



ADVENTURE

K. Kutumba Rao

Her father and brother went to their respective offices. Her younger brother went to school. Her mother and my sister-in-law were rolling papads in the kitchen. She had pitied them and went in there to help them. Nevertheless, they stopped her with an endearing joke, “you eat more papad - balls than you roll. It’s enough of your help. Why don’t you go away and look after some other work?” Her sister-in-law was also saying “There are only two rollers. What for is all this trouble to you? Why don’t you keep off from this and enjoy yourself reading a film magazine?” What was there for her to do after such comments? Thinking so, Rajyalaxmi stepped into the front room with a glass of water and two more papad balls, panting at the pungency of the balls on her tongue.

As soon as she stepped into the room her eyes fell on a letter in the window. It was addressed to her. It was her first experience with a personal letter. “Who wrote this? Was it my sister from Guntur? Who wrote the address on the cover in English? The handwriting was not her husband’s. Someone else must have written it. No doubt, the letter was from Guntur only. But there was already a letter from my sister. Her mother had not yet sent a reply. All of them had been busy with the house shifting. Unlike at the old house, there was a post-box close to this house.

Laxmi was restless till she had opened the cover. She ate the two balls fast and opened it and was taken aback to read the very first words: “To my sweet heart, Rajyam”.

Rajyalaxmi looked at the signature of the writer immediately: “Your ardent devotee Ranga Rao”.

She felt that someone abused or stopped her. Her eyes could not read. Some sound in the ears. She sweated all over. She was breathless. “Who was a Mr. Ranga Rao? How could he dare address me like this?”



After a while she had a thought. “Let me read it once and then I’ll tear it to pieces.”

“To my sweetheart, Rajyam,

There was no letter from you for many days. My life was without joy, unpromising and inert like the dry land lying baked in the violent heat. A cool drizzle of your sympathy would make the grass sprout up again. Was this the time for you to be silent, my Rajyam! Please write to me. The days won’t be the same forever. I’ll get a job soon. Meanwhile I have been selling my books one by one. But I assure you to buy twice as many later.

Honestly speaking, I should not ask anyone to sympathize with my plight. There was a job offered but I rejected it. That made my relatives and friends angry. Just for the sake of one hundred rupees can I serve under rogues and characterless fellows tolerating their insults? When I degrade myself so, am I not a burden to mother earth?

I sat down to compose a song. I might have sent it if I had been able to complete it. But as I have already told you, my heart is parched up. Why a song, I cannot do even cooing.

I wanted to write to you a very happy letter. But there is nothing except miserable cries. I promise to write a good letter next time.

Your ardent devotee, Ranga Rao”

It was good that she had read it. Now Laxmi was relieved of her tension. It was not a letter meant for her. But who sent it to her address? Now she remembered. Yes, some Telugu people were residing in this house preceding them. Might be there was some one among them with the same name. “Is it not just three days back we shifted to this house? Where is the possibility of anyone teasing me within such a short time? It would not be good if someone else read this”, Rajyalaxmi thought, tore it to pieces and threw it out. She went into the kitchen and started eating papad balls. “Have you come again, dear.” retorted my sister-in-law. By the time Rajyalaxmi answered her, their neighbor Mrs. Draupadamma entered saying ‘Ahaha! Aren’t they chilly papads? What luck? In these days we don’t see any papads except the white ones”.



“We are habituated to buy all sorts of things in these cities. Why should not we make papads ourselves instead of looking for them in the shops?” said my mother.

“Anyhow, if there is some company of friends taking interest in these things it is entirely different. Though I planned for papads and chips, I never made them. When Mrs. Ramayamma was here in this portion of the house, we joined together, and prepared a variety of mango pickles and chutney powders.”

Laxmi had an opportunity to enquire.” Why, aunt! Were there many women in this house before we came?” Laxmi asked her.

“Not many! Only Mrs. Ramayamma and her daughter were there. My god, the young woman was so fashionable. All the time she read books, magazines and went for movies or walks; she did B.A.”

“What was her name?”

“Rajyam, Rajyam, they used to say. Might be Rajyalaxmi.” “Very fine. Is it not my Laxmi’s name too?” said my sister-in-law examining her papad in the day’s light. “What is in a name? There is no comparison between the two girls. Is it enough if one applies a quarter-inch thick layer of powder on face? Where is this girl’s beauty and that of her’s? Anyway, won’t you give me two dozens of papads? I won’t have them free. I’ll pay for them.”

