

CONTEMPORARY TELUGU SHORT STORIES



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Translation
THUMMAPUDI BHARATHI



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CONTEMPORARY TELUGU SHORT STORIES

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THUMMAPUDI BHARATHI

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**Translation
Thummapudi Bharathi**

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*For
my amma and nanna*

*Who relentlessly denied to themselves
the pleasures of life;
bore endless suffering silently
and
enabled me to carve out a better life.*



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PREFACE

The present volume is a modest, maiden attempt to introduce a few Telugu short stories to the non-Telugu readers. Though the writers of these stories are popular they need at least a brief introduction for the readers outside Andhra Pradesh.

Allam Seshagiri Rao

*Born on January 9, 1934 Allam Seshagiri Rao acquired his post graduate degree from Andhra University in Political Science. He retired as a superintendent from Indian Railways. He has published two volumes of short stories **Manchimutyalu** and **Aranya Ghosha**. He has selected unusual themes for his stories and uses appropriate style. A good number of his short stories are translated into English, Hindi and Malayalam. An ardent admirer of Satyajit Ray, Seshagiri Rao is fond of the works of Hemingway, Steinbeck and Toni Morrison. The present story **Varadu (An Old Fox)** has been telecast as a T.V. serial called **Darpan**, directed by Basu Chattarjee.*

Chalasani Prasada Rao

Born on October 27, 1939 in Krishna district, Chalasani Prasada Rao is a multifaceted personality. He is a fiction writer, a journalist, a painter, a photographer, an editor, and a columnist all rolled into one. He took his post graduate degree from the Government Art and Architectural College, Hyderabad. He worked as an artist in the Andhra Pradesh

Information and Broadcasting department for more than ten years. He has twenty books to his credit. He is a well-known critic on painting in Andhra Pradesh. He is the editor of Kala, an exclusive magazine on art. Since 1974 he has been editing the monthly magazines Vipula and Chatura of Eenadu group.

Papineni Siva Sankar

Born on November 6, 1953 in Suntur district, Papineni Siva Sankar is a poet, and a critic besides being a story teller. He has published a volume of short stories entitled Mattigunde, two volumes of poetry – Oka Saaraamsam Kosam and Aaku Pachhani Boya, and a critical work – Sahityam : Konni Mouluka Bhavaalu. He is one of the editors of Kavitha O Kavitha, an anthology of the twentieth century Telugu poetry, and Katha series in Telugu.

Dr. V.R. Rasani

Born on April 19, 1957 in Chittoor district, Dr. Rasani Venkata Ramaiah is an upcoming young writer, working as Lecturer in Telugu in S.V. Arts College, Tirupati. Dr. Rasani has published a number of short stories, and more than half a dozen novels. He has tried his hand at poetry and criticism too. Some of his novels Mattibatukulu, Cheekati Rajyam and Batukata have won many coveted prizes. He has three plays to his credit. He has published a volume of short stories, Ma Uri kathalu in Rayalaseema dialect.

I would like to thank the Potti Sriramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad, for granting me Rs. 3,000/- as financial assistance for the publication of this volume of Telugu short stories translated into English.

I am grateful to Prof. K. Venkata Reddy, not only for his valid and resourceful Foreword, but also for his encouragement in all my academic endeavours. I wish to thank Dr. Asha Jyothi and Sri A.S. Ethirajulu for kindling the idea of translation in me.

I thank all the writers included in this volume for permitting me to translate their stories into English.

*I hope and trust that this slender volume of short stories will be of considerable interest to readers whom I expect to be **sahridayas** in their critical appreciation. I humbly state that the present work is not transcreation, but only a translation. In order to retain the flavour of Telugu story telling, I tried to bend the structure of English language. I practised a via media between faithful translation and free translation to make the readers feel at times that they are reading a Telugu short story in English. Essentially my intention of translation is to introduce the Teluguness to non-Telugus. The words in italics are culture specific, hence explained in the glossary section at the end of each story.*

T. BHARATHI

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November 21, 2001.

FOREWORD

Like any other form of literature, the modern short story is concerned essentially with people in their ordinary life, their behaviour and speech and with their thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It seeks to present the life-story of a mood, or a state of mind under the action of the incessant infinitesimal and unforeseen pinpricks of life. And the lyrical evacuation of mood and atmosphere tells us a lot more than what is apparent on the surface of the situation, and the open ended, circular movement of the story, however slight the event depicted may be, conveys to us the impressions of a much larger world of events of which the story forms a small segment.

Furthermore, the short story, as it is practised today the world over, is not a rambling, loosely knit piece of work. It is an organic whole with unity of motive, of purpose, of action, and of impression, producing a single vivid effect.

*This may be said to be borne out, to a considerable degree by the present volume of short stories translated from Telugu into English by Dr. T. Bharathi. As she makes it clear in her **preface** this slender volume is a maiden attempt to introduce a few representative Telugu short story writers to the non-Telugu readers. Though this is her first attempt at translating a creative*

work of art from Telugu into English, the impression one gets is that Bharathi has the makings of a fairly good translator.

The volume consists of five short stories originally written in Telugu by reputed authors. The first story, **The Enemy**, by Chalasani Pradsada Rao is a brilliant piece of social realism and sardonic satire. It is a satirical portrayal of the corrupt police system on a realistic plane. It is a well-made, conventional short story giving a twist to the narrative at the end.

If the first story is a scathing attack against corrupt practices of police officers, the second story, **The Faces of Violence** is a brilliant satire against the unscrupulous and avaricious medical doctors. It seeks to highlight the problem of medical violence of private doctors who refuse to treat poor patients. It deals with the plight of a poor villager, Venkateswarulu, whose wife, suffering from jaundice, dies a miserable death in a private nursing home, owing to the apathy and indifference of the doctor who neglects her because he is not paid proportionately. The harrowing medical violence the poor wife is subjected to is vividly depicted in the backdrop of George Wilson's book, **What is Violence?**

As a refreshing change comes the third story, **The Wind Tree** takes us from the artificial, urban plane to a natural, rural locality with the ambience of a typical Rayalaseema village. In

*the backdrop of Munidevara, the first head shaving ceremony; the story revolves round Munilakshmi, the only daughter of Muneiah, who was married five years ago to one, Venkatamuni, a greedy accountant in the Municipal office. Accused first of being a barren woman, and then of infidelity when she gives birth to a child, Munilakshmi is back in her parents' house and becomes a typist in the Panchayat Office, earning a handsome salary besides the property her father has registered in her name. Lured by her monthly earnings and the property in her name, her husband finds the Munidevara ceremony an occasion to come and take his wife and child pretending to be penitent. The story ends, like Ibsen's play **The Doll's House** on a note of rejection when Munilakshmi bluntly refuses the selfish offer made by her husband, displaying monumental courage and independence of mind and spirit to the great surprise of all.*

*Feminist in tone, **The Wind Tree** is a healthy structured short story with a good beginning, a good middle and a good ending holding as it were a mirror up to rural life in Rayalaseema, the story has a ring of authenticity. Realistic in content and expression, the story brings out the simplicity and nativity of the good-natured villagers in contrast to the greed and avarice of the hard-hearted townsfolk.*

*The fourth story, **An Old Fox**, is the longest and perhaps the most moving with its highly symbolic title and apt animal imagery, the story is quite convincing and appealing. The story is built on the contrast between the honest, simple and selfless life of the military personnel and the dishonest, greedy and selfish civilians, projecting the view that “While military men fight for the nation, the civilians cringe for food.”*

*Though the symbolic title, **An Old Fox** suggests that the short story is about one Dasaradharamaiah, a retired but re-employed accountant in an Assistant engineer’s camp office, it is really concerned with Chinnaiah, a jeep driver, a military man honest to the core, hard-working, brave, kind hearted, disciplined, helpful and sacrificial. The story depicts the betrayal of Chinnaiah by Dasaradharamaiah for all the good he has done to the latter and his family. Dasaradharamaiah is rightly likened to an old fox, “a very cunning, a very mean animal, that stoops down to any level for its food”. When Chinnaiah is dismissed from service for having come to the rescue of Dasaradharamaiah by questioning the misbehaviour of his boss, everybody in the camp site feels for him and even shed tears remembering the yeomen service he has rendered, Dasaradharamaiah was nowhere to be seen. He has sulked away from the scene lest he should be mistaken by the boss. It shows how human values are thrown to winds in the pursuit of selfish ends.*

*The last short story **The Hunter**, differs from the previous 'plotted' stories in that it is Chekhovian in conception and execution. We find in it the Chekhovian passion to see the truth, the Chekhovian instinct to reveal it by dwelling briefly, but with penetrating clarity, on one or two individual human beings. It is the tragic tale of a marginal farmer, Bairigadu, who struggles in vain to extricate himself from the cobweb of his debt to Suraiah, a typical avaricious business man. The unconventional ending of the story, leaving what finally happens to Bairigadu to the imagination of the reader, adds to its poetic richness.*

The five story slender volume makes a fairly good reading. The selection of stories from the contemporary short fiction in Telugu is representative and, what is more, reveals the social consciousness of the translator with a sense of commitment to the cause of the common man in the present day corruption-ridden capitalist society where human values are a big casualty.

Though, by and large, the translated stories make an interesting reading, they are not altogether free from certain perils of translation. More often than not, the author takes resort to literal translation which hampers the spirit of the original short stories. What is important is not the verbatim reproduction, but imaginative recreation in the target language.

However, the translated stories reveal the faithfulness of the author to the mood and spirit of the original stories. One can, of course, understand how difficult it is to find the exact lexical equivalent in the mother tongue of the lexical item in a language like English, especially for a beginner like the present author. Within her limits and limitations, the translator has done a good job.

Translation is both an artistic process and a craft. It is an artistic process in that only a sahridaya can capture the message embedded in one's language, and reproduce it faithfully in an alien language without disturbing its lexico-syntactic and socio-semantic structures. It is also a craft in as much as it involves a process of making choices and organizing these choices artistically in an effective manner. Translation, therefore, is not a second rate activity, but a first rate creativity leading on to transcreation. Besides fulfilling some of the needs of the country at the present, the potential of translation can be exploited for teaching English as a second language in our schools and colleges. Translation is an exciting and enriching experience, and it certainly needs to be encouraged further as is the case with the present work.

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November 5, 2001.

THE ENEMY

“**S**ir”, said the constable, coming to attention by stamping the iron-soled shoes on the floor.

The Sub-Inspector does not look up. He is staring at some costly bills on the table. A smuggled watch is glittering on the hand with which he is holding the bills. A cheap pen in the other hand is totalling the bills.

The total amount of the bills unnerved the S.I. The total amount is a little more than two thousand rupees.

Two thousand rupees! ... Is it a small amount? Ninety days salary!

When he was in the traffic wing during those golden days he got this amount for every two months as his share by exploiting the bullock-cart *wallahs*, cart pullers, old women, vegetable vendors and the people on pavements.

But within twenty-four hours that big amount flew from his hands. It was transformed into beer, brandy and whisky that flowed down from bottles into glasses. It disappeared like *masala* in chicken *biryani* and chicken roast.

If so, what is there! But it saved his job! Not feeling unhappy for losing two thousand rupees. He is not a propertyless pauper; not a fool, he knows how to earn extra money.

But...but...just like that! Within a single day...within twenty-four hours...!

Two thousand rupees had to be lost for grabbing fifty rupees, for taking fifty rupees bribe, three years back. Yesterday two thousand rupees had to be paid by way of interest on the principal.

On that day I did not take fifty rupees unnecessarily. Neither exploited any one nor forced any body to sell *mangalasutra*, not even made him mortgage it.

That fellow who gave that amount was very rich. Gave it to protect himself unjustly. My duty then was at Taluka centre. He was an upcoming leader in that town. In his locality he was the king, the minister and even the I.G of police. He was all in all in his area.

To prove his power he set fire to someone's house. When the affected person questioned him, he was beaten till his bones were badly fractured. Moreover, he challenged him to complain to anyone.

I did not know at that time that this challenge would cost me two thousand rupees. Absolutely no objection for me, if he had done anything in his kingdom. He may be the uncrowned monarch in his area. For that matter there are such kings as many as the hair in the moustache. But I was the only king with power in that town.

Then, at least out of sheer respect, he could have told me before he did it. It was okay, if he could have told me after that and asked for my forgiveness.

No! He didn't do anything like that. Instead, he sent for four "bottles", drank fully, lay down comfortably and had a deep sleep. Very leisurely, at the end he came, after that house-burnt, fractured-fellow had come with a procession of about fifty men and registered the case.

How did he come then? Not by himself. I sent word for him. So he came! I sent two constables and then he came escorted by a minister. He entered twisting his oiled and neatly combed

bushy whiskers. "Hello! how are you?", I quipped like the brother of my father-in-law, as he stepped in.

It is a fact that his foolish behaviour and his pose caused utter irritation. At the same time, I saw Gandhi's photo hanging on the wall in front of me, but absolutely forgotten his repeated preaching of peace and non-violence and proved my strength to that *chota* leader. Expended all my powers on him.

Got the registers and read out the registered case "You and your stupid whiskers! Your politics is useless if compared with my power", said the S.I to himself. Proved indirectly that his politics is subordinate to my power! Oh sharp-whiskered-*chota* leader! On the whole, by threatening and frightening I made him step down to plead me. By accepting fifty rupees with generosity, preserved the prestige of his whiskers.

Now those whiskers revealed their power. I was mistaken. I realized that his politics is more powerful than my uniform. Within these forty-eight hours, it is clearly proved that the crownless white caped local leaders, political whiskers are very powerful and my cap with the bronze badge is very weak.

By the grace of Lord Venkateswara and because of my own fortune, two years ago I was transferred to this city and posted in this seat- a *Kamadhenu*; but I have not imagined even in my dream, that this short-mustache-*chota* leader by conducting a few *dharnas*, has become the leader of the town. His guru has suddenly become a minister. They struck my job in their bushy whiskers and suddenly created the suspension order. When I was in that town he pretended to be good. Greeted me with a smile whenever he met me. "How do you do, dear!" he addressed me like a well-wisher. I never knew that such enmity was hidden under that

greeting. I did not know that fifty rupees were shining, along with interest behind his smiles. I could not even smell that behind his greeting there was a strong feeling that a day would come to reveal his power, and that I would have to stoop down before him.

The time was ripe. Now he revealed his true colours. Recently he came along with the minister to a function, recognized me and talked to me. "Are you here?", he asked me. Without forgetting, he directed his disciples to file petitions. Told his *guru*, and got the suspension order very silently. Created such a situation that I would lose my job very shortly.

