

LOGISTICS IN HANDLING DIALOGUE IN LITERARY TRANSLATION**V.V.B.Rama Rao, India**

Literary translation evolved independent of formal training as an academic discipline. All renowned translators went to literary texts in all languages to import or export literary works in a different language. They did so without any formal training and without the basis of any theory of translation. The translators took the texts they adored and translated them. They forged ahead rendering unto their readers what they thought worthwhile in a wording they thought best, to the best of their ability. A new genre “Literature in Translation” has come into being.

Literary translation from regional languages in India into English has been a necessity for the last sixty years. Owing to the country becoming independent there is a need for various native languages to be read in other states. To understand the varied cultures through the writing in other language regions, translations into English must be produced.

Literature has several functions and creative writing takes many forms called genres. Each genre has slightly different norms for criticism. Literary Translation has come to assume great importance in the context of translation being recognized as a genre. The need for expanding horizons of understanding between various language communities demands literary translation into and from many languages. Literary translation from regional languages in India into English has been a necessity for the last sixty years. Our country having become independent, there arose a dire need for various regional language literatures to be rendered into English to be read by readers in states speaking other languages. To understand the varied cultures through the writing in other language regions, translations into English are the only way.

Fiction has acquired a highly favored genre now. National integration has been the crying need after political independence. In creative writing of which fiction is an integral part there is special importance for dialogue with vocabulary and expressive devices in speaking. The characters in fiction, short or long, are not of the same cultural/social strata. They may be coming from several sub-language, dialect or idiolect groups. Many considerations like social/cultural strata, age, manners (or even mannerisms), accomplishments, living places, areas, situations and moods and emotions of characters are all important. Of the four ‘systems’ dialogue, narrative, description and commentary, dialogue is the very first. While the three others also raise problems for the practitioner, dialogue poses varied and deeper problems. Each practicing translator has to find his own ways to tackle the problems to devise ways to convey expressive devices etc of the speakers in fiction. Idiolects are of different varieties. There are three ways to deal with them: to be idiolect neutral, idiolect free or idiolect specific. It is an attempt to be artistic trying to avoid insipidity.

Though a generally thankless job, literary translation is a practitioner’s pride. No anesthetist is ever thanked as a surgeon does but his job is important too. Given below is Telugu story in translation by the writer himself to illustrate the problems. The dialogues are italicized and after each the points regarding the problems are discussed.

Khaidi

(The title of the story is retained as it is since the term is familiar to all in our country.)

On the first day he was in the jail, it was all totally unfamiliar and he was at a loss to know his way around. Not that he could move about freely: he was let out only to do his bit of work. On that day he was asked to do work in the farm, to water the plants one after another. There were several already doing their work there.

“Arre, Bhai, how many years did they give you?” The one with a dreadful scar across his cheek asked Kannayya with what purported to be a lot of affection for the newcomer.

“You braggart! Don’t try to draw him out. It’s simply his fate that he should be here. He is innocent and accursed.”

“Kannayya! Look how that fellow is coming strutting, swinging his arms like one on the parade ground.”

Kannayya looked that way and saw the sentry approaching.

“Quite a nasty bloke. A real sister-fucker. Shall I give him a good blow?” So saying he took up a stone, the size of a good lemon and hurled it at the approaching young fellow.

(In Telugu the word ‘naaganna’ is used as a term of endearment or affection for the young fellow, the new convict Kannayya) The appellation ‘Kondi gadu’ is retained and in Telugu ‘kondi’ is the word to describe a scorpion’s tail end.) This can be solved only by giving a footnote. The word of abuse need not be taken literally for it is used by the uneducated, vulgar people like those serving a sentence in prison.

The man was hurt on his pate and gave out a loud cry, which brought several khaki clad men on the scene. The one hurt said “Kondi” and pointed his finger to him. The one with a gun in his hand hit Kondi with the butt on the hip. Kondi lifted the hoe only to be disarmed immediately. The butt must have hit him hard but two khakis dragged him out to produce the *khaidi* before the officer.

An old sentry spat out: *“Things have come to this now – when we were young, no one dared disobeying and none ever tried to be violent. We were beating them at the least suspicion of arrogance or disobedience. If I kicked a fellow with my boot he wouldn’t get up for a week.”*

A week later Kondi appeared with chains on him. An elderly prisoner was saying: “Poor fellow! Didn’t I tell you that you have to swallow your anger! See what you have come to. And this is not the first time either.”

“Once these chains are off: you’d see what I’d do to that bastard!” he spat looking in the direction of the warder’s hut.

“Shameless man!” Kannayya said to himself.

(Bastard is a term of abuse not taken literally)

Vanajakshi set out to attend her friend’s wedding. It was almost nightfall when the car reached the place. Jamuna came out running hearing the car’s hooting. She took her friend into her room. The wedding was fixed for the next day.

The household was very busy.

Holding the coffee cup in her hand Vanajakshi asked: *“Whoever is this young man, this Sekhar? The wedding card struck me as very simple.”*

“He is practicing in the High Court. M.L. from Osmania.”

“Then you’d join him in his practice. That’s fine. I can send you clients for appeals. As for the fee we’d share it fifty-fifty.”