II

For one or two days Laxmi remembered Ranga Rao’s letter at every second. Those sentences had entered into her mind and even spoiled her own thoughts. Everyone had noticed her absent-mindedness and commented on it. As the days passed off, her feelings for Ranga Rao’s letter became numb like the shoe pinch that becomes hardened gradually. Laxmi did not worry about that letter any more.



There was, however, another letter from Ranga Rao when she thought it was almost over. Luckily it was also received by Laxmi unnoticed by others.

It was a brief note.

“Rajyam, haven’t you received my letter? Why don’t you reply me? Do you continue to tease me like this knowing my agony? Or have I committed any mistake.”

Laxmi was irritated by the letter after she finished reading of it. She felt only contempt for Ranga Rao. “Men always behave so. They admire a woman who is out of their reach. When she is wife _ _ _ tut tut - - - they are shamelessly indifferent to her”. She knew neither Ranga Rao nor Rajyam. Still her conscience told her that Rajyam did not deserve his affection. She became irritated with Ranga Rao’s love. When everyone was sleeping in the night, she tried to write a letter to Ranga Rao but she realized it was not easy as both her hands were trembled. The handwriting was shaky full of bends and curves. Letters were mutilated. She was sweating profusely and became cold. She read what she had written.

“Mr. Ranga Rao, your Rajyam is not here now. They went to another place. Don’t write letters to this address. Anyhow I dare say that you are doing something absurd _ _ _ .”

“What is this? Why should I care? No doubt, the whole world may read it before it is posted”. Laxmi tore it off into pieces. Three more months passed. Ranga Rao did not write again.

III

“Our elder daughter is crossing her sixth month, Shouldn’t we bring her here?” her mother asked her father. The moment Laxmi heard this she turned into a ten year old girl. She had this power of growing younger unlike others. There were certain incidents in Laxmi’s life which she felt happened just a day before. For example, she journeyed by a boat at her fifth year. Afterwards whenever she saw a boat she became a five year old child. She was ten at her sister’s marriage and whenever there was a reference related to her sister’s marriage she would become a child of ten and



recollect her sister in bridal attire and she herself as a co-bride. With this, she recollected the aroma of sandal paste, rose water, sandal sticks, the marriage pandal etc. It was her sister's first pregnancy and they would bring her here for delivery. Laxmi felt her sister's marriage with that *kalyana tilakam* on her forehead, had taken place *yesterday*. And she became a mother of a child. "She was married at my age but I am still unmarried...."

"We can bring her anytime. First, let us know our son-in-law's convenience", answered my father. "Please write. Don't forget it". "I'll bring her from Guntur" volunteered my brother.

"All right you can," said my father,

"I'll also go there", my younger brother joined.

"What do you go there for? I'll go there", said Laxmi.

"Nice. We will all go together like the disciples of Paramanandayya. To fetch a sewing needle, all the seven of them went", said my mother.

"A change for our mother to write a scenario on them", said my brother winking at me.

"Shut up, you jerk", said my mother.

The next day Laxmi unexpectedly happened to see her name-sake. She came with her mother to Mrs. Draupadamma's house and Mrs. Draupadamma brought them to Laxmi's house.

On seeing Rajyam's face Laxmi felt reptiles crawling all over her body. She could not understand the reason for it. She was by no means attractive. She seemed to be arrogant. Though she had big eyes there was no brightness in them. She was about twenty years old. She would speak only a few words but she always spoke them with a cocksureness and bluntness.

"What has Ranga Rao seen in this girl? What type of person is he himself?" Laxmi wondered. Laxmi was enthusiastic enough to reveal to her rival that she knew her secret.

"A match was settled for Rajyam", said Mrs. Draupadamma.



“Is it so?” my mother said with pretended joy.

“This girl has passed Intermediate. Her groom has a good education. He has passed M.A. and is drawing Rs.500/- per month”.

“A plum husband!” said Laxmi wantonly.

Though her heart was beating fast she could not resist saying something, but it was all in vain. Rajyam did not seem to listen. Only her mother seemed to have heard it and she asked “What is it, my girl!”

“Why should one marry a jobless fellow when a job holder is ready with folded hands?” This time Rajyam looked sternly at her. But she did not appear shaken. This made Laxmi admire her. “Though she is only two or three years older than I, she is behaving as if she is ten years senior to me. I should cultivate the same poise. If she had not that poise, could she fool Ranga Rao like that?”

Rajyam’s father asked my papa’s name and wrote it on the wedding card and invited us all for her marriage.

