

**THE  
BLISS  
OF  
LIFE**

THE BLISS OF LIFE

*By the same author :*

**CRITICAL :**

- Milton's Paradise Lost :** A Study
- Heywood :** A Prose Shakespeare
- The Heroic Argument :** A Study of Milton's Heroic Poetry
- The Eagle and the Phoenix :** A Study of Samson Agonistes
- Things Unattempted :** (A Study of Milton)

**CREATIVE :**

- Towards Marriage :** (A Play in Three Acts)
- The Carnival :** (A Play in Three Acts)
- Sakuntala :** (A Play in Three Acts)
- The Stream :** (A Novel)
- The Farewell Party :** (A Novel)
- Look Homeward :** (A Novel)
- The Mahatma :** (One Act Play)

# THE BLISS OF LIFE

( A Novel )

M. V. RAMA SARMA,  
M.A., Ph.D. (Wales)  
*Vice Chancellor*  
*S. V. University,*  
*Tirupati*

1982

S. CHAND & COMPANY LTD.

RAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110055

**S. CHAND & COMPANY LTD**

*Regd. Office :* Ram Nagar, New Delhi-110055

*Show Room :* 4/16-B, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-110002

**Branches :**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Mai Hiran Gate, Jalandhar-144008                                   | 285/J, Bipin Behari Ganguly Street,<br>Calcutta-705012 |
| Amidabad Park, Lucknow-226001                                      | Sultan Bazar, Hyderabad-500001                         |
| Blackie House,<br>103/5, Walchand Hirachand Marg,<br>Bombay-400001 | 3, Gandhi Nagar East,<br>Nagpur-440002                 |
| 152, Anna Salai, Madras-600002                                     | KPCC Bldg, Race Course Road<br>Bangalore-560009        |
| 611-7, M. G. Road, Ernakulam,<br>Cochin-682012                     | Khatasabi Road, Patna-800004                           |

First Edition 1979

Second Edition 1982

Price : Rs. 10/-

*Published by S. Chand & Company Ltd, Ram Nagar, New Delhi-110055  
and printed at Rajendra Ravindra Printers (Pvt) Ltd,  
Ram Nagar, New Delhi-110055  
Bound by Bajaj Book Binding House*

For Lord Venkateswara

## THE VISIT TO MOVVA

That was January 1950. I had just returned from England after taking my doctorate degree. I was pleasantly surprised to find Rama Rao, the Editor of a reputed literary quarterly, coming to see me. With him was another elderly gentleman who was introduced to me as Krishna Sastry, a retired university teacher, working on Kshetrappa's padams. Sastry had all the innovative zeal of a researcher. Rama Rao was a man of culture in the true sense of the term.

'Hallo, doctor, we have come to disturb you. Do you mind coming to your village Movva with us? We would like to see the temple,' the Editor said.

I was thrilled to be in the company of these intellectuals. More than that, a trip to my village was long overdue. On my return from England I should have visited my village already, somehow I didn't. This invitation was quite welcome.

'Yes, I'll come and show the temple to you,' I said.

We three started in a car from Masulipatam. It was early morning, slightly chilly, but pleasant. Sastry was for some time silent. Then he started talking.

'Doctor, we have heard much about Muvva Gopala through Kshetrappa's padams. We wonder what it will be like to be in the temple and to see the Lord.'

'It will be like our impression of the ocean, especially when it is calm. We may be inclined to say 'is

this the mighty ocean?,' I said.

'Do you think that we will be disappointed when we see the temple?' asked Sastry.

'O no, not that way. A poet creates beautiful things, he lives in a world of beauty. In order to appreciate all that he describes, we must be willing to accept his views and sympathise with him.'

'You know, even the location of the village and its temple is a problem. Kshetrayya says Mavva Gopala or Muvva Gopala whereas the name of the present village is Movva. Very often claims are made on behalf of other villages, but I personally feel that Kshetrayya belongs to your village.'

'Of course he belongs to our village and we come from the family of Kshetrayya,' I said emphatically.

'Will there be any elders in the village who can give some more details of Kshetrayya?' queried Sastry.

'I think there would be,' I added.

We reached Movva. We drove straight to the temple. Very soon there was a stir in the village. The young and the old gathered before the temple. They were all very eager to see what we were upto. To them there was nothing novel about the temple for it was there for hundreds of years. Muvva Gopala was known to them. They could even sing a few odd pieces of Kshetrayya's padams. They took it for granted that Kshetrayya belonged to the village and he was the poet-musician who brought renown to the village. I explained to them the purpose of our visit.

'Are there any unpublished padams of Kshetrayya



in this village?' asked Sastry.

Apparently none seemed to be in the know of things.

'Tell me why the village is called Movva, whereas the padams refer to Mavva and Muvva,' Rama Rao asked.

To this one of the elders readily replied.

'This village is supposed to be named after the sage Maudgalya. In course of time it has been Mavva, Muvva and now it is Movva. There has been a slight change in the way it is pronounced, that's all.'

'Are you sure that this is the village where Kshetraya lived and loved the Lord?' Sastry questioned.

'Of course, yes.' The answer came promptly from one of the elders of the village.

Sastry looked at the image of Muvva Gopala. It was impressive. The temple was in need of much repair. It looked sadly neglected. Rama Rao was talking to the villagers. Now and then he was looking at me. But Sastry was all the time gazing at the idol and the temple wondering whether he could see Kshetraya in spirit.

'How old is this temple?' he asked.

'A few hundred years' was the reply from the villagers. One of them added, 'it is generally believed that the temple was built by the Devatas in one single night, and by early morning the temple was seen. That must have been a bigger temple, vast in its size, perhaps more magnificent. When that was destroyed, this smaller one was built.'

(\*)

'Just possible,' nodded Sastry.

Then Sastry suggested that they could have a look at some of the idols. The priest brought out one of the idols usually taken out in processions. Much to the amazement of all, the word 'Mavva' was seen inscribed on the back of the idol. So the contention that Mavva, Muvva and Movva had been the names of the same village was proved. Sastry was mightily pleased with himself. He took a photograph of the idol. I was also much surprised because I myself never checked the idols before. We never had a doubt, so it never occurred to us that there could be any controversy at all as regards the village in which the poet lived. Sastry, like a researcher digging into the annals of the past observed every minute detail about the temple.

We then moved on to our house. We had lunch and Sastry took a photograph of a few of us belonging to the family of Kshetrappa. We felt elated. Then we planned to go to Srikakulam, three miles away from Movva, a village on the banks of the river Krishna. This was the capital of the first Andhra king and it enjoyed all that glory at one time. We were keen on seeing the temple of Andhra Maha Vishnu there. It was the temple visited by Krishna Deva Raya. The priest showed to us the inscription on the temple wall referring to the visit of Krishna Deva Raya. Pooja was done and we received the blessing of the deity. We moved on to the river, only at a short distance from the temple. The river was flowing smoothly. It was a grand sight. There were some islands nearby.

The river meandered by them. The whole scene was picturesque with all its sylvan pomp. The temple towered high and the river flowed on majestically. I murmured to myself that it would be a fit place for a rural university. The village with all its past glory reminded us of the Andhra kings of the past.

In the afternoon we drove back to Movva and spoke to a few villagers gathered at our house. The conversation was mostly in the form of establishing the cultural ethos for Movva. I took the lead in explaining to them how Movva was centrally located in a cultural belt.

'On one side of Movva there is Srikakulam, the village on the banks of the river Krishna. On another side is Ghantasala three miles away from Movva. At one time Ghantasala occupied an important position as the centre for coastal trade and for propagation of Buddhist culture under the Andhra kings. It has a hoary past, and it had been one of the important towns at that time noted for its contacts with countries like Java, Borneo and Sumatra for trade and for establishing cultural affinities.'

'It is only natural that surrounded by such places of historical and cultural importance Movva too would have flourished at that time,' Rama Rao said.

There is Kuchipudi only a mile away from Movva. By the seventeenth century this became the most renowned centre for Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi styles of dancing. Great scholars, musicians, exponents of dance and the great Siddhendra Yogi, all

lived in that village when Kshetrayya was writing his padams.' I commented.

Sastry got the suggestion.

'It is only natural that Kshetrayya should be the inheritor of this glorious cultural heritage. No wonder he has blossomed into an illustrious poet-musician.'

We realised we were getting late for our return journey to Musulipatam. We left Movva and on the way there was not much of talk. We were busy with our own thoughts. We felt as though we were all in search of a rich treasure. It was just possible that some more padams could be traced or some more material relating to Kshetrayya's life could be found. So we were full of hope. I felt quite exhilarated. Sastry decided to present the padams in the form of a book, and I said to myself that I should one day write the fascinating story of Kshetrayya's life. I wanted to collect some more information before I could present his life with all its novelty and romanticism. The car stopped and I was dropped at my place of residence in Masulipatam. I thanked them for the trip and they expressed their warmth to me for accompanying them to Movva.

Later I got a job in a distant place and I lost touch with the two gentlemen. But my interest in Kshetrayya never abated. **The Bliss of Life** is an imaginative reconstruction of Kshetrayya's life.

## ***THE BLISS OF LIFE***

: 1 :

Temple bells were ringing. Muvva Gopala temple was full of men and women. It looked like a celebration. In fact every day was a festive occasion in that temple in those days. In the midst of them was Mohanangi, a young girl, dancing in ecstasy. She was one of the girls dedicated to the service of the Lord, highly educated and trained to be the dancer in the temple. Her looks, her smiles, her gestures, her movements, all seemed to be in unison. There was a supreme light in her facial expression as though she had all that celestial bliss. Varadaiah, a young devotee of Muvva Gopala, was singing, the girl was dancing to that tune. He was wide-eyed, all aglow with emotion. He was keenly watching the dance and observing how Mohana was moving gracefully forward, backward and sideward, sometimes slowly and on certain occasions speedily. The postures of her hands, feet and neck and the jingling sound of the bells feasted and fed the onlookers. There were men and women, of all ages, in the temple, but these two seemed to be belonging to a world of their own. Nothing else mattered to them except the Lord. Both of them were devoted to Gopala. They were almost of the same age, young and good-looking. Their looks communed with each other and they admired each other openly.

unashamedly. The two joined together in their devotional songs and dance. That was their association and they grew together from their early years in that village.

Varada used to stay in the village, Mohana was a little away from the village, living with the group of dancers. Varada and Mohana used to go to Kuchipudi for getting their training in music and dance.

They had to pass through green fields and mango groves. They watched with interest the farmers working in the fields and they listened to their songs. Their main attraction was the harvesting season when several men and women used to work in the fields. In the evening as they returned from Kuchipudi they joined these groups of workers and walked along merrily. In the spring season it was real good fun to imitate the tunes of the cuckoos on the mango trees and longingly look at the fruits. Sometimes they would get a lift in a bullock cart and sit close to each other. The plantain groves and the red gram fields gave to Mohana and Varada a good opportunity to play hide and seek. Sometimes she pretended to be cross with him for taking liberties with her, all the time wanting in her heart of hearts such pleasantries to come from him. There were a few others also who studied in Kuchipudi at that time. But these two were extremely friendly even though they came from different castes. Invariably they were thrilled by the phenomena of nature, the sun rise, the sun set, the moonlit nights. The tank with its lotus flowers was an attraction for

them. Varada was a good swimmer. Occasionally Mohana joined him in bathing, but she could not swim. She was very keen on watching tender creepers twisting round sturdy trees. She enjoyed that sight of comradeship and often showed such sights to Varada. Evening time especially they enjoyed coming home. They felt relaxed. They would see the birds flying in groups, the cattle going home, the bullocks returning from the fields, the sheep and the goats moving on to the village. Now and then they were a little afraid of the bullocks because some of them were fierce.

Sometimes Mohana would come to Varada's house and see a puppet show or a shadow play in the village. Men and women used to come for those shows. Boys and girls usually played merrily before the commencement of the show. On some nights Harikathas and Yakshaganas were arranged. The village had a general feeling of fellowship and recreational pleasure on all such occasions and they moved together as one community. Varada and Mohana never missed any of those grand opportunities. Life seemed to be pleasant for both of them, their tastes were similar. They had refined artistic sensibilities and in their world everything seemed to be beautiful. Both of them were good looking and were exceptionally careful about their physical appearance for they believed that beauty was god-given and so had to be well preserved.

Thus they grew together becoming indispensable to each other's happiness. That night as Mohana was dancing she seemed to be at her best. The sweet

sounding bells tied to her feet produced a melodious rhythm whenever her feet tapped the ground. Her facial expression, her dance pose and in between her meaningful looks at Varada, all filled him with a sense of elation. Others were watching them, but they did not mind.

At about nine in the night the last ritual for the Lord was performed and the priest left the temple. Slowly one by one left the premises of the temple. There was a serene atmosphere. The temple door was closed and Gopala could no longer be seen.

Varada came out and sat underneath a tree in the temple precincts unnoticed by any. Mohana looked for him. She did not find him. He used to take her to her house, but that night he was all by himself. She searched for Varada and found him under the tree almost in deep meditation. She moved slowly, silently towards him, fascinated and thrilled by the statuesque pose of Varada.

The moonlight was falling on him. A gentle breeze was blowing. Mohana looked at him from one side. The nose was quite prominent, the eyes looked closed, his high cheekbone was conspicuous. As she neared him, she took a slight turn and went behind him. She closed his eyes with her hands. Varada touched her hands gently and understood that it was Mohana. There was tenderness in his touch and there was quick response from her.

'Varada, why have you gone away like this without telling me? I have searched for you everywhere.



Are you in meditation? Have I disturbed you? O! Varada are you angry with me?

Varada drew Mohana to his side, looked at her lovingly and whispered.

'Mohana how can I be angry with you? I have been your friend. We have moved together innocently, have learnt several truths about life from our teachers in Kuchipudi. But tonight as you were dancing, somehow I had a different feeling towards you. I wanted to possess you. So I thought I should argue within myself coolly about my relationship with you.'

Mohana smiled mischievously.

'O! Sage, is your meditation over now? Or are you like Arjuna in meditation only waiting for Subhadra? I shall serve you as she did.'

Varada was a little puzzled. He could not understand whether she was serious or was just trying to be playful and mischievous. Mohana was given to teasing him. As boy and girl, they used to play together and always she took the lead in teasing him and cutting sly jokes. He enjoyed her company immensely. They had similar tastes, they both belonged to the world of music and dance. But gradually as they grew to be man and woman thoughts of love occupied their minds. Their study of Bharata's *Natya Sastra* and Bhanudatta's *Rasa Manjari*, gave them an intellectual refinement and affinity.

Varada pleaded,

'Mohana don't take me non-seriously, I am fond of you, desperately in need of you and your company.'

Without you there is no world for me. I cannot sing unless you dance. I cannot compose songs unless I look at you and feel inspired.'

'Varada, I know your affection for me. I have also noticed the change in you recently. It is no longer that innocent look you have. Your looks communicate to me your desire to be with me, your passionate longing to take me into your hands. Take me, take all that I am.'

She tenderly leaned on him as though for support. The moon above looked at them, two novices in love making. Varada caught her in his embrace and said,

'Promise that you will be with me in all my life as my friend and that you will never long for anyone else.' Mohanangi replied emotionally.

'Of course I will promise all that. But let me tell you that I have myself come seeking you. It's not as though you are asking me for friendship. I want you, I need you. I shall be faithful to you. I shall always dance merrily only when you are by me, and by the sustenance of your looks I shall dare to overcome everything in the world. And we both belong to Gopala. In our adoration of Gopala we become united as one stream. We are one, inseparable whole. We sing and dance and leave the world to its flat and weary life.'

Mohana was moved. Gentle tears rolled by. She looked at Varada. He seemed to be lost in a dream. He was listening to her sweet, endearing words, yet he seemed to be far away from her. To bring him back

to real life she kissed him. He looked at her, pleased and bewildered. A new awakening came to him. He responded warmly and they swore that they would be loyal to each other and that nothing would ever separate them, not even death.

Next evening as the women gathered at the tank to carry water they were mostly singing the songs of Varada. The village maids in their teens with their lovely locks of hair and innocent looks took a fancy for Varada. They whispered his name in gentle tunes.

'Varada sings marvellously. His songs are musical. He seems to be living in a world of music. Nothing else matters to him. He does not even look at us,' protested Sarala.

'But he looks at Mohana all right. She has captured his imagination,' Kamala said.

'It's a pity for she is only a dancing girl,' said Vimala.

Varada was going by the tank at that time. Kamala noticed him. She jumped with joy. She was related to him. So she called him,

'Varada, come here, help us in lifting the water pots.'

He looked at them, a bevy of girls. They were all smiles for him. To attract his attention they were singing his songs sweetly and in a low voice. He was drawn to them. He neared them. They cast endearing looks at him. He looked puzzled.

'Kamala, why have you called me? There are so many of your friends here, all to help you. You

don't need my help.' He was about to go.

'No, don't go away. All of us would like to hear you sing. That's why we have called you. Please give us a song.'

'Do you think I can sing anywhere and everywhere?'

'I know you will sing only when Mohana dances. But we also admire you. Mohana is not the only one who appreciates your songs.' Kamala said.

Varada realised that Kamala was insinuating in her talk. He liked her even though he was not particularly fond of her. There was no point in hurting her feelings. So he said,

'I have just composed a few lines on Muvva Gopala. I am now on my way to the temple. Tonight I shall sing that song. You can listen to me in the temple if you happen to be there.'

They were all pleased with the suggestion. They just wanted to talk to him. Their request for a song was only an excuse to keep him with them for some time. Varada was lovable. He had magnetism. He was a Rasika. He dressed himself neatly, there was something decorative about him. He would have jasmine garlands round his neck and on his wrists. Women loved him. They longed to have a glimpse of him as he moved to the temple. He was like a Nayaka and his worship of Gopala also gave him that feeling of benign love for all, men and women.

Varada reached the temple. Mohana was al-

ready there. She was enchantingly beautiful, Varada thought. He noticed a new look in Mohana. Her large eyes were lustrous. Her beaming smiles bewitched him. She stood before him and he looked at her from head to toe.

'Varada, have you composed a new song?'

'Yes, I have,' replied Varada.

'Before others would come, let us practise. You sing, I'll dance.'

Varada's song was set to music and dance. It was splendid. She did the dance with gusto, with involvement. He was all praise for her. As students of music and dance they shared the joy and bliss of that splendid world. In the night the whole temple was crowded. The girls who promised to come were all there. Mohana's mother, her brother, her teacher, all were full of expectation. The dance was about to start. Mohana with bells round her ankles bowed before her dance teacher, then courtesied to Varada. The first item she did was to the accompaniment of Varada's newly composed song in praise of Gopala. Her mother looked at her surprised for normally Mohana should have given the conventional temple dance. This was a departure, a novelty. The mother kept quiet. Mohana started dancing gracefully. Varada and Mohana made a good pair and both were given to the worship of Gopala. The whole temple resounded with music and dance. The fine performance on the veena and the mridangam, and the cheerful sound of bells mightily pleased everyone including

the dance teacher. He was proud of his disciple. It was a remarkable achievement for Mohana and Varada. They were thrilled. She gave some more dance numbers, mostly the conventional ones. Muvva Gopala seemed to be pleased. It was a rare delight to watch Mohana dancing. But the one who felt immensely glorified was Varada. He knew it was his Mohana who brought grace and refinement to dancing. There was something special about it, it was dignified. Mohana danced with confidence, with understanding and with aplomb. She was gifted, he thought.

It was time for them to leave the temple. Mohana told her mother that she would come with Varada. He accompanied her to her house. On the way they had to go by the side of the tank and the whole place was full of trees. The banyan tree spreading itself sheltered many birds. Its branches were supported by roots that struck deep in the earth. In the day time the little boys would jump into the water from the base of the banyan tree for it just jutted into the water. The toddy palm trees grew wildly. There were tamarind, neem and mango trees, and thorny bushes on the bank of the tank. Varada and Mohana were inclined to sit for a short while near about that banyan tree. Mohana immediately leaned on Varada. She smelt of sandal paste and powder.

'Mohana, tonight you have given the best dance performance. I am sure our Lord, Muvva Gopala, would have been mightily pleased.'

'How about my lord' coquettishly looked Mohana

at Varada.

'I am happy, extremely happy. I have never seen you in a more alluring pose than today.'

'Then why are you hesitant, why don't you take me in your arms and give me the bliss of life. You have read all sastras, including Vatsyayana's **Kama Sutras**. I wonder why you are so detached. It baffles me and irritates me.'

'No, please do not say that. I am for you, you know that.'

He drew her towards him and looked at her lovingly.

'Varada, you have seen me grow into a woman. We have played together. We have studied under the same teacher. Now that you are a man you should long to possess me. I may be a dancer, but I have decided not to lead the life of a dancing woman and surrender myself to the highest bidder. That life is not for me. I know I am for you and you are destined to be my lord. Muvva Gopala has gifted you to me. It is His grace that has brought us together. I love you, love you to madness.'

Varada gently touched her locks of hair. The jasmine flowers in her hair looked lovely in the moonlight. He spoke endearingly.

'Mohana, I know your feelings for me. Nothing gives me as much pleasure as being with you. I am fond of you. You amuse me, your looks thrill me, but whether I am physically drawn towards you I cannot say. Perhaps the physical aspect of life does not

mean much for me. I look at you as my companion, as an indispensable guide for my literary compositions. I see in you the fulfilment of a dream, of my love for Gopala. I adore you. To love you is to love Gopala, for to me everything seems to be His image. My devotional love for Gopala is something real and substantial. It overpowers my physical love for you.'

'Varada what you say is not clear to me. You love me, yet you do not wish to have physical life with me. This is a little odd. Am I not physically attractive to you?'

She smiled mischievously and looked at Varada hopefully.

'Mohana, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I say that solemnly, and if at all I marry anyone you will be the person I shall choose. I promise that.'

He held her hand warmly as a promise, but she was not quite satisfied with that. She longed to be kissed. She looked at him pleadingly and in the moonlight Varada could see her youthful passion reflected in her gaze. She was lovely, graceful and feminine in her sweet looks. He kissed her, she drew closer to him. The birds on the tree made musical sounds. They approved their comradeship, but it looked as though two men walking that way did not very much appreciate their love making.

So Mohana and Varada moved on from the bank. They were silent. Varada left Mohana near about her house and came home very late.