“He doesn’t like my taking files either. He is quite old fashioned.” The sadness in her friend’s tone made Vanaja change the subject tactfully.

“Where’s the vididi, the resort for the groom’s people?”

“In this very street: the multi storied building of the Naidus. The wedding too is in that building.. Naidu is the richest man in this area. You should see his son: quite a character.” (The dialogue is between friends, two educated young women, one the bride and the other the invitee. This part is very easy to translate)

The friends sat in the bride’s room till late in the night chatting.

-The moment Vanaja entered the wedding pandal, Vanajakshi spotted the young man staring at her. He was dressed well: but none of *that* attractiveness in his face or demeanor. She remembered Jamuna’s hint. He must be the one: yes, Jamuna gave her his name also: Gangaraju. He studied up to Intermediate but then got tired of taking examinations every March and September. He turned a hero breaking the bones of everyone who tried to come in his way or attempted to correct him. She remembered that girls around in the village dreaded him. It was only her relationship that saved Jamuna for she is a ‘sister’ to the lout.

Before the wedding dais people were coming in small groups and settling in the chairs. Perhaps, it was a hired hand; the young man carrying a bucket of water slipped and fell. A man clad in silk slapped him as soon as the poor man could get up. The silk shirt had gold rings on all his fingers. Even without Jamuna her friend telling her Vanaja knew that the ‘silk shirt’ was the lout’s father and the owner of the big building

A villager, a young woman, was seen moving around. Gangaraju was looking at the young woman hungrily and suddenly he smacked her on her buttock. The lass appeared to shrink in shame and anger but there was nothing she could do. She ran into one of the rooms quickly. No one ever seemed to realize what had happened. Perhaps they didn’t want to see. That Gangulu, short for Gangaraju, was ogling, trying to make passes even at her. This was disgusting to Vanajakshi. She tried to leave as soon as it was discreet to do so. Soon after the *muhurat*, after presenting the set of rings she brought for the couple, she was ready to leave on the plea that she had an important matter in the court the next day. Once in the car, turning on the ignition, she looked at the verandah. As she guessed Gangulu was there, looking at her. She felt as though an insect was crawling on her. She released the clutch and drove off.

The carpentry teacher told Kannayya that the new superintendent had sent for Kondi to tell him something in confidence. Everyone was struck by the change in the *khaidi* thereafter.

The superintendent would call one of the prisoners to his office everyday and spend ten minutes talking to him. One day it was Kannayya's turn, while he was in the carpentry shed.

Kannayya found the officer who bent his head reading. The moment the convict entered, he put down his reading.

"Are you Kannayya?"

"Yes, babugaru!"

(The original word is 'chitam' which is really 'chittam' a word denoting the expression of abject slavery to the lord, or the master. Babugaru can be 'Sir' also but the actual words the character used are best retained.)

"No need to hold your hands bent together on your chest. You can put your hands down."

Kannayya wondered how the officer knew that he had folded his hands on his chest. It was a sign of deep respect.

"Did you learn anything after coming here, any work, craft, or something?"

"Chittam, I learnt the work of a carpenter !!"

"Did you ever repent for doing what you had done to deserve being sent here?"

"But I haven't done anything wrong, babu garu."

"Don't you know telling a lie is wrong?"

-Kannayya couldn't restrain his tears.

“Kannayya,” the superintendent paused a while to note the reaction in the convict’s face. *“Repentance shows the emergence of good. There’s no point in arguing that you did nothing wrong even after conviction.”*

“Forgive me, master! I haven’t done anything. I told them all. But none ever believed me. I swear by my mother, I haven’t done anything wrong.”

The superintendent pressed the buzzer and went to the window. Kannayya found himself shivering. Someone came into the room.

“Get me the judgement copy on this man!” The superintendent said.

Kannayya was at a loss to know what was going to happen to him. The sentry took a look at him and went out, his face stony.

In a minute the man brought a file and the officer sat in his chair and bent on the papers. Kannayya, bewildered, stood like a statue.

“You said you were never believed. What did you tell them, I mean, the court?”

“About what, sir?”

“About the crime.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong. I went into the master’s field to do the work. When the master’s son was trying to molest Rangamma’s daughter, I tried to save the girl and took his hand and twisted it. The bone, they said, was broken. I was asked to attend the court several times. My old mother was frightened. They showed her a knife and asked her if it was my father’s. Out of fear she nodded in agreement. They asked me if I had stolen money. I said I didn’t. But this prison, I couldn’t avoid. I don’t know what you are saying. Is it right to accept that I did something which I really have not? I am prepared to do whatever you want me to do. But I cannot agree that I did it. You are the lord of dharma. I will do as you order me to do.”

(This is not at difficult)

Kannayya did not hesitate to tell what he wanted to - all in a rush.

The buzzer sounded again and he was taken out.

- *“Whatever did the lord (the original word is ‘dora’) say?” Eagerly gathered round him, the other convicts questioned him.*

“I was asked why I came there and then I answered. He didn’t believe me. You too didn’t believe me either, did you?”

“You fool! You are a real fool. If you haven’t done anything why are you here?”