“By that time our people will also have come from Guntur”. Laxmi did not like to miss her last chance.

Again Rajyam looked at her sternly.

“Our elder daughter is coming for delivery” explained my mother seeing them confused.

“Why didn’t you share this happy news with us earlier?” said Mrs. Draupadamma.

The same day Laxmi struck off her father’s name on the wedding invitation, wrote Ranga Rao’s name and address, stamped it and posted it herself. Then she returned home with a sense of relief.



Her sister's husband wrote a letter asking them to take her sister for delivery after the 12th. The journey of her brother and his wife to Guntur was fixed for the 13th as it was an auspicious day. Rajyam and her brother also insisted on accompanying them. Rajyam however had the least hope of being allowed to go with them.

Unexpectedly there was a letter to Rajyalaxmi on the 8th. The women in the house were about to take their meals. As Laxmi was closing the main door to join them, she heard some noise at the window. There was a post-card addressed to her and dropped there. The hand writing this time was different. It was not of Ranga Rao's handwriting.

She kept it in the middle of her books quickly and went to her meal. She found no chance to read it then. So she started for a walk in the evening. "Where are you going" asked her mother. "I am feeling bored I'll return after a walk to the park." Laxmi answered. Until she made two turns on the road, she did not pull out the letter. Then she read it. "To Rajyalaxmi who became a curse on us. The card you sent generously was received. From that very moment my brother had a high fever of 105° and became unconscious. We'll remember your great favour for generations to come. Yours sincerely, Venkateswarlu." Laxmi felt suddenly weak. The strength in her appeared to have gone into the pavement. There was an alarm bell ringing in her head. The noises of the nearby cars were heard as if coming from a deep well.

"What have I done! I could not understand what forced me to post that card. Will it kill him? In that case, I'll be his murderer or no?"

Her conscience reacted to her thoughts. "Even if I didn't send him that card, would not he come to know of it later? Even then he would suffer from the blow. If he wanted to die for the sake of that wretched woman, was it my fault? Let him die ___". But if she had not sent that card? Would she have been totally absolved from his death? Why did she do that bloody thing?

She was not that much intelligent to know the reason for it. One could assess only about one thing. Laxmi might have posted it to show Ranga Rao "what his beloved was doing". When she came



to know about a man's intense love for a woman, it resulted in jealousy towards that woman. She did not however, realize it. She wanted to hurt the cause of her jealousy, that is, Ranga Rao and hence posted the card to him.

Whatever he might be, Laxmi reconciled to what she did. As she could not convince herself that she was not guiltless, her desire to see him intensified. 'I'll also go there and if I have a chance, I'll see Ranga Rao just for a moment.' She decided finally.

She did not know what she could get out of this. She had no assurance that she could see Ranga Rao even after her going there. Her soul, however, seemed to be calm at her mere decision of going over there. By the time she went there he might die but still_ _ _ _.

"Mum, shall I go to Guntur along with them". Laxmi asked.

"What for, so many people go there from our side?" retorted mother.

"I have to go there".

"... .."

"I have to go there".

'Let's see", said her mother noticing Laxmi's palpitation.

Inspite of many people dissuading her she was stubborn on making her journey to Guntur. So her sister-in-law stayed back and she started.

"Alright. You go there. Half the ticket is saved." said her sister-in-law to tease.

"You are the half ticket. Not I," Laxmi replied.

"If the railway people see the hubbub you made to go to Guntur, they won't ask you a ticket at all." her sister-in-law continued.

"Don't expect that I'll cancel my journey and send you there with your words. Don't be too clever", said Laxmi like a twelve year old girl.



“No, my dear, no. I won’t go. You can go in my place there,” said her sister-in-law.

V

Laxmi went to Arundelpet at Guntur. Already a day passed. Across the road it is Brodipet. Ranga Rao must be living somewhere there. If there were no “inner furies” as in the words of Potana, she would have gone to Ranga Rao’s house straight away in five minutes. Laxmi seemed to lack the needed courage to do it. She felt easier to brand herself with hot rods than to face him.

In spite of this, Laxmi started off to search Ranga Rao’s house the next day evening. The circumstances made it easy for her. That’s all.

Her sister’s sister-in-law, Sarada by name, was visiting her friend at Brodipet at 5 P.M. on that day. “I feel bored. Shall I go with you, Sarada?” Laxmi asked.

“O.K.” said Sarada.

