

Morning Coffee

Stories

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Translation:

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**Dedicated
to
my son & daughter
Phanindra & Priyanka**



On Whose Shoulders I Always Rely

**Your Loving Amma
(Rajyasri)**

Morning Coffee Flavour

Every morning is a unique routine of vivid experiences. Typically, to most of the people, from east or west, south, or north, from any nook and corner in this contemporary era commences the day with a cup of coffee. The flavor may differ, its consistency may vary, color may alter, but the concept is the same. The perception is the same. Exactly mirroring the life.

We have several continents, countries, states , cities and villages with myriad unique human beings and shades of experiences. Languages may vary but not the feel.

Eighteen parts of this morning coffee paints eighteen word - portraits of human life, especially woman, in different roles and potions, elaborating the sentiments, display the pleasures and pains, convey the bonds and bondages, duties and responsibilities and what not. Every word swells up from the depths of heart making the experience universal. With a cup of morning coffee, it trails to the submission of life certificate. All stages of life march in every piece like the seasons of the nature.

Grandma...I Love you- speaks of the bond between generations. And what the preceding era hands over to the succeeding, budding descendants. To respect the past and to pave the future is the present need of the society.

" Grandmas at home used to follow neatness and purity before the onset of epidemics and pandemics. Though we look down at what grandmas said, now their viewpoint is the protective shield for us to prevent the pandemic. What an excellent experience they had! When grandmas are at home, not Corona, its grandma also should run away.

My grandma laid a golden path for future generations.

So, grandma, I love you so much."

Women -freedom is the contemporary struggle of women.

A perplexing situation and needs a solution from every corner.

Not to say this or that every piece is a gem of the experience and amusement.

A unique narration in soft heart touching melody, that meets and permeates the soul.

I enjoyed every word of it and share the same to you all.

Swatee Sripada

Behind me ...

My beloved parents late Mahakali Venkata Rao and Smt. Prabhavathi behind every step of mine and my journey in studies, carrier, and literary trail. I vow my regards and tribute to them.

My beloved husband with all his support and care stands always by my side ready to lend his shoulder to lean whenever I needed a solace. How can I just convey my thanks alone to everything of my life.

I published " morning coffee " in July 2021 including 18 narrations. People at every age acclaimed it, enjoyed and accepted them as their own experiences, real and authentic with a tinge of introspection.

Let me pay my thanks to Dr. Mukthevi Bharathi for her encouraging and enlightening foreword to the Telugu version.

My well wishers advised me to bring it in other languages including English to introduce the universal experiences to others too.

My friend Swatee went through the book felt the authenticity and readily accepted to translate them into English. I am thankful to her from the core for the friendly help and sincere work.

Finally, my book designer and printer T. Rajendra Prasad for all his impressive effort to bring out my Book in the best gesture.

Thank you all

Your **Ketavarapu Rajya Sri**

Morning Coffee

I love the most in my home the pial at the premises and the land with cobbled stones following it. Then comes the fence. The jasmine vine entwined around it. A hibiscus plant by its side. Hibiscus flowers blooming early at the dawn. Besides that, a lemon plant, germinated on its own and now giving fruits. Money plant and Aloe vera, spreading everywhere without any care and nourish.

The servant house cleaner while cleaning the premises sprinkles a little water on them also.

Though I never showed much care they provide grace to the home and pleasure to me.

Early morning, before anyone wakes up, with a cup of coffee squatting on the pial, grazing the slow breezes, and enjoying each sip of hot coffee is a part of my routine. Then I turn to the fresh headlines in the newspaper. In a movie a character while turning the paper mentioned, " what is there in the newspaper? Milk adulterated, Ghee adulterated, and so on"

In the same way, rapes, increase in petrol charges, strikes, and dowry murders, in a line disturb the mind completely.

I am overly sensitive and become emotional so easily. Nowadays even psychologists' advise in newspapers not to be emotional either watching TV or reading newspapers, as the news creates a mental disturbance. They say we get positive energy by reading delightful and pleasant things. So, I just rush through the headlines and then land on inner pages related to women exclusively. There we have interviews of women outshining as industrialists and collectors, in high positions in various fields though born and brought up in middle-class or poor families. Then comes the principles of health, childcare brought-up beauty tips and so on. When the look runs around them so much interest boosts up. A special column about bringing up children " the Grandma's advice' attracts everyone.

Some mothers, though the kids deny it, stuff food into their mouths. What the innocent kids can do, but for throwing up? She didn't eat anything at all, moreover vomiting- worried parents take her to a doctor. He takes his fee and writes a bunch of medicines, one for hunger, one for digestion, one for strength and asks them to visit again after a week with the result. Parents are afraid of some diseases in their kids and make them swallow the medicines. Spending money reduces their worry.

But they never consider when the child denies food, she might have some indigestion or not feel to eat. If left without forcing the child, within a day she turns to routine and eats when she is hungry. Kids express their feel cry when they are hungry. It is the technique God has given them by birth.

New mothers must know such things by either reading some books or asking the veteran women and should relieve the kids' trouble with some home remedies. But how many modern women do this? If a child sneezes or coughs, immediately opening google and following whatever it mentions became a fashion. Whatever google mentions is nothing but the remedies that our veteran grandmas mention.

Unaware of that, today's modern women feel considering their mothers and grandmothers ignorant, raise their kids themselves in an ultra-modern way.

After reading the grandma suggestions in the newspaper, I thought to share this with Vanaja my new neighbour, who complains that her kid not eating anything and worried about the kid.

This pleasure of reading a newspaper while sipping coffee early in the morning boosts my energy as a tonic to do my routine work, attending to children, looking after the home, and doing my duty at the office.

Early in the morning, looking at my flower plants, sipping coffee, and enjoying the pleasure, is the half-an-hour time that I allotted for myself.

As soon I go inside with waking up my two kids to send them to school concludes a part of my duty. Then we, the couple taking the breakfast, packing our lunch boxes, just setting up the messed-up home by the kids to normalcy and starting school is the routine duty.

Without a red mark on the attendance register, signing in time as proof of women perfect at all levels, dumping myself in a seat to immerse in the files and then returning home in the evening. Again the morning scene repeats. As soon as the children go to sleep, cleaning the home and reaching the bed concludes the day.

In this routine when I can breathe freely is the time, I spend on the pial sipping my coffee. As usual when I was ready to squat on the pial from a crack on it a small weed peeped out and greeted me, good morning,

Oh, to share my pleasure, another creature here, - I replied to it with a smile.

It grew proving its existence and it is a part of my routine to greet it every day while sipping my coffee. Every day I think of watering it but as soon as I go in, I forget. Without expecting anything from me, without watering it, it raised. God only gives food to feed everyone. It is an unforgivable act of me, though have thought not watering it at all.

But the busy routine never brings to memory the thought of the plant when I go inside.

As usual, with my coffee cup ready to sit I looked at the plant to greet.

A great surprise, at the tip of the plant, grown almost a finger tip size, a small flower so gracious in pink colour, wet in dew drops. It greeted me humbly and beautifully. How could this petite plant have a flower? I looked at it with pleasure and astonishment.

The coffee I had tasted was more delicious looking at the flower but a feeling of guilt for not giving even a drop of water pinched me.

The naughty flower seemed to be laughing at me sarcastically,

" what if plants like me wait for the drops of water poured by you, no tree survives on this land. Can't the provider giving water to a frog in a crag give me?"

I am a weed, though not useful to anyone, with a feel of helping nature supporting the protection of the environment, providing you pure oxygen, and doing my share of duty to help you all I originated"

As if consoling me for not giving it water it looked at me dignified.

Every creature is created with a purpose. If a man knows what this small plant could get, he can overcome the inferiority complex. Can give his own share of help to society. Without running for the name and fame one should this life to help others- what with the great message and lesson taught by this petite weed plant. overwhelmed by the pleasure and amazement I thought.



Grand maa - I love you

Soon the days are close by -

While going for lunch

A Kinley water bottle in hand and

with an Oxygen cylinder to the nose.

Ten years back, looking at the water bottle in everyone's hand, I mentioned it in one of my writings.

Now in this corona era, along with the water bottle, the need for an oxygen cylinder to be seen and read in newspapers.

At that time, a Kinley water bottle in hand was a status symbol. Either foreigners or foreign- returned used to carry a water bottle. Here, we all used to drink normal water wherever we go.

" the guest is God." So, if somebody visits us first asking about drinking water if it is summer, used to offer a glass of cool water either from an earthen pot or refrigerator.

Now if we ask or offer water to a visitor, they feel worried " no, no, no need. We carry filtered water. " saying this takeout, the water bottle from a small bag, brought extra with their handbag, this bottle keeps cool water cool and hot water hot- they drink their own water and feel they are greatly civilized.

In fact, carrying their own water is not a strange thing for us. In my childhood, my grandmother used to fill her bronze tumbler with fresh drinking water from the drinking water tap as soon as it runs, keeping a brightly glistening bronze glass on it as a cover, and placing it under her bed.

If it is from the drinking water pot, she used to say I don't like everyone dipping their hands in it. Now when I recall it, I wonder how cleanly she used to be.

When we are invited to a marriage or any celebration, she used to carry a bag with a saree and blouse, a small napkin, her silver plate, and glass, and water in her bronze water tumbler with a screwed lid.

My dad used to pass an order, "she could not carry, somebody holds it." To say the truth, carrying that old bag we all felt ashamed. Moreover, a bronze tumbler filled with water made the bag extremely heavy.

"What is this whimsicality grandma, they clean the leaves before serving the food, you want them to know your greatness, you never take your food but for in the silver plate? Moreover, you start with this bronze water tumbler, everywhere to have lunch there. When you can't carry them, why do you want them all? Then my father recommendation to carry them. Wearing silk, a beautiful long skirt, to carry this bag, I feel so ashamed " I always showed my impatience.

But my grandma with a smile used to say,

"My son loves me so much. I can carry that but, if you bring it, it shows your respect for elders. So, your dad habituated you to this. " if I say something you may grumble it is my foolishness, but if we carry our own plate, glass, and drinking water, what great cleanliness and purity we have. If we clean and keep it back no question of a nasty defiling mess. However, they clean the leaves, and when so many are there, we don't know how they do it. Some insects might have crawled on them.

We don't know. Why should we risk ourselves? See the small gold flower in the middle of the silver plate, it helps us to digest the food we eat" she pounded a lecture.

" Ok, you draped so nicely in a silk saree, then why did you bring this cotton one? Are you not disdained in all others?' I tried my level best to escape to carry the bag.

" O that one, when I go for lunch, I change into that from this silk saree. Not only me, one who knows even a little bit of science. While eating however careful we are, sometimes pieces of food or while serving liquids droplets may fall. We can't wash the silk saree frequently. So, we wear voiles to eat. We can wash it as soon we go home. If we have food in a silk saree, we cannot wear it again for worship.

We wear a silk saree for its grandeur, but it flutters and suffocates. Do you know how comfortable it is to wear a cotton one while eating? You are just kids." She used to explain softly without feeling bad at all. Is there such a story behind this old bag, pondering over it carrying that old bag I used to take her holding her hand?

Not this alone, so many troubles with her stupidity. When dad returned from his office if we tell him about grandma something, he used to listen and say, " She is the older lady. She feels happy if you do what she says" he changes the topic, comes in first of all goes to her, inquires whether she had taken her medicines or not, keeps an apple or a pomegranate in her hand. It was great to eat an apple in those days. It's difficult to buy for everyone at home so, only one he used to bring for her. Though we felt annoyed at that time, later we realized that he laid a foundation for us on how to treat parents by watching them the way respecting his parents.

By the time we return from school, she used to stand ready at the threshold with a tumbler of water and turmeric mixed in it.

At that time, we used to carry books in hand to school. Keeping the lunch box on the books, we used to walk. Grandma used to rebuke us saying books are the forms of Goddess Saraswathi. If we keep a lunch box on it, it is spoiling the sacredness and we may not get a proper education. So, holding the lunch box on the lefthand and the books on the right we go out from the home. Then feeling both hands are tethered, as usual keeping the lunch box on books we walk freely. While returning just before entering the home we used to hold the lunch box separately. Being innocent we thought grandma did not know anything, but she always suspected us. So, hold the turmeric water as soon as we enter the home used to sprinkle it on our heads, books, and clothes saying the name of God.

" Oh see, the uniform is spoiled with turmeric color marks. If the teacher looks at them tomorrow, we have to climb the bench." We used to grumble.

" you should know that earlier, why do you try to conceal it from me?" she did what she wanted before going inside.

As soon as we return from school, we have to wash our feet at the premises where we had a tap. Looking at our feet to find out whether we washed them properly or not, she used to sprinkle turmeric water on us.

We had a separate entrance to enter a room where we should change our clothes. There used to be a cloth line tethered in the room. We have to put the school dress on it when we change into another dress before going inside.