It was good, before I received the order or before it was typed, I came to know about it. I was trembling the whole day. Shivered terribly. The files were moved, and things had come to such a pass that I could not do anything. There are "big heads" on the other side. Costly white caps are there on the big heads. I am alone and cannot fight with them. Even if I fight I do not believe that I will win.

How...? How...?

If necessary, there is nothing wrong to fall at the feet... Who said it? Is it Gandhi? Some god's father had also fallen at the feet of a donkey.

So, shall I go and fall at the feet of the *chota* leader? Shall I adore his cap? Pray to his whiskers – these were my early thoughts. There is no other way. Stupid prestige. Why, think of respectability, when the job itself is lost! Who will salute me if I don't put that cap on my head and put the uniform on my body? At least will anyone care for me?

But...! But...!

How to face the worst, where I am honoured with garlands.
Shall I massage his feet?

Then, suddenly I remembered the Municipal Chairman.

I have acquaintance with him, but not friendship; but every one knows him. He knows everyone. His popularity has spread all over the world. A confidant to ministers and boss to officers. He does not take up small works. Those who know him say that two families can live like officers' families with the amount of his telephone bill. Those who have got experience in his activities say that a building can be constructed every two years with the amount he spent on petrol for his vehicles.

Within forty- eight hours it was proved that all the things said about him are neither lies nor hyperboles. My suspension order is kept in suspension after eight hours of my pleading. As he is in a good mood he does not prolong the conversation on expenditure for this and that. First, he asked me to narrate everything in detail.

I narrated. I told him everything without concealing any fact. True. I took bribe. But for fifty rupees...after all for fifty rupees...such rivalry? Is this a punishment? I asked him with tears. Requested him to protect my honour. I can live without job, but cannot live if my honour is at stake. Saying so, I fell on his feet. He gave some evidences to prove that his great-grand parents and mine are relatives. Proved that both of us are from the same district. He also explained that the short-whiskers-*chota* leader and his guru belong to his rival group. He blessed me and called for the taxies. Started with his band of people. He stood there and made the gates of the Secretariat open, ordered for the files. Like a flash, every thing is done. The suspension order was suspended. I

breathed comfortably. I promised to offer my hair and whiskers to Lord Venkateswara!

His followers directed the taxis from there, directly to the bar on the hills. They praised the chairman and his popularity poetically. Emptied the bottles by praising the power. By giving all credit to his greatness, swallowed chicken. They enjoyed the girls while praying for his health and long life.

So what! Job is retained and honour is saved.

All the expenditure for the taxi, drinks and girls was calculated and it came to two thousand rupees. It is better. Everything is adjusted within that amount. If the job is retained this cap can fetch any amount of money. It grabs money.

* * *

The constable with irritation, fear and obedience again stamped the iron-soled shoe and called "Sir".

The S.I. looked up. The Constable's face is familiar; but behind him there is an unknown face. That is a female face. A very innocent face. Innocence is still shining on the face. It appears that she has not come to the police station before. At least her face is not seen among the high class faces that came last night.

"She is my acquaintance's daughter, Sir...a rowdy touched her hand.... You tell him", said the constable to the woman and moved a little to the other side.

Now the S.I. took a full view of her. Though she was not fair and beautiful she was very attractive. She was bubbling with youth. Generally women don't come to the police station. They are dragged. They may be good-looking yet they look like crushed flowers, dry roses, like dilapidated houses. But this girl does not look like that.

“She is like a dark-coloured apple... like a flower just blossoming. If someone has done something, why shouldn't they? Such a fruit is a temptation for a bite.”

“Speak”, said the S.I

She said that she is studying in a college; she has no one except mother and a younger brother. They get livelihood out of a house given for rent. They are living with that rent. If her education is completed, then she'll get a job...they can have a better living from next year onwards.

“Yes sir! She is studying well. She always gets first class in the college. Just within a year or so she will get a job. Her father will be happy wherever he is”, said the constable.

She could not control anymore and her eyes were filled with tears. Controlling her tears and sobbing, she said, “My father worked in this station”.

“Yes sir! Forgot to tell you. Her father worked along with me in this station. A few days before you arrived he died in an accident”, the constable said.

The S.I remembered now. During the first few days when he came here he saw the papers signed. Now he should not give up the case so easily. He who has ill-treated a constable's daughter should not be forgiven. He should be dragged to the station and imprisoned; he should be made to fall at her feet. He should be beaten till his bones are broken. Bad food should be served. He should be taught such a lesson that he would never look at a girl.

“How does he look like? Can you recognize him?”, the S.I asked.

“He is like a he-buffalo. He has large cheeks with bushy

hair. Why can't I recognize him? He lives in the building which is in front of my quarters".

The S.I. felt humorous. Any fellow looks like a he-buffalo if a girl does not like him.

"What is he"?

He sits in the room on the first floor of his home and looks at my backyard and bathroom.

"How is it?"

"Yes sir! Our tiled house is behind his building"

"Oh", thought the S.I., something like love is connected with this. That fellow is interested in her but she is not, he said to himself.

The girl ground her teeth. Her face was filled with anger. "He is a rowdy. He goes after a girl everyday. He always roams around my college. What does he know about love? stupid!"

"Okay. Tell me in detail, what has happened?"

"I think he always keeps an eye on my house. Yesterday evening when I was alone in my house, like a cat he entered stealthily and bolted the door"

The S.I remembered something. Last night in the bar also all the elders too went into the rooms behind the girls like cats. I was left alone outside, calculating the bills.

"Oh! Next?"

"He muttered something! He loves me it seems! We listen to such dialogues in the films. He learnt them by heart and uttered"

"What did you say?"

"My mother is in your house, you know! Go and talk to her!", I said.

"What does your mother do in his house?"

"She goes there everyday. She cooks in that house".

The S.I laughed. The world was changing. A rich man had fallen for a cook's daughter. He himself begged her. If so why did he bolt the door? "What did he say for that?"

"Anyhow it will be done! For the present give a kiss...once...only once...so saying he tried to fall on me".

"What did you do?"

"Slapped him on the face and showed the door".

"So, you only slapped him first".

"But, sir, did he not commit a crime by stepping into her house first?", murmured the constable.

"Yes...Yes"...said the S.I

"What happened next?"

"He is a cultureless fellow! He began to plead and fell on me. In the struggle I fell on the vegetable cutter and missed it narrowly. Otherwise, my hand might have been cut off", saying so, she showed the mark at the elbow.

"You could have bashed him with that on the head". He is about to say so. But did not as he remembered his designation. She could guess his thought. "When I saw blood on the hand I got so wild! I took that vegetable cutter and was about to attack him".

"Well done!" But the S.I did not say so.

"But", she said.

"I felt that Gandhi's photo on the wall warned me with a smile"

“Who is he? he is about to ask, but remembered that he had seen that bald-headed man’s photo on the front wall. “Oh. Yes!” thought the S.I

“Moreover my father’s photo is hanging on the wall next to that, in the uniform”.

“So what?”

“I stopped when I saw Gandhi. When I saw my father’s uniform I remembered that you are here to take care of such people, so I stopped”.

The S.I. felt happy. She was intelligent. She could control so much anger. A murder case was avoided from this. I think Gandhi could control the situations without committing murders!

The S.I didn’t hide his praise for the girl. “You have done a good thing girl! We are here to take care of such he-buffaloes. I will drag him to the station and imprison him wherever he is. I will imprison him for six months and make him eat the worst food. I will teach a lesson to the rascal which he will remember till his death. Where is your house? Let us go and see!” So saying he was about to get up.

“There is a big bungalow at the end of the main road! Behind that building is my tiled house. Probably he is available in that bungalow”.

“Does he stay in that building? Why does he stay?”

“That is his! His father is a leader. There are always crowds with many cars and jeeps”

The S.I. felt a bomb-blast on his head. Truly, the bungalow at the end of the main road is Municipal Chairman’s. Is this fellow his son! “At which end is that bungalow?”, the S.I questioned

with a faltering voice.

“The other end! ... Easy to identify. Everyone addresses the house owner as chairman”.

The S.I was shocked. He could not recover for five minutes!

“Okay. You go”, he said at last.

“Sir, shall I take her signature in the case register!”, asked the constable.

The shocked S.I got his innocuous statement as meaning, “shall I cut off your neck, sir?”

“We will see to that later, but first drop her at her house. Tell her to be careful with big heads,” the S.I said.

“Sir, see that the he-buffalo does not repeat such things”, she said with suspicion. She seemed to have understood something from the pale face of the S.I.

This time the word, ‘he-buffalo’, did not make him laugh. That word seemed very harsh, so he lifted his head. The constable understood everything. With a gesture, he took her out. The S.I sat there with the head in his hands. He was sitting in the same position for half-an-hour till the constable came back. He was frightened like a person who had seen a snake for the first time in his life.

“Look here! You said she is related to you. Tell her to be a bit careful. It is not easy to file a case against the chairman’s son. He can bring thousand and one evidences in his favour. If not, he can bring a certificate stating that he attended a dinner at the minister’s residence along with his father”, the S.I. said. “Yes sir”, answered the constable. “Anyway, it is just between you and me! When a big man like the chairman’s son came and proposed himself

why should this girl resent it, instead of jumping with a sense of joy?", asked the S.I naively.

As an answer, he kept a packet on the table saying, "she gave me to give it to you." And he stamped his iron-soled shoes again, saluted and left.

The S.I could not guess what that packet contained! "Maybe, she has sent the broken pieces of bangles, or a piece of her torn blouse for evidence". Thinking so, he opened it.

It contained the smiling face of Gandhi's photo with the broken pieces of glass frame. Along with it her father's faded uniform was there.

The S.I understood all that it meant. He couldn't resist thinking aloud, "alas, poor girl".



THE FACES OF VIOLENCE

The hospital disgusts me. I have a feeling that the patients there are writhing in the hands of a supreme power. I see the scene of various diseases tormenting the human beings there.

I see death there. The grotesque of life is visible there. That is why I am disgusted with hospital. But I had to go to the hospital when my wife was attacked with jaundice. Having known that doctor Parasuramaiah is a specialist in treating jaundice cases, we went to him.

The Santhi Nursing Home, a lonely building, is located at the end of the town. Beyond that building there are only agricultural fields. The doctor alone knows why such a big building is constructed far away from the town. By the time we reached the hospital, there was a marginal rush at the consulting room. In general, a majority of the cases that came to this hospital were chronic ones. A nurse and a pharmacist were busy going from one corner to the other. After waiting for half an hour, we got entry. Just then the doctor was wiping his hands after washing them. Responding to our greetings, he sat in the revolving chair and showed us the chairs. Doctor Parasuramaiah looked like a person below fifty years of age. He was fair and plump. He was sharp-witted. He was fresh like a tomato just plucked from the garden; a few white hair on the head. His face was pleasant. I formed a good impression of him as soon as I saw him. After conducting preliminary tests to my wife, Suguna, he asked me, "Why have you delayed it for such a long period without taking treatment?"

I told him that she had undergone treatment with another doctor.

"Don't you know who is a specialist for jaundice in this

town? Why did you go to some one else? All right. First of all, get these tests done,” said the doctor authoritatively.

We came back to him with the reports of urine test, blood test, LET test etc. He casually turned the pages of the reports.

“My god! LFT shows 15 milligrams... very high. Get admitted in the hospital immediately. A careful treatment is necessary. Right now I cannot say, how many days it takes to be cured, but don’t worry. She will be all right”, he told me. My wife, looked worried. She nodded her head mechanically to the doctor’s words. I patted her on the shoulder to support her. Inwardly, I too was worried.

“What do you do?” he asked me.

I told him that I was a lecturer in such and such a college. He smiled and said that his daughter was studying in the third year B.Sc., in that college. I happen to take that class also. She is a brilliant student.

Next morning Suguna was admitted in the hospital. I could be in the hospital to look after her, as the college was closed for the vacation. My mother-in-law came to my rescue in cooking. The hospital was a tolerable place.

Suguna began to grumble, as there was no fan in the room. As soon as we got into the room, all the neighbours formally introduced themselves. There was a jaundice case too in room number fourteen on the right side. We did not know who was the inmate of room number sixteen. Every now and then I heard a woman coughing in the room. It appeared that the coughing-person was suffering very severely. Perhaps, the cough was bursting and piercing the body. In addition to Suguna’s ill health, I began to feel sad for some other thing.

The medical shop was located only on the hospital premises. I brought the medicines as per the doctor's prescription. She should not have anything other than fruit juice for a few days the doctor has said. Suguna took Decadran tablet and then had fruit juice. Since it was a new place, I did not know what to do throughout the day. Last night I didn't sleep well. Around midnight, I woke up suddenly, and I didn't know why. Perhaps, it was the noise of the cough from the next room; it was reaching me piercing the walls. It was like waves, periodical but violent; a few words with fatigue came out with intermittent cough.

"Oh god! Can't bear this pain...Oh...O! god! ...Take me away".

I lost my sleep. I could not bear those words. I rose from the bed, opened the door at once and stood in front of the door of room number sixteen. The door was half-open. I entered the room by forcing the door open and was shocked to see a horrible situation. On the disorderly bed was a skeleton of a person continuously coughing; the skeleton was about thirty five years old, and from the mouth of that skeleton, blood was oozing out along with phlegm; disheveled hair, dirty saree in rags and a faded yellow thread in the neck. A peculiar repugnant smell filled the entire room. Perhaps, he was her husband standing silently in front of her and wiping the face with a wet cloth. It is clear that her condition is critical.

"Shall we call the doctor?", I asked

He turned and looked at me once, and carried on with his job.

"Shall I go and bring him?", I insisted.

He didn't answer me. She slowly turned her head and looked at me with gratitude. It seemed life was just lingering

somewhere in her sunken eyes. He gave two tablets to her. She swallowed them and her eyes shut she relaxed wearily. He was a dark and very lean person. His face looked rough yet with confidence. His nose was very straight and his looks were sharp. I stood there for a minute and then came out. After that I had a disturbed sleep during that night. Besides the mosquitoes also troubled me badly.

The doctor came for rounds around 9 a.m. The doctor said that saline had to be given to her everyday till the symptom of recovery of jaundice was visible. He repeatedly asked her not to worry, and walked towards the next room. The conversation was clearly audible from that room. She was telling him that she did not sleep last night and was coughing severely. The doctor said that he would prescribe different tablets and went on to the next room. After a short while the pharmacist Hanumantha Rao came. He was fair, short and active. While he was arranging the stand for the saline bottle, Suguna asked him why there were no fans in the rooms. Hanumantha Rao answered with a smile, “the doctor is afraid that more electricity will be consumed if the fans are fixed. If you want, you can get your table fan. But you have to pay extra bill for electricity and I cannot guarantee for that.”