His parents were waiting for him. They were not quite happy with Varada. He was found often dreamy and absent-minded. They thought that Varada should be married. They even suspected that he might be in love with Mohana. So the moment Varada entered the house his mother said,

'Varada, where have you gone? It is very late. Your father is very anxiously waiting for you.'

'I have been in the temple.'

'But the temple will not be kept open so late in the night.'

'That's true, but I have just been sitting in the compound of the temple composing a song.'

'Varada, what will these songs fetch you? You must now be seriously thinking of doing some work for your family. You are the only son for us and we are getting old. We wish to see you happily married.'

'Mother, there is no need to be married. I should be famous as a poet-musician.'

The father now came to him.

'Varada, be sensible. Our property is not so much that you can afford to be idle. You ought to be working for a living and not idie yourself with the composition of songs. Your education is over. So you may as well be a teacher.'

'Father, I respect your views but I have not yet made up my mind as regards my living. I shall ask Muvva Gopala what I should do.'

The father smiled.

'How can Muvva Gopala tell you? It is for you

to decide. Anyway it's already late. Go to bed now and bestow some thought on what we have said to-night.'

'I will,' dreamily muttered Varada for Mohana presented herself before his mental vision. The mundane life was dull and drab as compared with the rich, luxuriating world she gave to him. That exotic background was delightful. From his utopian world he was brought to reality by his parents, the need for getting married, for earning a living and for becoming the prop for his parents. But how could he marry anyone except Mohana, he muttered to himself. The parents would not accept Mohana because she did not belong to their caste. It would be demeaning and even scandalous for a brahmin like him to get married to a dancer. He knew that his parents would object to his proposal. But he said to himself that he should not think of marriage as yet, and with that consoling thought he slept.

When Mohana reached her house, she saw her mother waiting for her. She was a little surprised to see her mother still awake.

'Mohana, I think the time has come when you should have a rich man as your benefactor. It's all right you have been friendly with Varada, but now the situation is different. We have to go by our customs as much as Varada will have to honour the customs of his caste.'

Mohana was puzzled. She could not understand that there was such a wide gulf between her and

Varada. She took it for granted that he belonged to her and no earthly power could separate them. But what the mother said seemed to be a new slant on the problem. It looked preposterous that she should belong to anyone else except Varada. Her first love and only love was for him. So she told her mother,

'You don't worry about me. I have already given my heart to Varada. I know only one person and to him I have given my love. Others do not exist for me. Varada and I belong to the world of art, poetry and music. The conventions you speak of do not figure in that world either for me or for Varada, and we are both worshippers of Gopala.'

Mohana's mother simply laughed. She thought that her daughter was moonsruck and lived in an utopian world. It would take time for her to come down from those heights of glory to mundane living. Yet she felt she should try again.

'Mohana, what you say is true as long as you are a girl and Varada is a boy. But you are now grown up. You can't simply be ignorant about the worldly ways. You have to learn them, practise them and thrive. And how can Varada support you with his poetry and songs? As you look at him, you feel as though he is with you and not with you. He is always far off and remote from this world. Half the time he seems to be in a trance. I wonder whether he needs you physically.'

Mohana looked at her mother surprised and unable to believe what she was saying. But yet it was

true. She even wondered whether her mother overheard their conversation near the tank. What she said was true. Varada was often given to meditation. She had to bring him to the plane of reality on many occasions. But she was hopeful that one day under the intoxicating influence of her physical charm Varada would behave like any other young man longing for her embraces. She was not prepared to leave him for any other person no matter how rich he might be. So with that determination she pleaded,

'Mother, leave me alone. If you force me to take some one else and be disloyal to Varada, I shall die.'

Mohana's mother with her practical insight into human nature understood that she should leave her daughter free for a while and time would cure her of her infatuation for Varada. She realised that she should not precipitate events, even if it meant financial loss to the family. She should wait, patiently wait, she thought, and for the time being the topic was closed.

'Mohana, sleep now. It's already late. We will think of this matter later.'

'No question of thinking, my mind is settled. Varada is my lord.'

She left her mother with those words. Her mother sat there for nearly an hour, stunned and almost paralysed, for Mohana had given a death blow to her dreams of becoming fabulously rich through her daughter's association with rich men. For one moment she disliked Varada as one who was disturbing her

world of opulence. But she very soon realised that it was no use blaming him, rather she should blame Mohana for her foolishness and obstinacy.

The next day happened to be Mohana's birthday. She dressed herself in new clothes and was in a remarkably relaxed mood. But the words of her mother now and then came to her mind as irritating thoughts, and however much she tried to forget all about her talk with her mother last night, the whole scene lingered in her mind. Now that her mother had warned her of Varada she was more bent upon getting him and his love. She saw him that evening in the temple and he cast endearing smiles on her knowing full well that it was her birthday.

'Mohana, why don't you give me a party on your birthday? You haven't invited me to your house.'

'Even if I ask, you may not come', she tried to put the blame on him. He was anxious to show that he was prepared to come. She suggested that they might go to her house a little earlier after worshipping the Lord. He agreed to go, she jumped with joy. Mohana took Varada to her house that night. She gave him sweets to eat and treated him royally.

'I have always longed for you, Varada. I am glad that at last you are mine, mine own.'

'Do not take the whole credit for yourself for I have been terribly fond of you. I am lucky in having you as my companion in life.'

'Varada, you have to marry someone and lead a physical life. That also is a part of the obligation you

leave for society. Your mind is now given only to the worship of Gopala and to the writing of songs in praise of him. I am with you in all these activities. But more than that is the enjoyment of Sringara, the love that overpowers you and bestows on you the bliss of life. I give that bliss to you tonight on my birthday.'

She walked in front of him alluringly as though she was dancing. In that pose she neared him and looked at him lovingly. He took her in his embrace, he could no longer resist the temptation to possess her physically.

A few months passed by in a happy manner for Mohana and Varada. They tasted the elixir of life. His visits to Mohana's house increased and the village elders were scandalized. They could not tolerate Varada's behaviour. One night they gathered together in front of the temple under the big banyan tree. A raised platform was round the tree, and that was the place where the villagers generally met to discuss important matters of the village. Reputations could go down or could be built also round about that platform. In the past several were praised and some others were denounced. That night Varada was the target of attack.

'Things are becoming very bad. Varada goes about with Mohana. He is not ashamed of it. In the temple also now-a-days he seems to be concentrating more on her than on Gopala. We must stop this nonsense', said Goparah Pantulu, one of the seniormost elders of the village. He held some authority in the

village as Karanam.

'Yes it is true, Varada has left his house, his aged parents and he spends all his time with Mohana, echoed Venkaiah Chowdary, the village Munsiff.

'What is wrong with all that? Varada composes songs and Mohana dances. They are artists and votaries of the Lord,' mildly put in Ramaiah.

Ramaiah was one of the cultured persons in the village. He saw no harm in the companionship of Varada with Mohana. But his was a lone voice. No one supported him.

'If it stops with singing and dancing, it is all right. But it has gone beyond that limit. Myself and Veerayya saw them recently one night near the tank cuddled together. Didn't we see Veeraiah?' asked Somaiah.

'Yes, we saw them,' Veeraiah said.

'They are lovers now,' Gopaiah added.

'Mohana is a dancer. She is a refined one. There is nothing vulgar about her relationship with Varada. Anyway she is a dancing girl and even if she is physically attracted to Varada there is nothing objectionable about it. In fact most men have liaisons with these dancing girls.' Ramaiah looked at Gopaiah meaningfully.

The frankness with which he talked embarrassed them for most of them were given to such contacts with those girls. So they changed the line of attack.

'Ramaiah, you seem to be half in love with Mohana, yes, she is extremely beautiful. We do not

blame her, we are only angry with Varada. The way other young maids in the village look at him and long for him is something disturbing to us. His songs are full of Sringara and young girls are not supposed to sing those songs. The whole village is intoxicated with his love songs. Every girl sings and imagines herself to be a Gopika and Varada as her Lord Krishna.'

Gopaiiah vehemently attacked Varada.

'Yes we should get rid of him, the sooner we do, the better. Or else our young women will get into bad ways. His songs have a pernicious effect on the morals of these women,' Veeraiiah said.

'Varada has not asked these women to sing his songs or run away with him. If he is friendly with Mohana, that is his own affair. If he sings and she dances, it is for their own satisfaction and for honouring Gopala,' Ramaiah pleaded.

'O no, it is not such a simple affair. I tell you the whole village will be polluted very soon. We should drive Varada out of this village. He is bringing shame to the whole brahmin community by living with that woman,' Veeraiiah said almost fretting and fuming.

'If he is licentious, let Varada's father take care of him. Why should we worry about that?' questioned Ramaiah.

'What can his old father do? The other day he was talking to me, it was piteous to hear him. Varada now-a-days does not come to the house even in the



night time. He must be sleeping in Mohana's house,' Veeraiah commented slyly.

'Has the father told you? I don't think he would. I have known him for years. Mind you, Varada is his only son and his father will not expose him, Ramaiah ventured to say.

'So you suggest that I am a liar. Ramaiah, you don't have daughters. Therefore you are free to talk like that, but we have daughters of marriageable age. We have to save them from the wrong influence of Varada and as long as he continues to be in the village these girls will be crazy about him. For instance a few days ago my daughter Kamala and some other girls at the tank invited him to sing a song for their amusement.' Veeraiah looked angry.

Ramaiah was not prepared to accept the views of these villagers for most of them were either jealous of, or prejudiced against, Varada. So he commented,

'It only means that Varada's songs are popular. We should be proud of him.'

'Don't be silly, Ramaiah. If the songs are full of references to love making naturally young men and women will immediately accept them,' Veeraiah said.

'Why, even the old men and women may like his songs. They may take the devotional aspect of the songs while the younger ones may simply be delighted with the love theme. Varada's songs are full of devotional love. They appeal to all, young and old, if we are prepared to accept them unbiased.'

Ramaiah seemed to be getting the attention of

the villagers for the devotional aspect of Varada's songs never occurred to them. They only took them as love songs with an intoxicating effect on the listeners. They never imagined that the songs were from a devotee to the Lord in the conventional form of love. Gopaiah finally said,

'All right, let us leave this task to Ramaiah. He should talk to Varada's father and finally persuade Varada to leave this village. We have no ill will against Varada, we only want that the girls in the village should not develop Krishna cult. We do not want them to be Gopikas with Varada as Lord Krishna. That's all we want.'

Ramaiah was pained to listen to these words. He never saw Varada encouraging any of the girls in the village to talk to him. He was all the time with Mohana and he wouldn't even look at the other girls of the village. He thought, it was preposterous to suggest that a Krishna cult was growing in the village. But the village elders were prejudiced against Varada. It was quite plain. So he accepted the responsibility to talk to Varada and his father.

'Yes, I shall try to convey to Varada's father your anxiety to preserve the village from possible harm through Varada. It's a delicate job. I do not know how the old man will take it. Anyway, I shall do my best. My only request is that we should not create any situation that is unpleasant to Varada or his parents.'

Ramaiah's words had a soothing effect on all of

them. Even Vecraiah cooled a bit and they all left the place with satisfaction, for none of them wanted to attack Varada, at the same time most of them were worried about the wrong influence of his songs on the girls. Ramaiah's intervention saved the situation from getting worse.

Years later, on the Krishnashtami day the whole village was full of activity. The young and the old gathered together in Gopala's temple in the morning to celebrate Krishnashtami, the day on which Lord Krishna was born. Varada and Mohana were together. Their joy was supreme. The girls envied Mohana for her good fortune in having Varada with her. There were bhajans all around. Children vied with each other to get prasadam. Throughout the day worshippers came to the temple. All the young joined together in a ring and started singing and clapping. Their bodies were waving rhythmically. It was community singing and dancing. Men and women freely moved. Especially Varada's songs were their favourite ones. He was the centre of attraction. Everyone felt that he was a dedicated person. Varada sang melodiously in praise of the Lord. There was ecstasy in his movement and as the group singing came to a close they all wanted Mohana to give a dance performance. It was a ritual dance and as her body swayed to the rhythmic sound of music she looked like a nymph. Her movements were graceful, her facial expressions and gestures were superb. Even old men were thrilled by her performance. Everyone was

pleased. The young maids moved closer to Varada almost encircling him. Suddenly it occurred to them that he should stand in the centre and they would dance round him and enact the drama of the Gopikas with Lord Krishna. For a long time they had been waiting for such an opportunity and the time came when they could revel in song and dance. Mohana joined the group and they all danced with Varada as Lord Krishna. It was all good fun for them, but it suited the occasion. The love songs of Varada intoxicated them and their youthful zest enriched the romantic quality of the songs. Those who came to the temple were all involved in singing. It looked like a music festival. Women came in their best silk saris, children came clad in new clothes, the whole temple had a festive look. By noon the whole celebration came to a climax with the chanting of the hymns, beating of the drums and loud acclamations from the bhaktas. Everywhere there were coconuts, and camphor was lit profusely. Garlands culled of various flowers were presented to the Lord by the devotees.

There was a lull in the afternoon but as evening came the temple was again crowded. Outside the temple, stalls were erected, pretty dolls, fancy goods and bangles were sold. In some other places sweets and eatables were the main attraction. The merry-go-round was busy. The magician was performing his feats. The whole place looked like a fair. Bhajan parties started coming from neighbouring villages

also. The crowds became unmanageable. There were quite a few anti-social elements also thriving by thieving on an occasion like that. They were also busy in their own way. Some young men came for the fun of looking at beautiful women. It was a motley group that gathered there in the temple, the devotees outnumbering the other stray strollers. To the devotees, it was a religious function with all its dedication to the Lord. But to a few it was an occasion for idling or for pilfering.

The festivity went on late into the night. Varada got lost in the crowds and by the time the temple was closed Varada was not to be seen. Mohana looked for him, she could not find him. She thought that perhaps Varada would have gone to her house. She reached the place late but he was not to be found. She was unnerved. That was the first time in the last few years when she missed him. She felt desolate without him. It was pretty late and she couldn't go back to the temple again.

As the crowds gathered in the temple the noise increased. It was unbearable for Varada and he slowly moved to a place in the garden of the temple. Ramaiah had already informed him of the attitude of the village elders towards him. Varada realised that there might be some trouble for him even though Ramaiah assured him of his support. His mind was given to various thoughts. He felt he could leave the village but he did not know how he could go away from Mohana. He did not like to make her miser-

able. Moreover he was terribly fond of her. These conflicting thoughts oppressed him. He wanted to find a solution by appealing to Gopala that night.

The night was calm. All those who came to the temple left it. The whole place was serene and tranquil. He sat in front of the main door of the temple in deep meditation. He chanted the name of Gopala. Slowly his voice became a whisper, and after some time it stopped. He sat unmoved, he did not know how long he sat there. The early morning breeze blew on him. It was gentle, refreshing and delightful. All of a sudden he had an awakening. He saw the doors wide open and the deity of the temple Muvva Gopala standing in front of him. The beatific vision was only for a minute or so, but Varada clearly heard the blessing.

'Varada, I am pleased with your devotion for me. I bless you, you will be the most illustrious composer of padams and they will be sung by one and all for ages and ages. Visit several other places, spread my message all over the country. That is your mission.'

Varada looked at himself with eyes wide open. The temple doors were still closed. There was no one in front of him or anywhere near him. He understood that he had a revelation. God was kind to him, He blessed him. Varada now had a clear idea of his goal. He was destined to be the great padam composer, and his songs would be sung all over the country. He stood up with folded hands and uttered his

praise of Gopala in the most musical form. The lines came spontaneously with an inspirational touch. The revelation came to be true. There was a world of difference between the song, he composed now, and the ones he composed earlier. He sang in praise of the Lord wherein he mentioned that he was the bride and the Lord was his lover. He would please Him as a Nayika, and in several ways through Sringara Rasa he would dedicate himself to the worship of the Lord. In that thought and feeling there was mystic elation and communion. The song was a dedicatory one and Varada was the Jeevatma trying to get identified with the Paramatma through devotional love. Nothing else mattered to him, not even Mohana, except his devotion to the Lord. Like a Nayika patiently waiting for her lover he too would wait for his Lord. All his songs would be a dedication to, and glorification of, Gopala.

The moment he realised his objective it was almost morning. He rushed to his home very near the temple. His parents were already awake. Perhaps they did not have much sleep with all the din and bustle in the temple. They were very happy to see Varada.

'Varada, where have you been throughout the night? We haven't seen you in the temple. Please do not go away from us,' the mother pleaded.

'Mother, I have the blessing of the Lord. I am leaving this village. I have to sing and sing in praise of Muvva Gopala and spread the philosophy of love, love for human beings, for all the creations of God and finally the sublime love for God. We move from phy-

sial love to spiritual love. Srīngara is the best form for expression of this devotional love. All my songs will be composed in honour of Muvva Gopala. I'll celebrate His name in song and this village too will figure in the songs. I shall communicate the message of God and wherever my padams are sung there will be Muvva Gopala enshrined in that place. God has permitted me, I go now, mother bless me.'

Varada's mother was bewildered. She wondered whether he was sane. Varada was talking of things beyond her comprehension. Varada's father slowly moved towards Varada and embraced him. He understood the significance of Varada's words. He realised that Varada was inspired. It was difficult for him to accept Varada's proposal, but if God willed it, why should he stand in the way of fulfilment, he said to himself. He looked at his wife. She said,

'Varada, as parents, we cannot be reconciled to your departure, but if Muvva Gopala is to be honoured through your songs, by all means go and prosper. In far off places be careful, do not surrender yourself to pleasures. Be abstemious and devoted to God.'

The mother blessed him. The father gently patted Varada on the back and Varada himself was touched and moved. Yet he should go, he left them gently wiping the tears in his eyes.

Varada then moved on to Mohana's house. Everyone seemed to be sleeping except Mohana. She was sitting in the cool breeze in the garden. It looked as though she did not sleep that night for it was unbea-



rable to be without Varada. As he approached the house she ran to him with wide open hands, embraced him and bathed him in tears and kisses. Then slowly they came to the house. They were sitting side by side very close to each other. The gentle breeze was slumberous. Almost yawning Mohana said,

'Varada, what has happened to you? I have been scared. All night I haven't slept. I close my eyes, you are present before me. That is comforting, no doubt, but disturbing also. All the time I see you but you are not to be found anywhere near me. O Varada, do not leave me,' Mohana piteously appealed to him.

'I have come to say 'Good bye' to you.

'Good bye to me! What are you talking? Are you fed up with me? Are you angry with me? Varada, don't kill me.'

Varada realised the intensity of her emotion. It was a raging conflict in him—to be with her and enjoy physical pleasures, or renounce pleasures and dedicate his life to the worship of God. He was silent for a moment.

'Mohana, a few hours ago I had a revelation. From now on I am the consecrated bride of Muvva Gopala and He is my lover. I have to woo him, please him, praise him and worship Him through devotional love songs. I have to celebrate His glory through padams noted for their literary excellence, musical quality and dance potential. This is my cherished goal.'

'You can achieve all this by remaining in Muvva.

What hinders you from composing songs here alone?"

'True, I can sing and you can dance. But all that is over now. I enter a new phase. I should visit holy places and also go to Thanjavur where there is real patronage of Telugu literature and music. The court is full of great poets, I have to compete with them and bring laurels to Muvva Gopala. I am His emissary and He should be known throughout the country. This little village with its narrow conventionalism is no place for me. I should be free to sing and to me there is no other God except Muvva Gopala. Wherever I go, He will be with me, guiding me and inspiring me. I am thankful to you Mohana, for you have comforted me, almost idolised me. You have given me a taste of Sringara and all the emotional thrill that one gets through it.'

'Varada, I still cannot understand why you should leave me and go away. How can I live without you? Don't be cruel.'

'O no, please do not say such words. I am simply obeying Muvva Gopala's direction. I am His servant. I am His beloved.'

'But I am your beloved. I am your bride. I worship you, adore you to madness. As I dance to the tunes of your songs, I always feel an intoxication and an awareness that I belong to you. Physically, mentally and spiritually I am yours.'

'True. I am proud of you. I have always appreciated your talents. You are a gifted one. But God wants me to go. I have no will of my own. I sur-

render myself to the will of God.'

'Equally so is my surrender to you. You have to think of me. You want to be famous, I know. In courts and palaces you will see more beautiful women and forget me, a simple girl from a village. I shall die forlorn.'

Mohana sobbed, Varada touched her cheeks lovingly. He kissed her to assure her that he was fond of her.

'Mohana, I have already promised you that I shall be faithful to you. In thought, word and deed I am yours as far as this mundane life is concerned. But I see that I have a nobler and purposive life with a mission. I have to fulfil that. I also feel that sublimation of desires comes only through participation in pleasures. I do not believe in renunciation. Through a gradational process of willing and subordinating our physical pleasures to a higher pursuit we achieve the bliss of life, the communion with God and identification with the Lord. So do not think I am leaving you for good and that I shall end up in the company of women at the courts. All that is wrong. It will never happen. I promise you that I shall never yield to any such pleasures.'

'All that you say now conveniently. But you will be different when you see the rich embellishments of the court ladies. Varada, I have made you a man and now you want to leave me for others.'

Varada smiled.

'Mohana, you are jealous of the ladies at the

court. But you should be jealous of Muvva Gopala. He owns me. I belong to Him and my spiritual quest ends in getting identified with Him. So pray to Him in my absence so that He may permit you to be with me and we shall both fly like two birds in search of new lands and new experiences. Now listen to me.'

Mohana looked away from him as though she was not prepared to hear even a single word from him. He drew her face towards him and he pleaded.

'Don't be angry with me, Mohana. I know how you love me. You are also a devotee of Muvva Gopala. We both worship Him. You'll still be here in the comforting gaze of Gopala. He protects you. He will give you strength to stand the separation. I go to fulfil His behest. I shall first go to Kanchi. I have always longed to see Kanchi Varada. I am named after him. While in Kanchi I shall send word to you. You come and join me. We both will visit the holy places, glorify the name of Muvva Gopala and through the incantation of the verse we will create more devotees for our Gopala. We fulfil our mission and the Lord takes us back.'

Mohana listened to Varada. She was calm. She decided not to raise objections. She only pleaded.

'Varada, you should allow me to come whenever that may be. Till then I shall do my duty. My mother may try to pressurise me into accepting some rich person. I shall never do that. I shall wait for you patiently, but you should not try my patience. I am a woman, I need the protecting hand of a man.'

