area, the important people of this area would have grown into industrialists and would have gone to cities leaving the villages ..... would they have lived in villages even if they were requested to do so ..... would landlordism have got into this state of stagnation? ..... if a Tahasildar got promotion his subordinate would have got promotion as a Tahsildar ..... the junior assistants would have got promotions by stages ..... if the doras of this area grew into landlords and industrialists, we would have become clerks, teachers, mechanics and workers .....the coastal area communist

leadership reached greater heights in the name of Telangana struggle, became masters over us and in the name of oneness destroyed our lives. All the opportunities available in the Talangana were knocked away by the coastal people ..... they diverted the budgets to their region ..... political power also was theirs, now they talk of naxalites and are obstructing developments, sir .....

For that fort ..... he fought to gain the upper hand and we fought for his losing it ..... now the Muddunuru dora has bequeathed it to the village and the village school and thus expressed his gratitude ..... and his enlightenment ..... that enlightenment is now trying to unify the revolutionary parties and strive for separate Telanagana ..... though what the revolutionary parties profess is class attitudes, in practice it helped only in making the upper class landlords grow into wealthy industrial localized class.

“..... to tell the truth except for a few haughty doras, who would be angry with the revolution now? ..... then they lived in one village ..... now they live in villages and live in towns and cities ..... all parties are theirs ..... they know how to drive away people of my sort and this art they derived from their caste ..... those Velama doras ..... and Reddy doras ..... became leaders of the revolutionary parties also ..... they are not actually the children of landlords ..... they grew from poverty and thought of becoming upper class bourgeois but settled as petty of upper class bourgeois and from there gradually ..... developed newly rich upper class mentality ..... starting from Kondapalli to Adi Reddy and to Ganapathi ..... they are all the same type .....

“..... before the doras left the villages and went to cities ..... the business in cities and towns was handled by vysayas ..... padmasali ..... viswabrahmana ..... gonda ..... other shudra communities and castes ..... now these professions also

have been taken over by the doras ..... Red terror so positively made them to act and master the science of development ..... Ambedkar wanted the new development and growth to reach the classes of people who had yet to grow ..... the revolution made it difficult for the down trodden to reach it and passed it on to the upper classes ..... the burden of restriction fell on the castes and classes that needed to grow and all development went to the upper classes and the ruling classes ..... if I had known about this then itself I would not have joined it ..... now the past did not help me but is haunting me like a ghost ..... what benefit did we get out of twenty years of revolution ..... except self-confidence .....

“..... now the doras and the ruling classes have love, fear and devotion for revolution ..... they can save without an encounter taking place ..... it is very easy for them ..... officers ..... the police ..... the leaders ..... all are one ..... all are their own people ..... or those who listen to them .....

“..... oh judge ..... I am not angry with anyone for things to have taken this shape ..... I do not feel angry with the police who bounce on us like a ball that hits the wall ..... my anger is not on the ruling class ..... this is not anger ..... but .... agony, pain, sadness, tears ..... why did the course of history become topsy turvy? ..... within these twenty years our ambitions have become upside down ..... how did the ambitions of the doras who lost all hope surge forward? ..... why did the development of the depressed classes not take place because of the revolution? ..... why did the results of the struggles boomerang? It is not important to ask how much struggle was waged ..... its impact and result ..... but how much of it was registered ..... that is important ..... experiments are ours ..... results are theirs ..... restrictions and sacrifices are for us ..... experiences, leadership and development are their share ..... I am worried why it has been happening like this .....

“..... oh my revolutionary friends! ..... as time passes feelings die down ..... the history of experiences also disappears ..... but the attitudes and perspectives that grow out of them will keep going forward ..... that is why history means it is the history of perspectives ..... that is why man will be re-writing his history according to the perspectives that are born out of experiences ..... my people of seven generations ..... have to rewrite the history like Spartacus\* ..... that will be incomplete like this ..... the definition of incompleteness depends upon your perspective .....

“..... sir ..... my people know only to struggle and fight but do not know how to derive benefit from them ..... my people have our anger and emotion but not worldly wisdom ..... my people know only to die but do now know how to win in life ..... we belong to those oppressed castes which have produced for thousands of years all articles and created arts with our hands without knowing how to market them and make money .....”

“..... our products and art attracted the world ..... with that migration and wars commenced ..... those who enjoyed our art and labour handed over the country to the foreigners because of their selfishness ..... we did not know the language ..... we did not know how to express our ideas ..... we had no history ..... this is not my history ..... this is the history of someone else ..... my business is to carry on my shoulders the leaders .....

“..... on that side the police ..... on this side investigation whether I turned into an informer ..... what is more torturous than questioning and doubting truthfulness, sir ..... the government itself is afraid and is shifting the police stations into towns ..... if a note is sent to the S.I. or the minister, out of fear or devotion, the required amount is given for the party fund ..... but why should innocent people be tortured on the pretext they gave food or shelter, sir?

..... why should they be thrown into jails and made to run round courts for cases? ..... when the leaders of all the parties are getting things done because of fear, how can it be considered a crime if the same help is given because of affection and admiration, sir? ..... when my wife ..... out of fear or affection ..... without my knowledge had carried information once or twice ..... why should she be punished so heavily, sir? ..... ‘annalu’ also did not believe ..... they thought that she tried to reveal their presence to the police when opportunity presented itself ..... that was the reason why I took part in the procession of a lakh of people taken out against the police and the naxalites organized by the Ambedkar Associations .....

“..... now every step I take is being assessed with doubt ..... the two sections are referring to dictionaries to find meanings which are not there ..... sir, because of continuous jailing the fire in us has cooled ..... this life has been covered by soot ..... the house where revolution is cooked, for want of oxygen, the house is filled with smoke ..... my history has gone, hazy ..... now my life is smoke without fire ..... our lives smell half burnt wood ..... people here do not get burnt all at once sir, pass a death sentence on me ..... or hang me as my life neither can be burned in fire or converted into ashes ..... I am not an individual ..... I am the mother earth of lakhs and crores of Telanganites ..... call my children and sister devadasis, as prostitutes and pass the death sentence on me ..... my Telangana craves for freedom now ..... the villages and towns which we gave shape should belong to us ..... all these lands which we cultivated by felling the forests should be ours ..... we should reap the benefits of growth and development ..... we have to develop ..... we want freedom ..... we need freedom from the heavy weight of the schemes of revolution placed on our heads for the mere asking of a change in our lives ..... the death sentence gives us freedom of all kinds ..... so I request you to record this as my dying declaration.

“..... ha! ..... ha! ha! I came making all arrangements sir ..... I swallowed the required number of sleeping pills that will kill me. My Telangana is committing suicide.....”

“..... oh ..... my people of the world ..... don't play with this corpse and save humanness in man ..... co-operate with us for our freedom and equality .....”

Pentiah alias Praveen collapsed in the court hall ..... a crowd gathered around him ..... there was a hubub in the court hall ..... van – van – doctor ..... doctor ..... phone ..... phone ..... cries, shouts ..... the court hall was jam packed. In that confusion the pen of the judge broke.

- December 1997, *Vipula Monthly*.

### III

## RELATIONSHIPS

These days the auspicious time for celebrating marriages is being fixed in the morning hours. This arrangement creates no problems for anyone. Bathing can be finished at home and lunch could be eaten immediately after the muhurtha, the auspicious time, and leave for home. Conversation takes place only till the lunch is eaten. Later the marriage pandal is empty.

As the marriage was that of the daughter of the elder brother by relationship, the acquaintance with old relatives could be renewed. So we woke up early, finished our bath, got ready quickly and boarded the bus. The journey on the smooth black-topped road was pleasant. In olden days there was no good road for the village from any side. In earlier days by the time we reached the village holding the little finger of grandmother, walking fast, which looked like running, at least one toe of the feet had to be treated with turmeric paste. Our bare feet got bruised by the pebbles and rough stones.

That village was my mother's birth place. All my memories of the village days are connected with that place situated about four kilometers from Jagityala. Now that village is the second stage on the route that passes through Chilavkoduru and Dharmaram to Peddapalli on the way to Godavari Khani.

As the bus passed the Lakshmipuram cross roads I remembered that the people of our village complained that they would lose their sites and lands if the Peddapalli road was laid in that route. So the road passed through Japthapuram. From then on Japthapuram enjoyed wealth and prosperity. Lakshmipuram

has been thrown into a corner. The villagers now curse themselves for not permitting the road to pass through their village.

In my case also it happened so. The Japthapuram people refused my alliance with them. They had their reasons. There was no open space before our house, no backyard behind the house. There was no land, no site or garden for us. We eat what we buy in that session or on that day. If the alliance made with a family that depended on agriculture there will be enough to eat for the whole year. There would be no need to buy everything. With this plea my mother's brothers by relationship refused to make me their son-in-law. My mother and grandmother asked them to give their daughter in marriage to me but returned humiliated. "Will we give our daughter to a boy who is studying? How will he live and what work will he do? Even if you offer dowry to us, we will not take your boy as our son-in-law," they said. Now after twenty five years they feel sorry for not finalising our alliance then. Now my relatives curse themselves taking into account my small job and the happiness I enjoy.

My wife does not feel the pain and sorrow my uncles and aunts feel. She behaves in the opposite way.

"Ah! What did you have before marrying me? I was given in marriage to a hapless family. This house made fortune only after I set foot in it. I am a fortunate person. If you had married in the house of your uncles and aunts you would have lived in poverty like them. You got your job only after you married me. You have grown into a handsome man by eating what I cooked tastily for you. How did you look like at the time you came to see me for the marriage alliance? You were like a dried up stick and a skeleton without flesh and blood. Take a look at your photograph in the album taken then for your hall-ticket. You will recollect how you looked before marrying me" she taunts me.

How will anyone look before marriage? They only think of higher studies for the tomorrow and entertain ideals and

ambitions. How do you think my wife looked like before marrying me? She was skin and bones because of meager eating. She looked as though she was bedridden for a month and was just recovering. But she does not agree with the fact. "If I had not been beautiful how did you like me and marry me?" she asks. She boasts that my own house, my education, children and our growth was all because of her and she says the credit goes to her for our prosperity.

I might have said during one of our quarrels that my uncles and aunts were very good looking. Yet she started on the journey with out saying "Is that so! They will all be there for the wedding. I will see how good looking they are".

May be because of my changing places as part of my official duties, or because our old relatives were confined to village life or migrations or because of non-cooperation by my wife, for some such reason visits and return visits among our relatives did not take place over the years. Now this marriage provided an opportunity to renew contacts.

The bridegroom worked in the Bhivandi textile mill. The bride was my elder brother's daughter. She stopped her studies by seventh class and settled down as a beedi worker. My brother also had worked in Bombay and Bhivandi for twenty years in the textile mills. This alliance was settled as a result of such contacts. At present my brother had been looking after his fields and lands.

When my cousin brother's father passed away I could not go to offer my condolences. I thought that the relationship between us had come to an end with my absence there. But he gave me the wedding card and requested me again and again to attend the marriage. I thought I should not lose the opportunity of reviving the old contacts and relationships. I told my wife also the same thing.

There was another reason which I did not tell her. She

entertained proudly an idea that she had a large battalion of relatives and that I did not have relatives at all. As a matter of fact we too have a large number of relatives. But if the ladies of the house do not co-operate, it will not take a long time to break and disintegrate relationships.

My mother used to quarrel with my wife saying that because of her our relatives distanced themselves from us. I felt that the complaint was true. But my mother was not the mother of my wife to get her to accept the truth. The mother is the mother-in-law. The woman who is not a mother cannot become a mother-in-law. But the love and affection a mother provides by that relationship is of a different nature. The reaction a mother-in-law provokes is different. My wife could see only the mother-in-law in my mother. Even my mother could not see her daughters in her daughters-in-law. She treated them as daughters-in-law. No one knows when and where this mother-daughter-in-law syndrome started. The dispute has finally come to the stage when the mother says 'yes' and the daughter-in-law says 'no' to whatever that is suggested.

My wife used to pick up a quarrel with me saying "did I at any time answer back your mother? Did I fight with your old relatives? Why do you accuse me every now and then?" "Should there be a quarrel to keep relatives at a distance? If we don't go to their houses when invited by them for festivals and other occasions, relationships get broken automatically. Whenever some one asked us to visit them, you said that your legs were aching or your finger was troubling you and stayed away at home. If everything was well you said that no one was known to you there. If we visit people a few times there is an opportunity to know everyone. Do you mean to say you know my son before you married him? How did you get merged with him? In the same way we can get to know people." That was mother's argument.

"They are all new and unknown to me. You better go with

your mother," my wife used to say whenever there was an invitation. She never bothered to listen to my telling her that going with mother was not the same as going with wife and children. Having thus distanced me from my relatives, my wife taunting me that I had no relatives was a cruel indictment.

"When we were young children, we used to stay in the house of the present family where the wedding is taking place, calling them affectionately, "pedananna", "peddamma,"\* I said looking at her.

I closed my eyes and remembered my boyhood days as the scenes of those days flashed in my mind. Even as I was observing him my father's elder brother grew up into an old man. The houses which were beautiful looking then grew into dilapidated houses, without white washing or repairs, without people to live in them, moss growing on the walls, the plaster peeling off, finally resulting in the relations with that house being broken and lost. When I used to go there alone the new daughter-in-law and son-in-law of that house used to retreat into a shell. In this manner the later generations were unknown to me and our acquaintance got dimmed. I myself do not remember properly the relationships. I do not know which girl is the daughter-in-law of which family and house. My wife does not have any inquisitiveness to know who is who. My children do not understand the nature of relationships though I repeat it many times. The relationships which are not in daily use and the relationships which have no immediate use and need are being forgotten by the children. Thus in our generation the relationships of village life and the connections are getting lost. This development made me sigh in despair. Now some of my relations instead of calling me "brother-in-law", "uncle" etc. simply call me with the new relationship tag "saru". Why does this happen so?

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\* *pedananna is father's elder brother .  
peddamma is mother elder sister.*

The cousin who is celebrating his daughter's marriage now was born a week before I was born and so he became my elder brother. But during younger days we called each other familiarly, 'arei', 'orai', After I grew up though I gave up calling him 'arei' he continued to call me 'orei', exercising his authority over me as a senior. Even in our boyhood days he would say to me "arie, I am your elder brother. Do you know? You have to obey me. You are an ignorant fellow and do not know much" and boss over me.

As a matter of fact I do not know much about agriculture, villages, crops, cattle and the like. It was he who gave me knowledge about them all. It was he who introduced me to backyards, canals, gardens and the palmyra trees etc. But he could not fare well at studies and in education. So he gave up studying and started doing cultivation. He got married when he was fifteen. His relations tried their best to get the bride from their family. But my brother refused flatly the alliance. The girl who was to have been given in marriage to him got angry and did not talk to him for many days. When my mother asked for the same girl for me the girl twisted her mouth rejecting me on her father's advice.

At twenty he became the father of two children. He is now celebrating his second daughter's marriage. As his responsibilities increased in his twentieth year itself he handed over the charge of agriculture and went in search of work in textile mills. So when I was still a student he had become a father of children and an earning member.

By the time he became a father a change came about in his behaviour. He started looking down on me as a kid saying that I knew nothing about family and family life. He used to lecture on life's philosophy and Bhivandi life and made me feel very small. He who boasted of so much knowledge stopped the studies of his first daughter in her fifth class. He allowed his second daughter to study only upto the seventh class. He could not think of a groom who had studied beyond the tenth class.

The growth of my elder brother culminated when I settled down in my job with my wife and children. The morning that dawns early sets the first thing in the evening. He started feeling the burden of the family, children and their marriages and his life turned into that of a bullock at the grinding mill.

In olden days five or six elder brothers of father used to run sesame (gingelly) oil mills. It was at that time the oil mills came into existence. In the place of gingelly oil groundnut oil came into use. In the beginning when the groundnut oil was used boils appeared all over the body. Heads reeled and people suffered from bilous vomitings. Gingelly oil had a good taste and a pleasant smell. Now it was considered became bitter and the ground nut oil is taken to be good in taste and pleasant in smell. Tastes and attitudes do not remain the same always. Time brings about changes.

With the introduction of milled oils those who lived a princely life with grinding mills had to find new professions. They had given up their caste profession of weaving cloth long time ago. They had no idea of doing business and did not have knowledge of other things. About ten of them went to Bombay to work as mill workers. In those days textile mill workers were far better off than teachers or clerks.

Time never stays static. My father's elder brothers thought that if they resigned jobs in the Bombay textile mills they would get provident fund and with that amount they planned to buy lands. They resigned and with the money bought some land. One of my uncles who had no land or cattle resigned his job in the mills and with that money established two power looms. Now he is the owner of fifty power looms. The elder brothers of my father had no forethought. They thought only of agriculture. They had great love for the place where they lived. They had freedom as agriculturists where as they did not enjoy freedom as mill workers. Though they returned from mill work, they had to think

of it again later. In Bhivandi there were no labour laws or protection except wages.

My brother surprisingly preferred Bhivandi unlike the elder brothers of my father. I do not know what happened to his intelligence. He got caught in the drudge like the bullock of the grinding mill. Perhaps it is difficult to come out of a way of life when one gets used to it. He should know what pleasure there was in spending twenty years alone in Bhivandi while his wife looked after cultivation in the village. Now he has become a great devotee. He smears his forehead with huge religious marks, wears the sacred thread, performs poojas and the like. Whatever it is, as I have been living in the town for some years my brother could give me the wedding invitation. He asked me to attend the wedding without fail out of the love he has for me since our boyhood.

I wonder how the sisters-in-law are now with whom I had spent time in a jolly manner as a boy. Saraswathi used to go up trees first like a monkey before me and climb mango trees, tamarind trees and other trees. She used to run dashing like an arrow. Along with her, three other sisters-in-law, my elder brothers and I used to play in streams, on the platforms constructed in fields to watch the crop, under them, in the backyards of houses, walk and run together. We ate, exchanging the eats from our mouths, calling the process by many typical names. What games we played! What thefts we committed in the backyards of houses! I felt immensely happy when my grand mother said she would ask Saraswathi's parents to give her in marriage to me and how greatly I was insulted and humiliated by them!

By the time we got off the bus and started walking, the sun was beating down on us severely. My wife was murmuring that her make-up was getting spoiled because of the heat and sweat. I could not hear her properly in the sound of wedding music and

the blaring loud-speakers.

The marriage was to take place in a narrow space in front of the main door. The pandal was erected with fresh palmyrah leaves and the area was glowing forth in all its glory. It was also crowded. Many invitees had to stand outside the pandal. My wife walked towards the place where there were women. I stood in the sun along with others. I was greeting and talking to those whom I could recognize. Those who recognized me talked to me. Some addressed me as brother-in-law, some as elder brother, some as younger brother, some as father's elder brother, some as father's younger brother, some as son-in-law and some as son. They reminded me and also themselves of the childhood days. The children were lost in their worlds.

"When he got such a huge tent erected for dining why didn't he get two more tents erected at the marriage pandal? Why should he be so stingy while spending so much? Should you not attend to it, brother-in-law?" asked Lakshmirajam addressing me.

"You are there to tell him, being the son-in-law of the house," I smiled.

"Everything was lost and gone after the father-in-law passed away. Will this brother-in-law heed my words? Don't you know the mentality of your elder brother. He will not heed anyone's advice," said Lakshmirajam.

"You should have sent the message through my sister," I replied.

"Will he listen to her? 'What do you know sister, you better keep quiet. I am here to look into all these things,' he said to her who is a mother of three children," replied Lakshmirajam wiping the sweat off his brow, covering his head with a towel.

Everyone was waiting eagerly for the auspicious moment when the sacred and sanctified rice is to be sprinkled on the heads

of the bride and the bridegroom, the heat being unbearable and the hunger great. They were eager to rush into the tent where lunch would be served. If the volunteers had not erected the thick cloth wall there, half the invitees would have rushed into the tent which was erected in the yard beside the house. We were not able to see what was going on in the marriage pandal.

“At least a few chairs should have been placed here. As all are standing nothing is being seen,” I said to Lakshmirajam, to start a conversation.

“If tents cannot be procured, he will get chairs”, Lakshmirajam laughed. Someone brought the sanctified rice saying “namaskaram sir”, to me.

I took some quantify of it and asked Lakshmirajam who he was. “He is your elder brother’s brother-in-law” replied Lakshmirajam. I could not recognize him.

