

# CHAPTER V

# शशिरेखा

विद्वन्मणिः  
डॉ. केशवचन्द्र दाशः

लोक भाषा प्रचार समितिः, पुरी

## CHAPTER V

### TRANSLATION

The present chapter includes the English translation of two of the popular novels of Keshab Chandra Dash, namely *Śaśirekhā* and *Tilottamā*.

#### V.I Śaśirekhā (Moon Beam)

The Universe comprises of many different beliefs, religions and cultures. Every individual object has its unique meaning. Each soul is also characterized by its uniqueness. Many sub parts are put together to make one complete part. Nevertheless, objects are still manifested widely. In real sense, life lives between theism and atheism. During this time, human being's narcissism is conceived to be a mound of fire. As time passes, this narcissism increases profoundly. But this is not life. The struggle of life intervenes and takes the last breath. All the vanity which human existence was longing for throughout a life span meets its ultimate end in a moment. Life is thus rendered meaningless.

Abhrapad is very worried. Lipsā had already rejected his proposal for marriage. Hence, he is fidgety. He is not able to concentrate on anything. He cannot travel beyond his limits. He is also unable to keep a limit on his own narcissism. Therefore, he gets indifferent, annoyed and hates Lipsā. He is also prepared to argue with her. Abhrapad had turned vindictive. But he is unable to express it. His restlessness is evident in his day-to-day activities. His mind becomes unsteady. His thought process reminds him –“I am an esteemed person.” I belong to a dignified family. I am the head of the family and also an idol in the society. The struggle of life intervenes shows up to preserve the vanity – it is neither for life nor for sustaining it. The fight starts here and maintains itself. The

more you crave for narcissism, the more it grows within you and it ice balls into an ego clash, whereby one loses strength of mind. The sense of balancing, thinking or discrimination between what is right and what is wrong diminishes. The self reflections get distorted in the warped mirror.

Adversity finds the environment suitable and it starts to show its colours.

Lipsā is seen in the reddish sunset to be gazing at the movement of birds. At the distant horizon, multi-coloured clouds could be seen. The sun is setting behind the trees. The brightness of sun paves its way through the lap of sunset.

Lipsā took a deep breath. Habitually, adjusting her sari, she viewed her reflection in the mirror. She was very happy with her beautiful self. Signs of vanity are also deep rooted in her conscience. She was praising herself for her good looks. With all her thoughts of parental affluence, she came out for a stroll.

Father is old. Mother is also growing old. Brothers have all established themselves as successful businessmen in different cities. Lipsā is the youngest of the siblings and serves as a helping hand to her aged parents. Here there are no signs of false pride.

The servant approached –

Sir...! Please order me....!

Abhrapad looked behind and saw the old servant standing still. The calmness of his face had stopped his questions. However, his eyes were reflecting the thoughts and inquisitiveness for divinity. His hands were waiting to serve his master. Abhrapad told calmly,

- Fatherly...!
- Yes sir.
- What is the news now?

- News is what you please, sir.
- Lipsā had rejected the proposal.
- Okay. Anything more?
- Where?
- What is your choice? Your preference?
- Simple, poor and a kind lady....
- Oh, you are such rich and aristocratic.
- What is the need of aristocracy.....? Even if a good natured poor girl is apt for me.
- Sir, you please take your time and then make your decision.
- I have already decided. Let us start searching.....
- It is my duty.
- Then be fast with your search.....We will meet when you succeed.

Dinamani is a servant who has served his entire life. He is the contemporary of his current master's father, who had passed away. Keeping his last words, Dinamani had been serving Abhrapad, since his father's death. Till now, Dinamani had been executing his duties as a servant. He reserves the right on his master although he is a servant since he is the oldest and has been serving since long. So Abhrapad gives more weightage to his advice.

Dinamani keeps silent on Abhrapad's preference. He is used to his little master's choices and behaviours. He always remains apprehensive with his master's work; he is always suspicious of his words. Dinamani also knows of Abhrapad's anger. He is always cautious of his positive and negative aspects.

Dinamani has always been on the side of his little master since his childhood days. He always makes his best effort to inform Abhrapad of what is good and what is bad. But there is no effect of all this on Abhrapad's egoism. Dinamani is worried. At times, Dinamani has to get subdued by his master's wishes and

decisions. He becomes worried with the fact that inspite of possessing vast acres of land and exorbitant amount of wealth, Abhrapad cannot give away his miserly attitude and longing for more and more. His greediness is never limited to a point. He always dreams of accumulation of more and more wealth....wealth..... Winter has arrived.

The shadow of life encourages his feelings. The touch of wind feels like a flat blade of ice. The mumbling sound of water in the streams enhances his sadness. The environment is dusty. In the forest of his heart, signifying the darkness of his life, he could feel snowfall. In reality, his life is passing on in complete dreadfulness.

A seemingly strict idol is sitting on a swing. This is old Medinī. She has passed her life in hard labour. Her beliefs have been dilapidated. She is waiting for a sensation to happen in life. The winged chariot of life has run slow in her life. But her conscience reflects something. Her mind is in the wait for a silent encouragement. Only for life...for existence of life....She has no strength to work hard...for the services of life...

Collecting water from the pond, Śrāvaṇī crosses the household threshold. Medinī looked for sometime and again got lost in her deep thoughts. Śrāvaṇī is the result of her hard labour...her single girl. She has lost her father during her childhood. She has been raised up with the fruits of her mother, Medinī's hard earned labour. Labour is her only friend in life. Śrāvaṇī has now stepped into her youth. She has now been more cautious in life. The old lady's earning is spent for her only daughter.

Śrāvaṇī fully understands her mother's mind. She judges her position. She minutely observes the heritage of their poverty. But there is no way. What does she have except for self vanity? Everything was sold off whatever was saved. What is

left? Whatever is left cannot be sold. Holding her fortune with fear, Śrāvāṇī was passing her nights.

Everyday invitations were there. Many indications were present for welcoming gestures. They created surprises in Śrāvāṇī's mind and body. However, she could not make anybody her own due to reservations of social constraints. Roads of blame get elongated by merely touching her. The ill-fate of losing her clothes is continuously in search for her.

Many things revolve in her mind.

What is required in this materialistic world....? Medinī becomes analytical .....becomes thoughtful. But her motherly heart breaks down with her love. It is difficult to find solution for egocentric people. But still her motherly love does not meet its end. She imagines her daughter to have bracelets, necklace – but the vermillion is missing. Had that also been seen on her daughter's forehead, Medinī would have been very satisfied and happy.

The corn fields are seen to be convincingly green and beautiful. The waters of the pond give reflections to the white clouds and present an apathetic look. The early morning moon was shining from a distant horizon. The name of the village is 'Madhugram'.... It is like a small city. Everybody is familiar with each other and nothing is hidden.

The environment of the village is very beautiful. It is rich with natural resources. It is well known for its beauty. But the scenario has changed with time. The village looks like a crowded place today.

Śrīmukh has come.

The villagers are surprised by Śrīmukh's return to the village. When his father died, he did not return. Even upon her mother's death, he did not return.

Why has he come now? To have a look at the last remains of his dilapidated house?

People have different versions and logic regarding his return. Some people tell that he had been captured during his childhood. Some are telling that he had left his home due to his father's anger. Some others say that no-no...his mother had dedicated him to a nun. Again, some others say that his mother has actually a step-mother. So he could not tolerate her and left the house. But what has happened today?

Śrīmukh is happy and serious too. He is surrounded by many villagers who are throwing him various sorts of questions. Diligently and tactfully, he was answering to all their queries in order to satisfy them. In his speech, vanity was reflected. In his moral precept, the vanity of knowledge was reflected – I am learned...I am knowledgeable...I am considerate and above all I am near to God...Saying this, Śrīmukh turned serious. Śrāvaṇī was standing silently in the crowd.

There was a sign of smile on her lips. Śrīmukh is her childhood friend. After a long time, they will meet each other. Śrāvaṇī had been waiting for this visit. She is standing beside a hut like a statue. She maintained her brightness amidst her poverty. Her childish instincts could not be hidden her youthfulness.

The crowd gradually lessened. Śrīmukh came to Śrāvaṇī. Śrāvaṇī was happy. So was Śrīmukh. He whispered in a low voice,

- How are you?

Śrāvaṇī gently smiled and replied,

- I am fine.

- How is your mother?

- She is okay.
- What about others?

Śrāvaṇī nodded her head symbolizing everything is fine. She asked emotionally,

- For how long will you stay here?

Śrīmukh smiled innocently and replied,

- Cannot say, but I am still here.
- Then, do come to my home.
- Sure, I will come.

Śrīmukh, turned towards a different direction and started moving. Śrāvaṇī observed her childhood friend to become serious. He is not a saint, nor a monk. He is like an ordinary foreigner. He is familiar but still unfamiliar. Being not attached, he is still attached. Being ignored, he is still not alone.

Śrīmukh went to his home. The home was in a much wrecked state...remains of an aristocracy...summary of the end...symbol of the passage of time. Different kinds of plants had grown in the remains of the house. The inner portion of the house was filled with bird stools. It was the hideout of snakes. The corners were covered with cobwebs. The hills created by white ants had the bones of reptiles. All roads leading to the house were lost under the cover of yellow leaves.

Śrīmukh greeted with folded hands.

Suddenly his ears were filled with the echoing words of her mother. Her picture reflected in his mind. Her affection filled tears came into his mind. Somebody sounded a stick like that in his father's hand down his memory lane, symbolizing the aristocracy. His father breathed his last, remembering the

aristocratic tradition of his family. Whatever is visible in front of his eye is his hard earned property.

Śrīmukh was in a state of airlessness. Suddenly, he felt somebody's hand from behind on his shoulders. He looked back. It was Raghupati, a fatherly acquaintance known since his childhood – the father of Lipsā. Śrīmukh is speechless. He greeted him with folded hands after rubbing off his surprised look. Raghupati hugged him.

One more thing came into Śrīmukh's mind like a drop of ink on a piece of paper. Many things came across his mind. Here, there is a sense of consolation featuring a vision.

Discussing good and bad issues, made the path shorter to Raghupati's house. Śrīmukh reached at Raghupati's home. Suddenly, everyone was astonished at Śrīmukh's entry into the house. Śrīmukh was also surprised. In front of his vanity, the house was filled with sinners and was near to hell. The guest room door was opened by Raghupati. He also directed him on the location of the prayer hall. He went away assuring him of his return.

Śrīmukh is sitting. He is serious and worried. The colours of pre-acting are there in his preparation – affection and simplicity are evident in his eyes. Smile is there on his lips. This diction of happiness was devoid of any tensions and apprehensions. The picture of Lipsā was playing in his mind. Her imaginary picture is in rhythm with his heart beat. Since childhood, Lipsā's picture had covered his mind. He is hopeful to have a glimpse of the pretty lass. And he hopes that she would be astonished too on her arrival.

He felt the sound of somebody's silent arrival. Śrīmukh is excited. The innocence of vanity expressed itself. He remained tensed and kept sitting. One lady with veil came into the scene and placed a gift and glass of water in front of him.

Śrīmukh turns restless on having a glimpse of the lean and weak hands. The veiled woman went at a distance and saw him.

- Son, you are Śrīmukh!

Śrīmukh turns speechless but quickly regains his stature and responds,

- Yes...Yes...

- Oh,....So many changes How would I be able to recognize you? Śrāvaṇī was telling about you. Śrāvaṇī is my daughter.....do you know it?

- I know....

- I was anxious to meet you. Finally, I succeeded. Are you able to recognize me?

- I have recognized you.

- How did you know? Your father and mother have both passed away.

Who will ask about me? I am working here latching onto my fate. Śrāvaṇī is alone at home. I am not sure on when her fate will come.

Raghupati reached with all his family members. Medinī seemed to be interrupted and became unhappy. Standing there, Śrīmukh greeted everybody with folded hands. Raghupati introduced Śrīmukh to everybody. Lipsā's eyes were inquisitive. Lipsā's mother Bhavāni seemed indifferent. However, Raghupati is affectionate. Bhavāni avoided any conversation and went away from the room sifting some work. She also took along Lipsā with her. Medinī followed them. Changing the topic; Raghupati started conversation with Śrīmukh. He ordered him to stay at his guest room. He got a positive response.

The moon beam seemed to be happy in its natural habitat.

Covering her body with dirty clothes in the winter's dew and placing the pitcher on her waist, Śrāvaṇī was returning back. She met Śrīmukh on her way

back. Excited on seeing him, she paused. Śrīmukh was also happy to see her. Śrāvāṇī asked with egotism,

- You have become great. Why do you need to take our news?

Śrīmukh told innocently,

- No Śrāvāṇī. Nothing of that sort. I have met your mother. Surely, I will visit your place.
- Poor's place? Who has asked?
- No....no....it's not like that. All are equal and normal to me. Definitely, I will go to your place. My invitation remains. I accept it.

Śrāvāṇī smiled gently and went away expressing her feelings. Śrīmukh again turned serious. On his way, servant Dinamaṇi came. He had heard of Śrīmukh's arrival. He was astonished and happy to see her. He paid respect to him with folded hands from a distance.

- Greetings, young master.
- Fatherly, how do you know me?
- Why can't I recognize? Has my memory lost with the passage of time?
- Where are you now?
- Now, I am with Abhrapad. But from childhood, you are....it's okay. So, what next?
- I am moving for sometime. As long as it is possible...
- Don't do that. You go for family life. Is there any shortage of girl for you?
- So, you may search for one...

With a joking smile, Śrīmukh moved forward, while Dinamaṇi went in the opposite direction. At a distance, he happened to see Śrāvāṇī and thought that – 'Where will he go now? The man is now captured in the net.'

A mistaken time rendered a wise thought.

Raghupati is immersed in thoughts. How much is a daughter's father worried? How much is he apprehensive? How much is he aware of his daughter's nature and attitude? Really, how interested is he in owning someone else's son? But something is creating an obstruction. The hindrance is again caused by wealth only. Again the desire for wealth indicates vanity. Greed takes birth in vanity...hereditary...profession based...provincial...according to time.

The human soul is affected by narrowness. To come out with a solution, is difficult – hence the eye only sights greed. Work begins with envy. Failure of others is a language. Differentiation is the source of affluence. Reduction of aversion leads to complete acquaintance of knowledge. What is the result? Where is the origin? What is realization due to the downfall?

Regaining conscience, Raghupati becomes helpless.

Wishes are great. Beliefs are strong. Wishes are encouraging. He called his wife and gently said

- If Śrīmukh is for Lipsā...

At half the sentence, Bhavāni shouted.

- Don't tell that. Will my daughter be a beggar?
- It's not like that.... He has come new to the village? Where will he go? He will stay here.
- Why will he stay here?
- Here, means he has his land here. In a few days time, he will be starting to work over here and get established. With him our daughter...
- It's ok....Let it stop here. What work will a man do, who has been roaming here and there. How to believe a nomadic person?

- Yes! Nobody disagrees with you. But think of our daughter. None of the marriage proposals are suited to her because of her nature. Do you think that she should be allowed to grow older?
- Why should she be older? Is she ugly? Don't we have wealth?
- That is not the issue. Only that person should be chosen who would be able to tolerate her nature. Or else, there will be continuous fighting.
- Can a lowly person be my daughter's husband then?
- How can that be? There is no place for lowly person here. Here is the question is of agreement on ability.
- How is it agreed?
- It is evident in behaviour.
- This lowly person can also be good in behaviour.
- No, they are flatterers. They act well while showing their behaviour.
- Nowadays, everybody is a flatterer.
- Don't tell like that. Why will everybody be like that? People, who are selfish, can act.
- Humans are selfish. How can this man be devoid of it?
- No...no...He has not come here on her own. I have invited him with respect.

Bhavāni is silent. Raghupati seemed convinced. But he is thoughtful. Anyhow, he has to marry off Lipsā. Or else, there is no peace. There will be no completeness. What is the purpose of all these tensions? Who can decide on fate? Parents are only the creator.

There is desire in each and every word. Every word takes the shelter of contradiction. Meanings are also waiting for desires. Emotions are the roots of mistakes. When the vision is clear, the ways for achieving the mission are also

clear. But the objectives are secretive. So it is an assembly of sorrow. Dinamani analyzes in this manner.

Although Dinamani is old, he is still a servant. He is the oldest but still he is a mere servant. Hence, he does not dare to express himself freely. He controls himself not to give any advice. He is disturbed. The worried master is in front of him. He asked,

- Why are you so depressed? Tell clearly.
- What is the lacuna....?

Thoughtful Abhrapad asked,

- What... has the search finished?
- Finished....
- Then who will be the bride for this home?
- You must have known Medinī.
- Who is she.....?
- She is poor....old....
- I know. But how is she connected?
- Her daughter is Śrāvaṇī.

Abhrapad laughed loudly.

- Fatherly, are you thinking of my marriage with a servant's mentality?

Dinamani replied fearfully,

- No....no.... Sir!
- In your eyes, is there nobody else, except that poor lady?
- Whoever comes rejects you.

Suddenly, Abhrapad becomes conscious. Pride reflects in him. He shouted in a revengeful manner.

- Something must be shown.

Dinamani tried to convince him and advised him to spend some time thinking over the issue.

- No...she may be a servant or poor. I have to marry.
- Think in a peaceful mind. You have a position in the society. The family also beholds its aristocracy and tradition. Think rightfully and then take the decision.
- What is the requirement of thinking over it? You may proceed and give them the proposal for this relationship.
- What?
- Don't be unnecessarily late.

Dinamani kept silent, bowed down in front of his master and went away slowly, showing the symbol of acceptance of the proposal.

Probably, he lacks desires.

Raghupati is satisfied and peaceful, because his wife is in agreement with him. Now, he is ready to convince his daughter. He went up to his daughter's room and gently called,

- Daughter...! Daughter....! Lipsā....!

The door opened. But she was hesitating to respond to her father's invitation. She is not interested to talk. Lipsā is worried. Restless Raghupati asked her,

- Why are you tensed? Why is this hesitation? Is my decision for the marriage not suitable for you? Lipsā replied with ego,

- No..... I don't like it.
- Then, what is your wish?
- Don't you want to get married?
- I don't want to get married.
- What for.....?
- I don't want my life to be controlled by a man. Raghupati smiled.
- Ah....after marriage, both of you will be masters. In line with the situation, sometimes the male is the master, while on other occasions, the female is the master.
- No.... I don't want to be driven by somebody else's order or direction.
- You are inexperienced. I know that you don't try to understand anything. Currently, you will not think of it, but later, you will be repenting for it the whole of your life. Listen, see. At a distance, everything seems to be valueless. When near, valuelessness also seem to be valuable.

Lipsā's pride is passionate. She does not want to hear her father's sermons. She told boldly,

- Why don't you allow your daughter to exercise her rights?
- Why will I accept the words of inexperience in the name of rights? As a result of inexperience, you are now short sighted. You are not matured with experience. Why don't you understand? If I tell something, will it be against your well-being....?

Lipsā is answerless.

Raghupati cools down and continues,

- Child...! Every time there is no necessity of cutting down the trees to clear one's path. Are the shades of trees rendered to be useless, with the

presence of umbrellas? Always times shall not remain favourable. Think a little...

Raghupati leaves the scene. From the other side, Bhavāni enters the room. She is a little concerned to see her daughter's sorrowful face. She asked restlessly,

- What happened? Did your father mention anything? I know....he is of that sort. Without knowing anything, he is busy scolding, Lipsā replied.
- No....no....it is not like that.
- Then why are you worried?
- But, father was asking about marriage...
- Oh....! Yes.....! I had forgotten all these things. How do you....
- But I have not said anything.
- Why not? If father has already decided, how can it be disobeyed? Lipsā asked wisely,
- Did your father forcibly have you married off? Didn't you disagree with him?
- At that time, it was different. Now times have changed.
- With the changing times, human mentality has also changed?
- Oh....? I cannot make you understand. I cannot make out. Sometimes you are favouring your father and sometimes me. Don't know, what you wish?

Lipsā smiled.

Feeling disgusted, Bhavāni goes away. Lipsā gets immersed in thought. Mother is the first teacher. From early times, her each and every situation is effected by her mother. Firstly, she is not finished with words. Every symbol of her signifies word. Her thought processes are already transferred. But father controls the entire family. Parents are already at their advanced ages, so she is not in

preference to go against their wishes. Father influences the decision making process in the family. At the old age of her father, Lipsā doesn't want to see him in sorrowful condition.

The source is spiritual.

The road crossing is visible at a distance. The spring festival is seen in the lights of the winter. It is the beginning of perspiration. The koel bird's voice is heard from the crow's nest breaking nature's silence.

Śrīmukh came.

He is serious about his marriage with Lipsā. Her pride is intolerable. Some people are eager for the donations. Somebody is eager for seizing. On one hand where there is request, on the other hand, there is self dignity. In between the two, a fertile ground of vanity exists. Ultimately, Śrīmukh accepted Raghupati's proposal unwillingly.

Śrīmukh greeted with folded hands. A deep breath created made turns like the mountainous river. The fizz of the waves could be seen. His eyes were having the vision of a young lady. With the drizzling waters, Śrāvaṇī turned into the smell of the idol made of soil.

Suddenly, Dinamaṇi came on the way. He is running restlessly. Śrīmukh called him. But Dinamaṇi could not hear him. Dinamaṇi vanished away soon. He could not be seen besides the trees.

Dinamaṇi's mind is now filled with the sole thought of well being of his master. He is strongly determined for his master's welfare. He went towards Medinī's house. Seeing from a distance, Medinī became happy. She asked eagerly,

- Brother! What brings you to a poor's house?

Dinamani answered with pleasure.

- It is my good fortune, if I am made a member of your family.

Medinī is surprised.

- Member.....?
- Yes...Yes...Poor lady. I am here to bring you good fortune.
- Why are you in a hesitation?
- It's not hesitation. Only your welfare.
- What is welfare to me? Think of my daughter's welfare.
- Yes...Yes...Not only welfare. She would be a girl with great fortune.
- You always come with good news.
- What is the matter? I have come for your good fortune. Tell if you are ready to accept it. What will be my remuneration?

Medinī is thoughtful. In life, whatever is achieved cannot be accepted always. In search of truth, she has not been able to give everything. Sometimes, the poor heart beats wipe out everything. Maintaining silence, she thought deeply.

Dinamani requested her.

- Come....with me.
- Where.....?
- To my master.
- There.....!!
- Why there? My master wants to marry your daughter.
- What is this? He is of upper class. We are....
- So what? He is pleased with your daughter. That is the reason he is interested in marrying her. Your daughter will be my master's wife. You will also stay there.

Medinī hesitates.

Dinamaṇi tries to convince her.

- Yes. The proposal should be accepted. Your daughter will remain happy with him. You will also live the last days of your life happily. Then what is the loss?
- Loss...? Loss.....? Loss.....?

She asked to herself.

Dinamaṇi joyfully said.

- Why are you thinking about it pessimistically? You are old now. What is left over there in life? Who does not want to lead this life with good food and proper sleep?

Still Medinī is hesitant. She is in fix to whether accept the proposal or turn it down. She is not strong enough to be out of the proposal any more. Looking at Śrāvaṇī from a distance, Dinamaṇi felt interested. She looked at Medinī and told,

- Your silence speaks that you have agreed for the marriage proposal. So get ready for the marriage, as soon as possible.

Medinī is speechless.

Śrāvaṇī entered the room, put down her water pot slowly from er waist and asked Dinamaṇi,

- Fatherly! What brings you here?

Dinamaṇi told simply,

- Your mother would brief you. I am busy now. I am going.

Medinī looks steadily. Dinamaṇi is out of sight. Śrāvaṇī continued her work for the evening. Medinī could not measure and validate Dinamaṇi's words. She prays to the evening lamp in a confused state. Then she slowly calls Śrāvaṇī. She came and sat down with her. Medinī told the summary of the conversation she had with Dinamaṇi in a fearful voice. It took Śrāvaṇī by surprise. She felt excited in her mind and body with an unexpected pleasure. She could neither speak anything about the fact nor think much about it. She moved around the corner of the room to the courtyard restlessly. Observing daughter's unsteadiness, Medinī went over to the kitchen.

The wind had a touch of spring.

Śrāvaṇī is pleased. Nothing could be seen from a distance. But it is not dark over there. She could not even see anything near. It is also not dark over here. Everything is looking dusky. Everything is brownish. Śrāvaṇī looked up in the sky. The beautiful moon is seen. Moon beam was seen everywhere.... It is serving as the ornament for both night and day. The light is embracing the earth like an uncared monument. In all acts, it is the only actor. In the drama of life, it is seen repeatedly as the peace flag.

In the moon lit night, Śrāvaṇī closed her eyes. Near her ears was the murmuring of old leaves of a Peepal tree. The wind is enjoying her hairs. A portion of her sari is playing with the Tulsi plants. The night is deepening. The sacrifice is big.

This sacrifice is commensurate. Commensuration is also a sacrifice. So the relation between husband and wife is also a sacrifice. Sacrifice of feelings is not of any significance. This is devotion. Here devotion is an imagination of knowledge. Knowledge is enjoyment. Getting knowledge of something out of nothing renders somebody proud and wealthy just believing that there is wealth. Thinking of

marriage, she becomes a bride. That is why her enjoyment starts with the knowledge of her marriage. Notwithstanding anything, she becomes desirous of womanhood through marriage.

The late night is silent. Śrāvaṇī is continuously turning her side on the bed. The waves of imagination have captured her sleep. Incidents of marriage have captured her imagination. The same scenes and flow of youthfulness are there. Her mind is filled with all such imagination. Thinking of the enjoyment has made her body slack. Śrāvaṇī tried to sleep.

The new sun is rising from the east.

Keeping to his nature, Abhrapad is passionate. He is full of strength. Will is his dictionary of action. In an unpleasant environment, Abhrapad is waiting.

Dinamaṇi submitted.

- The marriage date is firmed up.

Abhrapad looked aggressively.

- Then why are you waiting?

- What type of function is envisaged?

- Everything will be done from the palace.

- Then the bride....

- She will be present here. One of the rooms of the palace will be decorated for her.

Dinamaṇi departs.

Getting mercy out of no reason has made Medinī self content. But Śrāvaṇī is a servant of somebody who has not come. Śrīmukh waits for the situation. He is worried about the sudden decision of Abhrapad's marriage with Śrāvaṇī. But there

is no way. How can he offer shelter to somebody, when he himself is staying under somebody else's roof? All his emotions came for sometime and again vanished. So he went to Raghupati's house. At the village end, the mud hut can be seen as before. Śrīmukh went ahead. In front, the houses are full of poverty. The door is open. Some birds are singing in the courtyard. A dog is sleeping. Śrīmukh saw the surroundings. He kept silent.

In the lethargic plentiful, days passed.

Dinamaṇi is seen. His thoughts had the marriage altar. The foundation was cruel fate line. The invitation was pale. The intention could not produce festive lights. The thoughts were occupied by arrangements for marriage. All bad deeds traits could be covered with the marriage. For differential feelings, the rights were clear. Again the seed of vanity bloomed at the centre. The constellation of stars is seen.

Hearing a sound, Dinamaṇi regained consciousness. He looked around. Again he hears the sound.

- Fatherly.....!

Dinamaṇi was happy to see Śrāvaṇī from the back. Now Śrāvaṇī is the bride of the family...the wife of an aristocrat...the wife of his master...Dinamaṇi thought - like a tree. When the tree becomes large, people respect it. During sad times, one shares his sorrow with the tree. With the imagination of excellence and gravity, he feels happy.

Śrāvaṇī is new to the place. She is not accustomed to the aristocratic lifestyle. She is used to the traditional values.

- She is inexperienced with the rituals. Here, each step is fearful. But Dinamaṇi, himself consults her for all activities. Also provides advice.

Recently, Śrāvāṇī also expresses her displeasure. Dinamaṇi inquires politely.

- Child....! What is the work?
- Come to the upper floor. Mother wants to tell you something.
- I will come after sometime.

Medinī's was thirsty with fear. Śrāvāṇī could not adjust herself in the new environment. Also, Medinī could not stay there happily. A distance is being formed between mother and the daughter. Thinking of mutual welfare, both their minds are fearful.

Dinamaṇi comes.

Getting him close by, Medinī becomes impatient. She tells innocently.

- Brother! With your mercy, my daughter's fortune has changed. What more do I expect? Now I want to go back to my home.

Dinamaṇi replied

- Sister! Is it not your home now? From now on, live here only.
- No....brother! Where is the place for me in this palace? I am filled with fear over here. How can I be there without any work?
- Where is your work here? You are the landlady's mother. Your stature is different here. There are other servants to work. Your responsibility is with me.
- But my mind always remains in my small cottage.
- It is okay. You are not used to this life style. In a few days, you will adjust with it. Do not be worried.
- What shall I do?
- Is there any restriction in sitting with your daughter? She is your everything. Whatever she likes, do it.

But Medinī does not have any place here. She is neither able to measure her daughter's stature over there. She is trying her best to spare the days by any means.

Śrāvaṇī's face is filled with smile. Her heart is throbbing. She knows the nature of her husband. She thinks of her husband's passionate nature. But she never disobeys her husband's orders. She never argues with him, even for petty issues. Husband is like God...any passion and wish is like All Mighty. There is neither limit to his desire, nor obstacle to his inclination. Śrāvaṇī is worried about her mother's illness....

Abhrapad ridicules Lipsā's arrogance. Dinamaṇi informed.

- Sir! Today is the day of solution.

Dissatisfied Abhrapad asked.

- Who's.....? What.....?
- You got married. Lipsā also.....
- Lipsā....? Today....?
- Marrying today.