'There is Muvva Gopala to protect you. No harm will come to you. He will bless you and send you to me to be my companion. We shall both live for the Lord, we will have no existence of our own.'

'When do you want to go then?'

'This very minute itself.'

'O no, today is not auspicious. Go tomorrow. Stay with me today. We have to be together, for separation comes like a dark cloud diminishing the lustre of the sun. I am agreeing to your departure only on condition that you will allow me to come to you later.'

'Yes, I agree to that proposal.'

They entered the house. By then every one was awake. The news of Varada's departure from Muvva spread like wild fire. The ominous group of village elders was happy that a threat, a potential threat to the moral life of the village was averted. They praised Muvva Gopala for sending Varada away, not realising that Varada was one of the chosen few of God. Little did they realise at that time that Varada would be a famous padam composer.

: 2 :

Varada was about to leave Mohana. He could not look at her lest he should be overpowered by grief. She had been crying all the time, she could not say a single word. She looked at him piteously, imploringly

as though he should allow her to join him at Kanchi. He too found it difficult to tear himself away from her. He had grown terribly fond of her and her endearing looks always bewitched him. Yet he understood that some superior force, some unshunnable destiny was driving him away from Muvva. Ever since he had the revelation his mind was given to a nobler path and an ennobling desire to glorify Muvva Gopala through his songs. That was an inner urge over which he had no control. So with great difficulty, almost in a choking voice he bade farewell to Mohana. He held her hand in his for a minute, gently touched it and departed. Mohana looked at him dazed and stupefied unable to believe that he could go away like that leaving her all alone. She even felt that he was no longer her Varada but belonged to Muvva Gopala.

Varada's first visit was to Golconda. It was at that time ruled by Abdulla Kutub Shah of the seventeenth century. He was noted for his patronage of music, dance and fine arts. His court was given to ease and luxury, but it also encouraged poets and intellectuals. Those were glorious days when one court vied with another in exhibiting its wealth and grandeur and also its poetic talent. Each court had its own coterie of poets and musicians and Golconda was no exception to this. Varada was first introduced to the court through some of the powerful officials who also happened to be niyogi brahmins like Varada. Coming from a village Varada was naturally flabbergasted by the opulence of the court. Its riches dazed him, its splendour and mag-

nificance thrilled him. There was a dance performance at that time. The Nawab was quite relaxed and was watching the show with involvement and appreciation. The courtiers were very eager to please the Nawab for whenever he exclaimed that the dance was wonderful they too joined him in adulatory language. The colourful lights, the flower vases, the soft delicious fragrance, the luxurious furniture of the court, all these stunned Varada for a while. He looked at the Nawab, courtesied to him and addressed a few verses praising him. Apparently the Nawab was pleased and he offered a seat to Varada and inquired about his journey from Muvva to Golconda. Varada answered him with dignity and told him about his venture, his odyssey of life, and how he planned to visit several holy places and courts in the South.

Meanwhile, the dancer was dancing and she was casting amiable glances at Varada. She found in him something sweet. He was totally different from the men she saw every day in the court. There was a certain undefined magnetism in Varada which appealed to her. All the time he watched the dance he saw only Mohana and none else. The dancer Kamala liked very much the innocent look in Varada. More than that his radiant youth attracted her. With his lovely locks of hair, large eyes and broad forehead Varada looked distinguished. Kamala was happy to see him. But his mind was given to Mohana and all his romantic infatuation for her came back to him with vividness. He wondered why on earth he left Mohana instead of enjoying her

sweet company. To be with her was bliss. Separation from her was unbearable, especially after seeing Kamala his thoughts went back to Mohana. The Nawab took to him kindly and he was asked to stay on for some more days enjoying the hospitality of the court. From that angle Varada was happy but Mohana still disturbed him. Added to this Kamala one evening accosted him,

'Varadaiah, you have honoured the court by your coming. Your songs are very much liked by the court. Why don't you stay here with us?'

Varada became alert. He understood the subtle suggestion in asking him to be with them in the court. It looked as though he was awakened from a dream, and he replied,

'O no, I can't stay, I have to go. I have to sing in praise of Muvva Gopala and my ambition is to spread the message of Gopala throughout the country. So I have to travel a lot.'

'But you can do that better by belonging to a court, especially to a flourishing court. And this is the right place for you. I shall dance and I shall express the emotional content of your songs through dancing. We will make a good team and we will get name and fame.'

Varada understood that Kamala was tempting him by referring to name and fame, the common weaknesses in ambitious men. Yet he wanted to be polite.

'I am not anxious for name and fame for myself. It is for Muvva Gopala that I want all that glory, not for myself. I am His devotee and I am dedicated to His service.'



Kamala smiled. She had none of that modesty of Mohana. Her smiles were open, transparent and they betrayed her longing for Varada.

'Varadaiah, what you say is all right. You may be a devoted servant of Muvva Gopala. But it does not mean that you should renounce all pleasures. We attain bliss only through physical pleasures. We are not supposed to run away from pleasures,' Kamala argued.

'I quite agree with you that from physical pleasures we attain ennoblement. But this happens only if we try and make an attempt to rid ourselves of these physical pleasures gradually. Or else we remain where we are, all the time enmeshed in this corporeal existence. We cannot ascend, nor can we transcend the earthly longings unless we make a desperate bid to control our libidinous inclinations.'

Kamala looked at Varada in a quizzical way for she never expected a young man like him to talk like that, and that too in the company of a fascinating dancer like her. She thought that something was wrong with Varada.

'I hope you are not disappointed in love. Or else you cannot talk like this. Youth is for love and for unbounded pleasures. There is a time for love making, a time for looking at the moon, struck with romantic imagination. You should enjoy life when you can, and I shall give you the elixir of life. Be with me.'

Kamala came nearer to Varada, but he excused

himself for the time being and went away. Kamala thought that Varada must be a fool in not responding to her amorous glances. She was not to be repulsed. The way Kamala talked to Varada made him feel insecure in such a place. He did not like to surrender himself to physical pleasures. He had to attain wisdom and establish right relationship with God. If at all he wanted physical life, no one could be a better partner for him than Mohana. She was all beauty, all perfection. So his goal was now to sublimate his desires and become identified with Muvva Gopala. This could happen only through adoration and worship of God in a pure spirit over years and years. Gopala would bless him only if he showed all that dedication in his service, and that was in the shape of singing the glory of Gopala through padams. That was his mission. Nothing should deter it. He should be steadfast in his resolve and not waver or yield to physical pleasures.

With that determination he begged the Nawab to permit him to leave the court.

'Why should you go? You stay in our court. We will honour you and reward you,' the Nawab said.

These honours and rewards or material gains did not mean much to Varada. However, he did not want to displease the Nawab altogether. Also his influential relatives at the court were keen on his staying at the court. But Varada's mind was given to other thoughts. The mighty zest in him that he should visit more places and glorify Muvva Gopala was irrepressi-

ble. So he politely said,

'I am thankful to you for the invitation. Kindly permit me to visit other places first, on my return I shall try to stay in this court.'

That pleased the Nawab, and Varada left Golconda that very day. There was a sense of relief for him in being away from the amorous approaches of Kamala. He did not want to run away from women, but he knew that his mission was different. So he was glad to be away.

Varada's next visit was to Tirumala Nayak's court in Madurai. In the days of the Vijayanagar empire some of the valorous Telugus migrated to the South and established their rule. Varada visited all courts in the South where Telugu was patronised and spoken. Madurai was one of the courts, where Telugu literature flourished. Varada's reputation as a composer of padams noted for their musical quality, literary flourish and lilting grace suited for dance was getting established. Wherever Varada went, he was treated with honour and his friendly disposition won several admirers for him. The universality of love was mostly the theme of his songs and they were clothed in Srīngara of the devotional type.

Telugu literature flourished in the sixteenth century in the Vijayanagara empire. Krishnadevaraya was a great patron of learning, and romances were written at that time mostly to please the kings and patrons. All over Europe, especially in Italy and France, these romances were written. These poems of

love and adventure concentrated on the two themes, love and adventure, that appealed to the rulers. The romance literature gradually spread to England. Curiously enough in Telugu literature too such a movement dominated the scene. The Telugu romances were full of the world of make-believe, of hair-breadth escapes, of great adventures and of love that was exciting, romantic, almost fantastic. The poets competed with each other in introducing descriptive accounts of physical love in its totality in their romances. The courts delighted in listening to such romantic verses. As in romances of the west similar conditions operated in the production of romances in Telugu literature, patronage of the rulers and the desire of the poets to please them with matter suited to their tastes. This age popularly known as Prabandha period produced romance literature at its best.

The Nayaks migrating to the South took with them the craving for this popular literature. The courts were full of such writings. It was court poetry meant for the patrons and the courtiers. Sringara was the dominating theme and the elaborate descriptive accounts of love making added flavour to the poetic compositions. It gave an opportunity to the poet to revel in intoxicating pictures of physical love and the poets were supposed to see things that the sun might not see. What would happen to a lover and his lady love might escape the sun's gaze, but not the poet's mental vision.

Varadaiah entered these courts when Sringara was

the delicious food. He himself was given to the world of beauty and love. So he accepted a medium where love in common parlance was to be the theme, but he transcended the limits of physical love and presented devotional love through his padams. These padams therefore had an immediacy and a relevance to that age for the love theme alone especially with a simple homely style, could catch the imagination of the age. Varada took on himself the task of composing padams with ease and felicity of language so that they could be sung by one and all. Sringara gave to his padams a contemporaneous acceptability and he pleased himself by making it devotional love where he was the bride invariably and Muvva Gopala was the lover. His padams gave mystic elation to the learned and the devout, and the pure and simple physical love appealed to the common man. This was the richness of the padams and they served the double purpose of catering to the needs of the age and in giving the poet the mystic communion with the Lord. The presence of physical love in his padams was only a means to an end, of sublimation of desires.

Tirumala Nayak was kind to Varada. He talked to him pleasingly and Varada composed a few verses on the ruler. This court was not given to so much of luxury as the one at Golconda. It was of a more austere nature and at that time particularly it was seized with the problem of deciding the relative position of Shiva and Vishnu in the Hindu pantheon.

Tirumala Nayak once asked Varada,

'Don't you think that Shiva with his innate simplicity and austerity is more desirable than Vishnu for worship? He is a healthy influence on mankind. If only we can emulate the example of Shiva, it will be a different world.'

Varada no doubt was given to the worship of Gopala. But he saw no difference between Shiva and Vishnu. So he commented,

'Shiva and Vishnu are the same. In fact the holy Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva of the Hindu theology does not differentiate the one from the other. The concept of Trinity refers to the functional aspect of one single godhead identified with certain duties—of creation, protection and destruction of all evil forces. The personal godhead is created so that it may be easier for us to understand the divine being. We attribute qualities to God as though he is austere or colourful. This is our own creation. We think that Shiva stands for asceticism whereas Vishnu symbolises love and dalliance.'

'Of course the worshippers of Vishnu mostly believe in Rasaleela, of Krishna and Gopikas and the romantic idealisation of love. The worshippers of Shiva have not created for themselves such colourful pictures of love and romance. There is more of ethical idealism in the worship of Shiva, whereas the adoration of Vishnu inculcates Sringara. This Sringara may be of the purest type or of the earthly one, it all depends on the approach that one makes towards love.'

'The fact is that Shiva and Vishnu are one and the same if only we do not develop preconceived notions. I love Muvva Gopala and I may see only Gopala wherever I go. Even when I visit other temples I see only Gopala and that too of Muvva. Similarly one who is in love with Shiva may see only that image and nothing else. But all worship is the same whether it is offered to Vishnu or Shiva.'

Tirumala Nayak smiled. Apparently he was pleased with Varada's explanation. He thought he was clever. The poets at the court took a liking for Varadaiah. They wondered how he could compose songs spontaneously and with such ease and felicity. They considered Varadaiah to be blessed and his padams to be inspirational poetry. The scholars at the court were intrigued with the rich, musical quality of the padams. One of them, Seshagiri, praised him openly,

'Varadaiah, your padams are extremely musical. We have had vaggeyakaras before. but their padams have been only musical. But in the case of your padams there is the unique blend of music, literary excellence and potentiality for dance. Your padams can be sung, they can be set for dance and they are full of literary quality. Varadaiah, you are gifted. What we acquire through laborious effort you get easily and without effort.'

Varada was a little embarrassed. So he said modestly,

'It's God's grace. I have no ambition to excel

anyone else in writing poetry. If I get name, it's not mine. All that belongs to Muvva Gopala. I am His devoted worshipper. I belong to Him and it is His will that I should celebrate His glory through padams. I fulfil that mission.'

'Yes we see that the honours of the court, the pomp of the rulers, none of these things move you the way they move us. We are of this world, we are in it. You seem to be far off and remote from this mundane world. We only wish we may have the same detachment to worldly things as you possess.'

'Nothing prevents you from having it. We have to exercise our will power in the right direction. Nothing is difficult for man if only he wills it. Man's ultimate end is to be one with God through sublimation of desires.'

'True, but how many of us can attain that end? Very few, I suppose. Only persons like you, Varadaiah, can be the chosen few.'

On another occasion Varada had an interesting talk with another poet of the court, Kodandapani. The poet heard Varada's songs. He liked them very much and he thought that the Nayikas described in the padams to a large extent conformed to the pattern of Nayikas classified in **Rasamanjari**. So he asked,

'Varadaiah, I hope you don't mind my asking you one simple question. Don't you think that your descriptive accounts of Nayikas as Sweeya, Parakeeya, Samanya with a host of other subdivisions is based on **Rasamanjari**?'



Of course they are modelled after the detailed versions given in that book. No doubt I have read **Rasamanjari**, but I have made some innovations also based on my observation and experience.'

'Yes, that's true. One even feels that you have all those qualities of a Nayaka. You describe your Nayikas and Nayakas in such a way that we see them as real ones.'

'That is exactly the creative imagination that renders things unapparent as real. The illusion of reality is what is required in creative writing. The aesthetic pleasure that is experienced is the affinity between the writer and the reader. The writer first experiences the thrill and he communicates it through his writing. The poet enjoys the beautiful landscape or has certain pleasurable feelings to communicate. In all such cases the emotional experience is the same for the poet and his listener.'

'But your poetry is inspirational. It is as natural as the wind that blows. It is like the sweet fragrance to the rose. It moves, it thrills and it establishes a tradition for a new style of writing that is at once rich, sonorous and simple.'

'I think you love me. Therefore you are so full of praise for my padams.'

'The whole court is full of admiration for your padams. Our ruler Tirumala Nayak is all praise for you. We all love you for your simplicity and humanity.'

Varada's stay in Madurai was a fruitful one. He

used to visit the famous Meenakshi temple and get up every morning roused from sleep by the sound of the Vedic hymns chanted in the temple. The temple flourished greatly under the Nayak rulers and Varada was specially drawn towards the imposing figure of the goddess Meenakshi. Varada liked this court as it was devoid of all that pomp and show of Golconda. In Golconda he saw only the pleasures of court and the veneer of sophistication, but in Madurai he found a simpler life and a purposeful activity. It was not given to excesses of frivolity and luxuriance. Intellectually too his stay in Madurai was stimulating. While he was there it was said that he composed nearly two thousand padams.

Varada's next move was to Kanchi. He heard of Kanchi Varadaraja and longed to see the famous religious centre. Also Kanchi was the place where Mohanangi was supposed to join him. The old town with its unique centrality of worship of Shiva and Vishnu appealed to him. The raging conflicts between the worship of Shiva and of Vishnu seemed to be harmoniously settled in Kanchi. The old town at one time also harboured and cherished Buddhism and Jainism. It was, therefore, unique in its catholicity of outlook. Shiva Kanchi with its temples was picturesque. The temples looked like forts with very wide, spacious gates. One would only marvel at man's ingenious nature in building such magnificent temples. The architects took pride in building them. The sculptors, in engraving the pillars, roofs and towers, had

immense joy and the masons and workers were dedicated to the work. Those were the glorious days when men were not yet materialistic in their outlook. Kamakshi temple with its scenic beauty and the Ekamreswara temple with its age-old mango tree under which Kamakshi was supposed to have worshipped Shiva, all had their spectacular effect on Varada's vision. The mango tree was unique in the sense that the four branches yielded fruits different from each other in taste and it had a hoary past. It was also said that the four branches symbolised the four Vedas. Shiva Kanchi with its Kamakshi temple was also famous as one of the important seats of Sakthi worship in India. But more than all these temples, the temple of Varadarajaswamy in Vishnu Kanchi was the one dear to him. He was thrilled to see the seven-storeyed tower with its imposing look and grandeur. The hundred pillared hall with its beautiful sculptures of Rati and Manmadha was quite spectacular. On the first floor of the temple was Varadaraja with his benign look. Varadaiah was at once in love with Varadarajaswamy and composed a few songs in praise of the Lord. For one moment he felt that his life's dream was fulfilled. He loved the beauty and the grandeur of the image. It was imposing and majestic. A little away from this was the temple of Varadaraja's consort, Lakshmi. Most of his time was given to the worship of the deity in Kanchi. Varada became acquainted with the priests and they gave him a unique honour and took to him kindly. Days passed and Varada enjoyed supreme bliss

in being near the temple that he loved. Next to Muvva Gopala, Kanchi Varadarajaswami attracted his attention. He composed songs in praise of these two deities and always the mystic elation, the bridal ecstasy was given to him. He was serene and tranquil and he wanted nothing of the world. His mind was given only to thoughts of Gopala and Varadaraja.

Meanwhile, Mohanangi at Muvva was waiting anxiously for the good news and when it came her joy knew no bounds. Her lord Varada had asked her to come. Her life's ambition was fulfilled. Her mother insisted that she should take her brother with her. Mohana agreed to that proposal. That evening she went to the temple and sought Muvva Gopala's blessing. She was full of excitement and she felt that she should be a fitting companion to Varada in his worship of Muvva Gopala, that she should dance and immortalise Varada's songs. If Varada should glorify Gopala through his padams, she would celebrate Varada's padams through her dance performances. It would be a happy combination of music and dance, in praise of Muvva Gopala. That was her ambition. The physical aspect of life did not particularly figure in her mind. She was prepared to adjust herself to a new way of life that Varada led. Mohana started with her brother Ramana for Kanchi with great expectations.

Very soon Varada's devotion to Kanchi Varadaraja reached its highest pinnacle. He was very often lost in meditation and leaning against one of the pillars in the temple he used to sit for hours almost motionless.

One night the worship to the Lord was over and after the last rites of the temple were performed the priests closed the doors and went away, not noticing Varada sitting in the temple. Towards early morning Varada woke up from his meditation and he felt he saw the goddess leaving the Lord's temple. He composed a padam thrilled by that vision of the goddess moving quickly to her temple. The grace and loveliness in her gait, the hurried posture in which she left the temple with her sari in loose array, and all these were so vivid and compelling to him that he could recreate the vision in a realistic manner. It was a memorable occasion for him. The priests were surprised to find him in the temple the next morning and they were of the view that Varada was a blessed one. Their admiration for him increased from that day and they considered him to be a saint who found his right relationship with God.

Varada stayed for a month in Kanchi, then he moved on to Thanjavur. He heard a lot about the glory of the court and its patronage of literature, music, dance and fine arts. The ruler was noted for his predilections for music and dance. He was a connoisseur of beauty and admired beauty in all its varying aspects, in women as well as in nature. Varada's mind was drawn to Thanjavur court, but he promised himself that he would come back to Kanchi after having established his own right as a poet-musician in the splendid court of Thanjavur. He was keen on spreading Gopala's message of love and devotion in that new court also. Already he had done that in two courts,

Goiconda and Madurai. So he prayed to Kanchi Varadaraja that night for a blessing and the next morning he left Kanchi for Thanjavur.

Mohana and her brother Ramana had to put themselves to great trouble in reaching Kanchi. They went straight to Varadarajaswamy temple hoping to see Varada. But to their great dismay they were told that Varada had left that place only the day before. Mohana was terribly upset and she cursed herself for having not come earlier. But the priests were all kindness to her. The head priest, the oldest of the lot, quite respectable looking, told her not to worry herself.

'You need not worry. Varadaiah is bound to come back. He is very fond of Varadaraja. How can he live away from him? He will surely come.'

'Did he tell you where he was going?' Mohana asked the priest.

'I think he wanted to go to Thanjavur. He heard much about the splendour of the court. So he was keen on going there. He must have gone to Thanjavur,' said the priest.

'We planned to see Varada here, but we have missed him. I am his disciple. All my dreams of presenting his padams through dance are over.'

'Don't be so much discouraged. You are bound to see Varada for he will come back. Till then you live in Kanchi and honour our temple by your dance performances. Thereby you will be doing service to your teacher Varadaiah.'

She and her brother agreed to stay in Kanchi and one night the dance performance by Mohana was arranged in the open space of the temple. She did it in a regal style. One number followed another, all set in tune to the padams of Varada. The dance performance was full of involvement, so the whole programme looked enchantingly beautiful. The onlookers were thrilled. Hitherto they only heard Varada singing, now they saw his songs transformed into dance numbers. Mohana's movements, her gestures and the joy with which she danced, all these gave a new recreational pleasure to the onlookers in Kanchi. The devotional aspect of the dance performance mightily pleased the devout and the religious-minded. To others it was simply a splendid scene, never seen before.

One of the spectators commented,

'Who is she? She looks beautiful and her dance is equally fascinating.'

The one next to him said,

'She is Varadaiah's disciple. She has come to see him in Kanchi but he has left. So she is staying for a short while in Kanchi.'

'So she is Varadaiah's disciple. He has a good disciple. Very attractive. He must be lucky in having her as a disciple.'

The sly comment was understood by the person who gave the information about her. He was a little annoyed with the speaker.

'Don't talk like that about Varadaiah. He is a saint. He is a devotee of Muvva Gopala. Far from

him these foul thoughts, we shouldn't even utter them."

He silenced the speaker and after some time the latter left the place. Perhaps he felt out of place in those surroundings where pure thoughts prevailed at least for the time being.

Mohana was admired by one and all. The priests felt that they could have retained both Varada and Mohana in Kanchi if only she had come a little earlier. They loved Varada and they wanted him to stay on. All that affection was given to Mohana in the absence of Varada because she was a good disciple to her teacher. She and her brother endeared themselves to the priests and they stayed in Kanchi visiting all the temples in that town.