“Did it take so long for you to say these two words?!” Someone expressed his own surprise.

“I thought that you had broken down there after being beaten.”

They all broke into loud laughter.

(The word lord is for ‘dora’ meaning the master, one of higher birth. The conversation between men of the same kind, all serving a sentence in jail did not raise any problems at all).

Karunkar Rao, the superintendent of the jail, read the entire file for a third time. There was no chance to find fault with the judgment. But then he heard something about the convict extra-ordinary from the carpentry instructor. The warders told him something and then he had the reports of the earlier superintendent.

It was his duty to look after the general welfare of the prisoners, to keep them disciplined, to make them realize their own folly, slowly though, and then see that their time and the State’s money spent on them were not wasted. It would be a good thing if the prisoner leaves to become a useful citizen after serving his sentence according to the law.

He sat down to his meal, thoughts eddying in his mind. Suddenly he said: *“The process of law is not my concern. But a greater commitment to a higher value urges me to transcend my duty as an officer. Tell me, my dear, is there a death more heinous than that of not being able to do what you really want to do rightfully.”*

“If I consider it not my official duty to do what I ought to do as a human being I’d do it. I can proudly assert that to secure justice to a fellow being is well within the purview of my professional duty too. But let me know what it is that’s weighing on your mind.”

“Perhaps for you, the dad and daughter, meal time is the only time for all kinds of discussions!” The superintendent’s wife said pouting.

Karuna casting a glance at his wife sighed.

Reaching for the supari his daughter produced before him, Karunakar said : “Let’s go to my office!”

-“Here’s the copy of a judgment I got. Go through it carefully,” he said hanging his coat on the back of his chair.

Vanajakshi went through the papers quickly and said: “When the murder and theft are only attempted, perhaps the judgment appears to be a little severe.”

“Whatever I may feel within, I can’t quarrel with a judgment.”

“You mean the convict is not guilty? If it were so why didn’t he prefer an appeal?”

“Because justice is expensive; because it needs money. No convict would go on asserting time and again that he is not guilty, except when he is nuts. I talked to the man and this is the first time in my twenty-five years of service that a thing like this happened. I couldn’t look into his eyes longer than I did. He was staring into my eyes with a strange glint.” ... The jail superintendent paused as though thinking and weighing the various ways of expressing what he wanted to say. After some time he said: “You say proudly that it is your moral duty to get justice done to a fellow human being. Think if there’s anything you can do for this Kannayya.”

“Let me go through the file once again,” said Vanaja and took it from her father.

Plaintiff: Resident of Yellamanchili, Gangaraju, son of Kannamnaidu ...

She suddenly remembered the lout with locks on his forehead. She thought for a while and asked “Can I see the convict for a moment?”

“You certainly can, during the specified visitor’s hours, on due application.”

The daughter was not surprised. She only said: “Can I have a piece of paper?”

After Vanaja waited for a few minutes, a couple of sentries brought Kannayya. It was ten minutes past five in the evening.

“Are you Kannayya?”

“Yes, ammagaru.”

(Ammagaru, is respected mother, a usual word of reference to a lady of the upper class)

“You haven’t committed any offence? Did you?”

“No, ammagaru. I have not done anything wrong. I swear by my mother now in heaven.”

“You tell me what had happened. We have only a short time: I can’t come to you again.”

Kannayya narrated the sequence of events right from his going to the field till he was convicted. Vanaja could understand this quickly. There was none to argue in his defense; he scarcely understood the charges and his answers were found irrelevant and for the court he sounded arrogant. *“I’ll get the case reopened. Don’t lose heart. People may think that justice is blind but the statute is made to protect the innocent...”* she stopped suddenly realizing that what she had been saying went above the poor fellow’s head.

She reworded her consolatory words and assured him that she would try her best to see justice done.

It took some time for the case to be reopened. Naidu and his son were served summons. Naidu rushed to Visakhapatnam and employed for his protection a very senior lawyer who undertook criminal cases. Vanaja prepared her case under the guidance of a very old lawyer who retired and gave up practice years ago. She produced Rangi and her daughter in the court and the court was apprised of the real sequence of events. It took quite a long time for the hearing to conclude but the witness of a woman testified to Naidu's complicity in liquor traffic and other criminal activities. Two men who were beaten by the drunken Gangulu bore witness to his criminal activities too. She proved that Kannayya did not commit any of the crimes he had been charged with. Gangulu's doctor who treated his fracture testified that Gangulu came with a fractured bone telling him that a bull hurt him in the field. The knife was testified by the old woman as her husband's, without her knowing why the question was asked. She explained to the court that the mother and son were uneducated and they were bamboozled.

Some *khaidis* too were produced in the court to testify to Kannayya's innocence. Kondi in his characteristic manner took the opportunity to explain his own assessment of the way justice was administered and only on the admonition of the court could he be stopped.

At the end of the hearing the court examined the file notes of the jail superintendent himself and ordered the release of Kannayya.

Seeing the befuddlement in the eyes of Gangulu, Vanajakshi heaved out a long sigh and walked towards her car. Outside Karunakar Rao had been waiting for his daughter.