All this used to take place under the supervision of grandma. She always remained neat and clean and like a principal made us do what she wanted.

" oh, I sacrifice all my strength to make the kids change their clothes and fresh up. Ush! " as if tired she used to squat on her bed. She never allowed anyone to sit on it. That is her way of purity.

On Saturdays she always did charities. Before taking bath that day, she used to sit on the Verandah with some coins, rice in a tin, and old sarees.

The program always started at eight in the morning, first of all, Sarvodaya people used to come with a tin. To them and the one reciting Veda, she used to pour rice in his bag saying "Krishnarpanam (submitting to Krishna). Then used to come a lame, she used to give him ten paise. (in those days it was a good amount), then two Muslim women used to come saying, Yaa Allah.

Though my grandma is orthodoxy, she never had any discrimination of caste or religion.

As soon as they come saying Yaa Allah,

"come fast, I am waiting for you. Why did you delay today? I have to take bath now ..." to both, she used to place ten paise coins separately- from a distance into their sling bags. If she could not get the change and had a coin of twenty paise - "Both of you share it, don't fight" she used to give it one saying so.

If sometimes she had a fifty paise coin, taking their twenty paise they used to return three ten paise coins.

"keep them there" when they kept them, she sprinkles turmeric water and called the God's name she used to take. Today as we sanitize currency notes, to avoid any sort of virus she sprinkled turmeric water.

As if she is indebted to them, when they come calling her from the turning of the street, Yaa Amma, or Yaa Allah every Saturday, we teased her -"Grandma see your goat are arriving, be ready."

"Don't mock them, kids, the sanctity will vanish. What I do is for the welfare of you all, not for me. Whenever God calls me, I am ready to go, what do I need?"

She used to give in charity every Saturday to four or five people.

In a short while, the vegetable vendor may come. Chit chatting with her, paying heed to all her troubles, giving some medical advice, and picking the fresh tender vegetables and greens. Along with the money, giving her two old sarees " see the sarees, don't think that they are fashionable. At least you can use them as a cushion under the bed of kids." She used to instruct her on how to use them also.

Then, she used to describe how she bargained the vegetable and picked the tender brinjals for my mother and used to pass an order to make it curry before going to bath.

Evening, at the time of dusk when we play with the pieces of tiles or ceramic, jumping on the floor, she used to warn saying, evening mother soil takes rest. You people should not jump in this way.

When we are pleasantly laughing and talking " laughing is dangerous in many ways. Draupadi had so many troubles because of laughing " wiping her eyes, taking out the evil eyes with salt, and instructing us to refresh up. In the evenings she used to offer benzoin smoke in the home to chase away the evil powers.

Now in the times of corona people advise us to sit in sunlight to get vitamin D. But grandma immediately after taking bath, used to do the prescribed exercises in front of the sun and seek the required Vitamin D.

When infants had jaundice in those days, grandma, laying them on her legs, used to sit in the sunlight, to get rid of it in two-three days.

As soon as the season changes everyone suffers from fevers and colds. She was never allowed into the room where the suffering people rested. Only hot Rasam with pepper, buttermilk, and salt mixed with softly cooked rice was the food.

Giving steam with turmeric water, hot water to drink, and a wet cloth on the forehead to reduce the temperature were her techniques to deal with colds and fevers.

The room was cleaned with Dettol and ample rest for the suffering person was used to cure the problem. Limited and restricted food definitely increased the resistance.

In fact, grandma is illiterate. But she is perfect at reciting all proverbs, duties and their impacts, culture, and tradition along with Ramayana and Mahabharata. She led her life on a dutiful path.

We used to grumble over her deeds, but now in the era of Corona, when veterans and eminent people ask us to sanitize everything and maintain cleanliness, now we turn back to our ancient rules and customs and recall what our ancestors mentioned earlier about the future.

Grandmas at home used to follow neatness and purity before the onset of epidemics and pandemics. Though we look down at what grandmas said, now their viewpoint is the protective shield for us to prevent the pandemic. What an excellent experience they had! When grandmas are at home, not Corona, its grandma also should run away.

My grandma laid a golden path for future generations.

So, grandma, I love you so much.



Adds ... Spoiling Moods

" Amma what is the breakfast? If you did Maggie, Ramya's favorite I won't eat" Ananth threatened packing his school bag.

Amma, if you made the green pancake and Upma, your son's favourite I won't keep quiet" Ramya retorted as if she is no less than her brother.

To avoid Gas trouble for my husband Idli every is necessary. I too have the same with him.

Even if one starves, I feel the pain. So, three varieties of breakfast making exhaust me, I forget it when they have them with great liking.

" why don't you make same breakfast to all? Honoring their likes, you pamper them a lot and spoiling them. How can they grow into able persons?"

Before I claim my tiredness my husband snaps at me and starts to his office bidding bye to the kids.

" what a strange thing! A mother satisfies when kids had food, but a father feels elated when they are capable" I thought.

Now the calmness after a storm prevails.

Without any patience to warm the cold Idli spread the frozen ghee on them to eat with chutney and switched on the TV. To listen to some preaching in a devotional channel. Since

early morning household chores cooking, packing lunch boxes, and convincing kids completely consumes the time.

The devotional channel now had a program on clarifying the doubts.

The doubts went on- while lighting a lamp in worship whether to put two or three wicks, which side the wick should face east, west, or north, south? Another one asked if the worship room should be in the northeast, but we are in an apartment. It is not possible, so what to do?

The person on the Tv quoted the Shastras, mentioned what was there in Puranas and cleared their doubts and finally concluded by saying

" Devotion is more important. Sri Krishna in Bhagavad Gita said

" leaves, flowers, fruits, water whatever you offer me with devotion I love it" so however you do worship God with devotion."

Yes, exactly, Gita said the same. My mind bothers me always but for the household routine, I never did any worship. Now I felt relieved.

He also said if we feel to worship and light a lamp, that itself is equal to performing puja. It is the adjustment in the Kali era it seems. I felt so relaxed listening to that. I was waiting eagerly for what he says next.

Meanwhile a break for the ads. Grumbling at the ads, I was just ready to put a piece of Idli in my mouth,

HelpAge India's advertisement. Showing an infant in a wretched condition in a piteous manner " can you fulfill the hunger of such infants? Can you stretch your helping hand? Just send Rs 500 a month."

Looking at that infant I could not swallow the piece of Idli.

I should ask my husband to arrange the amount at least for an infant.

I swallowed the Idli. Immediately Abbas arrived on the screen, " your bathroom walls look dirty? Not at all shining even if you scratch and rub them?" Showing the dirty bathroom tiles repeatedly, "Now Harpic comes in two varieties. The red one for bathroom tiles" he showed again the dirty nasty bathroom tiles repeatedly and cleaned them. I felt nauseated.

Today's breakfast is not in my fate. I felt even threw up the swallowed pieces too and switched off the Tv. In the kitchen, the vessels to be cleaned are waiting for me in the sink. Cleaning the kitchen, then the home messed up by children, continued up to one O clock.

To wash the clothes when I put them in the washing machine, I wondered how many things mothers do from the morning - "God just had a single incarnation in an era, but mothers have more than ten forms every day. But not even a word of praise for them from anyone."

A small piece of the poem came involuntarily,

Though we inaugurate mother in

As many angles as possible

Still, a dearth persists

Mother waking up with the sunrise

How many forms does she wear

The God Vishnu had an incarnation in an era

But a mother incarnates in ten forms a day"

The poem came up good. We have to commend ourselves. I patted my back.

Suddenly I remembered that day after tomorrow is my daughter's birthday. I have to buy a dress.

Along with her, I have to buy for my son also. If not, he keeps a sad face. If I have my lunch, then I may come back by the time the children return from school.

Lunch is prepared in the morning itself. Just warmed rice in the cooker and arranged everything on the table including curd. I could not have breakfast properly, so hunger made me mad. I just have some space now alone so, switched on the TV again. The cooking program. I waited eagerly for a new recipe to experiment with and to please the kids with some variety of snacks.

Just before a kitchen tip, she announced a break for ads. A mother-in-law with her shy daughter-in-law says we had constructed a toilet, you can use it" the new bride says, " But it's not clean" Again Akshay Kumar entered asking, " what you people use to clean your toilets?" came in and showing the dirty and ugly toilet bowl, explained how it turns clean with Harpic went on the display of it repeatedly.

I cast down my head to have the food.

After a while, Nagarjuna appeared with a toilet brush.

"When we use a toilet why to feel ashamed of cleaning it?" asking this he suggested using so and so company toilet brush when I was ready to switch off the TV

" Now let us see the tip for home makers" the anchor arrived. But without completing it she went for another break.

Baygon sprays ad.

" pulls out the hidden cockroaches and kills them. Use Baygon spray" and showed the cockroaches fluttering on their backs. My mind fluttered in pain. The happiness of having warm rice with Alu fry evaporated switched off the TV-" no need of any tips" and set out for shopping.

When we go shopping usually although we set a budget, we like the things outside the budget only.

But we celebrate birthdays only once a year so, crossing the limit I took a nice frock for Ramya and dress for my son. The bill crossed the limit of what my husband said.

Yes, he comments, what you know but to scratch the card, as if I am extravagant.

After dinner, I showed them the dresses. Both the kids and husband liked them so much.

When the kids went to sleep husband was a bit serious. " You never learn to shop within the budget."

Inquiring in more than ten shops, I purchased where more discount is given, but instead of praising not even said a word about how they are.

Many times, I said, " come with me. You can find how the rates are"

But he escapes, " am I doing such a big job without a knowledge of rates? I know how the shopkeepers cheat the women. I can't move around the shops" he escaped.

Kids are fast asleep. My husband was watching cricket on TV. He was in the mood off. To please him I sat by his side watching TV.

Virat Kohli made a sixer. When the match was interesting and crucial suddenly an ad appeared. I thought it might be about cricket but

" never take pan or Gutka. Never spoil your health" saying this showed the affected teeth, operated mouth and cheeks, and tongue and scaring patients most embarrassingly and fearfully. One of them said, " I sold my wife's bangles for the operation."

I felt nauseated. Unable to bear left the hall to my bedroom and staggered onto the bed. Even in sleep, I dreamt of fluttering cockroaches, diseased teeth and mouths, dirty toilets and toilet brushes and the piteous infant one after the other.

Women - public blurb

" What trash! Lonely women are so slight to everyone to disdain. They may throw stones on young women, but at this age of seventy what hell is this to me?" Sujatha in tears expressed her agony.

Sujatha is a popular writer. Her stories or serials are used to enthral the readers. She developed self-confidence and personality development in many women. Sujatha's son and daughter had married and settled in America. Her husband recently succumbed to illness. To fulfil that dearth Sujatha diverted her time to social service. She used to tell that it provided her immense self-satisfaction and gave her peace and calmness.

I am one of her best fans and friends. Her friendship is a God-given boon to me. After a long time, bored of talking on the phone I met her personally. She is not at home. The live-in domestic cook cum servant house cleaner Narsamma invited me, " madam went to see the Doctor. Please come in and wait" and offered a glass of water.

I inquired about the doctor.

" No idea madam, she said she will come back within no time"

Sujatha returned when I was in a tete-a-tete with the lady.

As soon as she saw me, she hugged me happily. We both turned emotional as we met after a long time. Though her hug is affectionate, a slight sigh came out from her as a sign of suppressing some anguish.

" Why do you see a doctor? What is wrong with you? Is it a routine checkup?" I asked her.

" Yeah, routine sugar levels checkup. The post-lunch reading went up to 320. You know I never have sweets. Even rice I take in limited amounts. I can't understand why the reading went up so suddenly?" she expressed her concern.

" sometimes even tension raises the sugar levels," I said, without an idea of what to say.

" Yes, tension alone peaked it up." She stated.

I looked at her surprised. She fulfilled all her responsibilities and spent her life peacefully in social service. What else makes her tense? I blurted out the same.

" Why do I have so many restrictions at this age of seventy? Why didn't they let women stand on their legs at any stage of life? If a husband is bedridden with illness or a useless entity, this society shows immense sympathy and respects her.

Take my case my husband had been bedridden for the last four-five years. Children now and then visited us. I alone managed everything. As soon as he left owns relatives and even siblings advised me, " why do you need such a big house? Why stay here alone managing with servants? Sell the home, go to America, and settle in your son's home. "vanish my peace of mind. When he survived, I did everything, now I do the same work. Without stretching my hand for any help, doing some

service and charity in whatever, I live my life peacefully. But some disdain my individuality and throw stones, making me strengthless” her way of talking and the pain in her words displayed how much she was hurt.

“ Ok, I may go to my son in America, but you know everything. Son, daughter-in-law, and my grandkids run around with their day-to-day routine, what shall I do but for watching them silently?

No other work but watching TV. Spending life at someone’s home, waiting for the weekend to go out with them to see the outside world” the agony in my mind flooded out as a stream.