I could not identify many who had come there. When I felt they were the old relatives I was introducing myself to them as so and so mother’s son, as the grand mother’s grandson and greeting them with folded lands. Many of them were in a doubtful state of mind like me regarding relationship. If the son was a known person his wife was a stranger. In this manner I could not locate relationship with nearly half of the old relatives. Somebody said the auspicious moment had arrived and the commin seeds (Jeelakarra in Telugu) and jagery paste had been mutually placed on the heads by the bride and bridegroom. There was pushing among the guests. After some minutes there was the announcement that the sanctified rice should be sprinkled on the newly married couple to bless them. Later guests walked into the tent where lunch was served.

With the advent of the video new problems have cropped up. In earlier days it was enough if some gift was given or if the elders were met at some time during the wedding. Now the video

records when guests came, where they stood etc. So I walked with the guests in a line and got shot by the video. My brother who was thanking those that attended the wedding hugged me affectionately. The old blood relationship tingled my body. I greeted my brother’s wife and told my wife that she was her younger sister. In olden days there were no ‘namaskarams’ among relations. People used to talk to each other with smiles. Now the other person has to be invariably greeted with a namaskar, to be considered as having spoken to the person. The ladies held their hands affectionately and I walked towards the lunch tent.

The tent was crowded. There too the introductions and small talk continued and it was two O’ clock by the time I finished the wedding meal. The old and new relations started leaving and getting their gifts entered in a note book. The members of the bridegroom’s party were involved in a heated discusson. When the priest was showing to the bride and bridegroom the Arundhati star in the sky at two in the afternoon I could not but laugh. The branch of a tree by the side of the pole of the pandal also registered its smile along with me by swinging.

The priest got the ritual of spreading the cotton seeds in the hot sun. Though three generations passed after stopping the practice of weaving cloth, the wooden shaft to which the yarn winds as weaving goes on was shining resplendent with turmeric and kunkum. This wooden shaft acts as the wooden seat for the bride and bridegroom to sit upon.

In villages also wedding dinners were being prepared as in cities. But my brother’s love for chilli powder had not yet abated. The curries were hot indeed. Our tongues and mouth began to burn because of the combination of chillies and dalda. Drinking water resulted only in filling the stomach without mitigating the burning sensation. We were feeling sleepy as our stomachs were full.

“Why don’t you stay on till the ritual of handling over the

girl to the groom's party? You can go after the night meal. Autos and buses are available late in the night also", said my mother's elder sister affectionately. She whispered "there are five goat heads and the legs. Two pots of toddy has been ordered for. Stay away," she requested.

"I too want to stay. I thought I could meet old relatives in the evening by which time the crowds would have left."

"Take rest for a while," she said and asked her grandson to take me to the house of Suresh.

The lady of the house offered water in a pot to wash our feet. Me and my wife washed our feet, drank cool water and sat on the cot.

I could not recognize the lady. But I have my system. I introduced myself and introduced my wife. She too had returned from the wedding dinner. Her mouth too was burning. She looked at me and my wife laughing happily and asked "Didn't you recognize me?"

I did not recognize her. But her calling me brother-in-law made me feel happy. My wife looked at me with a strange expression. How many ideas were hidden in that expression! Jealousy, doubt, suspicion, who was that woman? any love affair of the past? etc.

"I am Saravva. Saraswathi. When your grandmother came to ask me for you, my father drove you away. Do you remember? I am that Saraswathi."

I tried to recollect the facial features and looked at her keenly. Was she the same Saraswathi whom I saw when I was very young? Now the naughtiness of those days was not seen in her. With her age and the experience she had gained, she now looked elderly and dignified.

The way she talked also had changed.

"Abba! How we met unexpectedly after so many years!" I exclaimed surprised.

"I recognized you at the marriage pandal itself. I asked aunty whether you were not Ramulu bava."

"It is more than twenty years since we met. How is it you were not seen at any functions of our relatives?"

"I was at Bhivandi and Surat with your brother for some time. We all came down here three years ago. I came to our parts to get my children educated like you, bava" she said smiling mischievously. I saw in her naughty smile the experience she had gained in life.

"Is this your relative whom you wanted to marry?" asked my wife and eyed Saraswathi with looks that approved her beauty and dignity. My wife evidently didn't like Saraswathi who was more beautiful and dignified than herself. She would have certainly felt happy if Saraswathi had been a little dark and simple looking.

"Yes, akka, he said he would marry me and none else" said Saraswathi, calling my wife, elder sister.

We talked and recollected old days as my wife and children observed us. Saraswathi introduced her children to us. Her daughter had come of marriageable age. I asked her about her daughter.

"There was a proposal from Bhivandi. But I don't like the Bhivandi match. We didn't prosper by going to Bhivandi. I will educate my daughter like your son and make her an engineer or a teacher. She turned to her daughter our elder brother is studying engineering. You too should secure a seat in engineering," she said looking at her daughter.

She made sharbat with lime juice and gave it to us all.

"My father confined me to this meagre life without

forethought. If my marriage was celebrated with you I too would have been happy like my sister. My life took this shape for having got me married very young. If I was about twenty and had some knowledge of things, I would have married you. My father got me married when I was fifteen and washed his hands," said Saraswathi sadly.

"Nothing has gone wrong in your life sister," consoled my wife.

"There's a lot of happiness in living together, difficulties or joy. What kind of a life is it if the man goes far away and stays here only for fifteen days a year, year after year? Such a life shouldn't be wished even for the enemy. We have many desires. We may feel like talking about our problems. There is no one to whom they can be explained. All people don't react alike if a woman lives alone. I couldn't live in the house of my mother-in-law. So I rented a house in my mother's place and am living here", said Saraswathi looking at me. Though Saraswathi's individuality and personality had matured, she had not lost the verve of the younger days. She was the same dashing type.

She turned to me again. "Father thought you would never prosper but you have prospered. We who thought we had won in life's struggle have fallen behind. What can be the reason for it, bava?" she asked.

"Saraswathi! Those who could feel the pulse of the society and its development fared well. Those who couldn't, lagged behind." I told her.

"With the money earned we did not invest in establishing four power looms there. Instead we diverted the money to agriculture preferring our place but it didn't help us and our lives have no identity of any sort", sighed Saraswathi.

"As a matter of fact I too have not prospered catching up the growth in life. As father passed away early in my life I could not

go in for higher studies and so became a clerk. My classmates who pursued studies without a break became High Court Judges, University Professors, Ministers and doctors in America. I had to stop my studies as the hard earnings of my mother could not help me."

"You say that one should catch up with modern development. Many modern methods have been introduced in agriculture. We are following them. Textile mills also denote development. Yet why did we lag behind?"

"Whether it is the field of workers or the field of white collar jobs, if the employees have the power of dealing with the employers unitedly, demanding a share in the profits, the wages of the employees will be on the beneficial side. In olden days agriculture and cultivation were the main props for the life of man. As I did not have that support your father refused to give you to me in marriage. Now agriculture is losing its importance and money power. The textile mills of the yesteryears had a strong earning base and the wages were attractive. The small investors came out of the mill and they are now the mill owners in Sholapur and Bhivandi. Now that opportunity has also been lost. The electronic and computer fields hold the sway now. The early employees of these fields have become millionaires."

"Whatever you say, bava! Our grand parents, father and others of our village have lived with faith in agriculture but they have not prospered. If we believe in agriculture and depend on it, of course, there is no problem for food. But animals also eat something and live. You people are enjoying luxuries on the taxes the government lays on us indiscriminately, whereas we are leading mediocre lives. It looks as though the government is there to provide you a happy life; the government which exists to help us, poor agriculturists. That's the reason why you look so chubby, goodlooking and handsome. Your children are studying higher classes and forging ahead."

Though these words were directed towards me by Saraswathi, my wife frowned as though she was referred to.

“If every citizen speaks out like you frankly, the government cannot remain idle as now. The government employees also do not behave as they behave now. They will think about the people in all earnestness”, I replied.

As we were called to be present at the ritual of handing the bride over to the groom’s party, we all left after freshening ourselves. I was moved to tears when my brother’s daughter fell at our feet asking us to bless her though we had not taken up any responsibility in the celebration of the marriage. The relationships between and among people remind us of the responsibilities one has to bear for others along with the rights one demands from the others. My conscience questioned me what I did towards the growth and improvement of these old relatives bound by the bonds of relationships.

We were requested to eat our meal in the night but my wife was keen on leaving immediately. I guessed that my wife was jealous of Saraswathi leading a life of dignity and enjoyed a fully developed personality even in her poverty. ‘One should possess the quality of giving encouragement and offering a helping hand to those who have fallen behind in their growth and prosperity compared to our development but why exhibit jealousy?’ I thought. Later I put it to her in words.

“Did you have an affair with Saraswathi before your marriage with me?” asked my wife in reply.

I felt like laughing at her question. I also felt bad when she asked me that question specially when we were married happily for so many years. “Did you also have affairs with your uncles and other relatives? Why do you suspect me in that manner?” I asked. With that she changed her strategy. Next day she went away to her mother’s place.

## ULTIMATE PEACE

Ten years ago Rapolu Yallaiah took voluntary retirement. This scheme was not in vogue then. Ofcourse there was no such name for it. He used to work in Bombay cloth mills. His daughter Vimala grew up and reached the marriageable age. Till then he could manage his family without want. He was at a loss as to how he should celebrate his daughter’s marriage as he could not raise a loan. He resigned his job in order to get the provident fund amount.

His daughter’s marriage with Lakshman was celebrated on a decent scale. But he lost his job in Bombay. In 1982 Datta Samanth made workers go on strike for an year and a half and more than a lakh workers, lost their jobs. Yellaiah thought that when he could manage to live somehow during that period of service could he not live by resigning?

After his daughter’s marriage he left Bombay and went to Bhivandi. The working hours in Bhivandi were longer. They had to work for twelve hours a day. There was no provision for provident fund and laws for the safety of the workers were not in existence then. He returned after four years having fallen ill.

Yellaiah belonged to a village in Kodimyala mandal, Jagityala division. If a person gets used to live amidst trees and in the forest, he would not be able to leave that place and go elsewhere. He will get used to gossiping with people and spend time drinking toddy under the date trees. How long can he live sitting at home doing nothing? So Yellaiah started taking up small jobs and made a living. He celebrated his son’s marriage. But the dowry he

received was not sufficient to meet the wedding expenses.

He spent money for the birthday celebrations of grandsons and grand daughters. Debts increased by thousands. As he grew old, other responsibilities also increased. He could not but do some work. But he had no land to cultivate. He had no plough. He had no bullocks.

He opened a tea shop at his door step. But it did not work out well. He had no money to be used as outlay. He felt that he would not be able to go to Bhivandi and so accepted work as a labourer in a powerloom in Siricilla.

Siricilla was better than Bhivandi. There was no queue at the toilets, at the eating places and at the resting places as in Bhivandi. There was cool breeze and a lot of brightness... He felt happy. But in Siricilla power supply was erratic. If there was power, the weaving mills were not sound. If there was no regular work it meant no regular income.

Yellaiah reconciled himself to the situation as life was just moving on somehow... he would go to his village once in ten days, spend time with his grand children, with his son, daughter-in-law and others.

Though work was irregular, he did not feel it bad. If there was no work on a day, he would take a bus and go home. He would forget all the pain of the working place. He got unadulterated toddy at home. He had sound sleep after he had his drink. Yellaiah ran the family in this manner, now working, now remaining idle.

His second daughter stopped studies with seventh class. She was reaching the marriageable age. His son shifted to Metpalli taking his wife saying that he would do some work there. The house looked empty.

As matters stood, the owner of the powerloom, where

Yellaiah worked, committed suicide. It was rumoured that he committed suicide as his establishment did not function well, as his debts increased, also the interest. Those who gave him loans cursed him silently. Those who owed him money were happy that they could avoid payment.

Yellaiah failed to understand why the cloth woven after hard work did not fetch reasonable amount of money. He was of course used to drinking toddy at home but his owner was a tea-totaller. He would be doing some work or other from morning to evening like all other workers. Then why could he not make money worth his name? Will he not be able to put by some money unless he earned a higher wage? As for himself, what did Yellaiah earn by doing the work of a labourer? If he worked for a low wage, what would he eat? How would he live?

The association of powerloom owners arranged a condolence meeting. They discussed how they could avoid such a crisis in the future. Yellaiah started working with another owner.

A year passed. The second owner of Yellaiah hanged himself. At that time the cost of yarn shot up. Power charges increased. People said if the cost of these two items was brought down, the number of suicides will drop.

The government had given permission to export cotton yarn to foreign countries without a thought. As a result cotton yarn was in short supply in the local market and the prices doubled. If this situation had not been brought about, there would have been no suicides, said some. Yellaiah thought that it was a fact and tried to find a job at some other place. But in Siricilla the problem was the same with every owner.

When Yellaiah came home, Yellaiah's neighbour, Venkataiah, committed suicide not being able to repay loans, not being able to find work at a powerloom and also because of hunger. Everyone felt that it was most unfortunate that he should kill himself for

being indebted for a paltry sum of twenty thousand rupees.

Yellaiah imagined the problem of Venkataiah as his own and became depressed. He imagined as though he himself had died. Many other thoughts troubled him. He could not stay at home and could not think of going back to Siricilla.

His son-in-law and daughter invited him to stay with them at Godavarikhani. Lakshman, his son-in-law was a good man. But he had his problems and did not know how things would turn up.

Yellaiah now realized why it was said one should not go and stay with the son-in-law. As long as he was away from them he had the feeling that they were leading a good life. Now that he was with them he lost that satisfaction. The company of his grandchildren gave him some consolation, no doubt.

His son-in-law looked skin and bones having worked hard. Yellaiah thought of starting a petty business. Vimala was happy as her father was with her. He engaged the children, played with them, fetched water, vegetables and took the children to the school and brought them back....

Vimala could find some leisure because of the presence of her father. His daughter and son-in-law improved in their looks and health. The vegetable cart he started did not work well as there were many vendors on push carts. Yellaiah went back home as he did not find his stay profitable there.

When Yellaiah left them, they both cried. Lakshman had asked his father to visit Godavarikhani many times but his father refused to go there.

“If I work in your place carrying earth you will feel bad. I too do not feel it would be proper. How can we live if I don't work? How are the two other children to grow? How am I to perform their marriages?” he asked.

Vimala and Lakshman realized how a house would resemble a heaven if there was an elderly member present in the house. That was the reason why their eyes moistened when they bade farewell to Yellaiah.

Yellaiah wanted to go back to weaving. But he was not sure whether people would buy the cloth woven by him. He would have to invest a lot of money too. But he had no money. If people wore hand woven cloth will there be hunger deaths? Finally he took a job with a weaver at Garshakurti.

Mill cloth was available everywhere. Also readymades. Foreign stuff too. There was respect when people dressed in those clothes. Why should cotton wool be exported? Why should we import their cloth? Could our hand woven cloth compete with their fashions?

“During Gandhi's time people talked of hand woven cloth. They called it ‘swadeshi’. Where has all that enthusiasm gone now?” said an important man of the handloom society. Yellaiah did not get the passport of that question. He cursed the mills that were destroying their lives.

Many thoughts bothered Yellaiah. ‘If yarn made in far off places were brought here and sold, we too must have the freedom to go to those places and work there. When that facility and freedom is not provided to us, how are we to work and make a living?’ He kept thinking.

Yellaiah's house was agog with joy and happiness for the Dasera festival when his daughter Vimala, son-in-law, grand children, the parents of his son-in-law, and daughter-in-law turned up to stay with him for a few days.

His son-in-law Laxman informed Yellaiah that the doctors of his company declared him unfit to continue the job. They suggested that he should opt for voluntary retirement.

“Will they drop me out after using me as a machine? The salary they paid me got spent as and when they paid me. How am I to live when I lost the energy and strength in my limbs? How am I to educate my children?” lamented Lakshman. By morning the jolly atmosphere of the festive day turned into gloom.

“The company does not even possess the kind of gratitude which a dog expresses. How unjust?” Vimala, Yellaiah’s daughter cried.

“How will human beings live if machines that do the work of man are introduced?” demanded Veeraiah, Yellaiah’s son-in-law’s father, as if Yellaiah was responsible for the crisis.

“That is what I am also thinking. I wonder whom we should ask for redress” replied Yellaiah.

Veeraiah used to dig earth and do allied work. The advent of tractors and modern machinery displaced him from his work.

“My second son has been trying to go to Arab countries. Can you help him monetarily, Yellaiah?” asked Veeraiah.

“The professions followed by a caste or a community have not been feeding us. We do not know when the new professions close their doors. The hope that tomorrow will help is dwindling. How are we to live?” philosophized Yellaiah in a sing-song manner.

Thoughts like the above are rendered in a song by wandering mendicants and sanyasis generally but such singing got confined to be sung at the last rites of a dead person. This reaction of Yellaiah filled the house again with gloom and sorrow.

“Are these industries helping people to live by hitting hard the common man? Can a lay man or a man reduced to skin and bones compete with a man that goes in a car? What is the use of these plans and programmes that do not give work to hands that can work? Why these governments?” shot out Lakshman.

Yellaiah agreed that there was reason in the words of his son-in-law though he felt that the words used by him were high sounding.

Veeraiah said that the moralistic songs sung by mendicants and sanyasis deal with human beings and their lives. If men who can work do not enjoy safety for their lives where is safety for the society? Industries should help man and not destroy him.

Six months passed.

The money Lakshman received on his voluntary retirement was spent in repaying loans taken to send his brother to Arab countries.

Lakshman and Vimala went back to their place. His children were now admitted into the government school where there was no dress restriction. Earlier they had gone to a private school wearing the school uniform with tie and shoes.

Lakshman was happy with village life. The village, the pleasant breeze, and everything else was good.

But there was no work.

He had no land to do cultivation.

For him who had worked as a labour hand, he had no rest.

Now in the village he had nothing but rest.

He got accustomed to leading a restful life.

When his wife told him she had no firewood to cook food, he went into the forest with his axe. When he was cutting branches he remembered his boyhood days, the songs he sang, the games he played. When sweat poured down his face and body, Lakshman felt happy instead of feeling tired.

As he returned with the required firewood tied to his cycle, the forest guard stopped him and demanded money.

Lakshman wondered how the fellow suddenly appeared ignoring him when he was cutting wood for such a long time.

Lakshman did not know that finding fault was the only job of the guard.

The guard threatened Lakshman that if he did not pay him money, he would be booked in case and jailed.

“I didn’t get money. I’ll return with money” said Lakshman, left the cycle there and went home. He did not go back to the forest.

Another day Vimala grumbled that he had no work. So he collected a few fish-hooks and went to the tank. He had a good catch. When he was returning the fisher-folk arranged a panchayati. They had taken the tank on contract. They said the fish available in wells under the tank also belonged to them. Lakshman touched their feet, paid the penalty and got himself out of the situation.

“You lost your cycle. Now you paid the penalty. Whatever you do results in a loss. You better sit at home and do nothing” reprimanded Vimala.

Lakshman was confused and disillusioned. This earth, the water, the tank, the forest, the tree, this wood and stone – nothing was his.

How beautiful was nature! How peaceful the village! ... but nothing belonged to him. He wondered whether the air he breathed was his at all ... the trees, the gardens, the birds, the fish, the fields and tanks ... none of these were his. How could he love this village? How could he live in the village?

He had thought that the job in which he worked was his. But he lost the job. There was no job security. What was left to him in his life? Was it only the old house?

Now there will be peace for the rest of his life. Lakshman

stretched himself on the tank bund or under the fig tree.

“Father! mother calls you to come and eat food”, say his children going to him. He went, ate a few morsels of food and returned to lie down under a tree.

Yellaiah did not know what to do observing his son-in-law.

The lives of some ... who grew before his very eyes ... were getting destroyed ... the society also was getting disintegrated.

The philosophical songs rendered by the bairagis have been giving strength to man to face calmly the destruction of the society.

Yellaiah realized now why their songs were being made and sung. Vimala could not realize the meaning. She shed tears unseen by her father and her husband.

There was no anger in her sorrow. She was crying calmly.

In that calmness there was disappointment. A despondency.

It was a state of contemplation – a meditation.

It was a phase which stated that tomorrow’s society would also face that stage.

Yellaiah, her father, was singing the philosophical song tunefully.

In place of the symbols of destruction, sadness was quietly, peacefully and calmly spreading itself all over the house.

## LOVE ETERNAL

It was evening by the time Suvarna reached her hut. She had left in the morning to work as a coolie at a building site. Her two children who were playing in the dirt ran to her on seeing her. "I told you that you should be reading and writing till I came. Why are you playing?" she asked them annoyed but held them close to her lovingly.

She washed her feet, lighted the kitchen fire and arranged the childrens' books in order. She swept the floor and started cleaning rice for cooking.

Bhagyarekha who lived a few streets away came asking why she was late that day.

Suvarna wanted to tell her that the new head-worker was teasing her but on second thoughts desisted from telling her so.