Abhrapad is surprised.

- Marriage...!! Who is the groom?
- Śrīmukh.....

Abhrapad laughed loudly.

- Who that nomadic? That's fine.....That's fine. Genuine union. It is the correct punishment for the grave lady.

Old Dinamaṇi is polite.

Abhrapad returned with a satirical smile. Dinamaṇi is observing him without the blink of an eye. The musical sound of Lipsā and Śrīmukh's marriage is heard from a distant place. Vanity is dancing in the eyes. In the circumference, certain unspoken words are felt. There is a coating on what is said.

Śrāvaṇī called from the back.

- Fatherly....!

Dinamaṇi looked at her. There is sorrow filled interest in her face. Her eyes are filled with questions. Dinamaṇi asked.

- What is the matter?
- No.....Listen.....
- Listen to what....?
- Is today Śrīmukh's marriage?

Dinamaṇi became conscious. To calm her, he tried to explain,

- Yes...You must be knowing everything. And they are all aristocrats. Aristocrats have their relation with aristocracy, know...!
- I have no knowledge of any such thing at this house.
- How is that possible? The premises over here are large. Being here, where is the time to think of others? Also, what is the point in thinking about anything else? If anything is to be done over there, then there is benefit in investing time onto the same. Else, it only gives sorrow.
- Shouldn't we try to go over there?

Dinamaṇi took a deep breath.

- That's not possible, dear...!

Śrāvaṇī keeps silent.

Dinamaṇi tried to explain.

- Know...! At first one is desperate to find a house. Then..., this house makes him desperate and restless. It also decides upon his status.

Śrāvapī kept silent keeping her head down. Dinamaṇi observed her slow and unwilling movements.

The marriage ceremony ends with the business of disbelief.

Śrīmukh is fortunate. Lipsā's complexion is reflected in her vanity. She is looking new with her make up. She is feeling good with her new marital identity. Her seriousness is also beautiful. She is fresh in love. Her smile is artificial. Her self-boasting nature is evident. Her behaviour is sorrowful. Her expressions reflect purity of self-poverty.

Nomadic Śrīmukh is now a married man. He is serious with the dignity of marriage. All are happy with the marriage of Lipsā with Śrīmukh. Now both are in a room. One of them thinks that he is superior. The other thinks that she is superior. Something is being an obstacle for their union. Both are waiting for invitation from the other. There is a conflict of doubt in mind. Ego is not losing its strength. Śrīmukh walks inside the room. Keeping her chin on her thighs, Lipsā is also thoughtful.

The honeymoon night is passing by.

After a long thought, Śrīmukh came to Lipsā. He gazed at Lipsā's face. Lipsā is looking down. Śrīmukh extended his hands. Lipsā showed no interest. Śrīmukh apprehends. Nevertheless, to touch her lips, he moved forward. Lipsā protested with her hands. Śrīmukh is stunned. He controlled himself and sat on one side of the bed. He thought of many things, but could not read Lipsā's mind.

Śrīmukh is restless. He tries to explain to her,

- Lipsā! If this had been your mind's wish, then why didn't you express it before? What is the point in turning away now?

Lipsā's anger is at the tip of her nose. Śrīmukh sighs a deep breath. He shows tolerance. In front of him is an attractive beauty. But he is filled with male ego. He is neither able to go out nor able to come inside. He himself is to blame.

Lipsā is still sitting. The honeymoon night is passing by. Fire is in her heart. Mind is with protest. In her pride, aristocracy is reflected. In front of her eyes, here is only loneliness. In her thoughts, exist supremacy of husband...understanding of loneliness. Then, why did she come forward? Why did she protest? Protest is always not fruitful. True words are not always valued. Ability is not always recognized. Situation is complex.

Now, Lipsā cannot reproach her father. She is her father's first heir. She is her mother's pride. She also thought about motherhood. She cannot go against her own self. Superior thought processes get hindered at every step. Śrīmukh does not bend to her. Lipsā realizes that two parallel lines can never intersect with each other. Other than that, life would be full of conflicts. Marriage rituals are finished. There is now lesser risk of social denial. Parents are not to be blamed. She is accountable for her own deeds. Where is the sorrow in accepting own faults? Self confidence is required to endure it. Just as it has come, it would also go away. Somebody dear to the mind will definitely come.

The morning came after a long wait.

Śrīmukh is angry. He requests Lipsā again. Lipsā still maintains her denial. Śrīmukh extends his hands. Lipsā stares. Her face is clear with hatred. At the corner of her eye, there is an excluded look. She turned away her eyes. Śrīmukh well understood her mentality. He took back his hands.

Śrīmukh rose from the bed and came towards the door. He looked at Lipsā in a content manner. He also looked inside the room. He opened the door. The surroundings are unclear. The night had been cool. The road ahead is hazy. Śrīmukh looked far. Directions are clear. The eastern sky is a queer mixture of light and darkness. The tweeting of birds is heard.

Śrīmukh slowly came outside. Lipsā is surprised. She came to the door and looked outside. She saw fully. A few unfriendly relatives were seen. She wanted to hinder her movement. But he had gone far. She wanted to call her. But her throat did not support pronouncing his name. She wanted to follow him. But her vanity rendered Śrīmukh insignificant.

Śrīmukh gradually faded from Lipsā's sight. Lipsā's sorrow transformed into anger and she came inside and closed the door. She lied down with the pillow onto her face. She was in a state midway between anger and sorrow.

People seldom think that unfavourable union does not produce an effect. In life, time comes when one is unable to recognize the good and the bad. At that time, taking shelter of the unfavourable, one surrenders the favourable. The desired is breached. The aim is also changed. The grief of separation of the beloved. The undesired one's arrival is like wet fuel. But the inner meaning is significant. It can neither be imagined, nor be owned.

Medinī is bound by fate.

She lies down at her mind and age. Her daughter is the lady of the house. Her residence is also proper. Food is fine. Everything is sufficient. Yet the mind is dependent. She is always worried about Śrāvaṇī. Śrāvaṇī is primarily innocent. She hates to protest. She does not take part in arguments. Without being at fault, she readily accepts mistakes. This is the condition. Always, her son-in-law exhibits his anger. Without any reason, he does not hesitate to scold. As long as he stays

outside the home, things are peaceful. As he enters the house, the situation turns grim. If anytime, something is told, he becomes angry. He scolds as per his wish. But the mother's mind is not far away. Medinī weeps alone. But wishing for her daughter, she holds her tears. She explains to daughter. Clinching onto the unforeseen, she convinces herself.

Śrāvaṇī feels that she is a doll. Her work is to obey her master's orders in the house. Everything is done as per his interests. Śrāvaṇī is fearful. Her wishes are not fulfilled here. Her words carry no importance. Even her thoughts remain concealed.

Once, sitting by Medinī's side, Śrāvaṇī is thinking aloud. Expressing her grief, she is worried. She describes her poor situation. She submits her helplessness.

Suddenly, Abhrapad arrives.

Seeing them, he shouted.

- What is happening?

Śrāvaṇī is answerless.

Abhrapad shouted loudly.

- Old woman, why are always sitting here? Go and do some work. Who will give you food without any work?

Śrāvaṇī answered.

- What will she do?

- What are the maids doing here?

- How can you compare my mother with the maids?

- Oh...? Is she a queen? She had always been a maid.

- She has come over here as my mother. Not as a maid.
- Then what? My marriage is with you, not...
- What is in marriage? She is as much your mother as she is mine. Or else, how do I respect your elders?
- What emulation? What are you today? You are a maid's daughter and always, you will remain a maid's daughter. Or else...?
- Or else, what? Don't I have any right as your wife?
- Wife...? Rights? Since when did all such words come to your mouth? Do as I tell you. Or else, I will take your tongue out. Ha...,ha..., old woman! From tomorrow, I want to see you in the kitchen. Or else, both mother and daughter would face the same fate.

Abhrapad departs. Medinī came to Śrāvaṇī, wiped her tears with her sari and consoled her.

Daughter! Why are you quarreling for me? How long will I live? What is the meaning of pain and pleasure for me? I am happy with your happiness. The togetherness of both of you is my desire. Without any work, I would be lazy over here. As desired by my son-in-law, I will do some kitchen work. What is to be worried over here? Whatever he wants, will be obeyed. Why is this conflict? I do not have any conflict. Husband is God-like. It is not expected to have a quarrel with one's husband. If he is unhappy, then everything would be unhappy. Leave the conflict and be happy.

Śrāvaṇī's eyes are filled with tears. She condemns herself. She curses her luck. She is unhappy thinking of her mother's situation. But helpless. She neither tolerates her mother's insult, nor accepts her moving out of the house. Also, she could not keep her mother as per her wishes. She feels her house is changed. The residence is changed. The decoration is new but situation remains the same. There

is no newness to the experience. She does not feel in love with her husband. She blames her poverty for this. Now she feels that it is her poverty.

Śrāvaṇī is restless.

What would enable surpassing the circle of hunger? Some people are influenced by seeing only the top half of the stomach. At the end it is centered around the deeds. Their deeds have all led to self abandonment...sweet behaviour...love. These deeds result in a behaviour which becomes right. This is the pride of kindness...the formation.

Time passed.

Dinamaṇi lighted the candle as before. The lighting is not circled with any eagerness. There is slowness in the movement.

Śrāvaṇī is looking at the same. She is fearful. Every movement of her reminds her of domination and slavery. Śrāvaṇī departs for her bedroom.

The night passed amidst the vanity. Śrīmukh went elsewhere. He is worried. Still he maintains his pride...I am Godly...I am an aristocrat...I am very good...But there is hunger in stomach. His body has slackened. He consumes food at the mercy of others. There is no fixed place to sleep.

Days are passing like this. Śrīmukh becomes tired. Livelihood is difficult for him. He decides to spend his life serving people. He moves from one place to the other in search of a job. But he feels that everywhere people are like him. At the core of all work, there is vanity. Everywhere there is slavery. A good position at workplace implies full of vanity.

Śrīmukh sat below a tree on the footpath. He feels nostalgic about the past golden days. He does not feel like talking. Why should he feel bad with other's words? Now, wherever he goes, he listens to morals. Where there is welcome, there

is hesitation. Wherever he is staying, he is suspected by people. Wherever he stands, people complain against him. Whenever he speaks, somebody counters him. At the time of countering, he also notes the rude behaviour. People do not take him seriously. A few people try to hear him out. He is saddened. His breath gets arrested. Śrīmukh thinks – why do such things happen?

Everywhere there is the game of pride. The country is arrogant....The time is arrogant.....The language is arrogant....The profession is arrogant....The stature is arrogant.....The knowledge is arrogant....moreover there is arrogance in conscience. Like this, the arrogance flows.....At least, Śrīmukh also feels that he is also the origin of some form of arrogance. He is standing at par. Where there is no loss there is no gain – so where is the question of emulation? Amidst unnoticed hypnotism, he is arrogant. Passion for anything creates arrogance. Anybody comes against this arrogance to counter it. Here, there lies the indication of multiple faces of mind. Here there is description of self confinement. A feeling of differentiation would exist.

Śrīmukh is worried.

The tension of the repentant mind is like a spider's web. At the feet of pain are uncontrolled rituals. The people who live happily in the society are men of high thoughts. However, Śrīmukh has lost faith in the information of such good works. In front of him, lies arrogance.....that confinement.....that centre of desire.

The tiredness of time is making things grayish.

Opening the kitchen door, Medinī came to her daughter's bedroom. She walked slowly. She is looking down. Putting her hands on the waist, she is moving around. With the orders of her son-in-law, she works in the kitchen. Sometimes, she also works in her daughter's room. Whenever she gets some free time, she

comes outside cautiously. She talked to Dinamaṇi. She discussed about her pain and pleasure.

Dinamaṇi is happy in his mind. Medinī is also busy with her work. She is working hard. Where one is putting in labour, other is becoming happy. This is the theory of arrogance. One unhappy person finds solace when somebody else is also unhappy. The fatigue comes with the realization of self unhappiness. This is the reason people forget. Memories become unfavourable. The thoughts of confinement of rituals arrive. Dinamaṇi is immersed.

Gloomy events of his life come in front of him – his dead wife Parvati. She resembled a virago. Both her shape and nature were alike her. Both her image and her behaviour were alike her. Both her intelligence and her desire were alike her. Since, she became a wife, she tried to control all matters. She entered into everything. She did not think about taking anybody's permission. She also did not wait for anybody. She worked with likeness to her interest. She forcibly tried to own everything. She would be ready to humiliate anybody. She neither cared for blame nor praise. She was an idol of vanity in her behaviour. She could go to any limits to accomplish her work.

But all these were intolerable for Dinamaṇi. He still tried to pursue her to understand. But Parvati was firm on her decisions. Everyday, this led to arguments at home along with dissatisfaction. Due to this, Parvati gradually became very confounded. She increased her torture. Dinamaṇi also became rude. The small arguments turned into a major conflict and arrogance exploded. Dinamaṇi suffered with this explosion. Parvati also suffered and committed suicide.

Thereafter, Dinamaṇi is alone. Love and respect for Parvati does not come to his mind. Affection towards her also does not arise. Only her picture dances in the mind. She comes to his mind with bitterness and also leaves the mind with

bitterness. Distressed Medinī stands in front of him and continues to speak. New thoughts arise.

There is smile at the corner of Dinamaṇi's lips. His face is covered with an apathetic look. He is ornamented with old age. He is affectionate. He is filled with new thoughts in his mind amidst all the elements. Dinamaṇi gazes.

Medinī can be seen in front. She is restless. She is also looking pleased. She had not come since long. She wears a new look today. Did the son-in-law do something favourable? Did she get something? What may be the reason? Dinamaṇi shouted from a distant place.

- Sister-! Here here.....

Medinī smiled at him.

Dinamaṇi was surprised. His inquisitiveness increased. He asked emotionally.

- Sister....! What has happened today? Anything special?

Medinī is answerless.

- Today tell me. You look very pleased. Has son-in-law gifted you anything?

- Yes..., something like that.

- What is it? Wealth...? Or house.....?

- Nothing like that.

- Then, what?

Medinī sat slowly. She arranged her sari properly. With a smile, she started.

- God has heard me.

- Oh...! What is the matter?

- My daughter is pregnant.
- Oh! You are blessed, Medinī. Your sorrow will be away. But you will become more engaged.
- Truth....God should be kind enough. My daughter should give birth to a baby boy.

Dinamaṇi smiled.

- Sister.....Now we are more desirous. Where is the result? Having determination in mind, I was also desirous at a point of time. But.....
- Truth.....The path of life is controlled by crookedness.
- I am very much relieved since your daughter has gone to their family.
- Yes.....

Medinī takes a deep breath.

Knowing his master's nature, Dinamaṇi felt aggrieved. Putting his master's words differently, created his own words. His own deeds are all result of his master's wishes. His master's character depicted the poorest of mountains. Over and above that was stone-like extravagance. Inside it was deadly ice. Dinamaṇi is dejected. His thoughts echoed rudeness. His decisions were also emotionless. The reflection of his thoughts had a cruel parity.

In recent times, the temple of womb is cast with a spell. Fate is to be embraced. Purity. Unpartitioned happiness. Devotion is sincere. Śrāvaṇī is reflecting glamour and beauty. Abhrapad's ego is filled with many colours. But he is a mountain of pride and vanity.

He laughs recently. He is the conqueror. No body objects to his words. Also, nobody in his proximity is as talkative as Lipsā. Śrāvaṇī is silent. To Medinī, she is a statue. Dinamaṇi is silent as a servant. Others are quiet at the extravagance of his wealth and aristocracy. The rest of the people keep quiet being cautious of his evil

intentions. Śrīmukh is also not there to obstruct him. It is the right time to reach a goal...to lead a luxurious life.

Abhrapad laughed openly.

Sitting at the side, Śrāvaṇī is surprised. She asked gently.

- What happened?
- The matter is difficult to understand. What does it have to do with you?
- Then what do I have to do with?
- There is no need to mingle into my matters.
- Why?
- I have lots of wealth and lots of work to do. As such, I have lot of things to worry about.
- Is your problem not my problem?

Again, Abhrapad laughed.

- How is it possible? You are a maid's daughter. You have grown up in a poor cottage. How can you throw light upon my business? Further, I am an aristocrat....come from respectable family...traditional. Do you have any such cultural background? Work like a maid's daughter and also behave similarly. Be involved in your business.

Śrāvaṇī's face reddened.

Anger could be seen on her nose. Eyes were full of inquisitiveness. She controlled her anger and asked gently.

- Why are you mentioning all these things? You have married me knowing everything. Days have passed. Am I still not to be considered as your wife? Do you still not accept me as your wife?

Abhrapad laughed sarcastically.

- Wife....? All ladies have a single definition – ‘slave’. You are a slave. Furthermore, you are a slave’s daughter.
- Do you feel that by such words, I will be more a slave or a slave’s daughter?
- This is your identity.
- Do you not know anything else?
- I know it better....
- Knowing all this, how do you identify me in front of others?
- You would remember.
- What will be your benefit?
- You will become cautious of your rights.
- Is it your trick? Being involved in such self created sadness, how do you demand your masculinity?
- Sadness....? Whose.....? Mine...?? How does the breed of slaves gauge the potential of aristocrats?
- You may be master for others. For me, you are a different person.

Abhrapad shouted.

- Śrāvaṇī.....! You have gathered lot of courage for this protest. But don’t forget that I am the master of this house. I am an aristocrat...I am respected in the locality and come from one of the most respected families around. Always have control over your language. Else, I will cut your tongue in future.

Abhrapad went out angrily. Śrāvaṇī took a deep breath. She wiped her tears. She is sad. Her mind is shattered. She asks herself – who can make him understand? He is filled with arrogance. He is greedy. He is selfish. He is always

having untrue things in front of his eyes. Good things are valueless for him. Well wishing words are taken by him as harmful. Whatever is happiness is valueless to him. Only, whatever he is doing is correct. All other words are meaningless.. What does he wish?

Śrāvāṇī is worried. She curses herself. She deeply repents – why is she protesting? She has seen such things. She tolerates such incidents. There is no benefit in protesting against such things. Only dangers increase for others. The results will be dreadful. She will be silent here – she will not protest any more. If she observes something bad, she will close her eyes. Tear drops filled Śrāvāṇī's eyes.

The sky is filled with moonlight. It is exhibited lifelessly. The stars are twinkling romantically. The clouds are moving. The wind is impatient. Lipsā is sitting in the open palatial room. She is thoughtful. Her hairs are plentiful. Her clothes are shabby. Her sight is on dark treetops.

In the other room, resides her ailing father. He suffers from breathing disorders and is restless. Sadly, he shouts.

- Bhavāni.....! Bhavāni.....!

Bhavāni comes and responds back to him with a harsh tone.

- Why are you so much thoughtful?
- Ah.....! Did anybody go in search of Śrīmukh?
- Why should anybody go? Is he a child?
- Ah.....! It's not like that. He has gone out of home with arrogance.
- Then what is to be done? Is he arrogant alone? Don't others have ego?
- My daughter is suffering due to this arrogance. Why don't you make her understand?
- You have ruined my daughter's life by bringing this useless to our home.

- Oh....again arrogance?
- What arrogance? Do you know our daughter's mind? She is suffering because of such bad decisions.

For her entire life, she will live in trouble.

- Oh....What is my fault in this? After marriage, she is responsible for this. Then why is she seeking your help?
- What have you done?
- Why are you favouring your daughter? Because of my weakness. You are arrogant and she has also grown to be arrogant by following you. Who has listened to me?
- Daughter in such state of affairs by listening to you.
- It is due to her own fault. But the present situation is because of you. Always you are favouring her for her careless behaviour.
- Do you feel that my daughter will be my slave?
- No..., No....., she will be Goddess. She will be here just like yourself. Do you want that?
- You tell me only. My daughter will stay here as earlier. She will not go to that nomadic. If the nomadic comes here, I will kick him out. Yes...., hear me out, if you mention of him once more, the situation will be dreadful.

After warning him, Bhavāni entered the room. Old Raghupati caught on to fate and took a deep breath.

- Alas....alas....arrogance.....

Hearing all this noise, Lipsā came to her father's room and gradually sat by the bedside. Observing worries at father's face, she inquired.

- Father.....!

Raghupati became conscious.

Lipsā asked.

- Why are you worried for me?

Raghupati maintained silence.

Lipsā soothed him boldly.

- Do not be worried for me. Leave all your worries for me. I can manage them myself.

Raghupati is helpless. He tried to convince her daughter.

- Daughter! Time is not the same every time. Every time situation is not favourable. Whatever seems to be of pleasure today may turn out to be sorrowful tomorrow. Whatever is nectar today may turn out to be poison tomorrow. Think properly, my daughter! Judge the situation. Whatever is not done in a timely manner may not be fruitful in days to come. Still nothing detrimental has happened. Again, everything will be peaceful as before. Keeping your mind cool and head still, tread the path of your husband and be merry. Send out people to find out Śrīmukh. He will surely return after knowing the change in your mind.

Lipsā is absent minded. She stood silently for a while. Raghupati ordered her.

- Go....Go....., daughter....! As fast as possible, accomplish your work.

Lipsā went away slowly. Lamentation is there in her mind. Her voice is choked. The pain of repentance is there in her weak heart. The vision of Śrīmukh seems like a dream.

The sky is full of clouds.

Śrīmukh is tired. He is not interested in journey today. Without moving here and there, he tries to find the honey of peace. Everywhere are the footprints of narcissism. There is emulation of transgression. The destination is uncertain. The path is very dark. There is sudden fire at sight. The instincts are that of insects. People with arrogance jump into such fire.

Off late, Śrīmukh has been suffering with sorrow. He treads carefully thinking of egotism. His mind is thoughtful of clasp of arrogance. His feelings have become bitter with its shadow. Unmindfully, he is filled with disgust. There is tension all around. The influence and results of arrogance are beautifully demarcated – the difference between fire and ashes gradually become prominent. The result is ashes while fire is the influence. The burning is different. A form of thread is established. It looks like fire. That is why it looks like a thread. Its arrogance is like that of fire. This self creation controls the mind in oneness. Objects also look similar in nature. The arrogance of life is also one of such transformations.

Śrīmukh is pleased.

He does not have any such threads. Its ingredients are those of rights. It only burns when fired. Again, it turns into ashes. The ashes also burn the fire for sometime. Such ingredients take the form of ashes or a bloody look, this is the philosophy. The philosophy of influence and results is enlightenment. Here lies the desired thing. This is the goal. There is no sign of ashes.....there is no spark of fire.....only ability is called in the path of life.

Śrīmukh is humbled by himself. His saddened mind reminds him of his past. He feels sorry. There is no desire in the origin. Else, at every step, the lost mother spreads love. She comes again and again in his mind and weakens his heart. Off late, her appearance arises in the eyes. Śrīmukh turns sad. His speech also becomes

slow. But, he hovers around in search of something. Clothes are dirty. Lifestyle also follows madness of existence. Nevertheless, his search for something beautiful pushes him to go towards it....for repentance....for love....To embrace the unsupported....for illustration of the truth....for self containment...for well being.

But, recently, his journey is not peaceful. There, not only there is blooming of pride, but also, incoherence of work, which institutes the path of blindness. The revolution for freedom gets destroyed. Justice is denied. Duty is self –centered. Independent men are slaves of corruption. Everywhere, there is commotion, same thoughts....same feelings....multiplying the embracing....collective idol....Who would fee from this path...? Revolution burns him. Corruption fills the surroundings with smoke. The thorn of corruption hurts the foot. In front, the waves of injustice bubble extensively. But, these currents form the path. Otherwise, it is not possible to lead life.

Śrīmukh saddens.

The peaceful thoughts face hurdles. The goal turns cloudy. Śrīmukh sat below a banyan tree with his hands on his head. He could see some people in front of him. Everyone was busy with arguments. Then, an old man came. His dress was simple. His head had some grey hairs. His face was graceful. Being tired, he also sat below the tree. He turned serious after taking a deep breath releasing the tiredness.

Śrīmukh only saw. The old man inquired about the inquisitiveness of the youth.

- Young man! Where are you going?
- This locality.
- What will you do here?
- I have come here for the first time.

- What is your business?
- I have come here for work.
- What work?
- Anything that I get.
- Household work.....?
- What is your name?
- Can you come with me?
- Your identity.....?
- My name is Induketan. I live here. What is your identity?
- I am Śrīmukh. My house is far away. Now I live for work here and there.
- How much remuneration?
- I will decide after seeing the work.
- Fine...fine.....Then come.

Śrīmukh observed – the serious voice of the old man had pride in it. His inquisitive nature is boundless. His eyes were full of peace. Śrīmukh felt that he could depend on him. He got up. He was ready to follow him. Induketan went in front. Śrīmukh asked him at the side of the road.

- Who else is there at home?

Induketan laughed.

- Who else will be there? You will come.....and see.

Śrīmukh kept silent. Emotionally, he went on to follow him.

A silent house appeared in front of him. The paleness of the old man is observed. A dilemma is evident. Somewhere, illness is showing its presence. Here, the trees in the garden have also turned old. The flowers are bestowing a rare look. The path is become narrow. Induketan went in front. Śrīmukh followed.

Śrīmukh observed. Some other old man came down from the top room and opened the door. Induketan described.

- This is Śrīmukh. He is looking for a job. He...is my younger....Candrāmani.

Candrāmani responded in a perplexed manner.

- I am nothing....I am a dedicated servant.

Śrīmukh greeted him with folded hands.

Candrāmani greeted him into the house. Everything is decorated to serve his master. He showed him the guest room. There he asked Śrīmukh to settle down.

Śrīmukh entered.

Everything was quite old in the guest room. Everything was a mark of Induketan's family heritage. Śrīmukh was amazed to see all this. He felt glorious. His mind became composed. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a hazy picture. It was a lady's picture. It was drawn long back – that's why, the haziness. Śrīmukh is stunned. Memories of his young age emerged. It was as if, the replica of his mother. He suddenly shivered at such pronunciation. Śrīmukh closed his eyes. His eyes were drenched in tears.

Candrāmani brought water. Suddenly, seeing tears in his eyes, he asked.

- What happened? Why speechless?

Śrīmukh did not reveal his heart.

- No....no....Nothing of that sort.

Candrāmani observed from top to bottom. He was an experienced person. He did not take much time in understanding his mind. He is not a normal worker.

He must have come from a noble background. He must have had a glorious past. He may be part of some family heritage. He asked.

- Anything else required?

Śrīmukh answered gently.

- Nothing else. Only water.

Candrāmani went away.

The silence of the evening and loneliness of nature was evident. The stars started twinkling. Feeling assured, the moon showed itself. As a daily routine, Candrāmani cleaned the top room. He decorated the place by keeping the mat. He placed the things in order. Then he went to call Induketan. Induketan came up. He sat on the mat.

The moonlight brightened in the sky. Induketan sat down and concentrated by looking at him. He could see the goodness in him, as before. His expectations were climbing up on seeing him. Justice is purified by his goodness. Now, there is no time to have double thoughts. He is peaceful after being confirmed with his goodness. Here, the sameness of nature is found in name. Hence, so many things are going around. In the bouquet of names, this name is raising the bar of expectation. As a result, there is happiness. In return, this is the crux of fate. But what is there in return? Are friendship and relations enough these days? Induketan thought about the goodness with a cool mind and still head. In return, the discovery of a single name is instituted – ‘Moonbeam’.

Candrāmani informed politely.

- Sir....! He wanted to go out.

Induketan ordered.

- Bring him over here.

Induketan sat down seriously. Candrāmani made Śrīmukh sit down and got involved in his own work. Induketan simply ordered.

- Sit down here.

Śrīmukh was happy.

Induketan told.

- See the house here. You have come to know about the members of the family now. Tell me, what do you want to do over here?
- I will do, whatever you order me to do. Order me....
- Many days ago, some institutions were built by me. Due to my old age, I cannot go for inspection to those places. I am very much interested to know about the current status of those institutions. You visit those places, inspect properly and work for their betterment.
- Any information about the institutions.....
- Correct....All the information is with Candrāmani. Collect it from him and go. Yes....take the required money with you.
- As you wish.

Induketan called Candrāmani politely. Candrāmani came. Induketan ordered him.

- This is Śrīmukh. Today you are responsible for his eating. Again, from tomorrow morning, he will start his journey for visiting the institutions. For that, much information is required. You arrange them. Go....young man. From tomorrow, you will take care of all these things.

Candrāmani directed Śrīmukh about the way and went out of the room. Śrīmukh followed.

Lonely Induketan is immersed in deep thought. The night is shining. The night becomes serious once the evening sets. Silence follows the night.

The length of silence cannot be measured.

Śrāvaṇī is in pain by her grief. Her face is covered with lines of silence. With her limited wishes, she is worried now. Her future will be filled with tears. Now, she is the mother of a daughter. For this, her husband is very angry on her. At every moment, he is reprimanding her. Always, he admonishes. But every time, Medinī intervenes. She accepts all accusations by bowing her head. She prays for mercy. She persuades Śrāvaṇī to own all the allegations. But Śrāvaṇī weeps. She blames her own luck. She decides for suicide. On one side, there is her aged mother. On the other side, there is her newly born daughter. She is only crying. She chooses silence as the way of leading life.

Love and affection arises in her motherly heart. Her daughter's childhood makes her forget her sorrow and sufferings. She tries to convince herself. Her old mother, Medinī motivates her to think positively. She is now happy as a grandmother. Be it a boy or be it a girl, either is of much importance to her.

Abhrapad is dissatisfied. He is angry because of the birth of a girl child. He has even called off all the rituals of the birth ceremony. He has also cancelled the naming ceremony.