A tattered shirt, a pair of trousers some sizes bigger and twenty-five rupees in his pocket, Kannayya set out to the carpentry instructor's house. In three days he could find work in one Adiseshayya's house. He was asked to stay in a garage converted into a room. The cook in the

house used to serve him his meals outside on the kitchen verandah. It was a big house and there were two in the house - a widower and his daughter- Vinodini. The young woman's husband had been away in the US and he would return after a two-year assignment there. Briefly, the father and daughter explained to him the chores he had to attend.

Kannayya called Vinodini, *chinnamma*, the little mother. In a few days she became his guardian angel and he took great care of her. She would stand while he went about his work. He would say: "Well, why do you stand out here in the hot sun, little mother! You go in and I'd do all the work to your satisfaction." But she liked standing watching him at work.

-Kannayya got a letter written to his people in the small town. On getting a reply he told Vinodini of his intention to go to his place for a few days. He told her of his aunt, Rangammatta and her daughter Rangi, who was a victim of Gangulu. He was given leave to visit his people and some money too for his expenses.

Rangi embraced Kannayya only after a ritual practice: turning around his face a little salt and two dried *mirch* in a bid to ward off all evil.

Rangi appeared with a hair-bun beautifully done with a string of jasmines tucked in it. Kannayya was struck speechless with her glorious appearance. She was in the best of her health with a glow he never saw before in those big eyes. He couldn't take his off from her eyes.

"If only my sister-in-law were living to-day! That scoundrel had an eye on my little one and committed this atrocity. Anyway isn't there God with an eye that's as big as a basket! My dear young fellow! You could come out of the tiger's mouth. Listen to me. My daughter has come of age and days are not all that good. You tie the knot and I can breathe my last in peace. You'd all be fine by the grace of goddess Mutyalamma."

Listening to this Rangi ran into the backyard beneath the *Badam* tree.

They had a lot to talk about for the rest of the day. Rangî served Kannayya his night meal very early. She explained saying: ‘He had a tedious journey’. Kannayya wanted to sleep in the open under the *Badam* tree. Rangî brought a country twine-cot and made a bed for him. Rangî and her daughter slept in the hut.

The moonlight fell on the cot through the *Badam* leaves. The grass sparkled in moonshine. Kannayya, a free man now, was looking at the moon forgetting all his sorrows and tribulations. It was difficult to get any sleep. However hard he tried, sleep had been eluding him. He heard the soft tinkle of bangles and sat up.

“Come Rangî, come! Sit down!”

When she was hesitant he took her hand and drew her to his side on the cot.

“What’s it that is sparkling?”

“It’s a piece of glass reflecting the moonlight!” Rangî said laughing.

“I thought it was a miracle!” replied Kannayya and both broke into tingling laughter.

They returned to the cot and sat down.

“Why do you sit silent like that?” asked Kannayya.

“What do you want me to say?”

“All that happened when I’d been away, lost!”

“Don’t say that ...”

“Rangî, do you really like marrying me? We’d take atta too with us.”

“... ..”

“Why are you silent? Don’t you love me?”

“It’s your will, mava! How can you expect a girl to reply to such a question?”

(*Atta* is the term of relationship – father’s sister or the mother-in-law. *Mava* is mother’s brother could be the term for husband too. Terms of relationship are best retained – even a footnote would be all right. A number of footnotes would slow down the reading.)

Kannayya made bold and took her into his arms. She forgot herself for a few moments and said: “*Someone’s coming!*”

(Normally a ruse by the woman to get free from the man’s embrace or something like that.)

He let her go and she ran into the hut, laughing merrily.

Kannayya left the next morning asking Rangi to have a word with the *brahmin* to fix the *muhurat*.

“You have gone to your place. Is it to look for a bride?” Vinodini asked him with a glint in her eyes.

Kannayya was about to sharpen his chisel on a grinding stone.

“You always joke, little mother! You seem to be waiting for the little father’s letter. Has it come?”

“He wouldn’t be thinking of us. He has so much to do there!”

“Little mother, a drop of oil!

“I’d get you,” she went into the house.

She handed him a bottle of hair oil.

“Why this? This is sweet smelling.”

“It’s all right. Keep it. I’d buy another.”

“As you say!”

“Call me by my name, you can call me Vinodinigar.”

Kannayya looked up, his eyes full of surprise. She looked into his eyes with a mischievous smile.

He bent down his head to his work spilling a drop of oil and grinding the chisel pressing it with his forefingers on the round stone.

Vinodini was all eyes at the strong rounded biceps of the dark young man.

Kannayya raised the tip of the chisel to his eye level and examined its sharpness with his finger.

He wiped the oil on a piece of cloth. The chisel-end sparkled.

“Kannayya, come up to my room. You can do this later. You have to mend the cot a little!”

-Kannayya was captivated by the perfume in the room.

“What’s this smell, little mother!”

“Kevda, mogali attar, see this,” she opened the cabinet took out a small vial and smudged a little perfume on his vest.

(“Little Mother’ is a respectful term for the young lady in the house. Kannayya’s words and the employer’s daughter Vinodini’s words are clear signs of things to happen.)