“ With all such talks I lost faith in myself, and I am in a dilemma. Whether to stay on my own or to go and live with the kids. In that mental conflict the sugar levels increased it seems Mani” she said and looked at me as an innocent.

I am surprised. A renowned writer, is she talking so desperately? She initiated self-confidence in many women through her writings. When it comes to her case, nothing comes to her mind. I assumed the responsibility to awaken the brave woman in her.

I continued the conversation including the troubles of other women in our talks.

“ Suja, you know everything. A society with a cruel chuckle makes a woman weak-minded, who lives on her own with kids doing household work, away from her husband, as he is addicted to drinking and ill-treating, and sends her back to fall on his mercy to live together.

You know about Vanaja, she lectured eloquently on women’s problems and troubles on many occasions in meetings and receives titles like the Gem of women and the progressive

gem. Recently, she called me and expressed her agony. When people clap and praise her when she was on the dais, as soon as she comes down, bother her with questions,

“ what about your husband, it looks good if he is here. He knows about your eloquence.” Sarcastically comment as if I am wandering without caring about the home. With commanding looks mixing the mocking they talk. She expressed her pain”

“ If we think did all men take their wives or women to the meetings? nobody can ask this. In the name of supporting art, they all come to meetings, have some pastime, and go home leaving some nasty comments.

On one side, they claim women had independence but can never tolerate women’s individuality. You are a great writer and a model to many women. You know everything. Don’t be so sensitive. As long as we care about society it throws stones at us. Never bother about it. Stay here. We all can meet now and then do whatever we can for society and live independently and happily.” I encouraged her.



A joy trip

It's quite common at home to have arguments and counter arguments at home regarding driving in the car between me and my husband. I am a working lady. Both the children left for America for higher studies. After wrestling with files when we come back home, instead of sitting facing each other watching the face of the other, instead of fighting on silly matters searching for a reason for it, I asked him better to go somewhere.

"where do we go, is there a car parking? " my husband targeted a volley of questions.

" Might be, but what do I know? If there is no parking, we can park it in a lane or somewhere, let us go" I said.

" what do you know, you say many things, just sitting in a car only is your work. But, in every lane no parking boards at every home. Shop owners are bothered about their customers. If we wait and check the police would be watching us to park so that he can write a challan for wrong parking like a cunning fox"

He took me a lesson.

Relatives on both sides are in the city itself. Either in relatives, friends, office colleagues, or neighbours one or the other may have a birthday party, a get-together, or one or the other party. Without even going through the invitation card properly, "is there a parking area there? Stupid, they construct big halls but are miserly when they come to the parking place?" as if it is the mistake of the host, about the country, about the state, about the increase in the number of cars encroaching the roads parking them, about the public lacking civic sense, he lectures endlessly eating away their brains became routine. In between, I intervene under the pretext of asking for details of the function and offering coffee or cool drinks, lest they should feel bad.

But even after finding everything when we start, although the function Hall has a parking lot, at a distance of half a kilometre from the hall, looking on either side, used to stop at a dustbin and ask me to get down the car.

"what is this? You said parking lot is there at the Hall. Why do you stop at this dustbin now? Unbearable stench, wearing a silk saree, and adoring ornaments, instead of descending at the Hall in grandeur, what is this to getting down at a dustbin?" I said closing my nose.

My husband always has ready-made replies.

"Everyone parks at the Hall. It will be troublesome to take out of the car when we go. Here at this dustbin, nobody competes with us. It's quite easy to take out of the car while going. But in the office, you are always seated in a chair. Better for your health to walk a bit" with this he used to move forth. Though I feel the mood off, holding the silk saree a bit up, following him to walk half a kilometre became mandatory to me.

Some other types of functions – are housewarming functions. Unable to pay the rent in Hyderabad city, building a

home on the outskirts, invite us to housewarming ceremonies. Close relatives and friends printing the route map behind the invitation card, ask us to attend without fail.

Keeping the invitation card in front while driving he used to move in the right direction for a while on the day of the housewarming. The map indicates to turn to the right but the road on right has bifurcated in a V shape. When he was in a dilemma to take which one, I suggested, "let us ask someone."

"No need I travelled many times on this route. I know everything here." Boasting, roaming around in the lanes, finally unable to find the home, annoyed with the host for constructing a house at such a remote place and inviting us, scaring the hen and dogs obstructing the car in those narrow lanes by a loud horn, cursing the blue cross, that pleaded not to kill stray dogs, to save them hitting the car either to a Telephone or an electric pole damaging the car with a dent, then he used to call the concerned house- owner of the party to ask, "we are at this place so and so, how to come there?"

"if we asked in the beginning itself, we would have avoided the dents on the car and the trouble here?" I spoke.

He looked at me seriously as if it is a challenge to his ego,

"you can say many things. Sit in the car smartly dressed up. The driver knows the trouble of driving on Hyderabad roads" again to make me realize his difficulty targets a satire towards me. Finally, the house owner used to say, "stay there, I will send someone" and managed us to go there noting down the vehicle number.

Somehow after attending the function, standing in the buffet line impatient to serve food, repeatedly, taking all in one plate at a time, searching for a chair somewhere to sit, then while eating the food stuck in the windpipe, then went and brought water in a glass had a sip and kept the glass down. But

a boy came running and overturned the glass. The border of the silk saree became wet. Though angry, can't say anything to that child, finished lunch and had taken leave from everyone and somehow reached home. The dented car appeared ugly and felt pained.

"let us clear the dent and give a paint coating," I said.

"No need. All the roads here are mud roads. Though we repair it, some stupid may dash it again. Let it be" he showed his vexation. It is their birthright to show impatience. Wherever we go in that dented car only,

If someone comes in the way, scolding them, " have you informed at home" bearing all this sitting in the car -how boring and annoying.

"let us go happily in a cab, no need of searching the address, you don't have any tension, he will take exactly to the said address." When I advised,

" I have no tension at all. If we book a cab, he drops us there. Again, in return we have to book another cab. If the program delays, it's difficult to get a cab. Why don't to you just sit in the car what trouble do you have?"

What to do? In this life, in the dented car itself, with my husband, sitting and singing " let us go for a joy trip in the car" I should compromise.



Matchless - Motherhood

" Amma, what is this? Always sending me one or the other photo of a groom and asking me is " he looking good? Shall we talk to his parents?" immediately pressing me without even giving time to think how I can say yes or no. "Sirisha called from America pouring all her irritation.

After B. Tech, she scored well in TOFEL and GRE to do M.S in America. Though it is difficult to stay without her, I convinced my mind, " Why do I stop her when she wants to go for higher studies." There she rented a flat with friends, went to a part-time job after college, cooked and managed to do umpteen tasks at a time.

In the beginning, she used to narrate their troubles on phone often. When I heard them, here we pampered her a lot without a chance to work at all, even when she was in Engineering, as she has no time and was hurried, I used to feed her. Packing her favourite food, I reminded her repeatedly to have lunch.

I used to wait for her return from college. As soon as she stepped in, she always displayed her annoyance by saying, that seat was not available on the bus, instead of fifty-seat occupancy they pushed a hundred, she has to stand one and a half hours

on the bus and so on. After relaxing, she used to reach the dining table asking, "what is today's special." I used to feel elated feeding her forcing her repeatedly when she went on account of her college stories.

When I heard her troubles there my voice became dumb with grief, and I could not speak. As she could not listen to me,

" I know this Amma before coming here, it would be like this. Not only me all the girls coming here struggle exactly like me. We console each other and get used to this. If you worry so much, I'll not call you" she used to threaten me.

One day she called and told me happily, "Amma, do you know, we became prosperous. We purchased a dining table."

" can you save so much in your part time jobs?" I asked in surprise.

" Poor Amma, we didn't pay for it. Here people when they go for new things keep the old ones outside. The needy and students like us bring them home to use. We brought one such dining table. If someone keeps out chairs or ACs we can have them. Here all this is common. Take it light" and she laughed.

She said rake it lightly, but tears filled my eyes. " This crazy girl feels happy to get an old table, went to America for studies but facing so many troubles" I grieved silently.

With so many difficulties and problems, and emotional stress she procured her M.S.

Once when she was still on a student visa, she visited us stayed a month and went back. My mother started bothering me. " You sent the girl such a long distance before she indulges in some love affair do her marriage"

What my mother said is right. Without Sirisha's knowledge, with my email ID, I registered her name in "Telugu

matrimony," selected a few suitable matches and waited for her arrival.

" Marry? So soon, without even working after studies? , how thrilling it would be if I procure everything I need with my own income? Let me enjoy that happiness." She said.

What she said is right. Let her first settle into a job. Like the old generation, you are bothering her to marry" my husband too supported her.

" Yes. Now you say this. If she selects someone, then you point out my upbringing only. Others sarcastically comment us as if we wait to enjoy her income without marrying her. What do you know how we suffer?" I grumbled my husband sitting so casually.

" Ok, then select a befitting match and convince her. If you both like it, I have no objection. I 'll be instrumental in the wedding. " he kept everything on my shoulders.

Finally, unable to bear my infliction, " Ok, I'll marry. But I should talk to that guy. If our ideas agree, then only we can go for the marriage. Later don't force me" she agreed with this condition.

I felt relieved and

asked her, "what do you want to talk to him?"

" Nothing, immediately after the wedding both sides bother us to have kids. So, I would like to say him that we don't want any kids. Many orphans are in India. Let us adopt one and give a good life to that kid. Is he is agreeing, I'll marry him. If not it's ok. Without marriage I can adopt one and educate a poor girl. At least I can pay back the debt of my homeland to some extent" she said breathlessly.

I remained dumbstruck. Though I am proud of her high thinking, where can we get such a broad-minded guy? The matter came to its origin again.

When recovered a bit I said, "not that dear. If you have a kid of your own, then for the second one if you go for adoption, it looks good. Enjoy the sweetness in motherhood and you can implement your ideals too. Think of it" in a convincing way.

My trials succeeded and she agreed to meet the boy whom I selected on the matrimonial site on the net. I conveyed this happily to my son working in Maryland. He talked to her and arranged their meeting.

"Did you like him?" I asked her eagerly after their meeting.

She kept me in suspense saying, "what do we know about each other just if we meet once. We should meet three to four times then we can come to an understanding"

I prayed to all the Gods to settle this match. my worship fulfilled, and she conveyed good news. We did the marriage of Sirisha and Srinivas in all grandeur.

They both lived happily together two years after the wedding. I and his mother wanted to upgrade to grandmother level and started to bother them. Sirisha watching her friends had a change in her.

Soon they conveyed an auspicious message to us saying "we would be parents soon." We felt happy inviting the new pattern.

I went to America for her delivery. She delivered a chubby male child. She appeared elated forgetting the labour she underwent as soon as she hugged the baby to her chest. She fed him so eagerly.

I saw that rare mesmerizing scene astonished. She denied the kids totally but now, "This is the magic in motherhood" I thought.

Keeping her word, she adopted an orphan child in India through the "Save a child" organization and educated her.

My Leg is Paining

“Madam, in the government schools they started education through English medium. Did it come in the newspaper?” while asking my maid servant Rattalu entered in.

“ Yes, it is in a newspaper,” I told her.

“ Good Amma, we, me, and my husband, thought of our son to join in a convent school. If the government offers English medium, we can save the money” she felt happy.

As soon as I heard the English medium my mind transmigrated to my childhood days. Very happily I had written my sixth-class exams like a child’s play from a government school close to my home. I always remained number one in the class and bagged all acclaim of teachers, which made me proud and happy.

One day mom said to dad, “ Roja is growing. Instead of this coeducation school, let us go for girl’s convent. For higher studies or for a job in future English is essential. Any way we have Telugu as a subject.”

Immediately dad accepted it.

With an eagerness to provide me good future, they joined me in a popular English medium convent school. With new shoes school dress and a school bag I too felt enthusiastic and happy. Watching me in my uniform, pink colour skirt, and white blouse, my parents are overjoyed. I too went to school on the first day in the school bus smart and delighted.

I don't have any friends in the new school. The premises of the school is excessively big. In a vast school ground, everyone in the school assembled. Students are class-wise in lines each class has volunteered.

As I am new, one of the volunteers looking at the class and section on my badge kept me in the line of class 7th section B. principal and other teachers are on the dais. Senior students did the prayer singing Vandemataram. The principal greeted all with a good morning. Students in turn wished her good morning and went to classes marching in lines. Being a new student, I have an opportunity to sit on the first bench.

In the first period, we have an English and Hema teacher entered the class.

Students wished her, standing.

“ very good morning, be seated. “

Here I have trouble, I learned only the alphabet in English till now. I could understand nothing but the good morning. But others are speaking in English. I could not follow even a word. I sat scared. The class concluded. Before the other teacher's arrival, I asked a girl by my side her name.