“Well said! If the bulbs are also removed from the rooms, some more money can be saved”, said Suguna. Hanumantha Rao smiled again. He inserted insulin and arranged for saline drips to Suguna and went on to the other rooms. I could not come to a conclusion immediately about the doctor as a bad person.

Two days passed by and the hospital was no more a new place for me. The hospital was very big; a well planned construction. The rooms in the two wings for the patients were on both sides of the consulting room of the doctor. All the rooms in the upstairs

were air-conditioned; generally, only patients with prolonged suffering were admitted there, but not a single case of surgery was heard. Three acres of land in front of the hospital was laid out for plots with stone-marks. Beyond that the green fields extended for a long distance. The environment was peaceful except the noise of vehicles that pass on the Grand Trunk Road every now and then. I like a place without noise pollution. As the doctor advised Suguna not to move out of the bed, she missed the chance of enjoying the beauty of nature. In spite of the table fan the elephant-like mosquitoes pestered her. Suguna lost faith in the doctor, as he did not get fans fixed in the rooms.

On that afternoon, after lunch, I sat in the chair in the verandah in front of my room, and started reading a book that I had brought with me. I had to write a review of that book and had to send it to the journal within two days. The book was George Wilson's **What is Violence?**, which rationally analyzes the nature of violence and its process in the social system. Before I could go deep into the book, the husband of the woman-patient in room number sixteen came to me. He greeted me with a smile of familiarity. He looked at the book and me alternatively and then asked, "What are you reading?"

I said it was some English book.

"What is the book about?", he asked again.

What shall I say? I had to tell him the nature of violence. I can tell him that if a husband beats a wife without a reason, it is violence. Else if a wife commits suicide by drowning herself in a well as a mark of protest against the atrocities of her husband, it is self-violence. I could say that it is medical violence if a doctor refuses to examine a poor man who could not afford his fees of Rs.50/-. I could also tell that if a *Marvadi* squeezes the blood of a

lean-rickshaw fellow in the form of interest at the rate of ten per cent per month; it is *Marvadi*- interest-violence. It is violence if a farmer who sheds his blood had to live and die in debts. I can say some other thing as violence. But I wondered whether he could grasp my explanation. Still I explained to him my views and George Wilson's in a few words. He remained silent for a minute and said, "Will you listen to me if I say something?"

"Certainly", I said. There was silence in the hospital. Perhaps, his wife was sleeping inside. He began his story.

His name was Venkateswarlu. He hailed from a small village near Macherla. His grand parents had four acres of land. It was reduced to two acres in his father's childhood. It became common that there was no yield from the field because of drought. Even if there was a little yield, it was adjusted against debts, and again for the purpose of cultivation and expenditure on the family, borrowing became inevitable. Whenever the money lender came home, his father hid himself. He could only beget children, but had no economic capability to give education to them. He used to take the little ones to the field along with him. When his father died the family was left with only one acre of land. Without any choice he accepted the responsibility of the family with a sick mother and four younger sisters. He was seventeen years old by then. All the members of the family including his mother had to go for daily labour in order to earn the daily meal. Everyday, "tomorrow" became a permanent unanswered question.

At this juncture, one day some one raped Venkateswarlu's second sister when she went out for daily wage labour. She committed suicide by drowning herself in the well in order to escape the disgrace. His mother died within a week due to that unbearable sorrow. Trouble after trouble blew over, and he didn't even have

time to sit and weep it out. The responsibilities of getting the three sisters married off were still on him. With great difficulty, he could get the two sisters married off, but by then he lost that one-acre of land also. The only income was the daily wage. He borrowed three thousand rupees from a well-to-do man of the village by signing a promissory note for his last sister's marriage. Somehow he could do his duty for his sisters, though the amount of debt was increasing day by day. Again he began the struggle for existence without rest. Somehow he had to repay the debt. He had to retain his family house. He and his wife worked day and night even in the worst conditions of weather.

Venkateswarlu worked even in severe hot summer. He did all types of labour. He worked as a mason for a few days. After two years he could save a little money by sacrificing even his meal sometimes. But, he could never even dream that the money-lender was cheating him very cunningly. When he approached him to repay the debt, surprisingly the false promissory note showed the principal amount as rupees ten thousand. He pleaded in various ways, but of vain. The family was shattered. His wife fell ill. He did not know what to do. He got so wild and in that rage he took the axe and tried to kill him. But he escaped narrowly.

Venkateswarlu was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for attempt to murder. It is horrible even to imagine the kind of pathetic life his wife had to lead during those two years. By the time he came out of the prison, her health was completely spoiled. The house was auctioned for clearing the debt. He was badly disgraced in his own village. He came to the town along with his wife. For a short period he pulled a rickshaw. For some more days, he worked in a jute mill. Then, he was working as a *hamali* in the vegetable market. He had to search for work every day. He could

not provide a better medical treatment for his wife. At last, he had to admit her in the hospital when her sickness became chronic. There was no hope of cure. There was no money too.

Venkateswarlu narrated the entire story very casually. Except the smile, there was no other feeling reflected on his face, while he was narrating the story. But there was severe pain and spite behind every word he uttered. Just then his wife's coughing-sound was heard from inside. He got up and went in. I could not concentrate on the book. His story reveals the nature of violence. Though man is struggling every minute from birth to death, he has to face the question of existence and the encounter with it. This is the nature of violence in the society. George Wilson has not mentioned this point anywhere.

In the evening the doctor's daughter visited us. She is about twenty years old. Though not a stunning beauty, she still had some attraction in the face owing to good nourishment. After enquiring about Suguna's health, she invited me to their house for dinner. I hesitated. Suguna was bubbling with happiness and pride as the doctor's daughter herself came down to invite us. "Why do you hesitate when she is inviting you with so much affection?", she admonished me mildly.

The doctor's mansion was on the premises of the hospital itself. There was a lawn in front of the mansion and it was full of variegated plants, and they were nodding their heads because of the breeze. The creeper stretching its tendrils to the top was spreading its fragrance everywhere. The doctor himself received me. He took me around the house. There were six parts. Every room had mosaic flooring. The hall was full of expensive furniture like sofa sets, fridge, T.V. etc. On the whole, the mansion was beautiful. It looked modern and aristocratic. Even if I spent the

salary of the entire period of my service, I would not be able to construct half of that mansion. I never even expected such an arrangement of rich dishes on a large dinning table. I didn't even know some of their names. They were so attractive. It gave satisfaction even by looking at them without eating. I did not know with which item I should begin. Some of the items I just tasted with the finger just like a painter dips his brush in the colours. It looked as though the dinner was arranged keeping the social status in mind. After the dinner, the doctor and I had an informal chat. In the middle of the conversation, he showed a photograph and asked, "how does the boy look like?" The man in the photograph was handsome and dignified.

"He has both wealth and beauty. An engineer. But, she is totally disinterested. She is insisting on going abroad. She is the only daughter for us and if we get her married to a doctor and send her to America, how badly we will miss her? I don't know how to tackle this problem. You advise me. You try to convince her", said the doctor.

"What do we have here? Dirty India. I have to go abroad at any cost. Don't you think so, sir?", said the doctor's daughter.

I simply smiled, as I did not know what to say. After sometime I came away. Venkateswarlu was sitting silently in front of the room number sixteen.

"Have you had your meal?", I asked.

He smiled as an answer to my question. The same bright smile on the dark face. Daily he cooked for his wife. By the time I stepped in, Suguna was sitting on the bed, looking curious to know about the family matters of the doctor. I spoke to her and was about to sleep, when Suguna said, "Venkateswarlu fed his wife but he is starving himself".

“Why is it so?” I asked with a surprise.

“Why not? somehow, he has to save the money to pay the hospital bill”, Suguna said.

“How do you know?”

“Such matters are known to us in no time”.

I began to feel a vomiting sensation. I visualized the *laddu* and the other sweet dishes I had tasted and the dishes, which I had not tasted in the doctor’s house. How tenderly the doctor’s daughter just tasted and left them?

A sumptuous feast.....starving with hunger,
the problem of a costly son-in-law.....the problem of
hungry-empty-stomach...

the existence itself is a problem. The unbridgeable...disparities.

The doctor was treating Suguna very carefully. He conversed with her very jovially. The pleasant face in our room changed into an irritated one when he entered the next room. He did not listen carefully to the complaints of pain made by Venkateswarlu’s wife. He was careless about attending her. Her condition was worsening day by day; chest pain, breathlessness and continuous cough. Whenever she coughed, blood came out very casually. The doctor said that she would live only for a few more days. In spite of that, every minute, her fight against death was visible in her eyes. There was no other horrible thing for a man to lose the battle of life in the hands of death and spend the days with the pain of hell and fear of death, every moment of his life.

The pharmacist came in the morning and arranged the saline for Suguna and went away somewhere. He did not appear even when the bottle was emptied. He began to search for him in the entire hospital with confusion and finally I was able to trace him. He was giving an injection to the patient in room number thirty-five. Immediately he came running and removed the needle and bottle. Suguna scolded the pharmacist.

“How will the patients survive if you are so careless? I will inform the doctor about this,” she said.

Hanumantha Rao felt slighted.

“What can I do madam? I have to cover the entire wing single-handed. I have to look after every thing including giving injections to the patients. I have to work from morning till 10 p. m without rest. The doctor does not appoint another fellow for fear of extra payment. I am fortunate if he pays three hundred rupees even for working so hard”, he said with a complaining tone.

“How do you manage your family with three hundred rupees?”, I asked.

“Early in the morning I go round the surrounding labour colonies on the bicycle. Sir, there are people who cannot come to hospital and pay the fee; I treat them with my little knowledge of medicine and earn a little. Then patients give me ten or twenty rupees in the form of tip at the time of their departure from the hospital. Life moves on like this”. He hesitated for a minute. Again Hanumantha Rao began to speak.

“I know the doctor even before this hospital building was constructed. There is no account for the amount he collects from each patient. You know, the consultation fee is rupees fifty. He collects extra from the wealthy. Not even a single paisa is reduced

in the bill. Ten years before, the doctor had only a small clinic. But today he has a big hospital building complex. He has accumulated property that is sufficient for generations. The doctor wants to pay ten lakhs of rupees as dowry to his daughter. All these plots in front of this building are his. No one knows how many shares he has in tobacco companies and jute mills. Within a short span, he has become very rich and I remain as my old self. Saying so he sighed.

Immediately it didn't strike me whether I should hate the doctor who gave a sumptuous hospitality or should feel sad for Hanumantha Rao's life. Suguna felt sorry for the pharmacist after he had gone. It is natural that every person has some problem or the other. Yet, we do not understand a person's life unless we grasp the roots of the social problems. From that view Suguna could not understand the doctor or the compounder or Venkateswarlu.

In the evening I went to the market for vegetables. While I was coming back, Venkateswarlu crossed me. He was carrying a vegetable bag on his back and was going into the market. He was wearing a *banian* full of rents and a dirty *pancha*. His beard grew longer. The body was drenched in sweat and covered with dust. As usual, he smiled as soon as he saw me.

"What is this? Why did you come here, leaving her alone there?", I asked.

"For her sake" answered he briefly

"Are you starving?"

"In unavoidable circumstances"

Somehow I felt guilty. I remembered the banquet in the doctor's house and so I came away as I could not utter anything.

After seeing me in the market, Venkateswarlu was bringing vegetables every now and then. His help might be meagre but his

motive behind the action attracted me. I did not know how much he was worried about his wife's sickness. Yet he appeared confident. Every morning he brushed her teeth, helped her bathe and gave her medicine. He cooked food and cleaned her mouth with attention, but with disinterest, when blood came along with phlegm. The whole day Venkateswarlu's wife waited for him restlessly all the time coughing and rolling on the bed. Her glassy eyes and bony body scared me. Now and then Suguna went and talked to her.

"You will be discharged within two or three days. It is only the infection of jaundice. So, it has healed fast," said the doctor.

L.F.T report shows 1.5. We felt relieved. For Suguna, it was too difficult to stay away for fifteen days. She spent all these days as though sitting on thorns. Venkateswarlu felt happy to know that Suguna would be discharged. In the next moment, a ray of sadness spread on his face. That was the thought of his wife.

That night, I had a peaceful sleep. But around three o'clock I got up suddenly as though some one woke me up. I heard from the next room that Venkateswarlu's wife was severely coughing and could not breathe easily. I did not know why, but I suspected something. At once I got up from the bed and went into the next room. She was gasping as she could not easily breathe and was rolling on the bed. The cough did not stop. Blood was coming out of the mouth drop by drop. Venkateswarlu was shivering while holding his wife. As soon as he saw me, he left her and turned towards me.

"Please take care of her. I will go and bring the doctor", so saying he ran out without waiting for my answer. I held her very carefully and made her lie down. I took a piece of cloth and wiped the blood on her lips.

“I can live no more...a sinner I am...he has all the suffering because of me”, she said in between the coughs.

Those were the last words I heard from her mouth. After sometime, Venkateswarlu came back sadly. I looked at him questioningly.

“He won’t come. He said, Why should I waste my sleep for an everyday routine affair? “The doctor gave three tablets and slammed the door on my face”, Venkateswarlu said very hopelessly.

I was very much disgusted with the doctor at that time. I know he would come running in the middle of the night if the bridegroom comes from abroad. Pain did not subside with those tablets. Slowly she dozed off... the shade of death. She died in another half-an-hour. She was holding her husband’s hand. Not a drop of tear dropped out from Venkateswarlu’s eyes. Yet the face that glowed with fire of grief revealed that he was shedding tears violently in his heart.

Words fail me to narrate what happened afterwards. The doctor told him very politely to pay the bill and then take the dead body. Venkateswarlu did not have enough money either to pay the bill or to take his wife’s dead body to his village for the funeral.

He took a little help from me. He went out here and there throughout the day and came back with some more money. The whole amount was marginally sufficient to pay the doctor’s bill. Then without heeding our advice, he covered his wife’s dead body with a cloth. It was appearing fearful with the open mouth and carrying it on his shoulders he went away. With the red looks in the eyes and with the same smile on the face, he took leave of me. I can never forget the smile and the looks. Next morning I came to know that there was a dead body in the fields far away from the hospital and it was torn to pieces and eaten by dogs.

After that I do not know whether Venkateswarlu committed suicide or was still carrying the burden of life till his back was broken, or was breaking the awkwardly tightened layers of the society with a crowbar.

The feeling of disgust about the hospital, and the patients, that smell of death in the hospital and sickness of the patients was completely wiped out of my mind. I developed a sort of hatred towards some other social disease that squeezes man. While we were leaving the hospital, a foul smell reached our nostrils through the air from far away. It may be the rotten smell from the dead body of Venkateswarlu's wife, or the foul smell of this rotten social system.