Kannayya looked round. On three sides there were windows and curtains to filter the sunlight when it entered. On one side there were a couple of cots with beds made.

The ‘little father’ (the son-in-law of the house, Vinodini’s husband) on the wall from the framed photograph appeared to be smiling at him.

“Look here!” Vinodini said and sat on the spring bed and showed how to bounce on it. “Do you know how irritating it is when it creaks when I turn on the bed?”

“I’d set it right in a moment!”

Kannayya was about to fold the mattress but then she said there was time for that. From the cupboard she took out a book and asked him to come near. When he went near she showed him a picture.

“Oh, little mother! These are bad...”

“Don’t be foolish! See this!”

(Obviously the pictures shown are pornographic and the young man is not titillated.)

Kannayya’s heart went pit a pat.

“Do you know how much this album cost us? Five-hundred rupees. We got it from Bombay!”

She was showing another and Kannayya’s legs tottered. She dragged him on to herself on the bed.

“Please, Kannayya, don’t say no, at least for this once!”

He couldn’t utter a word.

“You are foolish. Whoever is here?”

Kannayya could only point his finger to the photograph on the wall.

“Nobody minds these small things out there in America,” she went on but Kannayya was struggling to free himself. In the scuffle the *pallu* of her sari came off and he couldn’t help staring. As soon as her quest began, he threw her off her balance and came down the stairs.

He threw his instruments in the shed and drew the door close.

She followed him down calling out, “Please Kannayya, don’t go ...”

Even after he had gone out of the gate she went on calling him.

What should he do now? Should he tell his carpentry teacher in the town? This kind of thing ... Wouldn't it be demeaning her, the little mother! No he shouldn't. What would he get by that?

Suppose he vacated the shed and left?

'If he married Rangī and returned with her to his work?' He mulled. 'She would be with him and then she wouldn't dare ...'

He got into a train.

Karunakar Rao was in his drawing room reading the morning paper. The telephone rang. He looked a little peeved and lifted the receiver.

"Speaking! Oh, Adiseshayya! How are things? What! A diamond necklace, in your house? Did they already arrest him? I am sorry!"

(This is Karunakar Rao's habitual speech in English.)

Karunakar Rao was in a dilemma. Should he tell his daughter that Kannayya had been arrested on the charge of stealing a diamond necklace from his employer's house?

-Putting his conviction behind the bars of his own conscience, telling himself that justice was not his responsibility, he heaved out a long sigh and got up.

-0-

(This translated version is from *For Old Sake's* , published by Authors Press, New Delhi, 2010)

Logistics of Handling Literary Translation - II

V.V.B.Rama Rao, Ph.D

Literary Translation is passionate pain.

There cannot always be a one-to-one correspondence between the source and target languages. The difficulties, problems and impossibilities are many. It is not because the practitioners are not consummate in their skills. The path is not smooth always. It is stony and thorny and the path would have boulders and thorns and one has to go round, climb or change the direction to some extent to reach the goal. Cultural variations, dialect multiplicity and things like proverbs present major difficulties. The proverbial phrase compounds in Telugu do not have equivalents or suggestive similarities in English. There is a very often used sentence in Telugu while narrating a story: *Katha kanchiki – manam intiki* – which brings in Kanchi – possibly Kanjeevaram, the abode of Goddess Meenakshi in Tamilnadu. The story, it would be said, would go there, to Kanchi, (i.e., end) and we homeward. A practitioner friend of mine rendered this title as ‘The story that missed the bus’. This is surely one way to jump over the boulder and in this case the reader of English who knows Telugu would do well to accept it with a large heart without cavilling.

Experience is personal and individual

In my earlier essay on logistics I tried to show how I attempted to convey both the flow and the flavour of the source language in my rendering. (I may be permitted to say that I always preferred ‘free rendering’ to ‘literary translation’ for fear of professors of Applied Linguistics with their scientific theories). In the land of Telugu speaking people, there are culture-based varieties and variations as well all society-based dialectical differences. And then words like ‘Dalit’ have serious connotations and when talking about social classes it is desirable to talk of the toilers, underprivileged, down trodden and depressed. (In civilized dialogue caste is taboo.)

Practitioner’s pious obligations

For the practitioner it is a matter of duty to present the different dialect variants in persons of the depressed strata of society. The practised speech in the higher level of language is not obtained in the speech of the poor, underprivileged toilers in rural areas and of such even living in towns and cities. Sometimes the dialect of these is used for not always unjustifiable humour.

Some Specific examples

Practitioners sometimes need to portray the life and language of these characters. North coastal Andhra, particularly Srikakulam and Vizianagaram Districts have a different dialect which is not different from those in the Godavari districts or Telengana regions. These regional rural

idiolects are varied sometimes leading occasionally even to communication breakdown. Here is an attempt to show how this could be done to preserve the cultural, social, dialect variations and make the narrative flowing and carrying the flavour. The variants may be named special 'idiolects' with no denigration intended. These too may be found in the educated and the uneducated. Here is a story with North Coastal Andhra rural idiolect. The characters are rural, not educated but with a strong moral sense. The story was published in *Andhra Prabha Weekly* 22-1-1986.

The translated story in its entirety

'Don't blame or say anything to her!'