“Shh,” she kept her finger on her mouth and said, “ speak in English,” she said her name was Sushma. Next entered the science teacher. Let it be any subject or teacher everything appeared to me the same. Nobody bothered about me. Whereas in the previous school how nice it used to be. I was the first one

in every field. Everybody used to praise me. But here, in this school, everything appears confused. Tears came into my eyes.

At lunchtime, students started to eat their lunch boxes on the lawn. I too with my box sat by Sushma and asked her,

" I am a new student; will you be my friend?" " You are welcome to have lunch with us, she invited. Though I could not understand her, I guessed she agreed to my proposal. Looking at my face, what she might have felt,

"Here in this school, we should talk in English only. We are in the English medium. They find us if we speak in Telugu. Jhansi is the leader of our bench. If we talk in Telugu, she finds us a quarter rupee for a sentence. Because of you, I may be fined. Please learn to speak in English" she leaned and murmured in my ear. After that, we had social, math, and some other classes. When the long bell rang, I felt relieved and returned home.

mom was waiting for me with cashews Upma eagerly for my account of the school. Looking at my disappointed, sad face she felt worried and asked me what's the matter. I narrated everything and cried. Meanwhile, dad also arrived early from the office. At the threshold itself I hugged him and cried, " Dad, I Don't like this school at all. Change me to the old school again."

"What happened dear, why do you cry?" caring for me he brought me inside.

" I can't understand what they teach in classes. We must talk to all in English only. They fine us if we talk in English. I don't want this school dad. I am scared. Everyone at school looks at me as a stupid without any knowledge of English. I feel so insulted." Again, I cried.

Dad took me close and smeared my head, " the first day anywhere looks like this. You too can learn if all speak English.

You are highly intelligent. Have patience, still, if you don't like it after a few days, then do whatever you want. We paid so much to join you in that school. My golden doll will work hard to bring us a good name" he convinced me.

Daily I used to complain about one or the other thing and my parent's convincing me became a routine.

By the time a month passed, I started to understand English, but could not express myself fluently. Even to talk to anyone with the fear of fine, sitting alone scared was unbearable.

That day our class shifted to a new building. Benches are not yet shifted. So, the class teacher asked us to sit on the floor and compromise for a while.

That day, when we are on the floor continuously for four periods one of my legs turned numb. To stand and move my leg I fear the teacher. After a while unable to bear I stood up at once.

When I stood up suddenly, the teacher asked me " what happened?" surprised. On one side this numbness in my leg and I must reply in English only. Otherwise, the fine. Whatever English I learned within this month, in that

" My leg is Nepping (paining) teacher," I spoke. I couldn't get the word pain, so I added -ing to the Telugu word and felt happy that I could give a reply.

" What did you say?" confused by my answer she asked and then perceived and started laughing loudly. The students in the class also started laughing. Unable to understand why they laugh; I bowed my head innocently feeling humiliated. Now whenever I recall it, I laugh non-stop.

Even today when it flashed in my memory, I started giggling.

" What is the matter Amma, you are laughing within , I completed my work. Let me take leave"

With the words of Rattalu, I came into the present.

She is the Brave

"Amma, I would like to join my children in a government school. Is there a school nearby?" my maid servant Lakshmi asked.

We reside in an apartment. Watchman's wife is the customized house cleaner in the apartments. Watchmen Veeraiah joined recently, with his wife and two children. He looks very neat. His wife, Lakshmi is pretty and works fast and meticulously. As soon as she joined the duties, she was anxious to join her kids in a school. I appreciated it. She said the boy must go to the third standard and the girl to the second.

I asked her about the T.C from the previous school.

" No, not yet, by the time we moved here the school was not yet opened. I will bring it later; they may accept it" she said.

" Ok, if she has so much confidence why do I bother? " I thought.

" Here is a government school nearby. I studied there up to seventh standard, A good school" I said.

" Then why did you stop there Amma?"

" Did not stop my studies, when my grandma bothered my father to join me in a girl's school, as I was growing, he

joined me in Madapati Hanumantharao girl's high school. " I revealed to her as if explaining.

" Then Amma , you too come with me to join my kids. If you are there the work would be faster. At two in the afternoon, I'll complete my household work quickly and come"

"Ok, I'll" within me I have an eagerness to see the school where I studied.

Lakshmi with her two kids came at two after completing her routine work, and I followed them to my childhood school. Students are running here and there playing on the ground.

We asked about the headmaster's room and went there. His room is teeming with new admission kids and parents.

Completing the midday meals provided by the government, students tease each other, argue and fight, and are going to their classes. The atmosphere is hustle and bustle. Moreover, the school is the centre for forthcoming supplementary exams of class X . Poor Headmaster, answering ten people at a time, taking the interview of new kids, and doing umpteen things at a time.

Sitting in an AC room, working silently, ordering personal assistant and the attendee who comes in as soon as I press the bell, I am used to a calm and quiet atmosphere. After a long gap, this school atmosphere appeared strange, perplexing and irritated me. But controlling myself, went into the headmaster's room, introduced myself, reminded him that I studied in the same school around 1961 and revealed the work that brought me there. Though he is terribly busy, asked me to be seated, said just one minute, showed me a chair, pressed the bell, and called an Aya.

Then he handed over two forms, " take them to Lalitha teacher, tell her that I sent them." He sent us with her.

Aya kept Lakshmi outside and took me into the staffroom. I greeted all the teachers and asked their names and subjects they teach, and the classes they take.

“ I studied up to seventh standard in this school. “ I said.

“ Is it?” everyone showed enthusiasm.

“ Yes, then Suryanarayana Murthy sir used to teach us Telugu. As soon as he enters the class, he used to make us meditate for five minutes closing our eyes. We played mischief closing and opening our eyes cunningly , waiting for the conclusion of five minutes. Though he was in meditation, how he was aware of it calling each one who made mischief used to give a blow bending us down. With tears, we used to reach our seats. Now, in the name of Yoga and meditation, it became a craze and popular. But he made us meditate in those days, though we can't understand its value.” As he said, the teachers, all at once said,

“Yes, Yes. Suryanarayana Murthy is a disciplined man. Are you a student of his” they felt happy?

Meanwhile, Aya gave a message that the principal wanted to see me. Along with the forms we came into his room. He checked the form and asked Lakshmi to show the T Cs.

Without any hesitation she requested,

“Please admit them first sir, when I visit my village, I will bring them.”

Looking at me, unable to say anything, “Ok, bring them soon, we should keep them in record” he said.

“Pay hundred rupees to each one. That too once in a year. We provide books and school uniform. Midday meals we serve. We use fine rice, better quality than what we use at home, with curry and Sambar.” He described.

“So many schools in the government schools!” I am surprised.

I paid the amount and joined them in the school. I thought I did a favour to Lakshmi, and she would look at me showing her gratitude.

But instead of that, (as if she brought me only for that) looking at the principal nonchalantly, “ All government schools provide books and food. I know all that” observing around the school,

“No playground for the children to play at all. Where could they play? In our village we have lots of place around the school. Here, no ground at all”

She talked as if she compromised to join the kids here.

The poor government provides so many facilities to students to increase the literacy percentage. I felt awfully bad about Lakshmi’s behaviour.

When we are coming back after joining the kids, I expressed my anger.

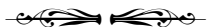
“ What is this Lakshmi, what do you talk about? We all had our education here and did good jobs. We don’t have playgrounds in our schools. Used to take us to the ground of the welfare centre to drill.

But still, when the government provides you with so many facilities to educate your kids, using them you must educate them well, but why do you talk so? “

“What you said is right Amma, but what do they do without providing facilities? Luring us , lingering around us promising, we do this, and we do that, they get our votes. Becoming MLA with our votes they earned crores. As they promised, without looking after our welfare and kids’ education, what did they do? How can they request our votes again?”

She asked me in return.

It’s my turn to be astounded. My grandma used to say an uneducated washerman is better than an educated one. How fearlessly Lakshmi expressed the things that education and our culture shut our mouths to spell out. Lakshmi appeared to me as the brave to question this system and the leaders.



Perplexed and confused

“ Amma, I am not at all well, feeling so scared” my son Ravi called at eight in the night. He is working as a software engineer in Mumbai. He shares an apartment on rent with one of his north Indian friends. Being a south Indian he preferred individual cooking.

When he is here when I mix the food and give him the plate, working with the laptop he used to have. Now he had an excellent job offer in Mumbai, so he went and joined. We feel about his cooking and food. I went on bothering him to get married so that he will have a companion and we can fulfil our responsibility.

But whenever we surface the matter, he just rebuts and says why so soon. I turned my anger on to my husband, “ Always bothered about office and home but not a thought of your son’s marriage “.

“ Why do you worry, let him settle in the job” my husband supported him.

“Now already he is in an excellent job. Girls nowadays are excelling at good jobs with high qualifications. My maternal uncle’s granddaughter did MBA and a job.

But she claims she will support herself, if someone accepts her ideas then only, she may think of the marriage. Otherwise, she prefers to stay alone. She never admits her parents to talk about her wedding.

It takes a long time for children to match ideas and then to think of their wedding. So, if we go on searching from now onwards, we may get one or the other. I went on pestering him incessantly.

" Have I denied? He says after procuring all the necessary luxuries like the car, and smart TV, he will marry. You are hastening this way. What he says is right. When he is sound financial, then only a girl may step forth to marry him. So, let us give him time. Don't be hasty" my husband said.

" Yes, let us see the matches, not that everything matches when we search. The horoscopes should match. If the horoscope matches the girl may not be beautiful. If the girl appears beautiful the horoscope may not match. How so many parents are troubled this way what do you know? Except going to office and diving into files. If we start now by the time, we can get one the auspicious moment arrives." Without leaving my hold I tried to convince them both.

They both stand on one word, so what can I do but for leaving the matter to God?

Ravi is in bubbling age. He spends all his earnings on movies, roaming about and on friends. Every weekend commuting on flights to Hyderabad, raking the shopping malls, buying all useful and useless things (Branded only), and emptying my pockets became a habit. In those two days, " Amma nobody on earth can do Alu fry like you" flattering me, gets all his favourite dishes like mango dal, Masala eggplant curry, and so on.

When he is ready to go back, " I have all my favorite food cooked by you. Are you satisfied? Let me spend my time thinking about it till I come back here. Don't worry about me. " he pleases me.

I know his luxurious lifestyle. So, if married I hope he can settle well and save the money. He says home and car but without saving if he spends this when can he settle? But he just blows away the matter of marriage saying something.

Why do the youth nowadays fear marriage? It is a huge responsibility, and they may miss their freedom.

" Amma, why don't you speak?" listening to it I am alarmed.

Ravi always appears jostling and bubbling. No health problems at all. But now calls he is not at all well.

" What Ravi , what happened, what is the problem?" I asked eagerly.

" Amma, blood motions. Five to six times since the morning. Not to scare you I have not informed it and thought they may subside. But not. Now , at night , I am scared and calling you."

We too, me and my husband are alarmed by the matter.

" Take your roommate and see a doctor" I aid.

" No Amma, he went on leave for four days to visit his native place. I am all alone."

" ok, call your office colleagues and visit a doctor"

" Today being a Saturday, they all might have gone out with families. At this time, I can't bother them with my problem" he hesitated to call them.

We all started to think about the problem.

" Amma, call or family Doctor Murthy and ask him to prescribe some medicine. Let see something tomorrow morning, if needed" he said.

" Why did Ravi, the brave and strong, worry so much? " I am disturbed " Ok let me find out. Don't be worried." I called the family doctor and conveyed to him the matter.

"Don't worry, ask your son to go for blood, urine, and stools examination and send the report immediately. According to that I will prescribe the medicine. They give the report immediately if asked. Ask him not to worry. Nowadays we have medicines for all troubles. No need to worry" he gave us confidence.

We conveyed everything to Ravi.

" how can he say so, without a doctor's prescription, how can I go for the blood test and all moreover, I don't know here where the diagnostic centres are, I don't know if they do the tests at night. Or not? " worried and irritated he asked me.

Within one year of his stay in Mumbai he visited every nook and corner but now says innocently about his ignorance of things around him, I felt bad about his fear and without a thought of what to do, " then take a flight and come here immediately. Within an hour you will be here. We have diagnostic centres everywhere around; from the airport, we can go directly and with reports Dr Murthy " still disturbed I sand him worriedly.

My husband listening to our conversation silently interfered,

" what is this? Watching you for a while. A small matter, he says something, and you are bewildered and confusing him. He is grown up. When he went out working, he should be brave. But for every petite thing calling you as an infant and your advice to come back flying. Too good. Instead of giving him moral strength still more troubling him"

" Have you asked him what did he eat in the morning? Might have had all useless stuff on streets " he displayed his irritation at our conversation not at all consulting him.

: I never had anything outside" Ravi said angrily listening to his father on phone.