Abhrapad is dissatisfied with himself. He is neither ready to accept the fatherhood of a girl child nor ready to quit the girl child. He has a feeling that he has been defeated. It is painful – if it were a boy, then his wealth would have multiplied. A girl implies that there would be deterioration of his affluence. But by any means, he would increase his property. The wealth would be more. It will be preserved for some future generations. Respect would also increase.

Abhrapad is busy in finding out a way. The means for acquiring more property sometimes get funny. He is immersed in thought. Even her daughter can earn wealth. For this, appropriate training is required to be provided. Primarily, she should be given proper direction through guidance. If she develops to be a talented dancer, then it would ease the path to earn more wealth.

Abhrapad is bit relaxed.

During that time, foster mother informed.

- As per order, the naming ceremony of the daughter shall be held.

Abhrapad eagerly asked.

- What is the daughter's name?

Urvī.....

Abhrapad was pleased.

All right....Tell it to your master's wife. I am coming back soon.

The foster mother went away.

Behind the scenes, the music of wellness is searching for the reverberation of time. Abhrapad is thoughtful in his room. The village seems dusky in front. The trees cover the terrain in green colour. It is greenish all around. The horizon is unclear.

Everywhere it is unclear.

Lipsā is nostalgic. It has been some years since her marriage. To the society, she is a woman. In her heart, she is repentant. With the expectation of reunion of husband and wife, father Raghupati has breathed his last. However, mother Bhavāni still gets furious on hearing the name of Śrīmukh. Filled with vanity, she

still advises her daughter to follow the footsteps of aristocracy. Falling down from a level is similar to death for her. Her age is visible in her white hairs. Her skin is showing the fading lustre. Still her eyeliner makes her eyes attractive. Colourful desires fill her heart and mind.

Practically, who will win whose heart? Everybody is filled with ego. There are some people who think beyond the line of vanity. Decisions happen to blossom. They bear fruits.

Lipsā feels that she is trapped. She can neither stay there nor move out. Fruitless time passes. The limits of tolerance have been shattered. Now, she even finds some white hairs from within the black ones. She is suffering from pain in her body. The solitariness and indifference of mind deepens. On one side, mother Bhavāni's ego is intensifying. On the other side, there is emptiness in the sky of thought.....blue beauty.....again pain of estranged relations. Some of the pale Champak flowers have fallen down. Lipsā still puts one Champak flower everyday.

The temple looks beautiful besides the Champak tree.

This is the place Induketan has indicated. Śrīmukh has come. Here, the cock's call raises everyone from sleep. Shadows determine the hour of the clock. The fox howls at night. This is such a village. It is clean all around. The paddy fields are all around. The temple at the end of the village is the place for virtue. But the temple is half broken. People come here and pray to God. But all the time, God seems unhappy here. Śrīmukh looked around. He sat down after taking a deep breath. He is worried – people have become used to this place. Nobody thinks about renovating this temple. Nobody is either repenting for its poor condition. Śrīmukh goes the priest.

- Are you he priest over here?
- Yes...tell me....what do you want?

- Who has built this temple?
- Somebody pious.
- What is his name?
- I cannot say.
- It is getting destroyed. Nobody seems to be bothering about any renovation work.
- Who will do it? Everybody is needy over here. Wealthy people behave as poor ones. Moreover, everybody argues 'I am superior....I am superior'. They come over here and pray to God for wealth. They quarrel over there properties. This is the condition. What is their benefit by investing over here?
- Then what are you doing over here?
- What do I do? I do it for earning to meet my family needs.
- Then don't you want to take care of the renovation work?
- I have taken care. But nothing has happened. Still waiting for some noble soul to arrive.

Śrīmukh turns answerless. His heart pains – who has done it? What is the achievement? What is the return? What is attained? What was the objective of the construction? What is the result? The objective of renovation is noble. Has anybody in the past tried to think about it? Who will take its responsibility? There would be variety! People forget the name of the founder.

Śrīmukh is restless.

The calm face of Induketan is coming to his mind.....the happening at the top room....then the servant Candrāmani. Thinking of some other destination, Śrīmukh got up from there. Nobody obstructed him. Neither was anybody asking about his next destination. He is lonely...a traveller.

This area is scarcely populated. It is one of the favourite places of Induketan. This is the place of Induketan's forefathers. They started there business from this place. Induketan had been following them. Since then, he felt the necessity of education over there. Therefore, firstly, he started a school there.

The school is in front of Śrīmukh. Some age old trees are surrounding the school. The foundation of the school is similarly dilapidated. All the rooms are door less. The wind passes through the broken doors. The small plants around the school render it the look of a forest cottage.

Śrīmukh came. He stayed in front of the wrecked school for sometime. There, firstly he came across two people. One was a beggar, another was a mad person. The beggar was having food. The mad person was engrossed in shouting on the other side. Śrīmukh saw. In one of its rooms, a lady beggar was bed ridden because of illness. On the other side, an old man struck with leprosy was blowing away the flies sitting on his pimples. Śrīmukh could not understand anything. Looking around...thinking. Suddenly, the sound of a quarrel was heard. Śrīmukh went forward. He saw two people quarreling. Both of them were drunkards. He could not decipher any reason for the quarrel. Śrīmukh looked towards them. He went forward to stop the quarrel. Suddenly, somebody shouted from the back.

- Do not go....Do not go.....

Śrīmukh was surprised. The beggar having food was shouting.

- Do not go. They are drunkards. They are always quarreling. Also, they scold and drive us away from here. They have no wisdom.

Śrīmukh asked boldly.

- What are you doing here?

- I live here.

- Since when?
- For many days.
- Do you lead life by begging?
- We are hopeless. What else shall we do?
- Okay, in a few days time, all will have to go out of here.
- Why?
- Did your father build it?
- So did your father build it?
- Beggar! Speak carefully.
- Why? We have been living here since long. Nobody has ever told us. Who are you to get us out of here? It is an eternal truth that whoever lives where becomes the master of that place. So, I am the master. Go....Do as you like. Oh, I was thinking of him as a saint. Basically, he is also a drunkard. Today, because of slightly more drinking, he has come here to sleep. Damn...Damn....Go....Search for some other place. You will not get any place here.

Śrīmukh was astonished.

During this time, other two beggars came to the school. One was blind. The other was deaf. Keeping them as witnesses, the beggar shouted at Śrīmukh.

- Hey, look! This drunkard is here to get us out.

The deaf told.

- What are you telling? Music....? Whose marriage is it today?
- Oh.....! Not music....Drunkard....
- Foot? What?
- Damn....Idiot....Deaf.
- Why Khadira leaf.....? Where is the betel leaf?

The blind man intervened.

- Stop.....He is talking of people.
- Talking of food.....? Where.....?

The deaf man stopped.

Śrīmukh departed amidst the discussion of beggars. Pride and vanity are sparkling at the back of his disturbed mind. In this quarreling situation, pride is the flag bearer. Śrīmukh went on to some other way. His mind started to think about the experiences. He also started introspecting.....What is the desire for these discarded places? What is the ownership? Why does he speak of right over here? What is he himself doing in the name of inspection? Is whatever he doing in his scope? Off course, there is greediness. Definitely there is an instinct of owning the things in his execution. This profit and greed, this hypnotism, this desire for crossing limits are all different steps of pride.

The heaviness of his heart lessened.

Śrīmukh stands on a straight road. Many indicated places are in front of him. He is happy. His mind is puzzled – is there no salvation from pride? Here just as there is no hope of victory, there is an apprehension of pain for defeat. Why does it happen? Why does such self indignation happen at every moment? Why such hesitation? Why such anxiety? Why such division based on needs? What are these philosophies surrounding pride?

Śrīmukh is tired and thoughtful.

A beautiful village is in the vicinity. In this village is Induketan's dental clinic. Śrīmukh decided to take rest over there. He asked some people for the landmarks of his other destinations. Here...Here.....some villagers came forward and directed. Śrīmukh followed them.

Śrīmukh came to the door of the clinic. The villagers directed – this is the clinic. Śrīmukh was surprised. He looked here and there. Some cows were tied in the adjacent room. One portion of the clinic is broken. On the other side, one door is closed. There is no door in the other room. But there is an idol placed in the room. Śrīmukh asked thoughtfully.

- Is it a clinic? Who is the doctor over here?

The villagers smiled and told.

- It is a clinic only by name. But no doctors come here and there is no medication.
- Then, how is it a clinic?
- Here, there is an ancient history.
- Tell me?
- This was built by a great person. He had appointed a doctor here. Medicines were also available. But the doctor was not interested to stay in the village. He went away elsewhere. Thereafter, nobody came. Then everything stopped.
- Then, is the door closed from that day?
- No...No...This room is used by the village youths. They organize a club here. In the other room, the religious activities of the village are organized. The village meeting and welfare activities are also organized.
- What is the history of this?
- Once upon a time, a great person had come here for a piece of work with his wife. Some of the village women requested his wife for the treatment of the children. She accepted the request and started to work. She organized everything. When, all the work was finished, people started to think about the name of the clinic. When, it was thought to name the

clinic after her name, she objected. She suggested naming the clinic after the name of the village God. Since then, it is so.

- What is the name?
- Śaśirekhā (Moon beam).....

Śrīmukh was surprised. He became thoughtful. The villagers asked.

- Do you belong to them?

Śrīmukh felt uneasy from within.

- Yes....
- Are you here to rebuild it?
- I am thinking about it.
- Oh, good luck.

He tried to call a couple of persons. Śrīmukh objected. The villagers asked.

- How can you return back today?
- Where should I stay?
- In this youth club only.

Śrīmukh is silent. The villagers are assuring him

- Don't be thoughtful. You have come for the welfare of the village. You are our guest. We will help you in all ways. There would be no problem. You stay here only. Afterwards, he went to bring the key of the room.

The villagers departed. Śrīmukh looked towards his way forward. He observed the half destroyed clinic. Again he looked at the nearby trees. He stayed there. The devoted look brought out the tree's old stories. Some people plant trees. Some people are responsible for deforestation. Thirdly, there are some people who neither plant trees, nor uproot them. They only observe and become happy. Some

people become proud by owning the trees. Because of intolerance, some deforest them. Some people become depressed by thinking that the trees belong to others. Without any reason, some people talk about the trees here and there. This has been the rule. Here, the third persons look valueless. Śrīmukh now feels to be part of this group. He looks at the trees. He also witnesses the cutting of trees. However, he still discovers his existence. He is conscious about self dignity.

This pride explains to self. This meeting creates bubbles. At the strike of fate, these bubbles increase with the wind. Their existence lies in water. Their speed is determined by that of the water. But, what reflection is seen in the bubbles? The reflection is that of self and the self centered bubbles. At the end, what is the result of all this?

Śrīmukh took a long breath.

What is the way? How to follow it? Everywhere, it is binding. The protest is shaped by its boundaries. All hinderances are prominent. The sign of depression is observed at the end. The seed of the beginning lies in the end. The lavishness of the exterior burns. Belief does not touch aristocracy. The mind enters the sense. What is there inside? Where is the base? Where is the end to wealth? Where is the end of knowledge?

During this time, the villagers were present. Opening the door of the youth club, they told.

-Stay here tonight. In the evening, some old villagers and young people will come here. They will discuss about the clinic.

Śrīmukh was pleased.

The villagers informed.

- If water is needed, you may go to the well there. You go there with this pot. We will come back in the evening.
- It is okay.

The villagers departed. Śrīmukh entered the room. Being assured, he changed his clothes. He sat down in the yard with a peaceful mind. Afternoon sets in the village. The varied dresses of the village women were seen. The modesty and spirituality of the people were enjoyable. The village cleanliness blossomed in the day-to-day village life. Śrīmukh became thoughtful on looking into the well. The gathering of village women was seen in front. Here somebody as 'Lipsā' is enjoying her vanity. Somebody as 'Śrāvaṇī' is wiping her tears. Again, because of sufferings and sorrow, some old woman has turned into 'Medinī'. Sorrowful Śrīmukh turned his head down.

The clouds could be seen in the western skyline. The deceitful disguise of the sunset expanded itself. The last moments of a hunt were signalled by the golden twilight. The evening ingredients are welcomed at the feet of the housewife. Far away, the sounds of the ringing bell at the temple increase the adventurous atmosphere.

Thoughtful Śrīmukh sat down.

The villagers gathered. They started the discussion. They prepared the blueprint of the restoration project for the clinic. Śrīmukh assured of assistance. The villagers were satisfied. Śrīmukh inquired about his next destination.

- How far is Yagnapur from here?

Some villager answered.

- It is nearby....What work do you have over there?
- There is a vast field for grazing cows?

- Vast field.....??
- A village fair is arranged there. Sometimes a herd of cows could also be seen there.

Everybody laughed.

Śrīmukh is astonished.

- What...? What is the cause of laughter?

An old man explained.

- Sir! Nowadays, there is neither any field nor any fair. For the field only, there is quarrel amongst the villagers. Everybody is interested in using the field for cultivation. People are using muscle power to acquire the field. Thus, the entire field is being used for cultivation. Still there is no end to the conflict.
- Why was the vast field not used for cultivation?

The old man became emotional.

- The story is old and great. Once upon a time, a great person was returning back on the way. Suddenly, his cart broke down at that place. The bullock was ill. It was not able to carry the cart. It was freed. But the bullock died after some time over there. The kind hearted person decided to build a cow shed at that place.
- Then?
- Within some days, the noble man bought the nearby fields. The whole field was declared as a cattle field. A cowshed was also built over there.
- What was the goal?
- The goal was noble. When the cows and buffaloes would turn old, they would reside over there. They would spend the rest of their life happily there. The goal was clear.

- Then.....?
- Then what? The noble man gave the responsibility to the villagers and went back. Now, there is neither any cattle field, nor any cowshed. Only, a quarrelsome village.

Śrīmukh gets tired.

The diseased should be asked. The desire for knowledge came to an end. The sounds of the fox deepened the night. The villagers departed. Śrīmukh also requested for everybody's departure.

His breath was filled with sad memories....whatever he is getting, he is also losing it. Quest is not only the source of search, but also the strong nature. He is desirous. Desire for getting something. It is greed.....greediness is the hidden language of vanity.

Why is this sadness? Śrīmukh asks himself. Why is his lack of confidence? The mind wishes to take possession of whatever is great in front. That is always not possible. Maybe, sometimes. Being compared with others, he is happy. Sometimes, unhappy. Sometimes, he is filled with sorrow. But why do such things happen? Till such time the desirous thing is got and the boundaries of the element are known, the mind is restless but why is this philosophy not known? The road is simple and the goal is also known. The goal is also clear. The boundary is also prominent. Vanity hinders the awakening. Again the mind takes a form to grasp self. The mind separates. He weakens amidst the universal pervasion. The desirous element reflects itself in the mirror of the mind. That is the reason for everything. The reflection in the mirror does not show the boundaries. So, there is restlessness, commotion and turbulence.

The practice for maintaining the boundaries are regular. All things are under control. The flames of pride have base in spreading satisfaction. The turmoil dies down.

Śrīmukh's heart unnoticingly chanted the consoling words....Oum Śāntiḥ....Śāntiḥ....Śāntiḥ.

The whole night passed away unslept.

Śrīmukh got ready after completing his morning formalities. He again started towards his destination. The name of the village is Abhayapally. There is a school. The school is for children. After visiting the school, he will be back. So he started his journey early morning.

His feelings for the chants of search gradually started melting. His thoughts were occupied with new ideas. His perspective changed. An age comes in life when, people accept nothing but their own existence. Here he gives so much importance that the other things in life diminish. But, now Śrīmukh is worried about his own existence. Variety comes to his thoughts. His worries are all centered on it. Ignorance is proved in a speedy manner. Still, recently, some uniqueness in prayers arouses him. Mind tries to absorb the same. That....what is independent.....more intoxicating....philosophy of selflessness in all directions....for all...

Abhayapally was like a desert. He met the people. Somebody took him to the school to talk about it. Śrīmukh was surprised. The school was in dilapidated condition. The broken down walls were standing like the mountain peaks. Some goats were eating plants on the broken walls. Hens were roaming around. Sheep were grazing. Crows were around. The area was covered with grass. Calves had gathered happily. Śrīmukh was speechless. He came away. The villagers asked.

- Are you a teacher?

Śrīmukh looked towards them and answered bravely.

- How did you know?
- Who else would know about a school?
- Oh....it was a guess work.

The villagers answered in assertive mode.

Śrīmukh asked.

- Is the school not functioning now?
- No...no...The building is broken down. How would it work?
- Then, where do the children study?
- Who is studying? The school is shifted to the other village. They have become more powerful. The school is functioning in their village. It is far away. So, the children are not going to school.
- Why don't you organize a school here?
- It was organized over here. By virtue of a noble person, a school was established over here. He also appointed a teacher.
- Teacher?
- Yes....teacher. The noble man was also taking care of the teacher's food and lodging. A teacher's house was also present.
- Teacher's house?
- Yes.....The classrooms had collapsed due to a cyclone. Thereafter, the classes were conducted in teacher's house.
- Can I meet the teacher now?
- He is not present.
- Where did he go?
- He was old. He passed away within a few days.
- Then?

- Then what? School was closed.
- School got closed....? Then, should we go to the teacher's home?
- Where is the home? It is also broken.
- Okay, we will come back after having a look.
- Let's go.....

Śrīmukh was again surprised. The condition of the teacher's house was similar to that of the school building. Near the half broken house, another half broken temple signifies that people live in the village. In the temple, there is a statue of Lord Shiva. Some flowers were seen on the statue. Śrīmukh bowed and prayed to Lord Shiva and calmed himself. Benevolently, the villagers showed him the way. Śrīmukh followed his way.

Śrīmukh moved on. The reaction of his past memories reflected in his mind. A lonely path was in front of him. There were only some footprints on the way. The sound of celebration of love and romance could be heard from nearby. It is the celebration of marriage. The sound of a microphone was carried in the wind from a faraway village. The sound was that of happiness. He was cherishing this sound of happiness and joy. His thoughts were facilitated by Lipsā. He was nostalgic. Śrīmukh was sad because of her attitude – what is the distance between picture and character?

Distance increases pain.

Silence spreads its colour in self thoughts. The virtues of self are adverse to waiting. Within sometime, the thinking comes to an end. The desired moment comes in front. The time is troubled.

Tears were filled in Śrāvāṇī's eyes.

The quest for knowledge in the reliable areas is destroyed. The love stream has died with the silent crying. The immersion of kindness had rendered the day

leaden. Medinī is no more. She was ill with common fever. She passed away forever lying on her bed. Some days had passed. Still her picture arises in Śrāvaṇī's memories. Like her mother, she realized her own faults. Still, how many are affected by her mother's dignity?

Śrāvaṇī was angry – only due to her husband's pride, her mother had turned to a slave. She was a slave's daughter. Her mother's death meant no more than a slave's death. Nobody is saddened due to it. Lamentation is a feeling – faraway. Nobody is there for any help. Where is the question of obstructing unsocial activities? If she protests for any such work, even her husband does not hesitate to beat her. He is also not that affectionate to her daughter. He performs the bare minimum responsibilities of a father. Or else, ignorance. His words are busy with the degradation of others. Greediness is reflected in his behaviour. The greed is extreme for getting something. Śrāvaṇī has many a times tried to politely make him understand. But all these are in vain.

Daughter is growing up. Abhrapad had arranged for dance training for his daughter, thinking that she can earn money just like a son would have. But Śrāvaṇī is not interested in all this. She had protested time and again. For this, she has been rebuked and beaten. She laments thinking it to be persuasions. But, the lovely dance of the daughter makes her forget her sorrows and sufferings. Silently, time passes on.

During the unfavourable times, age rolls by.

Lipsā is surprised by finding a few grey hairs on her head. Seeing the reflection in the mirror, she was filled with self pride. But like the dried champak flowers, her wishes squeezed. She does not take much interest in anything. Meanwhile, the seed of self realization is sprouted.

Mother Bhabani is ill for some days. Brothers did not have time to look after her. Sister-in-laws are also no better. Hence, Lipsā takes care of her. She feels disgusted and rebukes. But Bhabani is still immersed in her ocean of pride. She wants her daughter Lipsā to follow her footsteps. This is the cause of conflict between the two. Lipsā is always involved in conflicts. She blamed her mother for her dissatisfied life. But Bhavāni shouts on hearing the name of Śrīmukh.

Lipsā analyzes her present condition within the mixture of pain and pleasure. With her loneliness, vanity seems to fade away. The radiance of colours of pride was absent. But, Lipsā sees herself in her new clothes. The family only remains with a few servants in the name of visitors. There were some neighbours. Due to her nature, nobody was fascinated by her beauty. Nowadays everything is as usual...as per practices....Lipsā is not satisfied. She searches of somebody who genuinely praises her. At least, sacrificing oneself, who hails her beauty. But, now the situation is awful. Lipsā feels that nobody can handle her situation. Her courteous look suddenly thought of the importance of Śrīmukh. Lipsā searches for it and laments her past.

It had been a tiresome hunt.

Śrīmukh is present with all the information. Śrīmukh accepted Candrāmani's welcome and entered the house. He inquired about the master. Candrāmani replied politely mentioning his healthiness.

The autumn weather was fine. The white clouds were beautifying the clean sky. The beauty of the garden could be compared with that of the lover. The surrounding is looking green. The two sides of the path are filled with trees. The trees are swaying to the tune of the wind. The sun is about to set and it is time for the birds to fly back to their nests.

Induketan sat calmly. Smile is reflected on his face. His devotion indicated the tranquility of the autumn sky....in front of the eyes were the mouldable affectionate clouds....the green path of the season....the lamenting moonbeam....the art of the full moon.....

Union is a unique sensation. Here, sensation is alone. The provisions for journey are adequate. Separation is not of much importance. Differentiation is without parts. This is ideal form for formation. A part of the result.

Evening sets in with the dewdrops.

Candrāmani arranged the top room properly. As in previous occasions, Induketan went and sat over there. Śrīmukh entered humbly. Induketan asked.

- Have you visited all the places?
- Yes.....
- Were you able to collect all the details?

Śrīmukh answered sorrowfully.

- Nothing is favourable enough for collecting any details.
- Then.....?
- Everything is destroyed.

Induketan smiled.

- Then what is the worry?

Śrīmukh replied irritatingly

- But renovation is not possible everywhere.

Induketan smiled again.

- Then what.....?

Taking a deep breath, Śrīmukh replied.

- All these have to be built newly.

Induketan asked him seriously.

- Who will build it...?

Śrīmukh looked at Induketan's face. Then he replied slowly.

- As you instruct, Sir.

Induketan took a deep breath.

- Time has passed by.

Śrīmukh looked surprised.

- Why did not you tell earlier?

Induketan made him understand.

- My dear son! Everything has its limitations. Some form of controlling mechanism exists. When all these things come to the mind, at that time the mind also becomes controlled. Attitudes are also chained. On that path, appetite appears. That path is of abandonment....dedication... devotion....

Śrīmukh asked fascinatingly.

- How are all these things possible?
- Life is a form of power. By any means, this power needs to be utilized. As far as it is utilized, it is possible to express it. But how it is to be expressed, is a matter of thought.

Many questions gathered in Śrīmukh's mind – What was he expressing till now? In which direction was he utilizing his energy of life? How was the path okay for all?

Observing Śrīmukh to be silent, Induketan told.

- Expression power of everybody is not the same. Here, experience leads the way. Accordingly, life progresses. Sincerity decides the degree of expression. There, the result is union. But in reality, dedication determines the way of life.

Śrīmukh remained serious in a humble manner. His mind is disturbed by the springing thoughts of the devastated places. Looking for a means to own them, he questioned.

- Then what about the renovation of the dilapidated places?

Induketan smiled.

- Not only life, everything is time bound. When all these were constructed, it was an appropriate time. Thereafter, all were handed over. Now, what is left to be done? Where is the objective?
- Then what is the decision?
- Land was present. Land was left over there. Earlier the land was not unutilized productively. We had put it to use. It required planning. Ingredients were present. The skill of construction was present. There were some beneficial objectives. Only, there was lack of proper planning. This was our execution. But was the complete project sustainable? If the objectives are fulfilled, does anybody think of its future existence?
- Then what should be done over there?
- The development would be thrown out of gears.

- Knowing each and every thing, why did you get engaged in it? Why did you build all these? What was your objective behind all this? Whom did you dedicate all these?

Śrīmukh was bewildered.

Induketan looked at the sky. The moonlight was clearly visible in the autumn sky. The rhythmic sounds of insects were making the atmosphere pleasant.

Induketan started.

- My dear son. My experience has been my great achievement. In the flow of life, I have sometimes felt the arrival of bubbles. Transition has been attached with me all along. The idol of transition is my wife Moonbeam. We discovered each other at a weak moment. The boundary of life was clear to us. But there were a few obstacles in our path of union. At this top room, we decided on how to come out of our obstacles. Some welfare activities came across our minds. That's why we stayed at many places. While staying at many places, the welfare activities were thought of.
- Then, what was the reason of welfare thoughts?
- No.....It was the result of incompleteness.
- Then mother.....?
- She was the planner for all the activities. But, all our activities were centered around peace. Still, we could not forget the essence of life. Thereby, the way of life and its destination was controlled. Dedication was thought as the supreme law of life. So she was accepting dedication as the way of life in her works, words and mind.
- Then.....?

- Thereby my partner in peace was filled with happiness. The result of her deeds was the various accomplishments. So, her life was aligned with accomplishment. For me, way of life....accomplishment...enlightenment.

Induketan remained silent. Śrīmukh discovered his piousness and as a disciple, he laid down at the feet of Induketan. The autumn night made the relationship as a special one.

Servant Candrāmani indicated that the night was late.

Autumn had set in for long.

It is night. Abhrapad's sleep was disturbed. His bitter mind was filled with greed. The pain in his heart was intolerable. There was a heap of disbelief in his heart. His every word reflected vanity. There were no limits to his misbehavior. Everything was done for wealth creation.

For increasing his wealth, his daughter Urvī was recently put to dance. The public were pleased to see the dance of her adolescent stage. Though the prize money was less, still it was motivating. Abhrapad was very happy, since the money was getting added to his wealth. Nowadays, Abhrapad himself invested in some activities. For the well being of the daughter, old Dinamani used to move around with her.

But Śrāvānī was not in favour of all this. So she protested against it, time and again. She protested to Dinamani and her daughter. She also requested to her husband. She made him aware that the results would be fearful. But all these efforts go in vain. She cries. To whom shall she reveal to lessen her sorrow? Only mother was there who was close to her. Now, her place is taken by old Dinamani. He does whatever he can, but when helpless, only keeps a hand on her forehead revealing his helplessness.

He was ill for three days. Śrāvaṇī was busy in taking care of him. Urvī was also serving. But Abhṛapad could not tolerate all these things. He shouted at both of them on seeing them at the servant's side.

- What are you doing here?

Śrāvaṇī remained silent.

Urvī answered.

- Grandfather is ill.
- Grandfather....? He is a servant.....You can call him by his name.
- Can't servant become a grandfather?
- That I cannot tell.

Urvī asked boldly.

- Then what do you tell?
- Am I inhuman in front of a servant?

Abhṛapad slapped his daughter and asked her to go out from there. He also ordered to Śrāvaṇī.

- Go.....I had not brought you here for taking care of a servant.

Śrāvaṇī departed without any word. Dinamaṇi requested politely.

- Master, I do not need any care. Do not scold others because of me.

Abhṛapad stopped.

- It is okay. How long will you lie down? Start your work from tomorrow. Tomorrow night, my daughter has a dance program. If necessary, you have to accompany her.

Abhṛapad came into Śrāvaṇī's room. He told rudely.

- What, are you practicing a maid's work? Why are you so affectionate towards servants? Servant's place is at the master's feet. You are only giving them courage. They would start creating nuisance within a few days. If you again display such behaviour, you will be thrown out of here.

Abhrapad departed. In some other room, Urvī was crying. Śrāvāṇī was sitting there. She was blaming her bad luck. She was praying to God for her early death. But she was reminded of her old mother's advice to tolerate everything in life. She gave the examples to her daughter. She advised her daughter to increase the level of patience. She prayed to God for the wellbeing of their daughter and embraced her..... cried.

As Urvī grew, she became conversant with her father's attitude and character. She also realized her mother's sorrow. She understood her declining family values. She heard about her mother's past. She was disturbed. But she could not decide on what is to be done. Eventually, out of fear, she kept her head on her mother's lap and cried.

Urvī tried to forget her family history. In front of her eyes, was the ambience of the dance hall. Then the style and movement of the feet. She was tuned to the rhythms of the dhol. Her success lied in the smile on the face of audience. She was proud of the ovation and applause of public. Urvī remained humble. When she used to come back to the rest room after her dance performance, hundreds of hands tried to shake hands with her. As if she could not draw the picture of her life all by herself. The broken picture decorated her.

Being by Urvī's side, Dinamaṇi used to take pride in Urvī's performance but he also feared a lot for her future. Many thought of getting her as their life partners. Some people discussed with her regarding business on dancing matters, while some others asked for her value for physical enjoyment. Some presented her with

flower garlands in romance while some others waited for an exchange of smiles as lovers. Some praised her for her dedication to work while some others prayed for her future progress. But all these were in vain to Dinamaṇi. He did not wish to listen to any thing, He only wished to control Urvī. But this was not possible. He tried to explain Urvī. Urvī was becoming wealthy. Dinamaṇi thought – Father was burning with vanity. Others were also burning. Daughter was also going in same direction. She was burning others that time. Time would come when she would be burnt in other's fire. Her ego was increasing day after day on the ovation and applause of public. People were encouraging her. Actually, this was the lower most rung of pride. As she was going up the ladder of progress, she would have destroyed others as well as her own self.