'I wouldn't go, that's it. ... Don't blame me ... something is happening in me ... I'm not able to see... my eyes are seeing black shades, legs are tottering... I'm not well at all. Don't blame me..' Gairamma told her mother firmly.

(Gairamma is for Gouri)

'What is happening? The little girl sat down helplessly. What can I do bagamantuda?' Appayamma moaned in distress her heart soaked with love.

(Appayamma is Gauri's mother and Asirayya, her father. Bagamantuda is the expression Oh, God!))

'Yeh! Why are you getting upset like that! Perhaps she felt homesick and wanted to see her natal home. Came here running. Where is the muhurat to go back today? She'd stay for two half-days here and go back. Why do you become powder for this?' Asirayya puffed at his cheroot and making sure it went out threw it away to the corner of the makeshift fence before their hut)

(Muhurat is auspicious time – usually fixed by an elder. 'Become powder' is to be anxious, worried or badly agitated.)

Gairamma held her head between her knees and sat looking at the cow-dung washed mud floor.

'What is happening to you, little mother, tell me ... feeling weak? Perhaps she has gone with child!'

Her anger vanished, worry disappeared too and Appayamma began again: 'Whatever happened, dear? Any good news. .. why don't you tell me? She asked with affection.

(The nuance is 'have you missed your periods?')

'No such thing. Keep shut. While I am feeling like death coming, why do you bother me?'

'Oh, keep silent You go get some hot water for me, the little girl would massage my legs with oil ... my legs are hurting me... go, my littler mother; I'd take birth from you next...' The sick man pleaded.

'Die! Right but do you really wish to be born to this little girl! She would not go to her husband and I am struggling and trying my best to must all my strength ... I went there with this girl giving the all I could and again this girl has come back. Don't you know how many times this has happened? Would your leg aches ever go ... What is important your pain or her married life?' Have I not 'Is she a kid? Appayamma grew wild and went on: 'Have I not come here as a little girl, went to my parents for a festival or two and sometimes didn't go at all. When once we got her married, why should she come here like this? Whatever you may say, what ever play acting she does, she must go. If the one who should be there is here people would start asking, asking questions and spreading canards making my stomach turn. Did we ever face words like those? Though her staying here does not hurt us, for those who see us, it would not. You must start in the morning train,' said the angered mother.

(Telugu festivals aaviti and sankranti are important for the village folk. Aviti is more important for showing respect to manes, presenting new clothes and it is a family meet.)

Putting away all the earthen bowls and cooking pots in their places and taking up a pot she went out to the water tap at the end of the street.

In Asirayya's eyes tears eddied. Seeing his daughter, he said: Gairee... she went away telling us that she wouldn't hear any more of what we say... Listen to her. She is having her concern. She has a good manas is. Isn't she worried about you alone?

(Manas cannot be translated into a single word. It is mind-heart and sometimes thinking and even intellect.)

'Stay silent saying nothing, ayya.' Gairee stood up and picked up a small bottle from the corner. 'What is this? No oil in it. ... I'd go and get a quarter rupee's'. Bending into half she emerged out of the hut and walked fast on the path.

Asirayya felt chill and had shivers. Bending and turning on the string cot, he tried to reach the earthen bowl where a little fire was kept with burning char coal in the paddy husk. The bowl is a little warm though there is no fire in it. The fire must have gone out long ago. The words of his woman near the water tap are being heard.

'We gave her half of a tola of gold, a brass water pitcher, some aluminium cooking utensils and plates. We too all these and left our girl there. Still, why is she not staying there? Those are

good people. Asked if there has been a squabble, she says there's nothing of that sort. They have a little landed property; they grow two bags of mirch and ground nut two. They have a buffalo and four goats. When there are rains and busy work on the fields this girl has come away. Why should she come running away like that in this season? His knee pains are not new. Lat time when she came I bought a saree too ... why can't she go back silently? Nanitamma put in her hand a five rupee note asking her to buy bangles.

(Tola is a measure of weight of about 11.6 grams. Mirch is Chilly, Nanitamma is Lalitamma, the revenue officer's wife who is a friend of Gauri's and generally respected by all in the village.)

'If it is so, Appayamma, Wouldn't your sambandhi say anything? Luckily your son-in-law man... otherwise she would get into trouble, be careful! Any what does he say?'

'What would he say, if this girl comes rushing here with a love for her natal home?'

'Did you light your fire for cooking?' asked woman bringing a pitcher to take water and Appayamma lifted her pitcher to her head.

It is getting dark. Appayamma brought some burning coal and lit her earthen stove.

Asirayya lit his cheroot.

'Gairee... why do you sit there like that? Wouldn't you rise and do up your hair? I'd rub oil on his legs. He would never be satisfied. Darkness is falling... get up ...I'd do it. Go and wash your face.'

Gairamma rose up slowly.

'Orayyya ... I'm getting jittery', said Appayamma. 'didn't she come away raising a rumpus there?'

'Oh, no, does she know anything like that? Wouldn't a young girl come to her natal home?'