" Ok what did you eat in the morning, anything that develops heat?" I inquired.

His father's accusation and the worry of the trouble made him forgetful of what he had.

I am terribly angry with my husband, " unless one had suffering can't understand the trouble. When he called so worriedly, your accusations, are you worried about his flight charges, he will not ask you. He can bear his expenses, why do you bother? He is all alone, that too at nighttime when he is in the grip of fear your words pain him more." I expressed all my agony.

" He can't remember what he ate, first of find it out and gather the matter. Then you can bounce on me. Unable to ask him or to tell him anything pouring all your anger on me. " my husband targeted his words towards me when he had a chance.

" You both don't fight, now I remembered. I love beetroot. So, as it is a holiday, I made onion and beetroot curry. It came up very tasty. As I was very hungry, I had my food with it only. Nothing else?" he said.

Then a flash came into my mind.

" Oh, you had beetroot, which is the thing. So, the motion turned red. No blood motions at all. Drink a lot of water. By tomorrow everything comes to normal. No need to fear" I assured him.

" is it? Beetroot causes this. Is it true, I was so scared Amma, now what a relief I had? What are all thought I had within no time, from cancer to all other diseases. Where to go whom to visit , either to fly there or to call here, I became crazy for a while. What a heap of thoughts and O God, what is that tension" he is talking excited and delighted. Our fear alighted like cotton wisps.

My husband sent me a look of victory, feeling his interference only solved the problem.

Beetroot! What problem did you create? Played with all of us for a while.

Laughed and sighed before I went to sleep.

Decision making

"Jaya where did you join Amma?" early morning my brother Vikram called. The question rushed through anger and impatience in his voice.

When I am sipping and enjoying my coffee and running through the newspaper his phone call created hesitation in me.

"What? Yesterday you dropped at aunties home when she wanted to spend a few days there. Why did you ask me?"

"Don't play smart. When I called aunty, she said you had taken her and joined her in some Ashram. Where did you join her, is everything your wish only? No need to ask me?" his voice is sharp and loud.

Yes, mom said to him that she wants to spend a few days with aunty. I joined her in the Ashram. I have a habit of visiting old age homes, greeting the elders and offering them fruits and sweets. During festive days, a day before planning a special meal and sharing it with them with their pains and pleasures there a day earlier was my habit. I encourage them to share their Yester years pleasures and how they spent their festival days. When they recalled their pleasures and sweet memories inexpressible delight used to glow on their faces.

Some of them used to sing, some used to share philosophical things. Spending with them a day always provided me with great satisfaction.

Whatever celebration we have, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and so on, I always shared my happiness with the veterans spending my D-days with them, I made this habit with children also. During the working day, on Thursdays, I used to attend Bhajans at one of the old age homes, read the life history of the great philosopher and go back to the office again. My friends Geetha, Kameshwari and Rama also used to follow me.

" we had immense satisfaction and pleasure of service because of you, watching the pleasantness on the faces of the veterans, thank you" they expressed their happiness.

I shared all these with Amma. " Amma, not that everyone in the Ashram joined there because their children are not bothered about them. Some voluntarily opted for it." I used to say.

" Ninety-year-old Subbamma resides there. Once I inquired her, " why did you struggle here maa, don't you have anyone?"

She laughed wide opening her toothless mouth and said, " everyone asks the same. But I came voluntarily. My son and daughter-in-law go to jobs, and my grandkids to school. I must stay all alone at home throughout the day. They keep everything cooked and set on the dining table. But sometimes I don't have the patience and strength to come out to the dining table, to serve the food and eat. The mind craves some company. Sometimes feel depressed thinking about how long I have had to live like this, so I used to lie down on the bed. But that made my son and daughter-in-law feel as if they may not be looking after me properly. Without going to work, can't afford nowadays the expenses of kids. So, what can we say?

Not only this one or the other salespeople or to do some repairs ring the calling bell. They may intrude and rob the home. I can't reach the bolts also. Whether I closed the door properly or not is always a doubt.

Such day-to-day troubles are many. Though these are insignificant matters, as per my age to open or close the door I have my fears. I can't bear children worrying about me.

So, I convinced them and joined here. Then I felt relieved that I am not a burden to anyone. No need to wait for anything. Here is everything they serve me in my room. I can have whatever I like.

As age progresses, we may feel to have food as our wish. If the breakfast is tasty, we may feel to have more. But at home, they may not say but think why do the age-old have such craves? And we are too hesitant to ask them.

Here the managers of old age homes know everything. So, they ask repeatedly and move as to their needs and whims. I lost all most all my teeth. Here they make rice exceptionally soft and juicy and serve it in a bowl. They remind me of the medicines. Once a week a doctor visit everyone. Children take us home on festive days and bring us back. All my relatives visit me here. Once a week my son and daughter-in-law bring fruits and sweets. Here no responsibility to me. I spend my time talking to others like me and listening to them.

Every week philosophical preaching, bhajans, those who can read go through the books of their choice, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and so on. Those who can't read listen to them on TV in the hall.

Evenings they put chairs under the trees. If we have the patience we sit there for a while in a cool breeze and recall the good old days.

Age-old people wish to spend such a life. Due to the busy lifestyle today, it may not be possible to spare time to care for

the aged at home. Elders always feel to share their experiences, troubles, pains, and pleasures with others. They can do that at old age homes with their contemporary friends. They can share everything without any hesitation. They have the assurance that no one reveals them to their people. The mind feels relieved, I am happy here.” Subbamma concluded.

I used to tell them to mom now and then.

“ Yes, if we have the adjusting nature, anywhere it looks great. If we come out of the attitude that only children must look after us, we can share the things with people like us. Times provision of food and medicine. If not feeling well immediately caring people, calling the doctor and all facilities” Amma expressed her opinion.

“ I too wanted to stay at the old age home, for a change. Your brother will never agree as he feels it shameful. Somehow, you only can plan for me to stay there for a while. I am so vexed of lonely stay at home entire day. I have no dearth of anything at home, AC room, TV, , books to read , but no one needs me here. Formal greeting, though I have everything, to reveal what I think and to tell my own experiences, to chit chat a while I need same age people.” She expressed her mind.

“ Let us tell this to Akka and her husband also. If Vikram says something, she can support me.” I said.

“ I don’t know if she agrees or not, but let us tell,” said Amma.

I told the matter to Akka and his brother-in-law.

My brother-in-law said, “ if your mom doesn’t like to stay at son’s home let her come and stay here, I have no objection. Joining in old age home is not only shameful to your brother alone , but it also implies all of us.” My sister never utters a word against him. She can’t understand Amma’s feel.

If my brother-in-law can’t reach home in time for lunch or breakfast, though hungry and feeling weak, never takes food

thinking she is sincere if he waits for him. Then how can she support Amma's wish?

I said their opinion to Amma.

Amma stayed silent for a few days, but her desire to stay alone somewhere for a while remained persistent.

I worked as a secretary at one of the old age homes for a while, so Amma asked me to join her there without giving information to Vikram or Akka, "if I can stay there, I will. Otherwise, I can come back. Your brother never agrees to send me feeling it is shameful"

I conveyed mom's wish to the chair of the old age home.

"your mother is from a rich family. Whether she can adjust here or not? Let me arrange my guest room temporarily. If she can, we will arrange a room for her soon." He said.

I passed on this message to Amma. So, we both thought about it, and she asked him to drop her at her sister's home to stay there for a few days. He dropped her at auntie's home. We have not said the matter to her. That evening itself, I dropped her at the old age home as arranged before and introduced her to all.

The next day morning my brother called aunties home to talk to Amma, and then she said him that I took her the previous evening to join in some Ashram. He immediately called and pounced on me. Ordered me to bring her back immediately.

Unable to decide what to do, I called Amma,

Amma very happily replied, "So nice. Just now we had the breakfast. Very peaceful. "

Amma, being a woman, you can never take your own decision. Though you want, you can't spend your life happily as you wish.

" Amma, pack your things and get ready, I am coming to pick you up and drop at your son's home, will tell you the matter when I come there" with a heavy heart I started to old age home.

Open jail -A visit

The open jail in Charlapalli Hyderabad was constructed in an ultramodern way. Visitors from inside and outside the country visit and study the facilities in the jail. I read it in the newspaper and unexpectedly I came to the home department on transfer.

My friend Suguna by that time was in a high cadre in the home department as joint secretary. As soon as I joined there, I expressed my wish to visit the open jail at Charlapalli, to Rama.

“Ok, let us see the convenience, but we should inform the jail superintendent before our visit,” she said.

One day we both planned the visit and went there to fulfil my long-standing wish. We reached the premises of the jail by 10.30 in the morning. The premises appeared neat and clean. Some are chit-chatting on the well-maintained lawn, mowed regularly. Some are walking keeping their hands on each other’s shoulders. Two jail officials took us to the superintendent’s room. He welcomed us with a smile and offered coffee.

“See the people chit-chatting on the lawn, walking hand in hand, see the guy working on the computer in that corner, all are offenders and undergoing punishment in the jail. We

are surprised to see the man working as if he is a software Engineer is an offender, but he went on working as if it is usual.

" Sitting here, you said what is going on at the premises. How can you allow them roam so free and how can you observe them? "

we asked.

Here we can see everything in C C cameras. They can't escape anywhere. They have duties. Some water the plants. Sweepers and cooks all are criminals, undergoing punishment.

Let me send my PA with you, roam around the campus once."

We went out with the PA and asked him immediately, " the man working on the computer seems to belong to a good family. His dressing also appears smart as a computer engineer. How come he became a criminal, what crime did he commit?"

" A sad story. Ramarao came to Hyderabad from Vijayawada, to join a job and thought of sharing a room with two or three people before searching for a room. After two days suddenly the police did a raid, arrested, and brought them here. He never did any crime but one of the roommates had a connection with Naxalites it seems. So, everyone in the room is arrested. He is very innocent. Just for sharing the room for two days, he lost the job, though the parents tried to convince them saying he is not of that type, they denied releasing him till the hearing. The case is in court, it takes a long time before it comes to a hearing in court. When he can come out as an immaculate man is not known. He is a software employee, so sir has engaged him in computerizing the office work. He is too good, but his future turned to darkness.

Listening to his story wretched the mind. As one of the family members, he came out to do his job but becomes a victim of someone else's crime. How many people suffer like this, feeling sympathetic we walked with him.

Sitting on the floor In a big hall, many are enjoying playing board games like Ashta-Chemma, or the tiger and the goat, Drawing with some chalk. In another hall, a bunch of people are watching the TV. We felt strange and asked – “ Are they the defenders?”

“ Yes, they have the kitchen duty. We have a big kitchen to cook for the inmates of the jail. Some are allotted the work of cutting vegetables, cleaning rice and dals, so after completing their duty they come and enjoy like this. Playing games, watching TV, “ he took us to the kitchen.

We returned to the jail superintendent and congratulated him.

“ Not only this, but you should watch vegetable and fruit gardens too. Take rest for a while “ he described the details of the jail.

We visited the vegetable and fruit gardens. Some of the convicts are watering the plants, some are plucking fruits and vegetables, and some are packing them. The scene appeared pleasant. They offered us some fruits and vegetables. We paid for it. He took us to the entrance, where on the lawn a few young people are in chit-chatting. He asked us to address them and advise them.

All are young and no regret or fear appeared on their faces and sat hastily. Same I asked the PA.

“ All are roadside Romeos. Sit under the trees sideways and play gambling, buy

Gutka and other drugs stealing money and things. They fight among themselves and stab each other. We booked the cases and brought them here. They roam around here till they are sentenced. Nobody comes forward to give them security for the bail.” He narrated.

What a headache to the government. When parents are busy working for their livelihood, kids damage their lives.

When I asked them the reason for coming there one or two replied politely and some threw a careless look at us.

What can we do to the children who can never have education, culture, and proper family? How can we inject into their minds that they are the future citizens of the country, and they must get a good education to get nice jobs? Even if they are educated how can they get jobs? An unknown pain haunted me.

Somehow, I advised them in their language about the value of education, how it changes their lives, and examples of great people coming up from slum areas. This open jail seems to be a good place than their homes.

Some showed interest and some appeared carefree.

A visit to jail provided an unforgettable experience and a good opportunity to buy organic vegetables which tasted delicious.



Final Judgement

“ Mom, what did the doctor say?” as soon as the car stopped at the premises Ravi, my son opened the door and asked me, holding my hand.

“Let’s go inside first” my husband walked in.

New footwear at the doorstep indicated someone’s arrival.

“who might be that I am already tired” feeling hesitant I entered in.

My daughter-in-law’s parents are seated in the hall.

“ How are you sister-in-law? What did the doctor say? Has he prescribed medicines? What is the problem? Sirisha said you are not well, so we have come to see you once, we are waiting for you for a while” the daughter-in-law’s mother greeted us.