"Hari Babu came for you. He sat in our house for a while as you were not available. He left half an hour ago," informed Bhagyarekha.

Suvarna cursed the head-worker who teased her for more than half-an hour. Hari Babu came after a long time – after three years. Because of the head-worker, she could not meet him and lost the opportunity. She herself had distanced Hari Babu from her. She did not know whether what she did was a sacrifice or a feeling of helplessness. She felt pained now. Yet, she was sure she did the right thing.

"Did he say anything?" Suvarna asked without revealing her joy.

"I'll come again. Ask her to stay at home,' he instructed and left," said Bhagyarekha.

"Did he treat my children affectionately?"

"Yes. He called the children who were playing in the dust. He talked to them for a while and gave them money to buy what they wanted. He gave me this amount for the school fee of the children and these Jasmines", said Bhagyarekha. She gave the money to Suvarna and left.

The children sat before the lamp to study.

Suvarna cooked food and bathed. She wore the best saree she had. Except one or two, all her sarees were second hand sarees. But strangely, she looked attractive whatever saree she wore. Particularly the serene expression on her face and a hint of a smile that spoke of the rounded completeness of her personality, easily held the attention of people.

'Hari Babu,' she sighed.

Hari Babu worked as a supervisor in an apartment construction company for some time. Suvarna came to know of him at the construction site.

Hari Babu! He was a beautiful dream in her life. He was a sacred being in her imaginary world. The dream grew old and began to fade. Suvarna reminisced.

On meeting her for the first time he had told her that there were blossomed flowers in her smile. She smiled again. "When you smile melodious musical notes are heard in my heart," he had said.

"I wonder how I could be alive all these days without your acquaintance, Suvarna,".

She smiled again and he adjusted the ringlets of her hair.

"I can't imagine life without you"

"I am with you now"

"I need you"

"I am yours. When did I say 'no'?"

"You should be mine for ever."

"I've been with you whenever you wanted."

"Let's marry and leave this place."

"Hari Babu! I'll come to you whenever you want me. Why talk of marriage?"

"That's not it, Suvarna. I will get authority over you only after marriage. My life will also get settled."

"Hari Babu! If we marry and you gain your right over me, I may not be needed by you so much as now. You may get disinterested in me within a short time. Like all husbands you may hold your sway on me and love may be lost."

"Suvarna! Do you equate me with all husbands?!" He got annoyed.

"No. you are my Hari Babu. You are my dream world."

"Suvarna! Your love should be flowing eternally for me, on me!"

They had embraced each other.

"Suvarna! You are my only love. I know none else."

"Hari Babu! You know I am married. I have a son."

"Let it be so. But let us get away from here and marry. Your son will be with us."

Suvarna postponed marriage by giving him some excuse or the other. He felt annoyed and disappointed.

Days passed. Her husband kept beating and abusing her.

She bore them for Hari Babu's sake. Why did she not get rid of him? His smile was sweet and pure like jasmine. His heart was filled with true love. There was no lust in his eyes but his love was like the life-giving oasis in a desert.

Why did she not go away with him? He was her life. She was anxious that he should not experience the thorns of life. Will his life sail smoothly if he eloped with a married woman? That was her fear. Her previous experience terrified her.

Her husband, was he a husband at all? He was running a tea shop. She got acquainted with him when he frequented the tea shop. He was married and had children.

She knew all about him and yet fell into his trap. Did he throw the net or did she yield to him because of circumstances? She wanted a male companion. She needed protection from others.

How many nights she had kept crying! Could she now cry at all?! Father could not celebrate her elder sister's marriage. He could not buy a husband for her sister when men got sold like cattle. Father had to work as a textile mill worker giving up his profession which did not feed him. He had two children. For some years things ran smoothly. Then the mill was closed down. Thousands of workers lost their livelihood. Their family also suffered. The place where they were born could give them nothing. They could not save anything at the new place to which they went. They moved and migrated.

Father took up tailoring on a small scale. What he earned was not sufficient for their food. Where was the question of saving? Movement from place to place.....

Her elder sister waited for her father to perform her marriage and at twenty five she eloped. She had her doubts that the man she chose may leave her to her fate soon. Yet she took the decision. She did not see them again after leaving them. She lived alone

for six months after he left her. She started going to lodges whenever a call came. After two years she lived with another man. He had children and was a slave to vices. He used to pester her for money. She had to visit the lodges. She tried to leave him after she had two children. But he did not allow her to leave him. She was earning money everyday.

Suvarna realised that her father could not celebrate her marriage. Then there was the stigma of her sister's elopement. Her mother knew about her affairs but could do nothing about it. She eloped with Sekhar. He was a good person but life tempted him. He knew that her parents would be helpless if he left her in the lurch. Sekhar told her about his parents and sister and his fears about their life. He said he would spend a few days with them and return. She knew that he would not return. He married a girl who brought him dowry. With that money he celebrated his sister's marriage. After Sekhar left her she managed to make a living all by herself. Then she met Suribabu. Now Sekhar was a big man. But he cannot show her his face. As Sekhar was a good man she expected that he would make her his second wife. But he moved about avoiding her. Now if she left with Hari Babu, she was afraid that the old story may repeat itself. She did not want to face that situation. The force of circumstances would make Hari Babu also act like Sekhar. He will be attracted towards his new wife. That thought made her reject his offer.

She was by then the second wife of Suribabu. To add to it the difficulties poverty had created for her. Then there were the restrictions and limitations a woman's life entailed. Now she was a married woman and had a hut. She had a little place all for herself in the town.

She could not overcome her difficulties. Suribabu did not give a paisa at home. He knocked off what little she earned. She could not but go for work, go to lodges. She was called only when a family type was required.

Her decision to live by physical labour alone did not fructify. If she went to work at construction sites she had problems from the head-workers. The wages were also low. If she wanted wages to be paid everyday she had to yield to the advances made by men. She preferred satisfying the individual customers who paid her well than get far less by working hard the whole day. She had to keep working as a coolie at construction sites to win the esteem of society.

Hari babu entered her life when she was working at a building site. He was an innocent man. She used to hug him as she hugged her children to her heart. As days passed he developed his ideals.

“Suvarna! How long will you continue living this aimless life? Should your life be reduced to this wretched level simply because your father could not give dowry to a groom? Let's marry, Suvarna!”

“Hari Babu! I hate people who sympathise me and my condition. Don't marry me feeling pity for me.”

“Suvarna! Not with pity. I ask you because I love you. You gave life to me, to me who was leading an aimless life. Let us marry. No one depends on me. My brothers are employed and earn. My parents live with them. We will be free birds.”

“Hari Babu! I will not be able to bear if I am left a destitute as Sekhar did. The reason for Sekhar to distance himself from me was his marriage. He snatched away the meaning of my life. If he had not married he would not have been branded a cheat. He would have kept meeting me as a friend. I do not wish to lose you in that way. I need your affection. I must possess the feeling that you are mine wherever you are. You should always remain a good man,” said Suvarna smiling, suppressing all her agony in her heart.

From that day onwards Hari Babu grew serious-minded

giving up his playful nature.

“Suvarna! Why do you talk of things when I say that we should marry? Don’t you feel happy with me? Does he make you feel happier?”

Suvarna sobbed. “Hari Babu! Happiness does not lie in sex. Satisfaction has something to do with the heart. When two hearts meet satisfaction and happiness are attained and that feeling conquers every other thing. The heart bleeds when the inner satisfaction has not been achieved inspite of mere sex. The love you have extended to me will not be forgotten by me in my life. The moments we spent together are the most beautiful and blissful moments of my life. These memories will be cherished by me all my life.”

“If so, why do you reject marriage?”

“Hari Babu! I am older than you in age. I have seen the world. I don’t know for how long you will be enamoured of me. I am afraid you too will change after fulfilling your desire. I can’t think of you as a bad man. Unlike Sekhar, my memories of you should remain ideal. You should marry a girl you like, whom your parents like. You should see me in her. I should have a place in your heart unknown to others.”

“Suvarna! What is it you talk? I love you. If at all I marry, I’ll marry you.”

There was a heated discussion. Hari Babu got very angry with Suvarna for treating him as an innocent man and for her moralising.

“Do you possess any sense at all? Do you think I am a kid. Do you consider my love for you something like the game children play? Tell me whether you agree to marry me.” Hari Babu spoke in a severe tone. He raised his hand to hit her in his impatience. Whenever Suribabu raised his hand, she trembled.

When Hari Babu raised his hand she felt happy. How good it would be if he slapped her cheeks! The raised hand was the evidence of his love for her. Hari Babu controlled himself and lowered his hand. She was disappointed that he did not hit her.

“Hari Babu! Let your love for me remain in your heart for ever. Let me be a lovely dream in your reminiscences. When did I say ‘no’ to you?”

Days rolled by. Suribabu hated the second son because he did not resemble him. She knew that she wanted to convert Hari Babu into a child as part of her life. That Hari Babu himself should change into a boy and play in her lap, that she should suckle him. “Little” Hari Babu will be the emblem of their love.

“This fellow is my son. You yourself as my son.....” She smiled mischievously.

She knew how much Hari Babu grew in his own estimation at the birth of his son. How much his heart over- flowed with the joy of self-confidence.

Hari Babu gave up his job in the building construction company. He secured a better job. He left the town. His visits grew less.

He became a father within a year of his marriage.

How strange was his behaviour on the day his life took a new turn!

“Suvarna! You gave me life. You gave me self confidence. I can’t forget your help in my life.

you are the queen of my heart. You are the noble person who shared your love and made me a human being from my desultory life,” he had said and fallen prostrate at her feet.

“What’s this Hari Babu! What are you doing? Why do you compare me with a woman who lost her chastity, and with deities?

It is wrong to do so," she had said lifting up.

"Suvarna! I am offering obeisance to my goddess! I fall prostrate before my deity," he had said and again touched her feet with tears in his eyes. But they were tears of joy. He told her that he had been taken as a working partner in a company that built apartments. She felt happy. He brought new clothes to her and the children.

When Hari Babu grew distant from her, Suribabu's violence increased on her. As long as Hari Babu kept coming to her, Suribabu controlled himself with the fear that she might run away with him.

Suribabu got his children by his wife admitted in a private school and the children born to Suvarna in a government school. Though he put them in a school, he made them work as cleaners in a hotel. Suvarna could do nothing except curse him and cry for her fate.

A glow and a chapter in her life ended. The children were growing. They were her hope. What will they say when they come of age? Will Suribabu leave her by then? She told him with all definiteness that she would not go to the lodges. That she would not give him money, that she would educate her children and not send them to the hostel. With that Suribabu made his visits to her less frequent.

Now she passed through a phase of loneliness when she could not share her problems and difficulties with anyone else. Sometimes she wondered whether she had committed a mistake by distancing herself from Hari Babu. Was it love? Sacrifice? Helplessness? How would it have been if she had married him? Perhaps her life would not have been so distressful. Even if he had left her, perhaps there might have been a chance to live on his name, as his wife. Did she destroy the opportunity of his calling her mother and father as mother-in-law and father-in-law!

Were they not fortunate to be called so by him? Had they sinned so much to be deprived of such a privilege? Her father's sight had grown weak. He was not able to continue his tailoring job successfully. If she had married Hari Babu, he would have made her father at least a watchman at some site.....,father! how unfortunate you are ! You are unfortunate in not getting called 'father-in-law', she said to herself.

She should discuss with Hari Babu many issues. The children should be put in a different school. New clothes should be purchased. She must ask him whether he would help her financially to some extent. She must learn how it was possible to build a bridge between love and reality. He had said he would marry her. Now he had children. She should ask him whether he would take her atleast as his mistress. She should ask him whether he was prepared to call her mother and father as mother-in-law and father-in-law. It would be enough if he gave her a chance to live on his name. He need not fend her. She would live by working as a coolie. If he agreed to her proposal she would ask her parents to live with her. If he agreed..... if he accepted.....it was enough.....

The children slept off without eating food. She adorned her head with the jasmines given by Bhagyarekha. She waited for Hari Babu.

If Hari Babu did not respond to her wish to live on his name. It was better if Hari Babu did not turn up than being told by him that her proposal was not to his liking. Atleast she would be left with the option of dreaming about her desires and hopes. Hari Babu would come. He had to come. He would agree. Even if he did not agree to her idea, she would live by herself on his name. Her second son 'Chinna' was the evidence of her desire. What was the need for someone else to give the evidence?

She half closed the door and took a nap. She slept off the

night. Hari Babu did not come. It was morning. Hari Babu did not visit her. Suvarna got up. A sweet dream melted away. A hope got erased. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Hari Babu could not come because of some urgent work. Suvarna was awaiting him expecting him to come sometime in the night. How difficult it was to live without some hope! She thought that her hope should not end in despair.

Days passed. Suvarna awaited his arrival thinking that he should not come. She thought that things took the present shape as she having desired to live on his name. Hereafter she should not ask him anything. She should not get disappointed having asked. She should not expect anything from him. The sweet memories should remain for ever a pleasant dream. Let him not come. Suvarna conditioned her mind to the fact that her dreams and hopes should not get erased. Yet she kept on waiting for Hari Babu. The flow of her love for him kept running in the form of tears – into a rivulet. Before the children woke up in the mornings she cried in great agony, “mother! O father! Why did my life take this course? Should lives be sacrificed for the inability to shell down dowries? The man who closed down the mill is prospering. No one could do anything against him. Father! Mother! Why did you give birth to me?....” Bhagyarekha came now and then and wiped her tears.

There was at least one person, Bhagyarekha, to console Suvarna. Who was there to console Bhagyarekha? Her tears got dried up. The world did not know that the two were sisters. They were living without knowing the truth. If they came to know of it-many problems would arise.....Bhagyarekha desired that Suvarna’s dreams should come true. Though she knew that she would be disappointed, Suvarna was not able to give up her hope.....

## HERITAGE

“I don’t want that village alliance. I am not a little girl to be told which match would benefit me. Why don’t you listen to me when I say I’ll not marry till I secure a Group I post or a lecturer’s job? Each person has his or her own assessment of life. I may not be as experienced as you are. I am working as a teacher. I am also working in a village school. Don’t I know the mentality and attitudes of villagers?”

Kiranmayi possessed M.Sc., M.Phil., and B.Ed. degrees and was a gold medalist. She was overcome by grief and anger. She cried inconsolably thinking that her humility destroyed her life. She could not sleep in the night. She was lost in hopeless despondency and did not know how to get rid of the alliance that was proposed.

“Mother! Instead of marrying you who hailed from Jagityala, father should have married one of his close relatives whom he had known for long in the village. Why should your brother be proposed for me now when father himself did not prefer such an alliance forty years ago?”

Lakshmi Bai, Kiranmayi’s mother was taken aback at her daughter’s argument. She cursed herself that things had come to such a pass because of the stubbornness of the old in-laws. Rajesham, Kiranmayi’s father, was a lecturer in the degree college at Karimnagar. He kept his family in Korutla for the sake of his old parents and visited Korutla once a week. He had three children. Being the last child, Kiranmayi was pampered. The first son worked in Mumbai in a company. He married a girl from

Sholapur and visited his place now and then. The second boy settled in Hyderabad and was planning to go abroad.

“Tatayya! Did you develop love for villages now which love you did not possess all these years! If you have true and deep love for villages, sell this building and settle in a village. What happiness will I enjoy by marrying a man who has three younger sisters? Our earnings will not be sufficient to spend on their marriages and deliveries. If you say you would die if I don't agree to this marriage, better die now. Should my future life be sacrificed for the sake of you who may not live for a year or two more? Do you call this love? This is not love. It is the authority you have been enjoying high-handedly. This is arrogance. If you love me dearly you will bless me even if I marry outside the caste or religion. That does not mean I want to elope with somebody. If I love a man I will bring him to you and introduce him to you all. When you did not object the selection made by brothers regarding their wives, why should there be an objection in my case?”

Gangarajam, the grandfather and Lingamma her grandmother kept quiet thinking that Kiranmayi would go silent after shouting for some time. Their silence incensed Kiranmayi further.

“Tatayya! You feel proud that you had taken part in the freedom struggle. You loved yourself more than you love the people. You have reaped the benefits ten times for what you did long ago. You stopped there without progress because of your rank selfishness. If you had continued your struggle, society would have developed further. The post of the Sarpanch appeared a big post to you. Why did you not become an M.L.A. or an M.P.? If you had not been selfish why did you sell your properties in the village and settle in Korutla? As a result did not the village society go thirty years backwards?”

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\* *Tatayya means grand father. It is an affectionate way of addressing the grand father or very old persons.*

Kiranmayi washed her face and got dressed. Her mother served her steaming food.

“Mother! Go and tell them to-day itself. Tell them that I did not approve of the match. Tell them not to come tomorrow for the engagement ritual. Tatayya! You Tatamma! You brought the match. So you also go and tell them....If I miss the bus I have to apply leave....” So saying she walked out. Her mother and others felt that the storm had passed with her departure.

She could not concentrate on teaching in the classes. She was worried as to what she should do if the match was not cancelled.

As soon as Kiranmayi left, Lakshmi Bai served food to the old couple and started out. “If we had thought of acting after the wedding invitations were distributed, we would have lost our face. She refused to listen to you however much you tried to convince her.”

Gangarajam and Lingamma did not relish to eat so early. Moreover they were worried and disturbed at the attitude of their granddaughter. They ate a little hurriedly and boarded the bus.



In their days Lingamma and Gangarajam were praised as veritable Parvathi and Parameswara, the divine couple. Gangarajam was now eighty and Lingamma seventy five. Lingamma was seven years old when she was married to Gangarajam. They had been man and wife for more than sixty five years. They were an inseparable pair and no one could think of the one without the other. But in recent times they were worried who would go first. “I'll go first. I can't live alone without you,” said Gangarajam. But Lingamma would say it would be good if she went first.

“Did you note what things she said?” asked Gangarajam in the rattle of the bus, expecting sympathy from his wife.

“What’s wrong in what she said? I’ve been telling you from the beginning not to force her. She inherited all your qualities”.

Gangarajam felt hurt. He was pained at the grand daughter being supported and he being compared to her.

“Did I oppose my elders? Did I talk so rashly any time?”  
The old man.

“Didn’t you revolt against your elders? Did you heed the words of your father not to meddle with doras, the overlords...Forget the slavish lives you have lived. We have gained independence. All are equal now. To whom is he overlord? If you ask me to stay at home I’ll do so. If you want me to go my ways, I’ll go. But don’t make me a coward. What’s the greatness of his life? If all the villages spit at him, he will be blown off. Did you not attack them in that manner?” A smile danced on the wrinkled lips of Lingamma.

Lingamma’s words took Gangarajam back sixty years. His understanding of things changed completely after he attended the Andhra Mahasabha meetings at Jagityala, Korutla, Ciricilla and Metpalli in those days.

In the Andhra Mahasabha Movement he came into contact with many leaders like Burgula Rama Krishna Rao, Swamy Ramananda Tirtha, Suravaram Pratapa Reddy, Madapati Hanumantha Rao, Guntuka Narasaiah Pantulu, Ekkaladevi Lakshmana, Gangula Bhoomaiah, Vattikota Aluvar Swamy, K.V. Ranga Reddy, Chennaraju Gangaram, Kasam Sivaraja Gupta, Baddam Yellareddy, Butti Rajaram, Amballa Rajaram, the socialist Tirumala Rao and others.

Till then his village was his world. Now he realised that there was a world far bigger than his village, a country bigger than these overlords, there was the British Empire where the sun never set, there was the Socialist Russia, there was the Andhra Mahasabha, there was the Congress, there was Gandhi. He went

through many books distributed through the Library Movement. Whenever he went to Jagityala, he went through copies of Golakonda Patrika the daily news paper.

Though the Nizam repealed bonded labour in 1922, the overlords did not give up their hold on the villagers. To collect revenue and to run the administration the Nizam depended on the rich and the overlords or chiefs called ‘doras’. The Nizam had hoped that if he appointed people from upper class families and the wealthy people, they would not be greedy. But it were they who plundered the money. Caste and wealth helped them to torment the poor. They exploited the innocent people, made them into bonded labourers, enjoyed luxuries and grew into lazy officials. As a result the Nizam State fell behind other states in the country and the government got a bad name. If the poor had been given jobs they would have worked hard, being afraid of the people and the government. So many atrocities would not have been perpetrated. The Nizam had thought of taking Ambedkar as the Principal Secretary, but perhaps the wealthy persons prevented this appointment by the Nizam.

Gangarajam stayed with his mother’s mother at Jagityala and pursued his studies. By 1927 there was a high school established by the Nizam government at Jagitayala. A Bengali Banerjee was the Headmaster when Gangarajam was the student there. He had observed from close quarters the Vandemataram Movement and anti-separation Bengal Movement in 1905. Banerjee used to talk with the teachers in whom he had faith and some students about the above movement. Gangarajam was one of the students who heard the talks by Banerjee.