To Dinamaṇi, welfare of the family was his prime objective. Whenever, he apprehended a problem, he would have seen an obstacle. When he is not able to do so, he himself would become an obstacle – he showed as if he was ill. Sometimes, he had to look into household work. He would obey his master's orders. However, he did not let all this affect his affection for Urvī. He was bound to be present in the dance performances. But, recently he would pose to be ill to prevent her.

Once, Dinamaṇi was hearing a description of Urvī's performance from Śrāvaṇī. Śrāvaṇī was feeling very sad. Dinamaṇi requested her to refrain from sending Urvī to the dance programmes. Śrāvaṇī was helpless. Her husband's vanity was supreme. Then the daughter followed like insects. So, Śrāvaṇī was sad. She had a protesting mind. Her thoughts were bitter. Her silent nature was taking the protest in a different path. But off late, she had made her mind strong rather than to make protests. She promised herself to intensify the protest – by exploding the bomb of silence everyday.

Angry Śrāvaṇī was sitting.

Suddenly she heard a commotion and looked outside the window to find people calling Dinamaṇi.

- Fatherly.....! Fatherly.....!

Dinamaṇi was present.

Śrāvaṇī asked.

- Why is the noise?
- It's not noise. Wealthy Raghupati's sons are there with their new vehicles. They are enjoying the new vehicles.
- But these people do not come. Why have they come now?
- Today Raghupati's wife Bhabani is seriously ill. She would not live any more. What will the only daughter do?
- Isn't the daughter's name Lipsā?
- Yes....She had deserted her husband in greed of property. Father Raghupati died suddenly, so she is in trouble. Others would try to take advantage of the situation and confiscate her property. Off late, the brothers had arrived. Who knows, what would happen? She does not even think of where Śrīmukh has gone.

Hearing Śrīmukh's name, Śrāvaṇī's heart pounded faster. She became a bit pleased. A few thoughts from the past unsteadied her mind.

She asked.

- He would have had his share over here. Why isn't he coming?
- He has renounced all his own properties. Why are you worried about other's property? His properties are now used as temple for the village Goddess. Always, some spiritual ceremonies are held there. Religious meetings are also held there. People are involved in welfare activities over there. Some of them also provide donations.

- From the very beginning, he has been very generous.
- At an early adulthood, he had become a saint to make his father happy.
- Why did he become a saint? He had got married to Lipsā.
- What marriage? He had gone out on the night of the honeymoon. Didn't Raghupati search for him? Didn't he go on explaining to her daughter? But like mother, like daughter. The ego of both of them hurt old Raghupati. He died of his sorrow. Still then, they have not realized it.
- What will happen now?
- What now? Monks do not have any fixed place to stay. Who knows where he goes? Basically, Śrīmukh is a noble person. Raghupati had understood him properly. He captured a gem of a person as Śrīmukh and got him married off to his daughter. But what? Nobody acknowledged him. Because of ego and pride, the gem could not be recognized and now there is repentance.

Śrāvaṇī was speechless in self exhaustion. Forgetting dedication to her husband, she blames her luck. Observing her worried face, Dinamaṇi told.

- Who is to blame? Here also, it is the same situation. My master could not recognize her gemlike wife, inspite of getting her. One day, time will come, when he would also repent.

Dinamaṇi went out turning his back. Śrāvaṇī sat – whatever she has got in life, she has lost it. What is the way by which she could take her husband and daughter away from the evil path? Or else, should she end her life before witnessing the downfall of both of them?

Days were passing with the tension.

When it is the time for the buds to bloom, wind arrives there. Thereafter it spreads the fragrance. Not only does this attract the bee but also some other insects

along with that. When the bee comes for union, it also finds other insects. But how does the inexperienced bud understand the same? Śrāvaṇī is in agony. For some days, Urvī has been staying outside for her dance programmes. Off course, proper arrangements are present. Besides her, fatherly is also present. But still she is not in peace. Śrāvaṇī was roaming with her mind going hither and thither. The symbol of fear was there on her silent face. She was counting the days. Her foot movements were restless. Sometimes, she looked outside the door for her daughter. Sometimes, she would stare out of the window for a long time.

Many were going on the road. But nobody was clearly visible. Only a garland of heads could be seen. Her feelings were hurting her. Still, she could take her eyes off. Her mind could wait no longer.

Suddenly, a loud laughter could be heard. Śrāvaṇī turned conscious. She looked indifferently – her husband was laughing crookedly. She sat still. She was serious. Abhrapad started rudely.

- Punishment is received today. Till date, she has been suffering.

Śrāvaṇī asked politely.

- Whom are you talking about?
- That rude lady....now her ego is crushed.
- What happened....? Who is she.....?
- She is sinful Lipsā. Who is now whose relative.....? For wealth, everybody turns to be a relative. If wealth is lost, everything is lost. The property may not fall in the right hands.
- What happened....? Tell me clearly.

Abhrapad laughed crookedly.

- The old lady Bhabani has died. The entire property is to be divided. The sons are raising walls in their own properties. The house also got divided. The daughter's share has fallen in the room of the courtyard.....room.....That sinful lady has aptly received her punishment.

Again Abhrapad laughed.

Śrāvaṇī was disgusted.

- What are you happy for? Laughing at bad times of others is not good.
- What is her bad time?
- Anyway....What is here?
- I am greatly satisfied by the fact that the egoistic lady is punished. She must undergo atonement for her evil deeds. Simple lady.....
- What is her ego?

Śrāvaṇī asked angrily.

- Think about your own self.

Turning around, she departed.

Abhrapad turned angry.

- Śrāvaṇī.....! How dare you speak such words to me? Since when have you developed such habits?

Abhrapad boldly entered into the committee room.

It was on the verge of a conflict.

Off late, Lipsā has left the palace and has been residing in the room in the courtyard. It is clean everywhere and nicely decorated. Raghupati had built it with love and affection. It is here that he reaped the benefits of his business. He also meditated here for his salvation. He thought about the means for atonement. He

spent his leisure time over here. It was a very small portion of his property. This was now the share of Lipsā.

Lipsā became responsible for whatever she has inherited from her father. She has protest in her mind but many times more, it is repentance. This shelter is everything she has. The hut is her only property. The way for solution is also the path of this hut. The curvy road ahead led to the pool. In order to gauge the distance between the pool and the hut, she was sitting there. A lonely place. The other places were already used for worship. The places were renovated.....To be in line with the requirements for worship. Now, she is no longer influenced by her father's aristocracy. All around were the cruel sounds of insects. The harsh sound of the crow was dreadful. The violent crying of dogs was reflecting the torturous scenario of lonely life.

Lipsā repented.

That day, Śrīmukh was seen to be going out of the back door of the palace by the curvy road. Lipsā could not see her groom clearly in the early morning sun. Her eyes were tainted in vanity. But nowadays, mother did not advise to express pride. Even father did not advise to suppress her ego. All expressions are by self. All actions are by self. The quarrel between the brothers has ended. They have taken their shares. Off late, the favourableness of mind is only for self.

Lipsā was worried. With her every shadow of experience, there was vanity. The shadow itself was like a closed door. It neither allowed the outside light to enter, nor the inside darkness to go out. Recently, Lipsā experienced the removal of all ornaments. This freeness made her luminous. She understood the essence of life. She could feel other's pain. She was eager to tread into her new path of life. She could feel the closeness of the ordinary gentleman. She was eager to search for

him. She was ready to pray for forgiveness and devote herself to him. At the name of Śrīmukh, waves vibrated within her.

With age, the fickle mindedness was lost.

With open hair, Lipsā stared towards the pool. Waves were created...boundaries created...towards the shore. She was excited...crying...again looking towards....again looking towards the white water lilies, she closed her eyes.

Night fell.

Induketan went towards the top room. Candrāmani had not prepared the carpet. Śrīmukh was now a servant. In spite of his illness, Induketan has not left going to the top room. He tried to sleep over there. Sitting nearby, Śrīmukh massages the feet with his hands. He gives a description of the daily jobs. He explains the details of income and expenditure. Induketan praised Śrīmukh for his devotion to work. He is also pleased with his behaviour. Everyday, Śrīmukh listened to the past history of Induketan. But, on that day, Śrīmukh orated his history. Induketan knew that the story is completed. Induketan preached about life.

- Long live! You are not my servant. You are my son. Śrīmukh became polite.
- Why this unnecessary provision of rights for me.....? I have completed the responsibilities given by you to self satisfaction. If again my services are required, I would be happy to accept it. Where is the question of right? You are experienced. You are fully aware of the subject of rights and responsibilities.

Induketan smiled.

- Long live! On one hand there is responsibility, on the other hand there is right – this is the prime difference. Somewhere, the owner handles the

responsibilities. Somewhere, the responsible person becomes the owner.

You are on whose side.....?

Śrīmukh was answerless.

Again, smilingly Induketan advised.

- You are given some responsibilities imply that you have certain rights. Now you are responsible means you have the rights.

Śrīmukh was overwhelmed with politeness. He was quite impressed with the affectionate words of the old man. He asked.

- Then, what kind of responsibility is given to me?
- I do not know....., how long will I live? I am not bothered about what will happen to my properties after my death. I am bothered about you.
- Bothered about me.....?
- I have heard everything about you. I have also gauged the degree of your vanity. I also know about your transformation through various activities for removal of this vanity. I feel that you have gained your real state of mind. So considering your nature and caliber, I have granted all rights to you as my son.

Being surprised, Śrīmukh again requested.

- Tell me the responsibility.
- Now I am free from all family life. Here is the top room. The blessings of the moonbeam are also here.
- I am beside you.
- That is not enough. You are married. You have left your wife because of your vanity. Your left wife must be suffering. You have transformed. After your transformation, you are aware of your responsibilities. So, you

bring her for her transformation. Here, she will experience her life. The moonbeam will be your path finder.

Śrīmukh was surprised. He accepted his faults.

- I will obey your orders.

At this time, Candrāmani entered with a lamp. Some people beside him requested.

- They are here to invite you.

Induketan asked the requesting persons to sit down. One of the organizers gave him the invitation and told.

- In this locality, for the laying of foundation stone of a temple of dance, a dance programme has been organized. You are requested to come over there as a chief guest. This is our invitation.

Induketan smiled gently.

- Your invitation is accepted. But I will not be able to go due to my ailing health. If you wish, then in my place, I would appoint another person to go.

The organizers agreed.

- That would be fine. If you tell about him, then we would go and invite him.

- There is no need to go anywhere. He is there in front of you.

Induketan pointed his finger.

- This is Śrīmukh....He is a pious person. Let the foundation stone be laid by him. I think, that will be correct.

Everybody looked at Śrīmukh. His face was prominent even in the dim light. Some of the hairs were white. Some of his beard was also white. In the moonlight, his middle age was clear. But still there was a reflection of youth on his bare body. His peaceful and steady eyes were very polite looking.

The organizers invited him.

- Please do come.

Śrīmukh looked at Induketan's face. He looked at the organizers. He remained answerless in self guilt.

Induketan told.

- Do not be tensed. For your good deeds, there will be no catastrophe. Whatever is for the good must be promised.

Śrīmukh promised.

- I accept your invitation. I will reach at the proper time at the proper place.

The organizers departed. Once again, Śrīmukh showed his gratefulness to Induketan. He lay down at his feet and cried. Induketan took him up and hugged. He made him understand.....

- This is association.

Candrāmani's covered body shivered.

The dance programme commenced. The rhythmic tune of musical instruments began playing. All were anxiously waiting for the guest. Announcement was made that Urvī was going to present her dance. The audiences were relieved. The curtain rose. Urvī started presenting her dance on the stage. Her

dance came to an end with applause from the audiences. The organizer invited the guest on stage. The guest came. The programme started as per agenda. Firstly, the organizer invited the guest to bless one and all. Then, Urvī came to receive the blessings. Śrīmukh was astonished. The girl looked very much like Śrāvaṇī. The only difference was that there was no reflection of humility on her face. Śrīmukh welcomed her from the core of his heart. He gifted her with gifts and prize money sent by Induketan. Again, there was applause from the audience. Śrīmukh started to speak from his own experiences.

‘Respected! Life starts from a dot. It ends with association...But vanity obstructs the path of life. It gets reflected in many ways. Sometimes in the form of attachment..., sometimes in the form of infatuation..., sometimes in the form of anger.... Like this, it is expressed in many ways. Many pray to overcome the same. They face failure. But it is not understood – all these prayers are for life. If you do not understand the meaning of life, then all these prayers will go in vain. Again, the aim of life is association. There is peace in it. There is happiness. So, prayer needs to be the killer of vanity to establish peace.

After finishing his speech, Śrīmukh got down from stage. All were pleased on hearing his short and summarized speech. All congratulated the guest.

Śrīmukh prepared to return. He requested the organizers to arrange for his meeting with the girl. The organizers took him to the green room. Śrīmukh wanted to know the identity of Urvī. Finding Dinamaṇi at that place, he was surprised. Dinamaṇi could not recognize him. Śrīmukh went to him and asked.

- Is your name Dinamaṇi?

Suddenly, Dinamaṇi started examining him and asked.

- Yes....I am Dinamaṇi.....Perhaps you are Śrīmukh?

Śrīmukh merrily replied.

- Yes....., fatherly.....
- It may be sixteen years or more than that. Ah....my fate! I am blessed at your sight.
- What are you doing here?
- I am moving around with Śrāvaṇī's daughter.
- Śrāvaṇī's daughter.....?
- The dancer Urvī is Śrāvaṇī's daughter.

Dinamaṇi again indicated towards Urvī.

- Pay respect....Pay respect....He is a noble person. This is pious soul Śrīmukh at whose place the village Goddess is currently situated.

Urvī paid respect to him.

Śrīmukh blesses.

- Be happy. Be peace loving.

Remembering of Śrāvaṇī, Śrīmukh also wanted to inquire about Lipsā. Suddenly, the organizer reached over there. He ordered Dinamaṇi to bring Urvī to the stage. Dinamaṇi tried to move fast. He only remembered.

- You come quickly. There is no news.

With self dignity, Śrīmukh departed from the ceremony. Something spoken....Something unspoken....Something hidden....Something outside... Something understandable.... Something not understandable. But the point of union was as sweet as nectar in the origin of a flower. Hence, it would yield results in carrying out the search there. The search would be a fruitful nostalgia. The offerings of the mortal describe the importance of life vividly.

Induketan's days were passing by. One early morning, Induketan passed away. At the last, he gave the responsibility of servant Candrāmani to Śrīmukh and breathed his last. Now, in the palace, Induketan's position was taken over by Śrīmukh. The same top room. The same Candrāmani. The path finder in the association.....Śaśirekhā....

Candrāmani requested.

- What are you thinking about? Fulfill the desires of master. By this, you will be happy.

Śrīmukh sat. The picture of birthplace aroused in his mind. That is Madhugram, where he did all his welfare activities. It is here that he left Lipsā on his journey. The place still echoed of the voice of his father during his childhood. But, now, in front of Śrīmukh was a lifeless village. In the name of clamour, there were arguments. Mastery was demonstrated in scope of acquisition of wealth. Vanity was everybody's right. The weak were the ornaments of decay. Girls were in a land of vice. Men were acting as controllers.

Dinamani brought back Urvī to home. He described the good news to all. Abhrapad was happy about the prize money. He went to Śrāvaṇī's room to keep all the wealth. Śrāvaṇī was burning with anger. For the first time, she was entirely perturbed with anger.

- What, did you get the money....?

Abhrapad smiled diplomatically.

Śrāvaṇī hissed loudly as a snake.

- Uncivilized.....! Loafer.....! Hate your attitude.....Why don't you go to brothels?

Abhrapad shouted.

- Caution.....you servant's daughter!

Śrāvaṇī's disgust was evident.

- Demon..... Lower caste..... Go away from here. My life is ruined by getting you as a husband. You are also ruining my daughter's life.

Stupid.... Vile person.....

- Śrāvaṇī.....! I will get you tongue out.

- Go – Go.....Idiot.....

- Śrāvaṇī.....!

Abhrapad roared and started beating her. Śrāvaṇī shouted. Hearing her cry, Urvī came. Then, Abhrapad tried to strangulate Śrāvaṇī and threw her to the ground. Seeing this, Urvī became very angry. She took a stick and hit Abhrapad on his body. Abhrapad took her to another room. She tied her with a rope. He slapped her and went away, closing the door. Urvī could not shout in fear, she only cried.

Not hearing any sound, Abhrapad came to Śrāvaṇī's room. Śrāvaṇī was lying down on the floor. He tried to pick her up. He suddenly gained consciousness. Again he observed. Śrāvaṇī was senseless. Abhrapad became worried. He shouted at a loud voice continuously.

- Fatherly.....! Fatherly.....!

Dinamāṇi came from outside. Looking at Śrāvaṇī, he asked.

- What happened.....What happened.....?

- At first, bring water.

Then Dinamaṇi brought water. He sprinkled water on Śrāvaṇī's face. Abhṛapad used the hand fan, after which Śrāvaṇī gained her sense. Dinamaṇi became happy and asked.

- Where is daughter...?

Abhṛapad directed with an adverse attitude.

- In that room.

Dinamaṇi went over there. Urvī was tied. Crying Urvī became exuberant on seeing Dinamaṇi. Dinamaṇi consoled Urvī. There, Abhṛapad expressed his anxiety for Śrāvaṇī.

- I know....., nobody can live here peacefully. Pain....Only pain.

Urvī came to Śrāvaṇī's room. She cried.

- Mother.....! Mother.....!

Śrāvaṇī sat. Her eyes were filled with tears. Urvī called her again and again. But Śrāvaṇī remained silent. Then Dinamaṇi shouted.

- Daughter.....! Daughter.....! Why don't you speak.....!

Śrāvaṇī still remained speechless. Abhṛapad grew fearful. Gaining composure, he told.

- Śrāvaṇī.....! Śrāvaṇī.....! Oh, why don't you speak anything?

With tear full of eyes, Śrāvaṇī continued to stare. Urvī was restless. She told.

- Mother.....! Mother.....! Mother.....!!

Śrāvaṇī was indicating – 'Her speaking power is lost. She is not able to speak.' Urvī told surprisingly.

- Have you become dumb?

Śrāvaṇī nodded her head.

Filled with agony, Dinamaṇi told to Abhrapad.

- Why did you do this? You could not recognize your Goddess-like wife?  
You have converted her silence into her dumbness?

Abhrapad was pained. He could not understand on what is to be done and looked still towards Śrāvaṇī.

The storm had passed. The result has been fearful. The silence at home was like an empty palace. Solitariness was supreme. The silence was even causing pain to the sparrows. The inner consciences of all were unhappy.

Three days had passed. The same condition prevailed. Śrāvaṇī was speechless. She was dumb. Abhrapad was busy in contacting good doctors. He gave medicines. However, still there was no improvement. Urvī was also silent. She was not interested in speaking to her father. Dinamaṇi was busy with his service. He could not desert Urvī and her mother. He was working with her instructions.

Abhrapad was alone and worried. For the first time in his life, such an incident had aggrieved him. For the first time, repentance had touched his heart. She felt to be a failure on the issue of Śrāvaṇī. But he was not ready to bow down.

The afternoon was cool.

At the committee place of the village, some people were busy in fixing up the schedule of the welfare activities. A calm person gradually came over there. The villagers recognized – it is Śrīmukh. All of a sudden, the message spread. Many people came to see Śrīmukh. Dinamaṇi heard the news and informed

Śrāvaṇī. Urvī was sitting over there. She became anxious to meet Śrīmukh on hearing his name. Dinamaṇi reminded.

- He is a noble man...he has come to the committee place. Remember? On that day, he had blessed you and given a prize.

Śrāvaṇī was curious and had a gentle smile. Urvī rushed out without telling anything. She ran towards the committee place. Dinamaṇi was worried thinking about Abhrapad. He also came to the meeting place to gauge Abhrapad's actions.

Abhrapad was deeply thoughtful. He was recalling his past egos and vanities. He heard noise from outside and entered the meeting room. He looked to Dinamaṇi and asked.

- Where is the noise coming from?

Dinamaṇi answered with a fearful voice.

- May be some activities are being held at the committee place.
- What kind of activities? Today, there is no festival? Dinamaṇi was silent.

Abhrapad thoughtfully told.

- The medicines are causing no improvement. You search for some other better doctor. Or else, she would remain dumb forever. Recently, the daughter is also following her path. She is not talking with me. Whether Urvī is besides Śrāvaṇī? Call her....
- She is not there.
- Where has she gone?
- May be, to the village committee place.....
- Why has she gone there? Just let me check....., what is going on over there?

Abhrapad was ready to go. Dinamaṇi was helpless. Still, by acquiring some courage, he told.

- Why should you go? I can call her.
- No...No....I also have some other work. I am going.

Abhrapad went out.

Dinamaṇi quickly went to Śrāvaṇī's room and informed her about it.

- Daughter....! Something bad will happen. Just now, young master has gone out to the village committee place in search of Urvī. You please tell him not to go. Else.....Else.....

Dinamaṇi stopped.

Silent Śrāvaṇī got up and changed her dress.

Lipsā heard the news about Śrīmukh's arrival. Waves of pleasure spread in her body. She was anxious. Heart beats were going faster. She was restless. This was the right time to invite him...this was the opportunity for atonement...this was the correct time to surrender all egos and vanities. He would be invited to her cottage. Here the tears of repentance would be used to wash his feet. She anxiously changed her clothes and ran.

Urvī passed through the crowd and reached the committee place. She introduced herself and took the blessings from Śrīmukh's feet displaying a youthful mannerism. Śrīmukh also blessed her and gave her some more gifts. People were astonished. Abhrapad was looking at the scene from a distant place. He burned with anger – 'The daughter does not touch my feet. But she is paying respect to an unknown person?'

Abhrapad reached the stage. He shouted loudly.

- You arrogant....evil.....why have you come here?

Forcibly, Abhrapad took away all the gifts from her hand. He slapped her strongly.

- Go.....as soon as possible.....

Then he shouted at Śrīmukh.

- Nomadic....? Loafer....! Have you again come to destroy my family?  
Today, who will save you?

Abhrapad started hitting Śrīmukh. There was commotion all around. Śrīmukh remained silent. He stood like an innocent bullock. Abhrapad was hitting him angrily. Lipsā came at that moment. She was crying loudly and holding Śrīmukh. Still then, Abhrapad had closed his eyes and was hitting him.

Śrāvaṇī was running fast. Dinamaṇi was following. Seeing the scene of hitting from a distance, Śrāvaṇī suddenly screamed.

- N....N....No.....No.....

Abhrapad heard her shouting again and again mixed with crying and ultimately stopped hitting. Śrāvaṇī was weeping like a hurt deer. Lipsā was crying. Urvī was also crying.

Śrīmukh was bleeding heavily.

Lipsā was wiping the blood with her sari. Abhrapad held Śrāvaṇī tightly. He was also crying.

- What did you do? How did you do?

Seeing Śrīmukh's blood stained body, some people came to hit Abhrapad.

- Do you think that because of your richness, you can hit anybody?  
Come....Come....Hit him....Hit him.....

All the people came in front. All of a sudden, Śrīmukh came and stood in front of Abhrapad and tried to rescue him. People were angry.

- Go away.....Go away.....If all hit him, he is going to die today.

Śrīmukh requested.

- Brothers....! Listen.... Kindly listen.

The public stood quietly. Śrīmukh explained.

- Brothers? When the words from the mouth end, at that time, words come out in actions. If all such things were organized, then it was a necessity.

The people argued.

How....? How.....?

Śrīmukh explained.

- Śrāvaṇī was dumb. She had lost her speaking power due to her sorrow. She has regained her speaking ability. Her dumbness has been expelled. That is why I am happy. I don't feel sad, if somebody's hitting me is beneficial to the other. I am happy with this. If I am killed....

Suddenly Lipsā placed her hand on Śrīmukh's mouth.

- Do not tell like this. If anything like this happens, it is due to me. From the very beginning, I have given you enough grief and trouble.

Lipsā cried heavily. Śrīmukh consoled.

- Lipsā....! What is the reason for your crying? It is afternoon. This is the time to depart.....
- Where will you go? My cottage is open for you. My heart is decorated for your arrival.

Lipsā held Śrīmukh's hand and brought him to her cottage. The public were astonished. Abhrapad stood beside along with Śrāvaṇī. He was staring into the path. Old Dinamaṇi was sitting beside Urvī with a light heart. He wiped the tears and told.

- Why did you do it? Couldn't you understand the person who wanted welfare for your family?

Abhrapad was ashamed and repentant. He realized his degree of vanity. Realizing that the downfall of pride is the path for happiness, he ordered to Dinamaṇi.

- Fatherly..... Come....with me.

Dinamaṇi was apprehensive.

Abhrapad speedily came in front of Lipsā's cottage. Śrāvaṇī followed him quickly. Along with Urvī, Dinamaṇi followed their path. All united in front of Lipsā's cottage. Śrīmukh stood. Lipsā was only observing Abhrapad's movements.

Abhrapad folded his hands and told politely.

- Friend....! Śrīmukh....! Vanity makes a person blind. So I couldn't witness the good things anywhere. Today you have raised the curtain of blindness in my life. I am ashamed... I am repentant... I get your forgiveness.

Śrīmukh held his hands. Abhrapad told.

- Friend. Please forgive whatever misdeeds have been done by me unconsciously. It will not be repeated in the future.

Śrīmukh smiled a bit.

Abhrapad looked at Lipsā and told.

- Goddess! I know that my misbehavior is unpardonable. I am repentant for all the bad things that I have thought of you or bad words that I have spoken about you.

Lipsā smiled a bit.

- Śrāvaṇī was there for anything.

Śrāvaṇī smiled. Lipsā, Śrāvaṇī and Urvī entered the cottage. Dinamaṇi was pleased on witnessing this lovely union. Urvī invited Śrīmukh and Lipsā.

- Won't you come to our house? Will you not see my dance?

Śrīmukh smiled and told.

- Oh...Is it right? We must go. This year also, dance programme would be organized.

Dinamaṇi told merrily.

- Let dance programme be organized at village committee place this time.

Everybody laughed.

The evening approached. The lovely union is nearing the end. All the family members of Abhrapad returned back home.

Śrīmukh sat down.

Lipsā's cottage was shining in moonlight. The courtyard was looking bright. The white lilies had blossomed in pool waters. The sounds of the insects came. By the coolness of the moonbeam, Śrīmukh looked at Lipsā with a smiling face. Lipsā put on medicines on the blood stained wounds of Śrīmukh with tears in her eyes.

The invisible colourful morning approached from the veil of the night.

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# तिलोत्तमा



विद्वन्मणिः

प्रो. केशवचन्द्रदाश

## V.II Tilottamā

It is a small village housing more than a hundred families. Although the boundaries of the village are wide spread, still the village is small. Towards one side, an unnamed river is flowing by while on the other side, it is a pond full of lotus flowers. To the west, there is a long road while the north boundary constitutes of a farmland. Amidst all this, the village is full of trees. Looking from a distance, it seems that the trees are fully blossomed. However, the village had experienced many floods in the past along with many chilly winters. Still, the village is self sufficient by its own merits and efforts. The dust from cow-feet brings dusk to the village. Dawn alights the village with the calls of calves, roosters, dogs, cuckoos and pigeons. The day passes with the singing of the farmers. Night falls with the light from cowshed.

The seasons come one by one. Spring decorates the place with the blossoming flowers. The white moonlight, the joyful night, the cool breeze, Palash flowers- all render wholeness to the village. The summer heat surrenders to the shadow of the trees and hides behind the leaves. Monsoon fills the air with the fragrance of the first rains. The black clouds express themselves with an eye of lighting at the horizon. The village plays with the kitchen smoke all around it. The village fills songs to the mouth of the village kids. It brings smiles to the farmer's face. The village brings excitements to the new bride. The cool breeze of early morning gradually sets in winter. The paddy turns golden to bring the new harvest. The dry soil laughs with the blood and sweat of farmers.

The shepherds sing along as they walk along with their fleet of cows. The kids play in the dust, pick the flowers and enjoy each other's company. Amidst all this, somebody notices everything insignificantly. At times he passes sweet remarks. He always carries a smile like a flower. His teeth are placed like white

seeds. Dust is noticed in his fair complexion. He does not go to play inspite of everyone's call.

He turns down the calls of play telling

- Later, later.

During a quarrel, he tries to explain things and at times becomes gloomy. A passenger from a car asks him:

- Why are you so sad? Why are you so gloomy?

He smiles gently. Again a question comes.

- Hasn't mother given you food?

He modestly replies and smiles back.

- Yes.

- Then why don't you play?

- I will play later.

- Ok.

Everybody goes away seeing him smiling. He enjoys seeing others play- at times he claps – at times he dances. A blissful moment will exist in his poorly stepped dancing. His posture earned respect from others. Everyone is happy with his behaviour. His sweet speech, his running, his dance are all elements of happiness for others.

He is always kind hearted to the young girls. He praises the girls to his mother, treats them, accompanies them to their homes and promises to meet them the next day.

He is a king in minds of the poor villagers. He has maintained his tradition of strong bonding. Although, the modern generation is knowledgeable in literary

facts, their traditional knowledge compliments them. For example, if fashionable clothes are absent for kids, they decorate them with turmeric and vermilion. Just like the fragrance of basil leaves, the young kids spread their beauty with the traditional decorations. But as the saying goes – ‘Who knows the future?’ Also, it is said that future extends from one’s shadow but it is really difficult to prove it.