GLOSSARY

Banian	A man's upper garment wore under the shirt
Hamali	A person who carries loads
Marvadi	Money Lender
Pancha	A man's lower garment

THE WIND TREE

"Is that basket ready to be taken to the wind-tree?" A sixty-year old Muneaiah asked his son who was coming from the backyard while wiping his face with a towel after a face wash.

"Ah, it is ready".

"Did you invite Seenappa?"

"Yeh. I told him, but they haven't come so far!"

The thirty-year-old Muniratnam, Muneaiah's son, entered the house after answering him

The entire family is filled with joy as they are celebrating a ceremony, the first-head-shaving for the children after the birth. It is *Munidevara* festival. All the relatives who were invited to the *Munidevara* have already arrived. The white washing of the walls was finished two days ago.

The threshold and the raised platforms on either side of the front of the house are decorated with red-mud lines. Only that morning the floor of the entire house was smeared with dung, and the diluted watery-dung was thickly sprinkled in the front yard; beautiful patterns are drawn with limestone powder and the lintel is decorated with the mango leaf-garlands. On that auspicious day the house appears to be very pretty like a housewife who is nicely decorated to attend a domestic celebration. In front of the house and towards the backyard, a shed with coconut branches is beautifully erected for shade. The relatives are sitting on the mats under the shed, involved in casual talk. The ladies are busy with household work. There are two papaya trees-- Rama and

Lakshmana in the backyard beyond two water tubs and one is blossoming and the other is full of fruits. A young, black he-goat is tied to the tree full of fruits. A little away from that tree there is a Jasmine trellis; under its shade Muniraju, son of Muniratnam, studying in the fourth standard, and Munilakshmi's five-year old girl child are playing with pebbles.

Munilakshmi is sitting in front of the house looking at them affectionately. "How nice it will be if these two can get married immediately; so much wealth; this Muniraju is the only heir to all this property; why should others enjoy this property? It should be enjoyed by my child only", she thought.

Five years ago Munilakshmi, the only young woman of the house, got married, and after a child was born, she returned to her parents' house like a letter posted without the "to address".

"What sister! Is every thing in the house ready?" asked Muniratnam while coming out of the house.

"Everything is ready, brother...you and sister-in-law have to get ready", said Munilakshmi.

"Look, Munisundaraiah, why is it that all the names in your family begin with Muni", asked a relative who is sitting under the trellis.

"Don't you know? We have Munidevara. Those who have Munidevara, should always give the name of Muniswara to their children. After celebrating Munidevara, the child's head will be shaven for the first time after the child is born", explained Munisundaraiah.

"Oh! It is because of that you are all named as Muniratnam, Munisubramanyam, Muniraju, Munilakshmi, Munivenkatappa," said the relative while nodding the head.

“Okay please wait, I will come again”, said Munisundaraiah who got up and went to the backyard.

“What *Pedanayana*! Why did you come here, instead of sitting there?” asked Muniratnam, who is standing in the backyard.

“What to do? It is not even 10 O’ clock, but I begin to sweat under the trellis”, he said and began to observe the papaya tree. While looking at the tree which is without fruits, he asked “Ah! Ratna, will this tree bear fruit or not?”

“I don’t know why it has not yet borne fruits, *Pedanayana*. Look at those flowers. They are like lengthy creepers,” Muniratnam said.

“So, that is a male tree”

“Male tree, what to do then?”

“What else can you do? Take a sickle and go to the fruitless male-tree; while cursing it with the words-- will you bear fruits or shall I cut you down, bear fruits or I shall cut you down. After saying so for three times, put three notches; for fear, the tree may bear fruits. That is the belief”.

“If that is the case I will give you a sickle and you do that work *Pedanayana*. After that if it won’t bear fruits I will cut it down. If it won’t bear fruit it is a waste to be in the house”. Muniratnam went into the house, brought a sickle and gave it.

Munisundaraiah took it and went near the tree. Standing at the tree he lifted up the sickle. “*Rudapathika* tree, don’t you give fruits? You impotent, if you don’t bear fruits this time... I will cut you down. Will you bear fruit? Shall I cut you down? Will you bear fruit? Shall I cut you down?” Like that he posed as though he

was cutting down the tree and then he made three notches on the trunk. Drops of papaya milk began to flow from the tree as if the tree was shedding tears.

Looking at the whole incident Munilakshmi is mentally disturbed.

What is this world? An impotent man gets ready to marry for the second time. If a woman does not give birth to a child she is abused as a barren woman, and in many other ways. She is considered a waste object. Like this tree, if a man is impotent will he be warned that he will be cut off at once. Why should this discrimination exist between a man and a male tree? Why such difference is shown while judging a man and a woman?, she began thinking in various ways.

* * *

It is a fact that Munilakshmi was brought up lovingly and pampered enough like any other girl in her parents' home. Immediately, after completing Intermediate, though, she was not mentally mature, a marriage alliance came in search of her; the only son. On the top of that... an Accountant in Municipal office. Moreover, the bridegroom is handsome. In that village, no man could become an employee so far. Muneaiiah took it as an act of pride to have a son-in-law who is an employee; not only is there no employee in the village but not even a single young lad could pass the school final. Being the richest man in the village he paid rupees thirty thousand as dowry and sent his daughter to her in-law's house with all the marriage presents and gifts.

Munilakshmi led a normal life for two years in her in-law's house, but she could not give birth to a child. She performed rituals and rites. She took vows in the name of many gods, all in vain. So her mother-in-law began her wreak by saying, "the babes

are not crawling in the front yard because of this barren-woman." Her father-in-law began his curses, "As I have made my son marry this barren woman, my family is going to be heirless; My lineage is going to be ceased with him." Added to this, they began to search for a new alliance for their son on the pretext of less dowry paid by her parents and her childlessness. Being a very obedient son Venkatamuni too joined his parents. Munilakshmi told everything to her parents and wept. Muneaiiah having realized his daughter's problem somehow convinced the son-in-law and took him to a popular doctor in the town for a check-up. The doctor tested both of them and advised various tests. The doctors finally declared that there is no fault with Munilakshmi as her fertility rate is good; but the problem is with her husband, Venkatmuni, whose semen contains a low sperm count, and moreover they are dead cells. They also prescribed some medicine and tonics for the improvement of healthy sperm cells. Venkatamuni was shocked at this. He has taken enough care to keep this as a secret from others.

However, Munilakshmi's prayers are heard and dreams turn true. She has become pregnant. A girl child is born. Though the blame of barren woman is erased from Munilakshmi's life, some other problem has cropped up, adding fuel to the fire. Venkatamuni's parents dinned into the ears of their son that she had slept with some man and begot a girl child instead of a male child. "Who will preserve the lineage?" is the question they posed. The husband joined her in-laws in harassing her. He has become a slave to selfishness. Their superstition destroyed her life. All of them together put her in fire. The suffering was unbearable for Munilakshmi and hence she said to herself, "What if I don't have this husband? It is better not to have such a husband. When shall I be saved from this evil, and when can I escape from this hell?"

She is awaiting a remedy with such thoughts. After subjecting her to inhuman ill-treatment of foul abuse and ruthless beating, her in-laws and her husband packed her off to her parents' house.

After that Venkatamuni's parents tried for a marriage alliance. They tried to get more dowry this time. But all their trials failed. The parents of marriageable girls' felt that Venkatamuni's parents brutally sent away Munilakshmi who is a good and cultured woman. That too after a child is born. Any girl would face the same fate, if she were married to him, they thought. No parents are willing to sacrifice thier girl.

Days passed on. Muneaiah did not feel sorry for his daughter who had come back to the parents' house. He registered some property in her name for her maintenance after his death. Meanwhile, Munilakshmi learnt type-writing by convincing her parents. Muneaiah with great difficulty could secure her a typist post in the Panchayat office. Then he felt greatly relieved.

Munilakshmi has begun to earn her livelihood. She is commuting every day from her village to the Panchayat office, which is a kilometer away. Her daughter is also admitted there in a convent for education.

When Venkatamuni came to know of this, his greed began to increase. He was lured by her salary, and the property registered in her name. He started sending messages that he had committed a blunder and that this time he would look after her well. He tried every way to get her back, thereby getting all the property that belonged to her. But, Munilakshmi did not respond to his proposals. But, her parents pressurized her to utilize the opportunity to reconstruct her broken married life. Her brother and sister-in-law, the kith and kin, the near and the dear, all tried to convince her.

But, Munilakshmi did not budge. She resisted all persuasion very strongly. All the same, Venkatamuni did not desist from his trials.



Munilakshmi has come back to the present world from her reminiscences when Muniratnam called her and said, “Okay get up. We have to carry these baskets and go to the wind-tree.”

As she recollected her unfortunate past, tears filled her eyes. She entered the house while wiping her tearful eyes. There, in the centre of the house, the lamp kept in a niche in a wall is giving light steadily. Below that light there is a basket smeared with cow dung. Half of that basket is filled with rice, a packet of spices for curries, two coconuts, flowers, cosmetics, turmeric, petals of screw pine, incense sticks, and a hunting sickle.

Muniratnam breaks the coconut and lit the camphor and then silently prays: “Oh! Goddess... *Munissudaa*, you have to protect our children always. The children may be multiplied into thousands. They should inherit everything and be happy. Then he lifted the offering of camphor to all of them in the house to pay respect.

Munisundaraiah came into the street and shouted loudly, “Hey, people of *Munidevara* are coming. Go away. Otherwise, if something goes wrong don’t put blame on us.”

While Seenappa is beating the drum hanging in his neck, his son, Kondaiah, is playing shehanai. The people in street are moving away on hearing this music. Muniratnam started first while carrying the basket on his head. Muneaiah is walking behind him with a he-goat. Behind him all the members of the family are going along with the children. All the relatives are walking behind them. All these people are walking behind those with musical instruments.

They reached their mango grove in the north of the village within a few minutes. As it is the spring season the mango trees are full of budding leaves and flowers; there are some tamarind trees too. The weather is pleasant. With the music of cuckoo every now and then and the pleasant air blowing from the mango trees, it is extremely pleasant and beautiful.

In the north-eastern side of the grove there is an agriculture-well, surrounded by trees and bushes. A little away from the well and in the centre of the grove, a tall banyan tree is clearly visible. A mango tree is twined with the trunk of that tree. It looks like a small bush, as it cannot grow in the shadow of the banyan tree. Under that tree there is a small anthill; a black stone that looks like a *Sivalingam* leans against that anthill. That is Munidevara. That tree is the wind tree.



Muniratnam put down the basket under a big mango tree which is at a short distance from the wind-tree. All those who have come there also sat under that tree only. Muneaiah has tied the he-goat there to a thorny bush. Munisundaraiah and Munirathnam commenced their works. They cleared the bushes around the tree and in front of the anthill with a hoe. Then they sprinkled water and levelled the ground. Meanwhile Jayamma smeared the front side of the anthill with dung. Munilakshmi draw patterns with lime stone powder.

Both the men washed the stone with water and smeared it with turmeric and sandal powder. Muniswarudu is the *Veerabhadra avatar* of Mahasiva, an angry God. Hence they waited till the sandal powder is completely dried and then they drew the lines with ashes

and in the middle put the third eye with dots of sandal powder. They decorated the stone with flowers and petals of screw pine. They cut and brought some leaves of bale tree which is in a corner of the grove and kept them on the stone.

On the other side, the women arranged three stones and began preparations for cooking. Two women were grinding the spices on a stone, in the middle of the grove. Some children tied the ropes to the branches of a mango tree and started swinging. That day all of them were very joyous and excited as though they had come for a picnic.

The goat was innocently munching the tender leaves on that thorny bush not being aware that it is at the sacrificial pyre.

"Hey brother, Seenanna...you start," shouted Muniratnam. Seenappa in the same sitting position began the drum beating by keeping the drum in front of him and at the same time playing shehanai while keeping it in his mouth. Kondaiah, sitting on a stone, sharpening the knife while keeping a bowl of water, called them to come there. All men one by one went and sat in front of kondaiah for shaving. At the end Muniraju and the young child got their heads a complete shave. Kondaiah closed the box and took the shehanai from his father and began to play it.

Muneaiah took some locks of hair, which is shaven from the children's head and tied a few coins to them and slipped into the anthill. Both the children were bathed with the water drawn from the well and made to sit in front of the God after dressing them in new clothes. Then a coconut was broken and an offering was made with camphor. All of them came on to receive the offering of camphor.

Munilakshmi also received the offering of camphor and thought, “If my family life is all right my husband is supposed to do this Munidevara”. As soon as she thought like that there appeared her husband, Venkatamuni.

Though Muneiah and Muniratnam felt a little hurt for his arrival after sending his wife to her parents’ house four years ago, they greeted him indifferently.

Munilakshmi kept silent with annoyance for all the ill treatment she suffered and deserting her all these years. He called the daughter and tried to kiss her. But the young child came away avoiding him. Munilakshmi was puzzled at his odd behavior.

“Once he accused her of infidelity by suspecting the child’s birth, but now he is shamelessly pampering and kissing the same child. What sort of men are these!”, she thought.

Venkatamuni was hurt when his daughter refused to come to him. After that the goat was taken around the wind tree for three times and kept her in front of the anthill. Kondaiah raised the big sickle and killed it with one stroke. Blood gushed forth from the goat and Muneiah dipped his finger in that blood and put mark on the forehead of the children. Then the sacrificed goat was hung to a branch of a tree, upside down. The skin was peeled and the body was cut into pieces and cooked, and all of them ate it. After finishing their food all of them sat under the mango tree.

While the atmosphere looked so pleasant, Venkatamuni was experiencing pain in his heart, as he did not know how to raise the issue of his arrival. Just then, as though the problem was sensed, one of the relatives said, “what Venkatamuni, did you remember your wife and child after so many days”?

“*Chinnayana!* What happened has happened. So many

problems crop up in family life. Even then it is not my mistake. Still, I have come to take my wife and daughter back”, said Venkatmuni. How could he speak like that, as though I was on the wrong side entirely, Munilakshmi felt very bad feeling about her husband’s way of putting things.

“Oh, it is not like that. She has got a job now. Moreover, there is some property in her name and money in the child’s name. He has come for that”.

“Yes, of course it is right. Otherwise, how is that he remembers his wife and child only now?”, two people sitting in the back row murmured.

“All these days while she was there with him he harassed her very badly and finally sent her away. Now he has come to show his smartness and take her away”.

“Look at his face; a stupid fellow. Son of a debtor”, abused an elderly man, murmuringly.