Mohana was eager to know all about Varada's stay in Kanchi. With a feminine curiosity she started on her investigation. She became friendly with the women in the temple and through them she wanted to get information. All her anxiety was to find out whether Varada ever encouraged any woman to be close to him. One day she heard one of the women saying almost in ecstasy.

'Varadaiah has been a boon to the temple. It was marvellous to see him sing. He looked handsome even though he was a little absent-minded all the time,' said Lakshamma.

For one moment Mohana felt jealous of her and she could not understand why that woman should praise Varada so much. But then Sundaramma too was vehement in her praise of Varada.



'Varadaiah's presence has been an inspiration to all of us. We loved to hear his padams and we were all eager to see him in the temple. It was a rare sight indeed.'

'Was he coming to the temple everyday?' asked Mohana.

'Of course he used to come and bring with him dignity and honour to the temple,' said Lakshamma.

'Did he encourage anyone to be his disciple?' queried Mohana.

'O no, he was all the time praying or meditating. He took no particular interest in men and women. Perhaps he never saw what was happening around him. One night a strange thing happened to him. He was in deep meditation sitting in a corner of the temple. In the night time the temple doors were closed. No one ever noticed him in the night and by the time he awoke in the early morning he had a vision of the goddess moving fast towards her own temple after having spent the night with her Lord.'

'How happy Varadaiah was that day! He composed an exquisite padam celebrating that experience. O how we all admired Varadaiah!' said Sundaramma.

Mohana was proud that Varada was renowned and famous. He was no longer the Varada of Muvva. He belonged to a wider world. Kanchi owned him. She was only sorry that she could not see him in Kanchi. Separation could no longer be tolerated. She also realised after talking to the women that Varada never encouraged any woman to be associated with him even

though he was very much liked by the women. That was a consolation to her but nothing could give her pleasure unless she saw Varada. Her brother, mostly non-serious, enjoyed his stay in Kanchi. He liked the temple town with the bells ringing all the time and worshippers coming from all parts of the South. It was a novelty for him to see so many men and women. He was not religious-minded, but he knew a few tricks of a magician. Left to himself he would have stayed on for some more time in Kanchi. With great difficulty he could persuade Mohana to stay for fifteen days in Kanchi. She insisted that they should go to Thanjavur instead of waiting indefinitely for Varada in Kanchi. Her brother was not very keen on moving about all the time. He wanted to have an easy time in Kanchi and wait patiently for Varada's return. So he said,

'Why should we go on another journey? Let us stay in Kanchi. People are friendly to us in this place. And Varada is bound to come back.'

Mohana did not listen to him.

'Who knows, Varada is annoyed with us and may have left this place in disgust. If that is so, he will not return. So let us go. We will take our own time. I'll not hurry you through the journey. Please take me to Thanjavur for I live for Varada.'

'All right, I shall take you. I think you are crazy. Even coming to Kanchi is a wild scheme but to go further is almost madness. Anyway we will go.'

Mohana was pleased with the assurance of her brother. The very next day they started for Thanjavur.

## : 3 :

The Thanjavur court under Raghunatha and Vijayaraghava Nayaks attained its heights of glory. Poets, musicians, dancers, vaggeyakaras, all flocked to the court to exhibit their skill and talent. Vijayaraghava was a great patron of learning and he himself was a scholar of repute. He was the author of **Raghunatha-bhyudaya Natakam** and **Rajagopalaswamy Prabandham**. In a way he was the originator of natakams, plays in Telugu. He encouraged fine arts, dramaturgy, music and dancing. In the palace itself he got a dance hall built so that women of the royalty too could attend and enjoy dance performances. Women of the palace learnt music and dance. Vijayaraghava was equally interested in seeing plays and Yakshaganas produced in the palace. The whole court hummed with activity and it had all the splendour of Krishna Deva Raya's court.

Vijayaraghava was himself a Rasika and he especially appreciated the Sringara type of compositions. The court was full of gaiety and festivity. The poets composed songs in praise of Vijayaraghava. His dynasty was celebrated in song. The dance performances and music concerts added colour to the court. On certain occasions the court looked like a fairy-land and often Vijayaraghava's romantic imagination identified him with Lord Krishna. Incidental references were made to him as Lord Krishna with Gopikas. All the forty years he ruled, Thanjavur court had the best of life. Poets competed with each other, dancers with

one another so that they could catch the eye of the ruler.

Varadiah heard much about the Thanjavur court as much as the court heard of him. His reputation was at its height when he visited Thanjavur. His padams were sung with relish and enjoyment. Especially as vaggeyakara his name and fame reached Thanjavur. There was a general expectancy of his arrival and of the honour he would bring to the court by his presence. The day he was coming the whole court had a decorative aspect. Venkatamakhi of **Chaturdandi** fame, Ranga-jamma the poetess of **Mannarudasa Vilasam** and **Usha-parinayam**, Venkatapathi Somayaji, the poet laureate, Satakratu Srinivasa Tatacharya, the mentor of Vijayaraghava, Krishnaji, Kalakavi, and a host of other poets of Prabandha fame were all assembled in the court. The lights were shining in glass domes and everything was glorious.

Vijayaraghava was gay and cheerful. He was in a happy mood. The luxuriance of the court, the sweet amiable looks of the women added lustre to the scene. The courtiers were busy listening to the verses composed by Kalakavi on Vijayaraghava and his dynasty. A soft breeze was blowing. Sweet scents from jasmines and perfumes produced an intoxication all its own. Vijayaraghava's court was conspicuous for its dominance of women noted for their excellence in dance and music. Najamma, who looked like Jayalakshmi herself, and Cheempakavallema, embodiment of prosperity used to sit on either side of the king. Other women like the famous dancer Sitamma and extremely beautiful Mada-

narekhamma graced the court. Two women, heavily bedecked and ornamented, were to the right and left of Vijayaraghava gently fanning him. Meanwhile music was heard. It looked as though Varadaiah was coming heralded by musicians in the traditional style of reception. Vijayaraghava stood up and received Varadaiah with warmth and affection. This was unprecedented especially because of Varadaiah's association with Madurai court with which Thanjavur was not very friendly at that time. In fact Varadaiah paid a brief visit to Thanjavur in the time of Raghunatha. The king asked him why he had come uninvited and Varadaiah said that bees would come wherever lotus flowers were to be found. So in Vijayaraghava's time he came on invitation. The court poets were not altogether happy about this reception to Varadaiah. But they watched the show with curiosity.

The moment Varadaiah took his allotted seat in the court a bell was rung and the dance performance started. The stage was set opposite to the royal throne. Rangajamma gracefully bowed to the audience and started a dance number in honour of Varadaiah's visit. To the accompaniment of sweet music Rangajamma danced splendidly. Everyone was happy. There was terrific applause. Varadaiah composed a padam on the spur of the moment and handed it to Vijayaraghava. He passed it on to Kalaiah the dance teacher. The padam was suited to the occasion. The Nayika in the padam complained that Brahma made her a woman and gave her a lover who never understood her love for him. If she had been a man she could have taught

him a lesson. The song was danced by Rangajamma with involvement and gusto. Everyone was thrilled and it was considered to be a splendid performance. Ovation was given to her for a few minutes and she stood radiant with beaming smiles on the stage.

Somehow Varadaiah did not exhibit all that cheer. Vijayaraghava watched him and wondered why he was not pleased with the dance performance whereas everyone else was in ecstasy. Meanwhile a girl of sixteen from the royal family came on the stage and she did the same padam done by Rangajamma. This time Varadaiah was moved. He went to the stage and garlanded the girl. Everyone was surprised. They were mystified. Varadaiah explained.

'Rangajamma is a scholar. So her dance performance is, according to theory, flawless. But a good performance needs an understanding of human nature and human situation. There should be a harmonious blending of the theories of *Natya Sastra* with the live experiences. A performance that brings the two aspects together is the best, according to me. The girl has done this marvellously. Though she is tender in age, she seems to be gifted.

Rangajamma herself was convinced of what Varadaiah said. So she immediately presented her necklace to the girl and there was joy spread on every face.

That was an auspicious beginning for Varadaiah at the Thanjavur court. Even the poets had to admit to themselves almost grudgingly that Varadaiah was far superior to them. But then there was fear also among them that very soon he would elbow them out

and outshine them. They had their own reputations firmly rooted, invincible and unquestioned so far. His visit shook them out of their complacency. Ranga-jamma took an instantaneous liking for Varadaiah and Vijayaraghava was full of admiration for him. Vijayaraghava honoured Varadaiah that night in a stately way much to the amazement of the poets of the court. They had been there for years but none of them was received so warm-heartedly and in such a grand manner as Varadaiah was that night. So it irked them to see a new comer stealing the show with all its honour.

Unlike in Madurai court, in Thanjavur, Varadaiah had a few opponents even though on the whole he was loved and respected. A few days after Varadaiah's visit, the poets of the court joined together and discussed Varadaiah's padams.

'I wonder why the king is so fond of Varadaiah's padams. As far as I can see there is nothing grand about them. We do not have the flights of poetic imagination, nor do we have the dignified diction in his padams. They are of the moment, ephemeral in their nature, pleasing to the ear but ending in vapour,' put in Somayaji, the poet-laureate. He thought he would be the worst hit of all the poets in the court by Varadaiah's coming.

He was supported by Kalakavi who was full of encomiums for the king and his forebears. He was the typical royalist. He too could not understand why the king should be so fond of Varadaiah's padams.

'Somayaji, I agree with you. But for those ample

references to physical love what else is there in the padams?' queried Kalakavi.

'Vijayaraghava seems to be in love with all the descriptive accounts of physical love in the padams. If that is the stuff the king wants we too can give it,' sarcastically commented Somayaji.

'O no, it's not so easy as that,' interposed Satakratu, and added,

'Varadaiah's padams are not just descriptive accounts of Srīngara. They are based on his thorough understanding of the Alamkara Sastra and all the Nayikas he describes are strictly according to the classifications mentioned in **Rasamanjari**. Varadaiah has added to this rich material, his own experiences, felt and observed. Therefore, the padams acquire solidity and nearness. We feel as though we are seeing in his padams Nayikas and Nayakas in real life. That is the beauty about his compositions.'

'That's true, we cannot undermine the quality of the padams. They are lucid and they have ease and felicity of expression. They are in simple Telugu easily understood by all. The padams have a lyrical quality. They can be sung, not merely sung, set to dance also. How many of us can compose padams with all these three distinct qualities? None of us, I think'. Krishnaji commented.

'You all seem to be in the world of Varadaiah. Yes, Srīngara has universal appeal. So you are under that spell. I pity you Krishnaji and Satakratu for losing your balance.'



'Don't be sarcastic Somayaji. We have to admit to ourselves that Varadaiah's padams are the rage now. The sweet mellifluousness recommends itself to all, whether we like it or not. So why not we gracefully accord to him the praise he deserves, that's all I want to say,' pleaded Satakratu.

'O no, that naked Sringara in Varadaiah's padams upsets me. I can never be reconciled to that aspect of his padams. I may even tolerate his unceremonial address in singular number to Muvva Gopala and Vijayaraghava, but can never accept the Sringara part of his padams,' vehemently argued Kalakavi.

'Why what is wrong with Sringara? How about Prabandhas and all the hideous accounts of voluptuous love in them? If we can tolerate Sringara in Prabandhas and even feel proud of their detailed descriptive accounts we may as well accept Varadaiah's padams with all that Sringara Rasa,' emphatically pleaded Satakratu.

'We are not against the use of Sringara as such, but we don't want Sringara to be combined with devotional love. Varadaiah does that trick. He gives all that spicy material and ends on a purifying note of address to Muvva Gopala, as if Gopala too is fond of these descriptions. That is our chief complaint against Varadaiah.'

Somayaji thought he was clever in drawing this subtle distinction between physical love and devotional love. Satakratu only smiled.

'Somayaji, I think you are too much of a puritan. Don't we hear of Lord Krishna and his amorous episo-

des with Gopikas? Lord Krishna himself is an embodiment of Sringara. There is magnetism in him and when he plays on the flute the music is irresistible. We take all that as Krishnaleela. Varadaiah is now the bride who has fallen desperately in love with Gopala. So all his padams are addressed to Him. Also it is difficult to say where it is physical love and where exactly it is devotional love. In his padams the two phases are so dexterously interwoven that to those who appreciate physical love the padams simply look physical.'

'Satakratu, I can't really tolerate your veiled references. You are suggesting that I can see only physical love, therefore, the padams appear to be detestable.'

'I don't mean that Somayaji. What I say is that to great devotees all love is bhakti. Or else Jayadeva's **Ashtapadis** could not have been popular. Varadaiah's padams inculcate bhakti, they are full of devotional love.'

'Let us watch Varadaiah for some more time, wisely added Kalakavi giving the impression that much might be said on both sides. Somayaji was not quite satisfied with the arguments in support of Varadaiah's padams but he too wanted some more time to establish a climate of opinion unfavourable to Varadaiah. So the discussion ended there for that day.

One night after witnessing a performance of Yakshagana at the court Varadaiah was going home. Kalyani, the famous dancer in the court accompanied

him. Ever since Varadaiah came to the court she had a longing for him. She found in him masculine beauty almost to perfection, and his padams were danced by her with elation.

'Varadaiah, I am glad I have you with me tonight. I have been longing for an opportunity like this, and I am lucky today. Please visit our house tonight. We feel honoured.'

For one moment Varadaiah could not understand what Kalyani was saying. He was often given to meditation and as he walked he was dreamily thinking of Muvva Gopala. Her words put him on his guard but he wanted to be polite. So he accompanied her to her house. It was full of tasteful decorations and her room particularly was colourful. In one corner of the house there were parrots in the cage sweetly welcoming Varadaiah. Kalyani's mother made a reverential bow to Varadaiah. Sweet fragrance from the fully blossomed flowers in the arbour was spreading all over the house. Some fruits were offered to Varadaiah. Kalyani watched him closely, looked at him coquettishly and on the pretext of serving fruits to him she was almost falling on him.

'Varadaiah, I have only one great desire in life,' Kalyani said.

'What's that?' asked Varadaiah.

'To be your disciple, to sing and dance your padams and to serve you all my life. This is my dream.'

Moonlight fell on them. She put a garland of

jasmines round his neck and looked at him adoringly. Varadaiah was unmoved. He was amused, but he knew his goal.

'I think any teacher will like to have a graceful dancer like you as his disciple. You are refined, artistic and beautiful.'

Kalyani was flattered.

'I am grateful to you, Varadaiah, for all that you have said. To be praised by a vaggeyakara like you is no easy matter. I am blessed. I am yours.'

She leaned on him as though she would like to kiss him. He gently pushed her aside. She was a little hurt in her feelings, still she waited for his words.

'Kalyani, if you take me as your teacher, it is all right. If I can be of any use to you in perfecting your dance I shall do it with pleasure. But if you want me to be attached to you physically I will have to disappoint you.'

'How cruel of you! Love sought is good, given unsought is better. Won't you kiss me? I can show to you all the graces of the Nayikas that you describe in a realistic manner, tonight itself.'

'All that is true. I am not disputing your claims for keeping men enchanted. As I look at you I can see all those potentialities of Nayikas in you. But my life's goal is different.'

'What's your life's goal?' Kalyani asked half mockingly.

'I am in love with Muvva Gopala. I cannot love anyone else.'

Kalyani smiled.

'I thought you would say something very serious. We all love Gopalas and Gopalas, but that is only a mist, because they are only idols. How can we love idols? A sculptor cannot make love to the statue he creates, however, beautiful it may be. It has no life. Similarly the idols have no life. You are in love with an idea, that does not help you.'

'You are talking only from a physical plane. Yes, physical love needs response and reciprocation of feeling and emotions. But devotional love is sublime.'

'Sublime! It is a myth. Reality is what you have before you in your presence. The moon above is lovable, but you cannot kiss the moon. So the woman who gives you the pleasure of heaven is the one whom you should love.'

'I know, but I am wedded to Muvva Gopala. All my feelings and emotions, all my perceptions and capabilities are given to Him. I sing when He wants me to sing.'

'Varadaiah, I am disappointed in you. I thought that you would be the right Sringara Purusha for me. But you seem to be in a world of your own. Do you mean to say that you could write all those padams without experiencing physical love in life? It can't be. You are a Rasika. You are avoiding me. Perhaps I am not good enough for you. I shall try to deserve you.'

She stood up and faced him. She could not resist the temptation of embracing him. He gently touched

her head as though he was blessing her, and went away. She looked at him longingly. He did not look back. The moon was shining gloriously. Instinctively she looked at the sky and cursed the moon.

'Why does God create such good looking men if they are not meant for women?' she mused and she went inside almost bemoaning her sad lot.

A few days later Varadaiah was summoned for a private audience with the king. Vijayaraghava was a confirmed Vaishnavite even though he was fairly tolerant of other beliefs. He was intrigued by the padams of Varadaiah both by their Sringara and bhakti elements. He himself was a Vitaraya who enjoyed the company of beautiful women immensely. But he was also a devoted worshipper of Vishnu. He was full of poetic imagination and he was prepared to appreciate the poetic excellence in others. So a great affinity existed between Vijayaraghava and Varadaiah. The king bestowed on him special regard and affection and he was anxious to know more of Varadaiah.

'Varadaiah it always amazes me, how can you resist the lures of the court? We have women here in the court who are extremely beautiful, highly artistic and learned. We have poetesses, dancers and musicians among women who can be the ornament of any court, including that of Indra. To be in the midst of such bewitching women and yet to be resisting their seductive charm is something mysterious about you.'

'Nothing mysterious about it, O king. I was like anyone else madly in love with physical pleasures until

I had a revelation one night in Muvva. It then occurred to me that my destiny was different from that of others. I was not born to lead the ordinary life, I had to transcend its limitations and acquire a nobler one. Then you may say why I have not gone the way of those who have renounced the worldly pleasures. My life is dedicated to the glorification of Muvva Gopala. As a poet-musician I have a creative urge. I sing because I must, and I have to ennoble my deity Gopala. The creation of padams spontaneously with ease and felicity is a gift of the Lord to me, and I in return sing in praise of Him. Not as though He is in need of my praise, but I take it as my mission. God's works and deeds have to be interpreted by His worshippers, and His message has to be communicated by His saints and prophets from time to time.'

'So you choose to live with us only to spread the message of Gopala. What exactly is His message? Your padams only show your love and devotion for Him in Srīngara style, but do they also give a message?'

'The message is implied. As an artist I do not wish to make my poetry didactic. I do not want my padams to be 'classified as religious poetry. I would like them to be accepted for their richness in music, for their literary excellence and for their intrinsic worth in dance. I want my padams to be literary compositions. So through Srīngara I offer aesthetic pleasure and my devotion for Muvva Gopala is the propagation of bhakti.'

'Varadaiah, you have eluded the issue. Is there

any message, overt or implied in your padams, let me know.

'Yes, I should refer to the message of love. The whole world, as I see it, is one of love and beauty.'

The king smiled, for reality was different. There were wars all the time between one king and another, and hatred among men and women. He thought that Varadaiah's concept of beauty and love was only ethereal.

'How would you explain the prevalence of ugliness, sordidness and injustice in the world?' queried the king. Then he added,

'Perhaps it is easier for persons like you, Varadaiah, to live in a world of love and beauty for you do not lead the life of an ordinary human being.'

'I know I am not exposed to worldly life as much as others are. But my sincere belief is that through love, love of human beings and then love of God, in a gradational process, we achieve the nobler end. God has created this world of beauty and we negate the purpose and make it an ugly one. We are capable of loving but through our peevishness we hate others. So I believe in the universality of love, a love that sheds all its entanglements and becomes sublime in the final stage. Sublimation of desires and a willingness to submit ourselves to the will of God are desirable goals.'

'It is a difficult path, I think. The lures of life are so binding on us that we fail to extricate ourselves from them, and the ego in us makes it difficult for us to subordinate ourselves to God. Human beings, as



we are, we feel we are doing things and that we are the creators and destroyers.'

'True, we develop that consciousness all the time, but we have to come out of that mire through faith in God. An unquestioned faith in God, to a large extent, will give us the humility to receive everything from God. Nothing happens unless the grace of God is extended to us.'

'That may lead to inaction for we have to work and create things.'

'Of course we have to do our duty, but we need not be unduly excited about the results. We may leave it to God for He knows better when to give the reward for the work done by us. As you are a king, your duty is to administer justice and rule the country with love for the people. My duty is to glorify Muvva Gopala through my padams. We do our duty with faith in ourselves and faith in God. We do our work as an act of faith, knowing full well that God will be on our side as long as we are devoted to Him.'

'Sometimes even His worshippers suffer. We have great many examples of devotees suffering more than others. This seems to be a puzzle very often.'

'God may choose to expose His devotee to a fiery test before He accepts him. The path of celestial glory is a difficult one. So God purposely puts man in the midst of temptations so that he may be tempted and tested. And those who go through this process successfully become identified with God. They are the persons who establish right relationship with God and 'accept

pain and pleasure with detachment.'

'So you believe that through a process of exhibiting unflinching faith in, and unswerving loyalty to, God we attain the bliss of life, the supreme joy of being one with God.'

'Yes, but this does not mean running away from the world or renouncing worldly pleasures altogether. It is whole-hearted participation in, and gradual withdrawal from, mundane life that I advocate. This is done through a gradational ascent from a purely physical plane to a spiritual one. This is made possible through an understanding of our responsibility to God. He wants us to enjoy life, but at the same time He does not want us to forget our divine self. We have to claim it by turning to Him with love and devotion.'

'So you are now in the final stage of ascent when man's nobler self brings him nearer to God. You have attained the sum total of wisdom. You are a Kshetajna. We have yet to go a long way before we can attain that bliss. Long is the way and perilous is the path, yet we strive.'

'Yes we have to try hard. And the only way is through bhakti. We worship God and wait patiently for His grace.'

'Varadaiah, I am happy to be associated with you. I hope your stay in our court will be a pleasant one.'

'I am thankful to you for all that is done to me in the court. Enlightened kings like you, who are at once soldiers and scholars, are very rare. Your court is a perpetual feast of music and dance. We have read

much about Indra's court, but I see it now established in your realm. Posterity will have to accord a pride of place for your beneficial reign.'

'We hope so. I have the noble example of my father whose court attracted the best of talent all over the country.'