Grandmother explains ‘Dear, if you are not able to read, you are blind, if you are not educated- nobody would respect you. That is why, study and become great. In this world, you will not be able to earn, unless you are educated. Your brother would be able to snatch your wealth, your property but not your knowledge. If you gain knowledge, you will have property and people will come and respect you.’

Puspavallava sees outside the window. Sunflower droops and invites the evening sun. The birds return to their nests touching the temple peak. The twilight appears behind the back of the coconut tree. Following the black cloud, the moon appears with a mild smile in the reflection of the pond.

Puspavallava’s mind was filled with the gloominess of the drooping sunflower. Different thoughts made his mind heavy. Nevertheless the waves of happiness were dancing in Puspavallava’s mind. He is happy. Many mornings, evenings and days have passed by in the village banks. Everything was drenched in oneness. The choir was quenching the thirst. This evening, many thoughts are arising in his mind. The new thoughts are creating unknown waves increasingly.

Days were passing like it. Although the evening was unknown with lightning, it had come. Such evenings are really attractive. The age of twenty-one wishes for some invention. The village palm trees and mango trees are all enjoying with each other. Many false tears, unknown sentiments are noticeable. But all these are forgotten tales.

Today, some charm has come to the classroom such that it feels that the evening would steal it. The whole classroom is so picturesque. The seats, going, coming, people talking are all pictures that steal one's mind. Some people are seen to carry gentle smiles. It is felt like stealing their smiles forever.

Following Tilottamā's black eyes, her smile attracts Puṣpavallava's heart. He is able to see the storm of life looking at the rhythm of her love filled eyes. Even after closing his eyes, it is visible. The black hairs, the sweat droplets of her nose, teeth like the bent saplings of grass and waves of her long hair. It seems that she resembles the earth like a half-moon. Lightning illuminated the house.

A few books were lying on the bed. Pages got scattered here and there with the wind coming through the window. Going outside the house, Puṣpavallava saw that the evening has passed. He paid homage to his forefathers. Remembering his late father, he offered flowers to his late mother's photograph. Seeing a couple of kids laughing Puṣpavallava remembered his young days. He gradually reached to the doorsteps.

He tried to firm up his way of life, but found complexities in all directions. Puṣpavallava has been passing his days studying but no means of earning a livelihood have surfaced. Doctors, Engineers, Teachers are all the same today. Educated-Illiterate, Rich-Poor, the Deprived and the Greedy all long for a cosy lifestyle- thus rendering selfishness of mankind.

Puṣpavallava noticed dirt in his clothing, which was challenging his self-respect. The strings of life were gradually tearing apart. His foundation and beliefs were constantly being challenged. One could hear the sound of poverty at the end

of the month. Puṣpavallava laughed mildly. He walked inside his home but amidst all this conflicts, Tilottamā's smiling face was peeping.

- Do you stay far away?

Tilottamā's voice was echoing in his ears.

He felt ashamed. Romance aroused within him. Puṣpavallava started turning the pages one after the other. He felt afraid. His heart started beating faster. He sat firmly. Puṣpavallava continued seeing the book. Suddenly power went off for sometime. He sat in the dark and closed his eyes.

He travelled to his own thoughts. He could see his late father holding a child. His father asked the Sanyasi

- Will the child live and prosper?

The Sanyasi frowned and replied

- Don't worry- sorrow and happiness are evergreen friends. If a person lives his life considering all possibilities and consequences, he would be successful.

The Sanyasi laughed. Then they descended the stairs. His father slipped and fell down. The child shouted and injured himself too.

Puṣpavallava stopped dreaming. He found that his book has fallen down. The water container has also fallen and flooded water all around his room.

He didn't think much. Puṣpavallava opened the door and saw that night has deepened. All were sleeping deeply. Again he closed the door and went to sleep.

Today is Sunday. All are in a joyful mood in the hostel. There are some chit-chats going on by the side of the well. Some are washing their clothes. Some are taking water from the well and bathing. Puṣpavallava is however still asleep. The chilly wind coming through the window is making the room cold. Vadrikeśa saw Puṣpa sleeping. The door was closed from inside.

Vadrikeśa was inquisitive and approached the door. He knocked the door. Puṣpavallava changed his sleeping position and continued his sleep. Vadrikeśa knocked the door again.

- Who is there?

A sound came from inside.

- It is already 8'0 clock. Please wake up.

- Who are you?

- Vadrikeśa.

- Yes, Yes. Wake up.

- No work is there on Sunday – so I was sleeping.

- Oh don't you want to bath?

- When?

- Now. You have finished your work?

- Yes, Yes.

This time Aśutoṣa also came to have his bath. He shouted

- Oh! Puṣpa, come near the well.

- I am coming.

Puṣpa came for bathing. Vadrikeśa said,

- Aśutoṣa! Today we will tell something to Puṣpa.

Aśutoṣa poured water onto his body and inquired about what the matter is.

- After finishing your bath, come to me. I don't want to discuss now.

It is twelve o' clock. Vadrikeśa smiled and called Aśutoṣa to Puṣpa's door.

Aśutoṣa went to Puṣpa's place. Sitting on the bed, Vadrikeśa started in a cheerful manner.

- I would like to share what I have felt and seen. However, I have thought of an idea prior to this.
- What idea?

Aśutoṣa asked eagerly. But before this, whatever I have noticed, I am telling Puṣpa, don't mistrust us.

- Is there any mystery? – Aśutoṣa asked again.

Puṣpavallava smiled and told

- If you have anything to tell, please tell. Where is the question of trust – mistrust?
- Really, Puṣpa, Tilottamā's eyes were always after you. She was completely drowned in your thoughts.

Vadrikeśa laughed.

Puṣpa laughed and asked

- What are you telling?
- Really, and you were also.....
- ‘Now stop’, exclaimed Aśutoṣa seriously.
- What is there to be afraid of the truth?

Puṣpa told

- Tell something else, Vadrikeśa.

I have thought of another idea.

- Next Sunday, let everybody come from our class.
- ‘Where?’ asked Aśutoṣa.
- Wait, let me think.
- You mentioned that you have already thought about it –
- Yes, Sunday we will go for a picnic to Chilka Lake.
- ‘Everybody means just us’ asked Puṣpa.
- No everybody from the class.

And all laughed. Puṣpa asked,

- Okay, who will arrange for everything?
- What will you do over there?

Vadrikeśa observed him ironically.

- I have some other work.
- No, why is it so? As our representative, leader and elder brother – you need to take all the responsibilities for organizing it.

Puṣpa told nonchalantly,

- Aśutoṣa! Take all the responsibilities.
- No, no, I am not fit for the job. I will only come, stay with you all and if any specific job can be done by me – you may delegate the same to me.
- ‘What big-brother?’ Vadrikeśa laughed on Puṣpa.
- ‘What are you thinking about? I have asked in the class. Your name is also proposed. If anybody disagrees, then we will see.’ Vadrikeśa laughed.
- But....
- No but-but. Tilottamā should also agree. Why are you thinking? What are you pondering upon? If you come to hear of anything, tell.
- Tell if I have stolen anything. Have I looked upon anybody else’s wife?
- Varikesh! Don’t talk childishly.
- ‘What did I tell? Where did you find evilness in my thoughts? You have everything – beauty, youthfulness, education, art-loving nature, musician, singer. Infact...infact recently, I have also noticed an eagerness for marriage in your eyes’, and he laughed.
- Stop, Vadrikeśa! What will stop you?
- Are you not fit for Tilottamā?
- Who said that Puṣpa is not fit? You are telling like this, Aśutoṣa!
- Correct.
- ‘Leave it. What do we do now? Evening is over. Come, let us go for a walk’, said Puṣpavallava and started walking.

Gradually, the three friends came outside. The sound of the 6 o’clock bell could be heard from the hostel.

Tilottamā came. Nīlimā also came behind her. They were walking on the left side of the road towards college and chatting. At times, Tilottamā was speaking turning her back. Nīlimā also paused seeing Tilottamā turning back.

Tilottamā's gooselike gait, posture of holding books, smiling face, sweet voice, long hair and covered body would attract the attention of any person.

On the contrary, Nīlimā's shrewd sight, complex laughter, snake like nose, clever posture, sarcastic remarks, crooked gait and semi covered body would fool any person.

Though opposite in nature and habit, they were friends. They shared the same room, ate and slept together. Nobody went outside alone. Both had youthful nature.

Both of them climbed the stairs and entered classroom together. They kept the books in their left hand. An office staff came and informed them,

- The teacher is not well. He will not come today.
- 'Will we stay here for an hour? Any problem?', said Nīlimā.
- 'Would you please inform the other students?', requested the staff and departed.
- Tilottamā! Come and sit here for sometime. Hey, Tilottamā! Do I ask you something, will you tell me the truth?

Tilottamā asked innocently,

- What will you ask?

Nīlimā asked cleverly,

- Your mind seems to be a bit different.
- Different..... what are you telling?
- Since the last four days, you seem to be quite restless.
- What are you telling, explain in a simple manner?

Nīlimā whispered into her ears,

- Your feelings for Puṣpa seem to grow.
- ‘How come such thoughts came to your mind?’ she smiled.
- I have seen.
- What have you seen?
- Your eyes.
- Where?
- Towards Puṣpa’s eyes –
- Incorrect – Incorrect.
- It is not incorrect, I have seen it.
- ‘Nīlimā, I don’t like this habit of yours.’ She smiled. Nīlimā shook her head sarcastically.

Some students entered the classroom. Others also followed them. Vadrikeśa ordered with his hands – ‘All of you, sit down.’ Then he went near the teacher’s chair and started – ‘We have thought of an idea.’ All laughed.

Listen. Next Sunday, we will go for a picnic to Chilka and do boating in the lake. For this, you have to pay ten rupees. All of you have to pay to Puṣpa and sign therein.

The teacher arrived. ‘All of you please keep silent.’

Vadrikeśa expressed anxiously.

Everything has been decided. Any questions? We will organize everything in the next two days. Don’t be late – ‘Puṣpa, do you have anything to mention?’, asked Vadrikeśa.

Some requested – ‘Puṣpa is a good orator, speak something.’

The teacher asked angrily,

- How long do I have to wait?

As the teacher arrived, all stopped talking and occupied the seats quietly. The teacher started teaching.

But Tilottamā's eyes were fixed onto Puṣpavallava. Nīlimā was also looking at his beauty. She praised Puṣpa silently to herself – 'Remarkable figure. Innocent smiling face. The innocence of the mind was glowing in his looks. I don't know, what is there in my fate.'

The infant moon gradually made its appearance in the water. The night was speeding through the hills. The road below was visible by the dim light of the lamp post. The autumn dew made the grass bow down. A few sleepy dogs cuddled beside the closed doors by the road.

The motor vehicle speeded. Tilottamā's face could be seen through the small window. Others were talking loudly, singing and laughing in the vehicle. Puṣpa's hand was placed by the side of the window. Though he was talking, but his eyes were fixed onto the wavy hairs of Tilottamā. Nīlimā also kept on watching Puṣpa. She envied Tilottamā in her mind. Puṣpavallava was eager to fulfill his wishes.

A flag was seen on the top of the temple shrine at a distant village. The vehicle also wanted to stop for sometime at the parking area. The driver wanted to have a smoke. All were tired. When the vehicle stopped, all descended. Vadrikeśa went quickly to the hotel, arranged for some snacks and called everybody. All came in. But, Puṣpa, Tilottamā and Nīlimā came in last. Vadrikeśa laughed seeing them and asked

- Time has passed. Why are you so late?

Tilottamā spoke softly

- If all of you want to leave us, then you may proceed.
- Yes, we can go without you two, but how can we without Puṣpa?

Nīlimā stared at Puṣpa and remarked,

- Take your Puṣpa and leave us.
- ‘No, no. How can we go without you?’ Vadrikeśa replied gently.

The vehicle started its ignition. Everybody hurriedly returned finishing their food. The trees started moving fast, the houses went by. All started talking just like before. All were happy. Aśutoṣa sat at one corner and started singing. Everybody looked at him.

His sad tone was cherished by everybody. The pain of poverty, means for human existence, failed attempts, the shelterless condition of the impoverished, the dark path, unfulfilled thoughts of union and limitless desires were the theme of his song, which reverberated with his voice. His serious tone decayed gradually. Everyone praised him by clapping hands. Many requested him for another song but Aśutoṣa refused to sing. He pointed his finger towards Puṣpa. The sound of clapping doubled the sound of the engine of the vehicle. But Puṣpavallava did not want to sing. Chilka was nearby. Their destination arrived.

The vehicle reached the banks of the Chilka Lake. Small waves were playing in the blue waters of the Chilka. The boatmen were calling them from the banks. The boats were swaying. Some small hills were half inundated in water and having a bath. Some farmers were going to their fields taking the curly lakeside road. Some reserved women were gazing at the actions of the students.

The blue waters of the Chilka were spread over a wide region. The eyes could not see the end of the lake. The grey sky was only visible at the backdrop. Amidst all this, was fog and the sunrays were reflecting in the water. The water was saline but many birds were swimming in the water. Few birds were seen circling the sky in the fog. Nearby, a kingfisher was seen aiming at a fish with its head immersed in the water. Again the bird raised its head and looked up at the sky. Its search was successful.

Boat reached the bank. All are seen busy, enthusiastic and in happy mood. Gradually, the boats started entering. Fearful Tilottamā was still standing on the banks of the lake, behaving like a child. Puṣpavallava entered the boat and stretched his hand. Tilottamā paused, smilingly held Puṣpavallava's hand and entered the boat.

Nearby, the temple of Goddess Bhagwati could be seen. Everybody bowed and payed homage. The boatman held his boatstick to spade through water. First, he prayed to God. With a smiling face, he told, 'Please sit vey carefully' and then the black boatman tied a piece of cloth onto his head. He tied a sail onto one side of the boat and started singing...Oo.....

O Goddess Bhagwati....

The wind is blowing waves on your body

But you are so composed and still.

Although rhythmless, his song reached far ith his deep emotions. He thought – "In this world, I am alone and my companion is my boat. No education, no ceremony of religious rites, no dependencies. So he is the uncontested ruler of the waterworld. The world catches fire. Politics, Economics, Sociology – all change. The urban life earns money only to repent. Somewhere earthquake,

somewhere flood, somewhere storm – all contribute to catastrophes. But his mother, Bhagwati is always present. He is there, his boat is also there. Fishes are there in water and the lake is full of water. The heat of the sun is there. Fresh air is there. His small hut is also there.”

The boat was floating and sailing in the waters to create small waves. The breeze of the lake filled the boat. There was water everywhere. Inbetween, there were some semi immersed hills. Kingfisher birds were seen on the hills, looking far away.

In the Chilka Lake, the Kālijaī hill is picturesque and praiseworthy. The boatman said that Kālijaī is actually a God. People go there and provide offerings in water. They offer flowers and sweets also.

Aśutoṣa started to search for its actual reason. Aśutoṣa observed Tilottamā’s face and compared that to have fallen in love just like the tip of an iceberg immersed in water. Sorrow-happiness-kindness-love-forgiveness are all normal here. By any means and all efforts, man cannot hide these emotions. Somehow, they get revealed. Although nobody knows the core of these emotions, they definitely would speak out to reveal the thoughts.

The boat started moving fast in the blue waters. Aśutoṣa started to say something about the mythological story of Kālijaī

- She was a village girl. Modernity could not touch her. Her father and relatives were tired to search a suitable partner for her marriage.

Tilottamā asked anxiously, ‘What happened then?’

- As days passed, a groom was found for her in the Chilka. But he was neither handsome, nor rich nor educated.

- 'Then why was he selected?', asked Nīlimā in a disgusted tone.
- During that time, nobody wanted to send their daughters far away after marriage. Also, nobody wanted to keep their daughters after the age of sixteen. They always remained cautious about people passing remarks about such things.
- 'Is it right for a father to think of social pressures for a daughter's marriage in lieu of her happiness?', Puṣpa asked.
- His wish was there but nothing could be done, due to the heads of the society.
- 'Then what happened?' asked Vadrikeśa.
- The bride and the groom did not see each other but their marriage was destined by the society. So the marriage took place.
- 'Did they go to stay in in-laws house?' someone asked.
- No, no, they had to give something for the see-off.
- 'Give something??' everyone asked surprisingly. 'Father of the bride had to give dowry alongwith his daughter to the groom. They thought that by doing this, the groom would remain happy and forgive the ill deeds of their daughter.'
- 'Was the bride dumb?' asked Nīlimā.
- Simple girl, what could she do? Whatever happened was the wish of her relatives. When it was time, all arrived dressed up. The boat reached the river bank. The bride, groom and bride's father climbed the boat. The boat started to sail.

The boatman stopped humming his song and said

- Look! Here, the water is very deep. The row does not touch the bed over here. The boat sails here with the help of the wind. Here is the place of

Kālijaī God. All of you pray to Him. If you have any flowers, then offer it.

- ‘Yes....., throw.’ Tilottamā replied nonchalantly.
- ‘What happened next?’ Nīlimā asked.
- Then, a black cloud was seen from the western sky. The whole sky got filled with clouds. The wind blew strongly. Water started entering the boat. All were frightened and helpless.
- ‘What happened then?’ all asked apprehensively.
- Then the boat started fighting against the hill and finally it sunk.
- ‘Did all of them die?’ Tilottamā asked Aśutoṣa surprisingly. ‘No, no, after quite some time, the father and boatman reached the hill. But the bride rownded forever.’
- ‘What happened then?’ all asked.
- The father and the boatman returned to their homes. But some sailors say that after this incident, they have seen a lady with open hairs crying on that hill. She wears a white dress and roams here and there. Whenever, anybody is in distress, she helps them. After sometime, somebody came and made a temple on that hill.

The boat reached near Kālijaī hill. The boatman said,

- Please get down over here. Visit the temple and take Devi’s blessings. Roam around the hill. Before sunset, reach the boat.

Everybody clattered and got down on the hill. Tilottamā was waiting shyly. Puṣpavallava stretched his hand just like before. Tilottamā saw Puṣpa’s face and stretched her right hand. Both the hands stayed in position for sometime.

There are a few trees over the hill at a distance. Many birds live there. The birds like to have fish. Many fish bones are lying below the trees. The hill is

always full of birds chirping. The Devi temple also houses nests of many birds. The goats meant for sacrifice to Devi are roaming here and there. The waves of the lake always touch the feet of the temple and pay homage by making sounds. The last rays of the sun see the Devi before sunset at dawn. The moon gives light to the bird nests. Many people visit the temple everyday. They enjoy the Chilka during the day and return at evening to their homes.

Puṣpavallava held Tilottamā's hand and went downhill. Nīlimā was talking to others. Some were telling here it is, there it is and where it is, many stories.

Suddenly, Nīlimā's attention turned towards Puṣpa. She had heart burns but her face did not express it. She continued talking humbly. She went ahead. Talking nicely, she intervened between the two. She held both their hands. Puṣpa was a bit apprehensive. Tilottamā's simple mind did not understand anything. She saw everybody roaming and collecting leaves and flowers.

Puṣpa, Tilottamā and Nīlimā entered the flower garden. Puṣpa looked happy. Tilottamā extended her hands to pick flowers. But being short, she was not able to reach the flowers. Puṣpavallava plucked the flower and gave it to Tilottamā. He said 'Tilottamā! Your face is also like a flower.'

'What are you telling, Puṣpa?' Nīlimā asked with a crooked face. Puṣpavallava kept silent like a handicapped soldier. He saw silence all around. Birds were circling the sky. Some flowers were lying on the ground.

- 'Why do you have such crooked thoughts, Nīlimā! This is not fair', mentioned Tilottamā.
- 'Such words do not appear to be good' told Nīlimā.

- 'What happened, why are you getting angry?' asked Tilottamā.

Meanwhile, Vadrikeśa shouted

- Time is going by - be fast - be fast -

The harsh words of Nīlimā threw Puṣpa's heart into the blue waters of the lake. Thereafter, Tilottamā proceeded gradually for taking food. Puṣpa observed the swiftness of the cook. Nīlimā and Tilottamā dispersed.

Puṣpavallava smiled gently. Turning around, Puṣpa went downhill and found some shadow. Like a lost traveller, he sat down on a boulder. He could see a hundred reflections of Tilottamā in the waters of the lake. He was romanticized and could not feel his love sweat. Many thoughts crystallized like ice blocks in his mind.

Busy Vadrikeśa was calling them again and again. Puṣpavallava responded and started walking slowly. Vadrikeśa noticed his slow pace of walking and got angry watching him.

- 'All are waiting in the boat after finishing food. What were you doing?' Vadrikeśa asked angrily.

- My mind does not want to leave this beautiful place.

- 'Then you stay here. We are leaving' told Vadrikeśa excitedly.

- No, we will come here once again.

- 'We have not returned yet. How can you think of coming here once again?' Vadrikeśa asked sarcastically.

- We will, if we want.

- Okay – finish your food first. Then we will discuss. Sit.

Vadrikeśa sat first. He held Puṣpa's hand and made him sit down. Both of them started eating.

The boatman arrived and said

- Come all of you. The sun is going down to his mother's lap and the wind is also favourable.

Puṣpavallava started thinking of the day's happenings. Tilottamā was standing like a woman covered with dust. Nīlimā pointed out her finger to show a pair of swimming swans. The proud koel birds were proposing to each other. Tilottamā dreamt of a blue lotus in the lake water. The beautiful scenery of the lake was inviting the thirsty sun. The lake was also greedy of the sun. The unfulfilled waves could feel the shores like a widow's pain.

As seen in many poetries, the full moon is very much like the gradual lighting of the wick of a lamp. Like the poet of an unfinished poem, Puṣpavallava stated comparing Tilottamā's beauty with that of the moon. He could see a garland in the young hands of Tilottamā.

The full boat started progressing paying homage to the mild dusk. Glowing in the moon light; the dancing friends started praising the scenic beauty of the full moon. Thinking of future prospects, Tilottamā got excited with Puṣpavallava's thoughts. She prepared an imaginary garland with the moonlight. Today, she thought about leaving everything and lying down in Puṣpa's heart for sometime. She longed for a fresh touch to a shooting star. Just like an insect burns itself, the hunger for togetherness was burning Tilottamā's mind. Today, her mind is not ready to listen to the sermons of Buddha – Shankar-Jesus-Mohammed. Leaving aside all the jewellery and garments of the large heart of eternal love, she devoted

herself to the pyre of union with Puṣpavallava. It would be better to depend on somebody rather than to lead a suffocated life in an air conditioned room.

Tilottamā stood still for sometime just as a calm river. Her mind's eye looked upon the wavy waters. The boat sailed far. Everybody shared their wonderful experiences merrily. But Puṣpavallava's feelings could not be expressed. Now, he is near Tilottamā. He did not have the courage to look at her. He did not have the power. However, he was listening to everyone and did not speak.

The full moon rose high up in the sky. All were sleeping. The scenes were appearing in everyone's minds like dancing monkeys. Puṣpa was sleepless. He could feel the unknown touch of Tilottamā. The beautiful touch of a fair hand, the excitement of mild breeze, the touch of the long hairs of the sleeping Tilottamā – all these increased Puṣpa's heartbeats. He now wants to sleep in this blue night.

The boatman's song and the sound of boat oar sailing in the water was heard. On the other side, Aśutoṣa and Vadrikeśa's discussion broke the silence of the boat. All of them were half sleepy. Some were fully sleeping.

Amidst her sleep, Tilottamā touched Puṣpa's body unconsciously. Puṣpa suddenly woke up. He thought that Tilottamā is asking for something. His mind wanted to take her in his lap, but the surrounding environment was not suitable. If anyone happens to see them, then the next morning rumours would be spread. The scandal shall spread far by word of the mouth. Such thoughts started to create circles of smoke in his mind. He could never take the blame of a characterless individual.

The two eyes were gradually feeling addicted. He started sleeping in the boat with his sitting posture. Besides him, Tilottamā slept keeping her head on him. Both were enjoying the cool breeze of the lake and both of their dreams doubled. Unconsciously, Puspa's sleepy hand fell on Tilottamā's hand. Their hands remained in that position. The fingers were numb as the petals of dried flower.

Some dim lights could be seen far away on the lake shore. The boatman's song could be heard. As if the night was mad with romance with the moon in mid-sky. Some empty boats were seen as lines by the shore. Somewhere, the boatmen were sleeping keeping lights on in the boats. Somewhere, ailing sound of old boatmen were heard. Rickshaw driver was waiting by the road side – 'Come, come, Sir', shouted the driver blowing the horn.

° 'Wake up – wake up Sirs! The boat has reached the shore.' Two-three persons were shaken to be woken up. Suddenly, Nīlimā woke up. She saw Puṣpa sleeping with her hand kept on Tilottamā's hand. Tilottamā was also sleeping with her head kept on Puṣpa. Nīlimā turned very angry. She was deeply moved seeing both of them in that condition. She slowly touched Tilottamā, woke her up and highlighted Puṣpa's ill intentions. Tilottamā did not pay much heed to it. She saw later that Nīlimā's face is red with anger. Thereafter she controlled herself.

It is past midnight. All got down and started going towards the pre-arranged guest house. Nīlimā held Tilottamā's hand and started talking with her. Others also walked discussing about varied problems and good things.

Rain from a sudden passing cloud drenched Tilottamā and Nīlimā. They stood by the side of the window of an empty school. Both of them discussed about the sudden cloud. A guard saw them and asked, 'Why are you standing here? Come and sit inside. After the rain stops, you may decide.'

Both of them entered the room. There was nobody except both of them in the room. Nīlimā started to speak about their recent experience.

- Tilottamā. I don't like Puṣpa's behaviour –
- Why do you always talk about Puṣpa? In two months from now, our exams are scheduled.

Tilottamā expressed with artificial anger.

- Tilottamā! Why is it being discussed that romance has aroused in your mind? I know that you have a soft corner for him.
- If you know, then why are you asking?
- But, see, Tilottamā! We do not know everything about Puṣpa –
- Then, what do you want to tell?
- Don't you know? His behaviour is indescribable. Yesterday, when you were sleeping, his hands were over yours. I have seen it with my own eyes.

Tilottamā remained silent thinking about public humiliation. A seed of sadness mixed with ill thoughts was sown in her mind. She started thinking about it. Have others also noticed it like Tilottamā?

- Tilottamā? Not only is his poor behaviour, the language of his eyes is also not good. As if, he is always mocking. If such is behaviour towards us, it would definitely be poorer towards others.

Tilottamā's mind was full of sadness. Though angry, she maintained silence. The redness of her face was something worth seeing.

- Tilottamā! He is a loose character. If you want good for yourself, take him out of your mind.

Tilottamā's face was wet with tears. Her anger was transformed into tears and it tried to reveal itself. Nīlimā again started to tell something. Tilottamā told in a husky tone –

- Stop Nīlimā! Forget everything. This is the time for making merry, not for shedding tears.

Nīlimā artificially consoled her. She knows well that Tilottamā possesses deep love. That is why her goal will not be fulfilled there. She is neither happy with Puṣpa's behaviour during boating, nor she likes Tilottamā as before. Human behaviour is always reactive. When he sees that, there is no benefit for self, he turns revengeful.

The rains have become feeble. The shameless sun showed its face from behind the clouds. Rain drops were falling from the leaves of the trees. Some people started to go their ways. Some cows began to come out of the doors from the shelter taken in the school. The school staff hastened to go to their homes. Somebody came and rang the bell.

Both of them started to go towards their homes. The Deodar trees stood at the back as still as a monument. The motor cars were fleeing as thirsty nomads. Tilottamā was thoughtful. Her face sweated. Her mind was lustful under her skin thoughtful about the past days which caused the unexpected meeting of eyes. Today she realized that she would never be happy in her family life with the association of such a useless person. Nīlimā's artificial consolation had a womanly envy inside her. Dramatically, she ridiculed and said valiantly-

- Do not be afraid - life is a battlefield. Anything is possible here. I will try to find your life partner from anywhere else and try to satisfy you.

Tilottamā remained silent with a smiling face and a sad heart. Nīlimā reiterated doubtfully – ‘Or else, reveal everything to your father and think of a new plan.’

Both of them had smiles. The two friends gradually proceeded on the road. Thereafter, the road started to follow them like a mad snake.

Puṣpavallava sat alone silently in a room. He was reading a letter. It was signed by his old father –

Sri

Blessings from the old father. Mother is keeping well. You know that excepting the farm, there is no other property. This time, we have lost crops. Also, there was no water. Your ailing mother always wishes for your marriage. Otherwise, she would close her eyes in a few days time. You come home and take the responsibilities. Or else, how will the condition of Nirod and Kshirod improve?

It is holidays now. You come over here. Save the family. We have turned old. There is nobody to ask regarding our condition.

All are well. Still we want to see you. If you want to see your parents, please come.

We will wait for you.

Your wellwisher,

Serving father.

His mind was thoughtful on reading the letter. He remembered his father. He could hear his mother’s voice. Then, Tilottamā’s thoughts tried to stop him. Not only is the desire to marry Tilottamā, but also his mind full of love for her.

Noon was full with lightning. The sun tried to come out of the clouds. Nearby, Vadrikeśa and Aśutoṣa were coming. Both of them were in a discussion. Happily, they approached Puṣpa's door and mentioned, Puṣpa

- Good news -
- For whom?
- For us.
- What what?

Aśutoṣa happily told 'Puṣpa!'

- Both of us have got jobs –
- Where? Which post?
- The post of teacher in the foothills of Dhauli Mountain in a high school.
- Both of you over there?
- No Vadrikeśa got the job in a nearby village.
- 'Good-good' Puṣpavallava was overwhelmed! 'When are you going?'
- They ordered us to join before the Christmas vacation. So we need to reach in a couple of day's time.