'Not like that ... I'm frightened. If some one were to ask "Why didn't your go back'. What can I say? .. You know how respected we are in the gudem. Didn't we resolve many a problem? Didn't we resolve the crisis when Yarakayya's wife suffered injustice? Aren't they living happily now? If your girl hasn't told me what the problem is how can I ever know about it? Perhaps she told her friend Paramma.' Saying this Appayamma got up suddenly and walked out briskly not answering her husband's queries from his cot.

(Gudem is a small hamlet on the outskirts of a village where the poor live in small huts.)

Paramma and Gairee are childhood friends. But Paramma is slightly older. She got married and went to live with her husband. After about six months the man fell ill and his disease got worse and he died. Many told her parents to marry her off again But, Paramma was adamant. She refused to marry again. She has been working as a maid in the Revenue Inspector's house. His daughter began teaching her reading and writing and put ideas of rectitude and things like saying that marriage is just once for a woman. Gairee would talk at length to Paramma. She imbibed the educated girl's ideas.

Women in the street say that Paramma did not listen to anybody when they brought up the idea of marrying again. She would say firmly' Taali is only once. Morality is just the same for everyone. My life has turned like this.. But Marriage alone is not life and living. God above is there for everything.'

Appayamma was surprised that such a young woman should speak like that,

'Anyway, Paramma is a straight forward girl. If asked for anything she would do anything even would sacrifice her life for others' good.

Appayamma called her standing outside her hut.

'She went to the big street's house. Someone is coming there perhaps to take a look at their daughter. All the busy work is entrusted to Paramma. Sister-in-law, your daughter has come ... What news! What not come in, why are you standing outside?'

'My husband's legs are stiff and I want to take my daughter to her in-laws but she is not ready to go. ... Come in, daughter-in-law ... you say bride-looking would we get any sweets?'

Bride looking is a visit of the groom's people to have a look see of the young bride-to-be)

'Why did you come running? What is Gairee doing? What visit is that for 'looks'/ They demanded a dowry etc., of twenty-five thousand. The young girl's mother sat down in discomfiture. '

Appayamma thought that it was the best time to ask. She sat on the cot lowered by Paramma and thought of asking her the moment Paramma's mother left the place.

'Did she tell you anything? Any girl would jump in joy to go her hubby's place. Why is our Gairamma not eager to go ... very young husband...' She wanted to say something more but having looked at Paramma's face she kept quiet. *How older is Paramma after all.*

'Let it be atta. Let her be here for some more days. Let her be convinced.'

'What is there? Did she say or anything? Should she not tell mw the mother who had borne her?

'No, don't make it a noisy issue. After all what is there to tell you?'

'You talked about the teaching of manas. Did those people do or say anything? How would I act if she does not tell me anything? Mother, mother, I'd die and be born to you. Those people know about us. I cannot stay put if the say anything. What happened? Tell me.'

"Nothing happened,' Paramma said slowly.

'If you don't tell me it would be like killing and eating me.'

'Don't use such strong words. Our people are anxious to give our girls in marriage but is it not necessary to see what that family is and how the groom' heath is?

Appayamma felt like a thorn piercing her. Among those who fixed the match she was one. She is not ignorant as not to understand what the young woman said. The hit unsaid is that it the health condition of the groom was not checked before the wedding.

Paramma realized that she had hurt Appayamma. She said:' my fate is this. Did he wish to die? .. He fell ill and dies. .. But what is wrong with this fellow? Though he has his wife in his home he has relation with another woman much elder and not in a permissible relationship. If asked by his wife he would say that she does not know anything. What more should she know? They are living together and doesn't she know what is foul work is? ... As that girl (the Revenue Inspector's daughter) said what is relationship etc for a beast? What is age and what is shame? ... Would we hang bones on our neck though we do eat mutton? He pain is hers. Don't blame or bother her for some time.'

Appayamma did not stop even for a minute. She rose like n ignited fire work that zooms towards the sky.

'Olamma, Olamma, what injustice and what villainy!'

(This is an expression of both pain and the surprise about the wrong doing of some.)

Paramma was frightened to see the old woman like a burning cracker and she was a little ashamed too to have hurt her.

'Atta , what use is to have a squabble for things like these? If they are immoral, we have only to be silent as if we have not seen or known about the goings on. If we reveal these the shames is on us too. That big house girl says that Gairee must be brave and work to be on her own feet.

One should not keep mum thinking that it is one's own punya. One should rebel and hit back: that would be a consolation and satisfaction.'

When Paramma was repeating her praise of the big street girl, Appayamma did not wish to hear anything more. She went into her hut with bagfuls of thoughts, dignified and grave and concentrated on cooking food.

'Where did you go?' Asirayya asked. He knew that his wife wouldn't stay put.

'Come, I'd serve you food.' When the mother said this and began filling the plate for her Gairee, looking into her mother's eyes got agitated. She started eating.

'What is that eating? Eat well. Only those whose actions are beneath the caste honour and pride should be afraid of anything. Why should you fear?'

The young woman looked at her mother with his eyes filled with wonder and Appayamma burst out noticing this

-It was no day break but Appayamma set out saying: 'Don't look for me.'