Of course Gangarajam did not understand what was being explained. But the sessions did not go waste. He used to feel enthused when he learnt of the national movement, about Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, the reformation activities etc. But he did not find enough time to read while weaving on the handloom.

The weaving pit did not release him after his studies also. Gangarajam chose agriculture leaving the weaving profession which pinned him down to the pit.

Gangarajam's father's younger brother Chinna Lingam who had gone to Bombay brought, along with money, Bombay culture also. He brought with him beautiful muslin dhotis, soft leather chappals, the musical instrument sarangi, coats, khadi caps, Marvadi black caps etc. The village overlord Tukka Rao also did not possess such costly clothes. Tukka Rao's best clothes were those which Gangarajam's father had woven on his loom.

Differences between Tukka Rao and Gangarajam's father arose as Chinna Lingam handled agriculture as well as weaving. Tukka Rao grew jealous of the prosperity of Chinna Lingam.

Lingaiah argued that Tukka Rao should pay labour charges for removing silt from his part of the land which was part of the tank in the summer season. The villages formed into a sangam, a trust or an association. Gangarajam's sister was born at that time and she was named 'Sangam' in honour of the association formed then. The communists of Andhra Mahasabha supported Lingaiah.

Chinna Lingam, was active because of his trade union experience of Bombay. Some one murdered Chinna Lingam one night. Tukka Rao bribed the Tahasildar, the policePatel to escape from the case. Though Rangarajam's father chose to keep silent, people supported the association and attended the meetings.

When Lakshmi Bai came to live with Gangarajam, there was still fear in the family after Chinna Lingam's murder. Gangarajam started life cautiously. There was Andhra Mahasabha and also Arya Samaj which gave him courage and strength.

Many people got converted as Christians and Muslims not being able to withstand the injustices, bonded labour, excommunication from religion and such other indignities perpetrated by the overlords and their stooges. Gangarajam

realised that the Aryasamaj could do nothing except take back the converts into Hinduism by purifying and sanctifying them. His father's younger brother's children embraced mohamadnism and left the village.

How and why the conflict between the overlords and the Nizam started no one knew. As a result many people left the village and ran away. Later the overlords themselves ran away. They left the villages, went to towns and began to earn there.

With the advent of razakars, decoities, rapes, killings and burning of villages commenced. There was no security and so Gangarajam who was suffering from malaria took refuge in his grandmother's house at Jagityala. It was rumoured that the sons of Gangarajam's younger brother were involved in the killing of Tukka Rao and the raping of his daughter in the guise of razakars.

The situation in Jagityala was worse. No one knew when death would overtake them. Some local muslims joined hands with Arabs and took out an armed procession. They drew detailed plans to kill moneyed people and the distribution of the booty. All over Telangana such plans and agreements were made. The Hindus also took out processions with their arms. Plans for attacks and counter attacks were drawn all over. Lingamma who was attending on her husband Gangarajam was terribly shaken by the happenings. One night she went out and faced a group of razakars. As she answered them in Telugu she was surrounded and carried away and raped.

Fortunately Police Action took place about this time. The razakars disappeared. If the arrival of the Indian army had been delayed by a couple of days hundreds of people would have been killed. Lingamma would have been dead. One Ragella Latchanna broke into the house of a razakar, recognised Lingamma and took her to the house of her husband. She had an abortion and later she did not conceive. Gangarajam counted himself among the

dead but the Police Action saved him.

Some overlords returned to the villages. Gangarajam carried out a propaganda against them. In 1945 Gangarajam met the Nizam along with Ekkaladevi Lakshman. Dasari Ethirajam through Lakshmi Narayana Dasu for the establishment of a handloom co-operative society in Jagityala and Korutla. They carried on their mission for the starting of co-operative societies, for the abolishment of bonded labour, subsidy for yarn and the Khadi movement. As a result Gangula Bhoomaiah was elected as the M.L.A. in 1952. Gangarajam felt as if he himself had won the election.



People thought that by winning independence they had entombed bonded labour. But the overlords emerged from the tombs with new strategies. The Metpalli Khadi Board which was established for the welfare of the common man went into the hands of the overlords Vijayarama Rao and Chokka Rao. They could prevent the leadership of B.Cs till the advent of Telugu Desam party. When the B.Cs managed to get Amballa Rajaram as their M.L.A., he grew haughty on being addressed as 'dora' by the people of his caste and others. With that Gangarajam fell out with Amballa Rajaram.

Even before they could adjust themselves to the new equations in the struggle of life, history claimed many pages in the book of life. Gangarajam defeated Vijaya Rama Rao and became the Sarpanch. Later Vijayarama Rao became M.L.A. Gangarajam had to stop there as he had no financial backing. Though his followers could become Sarpanchs, the overlords, the police and the Patel joined hands, kept the officials in their grip and worked against him and the people. He did not know the art of destructive politics. His children were growing. They had to be educated and brought up answering their needs. So he rented

a house in Jagityala and sent his wife Lingamma and children there. He lived alone in the village.

He realised that whatever the struggles, the life of the villages will be like the proverbial frog in the well until democracy made its presence felt in village life. So he concentrated on making a living. He became a contractor for tanks and roads. Also an excise contractor. He settled in Korutla where there was bus facility which helped him in visiting offices. His sons secured jobs, and married avoiding close blood relations. They married girls who had studied atleast upto the fifth class. Lakshmi Bai came as his daughter-in-law on this condition. The traditional nine yards saree which Lakshmi Bai wore when she married Rajesham became a six yards saree when she gave birth to Kiranmayi. By the time Rajesham occupied a lecturer's post growing from a school teacher, Lakshmi Bai had imbibed and cultivated such culture in speech and other aspects as to produce the impression as though she had been a the degree holder.

When Gangarajam kept himself busy in the establishment of handloom co-operative societies Rajesham got an offer of a teacher's job in a village like Kiranmayi. But he refused to work as a teacher in a village. He preferred a job in the textile mills of Bombay. The teacher's job carried a salary of only forty five rupees where as the Bombay job would fetch him a hundred and fifty rupees.

He did not get the Bombay job. This benefited him. Rajesham worked as a teacher, did M.A. and later Ph.D and became a lecturer. Lingamma's younger brother's son took a job in Metpalli in a Khadi mill and by the time he retired as a manager his salary was as low as that of an attender, drawing only three thousand rupees a month. Rajesham was now drawing a five figure salary.

No one believed that the lives of those who went to Bombay would take such an unexpected turn. Similarly the lives of those

who settled in villages as agriculturists and cultivators remained static with no progress. But in the early days this category of people were proud and arrogant.

Once the parents of girls used to ask the groom's parents how many ploughs and cattle, how much cultivation they had etc. at the time of marriage negotiations. Now those questions have been forgotten. What are the educational qualifications, what job will he get are the questions that are asked. Gangarajam bought gold at the rate of thirty five rupees a tola for his sister's marriage. The marriage was celebrated for sixteen days.

Relatives used to arrive four days before the marriage. The dinners used to start with the anointing of Pochamma, the deity, by offering her a he goat as sacrifice. After all the celebrations and rituals were completed with the sixteenth day festival, the invitees used to go home. So these marriages were scheduled to take place in summer when agricultural operations were few. The number of carts in which the relatives came was counted. If hundred guests arrived in ten carts it was a big wedding. Gangarajam found it difficult to manage with guests who came in five carts for his son Rajesham's marriage. Now marriages have shrunk into a single session festival. It looked as though Kiranmayi's marriage will be a "meeting" wedding. She now said that gold and silver ornaments represented vulgarity. She did not wear bangles also except a watch on one of her wrists. It is likely that she would elope with some one calling it love. Rajesham tried to elope with a girl after he got the teacher's job. It was Lingamma's caution that preserved him as a good man.



"O my man, we have reached the place. Get off", said Lingamma bringing back Gangarajam into the present. The bus stopped far away from the station. Those who wanted to board it ran towards it. Gangarajam felt bad as the bus stopped far from

the stage. He wondered whether he had fought for such buses as these.

"Do you remember how hard we fought for getting the private service buses?" asked Gangarajam walking slowly.

"Why don't I remember? Was it not Vijayarama Rao that got the private bus service banned because his cart lost its prestige? He did not like the passengers sitting in private buses like lords, like himself. When the popular demand increased, he got the govt. bus cancelled, made his brother-in-law buy a new bus and put it into service. They bought thirty more buses with the earnings of that single bus, and built bungalows in the city." Lingamma recollected angrily how people became rich, those who had nothing.

"Namaskaram, Tatayya! Are you coming just now? When is your grand daughter's marriage?" asked the branch post master of the village distributing the letters.

"Namaskaram. How is your father, Sekhar?"

"He is well, Tata (grandfather). He went to Edulla to buy a toddy pot. He always remembers you. He tells me with great spirit how you fought for a post office and gave the post to father when it was sanctioned."

"Who is there now who recollect old happenings? By the by, I learn that your father moved with Vijayarama Rao's son during the C.C. Bank elections. It is not known whether time is moving forward or backward. What is the use of having fought so much? The sun is severe. I will move up," said Rajalingam and walked away.

Sangamma was all happiness on meeting her brother and sister-in-law. She thought that her brother followed the tradition of offered flowers and fruits to guests. She offering them eats again and again. Lingamma rested on the mat, Lingarajam on

the cot. Ajay, the second grandson came on his cycle and greeted the couple.

“Tata! It appears the bus stopped far away from the bus station. People say you fought for these buses long ago. Now the private buses are far better. They stop wherever wanted by the passengers.”

“What do you know about the old days? They ran private buses and prevented R.T.C. buses and did not want a bus depot to be established. After a long struggle this depot was sanctioned. These fellows who then said they did not want the depot, became its managers. They became Chairmen. All those young boys grew up fast-before my very eyes.”

“You could not get me a conductor’s job. Yet you boast that everyone grew before your eyes,” taunted Ajay. Gangarajam grew wild with anger. He controlled himself.

“Though I did not like to entreat them for it, I tried but failed. I walked back with shame. But should we always be begging and should they always be in places of authority? If I had kept touching the feet of every other man, do you think that this village would have developed so much? If you have courage, fight. In my time I could become a Sarpanch. Why don’t you become a mandal President or an M.L.A.? As though you have no one here you want to go to Arab countries. If you go to Arab countries your women become vassals of the men there. How useless are your lives here! You have no self-respect at all. When the country is being put to sale no one dares to fight.”

Ajay became furious.

“What has the country given to me to fight for it? Those who got benefited by independence and the development that took place must fight for it. This country cannot give even a conductor’s job to me and drives young men to Arab countries. If such a country is being sold why should I fight? If the country is

sold I will ask for my share. What do I care if the country is sold? If this country gets into foreign rule, I will be happy. Why should others gain and enjoy the freedom and development which I do not enjoy?”

Gangarajam was deeply hurt at Ajay’s words. He was shocked at the thinking of the youth. Before he could say something Ajay left him saying that he would inform relatives about his grandfather’s arrival.

“Don’t take to heart brother’s words, Tatayya. Of late he has been talking in this manner with everybody,” said his grand daughter apologetically.

Gangarajam wondered why they could not gain anything during fifty years of progress while VijayaRama Rao and the people on his mother-in-law’s side could amass wealth to the tune of crores of rupees. Ajai’s father Anjaiah committed a minor blunder resulting in a growing loss over a forty year period. When he failed in H.S.C. he was advised to do teacher training in Jagityala which he did not do in 1960. If he had undergone the training for two years he would have got a salary of sixty rupees a month where as in Bombay textile mills it was two hundred rupees a month. So he went to Bombay. But in Bombay the daily wages got reduced gradually while teacher’s salaries increased steadily. Whoever thought that the situation would change like that? Did he himself make bold to buy a bus? Did he not decide not to get involved in that bog?

Shankaraiah resigned his job in order to pocket the provident fund. With that money he bought four acres of land. But in order to cultivate his land he needed money. He went to Bhivandi. The strike by Dutta Samant for more than eighteen months created problems for the unemployed workers. The daily wages rate also fell.

He used to come home once a year. Friday poojas and drink

claimed a lot of money. Sangamma and the daughter-in-law worked hard, rain or sun, cultivating and growing crops. Shankaraiah said good bye to Bhivandi owing to age and ill health.

Shankaraiah was not poverty stricken now. But his children could not reap the benefits of education. They did not get used to village culture. The Bombay culture did not suit village life. His nephew grew up between the two cultures over forty years. He died because of heat stroke. His nephew's son Vijai had come of age by then. He was highly educated like Kiranmayi. He was running a school in the village. He had no inclination to take up any job. He had a mind to get into politics. He thought that if his wife worked he could make a name in politics without depending on others financially. He hoped that Vijai would carry out successfully the projects which he could not do himself. He could convince Kiranmayi. Kiranmayi was foregoing a chance to be the wife of a future minister. Who knows what things happen in politics? Kiranmayi herself may become a minister in the place of Vijai! Shankaraiah had committed a mistake going against the stream of progress forty years ago which resulted in his younger sister's family getting distanced. Now he wanted to bring his son's family and his sister's family into the main flow of life and progress. But Kiranmayi was foolishly stubborn in rejecting the marriage alliance. Gangarajam had to hold his head in helplessness.

Kiranmayi called him a selfish person. Was it a crime to live one's life on his own while working for the progress of the society? When Guntuka Narsaiah Pantulu dedicated his life to the handloom movement people accused him that he swallowed the money of the Sangam, that he talked of the Sangam, not being able to earn by himself. He then did business in textiles, earned money and ploughed back the money into the Sangam. So he was honoured as the father of the Handloom Movement. If he had depended on people's patronage, he would have been

branded a middleman! How wrong was Kiranmayi's thinking? If he had not worked hard, would Rajesham have become a lecturer and would Kiranmayi have reached the present state of prosperity?

Was he selfish or Kiranmayi? Kiranmayi was not able to bear the village culture consisting of cattle in the house, dung, hens, dirt etc. If this kind of agriculture did not flourish, how could the country grow crops and cattle wealth? What did Kiranmayi say, having known all this?

"Tatayya! Villages look good in photographs. But villages are not congenial for living. I will live in cities and write stories and essays that village life is glorious. Those living in towns enjoying all comforts and luxuries, living in posh apartments and in beautiful colonies, having knocked off all the benefits first, say that villages are good. Such people should be shot dead". Rajalingam trembled at the thought process of the youth represented by Kiranmayi. Kiranmayi was of the confirmed opinion that those who complain bitterly of sultriness if the power supply was off for five minutes and curse village life and the government as being worthless were the people who say that village life is good.

"Tatayya! Village mentality today reflects the cruel feudal mentalities. Democratic culture will not grow unless democracy strikes roots in villages. Till then villages suffer from small mindedness and jealousy. If there was a distant relationship, men begin to address women without respect as 'eme', 'osai'. There are no water closets in homes. People bathe near tanks, use the tanks as dhobi ghats and effacate at the tanks. In the villages people look at me limiting me to a caste or a house and say so and so belongs to so and so caste, she is the daughter-in-law of so and so house. But they never treat me as an individual and give no importance to my individuality, my intelligence and my knowledge. I hate being regarded as somebody's grand daughter,

daughter, daughter-in-law, wife etc. They should give me respect for what I am. This is not possible in villages.” She made many such comments.

Gangarajam fell into thinking listening to Kiranmayi. He woke up from his dreamy sleep when Rajaiah greeted him.

“Are you all well. Rajanna! Are the sons taking care of you? You faced difficulties with the death of your wife,” consoled Gangarajam.

“What shall I tell you! My sons got separated and distributed among themselves what I earned. Now they are not feeding me. You should talk to them” said Rajaiah and explained the position. Gangarajam sighed listening to Rajaiah.

“I have no patience now. Each one’s life has been as voluminous as epics. My grandsons and grand-daughters themselves do not heed my words. They say that I did every thing for myself.”

Rajaiah left as some people came to meet Rangarajam. Sangamma was busy making arrangements for the food of the relatives who were visiting along with her daughter-in-law. Ajai brought two pots of toddy. The aroma of the boiling chicken soup created the necessary festival atmosphere.

By the time bridegroom Vijai returned going round towns inviting people for the engagement, the house was full of relatives. He was crestfallen when he learnt that the marriage was cancelled along with the programme of distributing flowers and fruits. But the guests were not bothered about it. The guests finished their meal and were discussing incidents that took place fifty years ago. They expressed their opinion that it was wrong to finalise an alliance in a village with a girl who had studied in the English medium and imagine that she would live there. They all appreciated Kiranmayi for not telling her opinion after the wedding invitations were printed and posted.

Rajesham who reached the place that night, stayed away at home as he lost face with the decision of his daughter. He was awaiting the arrival of the old couple early in the morning. Kiranmayi went away to school as usual to make herself scarce.

“Vijai says he would never marry”, said Gangarajam. His daughter-in-law Lakshmi Bai supported her daughter instead of sympathising him.

“Men can cancel the marriage of a girl in the marriage pandal! How ashamed the brides feel if every man that comes to see them points out some defect or other? If once a girl says ‘no’ to a boy what arrogant indignation! Let them feel it” said Lakshmi Bai vehemently.

## IV

**VALUES**

“Swapna! Saroja desired that you should live a dignified life again. She wanted to stand by you as your companion. You found fault and pained such as good lady. That was the big blunder committed by you. In what way are we qualified to find fault with or criticise her? What right have we to do so? How did you get bogged down so soon into old thoughts after you stayed in U.S. for such a long time and left for India?

After meeting you Sarojakka telephoned to me and broke down crying. I saw Sarojakka crying after a long time. She had overcome sorrow and tears. She freed herself from her sad life and has been living happily spreading joy to others. If Sarojakka had wept so bitterly. I can imagine how awfully you pained her. That is the main defect in your character and individuality. Instead of extracting happiness from others, you force your sorrow and pain on them and deprive them of their happiness.

The confusion, which you think bothers Sarojakka is, in fact, connected with you. You considered your defects as her defects. You are subjecting yourself to self-deceit and deceit by others, not being able to reveal the facts. You are living in an illusion. What Saroja did was to blow off the illusion. You could not bear to be shown in a mirror what you are. Though she is your well-wisher, you have been treating her as an enemy, belittling her in the company of others and hating her. Many people hesitate to reveal facts to their friends though they have knowledge about them. But Saroja tried to make you understand what you are without fear and for that, you are finding fault with her.

She lives her life. Her problems are hers. Her pains are hers. Her values are hers. Why do you bother about them? Why should I be interested in them? Why should her issues become topics for our discussion? You deliberately asked Saroja about them again and again and worried her. The questions you asked her are all connected to your life. But you attributed them as if they were hers. She felt that you were asking the questions to belittle her, to put her to shame. She did not know what to say, what not to say. She gave answers in a confusing manner as she was not sure what would happen if she gave direct answers. As a matter of fact, she has corrected the lives of many persons like you and set them right. They respected her and accepted her suggestions. They treated her as a guide and a philosopher. Instead of learning from her, you questioned her life and her mistakes in her life. This only exposes your haughty pride and a superiority complex.

Sarjojakka remembers all incidents of her life. But she wants to forget some of them. The harm some people do by questioning forcefully about issues which people want to forget is very great. The questioners exhibit their superiority in the form of sympathy. You asked Saroja again and again about her attempt to commit suicide. It only shows your sadism and your superiority complex and cannot be called your kindness.

It is true that Sarojakka did not reveal some issues pertaining to her. What will you do even if she tells you about them? Are you ready to learn something good from such revelation? Are you ready to accept them as they are without finding fault with them? If so, listen. I'll tell you briefly about some difficulties she has been facing in her life. Unless you know why she wants to forget some of her problems, you will not be able to free yourself from the thoughts of the values set by the society. She is ready and prepared to accept all the incidents of her life in their reality. It is only the society, which reflects you, is not ready to accept the facts.



Swapna! some persons have a fickleness for childhood experiences. Saroja stepped into her youth ... in her sixteenth year... Satyanand followed her for six months and told her he loved her. He cried. He laughed. He made her laugh and tempted her.

“Swarupa! It was not just Satyanand the cause to hold me down like a bird in the jowar field. My bubbling youth was also a reason. Whichever cinema or a T.V. serial I saw, whipped up only that feeling. I am not finding fault with cinemas now. What will the cinemas do if I did not have the curiosity and passion to know what it was all about which my youth goaded me? Did the birds and animals learn about it by watching the cinemas? Once Saroja told me that the sexual desires will naturally spring up at the right age.