Aśutoṣa said.

- Go – wish you a happy journey.
- 'Would you not wish me? Big brother!' complained Vadrikeśa.
- 'Why did you think differently?', smilingly asked Puṣpavallava.
- May all flowers shower in your path.
- 'We accept all your good wishes', Vadrikeśa mentioned shaking hands.

Pausing for a while, he went into a different discussion.

- How shall we celebrate today – what brother? What do you want?
- It is your time to celebrate.

Aśutoṣa hurriedly went outside. He said

- I have asked the servant to get something from the shop.

The servant went to the shop. The three friends looked at each other. Vadrikeśa started,

- Puṣpa! Begin on some topic.
- Primarily for you two.
- No, asking mainly for you.
- After your departure, I will go back to my home. I have received a letter.
- All of us shall go. Tilottamā here.....

Stop Vadrikeśa.

- ‘Her news will be given by somebody else’, laughed Aśutoṣa.

Meanwhile, the servant arrived with sweets. He prepared to leave after bringing the sweets and keeping the change. But Puṣpa held his hand and asked him to take some sweets. He refused. After many requests, he took some and left.

Vadrikeśa calmly said

- Big brother. Do not forget us. If you ever require any help from us, do not hesitate.

Aśutoṣa held Puṣpa’s hand and said in a heavy voice

- Puşpa! Life is like a vehicle. When the vehicle stops, one has to get down. Sometimes one has to step forward, while at times one has to step backwards. It was exuberant to pass on the last three years merrily. To err is human. If unknowingly, we have made any mistakes, please forgive us.
- Do not say like this, Aśutoṣa!
- No Puşpa! The result of union is falling apart. People take from others. But the feelings stay as memories. Later when you sit back and think of the good and bad things, you would feel happy and sad.
- You know! Aśutoṣa!
- Puşpa! We would love to remember.
- Big brother. If you manage to get time, do come over there. Although you are alone over here, Tilottamā will make you forget everything else. When you marry, do invite us.

Vadrikeśa laughed at Aśutoṣa's words.

In the subconscious mind, Puşpavallava felt sad. He kept their hands on his and kissed them. All felt happy and laughed.

They went outside. Looking into the half sized trees, they kept walking. All three of them walked at the same speed. Their discussions also reduced. The wind became steady and favourable. The birds got busy in feeding their young ones.

Crooked road. Today also, it is reddish. There has been no improvement in five years, instead it has deteriorated. Work is still going on. The dilapidated house of fatherly, 'Dam' was situated on the road side. He comes here everyday. He tells

the history of his shop like that in the past – the tired pedestrians, the villagers drank water over here. They discussed politics. Everytime, improvements were discussed. Fatherly ‘Dam’ always used to criticize slow pace. He used to tell – during his time, every family was a happy one and his shop depicted the history of the village. The shop used to cater to the needs of his entire family. Times have changed. He was enthusiastic during his youth. He mentioned – sometime back they had together built the road by themselves. But so many years down the line, it has still not improved. But sometime before, after many requests – people came every year and put new soil onto the road to make it stronger. But due to the floods, every year the new soil used to get washed away. He was happy looking at the road during that time.

Since long, cattle used to graze by the road side. At times, they used to stray into houses and cause damage to them. They also damaged the crops. He used to make them go away by shouting. He was used to hearing the sounds of cows and buffaloes. He used to make them run away by hearing their sounds from a distance.

Puṣpa got down from the vehicle. Fatherly ‘Dam’s’ house was nearby. He was busy discussing politics as before. He observed changes in the village. The broken house at a distance stood like a ghost. The lack lustre of the farmers, shepherds remained the same. Only he had changed.

This is old fatherly servant in Dam fatherly’s dilapidated house. After a half completed life, he met Puṣpavallava. He greeted and came like a tortoise. He stood by ailing Fatherly Dam’s doorsteps. Fatherly’s eyes were filled with water.

Puṣpa touched his fatherly’s feet. He took the leg dust on his head.

- Why-why are you doing this?
- You are like my father. I am doing the right thing.

- No Master! It is not correct for you to bow down. Now...
- No fatherly! Since my father has gone to heaven, you have performed all duties as a father.
- As a practice, I call you as Fatherly. Basically you...
- Do not tell any more, Master! I am your servant. I am not sure what God wants -, since I was bound by your love, I took an oath to consider yourself as everything in my life and brought you up.

The servant took the cloth from his shoulder and wiped his Master's feet.

- Why do you do such things, fatherly!
- 'It makes me immensely happy' his voice trembled.
- Fatherly, is everything fine?
- Yes, yes, Kshirod has gone to school. Nirod has gone to the shop. They will return soon.
- Fatherly! Will fatherly Dam see us?
- Yes, yes, he is waiting. Come.....come.....
- No, please speak more informally, fatherly.

Smiling a bit, fatherly said

- Master!
- Again, you are calling me as Master?
- Puşpa
- 'Okay, it will be like this', said fatherly. Puşpa followed the fatherly servant.

Fatherly Dam laughed with toothless mouth.

- Fatherly Dam, greetings!
- May you live long.

- Fatherly Dam! People find difficulty in living today even for sixty years. Then why do you wish me long life?
- Oh! The youth of today do not wish for long life.
- Then what?
- Wish us prosperity – it is prosperity that allows a person to live.
- Where do you live these days? Is everything fine?
- Yes, yes – everybody is waiting at home. Fatherly Dam, will speak to you later.

The servant went in front. Keeping a desert-like thirsty mind behind, Puṣpavallava went ahead looking here and there. He noticed the village girls today. They also saw him. Those who used to build houses in the dust four years ago are reserved today. They could be seen far away. They are not talking. Today, he saw their feet painted in red. His face had the age old thirst. His journey was nice. The dresses revealed the excitement. The tight dresses exposed the arrogance of adult age. Puṣpa could see Tilottamā amidst such sentiment.

The old servant gave directions of the road.

- Go straight on the road.
- ‘Yes’, laughed Puṣpa.

The old servant also laughed.

He then started

- Master! We have accepted a marriage proposal.
- ‘Marriage proposal? Whose?’, inquisitively asked Puṣpa.
- The girl is beautiful – very beautiful – her name is Madhuchanda-

- 'But fatherly! I am not ready now. Neither do I earn. I am twenty five years old. Currently, there is nobody to look after at home. How do I marry under such a condition', expressed Puṣpa.
- 'You will get lots of wealth from the girl's side. They would also support the expenses of your education' the old man said smilingly.
- 'Has a word been given?' anxiously asked Puṣpa.
- No, - how can we do so without taking your opinion?

Puṣpavallava's mind was restless.

- Master! See, Kshirod is running back. Come quickly.
- A dot has stability and no turbulence. But I have disturbance and no stability. Puṣpa thought as he went. Thoughts of sadness and happiness continued to play onto his mind.

Gradually, Kshirod came. They came to the village. Sitting by the window side, many old women inquired about his wellbeing. Some wives saw him from behind the doors.

The sun gradually rose from the east and went to the horizon. The house compound was drenched in the calm colourful sunrays of the evening. Tilottamā was walking. She was plucking flowers. Again, she was throwing them. She was thinking of something. She thought about expressing it but kept it concealed within herself.

Her mind was in such distress that it could not be expressed. Without Puṣpa, her mind did not wish to live. His behaviour, endurance, humour, shy salutation 'Tilottame', his nice figure, high thoughts – all these have stolen Tilottamā's heart....., but he is characterless. In today's world, fraud people hide behind good

looks. Mother Anupama came out of the house. She used to look after the flowers in the garden during the morning hours. She observed her daughter's gloomy face.

She asked lovingly – 'Why are you like this?' She went over to her, wiped her face with her saree and said.

- Look Tilottamā! A girl is born to go over to some other house. Definitely, you will also go from here sometime or the other. So you need not be sad.

Tilottamā remained silent. Puṣpa may be characterless but his love is pure.

She has also observed his emotions. When she came home, Puṣpa had said

- Tilottamā! Do not forget.

Although hesitant, she also said

- You also don't forget.
- What is there in our life? Why are men happy in society, women also turn happy holding the hands of wealthy men.

Thoughtful Anupama said

- 'Tilottamā! Do not think otherwise. Bhāgyadatta will be your able husband. He has lots of wealth. He is the chief. There is no dearth of money. You will be very happy' laughed Anupama.

Tilottamā soon responded

- No, mother! Stop this proposal. I will not marry now.
- Why are you speaking like mad, Tilottamā? Your marriage is in four days time. You are now grown up. Educated. Your marriage will be held with grandeur. Why do you worry?

- 'I do not wish to marry' she cried.

Puṣpa's picture came up in her mind. But she was afraid and ashamed to reveal it. Or else – being educated, how does one tolerate a characterless person? Instead, it is better to be the wife of a wealthy person. But if the unknown person leaves her for some reason or if her soft corner is revealed someday and she is not pardoned or if he turns characterless with all his wealth – thinking all this, Tilottamā started crying in a high pitch.

Anupama tried to explain her 'Tilottamā! Do not leave your current happiness thinking of the dreadful past. It is your turn to be happy now. Do not cry any more. If you cry, you will eat my head.' Keeping hand on her mother's mouth – 'Do not speak like this.....my marriage...ends.' Tilottamā started crying with her hands covering her face.

Why are speaking like mad? If anybody happens to hear it, everything will be spoilt.....Beautiful husband. Beautiful house. Enough wealth to lead life. Then why are you thinking? Tilottamā continued crying. Puṣpa may be poor but he has a big heart. His likings are also good. Although he has sent a promising letter, now....Tilottamā could not think any more. Unnecessarily showing temper, she said –'You are bringing down everybody, Tilottamā! We will also lose our family tradition. Your father's prestige would also be lost. You are burning all of us. Hate birth of a girl.' She said to herself.

Hearing commotion in the room, the husband, Kamantak, said 'Come out of the room – why are you shouting?'

- 'Commotion, - commotion. Why do you not understand? Who has set up this marriage for which Tilottamā is crying?' She said with tears.

- 'I know dear. This is the weakness of women. Tears flow out of eyes very often.' Kamantak said sarcastically.
- 'Tilottamā, my days are dring up. Your mind is also not over here. You are not willing to marry. Your mind has a different picture of a husband. You will not have marriage over there.' Anupama said angrily.
- Dear. Do you have cowdung in your head? Everything is organized. Now you are telling that there will be no marriage?-
- If it does not happen here, it will happen somewhere else.
- Somewhere else?
- Wherever she wishes.
- Hey! Where do you want to marry? Have we ceased to exist? Alas....alas....alas....alas.
- Nīlimā asked to find out a husband for her. Be it so. What will happen to us?
- Alas....alas....alas. You dumb! I know everything. I have heard everything from Nīlimā. Firstly, he is poor. Secondly, he is not working. Thirdly, he does not have a family heritage. It does not work this way. Alas...alas..... I have to shut my ears of whatever more I have heard. Alas...alas.... It is sin to even to see his face.
- 'Is Nīlimā truthful? She said the truth – you first visit there, then you may decide. Where is truth in these words?' Anupama said boldly.

He said in a low voice

- No dear. Now we do not have the time to go anywhere else. All the relatives will arrive tomorrow. And I have given my word to Bhāgyadatta. Giving a word is like giving one's daughter's hand in marriage. It is a great sin to break a promise. We will give our daughter's hand in marriage. Our forefathers will be happy.

- Again you decide. You are my wife. You know that I obey you. I keep all your words. Then why are you thinking like this? And our daughter will also be happy with abundance. Nobody gives their daughters to jobless people. Nobody wants to see or hear their children to be unhappy. So dear, be calm, think and then shout. See what is going on –

Kamantak's high pitched and logical words made Anupama still. Tilottamā did not enter their room during the quarrel, nobody had noticed.

- Dear? Think what can be done. Such is the nature of girls. You know all this. I have work, let me go.

Kamantak went outside with these words. Anupama gradually entered through the door.

Tilottamā was looking at the garden outside through the window. There were bees in the flowers. The mild sun slowly turned hot. The sunflower began to bloom. Dewdrops could be seen on the creepers.

Then, some relatives arrived. They inquired about each other. They started to chit-chat with each other and enjoyed themselves. But Tilottamā's tears did not dry. Her mind felt empty.

Puṣpavallava hovered around the streets in the village. His mind was filled with worries – dual thoughts competed with each other. He thought – let me accept Madhuchhandā leaving aside Tilottamā. Again, ignoring the words of parents and friends let me go to Tilottamā. But Tilottamā has not yet signalled positively. She is selfish if she has embraced somebody rich thinking of his poverty..... Two months have passed but she has not written any letter. He wishes to write a letter – but if she lives elsewhere – thinking this, Puṣpavallava felt disturbed.

Puṣpa saw – not far away, along the curved road, a postman was coming. He laughed inside and asked

- Is there any letter for us?
- ‘No’, answered the postman and went ahead. He stopped and turned back saying, ‘Sorry. There is a letter.’

The postman went away after handing over the letter. Puṣpa could not control his anxiety after receiving the letter. Lines appeared on his forehead.

It is Tilottamā’s marriage. She has sent an invitation to Puṣpavallava. Fire of revenge burned in Puṣpavallava’s mind. The revenge is not towards Tilottamā. It is for Bhāgyadatta. Bhāgyadatta is known to him beforehand. They studied in the same school. His witty words have hardly spared any beautiful girl. Innocent people often go by one’s outer looks. They praise the outer dress. He praises his own actions and words. All are amazed by his witty words. How does one know what is in other’s mind without looking into one’s inner self? Thinking of all this, Puṣpavallava became thoughtful after sighing heavily.

Even today, Bhāgyadatta’s evil deeds are known to many. But he is rich. Everything is in hands. He proves the false to be true and otherwise. Nīlimā also belongs to his village. She is also similar. She is never liked. She never desires to see happiness in Tilottamā’s life. Such people only cause problems in other’s life. They do not think of themselves. What to tell others -. If such people do not think of causing problems to others and instead think good for themselves, then other people’s lives would be progressive.

Puṣpavallava was sad. He felt sympathy for Tilottamā. He loved Tilottamā. Tilottamā is the queen of his heart. But today she is leaving as the lady of someone else's heart. It is not right to think badly of her at this stage. Let her be happy. May she be a good housewife. May she fulfill the expectations of Bhāgyadatta and her relatives. Today she has no relations with Puṣpa. She is also separate. I am also for somebody else. But his mind does not agree. His heart is breaking. His body was trembling.

Puṣpa decided to write a letter. It would be the first and last letter to her. He went to the shop and bought an envelope too. With trembling hands, he wrote –

Shri

Tilottamā.....! Blessings and best wishes. I have been thinking of writing a letter to you for many days but am not getting time for it. This is the best time. Wish you all the best at this moment. With Lord's blessings, may you turn to be a good housewife.

Tilottamā! The couple's picture at the banks of the 'Chilka' would remain enlightened. If ever, you are reminded of me, do try to forget.

Many many good wishes.

From,

Your 'Puṣpa'

Puṣpa again went through the letter. His mind was full of sympathy. With all the good wishes, he dropped the letter into the letter box. His heart was shattered. His mind wished that a tear drop fell from his eye. But he couldn't.

Will he marry Madhuchhandā? – One he has never seen. Neither he knows anything about her. Only he knows her relatives. But in order to marry, one must know everything about the girl. Today corruption is seen even in highly esteemed families. There is a family tree but it is empty inside. At many places, beautiful flowers could be seen, but there are insects inside. What may be done? The world is in the grasp of wealth. Without money, man has no ground. Today the mind is dreadful. Greed and ambition has filled the mind. Man continues to live in this bogus world. Definitely, man lives.

Puṣpa returned. Meanwhile, fatherly servant came to the shop. He was walking gradually and wore a dirty dhoti till his knees. A spade was swaying in his hand. A shrunk towel was there on his shoulder. His white hairs were as sharp as the blades of grass. His mind was full of thoughts. He came close and smiled gently. Puṣpa replied with a gentle smile too. Fatherly told as before ' Master! Your mind has not changed even after repeated thoughts. Will you go out on a trip for some days? My serving days are almost ending. Still, I am not seeing you happy. For some days.....Master! For some days?' The old servant was impatient.

- Fatherly! I know your wish. Let me propose something.
- Master.....!!!
- Yes, fatherly.....!
- 'My Lord – today listen to me – and agree.....' the old servant said.
- Yes, fatherly! The appropriate time has come. I do not wish to make you unhappy.

- 'Master....!!' tears started falling down his eyes.
- 'Yes, fatherly! You may fix up my marriage.' Puṣpa wiped off the old man's tears.
- Master! You come over tomorrow. You can have a look at Madhuchhandā. I will send the news tonight.
- No fatherly! You can go. Please fix up the date of marriage. I do not require to go. The marriage would take place on the date which you decide.
- All right...all right...Please go home. Mother is waiting. I will return home after buying some fruits.

Both parted ways. Puṣpa went westwards towards his house. The horizon was smoky. The earth was filled with fog. His mind was if welcoming Madhuchhandā and departing with Tilottamā.

The busy marriage day had passed. Bhāgyadatta's bedroom is decorated nicely. Everywhere in the room, nice pictures had been hung. There was commotion everywhere. Everybody was enjoying the gala event. The village women were decorating Tilottamā. Many people had come. Some of them had finished taking their food. The neighbours were trying to put a smile on Tilottamā's face with hilarious discussions.

The sky was clear. The environment was good. Bhāgyadatta was discussing with his friends at the doorsteps. He was very happy. He was looking great in his new attire. Just then, the postman came and handed him some congratulatory letters. The letters were addressed to Tilottamā. Seeing this, he was very happy. He went inside his room and started going through the letters. There was also a letter from some Puṣpa. He was curious. His disbelief increased. He observed that the neighbours had all surrounded Tilottamā. Thinking it to be correct time, he entered

Tilottamā's room like a thief. He searched through her dress and cupboard and came across the couple's photo. He had a nice look at it and came outside.

He quickly came to the door. The face turned red with anger. He remembered Nīlimā. 'Brother! You would feel ashamed if you marry Tilottamā.' Nīlimā belonged to his village. She would never have lied. She also came to his house the other day. She had laughed and mentioned these words. He had laughed away on the words. But it turned true today. His heart was burning with revenge. He is clueless. He frowned. A mocking laughter aroused on his face.

Night arrived. Tilottamā was married. Her head had the mark of vermillion. Her eyes had new kohl (kajal). She wore a gold necklace. Her hair was decorated with flowers. She wore gold bangles. Her fingers had a golden ring with many precious stones. She wore a precious sari and stood in front of the mirror. Her handa and feet were numb. She was breathing heavily.

The neighbours wished a good night to Tilottamā near the mirror and went away. Tilottamā saw her own beauty. She was happy seeing herself. Precious jewellery, precious sari, the decorated multi-coloured lights, some flowers on the bed, a dim blue coloured light – all these reminded her of heaven. She imagined herself to be a celestial damsel. She laughed on seeing her image.

Gradually, the old history passed away from her mind. This is the ultimate goal in human life – the ultimate feeling. There was a day – when Puṣpa was the man in her life. At first she did not want to and also could not erase him from his mind. But today, she was even ready to walk upon a hundred Puṣpas. Just as the insect jumps into the fire, her love had also jumped. Tilottamā's face had the impressions of romance. She was looking at her image repeatedly. The sandal glowed on her. Her eyes had turned red with the kohl.

Her mind was again engrossed with thoughts. She was excited on thinking about boating in the lake..... If she had married Puṣpa, then definitely her life would have turned sorrowful. Listening to her parents, she had accepted Bhāgyadatta's hand in marriage. Today, her life would definitely be happy. Without wealth, life is like a vulture's corpse. Wives of poor people are never happy. All friends are also doing whatever is causing them to be happy. Today many people such as Puṣpa are under her feet.

Night passed. All are sleeping. Suddenly, she thought about her invitation letter for Puṣpa. She remained silent for sometime. She saw her sari in the mirror. Suddenly, she heard somebody coming. Tilottamā shivered. She saw Bhāgyadatta coming with some letters. Suddenly, she saw Bhāgyadatta throwing them on the bed. His face was bursting with anger. Tilottamā stood still by the bed and watched. He did not tell her anything. But he observed her for sometime. He turned his head and started to go outside. Tilottamā blushed and told 'Listen'-

Bhāgyadatta was excited by this single word. He could not go away. Turning slightly, he looked at Tilottamā's face. He was impatient. He forgot everything at that moment. He even forgot himself. His thirst for love was intense. He looked into Tilottamā's eyes and turned romantic. He proceeded. He embraced Tilottamā with both his hands. Tilottamā's vermilion made a mark on his naked breast.

But Bhāgyadatta's dirty mind was towards Nīlimā. She was his childhood love. A man does not like his newly wed wife if he has another lover. Even, if he goes towards somebody else, he does not forget his wife. But a woman can forget everything – Tilottamā was fully immersed in the new love. She closed her eyes and forgot everything else. Bhāgyadatta also enjoyed having love for a long time.

The night thickened. The nightplay ceased. Tired Tilottamā looked onto Bhāgyadatta's face. She remained smiling after completing everything. Slowly slowly, she uttered some childish words. Bhāgyadatta had a fake smile on his face. He was an expert in quenching his thirst of love. He smiled thinking about Tilottamā's private love. He would leave her just like his other girlfriends. If Bhāgyadatta remains alone – hundreds of Tilottamā would come to him.

The love thirst slowed down. The excitement reduced. Tilottamā thought that she was lucky, Bhāgyadatta was a master of love, it must have been good fruits of the deeds of her earlier life. Tilottamā kept her head on Bhāgyadatta's naked breast. Bhāgyadatta smiled gently. Tilottamā thought herself to be lucky. Bhāgyadatta thought – such natured women know tricks, they want to shed off the evil traits of their character. A used body only seems to be of noble character when seen from outside.

Accepting the old lover as a husband, such women get a societal acceptance to their characters. Such is their identity.

Tilottamā went off to sleep. The bed carried her lovely body, a pale blue light was on. Bhāgyadatta thought looking at the mosquito net – 'the human character also has many such holes'.

Tilottamā's face had the beauty of the full moon amidst a blue sky. Her hair fell in random manner over her forehead. She was looking like a sleeping swan. Her body had turned calm beneath her clothes. Her body was filled with the fragrance of love.

The night ended. Still, Tilottamā was sleeping. But the door was open. Many people were there. Suddenly, an old woman asked – 'Was Nīlimā over here, last night? She has not yet returned home. Is she over here?' Hearing the old woman's words, Tilottamā got up in apprehension.

Somebody said from inside –‘She had come in the evening. She had gone then only.’

The old woman tried to tell something with wet eyes. But somebody told – ‘Look into the neighbour’s home. She may be sleeping over there.’ The old woman went away.

Tilottamā completed everything in the morning and begun to wait for her husband. Her waiting time continued to increase. The wall clock continued to tick on.

Tilottamā made the bed. Suddenly she came across the bunch of letters below the pillow. She saw her picture with Puṣpa. Surprisingly, she saw the letters – one was Puṣpa’s greetings letter. The other was her husband’s. First, she read her husband’s letter with great happiness –

Tilottamā! Nobody wants to accept a characterless woman pretending to be a faithful wife. Look. Nobody can hide the truth. I have come to know of everything. I am repenting the fact that you had come into my life as a devoted wife. I do know of such girls and wives. My duty towards you is complete. Now, you may go to your lover, Puṣpa. He must be also waiting to have you. Although, tasted once, he will treat you as as a divine gift.

I know – you will forget – but, women shed tears only to show-off – you build an unseen cage to ignore everything. But after all, you belong to dirty waters - From your Bhāgyadatta.

Tilottamā could not read Puṣpa’s letter any more. There was darkness all around. She could not think any more. Suddenly, she fell to the ground just as a fallen tree. She turned unconscious.

Again, the old woman came to Bhāgyadatta's place in search of Nīlimā. With tearful voice, she asked – 'Sister! Nīlimā is nowhere. Does she come to meet your wife? Your wife was her friend.'

A woman softly called Tilottamā and entered the house. Seeing her fallen down, she shouted to draw everybody's attention. Everybody came over there. What happened...? What happened - ? Everybody started asking each other. There was a lot of bustle.

At the end of the village in the temple of Mahadeva, the morning golden rays of the sun fell all around. The chirping of birds could be heard from the nearby trees. After finishing the morning work, people go to the village pond through that route. Standing in the water, they bowed to the temple top. Some people took a bath and went to the temple. Some Brāhmaṇas chanted.

Puṣpavallava finished his morning bath and went to the temple. His face was very happy. Although he was about to marry Madhuchhandā, he is yet to speak with her. Today, it was his marriage reception. All were busy in the village. All had come to his house. Children – adults – elders, all were happy in seeing him. Puṣpa still had a childish nature. Even after seeing Madhuchhandā, he could not speak with her. The first feelings always create excitement in one's body. Whenever, he thinks of Madhuchhandā, he feels excited.

He came to the temple door and heard the priest chanting something in a loud voice. Although, he could not understand much of it, he devotedly paid homage and offered coconut and bananas. He also bowed. The priest blessed him with Vedic mantras. Then he held the blessed food (prasadam) and called the children. They were playing. All came running on Puṣpa's call.

All surrounded Puṣpavallava. He laughed at their behaviour. Somebody said to give him first. Others told to offer them at first. The commotion increased. Puṣpavallava observed that amidst them, some were naked. Some were half-naked. Water flowed from nose of some of them. Some were in underwear. He ordered – ‘Firstly, dress properly. Wipe your nose. Stand in a line. Then I will give you the blessed food.’ All became busy. Some started to wipe their noses with left hand.

Puṣpa gladly started to distribute the food. He had numerous thoughts in mind – they are half-naked, they are the citizens – they would do good to the society – they will strengthen the soil. Today he remembered everything, whenever he went off to study, these children would follow him. They carried all his belongings and shoes and saw him off till the highway. Until the motor car vanished from sight, they stood there to bid adieu. Also, whenever he returned home, news used to travel in advance and people used to greet him, whenever he entered the village. He distributed sweets to all. He found his books on his return to his house.

Puṣpavallava was surrounded by children. He saw that fatherly servant was observing his childish nature from far. Smiling, - happily – he came near and softly said:

- Master! Your wife has still not broken her fast. What are you doing in the temple? She is waiting. She has not even taken water after requesting. Come, what could be your relation with these?
- Fatherly! Why have you come?
- What can I do – mother has sent me.
- You proceed. I am coming.

Fatherly gradually started to go back. Puṣpavallava began to follow him.

All were present at home. Mother angrily said – ‘Puṣpa! Even after your education, you do not have any knowledge about household. Your wife is still fasting. You are roaming here and there. Was Mahadeva not present in temple?’

- Mother! While distributing the blessed food.....
- Do not speak any more. There is lot of work to be done. Ask fatherly and fix up.

Puṣpa’s entry made Madhuchhandā cautious. She got up from the bed and bowed down at Puṣpa’s feet. Puṣpa held her up. Thereafter she stood with her face looking downwards. Puṣpa remained silent. The moonlike face looked down. There were no words. She only signalled by nodding her head.

Puṣpa was excited. He left the bed and approached Madhuchhandā. He spoke sweetly holding her chin. Feeling ashamed, she did not utter anything. Puṣpa embraced her and picked her up onto the bed. He kept his mouth in her face. The light went off.

Tilottamā lay on the bed like an idle multitude. Her eyes were full of tears and hair disorganized. She cried like an injured bird. Sorrow blossomed from her body. There was darkness all around. She continued to lie down inspite of trying to cope with the situation.

Such time had come when inspite of taking all precautions along the path of life and inspite of having everything, it feels helpless. At times, even after falling down - man rises. But rising in such a situation is similar to an innocent animal being the slave of a situation. It is like the entire life had fallen apart. Although

there is a wish for atonement, although there is a wish for pardoning, it could not be done.

Tilottamā's revolutionary mind awakened. Neither she could take revenge, nor could she amend things. Many unclear thoughts engrossed her – 'Who has created the society? Who says that these rich people are ideal grooms? Is wealth and youthfulness the only form of life? Is marriage an absolute necessity?'

Puṣpa's image floated in her mind like a golden lotus. Puṣpa is such a lover, who would feel sad upon coming to see or hear of her grave situation. What is the benefit in thinking of such extra-marital love? Tilottamā was saddened. Today, nothing is her own; something which she can call to be her's..... Still she had to play the role of a newly wed woman in society - or - she could be a mad beggar flocking from door to door for money - or - suicide was also a good option. There are no other alternatives.

Again – if she continues to stay there, she would have to tolerate false blames. She wanted to destroy the society. Standing on the old steps of the old society, she wanted to announce loudly – 'Woman is a life partner - partner in enjoyment - partner in moving - partner in right'. But today she had seen the looks of sexually starved society. Under the disguise of dignity, there is forgery. Beneath the new cloth, there is an incorrect instinct. In the name of destruction of the past, there is an animal like instinct.

Mother-in-law summoned her in trembling tone

- Wife! Do not be saddened. I do not have any luck.
- 'No, no mother! I do not want anything. You be assured. I will go due to my fate', cried Tilottamā.

The old woman blessed her with both hands. She continued requesting her:

- Have some food. How long will you continue to live without food?
- Mother. I do not feel like living...
- Wife! He will definitely come back. Do not be impatient! Do not think otherwise. Come on, let us have some food!
- No mother.
- ‘Wife! Otherwise, I will also not eat. Your worries are mine too. SO first, I will die’, she cried.
- No mother! Whatever you tell will happen. Do not tell like this anymore.

The old woman went to bring food.