Though Venkatamuni could hear these words every now and then, he behaved as if he had not heard anything.

“Hey boy! so...what do you say now?”, Munisundaraiah asked.

“I don’t say anything. I only say that I will take my wife and child”, Venkatamuni said.

“Now if you take her back after so many days, what is the guarantee that you will look after her well”, interrupted Muneaiiah.

“No *Mama*, it was a mistake then. It will not be repeated. I will look after your daughter very well”, Venkatamuni said confidently.

"I don't know! If you want to set right your family...we don't have anything to say. But one thing?"

"What"?

"You should remember that a child will never be a burden for the parents".

"You need not stress it so much...you don't worry. This time I will take care of her. *Mama*, you send her with me".

"Who are we to send her? We gave birth to her and gave her to you. It is your property, take her if she comes".

"It is not like that *Mama*, you tell her," Venkatamuni requested. Venkatalakshmi was puzzled at his fox tricks. Every one was listening to the conversation.

"What my child! You have heard it all! Would you like to go?", Muneiah looked at her and asked. Munilakshmi remained silent.

"My dear, don't be stubborn. He stooped down and he is requesting you. Try to set right your life." Munilakshmi's mother, Ademma said.

"You think well and decide", Sundaraiah said. "What is there to say, *Pedanayana*? I cannot bear the violence in the hands of my in-laws after going there. Here, he says like that. After that I cannot bear the beating of this bastard husband. I cannot hear his abuses", Munilakshmi said with determination.

"It is not like that dear...your family...", he tried to say something more.

"No *Pedanayana*, don't persuade me. I know full well why he has come. Isn't it that we know the truth about our god. He has

not come with affection for the child and me; then about my family? Throughout my life I cannot serve this husband who has broken my heart, and his parents, to show that we are living together. There are no differences between us. 'I do not want this false family life. There will be no happiness in such domestic life as in the case of a ghee guard without ghee. I cannot deceive myself and just pretend for the sake of the approval of the world', Munilakshmi said curtly. After that, no one could say anything to her.

"If this is your final decision, give my child to me, I will bring her up", said Venkatamuni. On hearing that she reacted very angrily like a cobra.

"Your child! How is it that she becomes your child, if you come after so many years and claim that this is your child?", very boldly, she questioned him.

"Is she not my child as she is born to me?", he asked angrily. Everyone is listening silently.

"There is some thing sensible in what he says dear", Munisundaraiah tried to convince her.

"How do you say that, *Pedanayana*," Munilakshmi questioned.

"Not only the mother... the father also has a right and authority on a child, dear...", Munisundaraiah continued.

"Yeh...Yeh...educate her like that", Venkatamuni said vehemently.

Venkatalakshmi is now badly provoked. All the gloom stored in her heart all these days had flooded out.

"It is all right, *Pedanayana*. You say like that because all of you are men. Will you speak like that if you were in my position.

You said that he is the cause for the birth of the child; hence he has a right and power over the child. Look here! *Pedanayana* you look at this wind tree. What is the meaning of a wind tree? How could this banyan tree become a wind tree?

Birds eat various fruits and defecate anywhere. After eating and digesting the pulp of the fruit they defecate the seeds. Those seeds get dried up in sun, and when it rains they are soaked in water and then sprout. These sprouts later grow into big trees. We call such plants that are grown like that wind trees. As the tree is born through its seed, how will the bird have a right on that tree? Only the earth has a right on that tree because the earth protected it in its uterus and helped to grow into a big tree. Otherwise, the owner of that earth will have a right and power on that but not the bird that is the cause for the birth of it. This banyan tree is also like that. Some crows must have defecated the seeds of a tree that might have been floated to our garden through the wind and one seed could have sprouted and grown into an *Vuudaga* tree. As the seed was floated through the wind it became a wind tree. Does the tree belong to that bird... or to my father? It is the same even in my child's case. Just as this wind tree was grown up in our garden, my child has grown in my lap. Now she is a grown-up. Though my husband was responsible for her birth, I gave flesh and blood to her and protected her for nine months in my womb. Even then, has he ever visited her? No! Has he ever taken care of her? No. Hence I alone have a right on the child. He has no power over her. That's all!", said Munilakshmi very emotionally and excitedly.

All the people gathered there were flabbergasted by her angry flow of words. All of them shocked at her anger and Venkatamuni was not an exception.

All of them were stunned and stupefied at the kind of courage and determination displayed by such a naive and docile girl as Munilakshmi. They took no time to realize the truth that certain lessons are taught by life itself. Venkatamuni realized that there was no point in waiting there. He got up and started walking, hanging his head in shame. * * * Every one was looking at the direction in which Venkatamuni was going.

But, Munilakshmi remained looking at the *Vuudaga* tree, which was born of wind, grown up in the wind and called wind tree. She felt as though the tree on that day had grown taller and looked steeper, and greater.



GLOSSARY

<i>Chinnayana</i>	younger brother of one's father.
<i>Mama</i>	father of one's wife or brother of one's mother.
<i>Pedanayana</i>	elder brother of one's father
<i>Rudapathika</i>	born only to repay the debt but without any use]

AN OLD FOX

It was nearing 10 O'clock in the night. A thick darkness had enveloped the entire dense jungle. Only the tents in the camp were visible in white. While the petromax light was shedding bright light in the office-tent, the hurricane lamps in other tents were flickering. Dasaradharamaiah was still doing the office work. It became customary for him to work daily till one O'clock in the night.

Except the sound made by moths, it was completely silent everywhere. The hill-goat was bleating from a far of distance continuously. Dasaradharamaiah got a bout of cough. He coughed till the phlegm in the throat was cleared, and he came out of the tent to spit it out, pressing his chest with his hand. After relaxing for a short while, he thought of going home for today, but a lot of work was to be completed. Trying to guess the time, he looked at Chinnaiah's tent.

If the jeep driver, Chinnaiah, was in the headquarters, he switched of his light even in the middle of the work and went to bed exactly at 12 O' clock. He says that it is his ex-military discipline. Now the lamp was still burning in the tent. That means it was not yet 12 O' clock. When Dasaradharamaiah turned back to go into the tent to work for one more hour, suddenly he heard the sound of stamping boots along with a loud cry, "good night sir". He recognized it as Chinnaiah's voice and said, "oh! come! come! Have you not gone to sleep yet?" Chinnaiah was standing in attention in front of his tent.

"Military salute even in the night?" Even after leaving the military, he was still wearing that uniform and heavy boots, and has not yet forgotten those salutes..."come...come, had your dinner?", asked Dasaradharamaiah.

"Have just now finished sir! I came out to smoke a cigar. Are you still working? As it is, you do not enjoy good health, as an asthma patient. If you work so late during the winter, you may fall ill. Go home and sleep, perhaps, madam is waiting anxiously."

"How can I go now? Will the officials keep quiet for not doing work because of my ill health? Moreover, I am a retired person. They are kind enough to reappoint me. If I don't work properly they will sack me."

"Sir! I think you have crossed sixty years. How long can you work so hard like this?"

"Till I die... It's inevitable Chinnaiah. If I wish to live, I have to work till my death. Otherwise, how can my wife and I get our livelihood? Who will take care of my son who is studying in the town?" Saying so, he smiled heavily, went in and sat in front of the papers, while wiping the eyes. The contractor's bills, worth thousands and lakhs of rupees, appeared in a total blur.

"What a kind of life this gentleman is leading", said Chinnaiah to himself, thus feeling sympathetic towards Dasaradharamaiah and reached the blaze to light his cigar. The blaze was dying down because of the snowfall. With his boots, Chinnaiah raked up the dying fire by putting dry leaves and twigs into it. And then he sat down by leaning against the jackfruit tree; took a small stick from fire and lit his cigar.

A wild sheep was bleating at intervals. The atmosphere around was filled with the smell of smoke. The fragrance of a ripe jackfruit was tempting, whenever the wind blew. Chinnaiah looked at the tent on his left to see if anyone was awake; that was Dasaradharamaiah's tent. Light was flickering, "Madam might have laid down, and then it is all right." Thinking thus, he threw

out the cigar and slowly took out a bottle from his pocket. He took two gulps of cheap liquor, contained in the gripe-water bottle. Belching, he looked at the bottle with disgust; hesitatingly tasted a drop of liquor that was on the moustache. He tested the remaining liquor by slowly smelling it and then emptied the bottle by taking it in two gulps; then immediately spit on the fire.

“Tut! It is tasteless!” he said with irritation, and hurled the remaining two or three drops on the fire. The fire was put off. The rogue must have mixed it with water. These damned civilians are like this. They do not sell anything without adulterating it. If the military is permitted, they will shoot all these people... not even getting a mild kick... the cheats...”, saying thus, he threw the empty bottle in the bushes, and leaning against the jack-fruit tree, he stretched his legs towards the fire with disappointment. He lighted another cigar and the sweat on his face made it shine in the brightness of fire.

Chinnaiah’s real name was known to a very few people in the camp. They all addressed him as “military man”. He got delighted, hearing this. He took part in World War II and now he is a pensioner. Later he worked in Assam oil fields for sometime. At present he is working as a temporary jeep driver for the Assistant Engineer of camp number four. He has great reverence for the military and opines that military men are the only men. The remaining are “civilians”, he said slightly, “while military men fight for the nation, the civilians cringe for food. He expresses his belief stating that military personnel work with honesty and they are selfless and simple-minded men; whereas the civilians are *badmash admi*”.

Even at that age he gets up at 4 O' clock and does exercise even if there is cyclone. By 6 a.m. he finishes his bath and polishing of his shoes. Exactly at 6.30 a.m. he reports before the engineer after completing the dyeing for mustache, breakfast and tea. Before leaving the tent, he salutes everyday to the photographs of the emperor George, and Subash Chandra Bose.

"What Chinnaiah? Had your meal? When did you come from the camp?", enquired Dasaradharamaiah's wife, standing at the entrance of the next tent.

"Namaste madam, I came here half-an-hour ago. I kept the jeep in the shed and had my dinner just now and came here to smoke. Running from pillar to post since morning, I got this backache, and to reduce the backache a little, I was leaning against the tree".

"What side dish did you have for dinner? I kept *curd-chutney* aside for you", she chided him with affection.

"Why do you bother about me madam? Now-a-days it is becoming difficult to feed yourselves both; then why these favours"?

She stopped him in the middle and said, "No...No... anything given to you will not be a charity". She did not know how to express her gratitude more than this. Her heart was filled with affection and respect for Chinnaiah. Chinnaiah is a guardian of every family in the camp. He says that it is the spirit of the military. When he does not go out he takes up the cleaning of the camp. He also takes the children to the water tank and makes them swim and dive. When he goes to the city he prepares a big list given by every family and brings all they have asked for. That is the reason both the children and elders respect him greatly.

“Okay Chinnaiah your sir told me that your engineer gives more importance to you.... It seems that he will not go to camp without you ...”

While she is still continuing, he interrupted her by saying “yes, madam, I wish to be good with all of you as long as I live and should die suddenly like a bullet shot. I should die a military death. I don't like to die like civilians by falling ill and suffering in the bed. That is my wish, madam”.

“Oh! Don't talk like that... It is Okay. Does the engineer really shower his affection or is it false? Will he take care of your food during the camp...”

“No... No... madam! though he is a youngster, he is a great man. He is like god. Though he shouts now and then, he is good at heart. He is just innocent. I have never seen such an officer among civilians. It is not just taking care of me, he eats only after serving to everyone in the camp.” He felt that someone is moving beside her.

“Who stands beside you, madam? Who is this lass”? He then looked at the girl standing in darkness.

“She is my daughter, Chinnaiah. This morning my son-in-law came and dropped her here. He left immediately as he has no leave. She is now seven months pregnant. We plan to keep her at my brother-in-law's place at the beginning of eighth month. Before that we want her to be with us for a month. We intimated all this to my son-in-law and so he dropped her here”.

“What is this child”, shouted the disciplinarian, Chinnaiah, “Why are you awake till mid-night? You are pregnant and you have to go to bed early and also you must take sufficient rest”, he continued. “Look here child! If you wish to eat any thing, you tell me. I often go to city. I will get whatever you want from the city”.

Dasaradharamaiah is coughing in the office tent. "Madam, tell sir to stop working till late hours. I do not know when he eats and when he sleeps? Always sitting with the account books. He is not a strong person to work so hard. A weak person...."

"I am tired of telling him. He won't listen. He won't even heed my advice to get a tonic for strength. When I tell him not to be awake till one or two O'clock in the night as his health will get spoiled, he shouts at me by saying "who will do the office work?" Yes, it is true. We have no alternative. If he does not attend to this work, my husband, my son and myself, three of us have to die of starvation. Tears of blood are rolling from my eyes when I think of this critical situation," saying so, she began to weep.

"Don't weep mother! Don't. Father may hear you" consoled her daughter.

At that mid-night hour, in that dense forest when the two elderly women were shedding tears for their disastrous lives, even Chinnaiah who drove the truck on dead bodies in the war with a hard heart, is moved.

While the daughter was consoling the mother, Chinnaiah did not know what to say. With a much-disturbed heart he was about to go to sleep.

From the hills the loud roaring of the royal tiger was heard. The entire forest resounded with the cry. It remained silent everywhere. The sir's daughter held her mother very tightly.

"Oh! It seems a tiger's roar. It may come this way, let us go inside" saying thus she got up in a hurry. Fear of life is added to her agony of fear of living.

"It won't do anything madam, roaring far way. Poor thing, it's going for feed. Except those tigers who know the taste of human

flesh, the others will not even come near the human beings. Such tigers are not around, why are you shivering like that madam?" When he was about to narrate his experience in military while he was in Burma,

"Blove...blove...blove..."

Another howls... a cry of a hungry ghost. This cry is not very loud and deep like the tiger's, but very awkward. Chinnaiah who is conversing so boldly so far got disturbed when he heard this cry.

"What is this Chinnaiah? This is a new cry. Never heard," said madam. Her daughter is holding her more tightly with fear of this new cry.

"Old fox... this is called an old fox."

"What"?

"It is an old fox. It looks rotten. But it's very cunning; a very mean animal. Look...how fearful is the cry. All animals in the forest look at this as a ghost. This always follows a tiger. It is too old to hunt and eat by itself. Hence it is always shadowing a tiger. It lives on the leftover flesh and bones by a tiger. It cannot live independently. It finds out the dwelling place of animals in day time and takes the tiger secretly to them in night and the tiger kills them. It eats the remaining meat, after the tiger finishes. Such a rogue it is."

"To night a terrible thing will happen. Listen to their cries. The old fox is instigating the tiger on some animal. Poor thing! That is going to lose its life. This is ready to eat that defiled food. How it stoops down for food!"