“I thought that Satyanand would marry me. But he married another girl. When I wept and appealed to him to marry me, he said he would keep me as his second wife without marrying me. I wept again thinking how helpless a woman was. He utilised my weakness and played with my life for some more time black mailing me.

“When I missed my periods in the second month, my mother suspected the worst. I was confused with my vomitings. Mother shut her mouth saying that if we speak out we will lose our prestige. She pretended to be going to her mother’s place and contacted a sister in a hospital of the district. In those days abortion was done very secretly. The sister agreed to help us, asked us to stay in the room and sent some one into the room. We did not know whether the man was her husband, elder brother or younger brother. I was shocked. Mother could not do anything. After the abortion, they gave concession in the fee,” said Saroja crying.

“After the abortion, the weakness of my youth turned into fear. I started learning what life was. I learnt how much my mother

loved me and my future. She did not reveal to father what happened. For some time, myself and mother underwent great agony. I concentrated on my studies and passed B.Tech., I worked in Bangalore for some time. Later I left for Poone to work in a reputed company”. Saroja revealed her life to me in its totality.

In that way, Swapna! Saroja helped her parents with her job. Whenever the topic of her marriage was raised, she went on postponing it. Her mother knew why her daughter was postponing marriage. Her father did not know anything at all about it. Her mother, Anasuyamma, went to Poone to keep company with her daughter for some days. She was happy observing the self-confidence that developed in her daughter.

“Marry, my dear ... any boy whom you like ... of whatever caste ... marry ... I’ll make father agree ... don’t be afraid that something happened and that something may happen ... what happened no one knows except you and I”, Anasuyamma tried to console and convince Saroja.

Saroja’s conscience did not agree to the proposal. She developed hatred towards men, a fear. She would speak freely in the company of a group. But when alone, if a man was seen by her, she would leave the place silently as if she did not see anyone. She spent some time in Poone in this manner with fear. Then she took a big job in Bangalore. She left for America within a year. She worked there for three years. There were many offers for her in India and America. She rejected them all under some pretext or other saying she did not like the match. The parents were greatly worried.

Saroja started a new life in America. That was the time when her individuality blossomed forth in all its fulness and freedom. She liked the free and happy atmosphere there. She bought a car. Nothing can be done there without a car. She sent home some money from her earnings. She saved some for herself.

“Swaroop! I am beginning to understand now how meaningless are the values of what is called ‘character’ in India. If we observe how freely and happily the American society lives... how nice it would have been if the entire world turns into a free society... how many problems would have been solved... what is happening in India in the name of family and marriage is nothing but one sided slavery. That institution is worse than a jail, meaner than a prison.

“It is only when the values, respects and culture of our society identifies man beyond the folds of religion, caste, marital status and family institutions, we will be able to treat a human being as a human being. Till then we will be living within the confines of the frame and imagination of the vales forced on us. Should these values be continued as they exist? Where is freedom for us? How can we call this freedom? Swaroop! Do you understand all this, this issue?” Saroja asked me in all seriousness once.

“Swarupa! Everyone in America who watches the T.V. knows about Apra. I think you have read the books written by Apra. What a wonderful analysis about marriage, about love! If one has to divorce how to go about it, if one has to love and marry again what caution should be taken, ... how she disussed the problems from different angles! She explained in a marvellous manner how to start a new life after getting divorced six or seven times,” Saroja indirectly explained how she has been changing. I did nothing more than being a good listener.

“... Ravindra used to move very intimately and in a friendly manner. I thought that there was nothing wrong in living with him now and then. He is not married. So there was no one who humiliated or found fault with both of us. Time passed happily for a while. Ravindra’s visa came to an end. He had to go back to India as he could not get a job again. I asked him to stay with me till he got a job. He was a man born in India. Where will his male superiority go? He felt small to depend on me. He wanted me to

follow him to India. He said we could marry. I have a great loathing for India. The values in India are there only to torture people. I have a feeling that I should become one in the American society. I discussed this point with Ravindra.

Ravindra suggested that we both could live far away from everyone in Delhi.

“It is not so easy. Once we are in India, relationships and friendships will certainly grow. So I won’t come”, said I.

“Ravindra has a delicate mind like a girl. He loves me dearly. I was also worried that I would not be able to live without him. Yet I had no mind to go to India.

“Change your mind. Come away to India. I will wait for you in India for two years. If you don’t come even after two years, I’ll think of my marriage”.

Ravindra thought I would surely change if I stayed alone for two years. He has no memories of horrible experiences I have.

“After two years I happily told him to marry. He used to telephone to me about the details of the marriage discussions and his meeting the girls and their people. He said that no one knew about him as I know and that my decision would be taken by him as the final one. I looked at the photographs and biodatas in the internet, talked to the girls and suggested a match to him. Ravindra married that girl.

I felt very happy that Ravindra gave me so much importance and respect. In the name of love, Satyanand used my innocence to blackmail me. Ravindra was prepared to give his life for friendship and love. What a difference between the two! I sent gifts to Ravindra for his marriage through courier also. Our friendship continued without a break. Is it possible in India to continue a friendship of the past even though there is not love or sex relationship?

“Jessy! Marry someone whom you liked there. Don’t stay away without marriage thinking that our love did not end in marriage”, wrote Ravindra to me many times. Jessy is the pet name he gave me.

“I threatened him saying that if he reminded me again and again about my marriage. I would not lift the receiver. Ravindra respected my word. He did not raise that topic again. I told my parents also that I would not talk to them on phone if they discussed my marriage. As a result there was no one who asked me about my marriage.

“I spent some time happily in U.S.A. Though I did not secure a green card, I could continue in my job without any problem. Mother telephoned to me that father was not well. I didn’t believe it thinking that it was an excuse. But I had to believe it when I learnt that he had a brain stroke, that his hand and leg got paralysed and that he could not talk. Mother made him talk to me with the help of web camera.

As days rolled by mother was telephoning and crying. Whom do I have in the world except mother? It was mother’s support that helped me lead a free life like this. I could not decide what to do and got worried. To add to this the lonely life I was leading in U.S.A. created a feeling of vacuum. I used to remember Ravindra often. I felt that it would have been good if I had left for India as suggested by him. If I go to India, the topic of my marriage will certainly be raised. Different kinds of thoughts in my mind ... I heard that some girls were living in India without marriage with an understanding of ‘living together’. Some women were living as a single parent family with their children, doing jobs. I felt happy that the society was respecting them also. Yes ... It is their life ... it is their earnings. They will be meeting the persons they want now and then with love and affection. The system is good enough. I was happy that though late and though to a small extent, new values have been spreading in India. I had to return

to India at such a time.

Swapna! Saroja settled in Bangalore after searching for a job in India. She got her parents to Bangalore. Her father passed away after a brief time. She performed his last rites in Bangalore. Her mother stayed away with her. Mother and daughter have been living in Bangalore happily.

When Shashidhar came for Saroja, Anasuyamma treated him as her own son-in-law. She was happy that they two would settle down as man and wife. She expected them to go in for registered marriage. Anasuyamma did not know what transpired between the two. Vivek started coming in the place of Shashidhar. Anasuyamma accepted this change also. She respected Vivek also as her own son, as her own son-in-law. Vivek gave more importance to his career than to love and marriage. He left Bangalore searching for higher posts. Saroja had to lead a lonely life for some time again...

She spoke with Ravindra on telephone describing her life. The cheating of Shashidhar and the craze for career of Vivek she narrated to him crying. She guessed that Ravindra was only giving her words of consolation and the warmth of a true friend were missing in his reaction. His life was also not an ideal one. He proposed that they two should become one after divorcing his partner. Saroja felt that it was better to confine herself to friendship. She thought that she should not separate a couple who had reconciled themselves. If they had divorced already, she thought, she would have considered the proposal. She considered it as a time-barred proposal and hence rejected it.

There was a change in the attitude of Saroja after some time. What did she achieve in life? What should she achieve? Why should she live? Is this what is meant by life? Is there nothing else? Is it just making friendship with someone else? If he lives with her for some time and leaves her? ... How long to live in this manner? What will she gain if she goes on changing partners as

one changes jobs? What does she gain by this freedom? What is there in married life? What is it she does not have? Is the freedom she enjoys now real freedom? Is the protection found in wedded life real protection? How can she find a suitable groom in her middle age in India? Is it easy for a woman who had lived with other men as part of the living together method, to find a husband who will be loving and large hearted? Saroja started considering various aspects in her thought process.

Distance lends enchantment to beauty. There is a similar saying in Telugu that says distant hills look smooth. From close quarters we see only rocks, valleys, ups and downs. Not only Ravindra's, the lives of many others known to Saroja are not happy ones. People have been living imprisoned lives, bound hand and foot by someone, condemned to such a life. So Saroja could not decide anything. In a weak moment she tried to commit suicide. If Anasuyamma had not observed at the right time, Saroja would not have been with us as what she is. The Bangalore firm would not have had an efficient C.E.O.

After she recovered from her attempted suicide, and after she regained her balance of mind, she thought that she should do something good and worthwhile. She expected that she would find a good companion as a friend. She spent her money towards gaining that end. She became a good friend to many. She analysed their family conditions and problems and gave them counselling making them happy. In that process she also observed how married women were afraid that she would attract their husbands. She laughed at their unfounded fear. She was pained that married women were apprehensive about her who was unmarried. Later on she got used to all these apprehensions. She took care not to produce fear in others about her by chalking out limitatious for herself.

Now no one knows her past life. They also do not know why she did not marry. If anyone said that she had affairs, there

were people to cut short such suggestions and dismiss it as a non-issue. As a result Saroja developed a high profile indivality.

You know that she is working as a C.E.O. of an establishment. Many men would come forward to marry her as their first wife. But she has no such thoughts now. She has no greater aims than to correct and stabilise lives like yours. She overcame long ago the feeling of enjoying motherhood. You are not able to grasp or understand her realistic attitude about life. So you think of her as having no values and are confusing her with your distorted opinions.

It is strange that you should think of her as a lesbian and be worried. As a matter of fact, Saroja herself was afraid whether you were a lesbian at the question you asked her. Misunderstandings arise when persons do not talk freely and frankly about the doubts they entertain. What prevented you to tell her all aspects openly, as you told me, calling me Swaroopa aunty? When you face difficulties and when you are asked to get your worries spoken out, your responsibility is to get consoled by discussing freely your problems, receive solutions that solve the problems and respect the suggestions made by madam.

Swapna! Do you know how to lead a happy life? Do you feel like living a happy life at all? You do not even know how to learn from people who lead happy lives. You know only to convert their happiness into sorrow. That was the reason why Saroja, who solved the problems of many, cried bitterly instead of correcting your life. I grew very angry at you. I felt sure that you would never mind yourself in your life. But that does not mean that I would lose you with such a thought influencing me.

Swapna! Imagination is different from reality. Saroja madam lives even now in imagination. That is what you think of her. Perhaps that is my opinion also. Whose idea is it that she lives in her imagination, in her illusions and ideals? Yours... and mine. But for Saroja Madam... her life is not lived in imagination. It is

not living in ideals. That is a life of fact, truth. That is why we are forcing the word 'imagination on her. Now her mother feels very proud of her daughter, Saroja. That is the greatness of the heart of the mother. That is the mother's affection that loves and foregives beyond all values. How could her mother understand her daughter? Why are we not able to understand her? I think you understood now. We are thinking in terms of our values and attribute our views and attribute them to the individuality of Saroja!

Swapna! Tell me now. Who are in the world of imagination? What is meant by values? Do the values of society that help people to regain lost life as and when possible or the values that make people suffer all their lives that they have slipped and fallen on evil days?

Swapna! Her past and your present are one and the same. If you want to understand madam, it is understanding yourself. You come back to America. You will not find in India an opportunity to free yourself from old views and values. It is possible only in U.S.A. If you meet people like Apra, you will come out of your problems and your depression. It all depends on your discretion. I leave the decision to you".

## AFFECTIONS

'Before money, authority, power, caste and selfishness love cannot hold its say' thought Kanthaiah again.

Kanthaiah wanted to catch a bus. He sat on the bench in the hut hotel opposite the Jagityala new bus station. While reading the paper he started glancing at the name plates of the buses that were going into the bus station. The buses he wanted to board were coming and going. But he did not move from his bench.

'Where does love exist? Where did love go? Everything else gets defeated before love,' thought Kanthaiah. But it did not happen as he thought it would. His mind was in a turmoil with the internal conflict—whether that he felt was love or not. He changed his travel plans and sat in the nearby park for some time. The internal conflict continued in his mind. He wandered here and there for some time and turned towards home.

Chandamma, his mother, was waiting for him at home. He was away from the morning without eating food and was avoiding Saravva's arrival time. For four days he kept wandering about. Chandamma recollected the past and wiped her tears with the pallu end of her saree.

"Saravva waited for you for a long time and left. She invited us for dinner tonight. 'I came five days ago. Kanthaiah did not care to meet me even once. If I come here he makes himself scarce. He does not come to my house. What sin have I committed that he moves about without seeing me' she cried" informed his mother.

Chandamma grew silent observing the changes in his expression on his face. She stopped cutting the beedi leaves, put them aside and served food to her son. Kanthaiah ate a little, laid himself on the cot, pulled the bedsheet over him and closed his eyes.



“Saru!..... are you not responsible for my life taking this turn? Is not your selfishness a reason for my present condition? You are now making a name as an intellectual in the state. I am afraid to meet you now. You have changed a lot after your marriage. I am surprised how you could develop so much of self-confidence. The glow in your eyes makes me feel jittery. I feel like running away, far away from you. In a moment again I feel glad and elated at the way you have grown.

Saru! Why did you become a part of my life? How did you acquire that enlightened look as though you had understood the whole world? After your marriage I find a dignity in your gait. City life has polished you. Your language changed. The colour of your sarees changed. I feel awkward if you wear pants and shirts. At such times I feel you are not my Saru.

Saru! Did you achieve this improvement because you are a woman? Was it possible because of your caste? Why didn't I achieve the growth, the respect and the status which you could gain? How did you manage to acquire so much strength and a circle of people around you? Why don't I have them? My mother continues to roll beedis. Your mother stopped rolling beedis and finds no time to offer cups of tea and plates of refreshments to guests.”

“Kanth! You get married first. You'll then feel settled in life. Please save me from the discredit that I've been responsible for the sad plight in your life.”

“Am I blaming you for nothing? Isn't that the truth?”

There was an argument between the two. Saru toned down her attack. “Kanth! I agree with you. But it does not mean that you should live single. If you have any respect and love for me, for my own good, you should marry,” she appealed to him. Kanthiah realised after a while the correctness of her suggestion.

“If so Saru..... Find a bride for me. You know best what kind of bride I want. Find for me a wife that helps me grow like you after my marriage. But is it possible for me to reach your heights? After marriage our life may end up without any progress,” said Kanthaiah sadly.

“Kanth! You'll know certain things as time progresses, some as you grow in age, some by experience and some after marriage. There is no possibility for bachelors to know certain things. After you marry you too will develop self-confidence coming of a feeling of self assurance and dignity. Then you will get rid of the fear you now have for me. The nature of life differs from person to person. I have a feeling that you and your wife will reach greater heights than us,” assured Saru.

“Saru...aren't you unhappy that we missed marrying? How come, you speak with such balance!” Kanthaiah expressed his surprise.

“Kanth! Time heals wounds. Memories tickle the wounds. New experiences, new acquaintances, and a new life, create new awareness. They erase the old memories. If my husband and I are happy, it is because we are leading a new life. We have now bonds that fasten us together. When we remember the old bonds of love we feel sad. But the present is of greater consequence than memories. It can't escape us. That is the reason why when the mind secures serenity and loneliness, our memories float on water which becomes clear when it is still. That's why I try my best to create work so that my mind doesn't get the feel of loneliness. A part of it is this Women's Liberation Movement – what you call intellectualism.”

“That means you are erasing the memories of our love!”

“Kanth! Why do you cull meanings out of it? I fail to understand how I can convince you. I think you will understand some aspects if you marry. The life I lead now is the reality. I can’t but live in this real world as a wife, as an employee, as a mother and as a daughter-in-law. It’s then that our real life projects itself and our love, bonds and memories gradually recede into the background like a song, from sound into silence.”

“Saru...you have learnt many words. You have decided to forget me. Why do you take this devious course instead of stating it straight and clear?”

“Kanth! When I suggested that we should elope you couldn’t make bold to act. Mother, sister, this and that you talked of. Now you are freely accusing me. Do you know how pained I feel when you talk in this manner? I am now a married woman. Do you feel happy if I sit sobbing like a deity, like the goddess of sorrow?”

Women are like plants born somewhere and transplanted somewhere else. In the present social set up the feelings of love and sorrow of women are made to change from the real to the unreal, from the existing to the non-existing. There is no chance even to express pain and anguish in this society.

With the advent of new experiences and new memories, the non-existing equalities are completely lost and disappear. But the impressions they leave on one’s mind remain. These impressions take shape as inner energy and influence the future, says Freud. And as for removing the impressions of the inner energy it’s possible only through practicing dhyana and reading Jiddu Krishna Murthy’s works.”

“That means you are in the act of removing the impressions of our love from your inner life force.”

“How cruelly you throw blame on me, Kanth! You have

known me since my childhood when I didn’t know what shyness was. I also knew you. Are evidences necessary to establish how much I love you? Why talk of evidences? If I forget you three years after my marriage, is it called love? But my love for you is getting indistinct day by day, Kanth”, said Saru with tears.

“Kanth! I can’t be laughing and dancing freely now as in earlier days. I can’t visit your house frequently as before. If I do so the world will blame me. You know the problems. Because you are a man you expect me to be free with you as in olden days. Are you able to be free with me as before? Though you know that I have been in town you didn’t come. If I come to your house you are not available.”

“But then Saru! It is not to forget as you do. It is pain, remembering the past.”

“Kanth! It may be with pain. If you don’t fear that people would misunderstand you, why should you avoid me? You think ‘this Saru is not mine. She belongs to someone else’. That is the meaning. This fear and this love- we both possess. You are able to express your pain as you are not married. After you marry you too will not be able to express your pain. If you do so, your wife and the society will not admire you. You will be blamed. You will be treated with contempt.”

“If one marries, it is said, one gains the experience of seven years. But in your case you seem to have gained an experience of fifteen years. Your husband is seven years older than you are. By his association you became his equal. By marriage you gained an experience of seven years.

In this way, within three years an experience of fifteen years and an equal period of age have been gained by you. If I marry I gain an experience of seven years only. If my wife is seven years younger than me, my experience may be equal with hers and my age also will recede!.... You know why. It is impossible for me to

get a girl who is equally educated for what I am worth.”

“If that would be the case, Kanth, you must pull your wife up in the same way. I rose by my education and status. You are one of those who were responsible for the growth of my individuality. Would I have grown to this level without you? You know that I love you most next to my mother. For another reason I will love you more than my mother.”

“Saru! If that is true what more do I want? Our bonds are not physical. They are bonds of the heart,” said Kanth overcome by emotion.

With those words of Kanthaiah, Saru also felt elated. Her sorrow and pain dissolved and she smiled happily and serenely.

“Abba! How long did you take to open the doors of my heart Kanth! How beautifully have you put it! The feelings of friendship and the bonds of love seen between brother and sister, two sisters, mother and children, two men and two women will also be seen between men and women. This has nothing to do with physical union. If you understand this, it is possible for us two, as before, to be the source of inspiration for each other for ever.”

“Saru! You have grown to heights I can’t reach! My poverty is obstructing me from growing. In your growth is hidden the unsought help of prestige secured through your caste. You know that my caste does not enjoy any status.

For having been born a woman you gained some special privileges. You could find a husband who enjoys a higher status than you and your own level shot up suddenly. How is that possible for me who am a man. The saying “whatever the status, the man is a woman’s vassal” has not been said for nothing.

If a fifty year old man turns his looks towards a twenty year old girl his value in her estimation is a zero. Women grow in this manner making zeroes of many intellectuals and elderly men with

their self confidence. How can a man gain the same self-confidence, the man who marries a woman younger than himself?”

“Kanth! There is some truth in what you say. But tens of thousands of poor women are suffering in prostitute homes. Women are being raped. You will not understand the dirty looks of men who consider women as mere sex symbols, however great they are, whatever position they hold and the inconvenience and torture the women experience in those looks. But I like your looks. How serene and pure are your looks! How loving and friendly they are! Those looks of yours give me self-confidence, that you are with me all the time constantly. If I achieve anything, your share is great in that achievement”.

“Saru! Your explanation apart, how can I achieve the prestige and respect you command? Fortune favoured you. You rose in stages. Yours is highway journey. If once you get into the track you move ahead fast. Mine is a foot pathfull of ruts and pits. By the time people overcome all obstacles they will get tired. They will drop down. They grow old. Very few reach the highway..... Saru.... We are the earth and you people grow like plants. When we get defeated you keep winning. Toil is our lot. Victory is yours. The path of those who should win got shrunk into a foot path.”