Night fell. Just like the new leaves in an old tree, new thoughts were born in her mind. She was determined. She moved here and there. She heard about the stories of ascetic women (sanyasini). All have unconditionally devoted their lives for helping others. They perform welfare activities. From morning till night, they roam from one country to the other helping others. With their deeds, they are not looked down upon. Those who were looked down upon are praised today. They look after the helpless, orphans, tortured and sick people. Today they educate the illiterate. Moving from village to village, they advise people. In the society, they are like forms of Goddess Earth. Their lives are blessed. Otherwise, what is the benefit in living a mediocre life? So, it is good to go far away. Where, there is no selfishness, there is no animal-like instinct, there is no evil thought for others, there is constructive thinking, where progress of the world is thought about. Where, there is no smell of corruption and where peace exists.

But if she declares the life of a woman to be a consumable commodity, then many would approach her for love. Many would extend their hands to jump into her fire of beauty. They would bleed her tender lips. They would coagulate her blood. At least, in the heap of disgrace in society, she would be thrown like a mango seed and people would again search for new beauty in the disguise of

dignity. This consumption trend is life's pattern. This is the nature of life and negative side of youthfulness.

All are sleeping at night. Tilottamā looked at the darkness through the window. She had firmed up the road in her painful life. She did not want to spread her own fragrance like the smoke of an incense stick. But her life had turned to be the ash of such an incense stick. Shame does not look good in the life a deserted wife. It is required to live in the society. Nobody in the society is her friend today, nor are there any relatives.

With a dark mind and bare feet, she started walking. She left behind the open door. There is darkness in front. The road is complex. Destination is far away. The cut trees on the roadside are standing like sages. She was determined not to return back. The sound of feet was heard.

The koel bird was singing. Bunch of new leaves were all around. The untimely blossoms were swaying. The fragrance of lotus flowers filled the atmosphere. Far away, the shepherd's flute conveying love could be heard. Everything looked pretty. Behind the leaves, the ploy of the crow and koel bird continued. Today, it is spring time in the entire village. All are singing and dancing.

Puṣpavallava was excited. He had Madhuchhandā besides him. She had bright vermilion on her head. She walked with veil on her head. One could observe her sensitivity. Puṣpavallava went ahead describing the spring season to her.

Madhuchhandā followed. Puṣpavallava was excited in moving around during the spring season. Holding his hand softly, she tried to draw a romantic picture in her mind. Many thoughts circled in her mind like the colours of the fist.

She held Puṣpa's hand in fright. Puṣpa's heart beats increased. They were alone. There was silence everywhere. Puṣpavallava lied down on Madhuchhandā's breast. They looked at each other and got lost in each other. Their feet felt numb on the grass. Lifting the veil, Puṣpavallava kissed Madhuchhandā. Closing her eyes and putting her head down, she said

- You are not doing the right thing.
- Why?
- It is daytime now.
- 'So what?' Laughed Puṣpa.
- Don't you know?
- No.

Madhuchhandā remained silent.

- Chhandā! Will I ask something?
- Ask.
- Have you ever experienced the full moon in a forest?
- No.

She raised her head and looked towards him. Lines could be seen on her face.

- Chhandā! Have you ever wandered alone?
- .....Wandered.....Many times.
- Did you observe anything new?
- 'Yes.....' she nodded.
- In what form?

Madhuchhandā remained silent.

- 'Are you feeling embarrassed?' He held her chin and looked at her.
- Chhandā! Look at me and answer my questions.
- Ask.
- Have you ever felt sad?
- All my sorrow has gone away seeing you.
- Then in your life, I am.....
- First and last.
- Chhandā! Some questions are arising in my mind – please answer them.
- 'All right', she responded.
- 'Chhandā! If life has a boundary, where does it start and where does it end?' – Laughed Puṣpavallava.
- At a point.

Puṣpavallava was surprised. He thoughtfully replied

- Really, you are very intelligent.

Madhuchhandā was humble. Lines of happiness were seen on her face.

- Chhandā! When you prayed for my well being at the temple....
- What happened then?
- Telling.
- You can tell freely.
- Memory of a girl came across –
- Then.
- You do not know her. Then, I did not have a liking for you.
- 'Then', sadly responded Madhuchhandā.
- But, when I got your love, then your behaviour made me forget everything of the past -
- Who is the girl?

- I do not like to tell anything about those times. Also, whom do I tell it to?  
Hearing it, if you feel sad, then it is of no use.

Madhuchhandā looked dumbly towards Puṣpavallava.

- Chhandā! At times, life goes on like this in an unplanned manner.
- ‘Who was the girl? You did not tell.’ Madhuchhandā asked with pride.
- Forget it, Chhandā! It was my misdeed.
- What misdeed?
- All my love is for you only. But in return...

Puṣpa paused.

- Do not worry. Love is life. Love is God. Nothing bad ever happens to a lover.
- Then, am I at fault?
- No. It never happens like that. If you have any worry in your mind, then you are repentant. A repentant is never at fault.
- Really, Chhandā? I am blessed in getting such an intelligent woman as you. Tell – what do you want? I will give you everything.
- Dear! I want nothing but your love. Please give me the love that was reserved for her.
- Be it so.
- Touch my body and commit so.
- By touching you, I promise that my love is only for you.
- Is it true, dear?
- True - true.
- True.
- Yes true.

Puspa held her hand and placed her in his heart. His body was excited. Puspa's eyes closed in love, the bed of leaves made their bodies one.

'Dhauri' is at the foothills. The area is beautiful. There is greenery all around. Far away, the green paddy fields are seen. The Daya river flows nearby. Even today, the Dhauri hill continues to conceal the history of many people. Once there was a big war over here. Many people died. The Daya river turned red. Countless dead bodies were there inside the silt. So many women have shed their tears, that it cannot be counted. Many families have been buried in this womb. But today it is a fertile land. By God's grace, the foothills of Dhauri have turned green. Goddess Lakshmi has arrived in each house.

These days, many people come to the Dhauri hill to pray. The atmosphere is such that the chirping of birds is heard everywhere. Today many people and hermits have come here. They are talking with each other but the hill is standing dumb. Some are saying – Many days ago, a hermit came over here to pray. The remains of his leaf-hut are present even today. People say – he has been liberated. Now, somebody had constructed a big hermitage over here. Many people do farming over here. They graze the cattle and advise people. They prepare medicines from tree roots. Many people come here in grief. Many ill people come here to get rid of their illness. Many aged women come here and get attracted to religious thoughts. People do fasting. Foreigners come here to get peace of mind. Many poets, writers and philosophers also come over here.

Many men have come here to become sages. Many have also have improvements in health and mind. Many well educated people live here. Some stay as sages. Some people also die in the prity of atmosphere that is present over here. The dust over here is purified by their talents. Some graves laugh and tell –

‘We are also people.’ But today, Padmakāñcana is busy and told master –  
‘Welcome you hermit.’

The master observed with half bent eyes. He had a calm face. His eyes had the shadow of twilight. The lifeless body was dry. An oldness and aged look was covering the entire person. He was thoughtful. He posed with his fingers just as hermits do. He was boldly sitting in ‘Padmasana’.

Padmakāñcana asked humbly – ‘We live in the forest. She is in her youth...’

‘Why do you think, Padmakāñcana!’ the master responded boldly.

‘We will not be breaking the rules’, informed Padmakāñcana.

‘No. Bring her to me’, ordered the master.

Padmakāñcana went away slowly. He was very emotional. He had grown up in the forest. He did not have any demands. Whatever he had earned, was all there in the religious hermitage. He had only heard about doing good for the people from his master. Those who stay in the heaven had sacrificed their lives for the welfare of mankind. Hermits say that ultimate peace is liberation. Hard work is a commitment. Treatment of the ill people is religion. Doing good for people will give completeness to life.

Tilottamā stood at the doorsteps of the religious hermitage. The fair lady had a fair dress. Her head had a hermit like tuft of well organized hair. She paid homage with empty folded hands. Her kohl-less eyes were in waiting. Her face reflected the sternness of a lady hermit. She had a tired look with dusty feet. With strict heart she waited for master’s orders.

‘Lady! Come inside’ – told Padmakāñcana. Like a sad swan, Tilottamā entered gradually. Padmakāñcana signalled – ‘This way, this way.’

She felt as if Puṣpa was catching her saree and stopping her from entering, 'Do not go! Do not...'. Again she experienced the ruthlessness of Bhāgyadatta which ordered her to – 'Go, go'. Today she is neither a lover, nor a wife. She is a lone traveller. Whose feelings does she honour today? Again she heard – ' This way, this way.....this is the way.' Definitely, by offering herself to the master, she would gain peace in the religious hermitage. Leaving behind all insults, she stood in the pathway of being a hermit.

Both came to the master. The master sat on a long throne-like seat. His entire body signalled postures of atonement. Humbly, Padmakāñcana mentioned – 'She has come'.

After the prayer, the master saw her with small eyes. A gradual bold phrase uttered from his mouth

- May God bless you!
- I am obliged.
- Lady! Why have you come to become a hermit?.....

His voice trembled.

- Lady! You do not know that penance has become only a story in today's society. All are busy in experiencing happiness and beauty. Only people such as us who do not have anyone spend their time over here. Lady! You think once more –

Tears flowed from Tilottamā's eyes. She neither could see her wound nor could show her wound. With tearful eyes, she stared at the master.

The master told – 'Lady! Once upon a time, I was a young man. I was a family person. In the workaholic society, I also shared a position. But, the fire of communal violence struck the society. Everywhere there was a commotion- this is

a Hindu, this is a Muslim and this is a Christian. Plunder – revenge – vengeance was widespread. I used to work at some other place during that time. Unfortunately, I could not return home. I spent the night at my workplace. When I returned home, everything was finished. My wife and children were dead, the house was burnt.’ Tears came to the master’s eyes.

- Mother! When everything gets destroyed, the poor citizen has two options – being a beggar or committing a suicide.

The master remained silent.

- I am also helpless, father!
- ‘Helpless!!’ the master was surprised.
- Yes, father! I have nobody.....
- ‘You have nobody!!!’, the master was saddened. His heart was indeed very aggrieved. He tried to console –‘What is your name?’ Tilottamā remained silent.
- All right. Do not cry, do not cry. Today onwards, your name is Madhusmitā. It was my daughter’s name.

The master uttered the last words to himself.

- Padmakāñcana! Make all arrangements for the lady hermit to stay.
- All right master.
- Go mother! Nobody will insult you over here. Padmakāñcana will arrange for everything. Go, wash your feet. Wash your face. Eat something and we would meet in the evening. Go, stop staying under the sun.

Madhusmitā followed Padmakāñcana. Her eyes were on the trees of the hermitage. Everything was so very silent. Even the shadows were playing with artificial leaves. Gradually, they spent their days in the religious hermitage.

A year passed by. But there was no news of Bhāgyadatta. It was well known that Nīlimā had also gone with him. Their unhappy family was tired in searching for them. The news was also printed in the newspaper. It was announced via radio. But nobody was able to give any news about their whereabouts. How will somebody live like this? Man even forgets the gravest of tragedies.

The path was rough. It was thorny. There were trees all around. Hills were there everywhere. There was a huge mountain in front. It looked like a beast. At the foothills, lived a barbaric mountain tribe. Their houses looked like heaps from a distance. Everybody was used to the forest life. They lived on the food from forest and drunk the water from forest too. They wore clothes and shoes made out of animal skin. Some of the men and women were naked. They were not afraid of work. They roamed here and there day and night. Their vocabulary did not have the word education. Still they enjoy festivals. They make merry and are happy people. They do not fight with each other. They live together. Unity is their strength. They respect women. They can give their lives for the sake of respect of their women.

Nowadays, they also come to visit the towns. But people think that they are unsocial and hence scoff them off. The mountaineous region is heaven for them. At times, seminaked women also come to the town. People also laugh looking at them. If any tribal person comes to see that people are laughing at them, then they do not hesitate to shoot an arrow towards them. It causes loss of life. That is why people do not behave badly with them.

There has been progress in mankind today. For improving the comfort, many things have been invented. Still then, the customs of these tribals remain the same. Their livelihood has also not changed. They are happy even without the effects of modern inventions. Their health never betrays due to lack of food. They do not have many worries. Like the modern day homeless citizen, they are not hypocrites.

They do not follow blindly. They also do not dress up decently and hover around like the employmentless youth and create commotion by stealing here and there. They work hard the entire day. They have remained for ages and will continue to do so.

The leaves are dense. The sunrays are playing through the dense leaves. The situation is grave and empty. Here, it is Bhāgyadatta's rest house. Over the last one year, many things have changed. Bhāgyadatta is also repentant. He does not know, why he was with Nīlimā. He is no longer as beautiful as before. His greed for lust had still not ended. He had immense wealth. So there was no dearth of bodily pleasures. This year, Nīlimā was more than a married wife. She had thought Bhāgyadatta to be her husband. Everybody in the rest house knew that Bhāgyadatta was the husband and Nīlimā, his wife.

Nīlimā was sleeping. Bhāgyadatta was roaming outside. The locality could be seen from a distance.

Many workers were working in the rest house garden. Bhāgyadatta was thoughtful.

'Tilottamā was abandoned due to her characterlessness. She must be spending her days somewhere. She was beautiful. Alas! Leaving aside everything, I should have done a forest research. There has been conflict with Nīlimā. She believes that Tilottamā is dead. Nīlimā has always been envious of her. She lives with her pride. She always thinks of me wrongly. She is blind with selfish motives. Nīlimā has betrayed me due to selfishness' – thoughtfully he went towards the hill. To entertain himself, he went towards the locality. Afterwards, he told somebody – 'The lady is sleeping. I am going towards the hill for a while. If she inquires, inform her that I have gone.'

Although his heart was excited, he was patient. Nothing could be read from his looks. He went on. The locality was nearby. The mountain girls were carrying water pitchers. In that place filled with women, Bhāgyadatta felt like returning back to town. Questions arose in his mind as to what he should do? He slipped. He failed to decide and lost his path. He repeatedly thought as to what he should do? Either he should leave Nīlimā just as he left Tilottamā or else, he should kill Nīlimā and wipe off his disrepute. Then he may return to Tilottamā and innocently beg for pardon. She is generous. She would definitely accept him. But what should he do? Moreover, Tilottamā. The blame for leaving Tilottamā was like a venomous snake. Killing Nīlimā will end him up in the prison. On one side blame and on other side it was jail.

Bhāgyadatta looked up and observed that the mountain girls were moving in a line with their pitchers towards the forest. They were looking attractive in their seminaked condition. Bhāgyadatta sat on one side of the road. He felt tempted on looking at all this. He felt greedy at the scene. He controlled himself. He was thoughtful.

Meanwhile, Nīlimā woke up and found that Bhāgyadatta is not there. She washed her face and dressed up. She asked Sanatan,

- Where is master?
- 'He had gone towards the hills' was the getle reply.
- Hey Sanatan. The dogs are barking nearby. Why are you not stopping them?
- Mother! They were disturbing my sleep too – but I thought they were crying.
- 'Crying!' she asked surprisingly.
- Yes mother! When I was coming, I told them.
- 'What?' She asked again.

- Mother! I am afraid.
- Hey! What's the fear?
- Mother, when they cry, something bad happens.
- Bad? What bad? Your blind belief has remained the same. The era has progressed. Still, you are behind. Leave all these things. I am going out for sometime. Take care of the home.
- Okay.....

Sanatan left.

Meanwhile, looking Bhāgyadatta sitting, the tribal mountain girls opined that he was an evil person. They went in seminaked condition in front of him and he also looked at them. They told something. He thought for sometime and smiled and made faces too. Looking into his expressions, the women went on to fetch water.

Bhāgyadatta peacefully thought – ‘Today, there is no need for me to go back to the rest house. Let me go somewhere else. Let me search for Tilottamā. I will hide about Nīlimā. If somebody asks, where were you for so long? He would reply that he had gone for business elsewhere. He had come for discussions with other industrialists.’

‘But Nīlimā.....’

Nīlimā is a woman. If by some means, he is deceived by her. She has ability of deceiving anybody. He would think intelligently to protect himself. If she tells something, people would believe her. It is a woman's world.

Again, the tribal mountain girls crossed his path. He shamelessly observed their youthfulness. He knew that it was a danger zone. He had heard about it from Sanatan on numerous occasions – ‘Master! Do not go over there. The nomadic tribal people live over there. They do not understand anything. They only know

death and how to kill. Neither do they understand our language, nor do we understand their language.’

Bhāgyadatta got up. The women were returning. Nīlimā was also coming in search of him. Bhāgyadatta called Nīlimā in high voice. Hearing the shout, the tribal women ran off to their huts.

Nīlimā went to Bhāgyadatta and laughed. She embraced him. But the tribal women had gone to their huts and reported something based on which the tribal men came out shouting with bows and arrows and started chasing Bhāgyadatta. Bhāgyadatta looked at them with utter surprise. He knows that they are cruel – they kill mercilessly. He did not have time to think. He caught Nīlimā’s hand and started running. Both of them started to run for their lives and the tribals chased them. They were screaming. They ran with all guns. The path was thorny. The hilly road had ups and downs, they fell and again got up. The legs started to bleed.

At places, when they fell down, they started to bleed and their legs felt heavy. The shouts of the nomads broke their concentration. The nomads shouted repeatedly and they tried to hide. But the nomads started to shoot arrows. The arrows hit them. Their bodies were covered with arrows. Their bodies seemed to be similar to fallen trees. Their faces looked as bright as freshly plucked flowers. Pain increased in their bodies and legs started trembling.

The tribals arrived. They saw their blood smeared bodies. Their bodies shrunk in fear. Their breaths were waiting to be out. Their anger turned into compassion and sadness. They indicated to each other – these are husband and wife. They had come to roam during evening time. When we came out hearing the false reporting by our women, they started running. It is their bad luck which had caused this. They started searching for medicines.

They carried the half dead bodies to their homes. The sun was setting. Only their bloody rays stayed up in the sky.

Today, Padmakāñcana is a suppressed hermit under the feet of civilization. Under the cover of penance is present the unfulfilled social desire. In the narrow bylane of life, he has a string of worries just like a line of ants. He has an untiring nature inspite of his exploited state. Life is a struggle. Through the fallen leaves of the religious hermitage, many springs have passed. Amidst this, the youthfulness blooms. The tears of work on his innocent face have erased the signs of his fresh youthfulness. The illustrious youthfulness waits in tremble even today. He longs to feel the touch a young beautiful lady even today.

In the past one year, Padmakāñcana had become a security guard. Madhusmitā's arrival had reduced the timespan of one year. His atonement had turned to be nectar. Within this one year, his passage in front of Madhusmitā's window had turned to be a religious habit. Days passed. The nights were disappointing; the shamelessness of youth had not yet gone. The reserved life of religious hermitage had influenced him. The mind was apprehensive. Although Madhusmitā was a guest, whenever he thought of her, a sense of care aroused in his mind. But to no avail. Many a times, he had strayed in front of Madhusmitā's doors at quiet nights. But his entire patience turned into a doubt – Is Madhusmitā a maiden? Or is she – abandoned??

Too much care brings weakness in front. Too much care leads to forgetting one's imperfection. He thought, will Madhusmitā ever choose to lead a social life? Her time passes nicely over here. If Madhusmitā is a maiden – then there is nothing to worry, but if she is abandoned – then also, she deserves to have a social stature. She deserves the right to live. Padmakanchan was flooded with all these thoughts.

One afternoon, Padmakāñcana knocked Madhusmitā's door. Madhusmitā opened the door. Her face had a luminance. It seemed as if she wore a garland. She was looking very beautiful. She asked

- Lord, is there any work to be done?
- No, today it is a day of austerity. I have maintained everything and so I stand here.
- 'Maintained everything', she asked.
- You may close the door.

Padmakāñcana continued to stand even after the door had closed. He had a weak mind. He was very much influenced by Madhusmitā's tenderness. He thought of erasing her grief. He thought of various ways and how to succeed. It was as if all of Madhusmitā's sadness was erased. He tried to do everything to bring smiles on her face. He brought flowers to beautify her and make her happy. With this much care, Madhusmitā forgot everything. She started thanking.

But a wicked thought came across Padmakāñcana's mind. He was also afraid of it. He tried to control his mind. Thereafter he could not leave the ancient appeal of the mind. He tried to find faults. His character is not firm. He has thought of all this in the process of assisting a needy person. No, he is not a dignified citizen; he is similar to a greedy dog. Cheating the less costly, he wants to get the abundance. Treating other's life like a ball is not correct. The villagers were worshipping the stone with blind belief. Some people wash the earthen doll with coconut water. Some throw flowers at a dry wood and shout –Lord, Lord. She serves the needy.

Padmakāñcana looked back – a dark cloud was touching the peak of Dhauli mountain. The monsoon was chasing the religious hermitage in the form of water drops. Seeing that, all the thoughts concentrated in his mind. Padmakāñcana looked at Madhusmitā's closed door. He observed the path of clouds. The clouds

were moving eastwards away from the religious hermitage. The drenched birds had fearful looks at treetops. Droplets of water fell from the leaves on it's feathers. Padmakāñcana was saddened.

The thirst for bodily pleasures aroused with unspoken words. He stood in front of the door with artificial looks.

The door opened. 'Come, come, sit', with open mind, Madhusmitā called him. A wave of smile appeared on the face. There was humility in the eyes and distress in the heart.

'Tell lord.'

Controlling himself, Padmakanchan sat and started telling – 'Madhusmitā, Master has gone for pilgrimage today morning.'

'Is there any message?' - Madhusmitā asked.

During this time, two birds entered the room. They seemed to be tired. They have finished making love.

Madhusmitā smiled gently and went to make them fly out. Turning his head, looking at the window, Padmakāñcana said – the weather is pure. The noon sun is breaking its way away from the clouds. Madhusmitā –

- Tell, lord.
- I have a few questions.
- Ask.
- Madhusmitā? Actually, who are you?

She was disturbed for sometime. Then, she composed her mind and said –

- I am a woman.
- Everybody knows that. Are you single or.....?

- Why is there such a question in your mind, today?

He lost his mind. He acted dumbly.

- Not today. This is a question in my mind since you arrived.

She boldly replied – ‘I am married.’

- ‘Married? To whom?’, he asked surprisingly.

Madhusmitā was thoughtful. She thought about Bhāgyadatta angrily. She trembled in anger. Padmakāñcana observed a black shadow on her fair face. She thought about her unsuccessful past wherein she felt offering herself to Bhāgyadatta and it was socially acceptable. But even without society’s acceptance, one may fulfill bodily pleasures at suitable times. However, till date, she did not try to be physically involved with anybody. She does not even expect any physical or mental support from anybody. She thinks the world to a boundary of unknown people. In the eyes of a blind society, she was an abandoned – tears came to her eyes.

Laughing artificially, she asked –

- What did you think?
- You look like a single.
- ‘Single?’, she laughed.
- Look Madhusmitā. We do not have anything in our lives other than routine work. Life is a circle of ups and downs. Nothing will be there after death. There are expectations and hopes after birth.

No, Madhusmitā. You know my wish – I want to marry...

Padmakāñcana was quiet for sometime. Like the fragrance of a flower, redness reflected around Madhusmitā. She felt that Padmakāñcana was intensely immersed in her beauty. Like an unknown insect, he wanted to jump in the fire.

Puṣpavallava's image came across her mind. Once, like an innocent child, he had also begged for love. But where has he gone?? Innocent Padmakāñcana seemed to be his representative. His face also resembled a man in love.

Madhusmitā tried to explain him differently –

- Lord! Why is a person who had been firm all life, wishing to divert his mind now? Do not travel the wrong path.
- 'Madhusmitā!!' Padmakāñcana looked at her surprisingly.
- Yes, Lord! Think for sometime. It is you, who had wiped my tears with respect t. It is you, who had given me food with care. You had advised me like a father. You had asked about my wellbeing each day. You had looked after me more than a father and mother would have done.
- Madhusmitā!!
- Yes Lord! You had arranged for my shelter wiping out all defamation. You had heard rebuke from the master for my wrong doings. You had wiped my tears when I was unwell. When, I was sad, you had blessed me with new clothes and helped me like a brother. So, I had always thought of you as an elder brother. You think – rethink – how is our relation, since then?
- Stop – stop – Madhusmitā. You have wiped out darkness today. Please forgive me.
- No Lord! You forgive me. I have received enough from you but never gave anything. Also, my beauty had influenced you to traverse the wrong path. Elder brother, forgive me. Please pardon my mistakes....

With sadness, she touched Padmakāñcana's feet and started crying.

The brother's heart melted. Although he had a gentle smile, tears were seen on his forehead.

- Sister! You have shown me the path in life.

He picked her up and kissed her caringly on her forehead.

Meantime, the maid came to tell something. Seeing all this, she was fearful. She stepped backwards. With her narrow mind, she was thrilled. Silently, she whispered – ‘The guests have come. They want to see Madhusmitā.’ She went away.

- ‘Ask them to come in’.....she ordered.

- ‘I will take leave, Sister!’ – Padmakāñcana went back to his room.

Madhusmitā was worried. ‘Who had come?’ She asked herself – ‘Is it Bhāgyadatta?’

‘Or is it Puṣpavallava?’ – ‘Who wants to see Madhusmitā?’

She was determined – she would not reveal her true identity. If she is asked, she would reply as having not knowing.

Meanwhile two teachers came from the locality near Dhauli hill. Their clothes were dirty. They thought with an innocent mind. They came to visit the religious hermitage during the holidays. They inquired about the lady hermit. They were thoughtful about getting a glimpse of the great lady.

The maid brought both of them to the door and called – ‘Devi! Open the door –guests have come.’ The door opened. The maid went away. Madhusmitā looked at both of them surprisingly. Both of the guests exclaimed in a high pitch ‘Tilottamā! You over here.....!!’

Tilottamā was serious and remained silent. She signalled with her hands and asked them to sit down. Vadrikeśa and Aśutoṣa observed her smiling face.

Puṣpavallava's mother sat in the yard. Her bare back could be seen. The mild warmth of the sun was on her back. She was sitting peacefully with legs apart and facing the shadow. The arrangements for making betel leaf were besides her. The old pillow was with her. Above it laid the rosary of beads cuddled like a snake.

All have gone out. The old woman was alone. Wife had also gone to her father's place since the last four months. Puṣpa had also gone to his wife's place for the past ten days. At night, she washed her feet nicely and went to lie down. Since the time they have gone, she had not washed her hands and feet. There was no peace of mind. The house looked empty. Since they had left, there is nobody who talks with the old woman. She was securing the house like a dumb person. She could not even go out leaving the work at home. She was not used to doing work at home, since the time she had come. Recently, she has remained engaged with household work. At this age, she wants to get relief from everything. Wife used to help in household work. Some times – 'do this' – 'do that' she ordered.

The young ones do not listen to the elderly. At times, there was conflict over having food. She did not like to have such food. She went out of the house. She ordered the wife. She had respect for the wife. Her mind is not well since wife is not present at home. Moreover, wife is also pregnant. She was feeling lazy. She was not able to do any work. That's why she has gone to her parent's place. During this time, she must have what she wants. Or else, the child would become greedy on seeing unconsumed matter.

She offered something not sure of what is going to happen. Who knows whose mind? Father, mother, friends think – after a girl's marriage, their responsibility ends.

Puṣpa had yet not returned. What happened there? Is wife alright? Is her health okay? During this time, one needs to consult the doctor. One needs to take proper medicines to give birth. What is he doing over there? What is being organized? Thinking all this, the old woman's mind turned weary.

Puṣpavallava returned home like a tired bird. His body was sweating. His hairs were here and there. He called mother. Mother responded – 'coming'. Puṣpa observed all corners of the house – sunlight was entering through a hole and the light was swaying like an egg. This egg shaped light was trying to gain some stability. Puṣpavallava's face had a smile.

His mother's numb feet were excited. She inquired

- How is wife's health? Is everything alright?
- Yes, everything is in order. But Chhandā is not alright.
- Yes, during this time, health is like this. May God bless her. May she get relief.
- Mother! I will again go today. Whenever, she feels pain, I have to take her to the hospital.
- Nobody is there at home. Her parents are aged. Moreover, they are always busy with work. The younger ones do not have knowledge. Who else would go over there? The mind is anxious – I will go to visit my wife.
- 'Go – have a bath – then have some food. Thereafter you may leave', she said quickly and entered the kitchen.

The sunrays scorched the waters of the pond. Still the blue lotus was smiling. The fishes were playing. Far away, calves, goats and sheep were grazing.

A fisherman was inspecting the waters. Puṣpavallava finished his bath and returned home.

The afternoon heat softened in copper hue. The discussions between the mother and son ended. Touching mother's sacred feet, he left for Chhandā's home. The path was slippery. On both sides were grazing fields. Some thorny bushes stood to identify the cattle that grazed over there. Puṣpavallava went on. He carried a packet of sweets. His mind was in dilemma. On one side it was the baby who was about to be born and on other side, it was Chhandā.

He turned back to see that he had passed his village. There were remains of a garden. If somebody calls from Chhandā's village, somebody else would hear. Many thoughts were coming to mind in solitude. He started thinking – if Tilottamā were his own, then..... No, today she is of somebody else's, her thoughts were different. She must have forgotten the past. In her new life, she belonged to her new family. She was fortunate. He could not give any assistance to her at present. But, he had certain duties. He was supposed to gift her something on her marriage. He had not even done that. Nowadays, with Chhandā coming into her life, he does not even care to take any news of her. She was his life partner. She was his partner in happiness and sorrow. Her laughter and joy was a part of his happiness. She was his mind partner.