Varadaiah left the king profusely thanking him for the rare and distinct honour done to him. The king was immensely pleased with him and he made no secret of his admiration for, and appreciation of, Varadaiah's compositions. Varadaiah composed one thousand padams while he was in this court and his stay was fruitful.

But very soon the poets of the court became jealous of him. They could not understand the craze of the king for Varadaiah. He did not even flatter the king as they did. Even then the king was terribly fond of Varadaiah. It was humiliating for them to see the king all the time doting on Varadaiah. Both were worshippers of Vishnu. Perhaps on that account the king was more favourably disposed towards Varadaiah, they thought. Anyway they wanted to bring their displeasure to the notice of the king. Kalakavi was chosen to be the leader for this mild protest though of course all of them were with him. One evening finding that the king was in a good mood Kalakavi ventured to say:

'O king, we cannot really appreciate the manner in which Varadaiah addresses you in his padams. He forgets that you are divine. We have to respect, the king as the agent of God, sent into this world on His

behalf. Such a person should not be referred to in the singular number. A much more respectful address has to be used by Varadaiah.'

'Yes, we all agree with Kalakavi. We feel hurt and insulted as Varadaiah addresses you in his padams as though you are his subordinate. Do not think we are jealous of him and therefore we are speaking like this about Varadaiah. It is only our devotion for you that makes us talk like this. We have nothing personal against Varadaiah.' Somayaji said.

The king smiled. He understood that they were terribly jealous of Varadaiah. But he gently said,

'I quite appreciate your concern for me. But don't you think that a bhakta can address his lord in a familiar form? Varadaiah addresses Gopala also in the same way. How am I better than the great God himself? If Varadaiah can choose to refer to God in such familiar terms why can't he do that to me, an ordinary human being?'

'You are not an ordinary human being. You are a king. You are divine. Your love for Varadaiah is abused by him. He has to develop more respect for you or else we cannot show any regard for him.' Kalakavi put it emphatically.

'We also don't like the colloquial style he uses in his padams. Poetry should be elevating and dignified, or else it becomes prose. It should inspire us. How can his padams too full of vulgar descriptive accounts inspire anyone to lofty thoughts?' questioned Somayaji.

Vijayaraghava slowly and deliberately said,

'Varadaiah's padams have a genius, all their own. They may not inspire you, yet they will live. They will have a distinct place as literary compositions. Let posterity decide the worthiness of his padams. Nearness to the writings of a contemporary often blurs our vision. So we may not be very objective in our assessment of Varadaiah's padams. However, we will convey tonight our views to him and see how he reacts.'

That night when the court met there was a certain feeling of elation among the court poets. They thought that they had won a point and scored a victory over Varadaiah. The king's consent to place their views before Varadaiah was itself a glorious thing for them. So they were all full of smiles, half malicious and half mischievous. The king was anxious to teach them a lesson for he knew full well that there was no comparison between Varadaiah and the other poets of the court. He took Varadaiah as a blessed one, whereas the others were still struggling to get the best of life with their panegyrics and eulogies of the king. The king loved them but he was not blind to their petty jealousies and conflicts. He knew all of them and he saw through them as the sun would penetrate through the clouds. Varadaiah entered the court, and was seated.

'Varadaiah, our poets feel unhappy over your address to the king in your padams. Being used to a different style of writing they cannot see decorum in your address to the king. They think it is too familiar, almost vulgar. And then they do not also like the

language used in your padams. It is far below poetic diction. How do you account for these flaws, as they put it, in your padams?' the king posed the question.

Varadaiah smiled. It looked as though he anticipated such a virulent attack against his padams. He was not surprised, nor was he displeased with the comments.

'Unlike in poetry where a certain poetic diction, remote from common usage, is used and justified, in padams meant for singing and for dance the language has to be the one that is easily understood by the common people. It has a relevance and an immediacy to the spoken language, whereas the poetic diction has nothing to do with the common idiom. It does not mean that the padams have no literary value. They have, and the language used is simple and lucid. It has a liquid flow, it has ease and felicity and these compensate for an otherwise artificial or perhaps flowery style that is often found in poetry that is ornate and sometimes grotesque.'

The conventional poetic style was attacked by Varadaiah vehemently. The court poets felt insulted. So Somayaji stood up.

'Varadaiah, you have totally misunderstood the value of poetic diction. Rich poetry does not come so easily as that. It needs dedication, it requires patient study and scholarship. To be a padam composer you do not need all that effort. Perhaps you sing as spontaneously as the wind blows. One need not be a scholar to be a padam composer, but one has to be a dedicated

servant of the muse of poetry to write good and sustaining poetry. Moreover, poetry is meant for the elite, whereas padams are for common consumption.'

Somayaji sarcastically commented.

'Yes, poetry is for the elite and for worldly gain, for most of it is addressed to kings and patrons. But my padams are for the glorification of Muvva Gopala, for inculcating divine love in men. So, I should adopt a medium that goes direct to the multitudinous many, not to the chosen few, so that the message of love, of bhakti, is spread among the common people.'

Somayaji and Kalakavi smiled almost ridiculing that idea for they thought that his padams incited the listeners more to physical love than to devotional love or bhakti. Varadaiah noticed their sly looks but ignored them. He added,

'As for the familiar address to the king, I love the king and I am devoted to him. More than respect, I have love and affection for him. As a man he is lovable, as a king he is to be respected. I take him as a man when I address him in my padams. When I address Muvva Gopala I use the same style for I love Him as a bride loves a bridegroom. I am His devotee, His lady love and to me He is everything.

Varadaiah sat down. His explanation was plausible, even though the court poets did not like to agree with him. They had no further comments to make. So they kept quiet, though inwardly they were smarting. The king noticed that Somayaji and Kalakavi had nothing more to say. He looked at Varadaiah.

'Now that I have cleared the doubts of my colleagues, my brother poets, O king, with your permission I would like to offer a padam slightly incomplete. I shall be leaving the court for a few months. I wish to go to Rameswaram and visit other temples in the South. By the time I come back let anyone of the learned poets of the court, Somayaji, Kalakavi and others, complete the padam. I shall leave the last line to be filled up by them. The padam is like this, the Nayika says,

"My maids, expecting Muvva Gopala, I have asked for good omens, but seeing many other women enjoying themselves with their lovers I have been sad"

Let the poets complete this padam by the time I come back. I am sure it is a simple problem given to astute minds.'

Not much rejoicing could be seen on the faces of the poets. They thought they had won when the king posed questions to Varadaiah. But now everything seemed to be going against them. For the next few months they might not have any peace of mind, and if they failed to complete the padam they would be put to shame. They got themselves into a quandary and they did not know how to come out of it unscathed.

: 4 :

A few days after Varadaiah had left the Thanjavur court Mohanangi and her brother Ramana reached Tan-



jore. As ill luck would have it they again missed Varadaiah, Mohanangi was almost in tears. Her brother tried to console her but to no purpose. She was very much upset by the sad experience of missing Varadaiah both at Kanchi and Tanjore. They were hesitant to go to the court. They felt more at home in Kanchi. The court atmosphere was altogether strange for them. They did not know whom to approach. They roamed about for one day visiting temples. Then gradually they gathered information that Rangajamma was the right person to be approached as she was supposed to be very favourably disposed towards Varadaiah. They also heard about the rivalry between the court poets and Varadaiah. So they wanted to make a cautious approach and they finally decided to see Rangajamma that evening.

Mohanangi and her brother reached Rangajamma's house. They saw her maid and sent a message that Varadaiah's disciple would like to see her. She at once asked her to come in, and Mohanangi first went in. The moment Mohanangi looked at Rangajamma she was thrilled. For the first time she was looking at a court lady, it was a new experience for her. She felt that Rangajamma was graceful and dignified. She liked her instantly. Rangajamma was very much impressed by the natural beauty and loveliness of Mohanangi. She was simple and pleasant, gentle and good natured, that was Rangajamma's estimate of Mohanangi. The two looked at each other pleasingly. Rangajamma asked Mohanangi to be seated. The friendliness in

her emboldened Mohannangi to go ahead with her story.

'Madam, I started with my brother from Muvva a few months ago hoping to meet Varadaiah in Kanchi. But by the time we reached Kanchi, Varadaiah moved on to this court in Tanjore. And when we come here we find that he has already gone to some other place. I really do not know when I shall meet my lord Varadaiah.'

Tears came to her eyes. She controlled herself and added.

'Varadaiah and I studied together. We both used to worship Muvva Gopala. In those days we moved about as though we were inseparable. Then came this separation. This is unbearable. I wonder why Varadaiah should roam about like a mad man. He could have been very happy staying in Muvva itself.'

'I quite sympathise with you, but you don't realise the reputation that Varadaiah enjoys in the court. He is the best poet-musician available now. His padams are extremely popular and he is very much liked by the king. All this would not have happened if he had stayed on in Muvva. Moreover, his fate is not in his hands, some other supreme force controls him. He is not destined to lead an ordinary life. He seems to be existing only for glorifying Muvva Gopala through his illustrious padams. So you are in love with Varadaiah.'

'Yes I simply adore him. He is everything to me. I wonder why God has separated us.'

'True love needs to be tested by way of separation. So I think your love for Varadaiah has stood the test of time and you'll very soon see him. He will come back to the court after his visit to Rameswaram. Definitely he will come back for he has given a padam to be completed by the court poets. They should do it by the time he comes back, or accept defeat at his hands. Stay with me and see the fun of the court. You are not used to it, so it will be a rich experience for you to be in the court.'

Mohanangi was full of gratitude for Rangajamma. She did not know how to express her feelings of grateful thanks to her. She fumbled and slowly said,

'I am thankful to you, madam, for asking me to stay with you, but I have my brother also with me. Perhaps it will be inconvenient for you to have him also in your house. We will stay in the town and I shall be seeing you now and then.'

'O no, don't bother. Let your brother also come. You wait until Varadaiah comes, then he will take care of you. It's strange that he has never mentioned anything about you. How could he be so very indifferent to you? Varadaiah often baffles us. Even though he is highly respected he does not seem to be aware of it. The honours of the court do not very much matter to him. The most beautiful women long for him and he does not take any note of them even though he is polite to them.'

'The reason is that he is more in love with Gopala than with anyone. Devotional love overpowers him

to the extent that physical love is submerged in it. I am prepared to be with him as his companion, serving him faithfully.'

Rangajamma smiled. She thought that Mohanangi was simple and naive. How could she live with Varadaiah without being physically attached to him? It would be impossible, she thought. For the time being she did not want to pry into the secrets of Mohanangi. She left her alone to settle down in her house with her brother. Mohanangi and her brother Ramana were immensely pleased with the generous gesture made by Rangajamma. They felt grateful to her. Ramana engaged himself in trifling things and was all the time anxious to please his sister and Rangajamma. Rangajamma watched Mohanangi carefully and came to the conclusion that she was a simple, cheerful young woman full of optimistic faith. She also noticed that Mohanangi was terribly fond of Varadaiah.

A few days later Rangajamma suggested that Mohanangi should come to the court with her.

'I don't think I should appear in the court especially when Varadaiah is away. In fact I have come to Tanjore only to meet him and not to get any recognition for myself in the court. I am ambitious for Varadaiah not for myself,' said Mohanangi.

'You all seem to be a curious lot. Varadaiah is ambitious for Muvva Gopala, not for himself. And you say you don't bother about yourself. I really cannot understand how all of you can be so detached. I

suppose you love Varadaiah.'

'Of course I love him. I have already told you, but my love should not be a hindrance to him. Varadaiah left his home, his parents, everything for my sake. He thought that his life was for ever linked with mine. He did not care for social wrath. He was with me all the time. A few years passed in that blissful manner.'

Mohanangi became silent all of a sudden. She was very much moved. All those glorious days of romantic infatuation when physical love alone seemed to be the be-all and end-all of life came back to her mind. Nostalgic reminiscences of the past, of moonlit nights, of Varadaiah's fond embraces and passionate kisses tremendously overpowered her. Varadaiah's lovely figure with all its masculine vigour floated before her mental eye. She used to be baffled for very often he was serious and at the same time very tender and affectionate towards her. She did not know what mood prevailed in him or whether he was listening to her or was thinking of something else. But she was all adoration for him and she was prepared to adjust herself to his varying moods and get the most from him for she knew that he was extremely fond of her. In the company of Varadaiah she forgot all about the world and she took him for granted, a solid lover, an ideal husband for her.

Rangajamma was surprised when Mohanangi abruptly stopped in her narrative. So she questioned,

'What happened to you after a few years of

romantic life with Varadaiah?’

‘One night in Muvva Gopala’s temple Varadaiah had a revelation. He was told that he had a mission and that he should glorify Muvva Gopala through his padams. He realised that his life was one of dedication to the Lord and that he had to spend his life in propagating the message of the Lord. So he had to leave me. I pleaded with him, for separation was unacceptable to me. Finally he said that I could see him in Kanchi, but I missed him there.’

‘What type of life you wish to lead with him now?’

‘The type of life he would ask me to lead. I have no choice in the matter. As far as I can visualise it will be companionship.’

‘Even our sages have led domestic life. What prevents Varadaiah from leading the ordinary physical life with you?’

‘It’s true, but his love is now given to Muvva Gopala. I am also keen on serving our deity. I think I will be happy in being associated with Varadaiah’s love for Muvva Gopala. He sings and I dance and one day we both may be blessed by Muvva Gopala. I have also decided to abide by the wishes of my lord Varadaiah. I only pray that he will come back soon and take me back to Muvva.’

‘So you don’t want Varadaiah to be with us.’

‘No, court life is not for us. We are from the simple countryside and this sophistication of the court is far too intricate for us.’

‘But Varadaiah seems to be all right in the court.’

He is polite, courteous, generous and most of us love him. We, especially women, have only one general grouse against him, that he has not given any place to us in his affection. Now I understand why he has been indifferent to Kalyani. He wants to be true to you and to Muvva Gopala.'

'Who is Kalyani?'

'The famous court dancer. She is one of our most beautiful women. Her approaches were ignored by Varadaiah much to the displeasure of Kalyani. This created a stir for we could not understand how a Rasika like Varadaiah could be indifferent to the blandishments of Kalyani. Even Viswamitra surrendered to Menaka. So we wondered how Varadaiah could resist the temptations of the court. Now I realise that Varadaiah should not be equated with others. He has to fulfil a mission and he is one of the blessed ones. To them these pleasures mean nothing. By serving him you will also be blessed. I envy you and your good fortune in being Varadaiah's lady love. Yours will be an illustrious story of love, of love that has attained sublimation of desires.'

'I only hope that Muvva Gopala will give me that opportunity of serving Him through Varadaiah.'

Mohanangi closed her eyes as though she was seeing Muvva Gopala. Rangamma treated her with greater warmth and affection from that time onwards.

The court poets got busy with the completion of the padam. The whole thing looked silly for them. They could not enter the world of Sringara, nor could

they understand the sentiments of the Nayikas. They too had described romantic situations but they were mostly conventional. What one prabandha writer had done was copied by the other. They themselves did not have the feel of that romantic thrill in real life. Varadaiah studied *Alankara Sastra* and also was given to a romantic life. So his Nayikas figured like real women with all their love making. So the feeling in that padam where a woman longed for her lover, ye, at the same time got a jolt when she saw other women enjoying life with their lovers was something beyond their comprehension.

'How will a woman behave under such circumstances? Will she be angry with her lover? Will she be jealous of the other women who seem to be enjoying life? What will be her reaction?' Somayaji queried.

'I really do not know. Let us refer to *Rasa-manjari*. Perhaps there may be a Nayika of that type described in that treatise.' Kalakavi wisely commented.

Yes, I think we should consult that book.'

Somayaji agreed with Kalakavi. But Satakratu struck a note of deviation.

'How can you be so simple as all that? Surely Varadaiah has his creative imagination. Most of the Nayikas he presents are not simply based on *Rasa-manjari*, they are shaped by his personal experiences also. So you had better use your own imagination in completing the padam.'

Krishnaji agreed with Satakratu.

'I don't feel like completing the padam. It is



below my dignity to add one line to that bald and prosaic stuff. I tell you it is not poetry. It is at best poetic prose. A poet like me can never put himself to this demeaning task of writing prose. What do you say Kalakavi? Don't you think I am right?

'Of course you are right.'

Kalakavi supported him. But he added,

'Do you really think that we cannot complete the padam? Supposing we say that the woman is angry with her lover, it will communicate her feeling definitely.'

'But that is commonplace. Anybody can say that.'

Krishnaji dismissed that idea and ventured to say,

'I don't think Varadaiah would give such a simple problem to us. It must have a deeper meaning which we may not guess. Unfortunately we do not have any association with these beautiful women of the court. Perhaps Rangajamma may be in a better position to complete the padam. I think we may contact her.'

'That's a good idea, said Somayaji.

Somayaji was in the habit of taking snuff. Especially when ticklish problems worried him he would take large doses of snuff as though they would stimulate his mind. Kalakavi had a tuft of hair at the back of his head. He oiled it carefully and it always had a glossy surface. He whipped the pigtail furiously whenever he had to solve a problem. Satakratu looked at them amusingly for the two were mostly responsible for attacking Varadaiah. Krishnaji was by nature given to the appreciation of beauty in women. He had a

weakness for them but he could not openly exhibit that. On the other hand he stubbornly covered his fondness for women under a cloak of austerity and piety. So no woman could take the lead and he remained virtuous out of sheer necessity. So to all of them this padam with all its nuances of Sringara was a closed book. They could not unravel the mysteries of the feminine mind, especially in matters of love. Therefore they piously hoped that Rangajama the poetess of the court could help them. In that hour of need her personality acquired new dimensions. They were prepared to accept her as one of the illustrious women of the court even though on other occasions they had their own mental reservations as regards the worthiness of her poetry. They were also jealous of her for she was very dear to the king. In that mood they forgot all about their prejudices against her.

The court poets met her one evening. They were very respectful towards her. She was pleased and amused.

'Rangajamma, you should help us in completing the padam. We have tried our best, but we are not able to guess the manner in which a woman will react when she sees other women being happy with their lovers though she herself may not have that happiness.'

Somayaji requested Rangajamma to give them some idea of the varied feelings that come to a woman on such an occasion. Rangajamma was puzzled. She was the minion of the king, but then the king had several other women too. She was used to such a situation.

There was nothing peculiar about it. They had to share the love of the king. They were not Satyabharnas to quarrel with their lord. So she modestly said,

'Somayaji, I am honoured by the request you make to me. But I am as helpless as any of you can be. Perhaps on such occasions jealousy is exhibited or a desperate longing for her lover can be roused. Or it may be one of helplessness or acceptance of the situation calmly. Anyone of these can be associated with the woman who figures in the padam. But my knowledge is limited. You are great scholars and poets. So you ought to know men and women better.'

Rangajamma excused herself pretending to be busy and went away for she did not personally like the ill conceived protest against Varadaiah. She admired him and respected him. She thought that the court poets were exhibiting their shallowness in attacking Varadaiah. So she was not prepared to be drawn into the fray. She would rather watch the situation with detachment. So she left them gaping at her. They were disappointed. Suddenly they hated her even though a minute ago they were all praise for her. But nothing more could be done, they had to think again for a suitable line for completing the padam or else accept defeat.

After leaving Thanjavur Varadaiah first went to Srirangam. He was struck by the magnificence of the temple. The seven prakaras were supposed to represent the seven lokas. The one-thousand-pillared mandapa, the golden roof of the sanctum sanctorum, the twenty-

one towers, all these captured the imagination of Varadaiah. There were scholars sitting in the mandapa leaning against the pillars and chanting the Vedic verses. The scene impressed him and thrilled him. The whole temple had an atmosphere of serenity and tranquillity. He moved about and sat for sometime in the mandapa listening to the melodious tunes of the hymns. In years to come, he wondered whether all that piety and all that religious atmosphere would prevail. Man definitely needed a sacred spot where he could meditate and the temple with its spaciousness and architectural beauty looked like Kaliyuga Vaikuntha of Lord Vishnu.

Varadaiah entered the temple and saw Sri Ranganatha reclining on Adishesha. It was indeed a grand, picturesque sight and Varadaiah felt as though the world was at peace and all was right. The reclining posture of the Lord gave him that impression of ease, comfort and peace. The world of strife and stress did not exist at all, Varadaiah felt. For one moment he thought of the standing posture of Muvva Gopala as though he was graciously blessing His devotees. Here this image of Ranganatha reclining on Adishesha revealed to him the static pose of the Lord in a world of cosmos, harmony and blessedness. The relaxed posture of Ranganatha also signified to him the world of beauty and spiritual joy. He addressed a few padams to the Lord deeply stirred by the joyousness of the place.

Varadaiah was coming out. One of the priests addressed him,

'You seem to be new to this place.'

'Yes I have come from Thanjavur only to see the temple. I have heard much about the scenic beauty of this place with Cauvery flowing by. I now feel delighted in visiting this holy place.'

'Sri Ranganatha blesses all those who come to see Him. He is a generous lord, always gracious and sweet to everyone.'

'How old is this temple?'

'Very old I should say, but the stone inscriptions and copper plates show its existence from 9th century onwards. Mythologically this could be as old as the world itself. The sanctity of the place is testified by the mythological and legendary stories tracing its origin to Rama's time. Rama presented, we are told, the Ranga Vimana to Vibhishana for the services rendered to him in subduing Ravana, with the instruction that he should not place it on the ground, but carry it direct to Lanka. Vibhishana on coming to the river Cauvery gave it to a brahmin lad requesting him to hold it for some time. The brahmin lad placed it on the ground and the Ranga Vimana got stuck up. Vibhishana could not pull it out. So he hit the boy on the face and the boy ran away. Vibhishana then prayed to Sri Ranganatha and He told him that He would like to stay there with His head inclined to the South.'

'So that explains the reclining posture of Sri Ranganatha on Adishesha with His head in the direction of Lanka.'

'Yes, and the lad, who on being hit, ran away to the summit of the rock at Tiruchirapalli was no other than Vinayaka.'

'I have seen that temple on the rock. It is a grand sight. We can see from the rock the whole town and the river Cauvery flowing by. God's creation is wonderful and the location of the temples on the rocks or by the side of rivers is another mysterious occurrence in Nature. If one looks at these temples one is stupefied by the effort of man, the unceasing activity, all done as dedication to God. Or else these temples could not have been built.'

'True. By the by I have forgotten to ask you about your name.'

Varadaiah smiled and mentioned his name.