“Kanth! What’s this new tune? Tell me clearly what you want to tell me, please.”

“Saru.....The educational facilities which you have been enjoying for sixty years were those you snatched away from us, preventing us from reaping them. If along with the Poona Pact made in 1932 for the Scheduled Castes by Ambedkar and Gandhi. The B.C. reservations also had been implemented how could you have had this superiority and the opportunities? I would have been enjoying higher status than your husband! Our marriage would have taken place!”

Saru was overcome by sorrow and anger all at once.

“You had no guts to take me away then. Why do you boast that you would carry the weight of history on your shoulders now? Should you dig up history simply because we couldn’t marry?”

Do not pass comments on history overcome by emotion, overcome by a selfish mental assessment.....please. But then I agree with you on one point. I could gain quick popularity because I was in the city close to people and the realities.

As you didn’t have a strong representation in the media you couldn’t come into general circulation. Yet, it’s you who are propelling me now also. But I appeal to you not to ask me to wait here till your B.C. movement gains importance. I think I am not wrong in my wish.”

“It’s not like that Saru..... my desire is that you should set aside your individual development and selfishness and support and agitate for me and my people, not for your sake.....that’s my demand.”

“Kanth! I have my limitations. One person cannot fulfil all demands. You do your work. I’ll be with you.”

“Saru! Under the mask of feminism you have made clear your dirty caste-oriented and selfish political thinking. What is the benefit for us if women occupy the places of men? Is it not your responsibility to give a helping hand and support those who do not possess the necessary encouragement? You want to forget the historical truths confining yourself to your selfish feminist advantages and want us to bear our sufferings.”

“Kanth! Each one of your words pierce my heart like sharp arrows. Have you found in me to-day my high birth and the leprosy called caste which you did not observe all these days? What words and expressions you use! When I suggested that we

should elope you put me to torture like a coward. Now..... why don’t you kill me at one stroke instead of torturing me again.....?” Saru started crying as if her heart would break.

Kanthaiah did not know how to console her. He got angry at his inability to act properly at the right time. When he tried to drive home to her his point, she got a different meaning. On seeing her cry inconsolably, his emotion ebbed away quickly.

“Sorry, Saru! I have no intention to hurt you.”

“You women enjoyed the fruits for sixty years which should have been tasted by the B.Cs.....The benefits for women have been treated as the main channels at the expense of B.Cs whose priorities have been converted into rivulets. Is this not a conspiracy to remain at the helm of affairs for another sixty years to come, under the guise of attributing authority for women? Saru! My problem is mine. Your problem is yours. I feel pained for not having been able to tell you clearly my problem. I don’t know to whom I should make my point clear.”

Saravva wiped her tears and controlled her sorrow.

“Kanth! I am confident that we both can become one in the future. I will be happy if you win and I am defeated. If you are defeated and I win, we will bring about a constitutional amendment in the Parliament and in other forums for you to win. My path and your path are not different. The path of both of us is one and the same. Your place in my heart is made safe for all times.”



Three years passed in a trice. It was clear that Kanthaiah would lose and Saravva would win. Instead of congratulating Saravva, jealousy and hatred for Saravva overtook Kanthaiah. He was replying her letters. He was not going to the city though she invited him many times. Though she applied leave and went

to his house Kanthaiah was avoiding meeting her by being away.



Kanthaiah was pained that Saravva did not become the daughter-in-law of his mother. Chandramma was also equally distressed that Saravva could not be her daughter-in-law. She had brought up the girl with great love. She had imagined that she would be her daughter-in-law. The close relationship between herself and Gowamma, Saravva's mother, was of that nature, it was a relationship that ran through three decades.



Chandramma and Gouramma had come to Jagityala as the daughters-in-law when they were nine years old. During Gouramma's marriage some misunderstandings arose and contacts with the relatives got snapped. This helped the mother-in-law of Chandramma and Gouramma come close which developed the friendship of Chandramma and Gouramma. After they came of age their families became independent. Yet bonds of affections grew.

They helped each other in their daily chores. They exchanged information about their husbands and their nature. They laughed at the details. Kanthaiah was born on full moon day in Karthika month. Saravva was born on Sivarathri festival day. When the two women were pregnant they had decided to make their children husband and wife if their plans materialised. In the fourth year of Saravva her father took a mistress and neglected his family. He went round places for ten years. Later he took another woman as his mistress. During her crises Chandramma was the main support to Gouramma. For them both Kanthaiah was the first son for all practical purposes.



Saravva and Kanthaiah studied in the same class in the same

school. Kanthaiah played the childhood games of girls with Saravva. The other girls gave Kanthaiah the nick-name 'bodakka among women'. They studied together in the light of an oil lamp. Schooling and college studies was also in the same place.



The waters of the Pochampad canal reached the dry lands where nothing could be cultivated. Gowamma converted the land into a fertile land with her hard work. Open sites became plots. The price of land increased. Saravva's father bought a tractor with the money the bank offered, as it was satisfied with the fertile land. He traded in brick and sand.

Kanthaiah's father left for Bombay as the wages he earned as a weaver were too meagre. He returned home after a year and a half when the mill where he worked was closed down after a strike. He went round villages carrying clothes on his cycle, selling them.

He thought that he should do something better, sold his property and poured the money into the hands of a broker to go to Arab countries. The broker deceived him. He died broken hearted. While Gouramma's family prospered, Chandramma's family faced disaster.

Saravva's father, who started staying at home turned into an evil force in his daughter's life. Kanthaiah could not play the role of Lord Krishna. As a result Saravva could not become Rukmini\* though she desired it.

Chandramma resisted the love affairs of her son then. Now she started regretting her action.



Kanthaiah walked into the house as he did not find any one on the pial. Gouramma and three other women were busy preparing some eats for the festival occasion...

“Kanthu! Did you remember us after so many years?” asked Gouramma affectionately. She offered him a chair. She wiped a tear from her eye on seeing Kanthaiah who had thinned a great deal.

Kanthaiah looked around. Though he walked in he could not come to ask about Saravva. His prestige came in the way. Such a behaviour of Kanthaiah was not new to Gouramma.

“Saravva went to your house. She has gone to invite you all for dinner. She might have stopped at some one’s house on the way. Be seated on the chair. The new books she has brought are in the shelf. Go through them in the meanwhile,” said Gouramma.

Kanthaiah looked at the contents of the books. They were books dealing with history, human relations, reforms and literature discussed from the point of view of feminism. Most of the books were in English.

Kanthaiah was surprised. What great heights she had reached! All the highways were hers! He had no path to lead him. He felt very small. He thought of leaving the place, but could not go away. If he did not talk to her now, he would not be able to talk to her for a long time. Who knows when she would come again?

He sat huddled in a chair and closed his eyes. In that humble posture he looked like a pup sitting huddled in a corner. He was agitated. The courage with which he started out faded in no time. He got up all of a sudden and stepped out and almost ran into Saravva.

Saravva’s elder daughter greeted him saying “namaste uncle”, extending her arms towards him. The child was very lovely looking, an exact replica of Saravva when she was that age. Kanthaiah lifted her up and kissed her.

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*\* Rukmini loved Lord Krishna and married him and Lord Krishna could take her away in his chariot though opposed by Rukmini's brother.*

Saravva accosted him with her greetings in a pleasant manner and stared into Kanthaiah’s eye, with a mischievous glint in her eye. Kanthaiah experienced the flow of some unknown energy passing through him making him feel light for a few seconds. Distances and misunderstandings got removed from him. They both remained speechless for a while. Kanthaiah’s fear for her disappeared. He noticed the change in the language used by Saravva in her words.

“Saru.....Do you know how happy I am to hear you talk in our village speech! I now feel that you are my old Saru.”

“Was I not your old Saru before, Kanth,” Saru said smiling.

“Saru....you look very beautiful in this saree..... I do not know why you wear pants and shirts. They don’t sit well on you at all.”

“There! That’s what is called male thinking.....” smiled Saravva. She knew that Kanthaiah liked such a saree and so wore it purposefully. Without revealing the inborn curiosity of a woman she spoke again.

“But then Kanth! If I wear the saree like your mother and my mother in the old traditional way I will look more beautiful. Won’t I? You wear a dhoti and wrap a towel around your head and I will stuff chrysanthemum flowers in my hair. Then let us pose for a photograph. We then will look like a husband and wife pair of the previous birth. Don’t we? But do you know what my worry is, Kanth? Men who appreciate the saree saying it reflects Indian culture should themselves wear it for one or two days in a week and show their regard for it.” Saravva said smiling which pricked his ego.

“Saru! Industrialisation gave you modernity and culture. But it deprived our people of their traditional culture. Their lives ended with starving stomachs. Though Ambedkar showed the way for many people, Gandhism became the highway. But the

path shown to B.Cs by Jyotiba Phoole, the guru of Gandhi and Ambedkar, stopped midway.”

“Kanth, Mahatma Phoole taught the alphabet to his wife and made her a teacher. Savithri Bai Phoole is our country’s first woman teacher. Why don’t you carry forward this ideal? Your wife Padma is not an illiterate. She has studied upto Intermediate. If you can’t shape her into what you want, how can you alter and mould the society?”

Padma left you without telling you. But then why did you not go to her and invite her back? If she thinks that she suffered in her life because of Saravva, who is to blame? Do you feel that people should think that way?”

Why did his mother send him by force to Gowramma’s house? Was it to make Saru talk as she did? But he took care not to express his misgivings and talked about other things. He tried to assert himself and his actions and told Saravva that there was no fault of his.

“By the by, Kanth! You and I are not children. However much you try to protect yourself, your heart knows the truth. You are giving importance to personal problems and are neglecting the aspects that help socially. I know that I am the cause for this situation. I suffer thinking of this. Though we are lost in an emotional struggle.....it is our love that makes us regard our ideals and feelings inspite of the decades that have gone by.

One has to live life as a beautiful experience. With that inspiration one should grow in society as a writier, as an artist. You must love the society as much as you love me. It is not that I would be the only one behind your attempts. Now Padma is also ready to be with us in her ideals and thinking. You should now be prepared for some sacrifice.”

Kanthaiah realised there was some weight and truth in Saru’s words.



Another year passed.

Padma read the letter received from Saru with interest.

“Dear Padma,

Namaskaram. I received the copy of your paper’s first issue. I am happy you are the editor and Kanth, the manager. Congratulations. The paper has come out well. I am a little worried whether the editorial has been written keeping me in mind.

It is true that I did not suggest to you and Rajita that you should start a journal though I have been on the editorial board of a paper myself. I was pained at your idea that there was the ego of the upper classes in not suggesting that Scs and Bcs should start papers independently. I agree with you that in the suggestions the upper caste people make to BCs and SCs. the attempt to safeguard their own importance and authority is ingrained. So also in the suggestions of developed communities over the underdeveloped communities.

But Padma! In my desire that your individual and family life should be happy and prosper, there is no intention or exhibition of my authority over you. I have no other thought except love for you and Kanth. You are my people, a part of my life. How is it possible to exhort authority over myself? Though I feel that your social life should reach greater heights than ours, it was my mistake in not expressing it clearly.

Padma! I ardently wish and desire that our friendship should come out of the clouds of misunderstandings and proceed with love and regard for each other. The path shown by the Buddha through personal example that before love which is free and human, money, power and authority, selfishness, caste and religion are naught–this should be our ideal.

To spread our ideas among people our papers are the strong

agents. We cannot take back the words that have been printed. So before going to print each word has to be thoroughly analysed with patience. I desire that your periodical magazine should come out regularly without a break and that many papers should get published from our area, I remain,

- Your Saru.

After reading the letter Padma grew furious at Kanthaiah and whirled the letter towards him.

“Read how beautifully sister has written. Hereafter don’t write the editorials on my name. If you want to write an article write under a pen name of your choice. I’ll edit it and print it. See, how very pained she is. I’ll write the editorials in my language. By the by, I want to say ‘goodbye’ to your editorials which provoke caste feelings and convert friends into foes.”

Kanthaiah read the letter quickly with a smile. “Abbo! How much love you have for your sister! If you show the same amount of love in understanding things, it will not take much time to grow,” he said returning the letter to her. When he tried to kiss her hand she withdrew her hand looking sharply at him.

“What is this out of time romance of kisses forcing male superiority in the guise of love? Myself and Sarakka will together fight male superiority hereafter. We will prove that before selfless love authority, selfishness, caste, religion etc. are all empty words. O you great man! Please do not sacrifice human bonds for the sake of political advantage. This is the title I am going to give my editorial for the second issue.”

Kanthaiah was crest fallen. He had thought of teasing and annoying Saru together with Padma. His idea took a beating. ‘From now on they will tease me together...’ thought Kantaiah and pulled a long face holding his head.

## THE COMMON WEALTH

Yellakar is a peculiar man. It is difficult to say when he would criticize or appreciate a thing. When he criticizes he raises his voice and creates a situation.

If he wants to praise something he does it in the same manner he criticizes. If we remind him that he criticized it earlier he would say that it was correct in that context, “In this situation it is correct now”, he asserts.

He would never agree that he was in the wrong. If some one says that one who has no control over one’s tongue talks like that, he would smile and say “everything is for our good,” but never will he get involved in a discussion. He is the average Indian.

When Vijayalakshmi was crying at her husband’s death he said what happened was for her good. As he said it to me he was saved. If anyone had heard him he would have been necked out of the pandal,” Tut..Keep quiet. You have no human feelings,” I chided him.

“Every day he used to drink heavily and beat his wife. How can you say that his death in an accident was unfortunate? It was for her good”, whispered Yellakar. I was surprised at the way he entered into an argument with me. This fellow was supporting noisily Poshender, Vijayalakshmi’s husband, till yesterday.

“Poshender had problems which he could not speak out. No one thinks of destroying his own health and life. He lost his money. His health and prestige was lost. He punished himself. If we criticize him and drive him away it would amount to have

given him two punishments for one mistake.”

“It was correct then from his point of view. Now it is correct from the point of view of Vijayalakshmi. Orei, Venkulu! Think it over calmly, truthfully and without fear. What is the use of thinking about the man that is dead? Let us think of those who are alive.

Did Vijayalakshmi enjoy her life even for a day with her drunkard husband?

Now all her worries have been solved. She will be given his job. She would get pension and gratuity also. Her social life brightens. The present life will be a golden life for her compared to her earlier life. She would educate her children and bring them up.”

He calls me Venkulu instead of calling me Venkateswar only to show to others that he has every authority over me.

The last journey of Poshender commenced. The ringing cries reached heavens. We both carried the bier for some time. Yellakar supervised the funeral and obsequies personally.

On the third day ritual (feeding the bird) was gone through. Close relatives were all invited. Dinner was served under the trees near the place where the cremation took place. While attending to diverse activities, Yellekar started the same discussion.

As Vijayalakshmi continued crying, Sharada, my wife came and sat by me.

“What you said is correct, brother. But the vacuum created by the loss of a husband cannot be filled. It is said either the mother should be healthy or the husband should be alive.’ What is the use of all enjoyments when the husband is dead?”

When Vijayalakshmi asked that question, I observed a glow on my wife’s face. Sharada left me as someone called her. My

heart missed a beat and a doubt bothered me.

“Yellakar! Do all women think that they would be happy if their husbands are dead? Did you observe the glow on my wife’s face? It appeared as though she sang the old time song with a change saying ‘the woman who has no husband is a noble woman. O yamma! O yamma!’

“You idiot! The beauty and glow on the face of your wife Sharada is your reflection! She is happy and satisfied with her self-confidence that her husband was alive. How could you give such a wrong interpretation?” So saying Yellakar silenced me.

Sharada came back to me after a while. Yellakar started his argument again.

“Sharada! In these times it is not a great loss if the husband is dead as in olden days. These are times when women are starting movements saying they want everything except husbands.

If they feel the necessity of having a man, how many women are not quietly and silently running their house holds by taking into their fold a widower or a young man these days?

The world also winks at them. Now such a culture has entered the society.

Do anyone now raise a finger against your chinnamma, Lalitha?

One can lead a quiet life if a hue and cry is not raised. There is something called ‘Shukra Neeti’, that is the moral of Shukra.\*

The society creates acts, values, rules and morals. But they create exceptions also. These exceptions also follow some values and morals according to circumstances. These exceptions are called ‘Shukra Neeti’ in the world. Whatever is said by any number of men, finally it is this ‘Shukra Neeti’ that is followed. In practice, sometimes they are accepted, sometimes they are not,” concluded Yellakar.

Yellakar has no dearth for examples.

Chinnamma was one day caught red-handed.

“We are living together with mutual consent. Who are you to ask me? Don’t you sleep with your husbands and wives? I too am living as you are living. I too go to movies like you,” said Lalitha.

Catching her red handed helped her. Now she lives with him openly not being afraid of anyone,” explained Yellakar.

My blood boiled as Yellakar went on describing the so-called Shukra Neeti, making illicit and illegal connections sacred and holy.

Sharada heard him with great interest pretending as though she hated his talk.

The ritual of feeding the bird was conducted almost on the level of a garden dinner. No one expressed sorrow at the death of Poshender.

On the eleventh day when the kumkum, bangles and the silver rings of the small toes were being removed from the person of Vijayalakshmi, my wife Sharada, with two other women shouted that what was being done was cruel and atrocious.

“The kumkum on her brow and coloured sarees did not come to her with her husband” she cried.

Sharada did not mind if the mangala sutra and the silver toe rings were taken off. She wanted Yellakar to support her.

I was surprised at the way Yellakar argued with my wife.

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\* Shukra was the guru of King Bali, a rakshasa, who was ruling the three worlds. When Lord Srimannarayan approached the king as a Vamana (midget) and asked the king to gift him three feet of earth, Bali got ready to give the gift. Shukra warned the king not to concede the gift to Vamana who was no ordinary person. He then told the king on what occasions a person can break his promise to save himself. The moral is that rules have exceptions. So too principles.

The process of making a married woman a widow after the death of her husband is an awful ritual. Everyone agrees with me. But Yellakar took up a different point of view.-

“Sharada! It is good to break the old memories like that. She will recover from the shock quickly if she does not have on her person the symbols of her past life. She will gain a new life soon. It is better if all those bonds are removed.”

No one will agree with Yellakar’s argument. Every husband desires that as long as his wife enjoys his pension and his share of property, the sacred cord he had tied around her neck and the kumkum mark he placed on her brow should be with her all her life after he is gone and that a law to that effect should be made. The speciality of Yellakar is the reverse gear in which he drives the point. Sharada kept quiet hearing him which meant she half endorsed his statement.

A year passed.

Vijayalakshmi recovered fast enough. She took a job and developed self-confidence.

She now wears bangles and has the kumkum on her brow which widows are denied. She wears sarees according to her choice.

When Vijayalakshmi talks freely and smilingly with Yellakar, I have my doubts. Sometimes we cannot ask certain things for clarification with those who are close to us. We cannot discuss our doubts also.

One day Yellakar raised a new topic. “Venkulu! The man who passed rules that a widow who enjoys her dead husband’s properties etc. should not marry again is a sadist. For the children to grow up with self-confidence that they have a father, marriage is necessary for the mother. She would get the credit of having sustained the children and the lineage of the first husband.

The heads of our ancestors were filled with the mud called selfishness. I do not know what it is if a man does not think that his own lineage will continue if his wife re-marries, Is it innocence or idiocy?"

There was truth in what Yellakar said.

Lalitha's children call Venkatanarayana 'babai' meaning father's younger brother.

Though they do not call him father, he never treated them with any discrimination.

The children also treat him as their father.

Their eldest daughter's marriage was celebrated recently.

Lalitha and Venkatanarayana washed the feet of the groom.

No one objected to it.

Those who did not like the marriage and had objections, did not attend the wedding.

Venkatanarayana admitted Lalitha's son into B.Ed. course paying his fee etc. Though there was some confusion, Venkatanarayana solved it by saying he was treating everyone alike. With that they kept quiet.

Now I have a doubt whether Yellakar is taking the route of Venkatanarayana.

He cleared the doubt himself.

"Orei Venkulu\*! A trickish problem has to be solved now" said Yellakar.

But Yellakar was not the hero in the story. He was a 'marriage elder'. He explained the problem.

"The other day Vijayalakshmi spoke for a long time.

She wanted to know what I felt about Rajeswar.

She also said that Rajeswar himself wanted to know my idea about him.

If they both ask in that manner what does it mean?

Does it not mean that we should accept and bless them to live together?

What is it we can do in such a case as theirs?