Puṣpa had come a long way from his village. Chhandā's village could be seen. Palm trees could also be seen next to her home, long banana leaves were also seen. The cordial long leaves of the coconut tree could be seen. Suddenly, Puṣpa's left eye trembled. He caught hold of it thinking it to be an ominous sign. He went forward. Then he noticed vulture's call on the Peepal tree. The crows were also calling loudly. Seeing all this, his heart trembled. He still went on. A black cat ran

across. The call of the old fox beside Chhandā's village was probably addressed to him. Some women were carrying empty pots to the pond.

Puṣpa's mind was apprehensive. The old men in the village commented that these were ominous signs. Still then, Puṣpa was patient. He was educated. He thought that all these were blind beliefs. Many such false rituals were believed in the village till date.

Puṣpa looked up and saw Chhandā's home-servant running towards him. He was bare and had a dirty cloth from his waist till knee. He carried a cloth on his shoulder. He was panting and trembling. He could not even speak in front of Puṣpa.

Puṣpa asked,

- What happened, Madan? Where are you running?
- Master, to your home.
- What are you telling?
- Master! Chhandā Devi is extremely ill. She is under extreme pain. She has been taken to the maternity home. Therefore, please come over there.

Puṣpa hurried. He started going with Madan. He handed over the packet of sweets to him and requested him to bring it over there. The maternity home was not unknown to him. He hurried. The maternity home looked like the Devil's home from far. Various flower trees were also looking like patients. The flowers were also ill. The entry door looked dangerous. There, the guard looked like Devil's messenger. He asked him and got directions for the delivery room.

Anxious Puṣpavallava did not get permission to see Chhandā. The doctor did not allow him. He asked humbly – 'How is she?'

- 'Do not be anxious' - the nurse advised.
- 'Is her pain too much?' He asked again.
- 'Now she is unconscious. Do not worry. The doctor is there. Everything will be alright'. She gave confidence and entered the room.

Puṣpavallava continued to wait for the doctor's permission. Gradually, two hours passed. But nobody came outside. Chhandā's relatives were also present over there. Everybody was silent. All asked anxiously to the nurse –'Has she gained consciousness?'

'Do not worry', she repeated. The sun had set. The electric lights turned on. The screams of pain could be heard from the maternity home. It was Chhandā's scream. Puṣpavallava heart was tore apart. She was ready for the delivery. The thought of whether it would be a boy or a girl did not touch him. He was anxious. He requested –'Let me see her for a moment. I will come back after seeing her. Her pain will be slightly relieved on seeing me. Sister! Please, let me.....?'

'No, - she has regained consciousness. She will soon be okay. The doctors will come out soon. You may ask them. Also – please ask somebody to get some milk for her at dinner time.' Saying this, she entered the room.

Puṣpa sent somebody to the stores to get the needed. He continued to wait for the doctors. Puṣpa asked him anxiously –'Sir! Is her health okay?'

'Yes, but listen over here'- the doctor took him to a dark corner. Puṣpa followed him. The doctor put his hand on the shoulders and told him –'If you want to see her alright, give me five hundred rupees. Or else, nothing will happen. Actually -, this hospital does not have costly medicines. We have to get it from the

shop. That's why we need the money from you. I will get the medicines through sending the servants.'

The doctor acted too busy and wanted to go away.

'It is night-time now. I cannot even go home. I do not have this much money with me.'

'Then what will happen?'

'Give me some time - I will pay you tomorrow morning. Heal Chhandā for now.' Puṣpa requested the doctor by holding his hands. With cruel minds, he did not want to listen anything. Ignoringly, he mentioned – 'Don't you know anybody in the shop? Bring it from him - pay him back tomorrow morning.'

'No, I do not have anybody known over here. Even the friends that I know do not have five hundred rupees with them.' Puṣpa again requested him.

'Then what do I do? It is fate' – ignored the doctor and started going. Puṣpavallava again requested humbly – 'Look – I do not have anything. Only, I have two rings on my fingers. Accept these for now and I will pay the balance tomorrow morning.'

'What will I do with these? The shop is open. Go over there. Sell them and bring the money. I am here till ten at night.' The doctor departed hurriedly.

Puṣpavallava's mind was shattered. During this time, he saw some of the relatives and asked them – 'Please sit over there. I will come from the shop. The nurse will come and tell everything. Please do accordingly.' Puṣpa went away to the shop.

The rest of the relatives entered the maternity ward and started praying to God. At times the nurse mentioned – she is well.

It is nine at night. Puṣpavallava went from shop to shop like a mad dog. Some shops were open whereas others were closed. Puṣpa went to each shop and told – ‘Sir! Please keep these two and lend me five hundred rupees. I will return the same tomorrow morning.’ - But everywhere, he heard the same thing – ‘We will pay half for what we are accepting. These two will not make five hundred together.’

Puṣpavallava was frustrated. He could not think any longer. He tried many ways but could not succeed. He came to a rich person. He heard everything. He was miserly but was kind enough to mention – ‘These days, one cannot believe anybody. However, give those articles and take three hundred rupees in return. Go back to the doctor and request him to bring medicines with this sum. The balance shall be paid by you tomorrow morning.’ Mohammed laughed crookedly and mentioned – ‘Look! It is ten o’clock now. Return quickly and tell the doctor about me. You do not know, all are greedy over here’ – he smilingly entered observing the rings.

Puṣpa hurried towards the hospital – the dogs were running after him. He continued to ignore them and moved forward. The doctor was waiting at the doorsteps. He asked Puṣpa – ‘What are you thinking?’

Puṣpa silently observed – the doctor to be waiting at a dark corner. Puṣpa went upto him, caught his hands and told – ‘Sir! I have been roaming from one shop to the other for the last two hours. But nowhere, I have got five hundred rupees. I have got three hundred rupees. So please take this much and I will pay the

balance tomorrow morning.' The doctor accepted the money slowly. He softly mentioned, 'It is half past ten now. She is okay now. Go and see her. I am going now. I will meet you tomorrow at twelve noon.' The doctor went away.

Puṣpa ran towards Chhandā's maternity ward. He observed the relatives to be all silent. The nurses were waiting. Puṣpa asked –'Sister! How is Chhandā now?' The nurse remained silent. He opened the door and saw Chhandā's dead body covered in white cloth. He shouted 'Chhandā.....'

His scream got mixed with the darkness. It echoed a lot. Some of them came back to him.

The days melted, weeks of tearful eyes and painful months. Life seemed meaningless to Puṣpa and his body became tired. His ideas froze. All waited like the grass. He did not like to have food. The liquids seemed like poison. He remained silent and heard the sympathetic words of fatherly – mother's words could also be heard. All were dark in front of him. Chhandā's shadows seemed to dance in the blue sky. At every step he could hear, -'Dear – dear – dear!' It was very soft. He was being invited in the starry skies by Chhandā's bodyless spirit. At every moment, the echo could hear a painful cry.

Many words of the mind were untold. He heard Chhandā's last words. But he could not answer. She went away helplessly. She could not tell anything, she did not leave any sign. Her dream of motherhood remained unfulfilled. She could not even see her own child. The child also died with her - she could also neither see her mother's deadbody, nor her father.

Today, it is Chhandā's last rituals. The dogs and foxes were fighting at the cremation ground. The bride of the village, Chhandā's love turned to be an example. The shepherd was afraid to go to the cremation ground. The village boys

were discussing about Chhandā's spirits everytime. But the aged people, felt pity on Puṣpa about Chhandā's untimely death. It was empty all around Puṣpa. He thought – this is life where name and shape changes. Chhandā was unhappy – she was the unseen beauty of the cremation ground. There were as if no differences between work and idleness, happiness and sorrow. Only unconsciousness – unknown things of the mind.

Four months later, Puṣpa realized that he had an unknown pain in his mind. Chhandā touched his mind. He was invited as a traveller into space. Chhandā is no more. But her memories remind him everytime. Day by day, the pain went on increasing. He thought – his end was near. But the topic of remarriage was going on at his residence. Mother was also looking for a new wife. The young ones who knew Chhandā had also forgotten her. But Puṣpa became physically ill with the mental disturbances. Still, all wanted Puṣpa to remarry. But what does Chhandā's spirit want?

Chhandā was a good housewife – looked after her husband. Puṣpa was touched by her love and behaviour. She was everything in his life. But will he be able to forget her in grave? Man is able to forget. With the passage of time, he is bound to forget.

Puṣpa stood on the village bridge in the evening. The crooked road of the village could be seen. The village trees could be seen nearby. The villagers were celebrating spring festival over there. His thoughts woke up. During this time, he had asked so many questions to Chhandā. He saw the full moon and his love had doubled.

At this place, Chhandā had let herself loose. At this place his family life had begun. At this place, their deep love had danced. Puṣpa could not think any more. Tears started to come out of his eyes.

Puṣpavallava could see the dusty road. He could see two people in white clothes approaching. He remained silent. He tried to recognize them. 'What do you need?' He tried to smile gently. The two persons followed him.

Memories of the past came onto Puṣpavallava's mind. He continued to hear the known voices, 'Elder brother!' Puṣpa observed their changed clothes. He was Vadrikeśa, he was completely new. There was Aśutoṣa, the teacher from the village school. Both were teachers. They knew of everything – the country's progress, whether the females in the village were educated or not, the village population, who all had children, who had passed away, who were married, who were about to get married and to whom - etcetra. It was like the information about oil and salt in one's family. But in today's struggle of life, Puṣpa was defeated. The world was not in his favour. Fate had also not given his side.

Vadrikeśa embraced Puṣpavallava. Aśutoṣa also embraced him heart to heart and mentioned

- Puṣpa! Why are you so concerned? Forget the past. Think of the new. What has happened was bound to happen. What could you have done about it?
- 'Yes, friend!...., certainly.' Puṣpa sighed deeply. His mind was sorrowful.
- 'Elder brother! You seem to be ill' Vadrikeśa asked.

- Yes, after her death – don't know why – she remains in the mind painfully.
- It was bound to happen, what could be done?
- No, she has remained as a pain. I want to get rid of my physical illness. Death summons me to go near to Chhandā. True, friend! My days are over.
- Do not tell like this. Consult the doctor.
- True -, since that day, hospital is a devil's home and a doctor seems like Devil himself.
- No – brother. It is duty. Do not ignore it.

Aśutoṣa changed the topic and told – ‘You know, Puṣpa!’

- What?
- About Tilottamā.
- What is to be known? The person with whom I was busy for many days has gone away. Everything is sorrowful.
- You know that we have been appointed as teachers at the foothills of Dhauli hill.
- Yes, I know.
- ‘Don't you know that Tilottamā stays in an hermitage over there?’

Vadrikeśa mentioned dramatically.

- Tilottamā? At the foothills of Dhauli hill!!! In an hermitage!!!
- ‘Yes –’ both of them mentioned.
- ‘Since when?’ Puṣpa asked surprisingly.
- ‘She is over there. Don't know, why. She is abandoned. She has been there since a year.’ Aśutoṣa mentioned.

- ‘Nobody had mentioned all this before. Why are you telling this now? All these are lies.’ – Puṣpa told.
- ‘No brother! You know. We had been there once. By God’s grace, we had met her. We had also talked with her.’ Vadrikeśa mentioned anxiously.
- What did you talk about?
- Why is she abandoned? Why has she come over there? Why does she stay over there – and many more things. Thereafter our visit to that place.
- You have not mentioned this before?
- How did you know of all this? It was different during those times. Apart from this, she has adopted the religion of Dev. If you ever reveal anything about her anywhere, she would commit suicide.
- Then why did you reveal now?
- Now it is you. Her husband is dead, it is known everywhere.
- Her husband is dead!! What are you telling?
- ‘Yes, Puṣpa! Nobody knows where he had gone with Nīlimā. A year had passed. He had not returned till date. Everybody whispers that he was killed by the tribal people’ Aśutoṣa described.
- Does Tilottamā know?
- She only knows that she is abandoned by her husband. That also, she had not revealed. She had even changed her name. She leads the life of a hermit, who had lost everything.
- ‘There must be other bad hermits over there. She is beautiful...’ Puṣpa felt pain within himself.
- No -, there a hermit named Padmakāñcana looks after her like a sister.

Although, pained from within, Puṣpa could not say much. He invited both of them to his home.

Coming to his home, they again started discussing about the same thing. Vadrikeśa observed Puṣpa's health and mentioned.

- Brother! Day by day, your health is deteriorating. So.....
- 'What shall I do', Puṣpa asked.
- 'Puṣpa! Again start a family life', Aśutoṣa suggested.
- 'Family.....' slightly laughing – 'family has ended, Aśutoṣa! Stones will not look nice on a dilapidated foundation.'
- Look nice, it would look nice. If any of our old things get destroyed, or get bad, don't we purchase new things in lieu of those?
- True – but, heart or mind is something which cannot be purchased.
- You are correct in telling that it cannot be purchased from a shop – but the entire world is a shop and heart can definitely be purchased.
- Yes, it is easy to tell that heart can be purchased.
- 'Yes, I am telling that,' Aśutoṣa mentioned boldly.
- Look Aśutoṣa! Nobody will take a broken heart and give a new heart.
- 'Will give – will definitely give. I know of such a person', Vadrikeśa mentioned strongly.
- Who is that person?
- Tilottamā.
- 'Tilottamā!!' Puṣpa was surprised.
- 'Yes, Tilottamā', Aśutoṣa gave confidence.
- But, look, we have our society.

- 'So what?' Vadrikeśa asked.
- Think. Firstly, if he had a husband, then it would have been impossible to marry.
- Secondly, if he had died, then widow remarriage is considered bad.
- 'But, she is abandoned' - Aśutoṣa reminded.
- 'Look Aśutoṣa! Today society has progressed. Still it is orthodox. Widow re-marriage is only heard about. No educated person wishes to accept somebody's hand out of his own.' Puṣpa repented.

His pain of mind became intolerable. He bruised his heart.

- 'Brother! Then, don't you wish to marry Tilottamā?' Vadrikeśa asked.
- 'My family is destroyed, Vadrikeśa!' Puṣpa kept his hand on head.
- 'Puṣpa! You are educated, why do you think like a mad person?',

Aśutoṣa turned angry.

- No friend! My life has ended. She will not be happy holding my hand.
- Brother! You have forgotten that you were Tilottamā's lover. That is the reason why she had been abandoned.
- Vadrikeśa!
- Yes brother! Have you forgotten those days of love during your boating? Have you forgotten the picture of you two? Have you forgotten the secret conversations? Have you forgotten the secret meetings? How many times have you touched her at night below the tree?? Have you forgotten everything??
- 'Stop – stop, Vadrikeśa! Do not turn me mad'- Puṣpa's-tearful eyes.

Suddenly, both of them looked at him and said ‘Why are you sad? Whatever is bound to happen will happen.’

- Friends! I am a wingless bird today.
- No -, Puṣpa! The evil rules of society and poor traditions are bound to change. We form the society. The uneducated always criticize the values and ways but who cares to ask them? That is to be done, what is well thought of. Also, that will happen, what is bound to happen.
- ‘But.....’ Puṣpa murmured silently.
- ‘But’ has no place, brother. Tilottamā has undergone great change. Her calm stature would attract anybody. She serves as a mother to the orphans, sister to many by working there. If she hears about your present condition, she would definitely come to you. Again, a new family life would come up’, laughed Vadrikeśa! ‘Come, Aśutoṣa! Yes, brother! Do not worry. Things will be brighter in future. Tomorrow, we will go to Tilottamā’s place.’ Vadrikeśa came out. ‘Look - a black scorpion is going. This implies that something good will happen.’ Aśutoṣa followed.

Puṣpa stayed far. Vadrikeśa, Aśutoṣa went away. Puṣpa thought – in this world, only these people think of me.

It is nine o’clock. Puṣpa had yet not left the bed. His body was trembling. His heart pained. He was ill, for four days. He had not even drunk water. His mind flew like an insect at times. His pain was increasing, the medicines did not work.

Mother and fatherly were pained. They were looking after him. Vadrikeśa, Aśutoṣa came at morning and gave confidence. Their concerns were immense.

The absence of best friend was causing the delay in healing – these were their thoughts. They explained this to Puṣpa and went away for work. They would consult the doctor and come with medicines the next morning.

Even today, Puṣpa's mind was filled with Chhandā's shadow. He always thought that there was no point to repent over what had already happened. But he was filled with multiple thoughts. Vadrikeśa had a strong belief that Tilottamā would again come in his life. Again she would be his beloved.

Puṣpa's mild desires aroused – 'Even if she was abandoned, he had not forgotten her. The female mind was always following him. He wished to be her beloved. Even today he was excited. Even if she was confined by society – she was beloved....'

During this time, mother said affectionately:

- Puṣpa! Four days have passed. You have ate nothing. Come – eat something.
- Yes mother! I am hungry.
- Then, eat something –
- Yes mother! I will follow.

Puṣpa went gradually. His mind was happy. Tomorrow Tilottamā would come. Again, they would meet. He would see her in Chhandā's place. Again they would settle in life. Again, a new child would play in their house. He could see himself playing with the new children.

The afternoon heat was strong. Vadrikeśa and Aśutoṣa went. They went near the leaved houses of Dhauli hill. The tourists looked like a line of ants. Two three

vehicles were taking rest over there. There was excitement in the Dhauli hill. A flag was flying at the temple top. The chirping of birds was heard. At the back, a few white monuments were seen. The cranes sat in front.

Padmakāñcana was present at the main door of the temple. Enlightenment came out of his eyes. His face with twisted lock of hairs seemed to reject all desires. He tried to preach the tourists – ‘This is All mighty Shankar, renouncement is his ultimate goal. This God vanquishes sorrow. He destroys thirst. This is merciful Jesus, whose wish is love for mankind. This is the great man, Mohammed. He is the correct one, this is the religious comprehension. This God is ‘the universal idol’ – our leader is the supporter of universal religion. Man is great but God is the greatest – universal harmony, universal dedication, universal religion, universal progress, universal motivation for work, universal inquisitiveness is the discipline of the universal idol.

Both the friends heard Padmakāñcana’s preachings. Once certain about the recess, they went towards Tilottamā’s place in the inner portion of the house. The door was open. The afternoon prayers were on. The desired God was being worshipped. There was beautiful fragrance all around. A few birds were singing in the quiet garden. Friend called with soft voice – ‘Tilottamā.....’ with open hairs Tilottamā looked back – two known faces of the unfeatured past were present. One person slipped back somewhere with the passage of time. Finishing off her prayers, she invited respectfully – ‘Come, come’.

- ‘No, you complete your prayers’ -Vadrikeśa said.
- ‘Completed’ she instructed the servant – ‘bring the fruits from my temple’. She asked both of them – ‘Is everything well?’
- ‘Is it possible to stay well in our teaching profession?’ Aśutoṣa joked.
- Why are your feet over here again?

- Is it something special?
- ‘You know everything. What is there for us to tell?’ Vadrikeśa mentioned smilingly.
- What do I know?
- ‘Don’t you know about Puṣpa?’ Aśutoṣa asked seriously.

Again her heart trembled at the pronunciation of Puṣpa’s name. The old memories were aroused. His smiling face came across her mind. She could not tell anything.

- ‘Why are you silent?’ asked Vadrikeśa.
- ‘No -, something else came across my mind’- she controlled herself – ‘Yes- , what were you mentioning of which I know? It has been many days since I have met you all.’
- ‘He is all right now. Frequently, he mentions that his life is ending soon’. Aśutoṣa repented.
- I know that he is married. His wife must be staying with him.....
- ‘No -, Tilottamā! After your marriage, looking into his behaviour, near ones forced him to get married. You know all this. He tried to forget you by various means. His wife, Madhuchhandā was also very intelligent’. Aśutoṣa paused.
- ‘Then, what happened?’ she asked eagerly.
- Thereafter, his mind also hanged slightly. But – alas! Madhuchhandā passed away in labour pain....
- ‘Passed away!! When did it happen?’ Her heart saddened.
- It has been four months. He is going around like a mad person. His health has also deteriorated. His heart pains immensely’. Vadrikeśa narrated with sad voice.

- What is he thinking now?
- ‘What will he think? He has been eager since the time he has heard about you staying in this hermitage. He wanted to see you. But due to his poor health, he could not come.’ Aśutoṣa choked as he told.

Tilottamā became anxious. Her condition became similar to that of a fish in turbid waters. She started thinking and her ears turned deaf. Her favourite days turned as balls of smoke in her eyes. Puṣpa’s picture came up from within the smoke. Gradually, that picture started approaching her and called ‘Tilottamā! Tilottamā!’ Tilottamā’s mind melted in pity. Unnoticingly, tear drops accumulated at the corner of her eyes. She sighed and asked, ‘What else can be done?’

- ‘Definitely something can be done. We have thought of something. If you...’. Vadrikeśa paused.
- Tell, tell.
- ‘Tilottamā. Again come into family life. Whenever, people would speak about devotion, they would mention about Puṣpa’s wife. Be a wife to her for leading your life.’ – Aśutoṣa mentioned slowly and seriously.

Tilottamā’s body drooped. She went by the window side. She observed that workers are transplanting a tree in the garden. She controlled herself and looked towards her friends compassionately. Smiling gently, she told calmly ‘Look, I can do whatever you are telling me to do. But decide – to whom do I offer this defamed body, I have lost everything in life. Again, why do I impurify somebody whose life is sinless?’

- The Ganga river is never impure, Tilottamā! She washes away all our sins. You are the river Ganga. Your touch would again revive the frail Puṣpa.
- But Aśutoṣa! Real life is not like the happy union of films. Neither is it poetry, where there is emotional illustration. Nor is it the ideal plot in a novel. Practical life is very different from the imagined life. Practical life has many rules. There is society. There are family, friends and relatives. Doing things as per own wishes are always criticized. Moreover – I am a woman – secondly, married....
- But - you were the beloved in his earlier life...Have you forgotten?
- No – I have never forgotten – but...
- Then, what do you want; does his life burn in flames? What do you want, does his family turn into dust in future? Do you tell that he dies?
- ‘Do not speak like this, Aśutoṣa’ - with tearful eyes, she held his hands.
- ‘You can save his life. Now you think – what you can do...’ Vadrikeśa explained to her.
- ‘Look, Tilottamā. Forget the past sorrowful history. What else will you do in life? It is everybody’s goal to eye upon happy times. Whoever looks back stays at the back only. So do not think any more. You marry. Puṣpa-Tilottamā’s unique life would remain as an ideal one to us in the future.’ Aśutoṣa again explained.
- But Aśutoṣa....
- Now, there is no more time to think of anything else. Dress up. If it is not possible for you today, then when do you plan to come?

- Aśutoṣa! I am not thinking any more. I will remarry upon your words, but you have to wait for sometime.
- What are you telling? How many days to wait?
- Now, your friend is unwell. Think about his health. Wait for seven days. Thereafter, when he recovers his health, then I will go to his place. Today it is Thursday. I will go next Thursday. On that day, we will all go together – what do you think?
- ‘Right, right’ - telling this, both went away. Tilottamā bid them adieu with smiling face.

Both the friends went outside the house. The eastern sky had the half moon. Some evening stars had risen. Birds were gradually returning back to the trees in the religious garden.

Tilottamā stood by the door. With happy minds, the two friends melted away into the darkness. Tear drop fell from her eyes on the ground – ‘She had forgotten everything. But her teacher friends had remembered her. They thought about her even today.’ She looked back – Padmakāñcana was praying at main hall of the temple. The evening prayers were going on. He was ringing the bells.

Tilottamā was patient. This was a woman’s patience – did she stand determined? Her mind was disturbed – she had given word regarding her marriage. They would again come along with Puṣpa. Puṣpa is fighting with death today. If she had rejected him, he might have died as a consequence. She thought – today is Thursday. She had given time for the next Thursday.

But what can be done? There is a great barrier of the orthodox society in front. Thereafter, there is reproach by people. Behind, there is the dreadful past. At one time, she considered Puṣpa as her husband. Even today, she prays to God for

his wellbeing. She can give up her life for him. He is lying on the bed today like an injured bird. Hope is calling the beloved of the past. The love since her youthful days bewildered her. Her eyes were filled with tears. She felt that Puṣpa's weak hands were wiping off the sweat from her forehead. She shouted –‘Coming – I am coming.’

As if her shouting echoed and reached the front door. Hearing the same, Padmakāñcana reached her doorsteps and asked –‘What happened? Madhusmitā!’

- No, nothing as such. But I had something to say.
- Tell – there is nothing to be afraid of.
- No – nothing to fear – the autumn festival is being celebrated everywhere. So, I would be on fast for seven days.
- All right, nobody will stop you.
- So, nobody should come to my room for five days starting tomorrow.
- Why will you remain silent?
- Yes, after five days, I will do something.
- ‘Okay, be it so.’ Padmakanchan went towards the main hall of the temple. He had a doubt in his mind regarding Madhusmitā. But he did not tell anything due to his over-caring nature.

It is Sunday. Puṣpa is feeling healthy today. His mind is joyful. It has been two days, since the sickness has gone. He was waiting to see his friends.

It is ten'o clock in the morning. Aśutoṣa and Vadrikeśa happily entered. Their faces brimmed with success. Both embraced Puṣpa. Puṣpa asked merrily

- All successful?
- We are joyful – where does the question of being unsuccessful arise?

Aśutoṣa told boldly.

- But my health.....
- You are fine now. You will be completely healthy in another two days. So Tuesday, we will go from here. Let us see what happens.
- ‘Tuesday morning, we will go. Then, we will do what nobody knows. There are always obstacles in good work.’ Vadrikeśa cautioned.
- ‘Still, we will go. Let it remain a secret.’ Aśutoṣa went forward. Puṣpa followed.

Puṣpavallava laughed. The friends went to the village field. On both sides of the field, children were playing. The elderly people of the village observed both of them.

Today, it is the fifth day of fasting. Tilottamā was fasting even without drinking water. She was tired. Her nerves were lifeless. The heart burned. Her mind was unconscious, still her goal was same. The person whom she considers as her husband, for whom she bows in front of wood and stone, she prays - still ignores everything and accepts her as his wife – desiring such a life, Madhusmitā offered all her pains at the feet of the eternal figure.

Tilottamā did not want to see the ill-charactered Bhāgyadatta. But she wanted life for the beloved of her youth, Puṣpavallava. The entire society stood in front to blame her. The dreadful past was following her from behind. Still her eyes wanted to see Puṣpa. Tilottamā closed her eyes. She tried hard to remember Puṣpa. She prayed again and again, ‘God, give happiness to the beloved of my youth in return of my dreadful past!’ Puṣpa’s image came in front of her as a lover of her youth. She tried to embrace him. Tears of union started to swim on Tilottamā’s face. Her youthful smile turned pale.

It was a shady afternoon. It was lethargic all around. At times, mild breeze were moving some leaves. The chirping of wayward birds could be heard. Three friends were coming. Many thoughts came to the mind. After many days, success could be touched. Tilottamā's name brought happiness to Puṣpa's mind. He was delighted. He gathered enough strength to come. He chatted with the friends happily. They also felt happy.

The friends reached the gloomy environment of the hermitage. Apprehensive Padmakāñcana observed them. Remaining silent, he started looking here and there. Vadrikeśa asked him

- Friend! Where is Madhusmitā?
- 'What for? What is your identity?', Padmakāñcana asked ignorantly.
- 'We are teachers over here' – Vadrikeśa told devotedly.
- Trying to remember if I had seen you before.
- Yes, possibly, we always stay at the foothills. We visit over here occassionally.
- Do you know her?
- 'Yes, but she is.....' Vadrikeśa looked at his friends.
- 'Yes, tell', Padmakāñcana asked anxiously.
- 'She was our friend of old times and classmate too.' Vadrikeśa told hesitantly.
- You cannot meet her now.
- Why??

She is undergoing an austere life presently. It has been five days. Two days are left. Thereafter, her fasting would be over. Hence, it would not be correct to interrupt her before that.

- 'We want to meet her today only', Puṣpa mentioned depressingly.

- Come after two days.

‘There is no harm in our seeing her.’ Aśutoṣa suggested. Apprehensively, Padmakāñcana went ahead and said – ‘Friends! You seem to be aware of Madhusmitā’s true identity, so if you please tell the truth, there would be no loss.’ Padmakāñcana asked. Aśutoṣa merrily said – ‘Friend, her name is actually Tilottamā and not Madhusmitā. She is our friend, Puṣpavallava’s beloved of the youth....’

‘Tilottamā.... ....!! Beloved of youth.... ....!! Then come, let us go to her room’ – Padmakāñcana led the three friends.

‘Tilottamā ... ..! Tilottamā ... ..! Your husband has come! Tilottamā .... ..!’  
The religious hermitage echoed.

All gathered in front of Tilottamā’s room. Padmakāñcana knocked the door loudly. But, all were in vain.

After a long time, the door opened. Tilottamā’s pale body lay on the floor. Her face looked happy. There was a gentle smile on her face. Her white dress was disordered. Her hairs were free. Puṣpavallava shouted ‘Tilottamā - ! Tilottamā!’ He tried to awaken her while tears from his eyes drenched her face. His shouting was like the scream of a mad person. Hearing his shouting, the birds from the hermitage flew away. All were standing over there. All were crying.

The residents of the hermitage decorated the dead body with flowers. Tilottamā was sleeping forever while Padmakāñcana was silent. He also had tearful eyes. Friends stood motionless. Puṣpavallava put vermilion on her head. He

drew the vermilion on her forehead caringly and drenched her face by bringing his own face closer to her.

The dead body was raised. Padmakanchan was silent with tearful eyes. All were sorrowful. The three friends put arms on each other's shoulders and started to ascend the steps of Dhauli hill. Evening descended. The western sky turned red.

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