Chinnaiah is very much disturbed. "What an evil! I heard its cry just before going to sleep!" Thinking thus he went towards

his tent. Chinnaiah looked at the clock and switched off the light and went to bed. After sometime he heard the sound of creaking-chappals of Dasaradharamaiah in his drowsiness.

It was 3 O'clock in the early hours. The campfires were becoming cold, as the fog had spread out heavily. Suddenly there was a buzzing noise everywhere; Most of the women were running towards Dasaradharamaiah's tent. Groaning was heard from the tent. "Oh God! What is this, my child? This labour at this hour! I do not know what to do now?" Madam was crying. Dasaradharamaiah was walking up and down in front of the tent, as he did not know what to do at that hour of the night. Chinnaiah got up from sleep and came out of this tent. Singh's wife called Chinnaiah 'Hey! Military *admi*. *Idhar a-vona*'. All of them encircled him as soon as he reached there. All the women who gathered there informed that Dasaradharamaiah's daughter got labour in advance, hence she has to be taken to the hospital in the town. The storekeeper Kalyan Raman's second wife began to accuse the railway administration because, if anything happens in this forest they had to die, as there was no way out. Sumathi Kuttiyamma like Chandika ferociously shouted in malayalam, at her husband. "You men, are you making any arrangements to take her to town or just stand still looking at each other"? said the malayalee Kuttiyamma.

"Don't make a noise. Sir! Get the mother and daughter ready to go to town. You go and ask the boss for the jeep. I will take you to town, now", said Chinnaiah.

"But this is a government jeep. Is it right to ask for that? That too at this hour of the night", Dasaradharamaiah said in a hesitating tone.

“We too are government people sir! You get ready first...if you hesitate, I will go and ask him for jeep.”

“Please Chinnaiah do that favour and help me,” he appealed to Chinnaiah by holding his hands. “OKay, sir!” saying so he moved towards the engineer’s tent.

By then Dasaradharamaiah’s wife called him into the tent and said “Ayyooh Rama! You could have gone to ask for the jeep. Did you send Chinnaiah for that? Do we need to send some one for our work? You better go. You say you are a great accountant, and can’t you ask for the jeep?”

“You shut up! Why do you shout like that... you do not know anything.... You should keep quiet. What do you know about the engineer? He is a Ravanasura. Visiting all the camps during the day might have tired him. How can I wake him up at this hour of the night? He will pounce upon me like a tiger, as he is an angry man. If he becomes angry he will dismiss me and then from tomorrow onwards you and I have to beg on the roads. Don’t give such foolish advice and now shut up.” Grumbling like that, he came out and began to walk in front of the tent.

The assistant engineer came out on hearing the calling bell and looked at Chinnaiah and at the noise in front of Dasaradharamaiah’s tent and asked “what Chinnaiah? What happened? Is some one sick?”

“Yes sir, the master’s daughter is suddenly in labour. She is getting pains in the seventh month itself. There will not be any alternative but to take her to hospital”, said Chinnaiah.

“Oh God! What to do now?”

“Sir, the jeep is needed. I will take them to town and get her admitted in the hospital.”

"Jeep? It... a government vehicle...if you take..." hesitatingly he said.

"How can you talk like that, sir; it is a question of life...even otherwise how many times the government vehicles are used for parties, picnics etc," Chinnaiah is still to continue in a heated tone. "Okay. The key is on the table; take it. By 8 O'clock tomorrow morning you should be here. We have to go to camp to inspect the bridge. Bring the master back with you, after her admission in the hospital; there is so much work pending", saying so he lit the cigarette

"By 7 O' clock I will be here sir", he said and went into his tent and brought the key.

"Look Chinnaiah, if the master is in need of money, tell him to ask me without hesitation", said the engineer.

"Okay, sir" he said and brought the jeep out of the shed and stopped it in front of Dasaradharamaiah's tent.

"Yes, quick...get in", he put the luggage in the jeep. Dasaradharamaiah sat next to Chinnaiah in the front seat. His wife and daughter sat in the back seats. He started the jeep immediately.

The engineer, Rama Rao, was standing in front of his tent. While smoking the cigarette he began to appreciate the social service of Chinnaiah. Chinnaiah cannot bear it if anyone suffers. He was always ready to help the sufferer. Six months ago, small pox spread in the camp and Chinnaiah served all the young and old in the camp. He worked day and night. Once, when he himself suffered from malaria for two days, Chinnaiah extended his service to him. That was the reason why he respects Chinnaiah.

“But he behaves stupidly. He speaks truth bluntly... because he is a military man,” thinking so he saw the jeep going down and he went into the tent and drew down the curtains.

The work-spot was one mile away from the camp site. A new railway line was under construction in that thick forest. Thousands of workers were working hard. A bridge had to be constructed there. The work-spot was very busy with Malayalees, Sardarjees, and Bengalis etc. The contractors from north had their camps near the work-spot.

When the Assistant Engineer’s jeep halted, all the contractors came and saluted him with respect and said “*Aaiye saab!*” The A.E got down from the front seat of the jeep while the accountant, Dasaradharamaiah from the rear. Dasaradharamaiah is holding two bulky files.

“Dasaradharamaiah *garu!* I will go for the inspection of the bridge. Keep all the papers ready along with the signature of the contractors, then I will sign them. Chinnaiah, keep the jeep under that banyan tree and go and sleep somewhere till I come. It looks as if you didn’t sleep last night”, he said. He had the coffee offered by contractors and moved towards the work-spot.

As soon as the engineer left, Dasaradharamaiah opened the files and began to work out the accounts while sitting in a contractor’s tent. Chinnaiah slept in the jeep. Dasaradharamaiah was feeling drowsy, as he didn’t sleep last night. With much difficulty he was controlling sleep and doing the work.

It was 12 O’clock, by the time, the engineer came back from inspection. It was very hot. Dasaradharamaiah was sleeping, leaning on the table.

“Dasaradharamaiah *garu*! Bring those papers, I will sign them. It is already lunchtime. Let us go soon”; saying so he woke up Dasaradharamaiah, while sitting on the chair in front of him. Dasaradharamaiah got up suddenly and placed the file in front of him.

After turning a few pages, with surprise he looked into the drowsy face of Dasaradharamaiah and said, “Where is that big bill? That one...regarding bridge work”.

“Did not do it sir!” said Dasaradharamaiah with a low, dry voice.

“What? Didn’t do it? Oh! my god!” Rama Rao was shaking with anger, “I told you yesterday itself. What are you doing?”, he shouted.

“Excuse me sir! Yesterday night my daughter had some problem, sir, I wanted to do yesterday night itself but...”

“Shut up! Who bothers about your problems? You are paid to do office work, not to shirk from work by giving excuses like your daughter’s labour etc. Worthless fellows!” thundered the engineer.

By then, Chinnaiah brought the jeep, and kept it in front of the tent for the return journey. Dasaradharamaiah was shivering with fear.

“I am dismissing you from tomorrow onwards. Get out! Don’t show your face; didn’t I tell you repeatedly that the senior officers told me to send the bill urgently with my signature? Now he will pounce upon me like a devil. What is the use of having all of you? No! Despite your old age I gave you work with sympathy, but you shirk from work. Keep off from me, dirty fellow!”, saying so, he threw the file at Dasaradharamaiah’s face, as he could not control his anger.

Dasaradharamaiah, who was already trembling with fear, now felt himself lost when he heard about the dismissal. The hurled file hit his face and he fell down. The contractor's men standing beside Dasaradharamaiah so far held him and laid him down and sprinkled water on his face. Military Chinnaiah's blood boiled when he saw this.

"Are you a human being or a demon?", shouted Chinnaiah. He was about to attack the engineer with his fist, but controlled himself.

Rama Rao was totally flabbergasted, "What, is this driver Chinnaiah speaking like this", he could not believe his eyes. He shocked, looking at Chinnaiah who was boiling with anger.

"Would you hit the old fellow? Are you a human being?" Again he thundered. All the people around reached there, hearing the shouts.

Rama Rao's ego was wounded. He could not stomach the fact that his driver was shouting at him in front of all the people.

"What is this Chinnaiah? Are you drunk? Who are you to interfere in this?"

"Who am I? I am a human being not an animal like you. The old man works throughout the night. Last night he did not sleep. Will you hit him if some work is pending? The old man is blacked out. Suppose he dies? If you don't like him, dismiss him from the job. Do you have a right to hit him?" Every one was shocked as Chinnaiah was shouting with the military spirit.

"What right should I have? You rascal! How arrogant are you!", he rashly approached Chinnaiah.

Chinnaiah pointed his finger at the engineer and said, "it is no good sir! Don't over react so quickly. I am not the master to keep quiet. If your hand touches my body I will make mince-meat of you. I am a military guy".

Dasaradharamaiah, who became conscious just then got up immediately and stood between Chinnaiah and the engineer. "You stop Chinnaiah, why do you bother? Boss, please keep quiet. I salute you," saying so he held Rama Rao's both hands and stopped him.

"What? Will you cut me into pieces? You...see what will I do to you...scoundrel!" Furiously shouting at him, he came out of the tent seated him self in the jeep and started it angrily. Dasaradharamaiah sat at the back, "All right! I will get him dismissed. Stupid fellow", he shouted and pressed the accelerator hard.

No sooner did he reach the camp, than he called the steno and dictated the message. He told them to engage a special messenger and see that the letter reached the Divisional engineer by the evening.

He slept on an empty stomach. When he woke up, it was late in the night. After eating the cold meal that was kept on the table by the cook, he lit a cigarette and began to think. Sleep reduced his anger, mostly. He began to walk up and down while recalling the incidents that happened during the day. Chinnaiah's revolt was justifiable, if one can think deeply. Yes, why should he throw the file on Dasaradharamaiah... out of uncontrollable anger. Was it not a mistake? Yes, a mistake! Who is Chinnaiah? Why should he interfere? Chinnaiah could not bear the old man's fainting. His blood boiled. I got so angry as the bill was not ready in time. So

Chinnaiah got angry with the person who was responsible for the fainting of a fellow being. He revolted and I too got angry. No! Perhaps Chinnaiah was wrong according to law, but as per justice, any person with humanity will react the same way. He came to that conclusion. He sent for Chinnaiah at that hour of night. As usual Chinnaiah was calm. No one was there except Rama Rao and Chinnaiah.

“Sit! It’s all right. Sit in the chair. Did you come on foot from the work spot? Pity...”

“ It is all right sir! I am habituated to walk. I am a military fellow and moreover, it is only a mile in distance.”

“ Yes, you are a military fellow, that is why you said you would chop me into *khaima*?”

“ I regarded you with so much respect, why did you behave like that?”

“ Sir, did you call me to accuse? Sir, you think it over once again, whether what you did is right or wrong? How is it justifiable to hit that old man with the file? That... poor fellow. If your father is in such situation....”

“Chinnaiah you know that I am a short-tempered fellow. I shout but do not bite. I am only a barking dog! What I did was wrong. I would have accepted whatever you said only after I recovered myself from my anger. Am I not a human being? All right, let bygones be bygones. You said some thing in anger and I also said something. Forget everything. Don’t keep all this in mind. I have called you to say this. It is already late, go and sleep”.

“Good night sir...” saluted Chinnaiah and came out. “Good! What a nice person. As he has realized his mistake,

unmindful of his designation, he called me, a jeep driver, and admitted his mistake. Though young, he is god-like” appreciating like that he walked towards his tent, the military man, Chinnaiah.

Without prior intimation the Divisional engineer visited the camp that morning. Everyone extended a warm welcome. Special arrangements were made for the Divisional engineer and his staff.

After the meal at about 11 O’clock both the engineers discussed things keeping the maps in front of them. The senior engineer appreciated that the work was done very fast in this camp, compared with the other camps.

“Mr. Rama Rao! Send for your accountant Dasaradharamaiah and who is that... Ah, jeep driver... yah, Chinnaiah, isn’t it?”

Dasaradharamaiah, with a cleanly shaven chin and with an old coat on was standing in front of the engineers with extra obedience. Chinnaiah saluted and stood in attention. The Divisional engineer gazed at him for two or three minutes.

“He is the military....” he was about to ask something.

“Yes sir, he is an ex-military man,” said Rama Rao.

As though he was not interested in that information, he addressed Dasaradharamaiah. “Look Mr. Accountant! The assistant engineer appreciated your work and recommended your case. I give you an extension of one more year. Prove yourself to be a worthy son of this country,” he said and got up and shook hands with Dasaradharamaiah.

“All that is your kindness sir! The engineer might have recommended me by understanding my situation” and he could not speak more because of joy and happiness and he shed tears.

“No... no, you deserve it, I say”, said Rama Rao while playing with the paperweight on the table.

“You are a nice person sir. He works hard day and night. You are providing food to the old man,” as Chinnaiah interrupted, the Divisional engineer got so angry.

“Look, you should ~~not~~ interfere while I am talking to someone, it is not decent to interfere, and you say you are a military man,” shouted at Chinnaiah and again addressing Dasaradharamaiah he said, “there are still four or five bills of the contractor pending. Complete them by the end of this month. It is already delayed. Ah! I forgot to tell you, Mr. Rama Rao! I have asked for a generator for your camp. The chief engineer accepted the proposal. You will get electricity for your camp within a month”.

“Thank you, sir”, said Mr. Rama Rao.

“ Hey, what did you say your name... yes, Chinnaiah, now, you talk. Mainly, I have come on your work. I could have come earlier. But I could not, as I had been to Calcutta. Yes, what type of work you do here?

“ Am a jeep driver, sir”,

“Didn’t you say that you would chop the AE into *khaima* when he had gone to the inspection of the bridge, a week ago?”

“Yes sir”.

Rama Rao Suddenly remembered something and became very tense “No sir, that is ...I...”

“Wait please! Let him speak. Do you admit that you said that you would chop him into *Khaima*?”

“Yes sir”.

“Is it wrong?”

“No, by all means not. The AE hit Dasaradharamaiah’s face with a file. He fainted. Is it not wrong to do like that? You ask AE, whether it is a mistake or not? I interfered and he tried to attack me I said if you hit me I would chop you into *Khaima*. Not only I, but any man whoever is in my situation will say the same”.

“You mean that the engineers are helpless creatures. The problem is between the AE and the Accountant. In what way does it concern you? Not only you involved yourself in unnecessary things, but also warned your higher official that you would chop him into *Khaima*, sheer insubordination. Wrong ... don’t you say so?”

“It may be wrong as per rules, if viewed from human angle it is not wrong sir. It is connected with a fellow being”.