'So you are the famous padam composer. Your songs are well known. I feel honoured to see you. How long are you staying here?' asked the priest.

'Only for a day or two, I wish to go to Rameswaram,' said Varadaiah.

'Then be with us for the days you are here and visit the temple. Compose a few songs on Sri Ranganatha. We will all be happy to see those songs danced in our temple.'

'Yes I shall stay.'

A few days later Varadaiah left Srirangam and went to Rameswaram. The holy place of pilgrimage engaged his attention for a long time. Varanasi in the North and Rameswaram in the South were the two centres of worship from time immemorial. Varadaiah

reached Rameswaram halting in many places on the way. The holy shrine of Shiva was supposed to have been consecrated by Rama. So the temple could be very old. Varadaiah felt that he had come to the holiest place and he had a dip in the Sethu before he entered the temple. The image of the Linga, the architectural beauty of the temple, the corridor with four thousand pillars, all appealed to him. Apart from the holiness of the place it had the beautiful phenomenon of nature in all its pristine glory. As a poet the whole scene appealed to him. He would very often sit and watch the waves of the sea rolling towards the shore. The fury of the sea revealed to him the negative forces in nature and he thought that nature could be hostile also to man. For hours and hours he would sit pondering over the inexplicable puzzles of the world. Why should God, who has created this beautiful world, allow ugliness also to prevail? Why should man, bestowed with reasoning power, allow himself to stoop to levels of animalism and bestiality? All these questions baffled him and intrigued him.

One evening as usual he was sitting near the shore watching the sea. Someone, apparently in the Sanyasi garb, addressed him.

'Who are you? I have seen you in this place for the last few days. I always find you looking fixedly at the sea.'

'I have come to see the temple and spend a few days in this holy place. I have come from Thanjavur, I am Varadaiah.'

'So you have come to seek the blessings of the Lord. Legends tell us that Rama came back to this place after coronation. Krishna, Balarama and the Pandavas were also visitors to this holy shrine. This has a legendary past. Blessed are those who bathe in the Sethu. All sins are washed away.'

'This is indeed a fit place for meditation with the wide expanse of sea before us. It reminds us of the universe as a vast macrocosm, in which man is a microcosm.'

'I have earned peace after coming here. My life was full of misery, disappointment and distress. So I came to this place. Have you also run away from life in disgust?'

'O no, that's not my experience. I do not believe in running away from life. I take it as escapism and defeatism. If life is unpleasant we have to face it and accept the challenge. We have to fight the battle of life. We cannot expect only good people to live in the world. We must be prepared to accept the wicked ones also for good and evil co-exist.'

'I didn't have the strength of mind to face the trials and tribulations of life. The easiest thing for me was to run away from that wretched life. Here I have peace.'

'But of what use are you to society? As human beings we have an obligation to serve others. Our god-given talent must be useful to our brethren. Love others so that you may be loved by them. Your willingness to share the sorrows and joys with others is more



significant than your cold indifference towards your fellow beings.'

'How can anyone get peace of mind when he is surrounded by all the ills of life?'

'One can, if only the free will is exercised in the right direction. We can be participants in the pleasures and miseries of life and yet be detached. When joys come we need not be unduly excited and when sorrows surround us we need not go down and lose faith in God. He gives to us what we deserve.'

'I don't think so. Very often we see good people not getting the due reward. How do you account for that?'

Varadaiah smiled for it was no easy answer to give.

'Yes, sometimes it may appear to be like that. Our understanding of good and bad deeds in life may itself be determined by our likes and dislikes for others. Surely good will be triumphant. In the long run good deeds will be rewarded.'

The stranger kept quiet. He did not quite agree with Varadaiah. Even though he had come away to this holy spot out of sheer disgust for life he had not yet acquired the poise and balance of mind. He was still given to bouts of jealousy, anger and peevishness. He prayed everyday in the temple and bathed in the Sethu but these were only external appurtenances, but inwardly he was still unripe. He had to go a long way before he could acquire wisdom and understand God's ways in their totality.

Varadaiah finally told him,

'Go back to life and accept life with all its limitations. A life lived in a normal way is a fruitful one. By gradational process and by steady detachment you will acquire the nobler self. Serve others, and service to mankind is service to God.'

The stranger nodded as though he was half convinced about the imperative to go back and lead a purposeful life. The stranger's face looked brighter. He was grateful to Varadaiah.

'I am thankful to you for what you have told me. Now I see things from a different perspective. I am glad to have met you.'

So saying he left him. Varadaiah was deep in thinking by the time the stranger moved away from him. He thought of Muvva Gopala, the temple bells reminded him of the temple bells in Muvva. He had left Muvva more than three years ago. He had a longing to go back to his deity. He composed a few songs in praise of Muvva Gopala. He visited all the temples round about Rameswaram. While he was there very often he thought of Muvva Gopala. He was full of gratitude for Gopala who gave him the gift of composing the padams with ease and felicity. He spent most of his time in meditation and for nearly a month he was in Rameswaram. Already four months elapsed since the time he left Tanjore. He wondered whether the court poets could complete the padam. Finally Varadaiah decided to leave Rameswaram for Tanjore.

Mohanangi was there in Thanjavur for nearly

three months. Time passed quickly in the company of Rangajamma. But she was all the time longing for Varadaiah. She prayed to Muvva Gopala to bless her. She missed the simple life of Muvva and her mind was mostly given to the joys of the countryside. The tall trees by the side of the tank, the green pastures and the paddy fields of Muvva, all floated before her mental vision. The court life with all its pomp and show did not appeal to her. She did not have even the curiosity to know all about court life. She patiently waited for Varadaiah's return.

One evening Rangajamma again suggested.

'You had better come to the court today. Already you have spent three months here. A week ago some pilgrims have returned from Rameswaram. They say that within a week or so Varadaiah may come back to Tanjore.'

Mohanangi's face brightened with the very thought of meeting Varadaiah after three years.

'I am glad to hear that Varadaiah will be coming back soon.'

'I think you should dance the very padam he has given to the court poets for completion. You will be in a better position to do that padam through dance, and perhaps the court poets may get some ideas after seeing you dance that padam. Come to the court today. I am sure you'll enjoy the court scene. You will see poets, musicians, dancers, actors, artists and dramatists in the court and your experience will become richer thereby.'

'Thank you very much for suggesting to me to sing and dance the padam. I shall come. Who knows, Varadaiah may return to the court while I am dancing, and it will be a pleasant surprise for him if he sees me dancing.'

Rangajamma was very much pleased. She took care to see that Mohanangi was dressed properly, suited to the occasion. She took pride in her good looks, and with a touch of ornamentation Mohanangi looked more than beautiful. Both reached the court. She said that Varadaiah's disciple would sing and dance his padams that evening. The whole court was full of expectancy. Vijayaraghava with all his retinue came and sat on the throne. There was much fanfare as he entered and all his honorific titles were proclaimed with gusto. Beautiful women stood in rows on either side and sprinkled flowers on him as he walked to the throne. He enjoyed all that grandeur and he believed in exhibiting his splendour. Rangajamma told him of the novelty, of the dance programme by Mohanangi and the king was happy to hear about it. He missed Varadaiah for quite a few months, so he too was anxious to listen to Varadaiah's padams and see them danced on the stage.

Mohanangi started dancing. She was a little out of touch with dancing. Also the presence of the king, the court poets, the musicians and the dancers unnerved her for a few minutes. But very soon she gathered strength and she was dancing in excellent form. It looked as though her involvement in Varadaiah's padams gave her elation, and supreme joy radiated from her looks.

Her gestures, her movements, her expressive looks, all suited to the content of the padam, gave to her dance performance uniqueness and distinction.

Vijayaraghava with ladies on either side was watching the abhinaya very closely with a feeling of joy and satisfaction. He felt that Mohanangi justified her position as the disciple of Varadaiah. Just then there was a flutter and they saw Varadaiah entering the court. The king was all smiles on seeing him, and he received him with warmth and affection. Varadaiah saw Mohanangi and was pleasantly surprised. It was a glorious moment for both of them. Mohanangi looked at Varadaiah lovingly, and joy radiated from one face to the other. With tenderness, Varadaiah asked,

'Mohana when did you come? How is Muvva Gopala?'

Mohanangi was so full of excitement that she could not utter a single word for a while. then she said,

'I came to Thanjavur three months ago. I reached Kanchi just when you left that place. And I again missed you in Thanjavur. By Muvva Gopala's grace I have seen you at last, and my dream is fulfilled.'

Tears of joy welled forth, and Mohanangi was excited and emotional. Varadaiah gently touched her hand to assure her of his affection for her. She was given a seat in the court. Vijayaraghava made kind enquiries about Varadaiah's visit to Rameswaram and other places of interest. Varadaiah told the king that all was well and that he spent a fruitful time in Rameswaram. The king then looked at the court poets.

Each one saw his misery reflected in the face of the other. All of them were confused, and Varadaiah said,

'O king, the court poets, illustrious as they are, and scholars of repute as they happen to be, would have easily solved the problem by now. I don't think it is difficult for them to complete it.'

The king looked at the court poets in expectation. None ventured to say anything. Finally Somayaji said,

'We have not been able to complete the padam even though we have tried our best to imagine the type of Nayika presented in the padam. We have consulted Rangajamma too hoping that a woman's mind can easily be understood by a woman, but all to no purpose. We now request Varadaiah to complete the padam.'

Varadaiah smiled. He saw the sense of defeat writ large on their faces.

'It is a simple one,' he said.

'The woman after having longed for Muvva Gopala finally gets reconciled to her state. She feels that her first contact with Muvva Gopala is itself enough.'

Then he added,

'Her love for Muvva Gopala is devotional and therefore is different from that of the love other women have for their lovers. There is no point in expecting physical love from Him as others would, from their lovers.'

The court poets were very much surprised. It was very simple, yet it conveyed a deeper meaning. The devotional love was contrasted with physical love and the preference for the former was indicated. They were all praise for Varadaiah. The king said,

'Varadaiah, you are a Kshetrajna. You have attained the sum total of wisdom. You have established the right relationship with God. You are one of the blessed few, knowing everything, seeing everything perfectly. You have the bliss of life, the heavenly joy, the spiritual enlightenment whereby you have annihilated the lower self in you. You have attained divinity. The court cannot fittingly honour you for you are above all these things.'

'Yes, Varadaiah is Kshetrajna.'

The court poets in unison said,

'He is also Kshetrayya for he has visited innumerable holy places. One life is not enough to visit all these places but he has done it through Muvva Gopala's grace', the king said.

The court was full of praise for Kshetrajna. Somayaji and the other poets of the court felt sorry for what they had said earlier about Varadaiah's padams. Mohanangi was the happiest one. She was thrilled. Rangajamma came forward and said,

'O king, present this maiden to Varadaiah. That is the honour we can do to him today. She is a fitting companion to him, and together they bring glory to Muvva Gopala. Our court will have the honour of bringing them together on an auspicious occasion like

this.'

Mohanangi was introduced to the king and she bowed to him. She was presented by him to Varadaiah. In honour of Varadaiah's visit and as a token of her gratitude for the king and Rangajamma, Mohanangi danced one more padam of Varadaiah. That was her grand performance. Varadaiah looked at her in bewilderment. Sweet reminiscences of her dance in the temple in Muvva came back to him. He was moved visibly, he felt proud of Mohanangi and her devotion for him. The whole court was full of happiness. The court poets felt relaxed and enjoyed the whole show. The torture for them was over, so they were in a mood to share the general feeling of supreme joy and satisfaction spread all over the court.

Varadaiah spent a few days more in the Thanjavur court. He informed the king of his desire to leave the court.

'Varadaiah why do you want to go away? You have been happy with us, and now that Mohanangi also is here, you both can be an ornament to the court.'

'I am indeed grateful to you for the sentiments you have expressed. But I think I should go. Any time you want me I shall come back. For the present I wish to go.'

'If you feel that way we can't force you to stay, but if by any chance you change your mind you are welcome to be with us.'

'More than three years ago I left Muvva. I want



to go back to Muvva Gopala.'

'Our association with you has been a pleasant one. I hope you'll think of our court kindly.'

'Definitely. There is no doubt about it. I have had the best of time in your court, and I have found in you a great patron of learning. Your large-heartedness brings poets and musicians to your court. You are yourself a scholar. So we feel honoured in your company.'

'Varadaiah, I am happy to hear such warm words from you. Perhaps we have been related to each other in our previous lives, for I have always treated you as my friend. Do you believe in rebirth?'

'Yes, I do. Very often we take a fancy for almost strangers and we feel as though we have known them for years and years. All these relationships, I think, are of our past lives coming into the present life. Or else how can we explain the strange happenings in life?'

'I am glad you agree with me in this respect. Kshetrajna, you may not be reborn as you are one of the blessed ones.'

Varadaiah kept quiet. The king felt that there should be a grand function to bid farewell to Varadaiah. So that evening the court took a festive look. The court was packed to the full. Special lighting arrangements were made. Festoons were there all over the court. Roses and jasmynes, scented water, sandal paste were used liberally in the court. Women with all their finery graced the court. Rangajamma

gave a dance recital followed by the dance programme by Mohanangi. Both of them exhibited their artistic excellence in dancing. It was a rich experience for all of them to witness the superb dancing of the two.

As the dance programme came to a close, Somayaji stood up and said,

'We honour Kshetrajna for his excellent padams. They are unique in their mellifluousness and sweet grace. Muvva Gopala is celebrated through his padams. Posterity will always remember Muvva Gopala through Kshetrajna's padams.'

'Kshetrajna is full of devotional love for Muvva Gopala. It is something to be emulated. Like Annamacharya and Jayadeva, Kshetrajna has glorified his supreme deity through the medium of Srīngara. The concept of bhakti especially through the image of bride and bridegroom has received the greatest fillip through Kshetrajna's padams. It has been our good fortune to have this illustrious poet-musician with us in the court for sometime.'

Kalakavi paid his tribute to Kshetrajna. Somayaji and Kalakavi were in fact the two poets who questioned the quality of the padams. They were all praise for Kshetrajna. Krishnaji referred to the style of the padams.

'Kshetrajna's padams are lucid and simple. They have ease, felicity and richness with a nearness to the spoken language. Kshetrajna has introduced a new style suited to the genre, the padam.'

Rangajamma referred to the unique way in which

Nayikas were presented in the padams. She said,

'As we see Kshetrajna's padams set to dance we feel as though we are seeing the Nayikas in flesh and blood. The padams present human nature in a realistic manner. More than this they are excellent for dance.'

Vijayaraghava was immensely pleased with the court. He agreed with everything that was said about Kshetrajna's padams. The assessment was just and right, he thought.

'Kshetrajna is a scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu. He is well versed in **Natya** and **Alamkara** Sastras. He is a musician. His padams are full of spontaneity and imagination. Without any effort he composes the padams and they come to him naturally as though Muvva Gopala is dictating them on his behalf. As a man he is lovable, as a scholar he is eminent. Our court and the court poets especially have benefited a lot from his stay. We miss him, yet we hope he will come back to us after some time.'

The king summed up the contribution of Kshetrajna to the court. He presented him with shawls and honoured him in the most lavish manner. Kshetrayya was overwhelmed with all that warmth and affection shown to him that evening.

'O king, I am grateful to you for all that is said about me this evening. My stay in this court has been a rich and rewarding experience for me. I visited Golconda and Madurai before I came here. Even though those courts also were very kind to me, I felt

more at home in this court. Here the king himself is a scholar, so I have been almost a friend to the king. I have endeared myself to him and my style of writing with Sringara as the dominant theme has appealed to him tremendously. We both agree that the higher plane of devotional love is achieved only through physical love. We take it as a gradational process, we also realise that our friendships and associations with men and women are mostly based on our relationships of the past lives. I have a feeling that Vijayaraghava is Lord Krishna incarnate.'

This pleased the king and the courtiers immensely for that was the popular belief of the court. Kshetrayya expressed his pleasure in receiving eulogies from the court poets. It gave him a moment of elation for his padams were accepted by them. His dream of glorifying Muvva Gopala through his padams had been realised in a large measure. He thanked all of them profusely and he left the court with Mohanangi in a mood of fulfilment. It was a triumphant hour for him.

: 5 :

Varadaiah took leave of the Thanjavur court and proceeded to Kanchi. Mohanangi and her brother Ramana followed him to Kanchi. The news was soon spread that Varadaiah had come back to Kanchi. The temple priests heard a lot about Varadaiah and his

stay in Thanjavur court. They also knew that Varadaiah was styled Kshetrajna. As Varadaiah approached the Varadarajaswamy temple in Kanchi the priests received him with temple honours. It was a grand occasion for them. Varadaiah sang in praise of Varadarajaswamy. The head priest Ramanujacharya followed Varadaiah immediately after the darshan. They sat in front of the temple. Acharya reverently addressed him,

'Kshetrajna, you have been away in the Thanjavur court and you have received the greatest honour from Vijayaraghava. We have heard all about your success in your conflict with the court poets. Yet with all this glory that has come to you, very deservedly, there is no change in you. You are still the same person, dedicated to the service of Muvva Gopala.'

'Why should I change? All that glorification is not for me. It is for Muvva Gopala. It is only with His blessings that I compose padams. So I owe everything to Him. My job is only to sing in praise of Him and when He wills it, I drop like a fruit, to be reclaimed by Him.'

'Kshetrajna, all that is true, but it is difficult to be detached. Naturally we get involved in worldly things and take them as our own creations. The more we go up in life the greater is our consciousness that we are the doers. But it looks as though we are the actors on the stage. We get as much involved as the actor on the stage mistaking our acting for real experience.'

'That's true, that is the illusion we create for ourselves. It is convenient and necessary also, or else we lose the zest for life. Mere ascetic faith is negative. Participation in worldly pleasures and ambition to achieve something meritorious either for ourselves or for the country, all these are positive. No one disputes that. Only we should see that we do not become slaves to our ambitions. We have to be Karma Yogis but we cannot stress too much the reward that has to come to us. We must leave it to God.'

'That's what the Gita says. We must believe in Nishkama karma. But don't you think that it is difficult to put it in practice?'

'Apparently it looks difficult. Human beings, as we are, we long for fruits. All our deeds are motivated by selfish desires. Even the love we show to others is selfish because we expect something in return. That is the worldly way. But man has to come out of that self-centredness. He has to develop interests that keep him busy in the service of others, or in the devotion to God. That's why from time to time God sends His saints and sages into this world so that they may remind human beings of the ultimate reality and of the futility of earthly longings.'

'Kshetrajna, we feel you are one of the blessed ones. If court favours and honours do not move you then you have attained jnana, wisdom. What more do you want? Nothing, I suppose.'

'Yes, nothing. Only I wait for the god-given moment when I surrender my mortal coil and become

one with Muvva Gopala. In all our lives there is a sacred moment when the decision is made for us by the great God above. That determines our fate. We have to submit ourselves to the will of God. It is the experience of most of us.'

The priest smiled. He thought that Kshetrajna was generalising from his own experience. The god-given moment might come to Kshetrajna, but how could it come to others? As the priest of the temple he had been there for the last two decades. Did it ever occur to him that Varadarajaswamy was talking to him or giving him instructions to do particular things? Never, he said to himself. He heard that the temple bells would give messages. Even that did not happen in his case. He heard the bells mostly mechanically. They had no special appeal to him. On the other hand sometimes when he was in a hurry, they seemed to be too prolonged and too dull also. So Kshetrajna's conviction that in everybody's life there would be a moment of great significance did not have much of validity for him. So he argued,

'Kshetrajna, I think you are referring to a few blessed ones like you when you say that there is a great decisive moment in everybody's life. First of all our lives are so dull and monotonous that there is no difference between one day and another. They all seem to be the same.'

'Acharya, don't you get any thrill on certain days while worshipping Varadarajaswamy? Don't you feel that He is blessing you? Doesn't He communicate

any message to you?’

The priest smiled again. He thought that the whole trouble with the saints and prophets was that they would expect others to have their experience. Buddha tried to communicate his personal spiritual experience to others, but his experience was his. It could not be translated into an experience that might be true of all others in the world. Even if others sat under Bodhi trees for ages and ages nothing could have happened to them. Only they might have heard the birds’ notes, sometimes melodious, but often irritating. The revelation that came to Buddha might come to others only once in a while, the priest thought. Similarly Kshetrajna might have the revelation, but that did not mean that Gopala and Varadaraja would appear before their devotees and decide for them on their behalf. The priest no doubt had great respect for Kshetrajna, but he could not agree with him in all that he professed to be true. So he added,

‘Kshetrajna, I respect you and I love your padams, but I don’t think I can agree with you in your views. Perhaps I have seen only the sordidness of life with much of poverty all the time. Most of us experience only misery. Even though we pray to God we do not seem to be getting any answer. That’s the lot of most of us.’

Kshetrajna was silent for a moment. He was pained to hear that there was so much misery and distress in the world. Especially when the priest said it, he was taken aback.



'Acharya, I thought you were blessed. You have the rare distinction of serving the Lord.'

'True. I also feel honoured that way. In my previous life I must have been the most faithful servant of the Lord. So I serve Him again.'

'That's good, what else do you want? Is it not a privilege to serve God?'

'Yes. I agree, but if that service keeps us always in need we can't do dedicated work. I hope that God will be kind to me one day.'

'I am sure He will. Perhaps He is testing you. You have to accept life with all its joys and sorrows, with faith in God.'

'Kshetrajna, I agree with you that life has to be accepted with all its trials and tribulations.'

By the time they finished talking, the temple bells were ringing and the last ritual for the night was going on in the temple.

'Kshetrajna, listen to those bells. They seem to be musical tonight. Perhaps it is because of your visit. Varadarajaswamy is pleased with the service.'

Kshetrajna smiled understandingly.

'Acharya, the bells are musical not because of me but because of some awareness of spiritual enlightenment that has come to you. You are on the upward path. Pursue it and God will bless you.'

'I am thankful to you Kshetrajna for all that you have said, I shall remember every word you have said. I feel enlightened by your talk.'

The priest went back to the temple and Vara-

daiah slowly walked to his place of residence. Mohanangi was waiting for him.

'How is everything in the temple? Varada, have you composed any song on Varadarajaswamy?'

'Yes, I have. More than that I have had a long talk with the head priest, Acharya. He posed so many questions to me and I tried to answer them to the best of my ability.'

'Is he convinced of your arguments?'

'He was very hesitant, but finally he seemed to be chastened.'