Their request amounts to their saying that we should act as elders and solve any problem that may arise in the future," he said and after a while he looked at my Sharada.

Rajeshwar was none else than Sharada's brother. That is, he is my brother-in-law. Within four years of Sadhana, Rajeshwar's marriage, problems arose and their appeal for divorce has been pending in the court for nearly a year. Vijayalakshmi and Rajeswar need a marriage that has no legal sanction.

"What did you say?" I asked Yellakar because I know he is a double edged sword.

He is more strewd than me. He did not commit himself with any reply.

Discussions went on for a week or ten days.

Sharada, myself and Yellakar came to a decision.

Rajeswar and Vijayalakshmi invited about eight families close to them for dinner.

We also invited the two for dinner and presented them with a saree and a dress. They were both living happily.

After sometime Yellakar made a deadly attack on Rajeswar like a thunderbolt without lightning giving a warning first.

Vijayalakshmi, Sharada and myself did not know whom to support.

\* Elders call the youngsters in this manner. It is also a friendly mode of address.

“Some people lecture that globalisation and American imperialism are the enemies of the people of the world. A section of the ruling party does this propaganda deliberately to divert people’s mind from the internal bickerings of the ruling party. They have a big mouth. That same mouth is the internal enemy of India – the mouth called caste system and caste divisions. Caste is the important hurdle for India to grow into a major power they say. Do you know why not they say it? It is they who get the most benefit in every way because of the caste systems,” said Yellakar.

Yellakar who had all along attacked privatisation, globalisation, World Bank and Gatt, suddenly changed his attitude and we did not know the reason. We repeated to him his own reasoning.

“Orei Venkulu! Those who study history agree on one point. Changes in our country did not take place without the comings and goings of foreigners.

Because of Aryans of the olden days, the muslims of the previous years and the recent Europeans, the static society and institutions got disturbed.

Changes also took place in the caste system. Kabir, Guru Nanak, Ramananda, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Guru Ravi Das, Tukaram and their devotional approach took place to mitigate the influence of Islam and safeguard and reform their religion.

Rajaram Mohan Roy and Kandukuri Veereshalingam’s reforms would not have been possible if the British were not ruling in India. Don’t you agree?” asked Yellakar. We could not answer him.... To listen to what else he was going to say, I just nodded consent.

“Look here, Sharada! Modern education, medical treatment and industries developed because of the Europeans. Because of their rule and influence, we could get such a good constitution and equal rights. SCs and STs could gain reservations. Would all

this have been possible if the rulers belonged to the exploiting castes?

The B.Cs are not getting political reservations even after fifty years of independence.

Are these examples not sufficient to say that if the foreigner had not come to our country how hard-hearted the rule of our people would have been? So to prevent the conservatives from taking our country back to the Vedic times there should be the association with the foreigner.

The answer is globalisation.

No one has the power to stop globalisation. Intelligent people should be at the forefront of the movement and can make possible things instead of negating and discussing things which cannot be achieved. When Hindutwa promoters themselves are welcoming globalisation to serve their ends why should you and I oppose it?”

“Orei Yellakar! The poor people of our country have lost their professional livelihood. How are they to live?” I asked him.

“Do you think that poor people are living happily? The government itself declared that sixty percent of the population is below the poverty line. They are hardly dressed in a loin cloth. What else can be poorer than that? If anything, they may lose that also. Do you know what the “imperialistic social economy” says?

What will the American think when the Indian does not have even the loin cloth? It is beneficial to him if the purchasing capacity of the Indian grows. Just as he is trying to give education so that they can read the names of the articles he has been supplying, he will also do something to see that everyone has enough to eat. It is the middle class joys that take the dip. That is why the big and small industrialists are making so much noise. They paint a poor

picture of the poor and tell the poor that they would grow poorer only to enjoy their own happiness," concluded Yellakar.

"Brother-in-law! The argument of Yellakar is horrible. He is supporting those who are selling away the country."

Rajeswar gave his version of the argument. But it was not his thinking. But it was the effect of Yellakar brain-washing him.

"Without giving reservations to B.C.s on a full scale constitutionally as in the case of Scs and STs, saying that caste is the first internal enemy of this country and without solving the caste discrimination, talking about globalisation alone is not correct. A person who talks in that strain is a traitor in my view.

Because this is the problem of the majority of the people. A country means the people who are in the majority. It is the higher castes that are selling away our country. Without first pulling them down from power, without fighting, whatever is said by them is worse than treachery."

"Where does caste exist!" said Vijayalakshmi.

The life she was leading with Rajeswar was a result of the inter-caste marriage. She meant that in their case the caste did not create any problem.

It was not possible to convince and make Yellakar agree to a point of view.

"The American writer Gail Omvedt settled in India. She wrote many articles on this issue for nearly six years. Someone gave me the articles. Get them Xeroxed and read them," Yellakar gave me free advice.

He knows that the very idea of readings makes us feel sleepy.

Rajeswar stopped talking with Yellakar since then.

Yellakar felt hurt. Should he stop talking over such a small thing forgetting all the help rendered in earlier days?

After sometime the court awarded the divorce orders to Rajeswar.

He got vexed sending half his salary every month to his former wife Sadhana for one year.

He started to tighten his grip on Vijayalaxmi earnings and expenditure. She had suffered earlier. She began to support him.

Vijayalaxmi would keep away from the house on some pretext at the time of his arrival home. She started bathing in cold water. For her the future of her children was of importance. She kept herself under control.

Rajeswar did not reveal the condition at home to anyone like a thief stung by a scorpion. He resigned his job as he hated to send money to his former wife every month. He stopped sending her money after resigning. He kept quiet thinking he would act as and when she went to court again.

Sadhana former wife of Rajeswar approached his elder sister Sharada for help. By then she understood what respect she commanded and happiness she enjoyed at her mother's place.

Sadhana experienced hell at her mother's to which place she went proudly. She cried her heart out telling Sharada her plight. She was the wife of her brother.

Sharada was sorry and asked her to stay with her for some time. She assured that she would talk to her brother.

Sharada suggested that Sadhana should rent a house nearby and educate her children. She consoled Sadhana saying that mothers treat children with love and respect as long as the daughters do not depend on them. Sadhana cried that she would not have thought of divorce if she had known that life would be so awful, though her people encouraged her to divorce her husband. Sharada also was moved to tears at her brother's life and Sadhana's.

One day Sharada made Sadhana do all the cooking and invited her brother to eat food at her house. Sadhana kept away from the sight of her husband. Rajeswar ate relishing every dish. Sharada and I went to a movie leaving them in the house.

Sadhana and Rajeswar were on talking terms now.

Sadhana lives very near our house and is educating her children. Rajeswar visits her now and then.

Rajeswar met Yellakar.

He agreed that he had a point in his argument of globalisation. Anyhow he made friends with Yellakar, again.

Like Lord Srikrishna, the Geethakar, Yellakar assured Rajeswar that he was there to protect him.

Yellakar asked me and also Sharada for our advice. What experience do we have in these matters?

It was the first time for us to hear and observe such a case.

Lalitha and Venkata Narayana's problem got settled already. This case went topsy turvy. We were confused.

"Orei Venkulu! I too am not able to digest it. We have to feel that everything that happens is for our good. The husband and wife who got separated came together again. They will be happy hereafter because of the many experiences they gained during their separation.

Sharada! if Sadhana could wink at Rajeswar's relationship with Vijayalakshmi there will be no problem. Everyone could live happily like the Common Wealth Countries," said Yellakar again.

"Sharada! The Common Wealth is the forum established by countries which gained independence from the British rule. Though the British left, their culture has not left us. The countries did not like to sever all connections with the British. The

association of the Commonwealth countries got established like that. In the same way globalisation. The culture and connections will continue. So long as the parent institution continues, the adjustments on the lines of 'Shukra Neeti' will be inevitable!" continued Yellakar.

The problem with Yellakar is whatever he says appears reasonable and rational.

For two years everything went well.

Rajeswar got vexed by doing small jobs and trying his hand in business.

He mastered computer knowledge and went away to America seeking a job.

He started sending money every month.

He made Yellakar responsible in using the money.

He came to India after a year and a half and called his country 'dirty India', 'dirty Indians'.

He entertained all friends at a good dinner party.

When Rajeswar came to India, Vijayalakshmi's son was doing final year B.Tech. His younger sister was doing B.Sc. computers.

Yellakar's daughter secured a free seat at EAMCET. Sadhana's children were in Inter and tenth class.

Though they were studying in India, their minds were hovering around America.

It was surprising how Rajeswar changed so quickly, he who had hated America and globalisation.

Yellakar was not surprised at the change.

"Orei Venkulu! What is there in it to feel surprised? Hatred is the other form of desire! If you hate anything with all your heart, it means you desire it strongly. When grapes cannot be

reached people hate them saying they are sour. When they can reach them, they eat them.

Illicit relationships also are similar. When it becomes inevitable to accept what is hated and when that becomes a part of life, people begin to love what they hate. You will get angry if you are asked to wash the bottom of others but the mother does it because she has to do it and loves doing it.

Many people hate power. If power is within their reach do they keep quiet?

They love it and get used to it. This is natural in life. Rajeswar's case is also the same," said Yellakar preaching 'jagavatgeetha'.

Rajeswar stayed in India for a few days and left for America. Rajeswar's earnings created problems to Yellakar.

Yellakar's wife Raga Ragini started grumbling.

"Though we work hard the entire year, your earnings are not equal to Rajeswar's monthly salary. You also apply for passport and manage to get a visa."

Ramya, his daughter was listening to her mother's complaint.

It was clear what the mother and daughter had in their mind. Even if he sold the site of his house, he would not be able to get an American alliance for his daughter.

Yellakar who supported globalisation and America suddenly started opposing it. "They have no history. They have no culture. They are the blood hounds who killed a large number of locals called Red Indians and others and occupied continents shamelessly.

They, whose population is far less than our state occupied Africa, Australia, America and Asian continents. Africa, Australia and America did not get freedom.

They are the power mongers who distorted history. They are war mongers and useless fellows.

America itself got bogged down in economic crisis. It is silly that we should go there.

America is able to get on using the baton, its currency and its armaments. It is able to exist with the rise and fall of the dollar and the exchange problems.

The value of a dollar does not exceed the Indian five rupees. But our inefficient government has raised it to forty and fifty rupees. Do you know that the value of the Indian rupee at the time of independence was slightly equal the British pound and American dollar? It is our own government that reduced the value of the rupee and destroyed it." In this manner Yellakar went on cursing and criticizing.

Within a year Rajeswar got Vijayalakshmi's son, Navneeth to America.

Navaneeth was now a software engineer.

Sharada, Sadhana and Vijayalakshmi were making their attempts to find a bride for him.

But Yellakar stopped visiting us and telephoning also.

Yellakar does not reveal what happened in his family.

After Navaneeth left for America, Sadhana and Vijayalakshmi shifted into a house together.

Vijayalakshmi got herself transferred to the city.

Later they shifted to Hyderabad and started living in a flat.

Now they are living independently.

Once they depended on us for every small thing.

On the other hand we started depending on them either for money or some work now.

Yellakar's wife Raga Ragini went alone and met Sadhana and Vijayalakshmi and stayed there for two or three days.

She tried to convince them that the boy should marry a girl known to them and not a distant girl whose behaviour was not known.

Sadhana and Vijayalakshmi spoke with Rajeswar on phone.

They sought Navaneeth's opinion. Yellakar's daughter Ramya was born and bred before them. She was an engineer.

They both will live doing their jobs. Why bother about dowry? The girl will earn double the dowry amount in one year.

That was how they discussed the issue. After the match was settled Yellakar started talking to them. He had his selfishness.

When the match was fixed for Navaneeth, he could call Rajeswar 'daddy' on the phone and none objected to it.

Rajeswar and Vijayalakshmi played the parents of the boy.

Sadhana was happy as if her own son was getting married.

Yellakar's eye moistened.

"Orei Venkulu! These are not just tears. These are tears of joy. Did I ever dream of an American alliance? Did any of us dream that Navaneeth would go to America?"

If his drunkard father, that Poshender was alive, would his son have become atleast a school teacher? Vijayalakshmi would have died long ago for the blows she received. Navaneeth would have failed Inter and would have become a vagabond. What do you say?" asked Yellakar.

I was surprised that even in his hour of joy he did not give up his critical attitude and truthful analysis.

"The good that has been done will not go waste. Your goodness has helped you, there was just a little delay!" I said appreciating him.

Twenty days after the marriage, Navaneeth and his wife i.e. Yellakar and Ragarani's daughter Ramya left for states along with Rajeswar. Navaneeth could manage to get a Visa for Ramya in no time.

We all saw them off being with them till they got into the plane.

In the night the thought about my children engaged my attention and I grew thoughtful.

"Why are you still here without joining us at food?" asked Yellakar.

"What makes you so deeply thoughtful? Are you worried at what Sharada said regarding your children and their future? Things do not happen according to our wish. If it could be so, we would have been in the state of the early man. Do you know why? Because our desires and wishes do not move and go beyond our experiences," opined Yellakar.

"That's not it. I am happy that Vijayalakshmi and Sadhana became close like sister," I said to change the topic.

Yellakar posed like Lord Sri Krishna, the Geethakar.

"Oeri! They are like Commonwealth Countries! They will be together. America that robs us and India that gets robbed will remain friends tomorrow also. The necessities to keep them together grow as and when needed as they helped these two women."

"That's not what I am bothered about. It is about the brain drain," I said.

"Orei Venkulu! Don't make a theory that grapes which you cannot reach are sour. What if there is brain drain? If they export articles we export human beings.

Human beings are greater than articles. The wealth of Europe and America is the commonwealth of humanity. That is the wealth

derived after exploiting and robbing Asia and African countries for four hundred years. Read what Ram Manohar Lohia has written.

Is the wealth of America which robbed the Red Indians, the property of the Europeans?

It belongs to us all.

Australia also belongs to all of us. If we too go there like others, their wealth becomes ours.

Lohia said so many things but did not state that the wealth of the OCs is the result of the commonwealth of BCs over all these thousands of years.

Orei Venkulu! If it is not your foolishness, what do you mean by globalisation of articles?

The globalisation of goods is the globalisation of labour power! When labour power globalisation takes place how long will globalisation of workers take place! When once articles are globalised, will not human beings get globalised? It will somehow or other lead to the universal family," theorized Yellakar.

I could not say a word. His daughter Ramya and his son-in-law Navaneeth might have gone to America but this changed his attitudes. If I said this to him he would scold me saying "do not theories that grapes are sour."

I accompanied him to eat food as the women folk were waiting.

(To Kaloji with love, who on 21.10.2001 appealed to me with tears in his eyes saying "Ramulu, Kaluva Mallaiah and Pratapa Reddy-you should continue writing in Telangana language. If language is lost there is no culture. There is nothing else. Save our language" on the occasion of a cultural programme under the presidentship of Ambati Surendra Raju in Warangal)

## JOURNEY OF LIFE

"..... The boy is a soft-ware engineer in Bangalore. I got the bio-data from the marriage bureau. I spoke to the boy on telephone. I think this alliance would be settled. I learn that they are not keen on dowry. They said that if the girl is qualified to be a soft-ware engineer in the States, they are satisfied.

"There is a possibility of his going to the states within one year. You are a native of that place; I learn. If you go there once and find details about the boy's background we will proceed in the matter about Divya."

Sivarajam who was a scientist in B.D.L.(Bharath Detonators Limited) went on requesting Chandramouli on the telephone for nearly half-an-hour.

"Okay-let it be so. I too have some research work there. I will be around that place for two or three days. I'll visit their place also. Okay. Definitely..." Chandramouli put the receiver down.

Chandramouli left for Jagityala the same evening.

He went to his friend, Ramesham, who lived in the Mission compound. Chandramouli opened the topic of the alliance in a casual manner. Ramesham telephoned five or six people and collected the information.

"The boy's father Lasmaiah weaves cloth for Katakam Lingaiah for wages. The boy has a younger brother and two sisters. They boy is the only educated person in the family. The two sisters roll beedis. The younger brother failed in the degree

course." Ramesham gave the details.

"I have some work there in the poultry farm. Let us go there after eating our meal," said Ramesham.

Ramesham and Chandramouli went there on a motor bike after food. The black topped road was shimmering. Green fields attracted their attention all sides. Also fruit gardens. The breeze was cool and Chandramouli enjoyed the ride. They stopped at the poultry farm.

"Oh god! Did we reach the place so soon! Hardly half-an-hour ago we left our village," Chandramouli expressed his surprise.

"The road is fine. So we could reach soon," said Ramesham, praising the Chief Minister Chandra Babu Naidu.

In earlier days it used to take two hours to reach this place on motor bike. The road was slushy, full of ruts and pits, we had to push the vehicle in the sands of the streams." Ramesham continued.

"Namasthe, sir." Gangadharam, the owner of the poultry farm welcomed them courteously.

Details about the fowls, the production of eggs, their feed, their ailments, the care to be taken about the chicks were discussed by them. Chandramouli got his doubts cleared as the conversation went on.

Chandramouli was glad that many trees were grown around the poultry farm. Gangadhar took Chandramouli around the farm.

"Shall I get you date palm toddy, brother-in-law? Sri Chandramouli has come from the city. Should he not taste the village speciality?" Gangadhar ..... suggested.

"This gentleman is not used to any of these drinks. As for

me I am on a fast for half-a-day," replied Ramesham.

After a while they sat under the coconut trees by the side of the rose garden. Ramesham opened the topic.

"A number of alliances have been suggested for Ravi. The parents of girls have been visiting and going. Not a single alliance has come up to the stage of the young people taking a look at each other", said Gangadharam.

"Yes, why is it so?" questioned Ramesham.

"What is there to be told about him? For his parents, brother and sisters, he is the only important person in the family. In order to educate him his sisters were made to stop their studies at the seventh form and were sent to make beedis. If he reaches the level of going to America, his sister should be married to at least teachers. In these days which teacher would prefer a girl who has studied only upto the seventh class? They want a girl who is equally qualified. That is why he is keen on finding teachers for them by offering big dowries. His idea is good but in these days who will agree to spend their earnings for the house for seven or eight years? More than the girl, the parents of the girls have not been accepting this proposition. The boy will live in Bangalore or America thinking that marrying a girl from the weaver's family itself was a great concession. Even if the daughter and son-in-law are happy, how to run the big family? Such were the questions and doubts that arose", Gangadhar explained how each alliance went its way.

Chandramouli was surprised at the ideals and determination of the young man and appreciated his outlook.

"When the boy is working in Bangalore why should the father weave for wages? Why doesn't he own his loom?" asked Chandramouli.

"He tells me to stop working. He wants me to stop weaving

at the loom for good. But my brother does not heed his words. He says that he will not stop weaving on the loom which gave him food all these years. If we ask him to own a loom, he says that he is not prepared to undergo all the bother connected with owning a loom and selling the yarn to seths. He said with definiteness that he would weave for wages and would not possess a loom himself."

"Perhaps it would have been good if he had a poultry farm like you," suggested Chandramouli.

"Maintaining a poultry farm is a risky proposition. How will my brother manage something which is so risky? Is it possible for the man to run a poultry farm who did not want to possess a loom for himself? I am afraid he has become philosophical. Once my brother had his own loom. He had a good name around ten villages that he wove fine sarees. People from different and far off places used to meet him, give advances and get their sarees woven by him. Now dogs have carried away those days..... The lives of all weavers have fallen on bad days." Gangadhar remembered the old days and grew sullen and pensive.

"I went along with him for the EAMCET counselling. I paid the fee myself. Of course he returned all dues after he secured a job," concluded Gangadhar.

"This gentleman has also come in connection with finding an alliance. His close friend's daughter is to be married. Her father is an important officer. But the girl has a squint. If she wears glasses the squint is not observed. She is of normal complexion and is not fair," Ramesham gave the facts.

"That fellow is not very particular about such things. If you are satisfied it is okay. I will make him agree to the match. He will not say 'no' to me. Did I, at any time, say 'no' to you? If you feel that the match can be considered favourably after learning all the facts about the girl and the family, let us make the boy say

'yes' ...." He turned to Chandramouli, "Have a look at their house, I'll take you there," he offered.

They started walking, leaving the bike there. Chandramouli felt elated and excited at the vegetable and flower plants which looked green and fresh.

The looms situated in homes were making noises as the shafts moved this way and that across the loom. "I think there are a number of looms in this village," said Chandramouli.

"Not many. May be there are about sixty looms. But only twenty or twenty five persons are weaving. They too are weaving for wages with the master weaver. They are making towels and lungis mostly. Sarees only now and then. Sarees of eight or nine yards length are not available in the market so they are woven on orders."