“Were not you there at that time? What do you say Mr. Dasaradharamaiah? Don’t you say it is wrong?”, he questioned Dasaradharamaiah.

He took two steps forward from his standing position, as if explaining a crime, with big widened eyes. “It is certainly a mistake sir. It is between AE and me. Imagine that the AE in his uncontrollable anger threw the file on my face, as I committed a mistake. Is it wrong? Never! Why should this fellow be involved in that? Sir, don’t the parents scold, if children commit mistakes? Is that wrong? It is very natural that some problems occur between officers and subordinates in the office. The AE had no personal grudge, when he threw that file. While I was silent over the matter, why should he interfere? Why should he get angry and fight with the AE? I stood between them and stopped it sir. He has not given up his military attitude. How big an insubordination! The AE is a Dharma Raja. If it is during our times, the English officers might

have fired a bullet at him” said with a single breath.

When he heard all this, Military Chinnaiah was totally disoriented. He experienced an earthquake under his feet. He heard everything like a mentally retarded person. “So, is it wrong what I did master?”, he said, while turning his face away.

Rama Rao became restless to hear all this and stopped the conversation and said, “ Excuse me sir, in a hurry and in a fit of anger I sent that report on Chinnaiah but he is a nice man. On second thoughts I realized that it was my mistake. Later every thing was patched up. I forgot about that report. I want to withdraw the report ...”

“No, you cannot. I view this most seriously ... Chinnaiah from this evening we do not require your services. You can get the accounts settled and take the amount at this moment. Yes, you can go now. Mr. Dasaradharamaiah you too can go”, the Divisional engineer decided very quickly.

“Yes sir!”, saluted Chinnaiah and went away.

Rama Rao beseeched the Divisional engineer so much. He never pleaded for anyone so far like this in his service (except for Chinnaiah’s sake). But the Divisional engineer did not heed. “Mr. Rama Rao, you are still young. We have to suppress such argumentative staff there and then. Take it easy.” He then signed the dismissal orders of Chinnaiah typed by the steno and got into the jeep and went away.

The sun set in the western hills. Chinnaiah collected the money and packed his belongings in the kit and hung it on his back. He also put the hurricane lantern and water bottle on his back. He did not appear like a person who had lost his job. He looked like a military soldier shifting from one camp to another

during war. Not a trace of worry or depression was seen on his face. He gave the jeep key and saluted the engineer for the last time. Rama Rao looked down as he could not look into the face of Chinnaiah.

"Why do you feel sorry Babu? ... You are young but you are a god, Babu. Do you remember once you said that you are a barking dog; No, you are not a dog. You are a tiger...a royal tiger. You have a great heart and we who are depending on you, are dogs and foxes. By mistake you are born among the civilians. See you again Babu", he moved on.

When they came to know that Chinnaiah was leaving, everybody in the camp gathered there. With a smile he shook hands with everyone. When he noticed that some of them were shedding tears, he encouraged them by patting on their backs. "You civilians! Am I going to die? Why do you take it like this?"

"They have dismissed such a nice person from job. Won't these officers be punished with disease?" Kalyan Raman's second wife began to accuse the officials in Tamil, which could not be understood by Rama Rao. She gave a glass of buttermilk to Chinnaiah.

The Singh's wife brought a small packet of parched rice mixed with chilly powder and while keeping the packet in his bag she said "Hey! Military man *ham sab log ko chodker kaha jate ho!*" (Oh! Military man where are you going, leaving all of us?), and began to weep like a small child.

By then the master's wife and daughter came out and stood in the doorway. "Chinnaiah, it is getting dark. Where do you go now? Take food and sleep in our house tonight. You may go tomorrow morning," she said while going towards him.

“No madam! Why should I stay here anymore? I will go ...” he then looked at the tiny tot on the cot. “Oh young child! When you grow up, don’t join the civilians, but join the military like me”, and then he whistled in a low tone.

“Nemesis will come upon those who are the cause for your dismissal from job,” said the master’s wife while controlling her sorrow. Her daughter was weeping and began to look at the child as she could not look at Chinnaiah. Dasaradharamaiah’s whereabouts were not known; he sulked away like a fox, somewhere.

Chinnaiah left the campsite and reached the road. The *hurricane* light and the water bottle on his back were making rattling sound by hitting each other. Like white powder, the moonlight was spread on the earth. The AE Rama Rao while standing in front of his tent could see Chinnaiah who was walking on the road, very clearly in the moonlight.

Then suddenly they heard the tiger’s roar “Oh! My! ... Tiger ... Chinnaiah ...” saying loudly the master’s wife came out of the tent running.

Chinnaiah was walking steadily as though he had not heard the tiger’s roar. She was looking at him with a sense of surprise at his courage. Then an ugly cry was heard.

“Blove ... blove ... blove ... blove”, the old fox was crying.

Chinnaiah who was walking steadily till then suddenly stopped. He stood for a second with a shudder and then began to walk fast.

The master’s wife stood there, looking at Chinnaiah. Chinnaiah, who was not afraid of the tiger, was scared of the old

fox. Chinnaiah was not to be seen after crossing the down. Rama Rao lay down, but did not sleep.

Dasaradharamaiah reached home after midnight.

Throughout the night the old fox was crying “blove! blove! blove!” in the forest.



GLOSSARY

Aaiye saab

come sir

Ayyooh

An expression of pity

Babu

address of respect

Badmash admi

Bad men

Garu

address of respect

Khaima

chopping the meat



THE HUNTER

Heat ! A blazing heat !!

The hill streams and torrents in the forest were dried up. The hills were covered with heat waves. The fainted birds were falling down on earth because of the heat wave. Thirst!

Tigers, wolves, deer, spotted deer, birds, insects are migrating in herds to quench their thirst. They are running and running for water. Running day and night to quench their thirst. If a wild boar falls it may fetch two to three hundred rupees. By luck, if a sambur is gunned down, it may get four hundred rupees. Even a spotted deer can get not less than one hundred and fifty.

Suraiah's debt will be paid off. The debt amount was taken by mortgaging his small piece of dry land which has turned to be a waste land because of the drought for the last three years. The principal and interest put together was now exceeding three hundred rupees. If it was not repaid at least this year, Suraiah will take over the land for the debt amount. By swallowing the lands of many people like this, the businessman, Suraiah, who came from the low land has become a lakhier. As Bairigadu knew this fully well he has decided to protect and keep his land.

Bairigadu brought out the country gun and began to dust it. He took out the old gun-powder bag and put some gun-powder on the floor and lit it with matches. It caught fire at once like a poorman's hope. He thought that though the gun-powder was old, it had not lost the power. He picked up old nails and small iron pieces from the bag and packed them in the barrel instead of bullets, bits of paper and pieces of cloth were stuffed on the nails tightly. He then tightened his loin cloth, pulled the tatty of the hut, clutched the gun and set out towards the forest for hunting, with the bag on his shoulder.

The sixty year old Bairigadu's wrinkled face is like the cracked

land. The body which was withered by age and problems was like a skeleton covered with skin. The looks in his red eyes were very sharp like the sparks of fire. In those looks, the perseverance and patience were not yet weakened.

Heat was so severe though it was past midday.

Far away in that hamlet people were worshipping the forest-goddesses and beating the drums in a ritual for rain.

The trees shed leaves and remained as stumps. The entire forest was filled with withered leaves.

When Bairigadu was walking it appears as though a scarecrow is walking with a gun in the forest. The parrots in the bamboo thicket fly away by making noise because of the sound made by the dry leaves that crack under Bairigadu's feet. Looking at the strange figure of Bairigadu the crows in groups came off the trees with so much noise and begin encircling Bairigadu's head. They followed him for a long distance with stretched out necks.

Bairigadu was striding quickly so as to reach the waterhole before sunset. He takes shortcuts, crossed shrubs and bushes, stone - hills while panting and breathing hard; reached the waterhole by evening after climbing down two hills.

In the middle of that deep jungle, near a dry stream, in the shade of those thickly grown bushes, the land was wet. There was a small water hole at the centre of the wet land. The pit was formed by slow oozing of water. The mosquitoes on the water hole rose as soon as Bairigadu approached that place. Except here, there was not even a single drop of water any where in the forest. All the

animals from the surrounding areas had to come here to quench their thirst. Bairigadu observed the surroundings of the water hole.

The footprints of animals were clearly seen on the sand of the stream and on the wet land. The wild hogs were digging up the wet land for water and forming the mounds.

The setting sun behind the hills appeared beautiful through the gaps among trees. Though the heat wave was becoming cool, the heat flings from the hill stones that were roasted in the hot sun throughout the day.

He took out and sharpened the knife from the bag and cleared some place to sit in the middle of the bamboo bush, twenty yards away from the water hole. He cut some branches of trees, brought and piled them up around him so that he is not visible from out side. He made holes to shoot through them with the gun. From far away the hide appears like a shrub among shrubs. He congratulated himself on arranging it so skilfully. Then slowly he crawled into the hide and sat there. He raised the cock of the gun and put it by his side. He was peeping through the holes on four sides for the animals that would come to the hole to quench their thirst. He listened to every sound very carefully with the cocked ears. He is a seasoned hunter.

Kyau ... Kyau the peacocks were crying in the forest. The piebald birds were getting down from trees one by one slowly going down to the water, drinking and flying away.

The peacock pair came running, making rustling sound on dry leaves, stopped at the water hole and looked around in fright. Sucking the water quickly, lifting their necks and gulping, they quenched their thirst. With his thirst quenched, the he-peacock spread its tail in joy, looked at the she-peacock with a down cast

glance and began to dance. The peacock's tail flashed colorfully in the twilight sun rays. After dancing for a while the peacock pair flew into the forest as though they were floating. While evening was drawing, wild fowls and various types of birds came to the water hole, drank water and went away.

Slowly the evening twilight began to spread. The chirping of birds was reduced. They were reaching their nests.

Now it was time for animals to come for water.

Bairigadu's back was aching severely for sitting for a long time in the hide. Gradually darkness spread all over the forest. The shrill noise of crickets increased when darkness thickened. Far away in the valley of the hill a wild sheep began to bleat. Bairigadu could see the starlight reflecting perfectly in the hole. In such darkness also the sand in the dry stream was clearly visible as though it was neatly arranged.

Hours were rolling by. Very cool breeze was blowing like waves on the dry leaves and whenever the cool breeze touched Bairigadu's perspiring body, he felt greatly relieved.

Suddenly the sambur shook the forest by crying *phonk* . . . *phonk* with fear and ran away from a nearby place. Bairigadu could clearly hear the sound of its hooves while it was going away. Suddenly the noises of crickets stopped. Silence everywhere ... Unbearable silence spread over the forest. Bairigadu was startled in the hide. He experienced goose-flesh all over. Involuntarily his hand reached for the gun. Totally confused, he could not understand the reason for this tingling sensation of the body.

Bairigadu felt that a black figure was moving in the bushes beside the stream. His eyes pierced through darkness. He slowly

lifted the gun on to his shoulder and began to aim at that figure. Walking heavily that figure reached the water hole. Crouching down on four feet, keeping the mouth in water hole, it began to lap water.

A whiff filthy smell came along with the air... Bairigadu's heart missed a beat... A royal tiger is drinking water...

A country-made gun, that too only with one round. If he misses the mark? Even if it falls down with one shot, it is not easy to sell it, escaping the notice of forest officers. Suraiah's debt will not be cleared. Instead, six months imprisonment is inevitable. Slowly, he lowered the gun and began to look at the tiger, sitting steadily like a bush among the bushes.

The royal tiger drank water and stood in a leisurely manner; then hit the earth with its tail, two to three times with satisfaction and walked fearlessly into forest in darkness. On seeing the tiger a lion-tailed monkey sitting somewhere on the edge of the highest branch warned its herd by shouting *hup... hup*. After that, troupes of monkeys began to chatter all through the forest. Slowly the cries were lessened as the tiger was going away in the distance. Again the forest is filled with silence.

"Tiger's smell fills the air. No animal will come for water" thinking thus, Bairigadu sat down with despair in the bush. He sighed as his whole effort is going to be wasted. Suraiah appears more fearful and cruel than the tiger in his mind's eye. The only one source of livelihood - small piece of dry land- he will snatch it.

From the midnight onwards the blowing of wind is increased. There was lightening every now and then in the far off hills, and the rumbling of thunder. Bairigadu lifted the head and watched the sky. Dark clouds were encircling from four sides.

“Perhaps, it will rain “ thinking so and cursing his bad luck, he sat there, beholding the head. Slowly the sky is covered with clouds and it is thundering. The wet air is blowing fast. The bamboo bushes are shaking and making rustling sound. The dry leaves that spread in the forest are flying in circles. The dust particles in the air look like a curtain of dew in the black darkness.

“When there is so much disturbance, which animal will come down? My fate is like this!”, reflecting thus he sat while looking into the void. In addition to this despair the rain fall in the far away forest is clearly heard by Bairigadu. Slowly the drizzling came nearer pattering. Two or three drops fell on Bairigadu’s body also.

Zara...Zara sound is made on the dry leaves in the forest opposite him. The sound is increased while coming nearer. Bairigadu heard carefully by cocking the ears with suspicion. The sound of foot steps on dry leaves; sound of hooves... sound of herds running. Herds are coming, running. run...run...thirst.

A big lightning.

In the light of that lightning a herd of spotted deer are running precipitately toward the waterhole.

Again darkness.

In the darkness the spotted deer are running in a disorderly manner. They are pushing and drinking water noisily. *Taka...Taka* the rattling sound of the antlers touching each other.

Like a flash Bairigadu lifted the gun and took aim. The herd would go away if he delayed. He pulled the trigger of the gun, aiming at the centre of the herd.

Dhoom! the sound of the country gun resounded in and around the hills. Spotted deer flew on all sides with confusion.

Smoke of the gun...crude smell of gun powder.

Bairigadu came out of the bush in a hurry, screened his hand from the smoke and began to search madly on four sides. A kind of rattling sound is heard in the bushes at a distance of two yards from the water hole. Bairigadu ran towards it.

The spotted deer is struggling in death throes. The bullets penetrated the stomach and the intestines came out. As soon as he saw that he at once fell on it, holding its legs with a suspicion that it may run away. The spotted deer which was suffering terribly kicked him. "Damned animal", abusing so, he fell on his back. Bairigadu's shoulder is scratched. Recovering in a second he leaped on it and trampled *kasa...kasa* on its neck with his legs till it stopped the last breath. A very sharp antlers-spotted-he-deer. He kept the hand on his shoulder which is bleeding with scratches and looked at the spotted deer with a hope and breathed hard. It sells for a minimum of two hundred. One half of Suraiah's debt will be cleared. He plucked some four or five leaves, chewed *Kasa...Kasa* and spat the spittle with the sap of leaves on the shoulder-wound. He began to blow cool breeze with his mouth on the burning pain and sat there struggling till it was cool.