“ She entered in just now. Let her have some water and relax. Stop your series of questions.” Her husband Prabhakar Rao chided her.

I had a glass of water given by my daughter-in-law and said to them, “ I had Rheumatoid Arthritis, the doctor has prescribed medicines”

" you mean joint pains?? Janaki, daughter-in-law's mother questioned.

" Yes, joint pains, I can't stand for a long time while working. Folding the fingers is painful. I can't hold vessels and even a spoon. Morning when I wake up, I feel the stiffness. So, I visited the doctor"

The cartilage between the joints had worn out. He prescribed some medicines and advised physiotherapy." I revealed everything to avoid her questions.

" English medicines may not work for joint pains. Moreover, It is a life-long treatment. My neighbor woman had the same problem. She is using Ayurveda medicines. now, she is alright. She can do her work easily. Let me ask her the prescription, take them. English medicines cause gas problem and another medicine for it"

"Ayurveda is our Indian medicine. Nowadays everyone tends to use native medicines" She went on advising.

" when you say so much how can I deny, let me think " I said.

"Ok, take care. Let us take leave" they said to my husband, watching an old movie on Tv inside and started.

I went slowly to the threshold to see them off. My husband is so polite he greets the visitors once with a hello and goes inside. Timely meals, watching TV, evening walk with colony friends, night light food and sleep, this is his routine.

Being a woman, I can't stay that way, when my daughter-in-law cooks, at least I have to cut the vegetable or my son may feel something else, though I have pains, going to help, tiredness, why only women face such sensitive situations?"

Thinking about other feelings, unable to please or convince them, is perplexing.

My husband suddenly yelled, "Jaya come here, look at this ad in the TV. May be useful to you. See if that oil is smeared the pains will vanish it seems"

I watch that advertisement every day. But never cared about it. But, today, with the diagnosis of joint pains I watched it eagerly with the hope that it might be a remedy.

"without those prescribed medicines and all smear this oil. How can it stay without giving relief, we will see. Let us ask Ravi to order it online" instead of me, he came to a decision.

Moreover, in that ad, they showed as soon as the oil is smeared the one unable to walk earlier quickly ascends the staircase.

"Mom, what dad said is right. If you both Ok this, today I'll order itself."

In a short while Ramya, my daughter called from Vizag.

As she called the agony within me welled up.

With the phone, I went into my room and narrated to her what happened this morning. I can't understand what medicine I have to take- I said.

"Don't worry mom, it's true the English medicines cause gas trouble. Ayurveda medicines heat the body. Again, you have to drink buttermilk or so. I know the nature of your body. Without doing any harm, though they work slowly Homeopathy is the best.

My mother-in-law's sister had the same problem. She used all the medicines faced the side effects and now for the last six months using homoeopathy.

Yesterday, I heard my mother-in-law talking to someone that she is better now.

You and dad come here. You can see the same doctor and use the same medicines. Stay here with me till the treatment

gives a good result. Always you looked after us all, now give me a chance to look after you" when she asked with immense love and affection, I felt relieved and happy.

" let me talk to your dad," I said.

In the evening when he was ready to walk,

" Jaya Doctor advised you walking. Come with me let us walk in the park. All my friends everyday come with their wives. You are escaping with a pretext of work. Now the doctor said walking is necessary. Come on" my husband insisted.

As we entered the park, I felt a bit relieved. Greeting each other and sharing pleasures and pains we walked slowly. After two rounds I felt tired, and we sat on a bench. After one more round my neighbour Pankajam joined me.

In usual chit chat the topic of my joint pains came up. " everyone passes on their own advice. My daughter asks us to come and take Homeopathy medicine." I said.

" Is it? I too have joint pains and swellings. Mornings I had so much trouble folding fingers and joints. Morning yoga and meditation, and evening walking reduced them a lot.

Don't take any medicines. Always think positive. Meditation and Pranayama reduce all the pain. Listen to me" she said.

No need for any medicine statement has given me delight. But who will teach me Yoga, meditation, and Pranayama? I asked the same.

" your attention on the breath" Patriji teaches on TV. see so and so channel" she replied.

While returning I said the same to my husband.

" Yes, they too are good. Apply the oil and do them, they give quick relief." He said.

At home when I said this to Ravi he said,

“ Yes maa, the meditation “ Sri Sri’s “ Art of living” is especially useful. My friend’s mother is a member of that, and it seems many diseases are cured by it. That too we can consider”

The next day morning my husband’s cousin arrived. My joint pains topic came up with him. We said about treating it with meditation.

Immediately he said, “ Yes, we can cure many diseases with meditation. Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev’s “ Esha Meditation process “ is excellent. Let our thoughts go anywhere, “ I am not this mind nor this body” listening to his base voice, finally concludes with a flute play. Just if we sit 12 minutes in meditation, the body seems to be exceptionally light. We feel so pleasant” she recommended.

After listening to all their suggestions, I am perplexed about whom to follow and what to do and felt disappointed.

When I was pondering over it my daughter all came in asking, “ what are you thinking aunty?”

“ What to say Sirisha, Doctors say English medicines. Your mother says Ayurveda works well. Ramya suggests Homeopathy. Your uncle gets ready to order some oil.

Others suggest leaving all medicines meditation alone heals everything. Even if someone says attention to breathing, the process of meditation, my son stresses the art of living, your uncle’s cousin, “Esha meditation process.” Each one has advice, without leaving a chance for me to think about it. They are deciding.

Others may come and suggest Unani medicines too.

Unable to decide what to do I am thinking”

" Aunt you know very well about your body and what suits it rather than others. This may disturb you still more and increase the pains. You need a break first of all. If you are quiet and peaceful, it cures half the problem."

" not to anyone's home join in a nature cure hospital. There along with diet restrictions they reduce the weight too. So, the knee pain comes down. Amid the greenery you get pleasure and psychological relief. The nature is the best doctor. Forget everything and relax there a month. You will come back, healthy, resplendent, and relaxed. " indirectly she revealed the new method of treatment.

Oh, the matter is back home again. So many treatments for my single problem? Anyway, the final judgement is His (God) only. I pleaded with god to show me a way.



A sigh of relief

" my granddaughter's marriage is fixed Amma" servant house cleaner Lakshmi happily announced as soon as she entered in.

"Good, what is he?"

" He is a driver, no addictions at all" he had a field in his village. My younger sister is married.no responsibilities at all. A good match" she said at a stretch.

When she went on happily, I worried within, " How long will she abscond from work on the pretext of this marriage?"

If she attends the household chores by the time I cook and pack lunch for my children and husband and run to my office with my lunch box, I feel exhausted. How long will she declare leave? I am counting

within me. But outwardly I said, " good news Lakshmi, your granddaughter is lucky."

She is eager to say something in her happiness but guessing what she says with borrowed patience I said, "Ok let us talk later. Wash the vessels, I have to cook" I changed the topic. She entered the work with a kind of displeasure.

The next day, as soon as she came in started to narrate, " Amma immediately after this Aashaadha, they fix the time it seems. We have to give ten Tula gold, one lakh for the boy and other things, a scooter, a ring, cots, and kitchen needs"

" you have to give so much compared to us," I said.

" yes Amma, He is just a driver, so it comes to this. Otherwise, if he is in a job we have to give much more"

I felt relieved that it may take a month more.

Every day she carried one or the other news while coming to work'

" see the smartness of my daughter-in-law Amma, never bothered about us even on a single day but now asks me what I am going to give my granddaughter, what we have except, working for livelihood I said"

" you might have amassed some amount. Both are in old age. Why don't you give some gold to your granddaughter? Are we not going to care you, if needed? Have you educated your sons? Stopped them in tenth and engaged in working. What you did with the amount my husband earned with you people? His challenging work too was contributed to your earning. Count all that and give now, and she said many things. When my son was sick in his childhood , we spent a lot and saved him. We have three sons, not even a daughter-in-law calls us for a day"

When my husband worked as a guard, I did the household work and requested the owners managed some work for them and did their marriages. When my husband suffered from Dengue fever, we spent a lot on treatment. Not even a son offered a paisa, I managed to take a loan from you all" She went on.

My husband was so bored listening to her and said, " leisurely have this talk after sending me to the office. We will be late if you sit listening all this."

She controlled her talk but started to pay more attention to work. Dusting, cleaning the dining table and sofa set, rearranging the kids' rooms, folding the dried clothes arranging the utensils in the kitchen as if to please me.

Watching everything I felt she is pleasing me for a leave of a week or ten days. Anyway, I have to manage the work.

Normally I used to ask her about things around me as soon as she comes to work, but now I stopped being scared of her marriage stories. After a week when she was ready to leave to complete the work she called me,

" Adjust me twenty thousand rupees Amma. You can cut my salary every month, granddaughter's wedding so, I need some amount." I never expected this and did not know what to say. I thought she may ask about the leave. I felt a bit furious too. Now and then ask for a loan with one or the other pretext.

" your husband is a guard; you get a free accommodation with free current and water. Moreover, you have chits also. He can look after the wedding expenses. Why do you need this loan? You pay the chits with your salary; then how can you manage? Still, he asked you to bring the money. " I said loudly.

" He never asked me Amma, my ear drops, and anklets are mortgaged, to get them I asked you. Without even them how can I go for the marriage? In our caste, grandma should buy the silk saree for the marriage" she gave a strong reply though softly.

" You never give a chance to say your husband anything, But every month showing one or the other expenditure, you take half the salary in advance. Now you vow 10,000 and still, you need 20,000 more.

But see, we have our expenses, children, their education, medical expenses of our mother-in-law, and so on. What work you have at my home hardly, half an hour. I can do but due to

a busy schedule in the morning, I engaged you. Now and then frequently you take leave also. It's ok. You have your problems.
" I blurted out the anger I had in for a long time.

She went away without a word. I started to fear whether she comes or stops tomorrow.

I lost my peace of mind. My Parents-in-law are coming from the village for my mother-in-law's operation. If she stops, how can I manage? Have I done a mistake in a hurry? It bothered my mind.

But what did I say? We have our unavoidable expenses. Looking after the older parents too is our duty.

We are asking friends to help us out adjust some loans for our mother-in-law's operation,

Meanwhile, my husband called,

" Sudha my friend Prasad is ready to arrange some amount, now I am relieved"

" So nice, everything is God's grace" I turned towards the worship room to fold my hands.

" My friend is helping, and you give that credit to your God, ' he complained.

" I mean God helped through your friend; how can God appear for such unimportant things?

A friend in need is a friend indeed. Convey my thanks also to your friend"

Evening when I lit the lamp at the God suddenly, I felt a slap, " He has provided what I needed in time, but what about the servant maid who depends on me?"

She too has her own needs. She too asked me for some urgency. I should help her out. We have a big need and her sis small, a big and a small line.

She is a sincere worker. Now and they inquire about my well-being and share my pains and pleasures – as if she is a family member. When I was not well, she looked after the kids and managed everything. Though I recalled everything, how can I adjust the money? Ok, in whatever I loaned from it only I thought of adjusting some to her.

When she arrived at work, I asked her about the marriage and the time of it. Her face lit up like a firework.

“ they need the amount first. Without that if we fix the time, it will be troublesome. Soon we amass the amount and go for it ”

“ then , Ok, Lakshmi though we have heavy expenses I may adjust some if not the total amount you asked,” I said.

“ I know Amma, You always come to help me out in my need. You are so kind. ” she smiled.

My mind, coming out from the botheration since the morning, felt relieved and light.



Feeling coy

" Ammalu, how can it be if you are busy with your own family? Think of Praveen too. If we can search for a girl and perform his marriage, we both can move into the philosophical path." Hinting at my daughter in America I sent a WhatsApp message.

My children both did Engineering, did MS in Us and pursuing their jobs there. As soon as Vasantha joined a job we plagued her and did her marriage with Karthik who works there. She had two kids. We attended her when she had the kids and stayed there six months each time. Now they have a babysitter and doing their jobs.

What is that America, haven't we got jobs here? We should enjoy the grandkids through skype only. If they are sick, we feel bad here. If they come back... but they say, why don't you settle here with all the better facilities? But it's difficult to stay for many days. No one to talk to or share what we feel. Vasantha's mother-in-law feels the same.

I too by compulsion stay there when needed.

My daughter's call brought me back to this world.

" Mom, I saw your message Don't blame me. What can I do? You people send the matches from matrimonial and asks

me to convince him. But he says " I am not bothered about the beauty or any other thing. I should feel that I should marry her. She has to suit my mentality. What is keeping me in the matrimonial for sale? "

Even I tried through my husband also, but he stuck to his words. Never say that I am not worried about him"

Once it was too strenuous to find a match for a girl. But we can see good and bad and can probe ten places for the sake of a girl. Now for the match of a girl, it's not traditional to go around girls' homes.