"How many families live here?" asked Chandramouli to satisfy his curiosity.

"Twenty years ago there were hundred families. If they all had lived here by now they would have grown into three hundred families by the lowest estimation. But now there may be fifty houses. The others left seeking employment and livelihood to different places – not one place, not on one particular job." Gangadhar again fell into a pensive mood recollecting past events.

A cat jumped out of a window, eighteen inches high, with a mouse clutched in the mouth.

"There's no one in that house now. The owners of that house built a house in Jagityala. No one is prepared to buy this house. It costs fifty lakh rupees to construct a house like this. No one is willing to buy the house along with the site."

"What's the reason?"

"Who's living in villages now, sir? Moreover the owners had

laid a condition that the house should not be dismantled but retained as it is. A lamp should be kept burning in the house. The open space before the house should be cleaned, watered and a pattern with lime stone powder should be drawn. They are not selling it for want of money. The wood of the house alone fetches fifty thousand rupees. They were born and bred in that house. The house proved auspicious to them in all respects. It is a house where goddess Lakshmi lives. In these days even if you offer two lakh rupees such a good house would not be available. When a party wanted to buy it for thirty five thousand rupees and use the house the as a cattle shed, the owners did not sell it," informed Gangadhar.

"What does the owner of the house do?"

"What do they lack, sir? They are four brothers doing four different kinds of jobs. The eldest is a whole-sale cloth merchant in Jagityala. The second brother runs his real estate business covering the area between Jagityala up to Hyderabad. The third runs a bar cum restaurant. The youngest is a M.A., B.Ed. and runs a school in Jagityala. There are eight hundred students in the school. The two acres of land purchased outside the town for the school fetches two thousand rupees a yard if sold as plots. When young they worked hard. Now they maintain cars. When they were young all these brothers wove yarn with their father. In those days four looms used to be working in their house...."

In some homes there was no movement of people.

"Why are these houses silent?"

"They are the houses of Kapus. They all have gone to fields to cultivate lands. They will be returning in a short time."

A few yards beyond the houses of the Kapus, the sounds of working looms were again heard.

"This is the house of Ravi Prakash. Please walk in," said

Gangadhar, going in.

"Gangadhar has come," said Lachumbai addressing her husband Lasmaiah. She stopped her work of spinning the yarn on the charaka on the pial. She placed the cot on the pial removing the charaka and other items. She spread a bed cover on the cot, brought an old wooden chair and pushed aside the beedi leaves cut by her daughters.

Lasmaiah came out of the pit at his loom and adjusted his dhoti folds, wiped his face with a towel and put on the shirt which was hung to the peg of the loom.

Lasmaiah came out and greeted Ramesham saying "namaste."

The house resembled a factory. The smell of canjee emanated from the pot.

The long wooden planks and the thick adjusting brush were placed leaning on the wall. A saree was put to dry on a cot against the wall. The loom pit was clearly visible. The other itmes used for weaving were all in the room. There was a window at a height of about a foot and a half above the ground. Good breeze was blowing into the room from the window. Sun light dazzled on the cloth that was being woven on the loom.

"Where did your children go?" asked Ramesham.

"They said they would spend some time with their friends. They took with them the beedi leaves," replied Lachumbai.

She placed cow dung cakes in the mud oven, lighted the dried sticks with kerosene and started making tea.

"What brings you here?" asked Lasmaiah.

Gangadhar and Ramesham explained the purpose of their visit.

Lasmaiah was happy that a big officer from Hyderabad came

to the village seeking an alliance. His face blossomed forth like a full blown flower.

“ If your son goes to America, you too have to go there. If the son and daughter-in-law go to their jobs, you will have to live in America looking after your grandsons and grand daughters.” said Ramesham smiling.

“Why? Are there no children here? There is another younger son here. We will not go to America, not only America, we will not leave this village and go elsewhere. Anyway he will live there for five or six years and come back to our country. He said he would be there till sisters are married and till we buy a house in the city,” informed Lasmaiah.

“Before they go to America, everyone says so. Once they are used to the comforts of America, no one returns,” said Ramesham smiling.

Lachumbai brought tea for them all. Her two daughters ran home learning that some visitors had come to their house.

“This is the elder one, this the younger,” Lasmaiah introduced his two daughters to the visitors.

The eyes of the girls glowed with the pride that their brother was working as an engineer in Bangalore apart from the innocence they reflected in their eyes. They looked again and again at the photograph of the girl which their father held in his hand.

Chandramouli knew that talking in a manner that would be appropriate with the situation and status of a person was an art. “They are also not greatly propertied. Their father also wove cloth once. They are also not very rich. You are also not poor. They came up in life twenty five years ago by getting educated. Your boy came up in life now. They too lived like you in earlier days. Why talk only of them? We all lived like that”, said Chandramouli.

Chandramouli reminisced his past. He wove cloth in one

session of the day and attended college in the other session. His parents also worked hard. He spoke of all those experiences in a friendly manner.

Lasmaiah glanced at his wife and his children. He guessed that they liked what Chandramouli said.

“Did your son telephone to you?” asked Ramesham.

“He telephoned yesterday. He informed that the girl, according to reports, had a slight squint. ‘Someone from their side may visit you. If they like our family and our house and if you feel that things will be okay, go and meet them if they invite you’ said my son,” explained Lasmaiah.

“What about gifts and other presentations?” Ramesham wanted to know.

Lachumbai interfered saying that Lasmaiah will not talk about these things.

“We are trying for a match for our first girl. One of them is likely to be fixed. The boy had not yet got a government job. It may take another five or six months. They are demanding four. The other expenses will reach one or more. We are looking for a match for our boy so that the first girl’s marriage also would be celebrated with his dowry”, explained Lachumbai. She was happy that she quoted one more than what the boy’s people had demanded.

Chandramouli calculated that the total would come to five. Sivarajam was ready to spend nearly eight or ten for his daughter Divya’s marriage. If the present boy is going to be available for such a reasonable amount, he could as well offer his own daughter. His daughter was studying B.Tech in the final year. She was more impressive looking than Divya. He was a little worried and agitated. Chandramouli felt that he should have brought the photograph of his daughter also.

Ramesham and Chandramouli went out and had some discussion. Chandramouli spoke to Sivarajam, the girl's father. He handed over the mobile to Ramesham. Ramesham and Gangadhar described and explained the details. Gangadhar spoke to Ravi Prakash also. Later they all returned to the pial and sat on the cot comfortably.

"Then, when do you go to see the girl? Their addresses in this visiting card. Take Gangadhar with you and take a look at the girl," said Ramesham.

"That means, you are keeping away. You are the important person. How can we go without you?" said Lasmaiah who knew how Ramesham managed things. Can I escape if you insist on my going? " smiled Ramesham.

Both the parties guessed that the match would get fixed.



Two months later the marriage of Ravi Prakash with Divya, the daughter of B.D.L. Sivarajam, was celebrated on a grand scale in Hyderabad. But Lachumbai and Lasmaiah were not happy with the marriage that was celebrated in a hurly burly manner. Their son arrived five days before the marriage saying he could not get leave. There was not much time to go through the many formalities and rituals connected with the marriage. They did not at all feel that the wedding took place in their house. Sivarajam sent the bride-groom and the bride on honeymoon three days after the marriage. Lasmaiah did not appreciate this going around places when the daughter's marriage was to be celebrated a few days hence. Ramesham consoled the old man.

"In our younger days weddings took place when the boy and the girl were hardly fifteen years old. For every festival the young couple were moving between both the families. In that manner relationships were growing and acquaintances were made. People knew each other in course of time. Now marriages

are taking place when the boy and the girl are grown up. They are being sent on honeymoon so the boy and the girl could know each other. That means they are being encouraged to love each other after their marriage. By the by, we are all there to help you for your daughter's marriage." Ramesham spoke words of courage.

Fifteen days later the marriage of Lasmaiah's elder daughter, Vijaya, was celebrated in the village as desired by her father with fan fare and music. Ravi Prakash spent money freely for the dowry and other expenses as directed by Ramesham and others. Divya observed all the details and proceedings curiously.

Five days before the marriage the deity Pochamma was worshipped and dinner was served to all guests, sacrificing a he-goat. Divya felt it strange that Lasmaiah and Gangadhar uncle should themselves do all the cooking.

Lasmaiah wove the wedding saree for his daughter Vijaya himself. Gangadhar performed the special ritual of Vijaya being 'made the bride' two days before the marriage. He sent his daughter who was studying ninth class as the brides-maid to follow the bride.

Pots were decorated with lime and lime patterns and the 'Trendla pooja' was performed. Seven earthen ovens were dug. In olden days these huge earthen ovens were got ready for the guests who used to arrive on bullock carts for marriages as they would be dust ridden. Firewood from the forest was brought to boil water for bathing. Grain was stored in huge pots. Those traditions are being followed now also as emblems of the past practices.

The branch of "Andugu" tree was brought with music and it was fixed before the house. A platform was constructed with mud.

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\* Went through the ritual in the marriage pandal before the marriage sanctifying the groom and the bride.

Married women performed pooja to the well and brought water in brass pots. They made *Kooraallu*, the pooja of the new pots. "*Trendlu*" pots were taken to Pochamma temple with music and brought back after worship there. They walked to the temple of Pochamma holding a bed cover on their heads and returned holding the cloth like an umbrella. No one of them knew why this ritual was being followed. If someone suggested that a certain thing should be done, doing it had become a tradition. The family dhobi performed the ritual of mitigating the evil angel's influence with cooked rice mixed with kumkum as they entered the house.

Women consider this ritual as very important. The married women ground turmeric into powder in grinding stones.

A marriage pandal was erected at the doorstep with coconut leaves. The pandal was decorated with coloured papers and different designs.

The gold mangala sutras and the silver rings for the toes of the bride which were got made by the goldsmith were brought with band music and burning camphor. Songs on the loudspeakers were heard all by over the village. The dhobis and the barbers\* prepared the bridegroom "*Mylapolu*" go through the saved bath bath before marriage ceremony.

The bridegroom was met half way with band music when he was coming from the Markandeya temple and the bride's party followed him. When the groom's party and the bride's party faced each other the exchange of pasupu, kumkuma between the parties and mutual offering of sugar to be eaten by both the members were gone through.

Later the process of giving away the girl to the groom's

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\*Rukmini's father announced a *swayamvara* for his daughter when Kings and Princes assembled and the bride would choose her man from among those assembled. Sri Krishna arrived and is chosen by Rukmini. When Krishna was about to leave with his bride, her brother Rukki arrived to fight with Krishna for he wanted his sister to marry someone else.

party.... No one knows why this ritual of cumin seeds and jagery paste being placed on the heads of the young ones became more important than the actual marriage celebration. The bride groom and the bride were made to press down the feet of the other by turns. They were made to taste each other's saliva and eats. The saree and the dhoti end were tied into a knot. In broad day light at noon the Arundhati star was shown to the couple by the priest after the marriage ceremony. Cotton seeds were made to be spread by the couple. The groom and the bride went round thrice holding a balance in their hands. Ravi Prakash wondered why his marriage in Hyderabad was not celebrated with all these rituals. Gangadhar explained that each village or place will have its characteristic traditions at these celebrations.

In the evening the ritual of handing over the bride to the groom's parents took place. The marriage pandal, which till then presented a joyous atmosphere suddenly turned gloomy and dignified. The bride's parents placed dried date fruits in the hands of the bridegroom, his parents and the bridegroom's father's brothers and shed tears. The bride, Vijaya, could not control her tears and cried aloud. Some one wiped her tears. She touched the feet of all the elders saying, 'I'll get going'.

The bride was about to move along with her husband. The bride's brothers stopped the couple from going. They smiled and protested saying that their sister cannot be taken away. Chandramouli recalled Rukmini's marriage\* when he saw this argument taking place. Everyone witnessed happily this scene being enacted by the sons of Gangadhar and Ravi Prakash. The boys demanded five thousand rupees to be given to them for allowing their sister to be taken away. The amount was finally brought down to five hundred rupees. The father of the groom placed the money in their hands and asked them to be satisfied with it. With that this particular ritual ended. Then these young men carried the groom in their arms to the car. The procession

reached the outskirts of the village with band music. Some young men danced while the procession was moving out. Ravi Prakash also danced with them for some time.

Lasmaiah and Lachumbai appreciated the good arrangements made by Gangadhar and Ramesham and said the arrangements far exceeded their expectations. Two days after the marriage they went to the groom's house for the return dinner. On the third day presentations to the groom's mother etc. Again non-vegetarian dinner. Gifts were exchanged between the relatives of both the parties, to the women and men folk of both the families. Lasmaiah and Ravi Prakash presented new clothes to Gangadhar and Ramesham for over-seeing the arrangements for the marriage and touched their feet in reverence. Divya also touched the feet of everyone there. She showed keen interest in what went on and enjoyed the proceedings.

Four days later Ravi Prakash and Divya left for Bangalore. Three months later he left for the States. Divya received her visa after four months.

The rest of the story is known to all. So I will give brief details.

The alliance for the younger sister of Ravi Prakash was settled after one year. He bore the entire expenditure for the wedding but made it clear that he will not be able attend the marriage personally. As Divya was with him in the States for only one year and as the expenses for them both to come and go would be very high, it would be impossible for them to attend the marriage. They explained again and again the position on the phone.

At the marriage people began to comment that Ravi Prakash had become an American and that he and his wife would behave like that thereafter. Lasmaiah and Lachumbai reconciled to the situation and consoled themselves thinking people would talk like that out of jealousy for the prosperity their son enjoyed. Their very close relations themselves could not bear the news that Ravi

Prakash bought a car for eight lakh rupees.

Some years later Ravi Prakash secured a transport agency for his brother taking the help of his friends in India. That firm had been running well.

Limbadi of their village who was a wholesale cloth merchant in Jagityal came forward, offering his daughter in marriage to the second son of Lasmaiah. The old couple could not believe the offer for they felt it a great honour which came by most unexpectedly.

Gangadhar and Ramesham again acted the 'marriage elders'.

"What is great about me, I am a big businessman to-day. But once I worked on a salary of ten rupees a month. Your son became a big businessman with his lorry transport quickly. It is all because of your elder son. Alliance with you is something known to every one as a good alliance" convinced Limbadi.

The marriage was settled after discussions held during two months. It was three years by then after Ravi Prakash had gone to the States. Ravi and his wife too wanted to visit India. Chandramouli's daughter Praveen, who had gone to the States to do her M.S. also came to India as her marriage too was fixed.

Everyone appreciated Ravi Prakash during the two marriage celebrations.

Ravi Prakash pointed at his wife and said the credit went to her.

"I advanced the money to buy the house from my salary. The money sent home was mostly from the salary of your daughter-in-law," Ravi Prakash told his parents.

Many felt jealous towards the daughter-in-law. The elders blessed her saying she was the "Mahalakshmi" of the family. Youngsters touched her feet. Divya was moved at the affection and regard shown by the relatives belonging to the village. Divya

who was with child appeared more beautiful than ever what with people appreciating her.

Ravi Prakash applied for the pass port for his parents. Going back to the States they requested again and again the old couple to visit the States. Gangadhar and Ramesham took Lasmaiah and Lachumbai to Madras twice. They paid four thousand and six hundred rupees for each of them by draft and went to Madras on the scheduled date.

On the first occasion they did not know what to talk and how in the American Counsellate and were confused. Visas for them were rejected. For the second trip the old couple were given training. Yet the old couple said they would not go. They felt very much humiliated with the tests. Gangadhar and Ramesham appealed to them to make the visit and looked after the papers. At last the visas were got ready at Madras. Ravi Prakash got the flight tickets reserved and sent them to the parents.

Lasmaiah and Lachumbai left in cars with four huge suitcases to the airport accompanied by Limbadri, Ramesham and Chandramouli. The Sivarajams met them at the Hyderabad airport. All other close relatives also met them there. The old couple's eyes moistened on seeing them all together. The daughters shed tears. After a wait of two hours they boarded the plane.

The clouds were beneath them as the plane flew in the sky. As they passed Bombay and London, they felt as though they were passing through 'deva loka', the world of the gods.

As they got off the flight, their son Ravi Prakash was there to receive them. The joy of the parents knew no bounds as they travelled in their son's car.

They could not but appreciate and praise the good roads and the pleasant surroundings.

The house of Ravi Prakash was beautiful. It looked like the spacious houses seen in movies. The house was built on a eight hundred yard site. The beauty of the house was never imagined in real life or even in a dream.

One day Lasmaiah asked Divya what the rent was for the house. She suggested that he should ask her husband.

"I told you I paid an advance for the house. I have to pay rent every month for fifteen years." Informed Ravi Prasad.

"Will it be ten lakh rupees?" enquired Lachimbai.

"It is a crore and twenty lakh rupees" replied Ravi Prakash taking the hand of his mother endearingly.

His mother could not guess the value of the figure given by her son.

"This is the result of the arrival of the first daughter-in-law into our hosue" said the old woman blessing them both.

After a month Divya was delivered of a baby girl. The old parents were happy at the birth of a baby girl.

Divya went back to work even before the expiry of a month after the delivery. With the birth of the baby a new chapter was opened.

The American play commenced now.

The family changed beyond imagination for the reason that one member of the family was highly educated!

The old couple thought that they have now an American grand daughter. They repeated the words 'American grand-daughter' again and again.

Ever since the birth of the baby, the girl's parents, their son and daughter, sons-in-law, Chandramouli, Ramesham or some one from India were telephoning to them and the telephonic

conversation between India and America kept going three or four times every week. The old couple felt as if all their relatives were in the next street.

On a week-end four or five friends sat together in the house of Ravi Prakash.

They discussed many things. Divya also took part in the discussion.

Amarender, the close friend of Ravi Prakash, was often finding fault with Ravi Prakash, in all seriousness though smilingly.

"I've been telling you from the beginning not to buy a house. You are converting money into dead capital by paying rent for fifteen years," said Amerender.

"Skies have not fallen on our heads! How old are we? All of us are just thirty plus. I am only twenty seven. Some of my classmates in India have not been employed even now. Anyway we have to pay a thousand dollars as rent for a house. We are paying another seven hundred as extra amount. Okay. Forget, what has been done. What do you propose for the future?" said Divya.

Praveen's husband Parthasarathi said that he was not prepared to take a risk so soon.

"What is life without taking a risk? You can't drive a car without taking a risk. Show me the place where there is no risk. Are these jobs permanent? This is not India," said Viswender Reddy, a friend.

"My husband says so in the beginning. But later he is the first to do things" said Praveena smiling.

"How long should we lead lives like employees in a routine manner and live a life of boredom? We should embark on some adventure. We should start some venture on our own. Why should

we not reach a higher stage in life than this?" suggested Amarender.

"Why should we not start a software company? Three hundred dollars are sufficient for registration. Could we not establish an institution, so many as we are? Don't we have that strength? Is it impossible if all of us joined hands?" Vinod argued.

Finally they all agreed to start a soft-ware company with Divaya as M.D.

Though Divya rejected the idea of her being made the M.D. there was a glow in her face.

Parthasarathi felt as though he was being bogged down in a mire.

"Be brave. Forget the past. We have taken another step towards a new paradigm. We will succeeded surely. Hereafter a new chapter opens in our lives..." said Vijay enthusiastically.

The telephone. Divya received the call. It was Chandramouli. Divya briefly explained the proposal they had discussed. She asked him for his suggestions. Chandramouli was very happy. She pressed the speaker to be heard by all.

"In olden days it was next to impossible to get a teacher's job. In your generation some of you could go to States. When I observe you and your enthusiasm I am reminded of Lala Lajapathi Roy, Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, A.K.Ramanujam, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and others. They got a chance to visit foreign countries 150 years ago. You got such chances now. You have started your lives now. Your reaching greater heights depends on your enthusiasm, determination and talent. Who told Bill Gates to grow in life? Satyam Ramalinga Raju, Infosys Narayana Murthy-who told them to venture forth? Who told Ambani who started his life as a clerk, to reach greater heights? Did anyone tell the orphan boy, Ford, to reach the summit in car manumacture? It all

depends on determination, decision, continuous effort and hard work. The conquerer of the world. Alexander, said that the world is very small for the person who wants to win. I have nothing more or new to tell you. You will have the opportunity of serving your land the more you grow. Don't forget this. Best of luck.”

Those present clapped their hands.

Lasmaiah and Lachumbai looked round innocently not knowing why they clapped. They were sure that their son and daughter-in-law will do good deeds always.

The old couple had their thoughts on their daughters. They felt it would be good if the two sons-in-law also came to the states. They spoke their mind to Ravi Prasad.

“We are going to establish an institution for such persons. If they learn computer training there, we can find them some work here. That is our attempt now,” replied Vijay, all smiles.