That is a he-spotted deer. A heavy weight. Bairigadu was lost in thought as to how to take it home. It is not possible to climb down two hills while carrying that heavy weight. There is a shortcut. But it is impeded by bushes and mounds of earth. At certain points one has to penetrate through bushes and narrow paths. Though it is very difficult with all these impediments, it is better than the long way.

Unable to lift the dead spotted deer, he held its four legs and gathered all his strength by controlling his breath and threw it

on his neck. He tottered under the weight. He took the gun that is left at the spot and held it with one hand as a support and began to walk. He was walking through the shortcut. The wind was blowing from the opposite direction. It was drizzling. He was walking in that dense forest in darkness, crossing thorny bushes, big stones, mounds of earth, unmindful of that severe suffering and with the only happy thought that Suraiyah's debt would be cleared. The spittle and blood oozing from the mouth of the dead spotted deer is sticky and slides on Bairigadu's body. The bamboo thorns and thorny bushes are scratching Bairigadu's body. When he bends to penetrate through the narrow paths it seems that his back breaks because of the weight. He groans with pain. He wants to put the animal down and take rest for a while. He felt that he would not lift it again if he put it down. He was walking like that with so much suffering.

At a long distance low cries like whistles were heard. Slowly the whistles were coming closer from four sides. They were shouting systematically one by one, as if they planned like that. It did not take much time for Bairigadu, who was born in the forest and became an expert in hunting, to realize that they were the barking of hounds though it appeared like birds-cry in the beginning. When the hounds get scent of an animal, they attack it from four directions by shouting like whistles. They tear and eat lumps of flesh when the animal was still alive.

Bairigadu's heart began to beat pit-a-pat. By and by the shouts and sound of foot steps drew nearer and nearer. The hounds came running as they scented the blood in the air, oozing from the wounds of the dead spotted deer. It is known that hounds will not harm a human being. What if they hinder him for the deer he was carrying? As he was alone they might attack him. The thick forest

around, the deep darkness and his loneliness -- all these were increasing his heart beat. By gathering some courage he wanted to hide the spotted deer in a bush. Whereever it was hidden, they scented its blood, pulled it out and ate it by tearing it into pieces. He looked in all directions. Nearby there was a big banyan tree. Walking confusedly and in a hurry, he came to the tree. Its branch was within reach. Carefully he pushed the spotted deer on to the branch without getting it slipped away from his shoulder. Quickly he tightened his loin cloth and climbed the tree. As soon as he climbed, the hounds encircled the tree from four sides. They began to dance by jigs around the trunk of the tree. Some dogs began to scratch the trunk *Bara...Bara* in the process of climbing the tree.

Bairigadu from the tree began shouting *Hooth...Hooth!* to scare them away. The hounds were not frightened by his threats. On the contrary, they sat around the tree, firmly entrenched, meaning, "Isn't it that at any time the spotted deer may fall down?". The blood drops falling every now and then from the spotted deer's wounds were licked by hounds while competing with each other.

Bairigadu was fed up with shouting from the tree. He thought that they would not go away. He thought of shooting at them by pouring gun powder in the gun. But he cursed himself for having left the bag of gun powder in the house in that hurry. "*Ber...Ber*", barked a bay-spotted deer as though shouting through an iron pipe. On hearing that shout the herd of hounds got up with a jolt. They pricked their ears. The hair on their back stood erected. They gathered silently while shaking their tails meaningfully. Looking in the direction from which the shout was heard, they got excited and ran towards the new prey like dogs unleashed from their chains.

"I am saved" uttered Bairigadu sitting on the tree, with a sigh of relief. By the time he arranged everything and got down, the

drops of rain suddenly turned to a hailstorm. The damp air was blowing forcefully. By and by heavy rain started, the lightning flashed as though it was dividing the sky. The branches of trees were falling down because of the wind. It was pouring heavily as if the earth and sky merged and a great calamity was going to happen. Bairigadu was drenched. The spotted-deer fell from the branch because of the rain. The rain stopped after two hours.

Bairigadu got down from the tree. With great difficulty he lifted the spotted deer and put it on his shoulder. The gun was not giving proper support to walk, as its butt was sinking in the mud. The wet spotted deer was slipping from his body as he was walking. Summoning up energy with persistence and by resolving to repay the debt of Suraiah, he was walking in the mud, thorns and pit falls.

It was, perhaps, past 2 O'clock in the night. The sky looked very clear as if it was washed by the rain. A thin layer of moon light appeared. The rain drops on the leaves were shining like pearls. The forest was filled with the croaks of frogs and the chirping of moths and crickets. Bairigadu covered a long distance. He would reach his hut if he walked a mile after crossing the small dry canal.

The croaking of frogs was increasing while the dry canal was nearing. When he reached the dry canal, Bairigadu almost felt giddy. The dry canal which was filled with small mounds till a few hours ago was now flowing in full as the rain water came from hills. The water was flowing in whirls.

Then there was no alternative for Bairigadu except crossing the stream. If he were to take a round way to escape the stream, he had to walk four times the distance which he had already walked. Not only walking but climbing down the hill...Though the canal was filled with water, Bairigadu knew that the canal was not very

deep. The water level would be upto the chest. Width would not be more than ten yards. That too for a good swimmer like Bairigadu this canal was not to be considered at all. Bairigadu decided to cross the stream with that confidence. He lifted down the spotted deer on the bank of the stream. He rubbed the painful neck and legs with his hands. It was not that easy to hold the gun in one hand and carry the spotted deer on the shoulder and walk in water, while balancing the weight as the water was flowing very fast. So he held the gun with two hands, turned it round and round and then threw it to the other side of the bank. It fell in the mud on the other side. He congratulated himself in his heart on the strength of his shoulders and his aiming though he was old.

He got down from the bank and slowly stepped into the water. Frogs were jumping into water from the bank. The mud was very slippery. Slowly he entrenched the feet firmly and pulled the spotted deer from the bank on to his shoulder. By resting the weight on the neck he held the hanging four legs with his two hands. The feet were sinking in the mud because of the weight. Taking step by step, he was walking very carefully. The water with foam appeared like a curled white snake in the moon light flow of water. By one foot depth of water, it was pulling him down. The dry branches and logs were carried away very fast. Every now and then the broken pieces of branches were falling into water. Now water was touching his waist. He crossed half of the way. The speed of water flow was now pulling him with more force. He was pacing slowly by balancing the weight on the back. Suddenly he stepped into a ditch. That's all!

He fell and reeled in the water by turning over. The spotted-deer fell a little away with a shake. He was carried off by currents of water. He was rolling, while being carried away. He was diving,

not being able to stand firmly on the ground against the force of water flow. While he was carried away like that falling and diving, he saw the spotted-deer which was carried away a little in front of him. Even at that critical hour of life and death he at once remembered Suraiyah's debt. Diving like that he balanced a little and while swimming he suddenly jumped and fell on the spotted-deer and held it tightly.

As the width of the canal was less, the flow increased its speed there. He was carried off with the currents of water though he tried to swim against the flow with great difficulty by holding the spotted-deer. Logs, sticks and water snakes were going fast by him, almost rubbing against him. Like that he was carried away for two furlongs holding the spotted deer. And then as the canal again was wider in that spot, he caught the branch of a tree which was hanging on the water, trying to balance himself in the flow. He did not let loose the spotted-deer. With great difficulty and with the support of the branch he stepped on the bank. He also pulled the spotted-deer on to the bank. Fortunately that was on the other side of the bank. There he had rest for one hour, and as he had no strength to carry the spotted-deer he dragged it by holding its legs on the bank till he reached the spot where he sank. He took the gun which was lying in bushes. As it was early in the morning, the birds were chirping one by one. The wild fowls were also crying. Though his wet body was shivering in the cold wind, he decided to reach his hut before the sunshine. So he carried the spotted deer on the shoulder. Panting and sighing he could reach it only after the sunrise. The animals were crying in the hamlet.

He put down the spotted-deer, kept the gun against the tatty and sat on the raised platform with tiredness. The whole body was like a big sore. The body was full of scratches of thorns --

blood was oozing. There was a bump on the neck for carrying heavy weight on it. The shoulder which was scratched by the hoof of the spotted-deer was swollen, a throb of severe pain. Added to this, he began to feel hungry. Closing his eyes with pain, he leaned against the wall. "It is all right, all this suffering and pain. Suraiah's debt will be cleared off. The piece of land can be saved". While he was thinking like this, it seemed some body was moving at the door. Slowly he opened his eyes. With a shock he stood and shivered like a frog that saw a snake.

"Is this the only one, or some more were caught? hidden them some where in the forest, you son of a thief!" asked the forest guard very mildly, with poisonous looks.

Bairigadu stood with folded hands. Words were choked.

"Do you have license for this gun?" another question.

Bairigadu was about to fall at his feet.

"Why don't you speak. You scoundrel?" thundered the forest guard.

"Sir...sir...a poor fellow ... I will never do it?" He fell at the forest guard's feet and held them by lying his face down.

The guard lifted him by holding his hair.

"Does it belong to your mother's husband... hunting the animals? In the night itself I heard it; your gun-shot. Taking rounds from the night onwards to know who could have shot it - you are caught, you bastard ! "

"I will never do it again. I promise. Today only I went. If I go again you hit me with your chappal". Bairigadu's throat was choked.

"Carry this to the town. I will book a case. Six months for hunting the animal in the forest, and another six months for

possessing this gun without license. You will be cleaned of the itching! A right punishment for you is to throw you behind the bars...yes... go...go...what, why are you looking like that? I will kick you on your breast.”

All the villagers going for wood in the forest gathered in front of Bairigadu’s hut on hearing the forest guard’s shouts. Bairigadu was pleading by holding his feet.

From among the gathered people there was Suraiah. It was not known when he came. Like a fox he came forward by pushing all of them aside and asked, “what happened, guard sir?”.

“Look at this bastard! Not leaving a single animal, hunting as though it is his father’s forest. No license to go to forest. No license for the gun. The elder sons of the government”, he said while showing the spotted - deer and the gun.

“That is why you don’t get your livelihood. God does not favour you. You are aged. Why do you have this ideas of stealing? Why did you steal? Your wife and children are dead. You are alone, lonely and about to die. What do you want to gain by stealing and what will you do with it? Why do you still have the yearning for money?”, Suraiah scolded Bairigadu.

“Yea...yea...go...go...don’t you hear, you go?” saying thus, the forest guard was about to go towards Bairigadu.

“Look, guard sir, don’t think that a businessman is interfering. If you don’t show compassion what will happen to him. He is a poor fellow. Who will protect him, if you don’t?”

“Guard sir, have patience. Oh son of a bitch, Bairiga, take that spotted deer. Go to my house. There we will talk. What are you looking at here, all of you, instead of going and attending to work? Is this a bioscope or *kolatam*? Suraiah shouted thus and

sent the gathered people away. Bairigadu was walking in front, carrying the spotted-deer. Walking behind, throughout the path, Suraiah had secret consultations with the forest guard. They reached Suraiah's home in the hamlet.

Suraiah led the guard and Bairigadu into the house and while standing at the door he shouted. "Oh Bairigaa! Is it justice or injustice to hunt animals in government's forest with an unlicensed gun? Look at the god's face and tell. What do you say? Is it not unjust? Is it not just to be punished for that? What do you say? Guard sir though young, he is a just man. He lets you off to honour my word. What do you say? You give a gift of one hundred rupees for this sir. Don't talk any more. What do you say?" but the guard said, "What is this Setty... don't...don't...I book the case".

"Sir...sir... don't say like that. If you insist like that, poor fellow, he will die. Oh Bairiga! what do you look like that for? Give him quickly".

"Where is the money with me?...otherwise, I give up the spotted-deer".

"Ah! what did you say, damned fellow! give up the spotted-deer? What do you give up? Anyhow that is his'. Did you bring it up to give it up now? The government's property belongs to the government people only. What do you say? Look. If it is delayed that sir may change his mind. If the case is booked, six months for this, and six months for that. You will never come back to hamlet. You will die in the prison. What do you say?".

Bairigadu felt that they were digging a grave to bury him while he was still alive.

"There is nothing that you don't know, where is the money with me?

"Okay! while looking at Bairigadu, thoughtfully in

annoyance and angrily he said "this also comes on my head", and then he rashly went in and brought a paper.

"I have to clear all these dogs fights in this village. Okay! put the thumb impression on this. Okay. You go. We will meet later. Yea. What do you say? If you still stay here his mind may be changed". Saying thus Suraiah sent him away by force. Bairigadu went away with his head bowed down, losing all hope on that small piece of land.

Suraiah folded his hands in front of Goddess Lakshmi; hid the paper carefully in the box and hung the key at the waistband.

"Look Setty, send that spotted deer with the servant. Tomorrow is our Ranger's daughter's marriage. I will send it there. That Ranger's thirst can never be quenched, no matter how much you give. He wants more and more; he squeezes", said he to Suraiah and shook hands with him and went away, fondling the hundred rupees in the pocket.

Sitting in his hut Bairigadu wept bitterly for a long time. He did not know when it happened, but he fell asleep. In that short nap...

Heat! a blazing heat!! The birds fainted and fell down owing to the sunstroke. Tigers, wolves, deer, spotted-deer, birds, herds and flocks of them running with thirst. Thirst... unquenchable thirst.

Amongst them he, the businessman Suraiah, and the forest guard were also running... Thirst.

Bairigadu was suddenly startled from sleep. It was dark. His body was shaking. The scratched body was swollen and was hurting. Fever was squeezing him. Shivering like that he came out of the hut. Darkness. Darkness around. The entire forest was filled

with darkness like his life. He breathed fire from his mouth and eyes. Blood was boiling with fever, spite and revenge.

He took the gun. Not for animal hunting.

In the complete darkness he was walking through the forest like a blazing sun.

Tigers were roaring, wolves were following. Like an emancipating -- iron arrow to kill them into pieces, he was walking with the sole aim in the dark forest.

He went into the hills, crossing the shrubs, bushes and streams. Bairigadu who went into the forest holding the gun like that never came back.



GLOSSARY

Bairigadu :	Bhirav + gadu; Bhirav = name of a person, gadu = a suffix addressing marker in third person for male; this is used as a suffix for the names of lower caste and low income men in Andhra Pradesh.
Kolatam	dance by men using sticks like a morris-dance in a ring in which sticks are struck together in harmony.
Setty	common form of address for a business man in Andhra Pradesh.



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