So, we should select from the matches approaching us, so, the girl according to his tastes of him we have to see, and the horoscopes must match. With such prerequisites, I requested the matrimonial and gave my phone no to send the details. I and my husband sieved so many matches and selected two or three, and sent them to my daughter, among them again she filtered keeping his tastes in mind and then one or two she talked about them in a way to convince first and then showed the photographs. If I send it directly, he fights to ask me, have you kept me for sale? So, I kept my daughter as the mediator. But still, he attacks me. But with his sister, he says I'll talk to mom. But he calls me and says, " See mom, I told you many times. The girls you select are not suitable for my mentality. As soon as they marry, they demand me to take them to movies and fast food. With the love scenes in movies in their dreams, if they anticipate from me that life I can't.

I have an eagerness to achieve something in life. In India, mainly in remote villages, to the below-poverty line people, I would like to do something as my share of service. One who supports me in that and should have her individuality with some goal in life is the one for whom I have been waiting" he expounded to me in a long lecture.

If you talk with the girls whom we showed you, you come to know whether they have an aim in life or not. Without even a word of exchange to anyone, how can you underestimate them and disdain them? " I argued.

" Nowadays girls are highly qualified, working in multinational companies earning so much. They too have their bunch of conditions. They too select the boys whose ideas go with theirs. " unable to tolerate his looking down at the girls, favouring them, tried to convince him. " The number of girls is less than the number of boys. Still, if we go on counting everything after a few years you may not get a girl to marry. You will be bald" I threatened him.

" No worry. I can wait till I get the girl that matches my mentality. In America baldhead only gets matches early. Girls like the baldhead as a symbol of maturity. " he catapulted the weapon onto me.

Me and my husband used to have fights between us over his marriage. "exactly stubborn like you" I used to say to him. " You can't convince him and pounce on me " he used to retort.

Moreover, men had a weapon. Threatening, " I'll not bother about him. Let him marry or not. If he accepts just, I come and bless him, you both do whatever you feel" he used to pass the ultimatum.

For a few days, I observed silence feeling I might have a daughter-in-law or not in my fate. But in some functions or gatherings when women talk about suitable girls for my son and used to give the details of the girl with their phone number.

Again, the hope used to raise in me if I convince him..." Praneeth, we can't get everything, cent percent mutual matching of ideas may not be possible. One should adjust. Look at your dad and me" again I tried to convince him.

" I say this not to become like you. Your father at that time matched your horoscopes but you both always fight for one or the other thing every day. Are you people leading your life with adjustment? I don't want such life" he expressed his opinion very frankly.

" What type of life you expect?"

" we both should talk first. Understand each other, then if we both feel we can live together, we will marry. Otherwise, no. if I can get a girl with independent thinking I will marry if not I'll not. I will remain as a bachelor. Achieving my aspirations. But I can't live a life compromising every minute. " he said frankly.

I too felt angry, and my self-respect is wounded. When we are anxious to do his marriage, as he talked about us, I felt pained. Unaware of where to express me, again I carried everything to my husband. " You said an ultimate and remained unbothered, but people criticize me, saying we are enjoying his earnings and not bothered about his marriage. " he glanced at me as if staring me mad and went back to his work.

I am really mad, even without any cooperation from any corner, to do my duty as a mother, again I started my trials through my daughter.

Among the four-five matches I selected, She said he has obliged to talk to Vineela. A cool message she sent.

At an auspicious moment Praneeth called me and said, " I am talking to Vineela, are you happy? But don't conclude that I'll marry her. Just to escape your pressure"

A month passed, but no reply from him. Unable to stay quiet I called him.

" have you both talked? Came to an understanding? How many times you both would talk? Other people are forcing them" my anxiousness is not to miss the match.

" Mom, we have to stay lifelong together. How can we decide just in a month? But still as if bargaining vegetables, I don't like dealing with girls. Give me time, how can we ask me so soon" he took me to a class.

" familiarity breeds contempt. If you share everything now, what else you talk after the wedding? What newness you get?" I muttered within.

I have a conflict within me, is it better to talk about everything and marry taking care of all differences, or marry the parents settled one and adjust and understand each other moving forth is better?

Men and women think differently and had a lot of discrimination. To live together compromise and adjustment are but natural. Strengths and weaknesses must be honoured to live together.

One day my daughter called and said, " mom, Anna says Ok. He asked me to tell you. I said you tortured her so long if you say she will be happy. But he is feeling shy" She conveyed sweet news. Hitherto frank ideas and arguments where they went? Feeling Shy?

I laughed cordially, concluding my wait with good news.



The Trap

I had a profound desire, while I worked in my office, to have a siesta after lunch.

After retirement, still I assumed I am in the office and could not sleep. After a few days, I observed the entire apartment by midday used to turn pin drop silent. I inquired about it. All women are tired of cooking and sending kids to school and husbands to the office, then with household chores take a nap in the afternoons to boost their energy to work in the evenings.

Then I suddenly remembered my profound desire to nap after lunch. I started to implement it. As usual that day after lunch, I perched on the bed, when I was about to fall asleep, my cell phone buzzed. Unknown number. I am a writer and people used to me congratulate me if anything publishes.

" am I speaking to Rama Devi?" the voice of an aged man sounded affectionate.

" Yes, may I know your name?"

" I am Venkatadri. Director of the state library. Have you remembered you always used to give us your books to send to libraries? I always received them from you and my P A used to give the receipt. Have you remembered me?

Now I am retired. Have you published any new books? " he introduced himself and asked about my new books.

" I have couple of new books but could not have a book launching function due to Corona"

" is it? " then he inquired about my kids and my whereabouts of me.

My sleep vanished. But now when he came to personal things, I too asked him about his well-being.

Then he started, " Recently I fell ill and went to a private hospital, close to my home for a checkup. They suspected Corona, made me wait for half an hour, took the details about my pension and bank balance, though I don't have Corona, claimed that I am positive and admitted me there. My wife was not permitted to visit me. Fifteen days they tortured me with unnecessary medicines and looted all my bank balance, discharged, and sent me back.

Even after coming home, the side effects of the medicines itching, and allergy suffered a lot. I spent all my pension.

Finally, somebody admitted me to a nature cure hospital. Now I am speaking from there."

"what a pity, private hospitals on the pretext of cheating people and looting the money".

Recently, it came in the newspaper, that a lawyer, with a slight fever and the assurance of his LIC policy, went to a nearby hospital. They did the Corona test and said the result will be given the next day. On the second day, they informed them he is Corona positive and asked him to join the hospital. First, they demanded to deposit of two lakhs, and after three days he had a doubt and demanded the report because the result was not sent to his phone.

But they said they received the call. When he called his lawyer friends about the matter the reality came up. They sent

the phone number of an office worker to the lab and when demanded and went through the messages, a negative report was seen. They cheated even a lawyer but still charged for three days ICU and medicines they demanded three lakhs and after payment only they discharged him. What about illiterates and common people then?

" Yes, maa now my condition is the same. " he sighed.

"Ok take care " I was about to cut the call.

" Amma, I need a small favour from you," he said.

I am listening to him silently.

" Haven't to recognized me?"

" I don't know, its

along time I have forgotten. But how can you get my number?"

" Oh, what a doubt, we used to talk about your books. I have your phone number ;nobody has given it"

" Ok, tell me " I said.

" Here treatment is free, but we have to buy the medicines. Can you help me"

Recently I did a lot of serving others by helping financially or providing needy things to many and even friends. The budget I fixed for it has already been exhausted. But still, I thought of a small amount.

" How much you need?"

" Four thousand, can you adjust please?"

I said ok and sent the amount online, called him and informed the same.

" thank you so much, not in January but in February pension I will return your amount," he said.

" No need. For medicines its ok. Take care " I hang up the phone.

But still, something nagged me behind, who had given me my number to him? So many stories in newspapers and messages on phone about people cheating on the pretext of medicines and starving. Some are tracing phone payments and looting the amounts. Is he really in need?

Did he say government job and pension, is he in need of four thousand?

Meanwhile, my friend Suma called. It's not proper to reveal the charity we do, but doubt started to eat me up. So, I said everything to Suma.

She advised me, " Think before you help others. You are always kind, if the help goes to needy , its ok. But sometimes taking it as a pretext some want to get money".

" it's ok "

The next day afternoon I called him and asked him whether the amount is credited or not.

" Yes Amma, thank you so much"

His voice is shivering. To clarify my doubt I asked, " you are here, but what about your wife and Children?"

" my wife is in her sister's home in Hyderabad at present. I have two sons, employed well. One is in Hyderabad and the other is in Delhi. What to say about the present generation we both are living separately on my pension.

Only one thing about my children, you can understand,

" Why do you join in a private hospital and spent all the money now? You are old, is it necessary? We have to live as long as god wishes." With a hoarse voice suppressing grief he said heaving heavily.

I too felt sad. ‘Don’t worry. If you need help, please call me. You are heaving take rest and take care” I change the phone.

After ten days, I and Suma went to the library to give our new books. We met an old acquaintance there. We talked about, Corona, and the wretched condition of many people and I mentioned Venkatadri, his recent call and the amount I sent to him.

“ Oh God, you too, as far as I know you are the seventh one sending him the money. When one or two said this, I called him and asked, but he said, why do I ask, somebody anonymously using my name” he said.

Suma and I looked at each other. We are cheated. She warned me again not to get into anyone’s trap.

Night, just before falling asleep I remembered it again. How nicely he pretended and used me. What to do now? Another life lesson. How many more Corona will teach?



Disguise Torture

"Madam, your story in XYZ magazine is too good. A good message it has."

" Thank you. Your name"

" I am Bhagwanlu from Kadapa . I love fiction. I buy all the magazines in the market and read them. You have portrayed the feelings of a lonely woman so nicely in the story. What are you, madam? How many stories did you have in your credit? Have you published books? " went on firing questions and without my intervention, he narrated about himself and his family. I heard him for a long time patiently as he showed his interest in my writings. But there appeared no end to his blabber.

"Excuse me I have some urgent work" I hanged the phone.

I write fiction depicting the injustice to women adding irony. They are published in weeklies and monthlies. They provide the writer's phone number. So, the readers call to say their opinion on the writing. Many called me and appreciated the satire and humour in my narrations.

"we are so relieved by your stories when vexed by the TV serials." they complimented.

Newly launched magazine editors request me to send a story, a poem, or a write-up. I feel elated to accept their request. When I received Rs500 remuneration for my first story, I was so delighted as if I ascended the Himalayas. Then receiving remuneration became common. Nowadays no magazine pays any remuneration to writers.

Probably the magazines receive countless writings and they concluded, that just publishing the writing itself is a great favour to the writer. So, no need to pay any remuneration.

Reading habits also diminished to a great extent. publishing a magazine is not an easy task. So where is the question of payment to the writers?

A new magazine " She" requested me to send a story. In the first issue itself, they published it.

It's the story of a lonely woman, Malathi. children are grown up and married. Her husband suddenly expired. Though they force her to resign from the job and settle with them, neighbours advise her to do the same instead of living alone she prefers individuality. More than missing her life partner, the pain of pity is unbearable. How society pulls back the lonely woman, instead of stretching a helping hand depresses her. Society suppresses her with all unnecessary concern and sympathy which she never awaited for. Like a spring Malathi with surplus confidence raises up whenever she is pressed to the ground and proves herself in social service and life.

This is the story. Many called me to say their appreciation.

In fact, I have not seen the magazine that published my story. Leave the remuneration, can't they send a copy of the book? I sent the watchman to buy the magazine. But it was not available anywhere. My husband also, looking at my anxiousness went to the centre to buy the book. He completed all his work outside returned after an hour and complained he

unnecessarily wasted his time roaming around the shops for the magazine but said that it will be sent only to the subscribers but not for sale in the market.

Still, many called and congratulated me for penning a good story. Though the book is not available the response was good, and I felt happy. 'at lunch time when we were at the dining table the phone buzzed. Unwillingly I lifted the phone.

" I am lawyer Manohar. Your story is very good. The way a woman protects herself from the troubles of the society looks good. We dealt with many cases of women. The points in the story help us a lot. We will come and meet if you provide the address. We want your other writing about women."

My husband was staring at me impatiently.

" Sorry, I can't entertain anyone at home. " I said.

" I too do the same. Very busy. Can you send me the books? I'll give my address. This too is a social service"

To get rid of him I said I'll see, asked him to send the address and hanged the phone.

Another phone call after a while.

A student. Sitting in the library he read my story. He talked about his literary interest.

" Madam, if you don't feel otherwise, your voice is good. Do you sing?"

I stopped him there and cut the phone.

The strange thing is not a woman called about the women's story.

Another one asked about the picture of the story. In fact, I have not to scene the picture.

After two days the phone buzzed early in the morning at four. Sometimes children from the US call us at odd hours if something urgent comes up.

Without even watching the number I said, " at this hour what's the matter my son?"