'I am glad he is in agreement with you. I like him very much.'

'But the amazing thing about him is that he is not completely involved and dedicated in his worship of Varadarajaswamy.'

'Varada, you cannot understand the ordinary life led by the priests. They are like others exposed to misery and suffering and they have to support their families. Luckily there is no such obligation for you. So you cannot enter that world.'

'As if you can enter, tell me what misery you have experienced in life.'

'The greatest misery of being separated from my lord Varada, and to miss him in Kanchi and then in Tanjore, what more misery is needed?'

Mohanangi was almost in tears. Varadaiah smiled.

'All that is over. Mohana, by Muvva Gopala's grace you are with me. Why do you bother about the

past? Forget all about it.'

'How can I forget all about that misery so easily? Varada, you are different. Your attitude towards life and your mission in life are totally different from those of others. In fact most men may not have any mission at all. They lead a sheepish life and death claims them. That's all.'

'I think I should inculcate the spirit of bhakti in everyone. Those who pray to God can never be abandoned by Him.'

'I hope you are not trying to run away from me on the pretext of preaching Gopala's message,' Mohana said smilingly.

'O no, I am not suggesting that at all. As I see men and women in suffering, in misery, I feel like spreading the message of Muvva Gopala, of loving God and loving fellow beings.'

Mohana looked at him endearingly. Varada had gone a long way in the journey of life. There was a world of difference between the Varada that made love to her and the present one who was with her but appeared to be far off from her. She had to adjust herself to the new way of life, of companionship with Varada. She was willing to serve him and be with him in his 'worship of Gopala. She made no claims on him, but served him with singular devotion. Varada was still fond of her but in a detached way. She simply adored him. The very ground he trod was holy to her. Her love for him now bordered on worship.

Varadaiah and Mohana spent a month in Kanchi visiting all temples including the Buddhist stupa. They were treated with respect. The priests requested Mohanangi to give a dance recital. A huge pandal was erected in the temple precincts and it was decorated tastefully. It was a grand occasion. Men and women gathered in the pandal in their best attires. The elders of the town took full responsibility for organising the programme and for maintaining orderliness among the assembled. Varadaiah was treated as the chief guest. He sang the favourite songs composed in praise of Varadarajaswamy. Mohanangi danced with understanding and appreciation of the padams. Her nymph like movements, the sweet bells' jingling sounds and her fine gestures, all kept the audience thrilled. There was no need for the elders to supervise and conduct the show. The artistic dancing, the graceful figure of Mohanangi, the rich musical voice of Varadaiah wafted the audience aloft and they floated on the wings of ecstasy. Especially the song that Varadaiah composed earlier on seeing the goddess of the temple leaving the Lord in the early morning was received with tremendous ovation as Mohanangi danced displaying the posture in which the lady left the kelikamandiram. The padam had all that inspirational touch when Varadaiah first composed, and when it was danced it became life like and picturesque. For one moment Mohanangi forgot that she was only dancing. She seemed to be the goddess herself. Varadaiah was visibly moved when he saw his own

creation, his padam, given a life and substance by Mohanangi's dance. He looked forward to the day when she would render all his songs realistically and vividly through her dance performances. She understood his padams completely, she was his true disciple, his companion, his devoted lady. The elders of the town, the priests of the temple with folded hands requested Varadaiah:

'Kshetrajna, you should come to Kanchi again and give us the pleasure of your company. We feel honoured by your visit and we all pray to Varadarajaswamy that He may bring you back to Kanchi. We are thankful to you, Mohanangi, for the excellent dance performance you have given.'

Varadaiah acknowledged their greetings and the next morning he left Kanchi for Golconda. He wanted to fulfil the promise he had given earlier to the Nawab. Mohanangi and her brother accompanied Varadaiah to Golconda.

Varadaiah's reputation as the famous padam composer and as Kshetrajna reached the Golconda court. The Nawab was anxious to have him back in his court. The court of Abdulla Kutub Shah who ruled Golconda at that time was noted for its patronage of fine arts, music and dance. Philosophical discussions, religious discourses were also encouraged. Siddhendra Yogi of Kuchipudi was one of the illustrious persons adorning the court at that time. Through him Kuchipudi was gifted by the Nawab to the Bhagavatas of that village noted for their unique style of

dancing. The Golconda court also had vaggeyakaras and the high officials of the court wanted Kshetrajna to stay in the court. That was also the time when Panditrarayalu of **Rasagangadharam** fame was very much honoured at the Moghul court. So the Golconda court very much wanted a renowned poet like Kshetrajna to be the poet-laureate. The reception given to Kshetrajna by the Nawab was splendid. The court was usually given to gaiety, pomp and show. All that ceremony was doubled on the occasion of Kshetrajna's visit to the court. Kshetrajna was allotted a special place by the side of the Nawab and the whole court stood up as Kshetrajna moved to his seat. They kept standing until he was seated as a mark of respect for him. The Nawab received him warmly with a broad smile.

'Kshetrajna, we are glad to have you back with us. You have kept up your promise to visit Golconda. I think five years have passed now since you left. Our court is the same but you have acquired fame and name as Kshetrajna. We are happy about it', the Nawab said.

'I am glad to be back in this court. I have been in Madurai and Tanjore. I have seen quite a few temples in the South. I have yet to visit a few holy places before I go back to Muvva Gopala.'

'So you still want to go back. Have not the courts given you anything sustaining so that you may stay there as one of its much venerated poets?'

'No doubt the courts have honoured me. But my

mission is different. I don't want to belong to any court, I would like to move about so that Muvva Gopala is known all over the country.'

'Now that you have seen much of the other courts you may as well stay with us. I think, this is the general view of the whole court.'

The Nawab looked at the officials and they nodded significantly. Kshetrajna was happy to hear those words, all the same he knew full well that he had to disappoint the Nawab.

'Anyway I am not leaving the court in a hurry. I shall stay here as long as Muvva Gopala wants me to be here.'

The Nawab laughed.

'Don't say all that to me. If it comes to that, how can Muvva Gopala permit you to be in a Nawab's court? So it is your own creation. If you feel like staying on, you can, you will, I hope.'

'As for Muvva Gopala's permission, yes, I get it from him. Your court is quite known for its catholicity of outlook. You are a great patron of letters, music and dance.'

The Nawab was pleased with his reply. He kept quiet. Then it was time for the dance recital. The dancer came on the stage. The musicians were ready. The dance teacher was singing. The pleasant sound of the bells was heard. Kamala bowed to her teacher, to the Nawab and the dance was on. She saw Kshetrajna. Old memories came to her. She felt that she should not leave him this time. She was the best

dancer of the court and she was very much liked by the Nawab. She did the Kuchipudi style of dancing. There was grace and levelness in her dance, and the court was full of applause for her. Then she danced the padam of Kshetrajna mostly to please him. It was one of the famous padams of Kshetrajna and referred to the change in Muvva Gopala. Indirectly she thought she could refer to Kshetrajna and suggest that there could be a change in him also. He watched her, the padam was done well. But he felt that Kamala was trying to overdo the padam by getting too emotionally involved. He recognised her as the woman whom he had refused earlier. He realized that he ought to be careful for it looked as though she was still fond of him. Especially now that Mohanangi was with him he thought he should be more careful. Or else there could be unnecessary complications in his relationship with Mohanangi.

The dance was over. Kamala cast endearing looks at Kshetrajna, but he was determined not to encourage her. The Nawab asked him,

'How is the dance performance? Do you like it? Your own padam is danced. You see how fond of you we are in this court. Everyone likes you. The officials, the poets, the musicians, all like you.'

'I realise that, and I am grateful to you for your kindness.'

Then all of a sudden the Nawab had an eccentric idea. He called Tulasi Murthi, one of the vaggeyakaras in the court and said,



'Murthi, how fast can you compose songs? Kshetrajna sings spontaneously and all his padams are melodious. We would like to have padams from you also.'

'Kshetrajna is gifted. He has Muvva Gopala to inspire him.' Murthi modestly said.

'Yes all poets are inspired. Or else they cannot write poetry. They will write prose. Or perhaps some poets are thrilled by the intoxication of wine and women.'

'I have none of these inspirational touches. My poetry is based on my scholarship. You have graciously accepted me as the best poet of the court. I live by the very kindness you extend to me.'

'All that is true. But times change and we change with the times. The court poets at Thanjavur have questioned the merit of Kshetrajna's padams for he has set a new style, perhaps an unconventional one. But they could not complete the padam given by Kshetrajna. I think it will be better for the poets of our court to emulate the example of Kshetrajna's padams.'

'I don't think it is so easy as all that.'

Murthi murmured. The Nawab felt like teasing Murthi because at every stage he was retreating. He was not coming forward to assert boldly his own style of writing. To a large extent he was yielding. The Nawab did not very much appreciate Murthi's acceptance of a passive role. He wanted him to be active, dynamic and aggressive.

'All right if you cannot compose padams and if the other poets also cannot manage to do so, we pose

a challenge to Kshetrajna. You'll see how gladly he will accept it.'

The Nawab turned to Kshetrajna and sportively said,

'Kshetrajna, we know your greatness. You are unrivalled as a vaggeyakara. Still I would like to put you to a test. You have to compose 1500 padams in 40 days. We'll honour you in a fitting way if you can do this on time. It is not as though I want to test you or embarrass you. We are too small to expose you to any test. However, I do this only to spur our court poets to activity. They should learn a lesson from you. That's my idea in assigning this task to you. I hope Muvva Gopala will help you.'

Kshetrajna understood the subtle undertones in the last line, yet he was not unnerved. Very boldly he said, he would accept the challenge.

'Yes, I shall compose the songs within that time. In other words you want me to be in the court at least for those forty days. By Muvva Gopala's grace I think I shall succeed.'

'That's the spirit you should have, Murthi,' the Nawab commented.

That night Tulasi Murthi could not sleep. He felt slighted in the presence of all those assembled in the court. Even though Kshetrajna was no rival to him, yet his visit looked like an unnecessary intrusion. Murthi would have gone on peacefully with his eulogistic poems addressed to the Nawab. But all that was changed with the coming of Kshetrajna to the

court. Suddenly it occurred to him that he should at least prevent Kshetrappa from completing the work on time. He also remembered that in the past Kamala made advances to Kshetrappa and that he did not respond to her importunities. He thought he could make a common cause with her and somehow make it impossible for Kshetrappa to compose the padams within the forty days allotted to him.

The next morning Murthi approached Kamala. She received him courteously wondering why he should come to her.

'Murthi, I feel honoured by your visit. You have given me a pleasant surprise. What brings you here? Can I be of any service to you?'

'Yes I need your help. You know Kshetrappa's visit is not a blessing to us. The Nawab seems to be all praise for Kshetrappa forgetting all our loyal service to him. It looks as though the new-fangled writings of Kshetrappa appeal to the Nawab more than our solid, scholarly writings.'

'All that is true, but what can we do to make the Nawab realise that he is overestimating the capabilities of Kshetrappa?'

'That's exactly the matter I would like to discuss with you. Supposing you keep Kshetrappa diverted with your wonderful charm he may not concentrate on his padams and fail to honour his word. That will put him to shame and the Nawab will cold shoulder him. I also know that Kshetrappa has not been very fair to you. So don't you think, we should pay him back in

the same coin?

Kamala was pleased with the idea. In fact she was waiting for an opportunity to get at Kshetrayya. She found that with the assistance of Murthi she would be able to succeed in her plans.

'Yes. I can give a love potion to Kshetrayya and that will make him a slave to me. I shall manage to get him under my thumb. I shall thereby be of help to you, but I will also have my desire fulfilled. It will be wonderful to see Kshetrayya on his knees in my house.'

Murthi put money in Kamala's hands. She took it even though she pretended to be averse to such mercenary transactions.

'Murthi, I have accepted to help you because I respect you, not for the sake of money. You should not have given me money. It looks like a bribe.'

'O no, not a bribe. On the other hand it's only an expression of gratitude to you. You may need that money in the process of seducing Kshetrayya.'

'Let us see what happens. I shall invite Kshetrayya one evening and give him love potion mixed with the drink I prepare for him.'

'That's an excellent idea. Go ahead. All luck to you. Mind you, the amount I have given to you today is not the final settlement. I shall see you later.'

Murthi left Kamala, and she started scheming. She longed for Kshetrayya. He was the only person who could run away from her snares. So she took it as a challenge to subdue him and overpower him with

her blandishments.

Two days later the Nawab sent word to Kshetrayya asking him to see him. Kshetrayya went to the Nawab. He found him in a cheerful mood and the Nawab welcomed Kshetrayya quite warmly.

'How are you Kshetrayya? How is the work going on?'

'I have not yet started. I shall compose the padams a little later. I have to wait for the auspicious moment.'

'How do you know the auspicious moment? Do you know astrology also?'

Kshetrayya smiled.

'I don't know astrology, I haven't studied it. No doubt I have read *Alankara Sastra* and *Natya Sastra*.'

'That we know. Your padams reveal that knowledge. But do you believe in predestination?'

'I can't say that I believe in it definitely, yet we have to accept some planetary influence on us. Or else how can we account for the meteoric rise in the case of some persons and dismal fall in the lives of others? Even in one's own life there are periods when one feels that he is on top of the world and then he falls. Very often it looks as though he is not responsible either for his phenomenal rise or for his abysmal fall.'

'Then will it mean that man has no will of his own and that he simply subordinates himself to the unseen forces in the world?'

The Nawab was very much interested in discussing

problems of this type. The enigma of life often puzzled him. He could not altogether put faith in his individual effort, nor could he fully rely on fate or blind chance. Whenever his mind was free from political pressures he was in the habit of talking to learned men of the court on these philosophical aspects of life. Kshetrayya understood the mind of the Nawab.

'To a large extent we depend on our own will, on our own individual efforts. But we have to accept the fact that in some form Karma also rules our life. While Karma may not be completely binding on us, we cannot altogether dismiss it as non-existent. We have to give some consideration for things predestined for us.'

'So you wish to give equal importance to our free will and to the predetermined forces that shape our lives.'

'I am inclined to give more importance to our individual will power, but I also feel that the final stage in man's life is surrender to the will of God. We may be doing things on our own and go by our judgment, but there comes a time when we accept our limitations and become wiser in leaning on God's will.'

'Kshetrayya, I don't quite understand you at this stage. Please explain what you have in mind.'

'What I mean is this. We put in our individual effort, we may even feel proud of our worldly gains and success. In other words we develop our ego, we feel we are the lords supreme. We get more and more involved in worldly entanglements. All this is to be

credited to our will power, our ambition and our undaunted spirit. But this should not blind us to the fact that we owe all this in a large measure to the grace of God. Then there should be withdrawal from the egotistic sense and we should develop an awareness of our obligation to God. Our involvement should lead us to non-involvement and detachment, all the time with faith in God.'

'This is slightly clear. I now follow your argument. While on one hand you appreciate the human effort and endeavour to achieve something in life you also seem to be suggesting that it should not be a surrender to worldly objects. We must rise above this worldliness and develop other worldliness through the worship of God.'

'Yes, that's what I mean.'

'Kshetranya I put one personal question to you. Did Muvva Gopala reveal himself to you?'

'Yes, I had a revelation. I felt I saw Muvva Gopala talking to me and from that time onwards I had dedicated myself to the service of God. Muvva Gopala is everything to me.'

'I know, I understand your love for Gopala. But does He appear before you now also?'

'Not necessarily, but intuitively I feel what Gopala may tell me, and I also know that He will protect me from all harm. When my time is up He will again give darshan to me.'

'Anyway who will try to do any harm to you? You are a blessed person. I am sure that everyone

loves and respects you especially in our court. Please do write a few padams about me so that I may always remember you as one who is loved by me.'

'Will it mean that you will not remember me if I do not write padams on you?'

Kshetrayya smiled and the Nawab laughed boisterously.

'You are very clever Kshetrayya. But you know even God wants that we should offer Him at least flowers. It only shows that you love Him.'

'Yes, I know. I was only amused when you asked me for padams. I myself would have done it, but now that you have asked me I shall definitely obey your order.'

'It's not an order, it's a request.'

'A request from a king is as good as an order.'

The Nawab laughed again. Kshetrayya took leave of him. He was in a happy, relaxed mood. He was grateful to Muvva Gopala for making his mission easier for the Nawab himself showed the highest regard and affection for Kshetrayya. The cosmic force of love seemed to be operating successfully in the world. Kshetrayya was in a mood to love everyone. That was the expansive nature that dominated in him at that time.

Kamala was patiently waiting for Kshetrayya while he was talking to the Nawab. The moment he came out she accosted him.

'Kshetrayya, you seem to be coming from the Nawab. I should say it is a rare honour done to you.



He never calls any of the court poets for a personal talk. So we all feel happy about the Nawab's love for you.'

'Yes, he has been very kind to me. No doubt he has put searching questions to me.'

'And I am sure you would have answered them successfully. These questions are no problem for a person like you. It is not for nothing that you are called Kshetraja.'

'Of course I have done my best in satisfying the curiosity of the Nawab.'

By then they reached Kamala's house, she invited Kshetranya to step in. He could not refuse the invitation, especially in that mood of expanding love on all persons and objects in the world. So he entered Kamala's house. The house looked fine, everything was arranged neatly.

'Kshetranya, I am glad you have come. I shall get you a drink; lemon or orange juice, which one do you prefer?'

'In fact I don't want anything. I have to go now.'

Kshetranya tried to get up. But Kamala looked at him pleadingly and asked him to stay on for some time and accept her hospitality. He saw no harm in it, so he yielded. She went inside and mixed the love potion in the orange juice. She prepared a tasteful drink and brought it to him. He took it unsuspectingly.

'The drink seems to be very tasty.'

'Yes, I have put all my love for you in that drink.'

So naturally it will be tasteful. Kshetrayya, why don't you love me?'

'I love everybody. That is the message of Gopala.'

'But Gopala loves many women. You don't love even one woman. How can you call yourself the devotee of Gopala? If you are the true bhakta you must imitate everything your teacher does. You must emulate his example.'

Kshetrayya thought that there was some meaning in what she was saying. Kamala observed that Kshetrayya was not contradicting her statement. So she added,

'Except Narada, I think most of the sages have led domestic lives. There must be something wrong with Narada or else he too would have married. Life is incomplete if it does not taste the pleasures of physical love.'

Kamala came nearer to him. He did not move away from her, nor did he try to avoid her. He was passive. He felt there was some change in him. He asked himself why he should not get away from that house. Yet he had no will of his own. She looked at him lovingly, she used all her seductive charm and for one moment Kshetrayya felt that she was exceedingly beautiful. She came almost close to him. Then he realised he ought to go away. Even then it took some time for him to leave her. She understood the game. She wanted to keep him longing for her. She did not like to yield to him immediately. So she herself took the initiative in sending him away.

'Kshetrayya, I am glad that you have spent some time with me. I hope to be acquainted with you in a more intimate way in course of time.'

Kshetrayya quietly walked out. He never expected that Kamala would behave like that but he did not understand why he tamely endured all that coquetry from her. He wondered what had come over him and he did not know why he allowed Kamala to make amorous approaches to him. He thought he should never go that way and he wanted to avoid her completely.

For two days Kshetrayya tried his best not to go to the court. Kamala wanted to leave him alone for sometime so that he would long for her desperately. She knew that the love potion would work on him and he would need her. She tried it on others before and they all surrendered themselves to her. On the evening of the third day Kshetrayya wanted to see Kamala. The desire became oppressive. Mohanangi watched him carefully and she realised that something troubled Kshetrayya.

'Varada, you don't seem to be all right. Something is worrying you. Do you think that you cannot write the padams in forty days? It does not really matter. You are not anxious to be a court poet. So you may leave the court any time you like and go away.'

'That's true. I am not worried about that. For a person like me honours of the court do not mean much.'

'Then what troubles you? You must tell me.'

'Mohana, don't get over-anxious about me. I am all right.'

'Varada, I have a right to be interested in you. I love you to madness. Don't you realise that I live by your looks?'

'I know, but somehow this atmosphere does not suit me. I think.'

'Then let us go away.'

'How can we go away after having accepted the task to write padams? I'll just go out for a walk. I will come soon.'

Kshetrayya walked out abruptly. It looked as though automatically he was walking towards Kamala's house. She was in the house. That evening she was free. In fact she was expecting Kshetrayya to come to her house. She was rather surprised that he did not turn up as yet. The moment she saw Kshetrayya she welcomed him very affectionately.

'I am glad you have come. Two days I have spent miserably looking for you. Time has been hanging heavily with me. You know how lovers feel. You have described all those feelings in your padams.'

'I have just been lazy. I should have seen you earlier. I am sorry if I have given you anxious time.'

'It's all over. Now that you are here I feel very happy. Kshetrayya, I have seen a woman with you. she is young and beautiful. I hope you are not fond of her.'

'Don't be jealous, she is my disciple. She is very fond of me but she is in no way your rival. You are

unique in your beauty. You are refined and urbane, whereas she is simple and naive. So there is no comparison between you and Mohanangi, my disciple.'

'Why do you want a disciple when I am here to take care of you? I will give you all the comforts of life, I will dance your padams and make you feel happy.'

Kamala took his hand and promised that she would be faithful to him. He allowed himself to be touched by her. Then she brought him some fruits. She requested him to sing. He sang one of the padams and she danced. He watched her graceful form and was very much pleased with her amiable looks. He looked at her longingly. Kamala understood that the love potion worked on him. Still she wanted to keep him waiting for her. She took some pleasure in realising that at last she could subdue Kshetrayya.

The moment Kshetrayya stepped out Mohanangi followed him. She suspected that all was not well with him. She had her own fears and doubts. She even felt that some woman of the court might have tempted him. She watched him from some distance and saw that he entered Kamala's house. She wondered why he visited her house. She went back to her place and waited for Kshetrayya for nearly an hour. He did not come. She became anxious and unnerved. She feared that some harm would come to her lord Varada. She prayed to Muvva Gopala to save Varada from all snares and lures of the court. She never liked the courts. Now she was all the more disinclined towards

court life. So she started for Kamala's house and by the time she reached that place Kamala was dancing and Kshetrappa seemed to be under that spell. She caught hold of Kshetrappa's hand and said,

'Varada why are you here? Let us go home.'

The moment Kshetrappa looked at Mohanangi he came to his senses. He stood up and was about to leave Kamala's house. Kamala stopped him and said,

'Kshetrappa, you cannot leave me like this lonely and unappeased. Don't go and make me miserable.'