Asirayya is still asleep. Alighting from the train with hands moving forward and backward (in an army man's drill) with dignity she walked full kos and when the sun rise a length of two hands she stepped before her sambandhi's house.

(Punya is merit. Sambandhi relationship indicates the link between the bride and groom's parents. Kos is about two and a half-mile distance.)

'Vadina!' She roared.

(Atta is mother-in-law or aunty; vadina is elder brother's wife or sambandhi)

'Olamma! Appayamma! Where is the young woman?'

'Don't you know where she is? Your son has been rollicking openly with a woman older than himself and one with no acceptable relationship. What need is there for him for my daughter since he has another woman for him? I don't like the play acting

We are people who solved many a dispute in matters related to weddings. We counselled people and fought for justice. We are not those who promote enmities.'

'What is it? What are you saying?'

'You ask me!? Where is that man?'

'Went to the town, he hasn't come back in the night. I thought that he came to your house,' said the woman with innocence.

'He hasn't. I came here to dissolve my daughter's relationship with your son. What I am objecting to is not something you don't know. I did not have eyes but my daughter has a manas (mind-heart). I came to know that just a little ago. Whatever have we given keep it all yourself. If you want to have a 'trial' come to our place, tell our village elders and take the girl back if they judge that she must go to her husband. I give you three days' time. On the fourth day if I don't find a husband for my daughter my name is not Appayamma any longer. I'm not even Asirayya's wife.'

In that street there are twenty dwellings on each side. Since it is breakfast time all men and women are in their huts.

Appayamma's loud angry words slapped the backs of all and all came out to listen what is going on.

Seeing the gathering with tears in her eyes Appayamma told them all what she wanted to say. Experience told her that there would be no point in stoking the fire of a quarrel. What she would do she told all. There was no answer from anyone.

She turned round quickly and none in the street made any attempt to stop or, greet or question her. None tried to assuage her grief or show her any sympathy for the injustice. Nobody took 'vakalat' either to her or the ones in their village.

After she walked for half a furlong her son-in-law appeared. There was a woman by his side.

"Atta!" the young man said.

'Who are you? Am I your atta?... Is this the shameless woman who threw fire and ashes on my daughter's life? (She went of rebuking the woman calling her harlot etc.) I told your mother... After three days if you do not come to take my daughter after meeting the elders respectfully and stop dallying shamelessly with this woman, you are not anything to us. Lack of food or poverty does not mean lack of respectability and morality. You, shameless dancer, who are you? What is your connection with this man? With him you spent the night in the town ... you shameless harlot...'

Spitting out vehemently with disgust Appayamma walked forward not looking back.

She returned home like a hurricane. Yesterday's peace, calm and yesterday's confidence just disappeared. She broke out again:

'May his hair be shred! May his injustice perish! That man bay be eating grass but why should that buffalo of a woman have decency ... big is she with brawn and fat... woman who has given up all sense of shame... She would even sleep with a man on the road.'

Asirayya asked: "What is all this?"

'The great service you have rendered. I saw that with my own eyes. Now you look for another match for my girl. If that fellow is promenading with that shameless woman ... why should she care for him? I gave him three days' time. Within a month's time I'd marry her off again. ... Not within three days, he wouldn't come even in three years. ... Such shameless fellow would even kill my water if she goes there. That woman is like buffalo after which has two calves I wouldn't send there even if she wants to go.'

Asirayya kept mum.

'If you can, come rouse an argument and take an agreement and take her away, I told him. ... All the men and women in the street kept seeing the wonder. But none interfered and none asked about the quarrel. I know what his courage is. But sending the girl to such a house is like destroying her which I would not do. It would be like cutting off her head.'

Appayamma went muttering in a low voice.

-When it was sundown Gairee came in with a carrier ammayi garu gave her.

(Ammayi garu, is a respectful way of referring to the Revenue Inspector's daughter.)

'My mother, my mother!' said the distressed mother to her daughter. She continued further and said 'I have seen with my own eyes. None in the street bothered to the wretched crime or asked me any question. ... Aren't morality and justice dead? ...

Don't fessr. My mother's younger sister's son is working in a mill in Komatipalli.

I'd send word to him and fix the marriage.'

'For whom would you fix a marriage? If he is without morality or a sense of caste pride would we bite grass? My marriage is performed and now it got burnt. Would I die if I have no husband? He is a man with no morals. Yes. But what are we? For a woman there is marriage only once. ... Never ask me to marry again. If you do I'd hang myself.'

Picking out a burning faggot from the corner she broke into two noisily and put it in the burning fire.

'What, you left him and came away: I didn't say anything. What if he gone? We can find a good man now ... Whatever he might have thought of Appayamma, he doesn't know what I could be and what my ability is.' Appayamma said in a loud voice.

'Don't say anything...' Asirayya roared.

Appayamma remained standing looking at her husband and her daughter turning her eyes to one and the other.

'Ammai garu said that she would teach me reading and writing. Till now I was in their house. Don't say anything more to me. Isn't morality the same for man and woman? What would I have done if he's dead? Having a manas people should be bound by morality. That is what our elders said always.

The young woman's eyes were brilliantly sparkling.

Appayamma remained motionless wondering if it was her own daughter that was speaking.

-0-