" Madam, I am Bhagwan, remembered me? I called regarding your story. That time you were busy and said we will talk later. This time is better, and no one will have any work and disturbance. Mostly women wakeup early. Don't feel bad. Your story haunts me. So, talk about it..."

What is this? Calling at this time? What to say? I felt annoyed.

My husband was irritated and said, "who, at this hour?" turned to the other side to sleep.

I thought of abruptly disconnecting but he may call again.

"Don't disturb my sleep?" I said and switched off the phone.

How can I get sleep? What is this? Is it a favour or a punishment? Receiving calls and nonsense talk is a headache.

Morning at the breakfast table when the phone buzzed my husband looked at me annoyed.

From the editor of the magazine. " madam, the story had a good response. We will send the magazine. Sorry for the delay."

" It's Ok. But one request, never give my phone number. Let the response be in the form of letters to you. " I said.

Is this the love of literature or nagging?



Spectacles

“Tring, Tring” the calling bell sounded. I am not free to open the door. I entered the kitchen just concluding my pooja. To offer God I set a silver plate with all cooked food curd and ghee. After offering the food and camphor light changing into another sari is my habit.

I am eager to do the worship since the morning but when we start mind roams around without concentrating on God. By the time we complete chanting and all other rituals a robot feels relieved and enters the kitchen for food preparation.

Whatever we arrange, however we try, the mind never stays in grip. Devotion too, turned mechanical.

By the time I came out of my thoughts and washed my hands the doorbell buzzed again.

“courier” a voice sounded.

Adjusting the slithered saree pleats I opened the door. It's for my husband, he is not at home.

“ sign and write your phone number” he had given me the paper and pen.

It's the peak time of Corona. The paper and pen might be touched by many. Children from the US advise us to keep

newspapers and milk packets, outside for an hour, then to sprinkle the sanitiser before touching them. Then how can I touch this paper and pen? We kept a table outside for such things. To bring my pen I turned inside. Nobody is at home, suspecting him following me inside, turning and looking at him, I moved in. I brought the pen back, but I could not see properly the name of my husband on the paper. Again, I went in for the glasses.

" how long will you take, I show you, please sign here and write the phone number." He stretched the paper towards me.

" I'll not touch the paper in your hands. Keep it there, move aside and stand. Don't mind, the Corona days. I must be careful." I tried not to hurt him and came inside again for my glasses.

No, where it is seen. Every room, hall and kitchen searched and searched, retreated as defeated, and asked him where to sign. Without touching the paper, I signed with my pen and asked him to keep the packet on the table.

" from where it came?" with inquisitiveness to know.

" From America" he replied and hurried out with a fear of my questioning.

Ok, let him come and open it, I went inside to set the table. Then I remembered about the glasses.

I could not remember where I kept the glasses. The platform of the kitchen, the Dining table, on the bed, nowhere I could get them. Tired and exhausted I settled on the sofa.

As soon as my husband came, he brought in the packet when I tried to pour sanitiser, he denied saying he has lots of immunity don't be too superstitious and opened the packet. My son sent us N-95 masks, thinking we might feel lazy to go out and buy them.

" like mother , the son too. Can't we get masks here, has he to send them from America? " he showed his annoyance.

" N-95 masks send out the air we breathe out it seems, and they are good for health. So, he might have sent them. You look at everything negatively. Instead of feeling happy for his care, why do you criticize him?" supporting my son I said a bit loudly. He stared at me and went into the room.

" I forgot to say, my friend Subbarao's wife had written a story and published it in Eenadu Sunday magazine. He asked me to read it and tell my opinion. I don't know anything about the stories. You read it and tell me something" he came to the dining table."

"OK, I'll do that" then I remembered about my glasses,

" I have been searching for my glasses, but I could not find them," I said to him.

" You keep it wherever you like. No particular place for it. In bathroom, in fridge, and even in wardrobe too. I am tired of searching it for you. No discipline to keep it at a place" he started nagging me as if using the chance.

" it's my fault to ask you" I started to serve the food.

But what he said is true. Once I forgot the glasses in my wardrobe while taking a sari. At another time, while taking out vegetables from the fridge I did not notice the glasses slithering inside.

The real problem is they are just reading glasses. I need them while reading only. But as the doctor advised me to wear them always, I put them on. But while cooking I feel discomfort when the sight turns dim due to the vapours, I keep them aside in the kitchen. Sometimes I push them up on the head and could not find them anywhere and when I lifted my hand to the head, I find them.

Once my neighbour lady came to the home. Talking with her I kept the glasses on the sofa, and then she said, " you are more pretty without glasses"

" what to do? Doctor advised ,me to wear them. I can't escape"

We had a chit chat and when she left, I came in, but could not find my glasses.

" she complimented you, without glasses, you look smart. In the josh, you might have thrown them somewhere. Have I asked you at any time about my glasses, I keep them very carefully.

You have no care of money. You feel, what if I lost it, I could buy another one " my husband's satire.

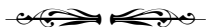
I am so annoyed I too retorted back, " you are earning crores and crores, so I bought glasses fixed with diamonds"

You keep the glasses in your pocket. Men have pockets on shirts and pants. So, you never keep it here and there. Without pockets you to do the same"

" Now for women sarees with pockets is the latest trend. I'll buy one for you" he said changing the ambience.

" but you never search my glasses. What a pity I have to hear so many things for it" I patted my forehead.

" why are you so serious? You have to pay something for my help. " he descended the glasses on my head laughing.



Life Certificate

“ Hi Manasa, did you submit your life certificate?”

“This time they are not accepting in pension office it seems.” Uma anxiously called me.

Uma and I worked together in joint secretariat. We are good friends. She is elder to me, retired prior to me. But we both have the same mentality and ideas, worked in the same section, so we used to share everything, even after retirement the bond of friendship still continued.

Uma had a fine lifestyle when her husband was alive. When he passed away so much change came over in her son and daughter-in-law. Keeping all her son's salary in hand, her daughter-in-law started to play, without keeping enough provisions at home and cooking only inadequate food. When they all had the food and left to offices and schools, when Uma was ready to eat a spoon full curry, and dal, leftover rice was seen. Though the rice turned hard, unable to swallow that adding water and mixing everything in it she used to swallow with water. She narrated everything to me and felt very bad.

I consoled her and advised her to reveal everything to her son in front of her daughter-in-law.

" I did that too. She just grumbled about school fee and expenses. My son went into his room without talking anything. In fact, he has taken amount from me asking for school fee and other expenses saying he will return soon. But his wife lies. What to say and to whom? Again, I gave a cheque asking him to bring groceries. But with one or the other pretext, avoiding it and leaving for me the same food." Uma narrated as the voice turned hoarse.

I felt very bad. What grand life she led once! She used to wear every day latest fashionable saree unused before. We both used to wear the exclusive colors meant for each day. Once in a week during lunch time at office we used to visit a restaurant to take sumptuous lunch and to share our dreams, the plans about weekends and movies. We are commended by our officers as we never kept any pending work. How pleasantly we spent the days.

We always felt happy that we can stay happily with the pension we get after retirement. Without depending on others.

But now, taking all her pension, her own people are not even giving her good food.

" sons beat their mothers and loot the money for their addictions, and my son in a polite way takes my money. That is the culture of huts and this, the culture of buildings, no difference at all what to do" She said.

In such circumstances, the rules of government about the routine work of submitting life certificate every year in the month of November, left all the pensioners in confusion. Every year personally we used to submit it in the pension office but now the government passed an order to submit it through Jeevanpraman app and no need to visit the office.

Old age itself brings tension for everything. Though two months' time is given everyone wants to submit it immediately.

She asked her son but however he tried, he could not download the app. She called me and said the same.

"Don't worry if we can't govt will show a way definitely. For people like us let us wait and see" I convinced her.

She said OK.

We talk everyday regularly. Next day she told me our informed me that when we approach mee Seva with Adhar card they are taking fingerprints and submitting the life certificate.

My fingerprints never come properly. The lines are worn out. Recently I tried for a telephone connection and unable to give my fingerprints, took it on my granddaughter's name.

" Ok tomorrow I'll find it out" I said.

Next day , I visited a nearby mee seva center with adharcard and there she tried her level best to take my fingerprints but could not. She asked me to wait and moved on to the other one in line. The same problem continued with others also. Finally,she called me, applied some sanitizer to my palms and succeeded in getting fingerprints.

I called Uma and said her the matter.

" Oh god, I too never get the fingerprints properly. Scanning iris also may not be helpful as I underwent cataract operation for both my eyes." She expressed her fear. Moreover, the fear of Corona. If I didn't get the pension ." she expressed her fear.

Next day, it is announced in newspapers that life certificate can be submitted to postman also. They come home and take the fingerprints. I said her the same.

But that too was not helpful in her case.

I received a letter in registered post. The post woman Lakshmi had given it to me.

I asked her about life certificate.

" Yes mam, apart from our own work, its an extra duty. It takes time to take fingerprints and all."

"Do you get extra payment for it?"

"fifteen rupees for a person"

" but they charged my friend Rs60"

" It goes to the postal department. We get only Rs 15"

What a hell to prove our selves alive.

They said within four days the T app may be downloaded easily.

The same I conveyed to Uma.

"somehow, I pleaded my granddaughter and sent my details through that app. We received a message successfully submitted. But could not get the receipt." She said. 'finally, we can submit the life certificate successfully.

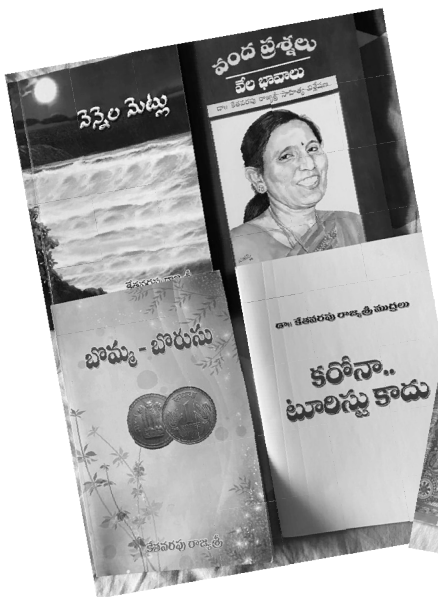
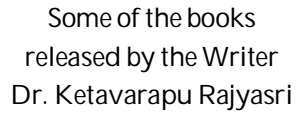
How many aged might be suffering like this?

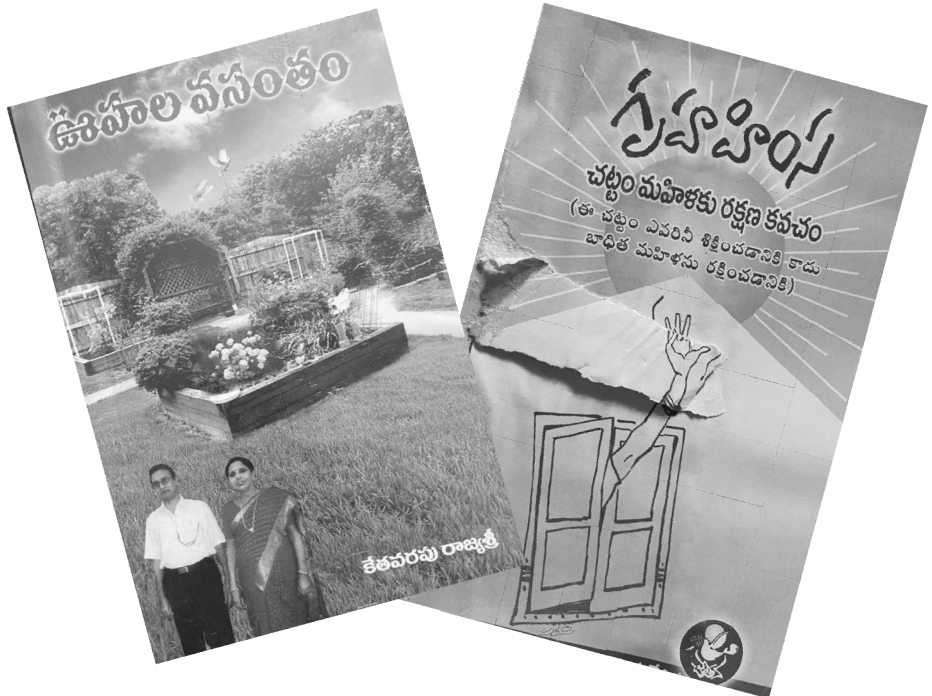
Within a week the government passed a GO that we can submit it in pension offices.

Giving all pensioners a month's mental torture the govt retreated .

To give a life certificate what journey of hell we faced.









A Telugu Version of "Morning Coffee" story book released by the Chief Guest Dr. K.V. Ramanachary, IAS (Rtd.), Advisor to Telangana Govt. on December 16th 2021 at Sri Thyagaraya Gana Sabha.



Receiving Doctorate from United Theological Research University