Then she turned to Mohanangi and frowned on her.

'Who are you to take away my lover from me? You first leave him alone and go away.'

Mohanangi with her rustic simplicity looked contemptuously at Kamala.

'I have every right to take him away from your clutches. He is my lord, he is everything to me. What do you know of love, pure and simple? You want to tempt him and demoralise him. Perhaps women like you don't have any scruples in asking for fruits that do not belong to them.'

Mohanangi looked furiously at Kamala and took Kshetrappa away from that house. She did not speak anything on the way but she was almost in tears. She could not understand why Kshetrappa had gone to Kamala's house or why he was showing that much interest in her. The moment they reached the house she burst into tears. She could no longer control herself.

'Varada, why have you gone to that house? I never expected you would be interested in any other woman except me. You are unkind to me.'

'Mohana, something has come over me. Three days ago while I was returning from the Nawab Kamala invited me to her house. I saw no harm in that and I went inside. She offered me a drink. From that time onwards there has been some craving in me to be with her. I tried my best not to go that way, but this evening I felt weak and went to her house.'

'She would have given to you some love potion. Or else how could you be interested in her all of a sudden?'

'May be, she may have done that. But why should she do it? She has so many courtiers at her beck and call. Why should she long for me? I don't think I have given her any encouragement.'

'There may be a deeper game in it. We will find out. Luckily for us Siddhendra Yogi is staying at the court now. I shall approach him and ask for his blessing. My brother Ramana will go out and spy over Kamala. He may get us some information.'

Kshetrayya was quiet. He was still in that world of Kamala. That night Mohanangi's brother Ramana roamed about for some time. By the time he was near Kamala's house he saw someone entering her house. He followed him and tried to overhear. He could not hear every word but he could get a general idea of their plot against Kshetrayya.

'Kamala, what has happened?' asked that man.

'I have given him the love potion. He has just been here longing for me. Some woman has taken him away. But he will come back to me. He needs me.'

'That's good,' he said.

Ramana guessed that the newcomer was conspiring against Kshetranya with the help of Kamala. He ran to his sister immediately and informed her of the game played against Kshetranya.

Mohanangi said,

'Varada, my guess is correct. Kamala has given you love potion. She is in league with someone from the court.'

From the description given by Ramana Kshetranya could guess that it must be Tulasi Murthi who was with Kamala. It was also clear to them that it was done to divert his attention from his task of writing the padams on time. Mohanangi decided to consult Siddhendra Yogi the next morning. She went to him with her brother. She bowed to Siddhendra Yogi and said,

'Kindly help Kshetranya. He is given a love potion by Kamala, and Tulasi Murthi seems to be in league with her.'

'It is very surprising that they should stoop to such low levels. It only shows how man can be bestial forgetting all about the higher self in him. The passionate longings and diabolical urges in man develop only the lower self in him. I think Kamala and Murthi have descended to that level. I shall talk to them, but first let me come and see Kshetranya.'

Siddhendra Yogi reached Kshetranya's place and



sprinkled some holy water on him and gave him something to eat, perhaps an antidote to that love potion. Siddhendra Yogi comforted Mohanangi and he said that within a week Kshetrayya would be normal again.

Mohanangi prayed to Muvva Gopala. It took a few weeks before Kshetrayya could work in peace and compose padams. Siddhendra Yogi chastised Kamala and Murthi and both fell prostrate before him and asked for forgiveness.

Of the forty days limit only three days remained. Kshetrayya used to go to the court and talk to the Nawab but he did not as yet feel like composing the padams. One evening the Nawab asked him,

'Kshetrayya, how are you getting on with your work? By now you would have completed most of the padams.'

'I haven't done anything about it. I am yet waiting for Muvva Gopala's blessing.'

'How can a simple blessing help you? You have to put in effort.'

'That's true, but that effort comes to me only when Gopala wills it. He knows when to give that power to me. In fact our desires become stronger in us only when fruition is at hand. So I am waiting for that god-given moment.'

'Supposing it doesn't come in the next three days you are undone.'

'It will not happen that way. Muvva Gopala will bless me.'

The Nawab admired Kshetrayya for his implicit

faith in Muvva Gopala. In another corner Tulasi Murthi was feeling happy that Kshetrayya might fail in accomplishing his deed. Kamala was still looking at Kshetrayya amiably as though she had a hold on him.

Only a day more, still Kshetrayya did not feel like composing the padams. Mohanangi was very much upset. She kept the whole house clean and prayed to Muvva Gopala with great devotion. Kshetrayya too was in deep meditation throughout the day. It looked as though the clouds that hovered over him disappeared. There was a divine glow in him. Mohanangi realised that the time had come for Kshetrayya to finish his work through Muvva Gopala's grace. Kshetrayya had the figure of Muvva Gopala before him. He felt as though he was in communion with him. The whole room appeared to be full of celestial light. He heard the music coming from Gopala's flute. It was ravishing, it caught him in a frenzy. He acquired new powers through Gopala's blessing. He started writing. By early morning the padams were ready.

Kshetrayya was thrilled by the moving breeze. He felt he saw Gopala with his magic flute waving to him and blessing him. For one moment Kshetrayya heard a divine voice, apparently that of Muvva Gopala.

'Varada, very soon you will be with me. Visit some other holy places also and come back to Muvva to be identified with me.'

The voice was musical, more musical than his songs. He opened his eyes. He saw the padams before him, he really did not know whether he wrote them

or Gopala wrote them for him. He saw Mohanangi lying by his side in a blissful sleep. He slowly touched her. Mohanangi woke up and saw to her great amazement the padams completed. She knelt before the figure of Muvva Gopala in prayer. Then she looked at Varada and embraced him. She was very happy. Her joy knew no bounds. Varada was overwhelmed with her affection for him. They felt that they belonged to each other not in this life alone but in their past lives also. Tears of joy came to Mohanangi for Varada was blessed by Gopala.

Varada and Mohanangi prayed to Muvva Gopala and kept all the padams as thanksgiving to the Lord in front of Gopala's figure. It was day-break. At about eight in the morning the Nawab sent his officials to see whether the padams were completed. They were amazed when they saw the padams. They understood that Kshetrayya had the blessing of Muvva Gopala in full measure. They went back and reported the matter to the Nawab. The whole court was agog with the news. It was the greatest sensation for them. Tulasi Murthi now realised how foolish he was in trying to obstruct the work of Kshetrayya.

That evening the Nawab asked his officers to get a grand show arranged in honour of Kshetrayya. The court had a festive look. The Nawab received Kshetrayya with respect and admiration. He said,

'Kshetrayya, our court honours itself by honouring you. Muvva Gopala has blessed you and we are happy that you have accomplished a great deed on time.

You will be remembered for ever as the greatest vaggeyakara that Telugu literature has produced. One peculiarity I have noticed in your padams, whereas many other poets and composers of music use their names in their compositions you only mention Muvva Gopala. You never refer to your own name, or, in the conventional manner of writing, to your family. You seem to be existing without a name and without any family heritage.'

Kshetrayya smiled.

'Yes, I use no name because I take no credit for what I have done. It is only Muvva Gopala's grace that is responsible for these compositions. So I address them to Him, and I have no personality of my own. I serve Muvva Gopala through the padams and all my love for Him is revealed through them.'

'Yes, I know. You have effaced yourself. Your bhakti for Gopala is something unique. Like Jayadeva and other saints you are deeply in love with Gopala. Your padams have a dualistic role. They please all those who look for Sringara at the surface level, for others the padams stand for the spiritual experience of the devotee. The devotee's love for the Lord and all the varied feelings that come to him in pursuit of the devotional love, sometimes in hope and sometimes in despair, are like the alterations of bliss and suffering that may be experienced by a Nayika waiting for her lover. The more we see them in dance form the greater is our fascination for them. What do you say Tulasi Murthi?'

The Nawab had a dig at Murthi.

'O lord, what all you say of Kshetrayya's padams is true. They have the rare distinction of being musical, literary and excellent for dance. Only Kshetrajna can write such padams. At best one's own songs may be musical, but to have all the three characteristics mentioned above and to have the whole human nature presented especially through a simple, lucid style, are gifts not given to ordinary poets. Only the blessed few like Kshetrajna can inspire the literary world with such padams,' said Tulasi Murthi.

'I am glad you say that. Kshetrajna, I have one single doubt. In using Muvva Gopala alone in your padams, not your own name, I feel that perhaps you are Muvva Gopala in disguise.'

Every one laughed, and all were pleased with the tributes paid to Kshetrayya.

'Kshetrajna, you will be remembered by all of us as a poet, a musician, a scholar, as one who has created a new style of writing and as one who has elevated Sringara from the plane of physical love to devotional love. Madhura bhakti in your padams is something unrivalled. Your understanding of music and dance, and your recreation of abhinaya are unparalleled.'

Kshetrayya thanked the Nawab and the whole court for the excellent treatment given to him. The Nawab presented valuable gifts to Kshetrayya. As a token of appreciation of the honour done to him Kshetrayya told them that he would sing some of the newly composed padams and his disciple Mohanangi

would dance. The Nawab was pleased with the proposal and Mohanangi danced in a blissful state to the accompaniment of Kshetrayya's songs. The Nawab was mightily pleased and he said,

'Kshetrajna, you stay with us and Mohanangi will dance your padams. It will be an honour done to us if both of you can stay with us.

Kshetrayya did not wish to say anything. He thanked the Nawab and left the court with Mohanangi. Throughout the function she was watching Kamala. She did not find her to be happy even though she found Tulasi Murthi keeping up a bold front. Kshetrayya and Mohanangi spent a few days more at the court.

Even though Kshetrayya visited several Kshetras, holy places, and was popularly known as Kshetrayya, he still wanted to visit a few holy places. So he told Mohanangi,

'Muhana, you take your brother and go to Muvva. I shall visit a few holy places and then come to Muvva Gopala.'

Mohanangi was sad.

'Varada, why do you want to be separated from me again? I can also follow you to the places you go.'

'I wish to visit a few temples and offer prayers to those deities before I come to Muvva. It will be unnecessary bother for you.'

'Don't I deserve to share with you all that holiness you acquire? I have stood the test of time, I can't be away from you. Just as you have dedicated yourself

to the service of Muvva Gopala I have been devoted to you. You can't question my devotion to you. I have accepted the way of life you have chosen for me with the hope that both of us may attain bliss through the worship of Gopala. That being my faith in you how can you ask me to go away from you?"

"Mohana, I have only suggested that you may go, lest you should be exposed to discomfort. Visiting courts is different from visiting holy places. There may not be any physical facilities in those places. But if you choose to be with me in all my hard and uncomfortable journeys, by all means do so. But let your brother go away and he will be able to give a good account of us in Muvva."

Mohanangi became pleased and happy. She was like a child, she sobbed when Kshetrappa said she should go away. Now that he agreed to take her with him she was all smiles. He liked her for her simplicity and for her innate faith in him. Kshetrappa took leave of the Nawab, and no more courts for him, he said to himself. Mohana's brother was sent to Muvva. He was happy to go away because he did not find much fun in moving about from place to place. He liked a static life.

Kshetrappa and Mohanangi moved on to Bhadrachalam. That was the time when every effort was made to build the temple on the banks of the Godavari. The temple was taking shape. The location was picturesque. One could see the river roll on by the side of the temple. The elevated spot on which

the temple was being built overlooked the river. The whole place was in the forest. Kshetrayya prayed to Lord Rama, and the idealism of the Lord as a model king and as a devoted husband always attracted him. Then they moved on to Srisaïlam. It was a difficult journey through forests and it took them a few days to reach that place. Nearby the river Krishna was flowing. The temple was a huge one. It looked more like a fort. The Andhra kings contributed generously to the temple. It was a Shaivite shrine, but Kshetrayya never bothered about these differences. The Shiva Linga was supposed to be rising from unfathomable regions and Srisaïla Mallikarjuna temple was considered to be one of the most famous temples of Shiva in India. Srisaïlam was one of the holy places, and Kshetrayya was impressed by the grandeur, the loftiness and the serenity of the temple. He composed a few padams addressed to Mallikarjuna Swamy. Kshetrayya and Mohanangi stayed for a few days in Srisaïlam for they were quite tired also.

Kshetrayya took pity on Mohanangi but she showed no trace of tiredness. She felt happy in being with her lord Varada. The companionship was more intoxicating to her than the romantic love-making she had earlier from Varada. This was a new experience for her. To serve Varada and to be by his side all the time was all that she wanted. And both used to sing in praise of Muvva Gopala.

Kshetrayya then moved on to Cuddapah and visited Venkateswara temple. The rocky region ex-



tending from Tirupati to Srisaïlam in the shape of Adishesha with Vishnu temple and Shiva temple on either side revealed to Kshetrayya the oneness of Shiva and Vishnu. The same range of hills extending from Tirupati to Srisaïlam accommodated both Vishnu and Shiva, and both were holy places from time immemorial.

The climb up the seven hills was an arduous task. The whole scenery—the beautiful phenomenon of nature with its sylvan pomp—was spectacular. There was a thrill in climbing the hill and it was a test for the devotees. Kshetrayya wondered why Lord Venkateswara chose to be on top of the hills. The serene, tranquil atmosphere that prevailed near about the temple justified all the hardships that the devotees faced in reaching the summit of the hill. Lord Venkateswara's temple was of particular interest to him. He longed for a visit to this holy shrine for years and years. At last his dream came to be fulfilled. He and Mohanangi reached Tirumala, the holy abode of Lord Venkateswara. As Kshetrayya looked at the idol he was thrilled. The more he looked at it the greater was his longing to stand there and behold the beatific vision. The idol was aesthetically ravishing in its beauty. There was something magnetic about it. He composed a few padams addressed to Lord Venkateswara. No other idol had given him such an exhilarating picture of Beauty, Love and Justice as that of Lord Venkateswara. The standing posture was imperious and dignified and with his eyes covered by

namam, composed of camphor. He seemed to be winking at the little, little imperfections of his devotees. There was blessedness. Next to Gopala, his own dear deity, the one he loved most was Lord Venkateswara. He loved Kanchi Varada too, but there was something mystic and sublime in this temple, Kshetrayya thought.

Kshetrayya saw the figures of Krishna Deva Raya and his two wives at the entrance of the temple. The temple received large, generous gifts and endowments from Krishna Deva Raya, and earlier it received patronage from Chola and Pallava kings also. Krishna Deva Raya was a staunch worshipper of Lord Venkateswara and he considered Him as his patron deity. The temple was noted for its wealth also. It was said that Lord Venkateswara borrowed a huge amount from Kubera, the lord of wealth, for His marriage. The debt would be liquidated only by the end of Kaliyuga and till then His pilgrims would contribute their mite to the Lord.

Kshetrayya was very much in love with the temple and its holiness kept him interested and involved in all the legendary stories of the temple. The very location of the temple surrounded by thick vegetation and tall trees all around simply fascinated him. Kshetrayya and Mohanangi stayed for a month in Tirumala worshipping Lord Venkateswara. He remembered Annamacharya who sang gloriously about Lord Venkateswara. In fact what he did to Muvva Gopala, Annamacharya did for Lord Venkateswara in the form of musical compositions.

Life was peaceful. Mohanangi could see that there was an autumnal mellowness in Kshetrayya. Even though he was not so old, he was full of mellow fruitfulness. He had seen several holy places like Chidambaram, Tiruvalur, Kanchi, Madurai, Tanjore, Srirangam and Rameswaram in the South. In all he visited about twenty holy places. He spent some years in three courts, Golconda, Madurai and Tanjore. His life was rich and full. He sang melodiously in full throated ease wherever he went and his padams were accepted as a solid contribution to literature, music and dance. He felt as though Muvva Gopala was calling him back. For nearly ten years he was away from Muvva.

One evening Kshetrayya told Mohanangi,

'We shall offer worship to Lord Venkateswara and we will leave tomorrow for Muvva.'

Mohanangi jumped at the idea. Her whole face beamed with joy and she had a broad smile.

'Yes, we will go. I long to be back in Muvva amidst the green fields. Last night I dreamt that we were sitting by the side of the tank.'

Kshetrayya was reminded of the night when he and Mohanangi sat by the tank after returning from the temple. For one moment he was silent. He thought of those days, his romantic love for Mohanangi. All that was over. Both of them had gone a long way in their travel. Still the sweetness of those days was lovable.

'Mohana, we may again sit by the side of the tank,

but our minds will be given only to an appreciation of God's ways and to an awareness of objects we see as manifestation of divine beauty and grace.'

'Yes, we have changed, changed a lot over these years. As I look at you I feel that you are a part of the divine essence. So I am hesitant even to touch you.'

'Don't be so simple, Mohanangi. I am a human being and by the grace of Muvva Gopala I have acquired wisdom that makes me realise what I am and what exactly is my relationship with God. That does not mean I am divine.'

To assure her that he is only a human being he held her hand in his and gently touched it. She could see that Kshetrayya was still fond of her. On an auspicious day Kshetrayya and Mohanangi left Tirumala. Before they departed they sought the blessing of Lord Venkateswara. They came down and saw a few temples in Tirupati and started for Muvva.

That was Krishnashthami day. Kshetrayya came back to Muvva. A year ago Ramana, Mohanangi's brother, came back and gave a wonderful report of Kshetrayya's success as a poet-musician and composer of padams. The whole village was full of curiosity to see their Varada, now styled Kshetrarajna and Kshetraraya. The temple was crowded. Men, women and children all gathered together in the temple. The whole temple wore a festive look as it happened to be Lord Krishna's birthday. Varada's mother was alive. She was extremely delighted to see her son

coming back to Muvva after having glorified Muvva Gopala through his padams. She embraced him and blessed him. She took to Mohanangi also kindly. The village elders who once attacked Varadaiah in their ignorance now turned to him with reverence. They were prepared to accept him as the saint of Muvva. Some of them were very old. Still they visited the temple to see Varadaiah. Throughout the day there were bhajans.

In the evening Kshetrayya wanted to sing his famous padams and Mohanangi would dance. Together they wanted to sing and dance to their hearts' content. So from the neighbouring villages too men came in large numbers. Especially admirers of Kshetrayya flocked to the place. Mohana started dancing and on her face there was a dazzling brilliance. She shone like a star. There was a celestial glow on Varada's face. The padams were dedicatory verses and the divine love for Gopala was expressed in a simple but effective manner. Mohana's rendering of the padams was superb. To the onlookers and to the listeners Mohana and Varada looked like Radha and Krishna with all that sublime love.

Suddenly there was a halo around Varada's face. It looked as though he was experiencing the rapture divine. He was still uttering the name of Gopala. Some spirit moved from him and reached Muvva Gopala. He became identified with Gopala. Mohana was dancing as though she was in a trance. Very soon she realised that her Varada had attained the bliss of

life and had become one with Muvva Gopala. The sublime pose of Varada thrilled her. With eyes closed in ecstasy she gently leaned on Varada and looked inseparable from him.

----- : 0 : -----

## GLOSSARY

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Alamkara Sastra  | : science of aesthetics   |
| Gopikas          | : women worshippers of Lord Krishna   |
| Harikatha        | : narrative art dealing mainly with religious, mythological and devotional themes                           |
| Indra            | : Overlord of the Devatas   |
| Jeevatma         | : individual soul   |
| Kalpyuga         | : last of the four yugas of the Hindu theology, the present world   |
| Karma            | : the sum total of one's own actions in the previous lives  |
| Karma yogi       | : one whose work is done as an act of faith   |
| Kelika mandiram  | : bridal chamber  |
| Krishnaleela     | : Krishna's amorous sport with Gopikas  |
| Madhura bhakti   | : bridal mysticism  |
| Manmadha         | : the god of love   |
| Menaka           | : a dancer in Indra's court   |
| Namam            | : Vaishnavite sect mark   |
| Nayaka           | : hero  |
| Nayika           | : heroine   |
| Nishkama karma   | : disinterested work  |
| Natya sastra     | : dramaturgy  |
| Padam            | : lyrical composition set to music  |
| Paramatma        | : universal soul  |
| Prabandha        | : a poem with a well-knit structural design   |
| Prabandha period | : late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Telugu literature in which prabandha writing flourished |
| Radha            | : the beloved of Lord Krishna   |
| Ranga vimana     | : aeroplane presented by Rama to Vibhishana   |
| Rasaleela        | : amorous sport with particular reference to Lord Krishna and the Gopikas                                   |
| Rasika           | : a man of cultivated aesthetic sense   |
| Rati             | : consort of Manmadha   |
| Satyabhama       | : one of the consorts of Lord Krishna   |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Śringara        | : erotic sentiment   |
| Śringara puruṣa | : a man of erotic inclinations   |
| Subhadrā        | : wife of Arjuna   |
| Yaggeyakara     | : poet-composer  |
| Vibhishana      | : brother of Ravana  |
| Viśvāmitra      | : sage-creator   |
| Vitaraya        | : king of gallants   |
| Yakshagana      | : folk drama patronised by the Thanjavur kings; yakshas are a particular set of people in Andhra. They sing and dance; their dances are known as yakshagana. |



## THE BLISS OF LIFE

M. V. Rama Sarr 200003

Besides being a leading scholar and a prominent figure in Indian literature and an authority on Milton, Prof. M. V. Rama Sarr is also one of our few creative writers who have through their writings successfully projected the best social and cultural legacies of our country to Indian as well as foreign readership. In addition to three plays *Towards Marriage*, *The Carnival* and *Sakuntala* he has so far published three novels—*The Stream*, *The Farewell Party* and *Look Homeward*, all of which have been acclaimed as substantial contributions to growing Anglo-Indian literature.

*The Bliss of Life* is his fourth novel. It is an imaginative reconstruction of Kshetravaya's life, the famous poet-musician of Andhra Pradesh, belonging to the village Mouva and one of the ancestors of Prof. Sarr himself. The novel presents intimate glimpses of the many faceted socio-cultural life of the Andhras, the Kuchipudi dance, the institution of the dancing girl, the temple, the simple rural folk and their innocent joys and sorrows, all manifestations of divine beauty and grace. The novel has a philosophic ring echoed in words of the hero: "I am inclined to give more importance to our individual willpower, but I also feel that the final stage in man's life is surrender to the will of God." It is this surrender to the will of God, that ultimately leads to "the bliss of life".

**S.Chand & Company Ltd**