Both of them started and reached the destination after of long walk through a lane. Laxmi was introduced to Sarada’s friend and her mother. Laxmi sat there for a while. When Sarada and her friend were deeply absorbed in conversation, Laxmi took a chance saying “Now I’ll go home Sarada: I know the way”.

Sarada just nodded her head continuing her topic. Laxmi started from there enquiring about the lanes. It took her four minutes to reach the lane where Ranga Rao lives and another three minutes to find-out his house. She stood before the main entrance with a heart beating fast. The house had a poor approach. She found nobody there when she started back.

She heard from behind a cycle bell and turned back. A young boy got down from the cycle and asked her.

“Whom do you want?”



Laxmi had no words. She shook her head. She felt like running away but she could not move.

“Your name?” the boy questioned.

“Laxmi: Rajyalaxmi”, She said in a low voice.

There was an indescribable change in his face. He stood like a statue for a while. He became pale. His face turned red like an elephant yarn. He managed to speak “My name is Venkateswarlu. When did you come”? “I came yesterday”.

She realized who she was in his eyes.

But she did not know how to explain all that had happened. She could not do it especially on the road, that too, in just one or two sentences. “Would you come inside” My brother went to see the doctor. It will take another fifteen minutes”. He said.

“How is Mr. Ranga Rao,” she inquired.

“There is improvement, he opened the door and went in. Laxmi followed him silently like a cat. The house had a good front yard. There were pyols at the main gate. Laxmi sat on one of them and wiped her face with the hem of her saree. “You can come inside. I’ll ask my grandma to make coffee”. There was no anger in his tone.

“It’s alright. It is fine here”, she said.

He did neither sit there nor go from there. He stood there confused for a while and asked her.

“Your marriage will take place in four days, I suppose”.

“No, no, my marriage is not now”. She answered hurriedly.

There was a glow on his face for the first time.

“Please come inside. I’ll come just in a minute,” he went inside.



To her every second was like a yuga. She felt a sense of relief in his absence. “Is it not better for me to go? He is recovering. My duty is over. Why should I invite further troubles?” Laxmi rose. She was a bit sad that she was separating hereby from the role of ‘Rajyam’. “It is not necessary any more. I’ll never be meeting them again in my life. They won’t be able to meet me”.

She almost ran as if someone was chasing her. Just then there was a tonga at the main gate. A weak, sick person got down with a bottle of medicine in his hand. He looked so absorbed that he did not notice the girl coming out of his house.

If he is Mr. Ranga Rao, then, never had she seen such a handsome man....

VI

It was one month since they had brought their sister to the city. The “Simantham’ function was also over, Laxmi felt everyday was a day of festival. Rajyam’s marriage was also over with a lot of pomp. The bridegroom had a bald pate. He was fat and dark. When he laughed the earth and sky seemed to reverberate.

Mrs. Draupadamma described the marriage vividly.

According to her more the money is spent, the greater is the marriage. Her sister came to the city for the first time. She wanted to go outside every alternative day although it was painful for her.

One day Laxmi and her sister and their brother planned for an evening movie. Laxmi was washing her face in the bathroom. Her brother was combing his hair.

“Who is there inside,” a voice was heard from the verandah,

Her brother came out. A stranger was waiting there.

Her brother felt he looked like a film star.

“Who is residing in this house now?” he asked. Her brother answered that they were the new tenants.



“Is there any girl, Rajyam by name, in your family?” he asked.

“Not Rajyam. She is Laxmi” answered her brother proudly.

Laxmi came out just then wiping her face.

She could not recognize the sick man she had seen at Guntur. Now he was healthy and looked more handsome. Ranga Rao on the other hand saw her for the first time.

“Is your name Rajya Laxmi?” he asked.

Laxmi’s voice sank. He too did not wait for her answer. “I understood everything. My brother Venkateswarlu has mistaken you. Thanks for the pains you have taken for my sake. I’ll talk with your elders in a day or two”. So saying he went out.

Two or three days later her father on returning home told her mother. “Who is that boy? He said he came to our house also. He says he wants to marry Laxmi. He was jobless for a while, but now he has a job. He praised Laxmi as *one in a million*. How did he come to such a conclusion?” he said stupefied.

As she heard it, Laxmi said, “I don’t like to be a second match for some one”.

The cat was out of its bag. The ladies cornered her and pressed her to reveal what had happened. At last they persuaded her to accept this match.

Ranga Rao came there twice or thrice. Every time he came there her sister-in-law teased her saying “See dear, your husband has arrived”. Ranga Rao asked for a chance to speak to Laxmi privately. The elders accepted it.

Ranga Rao told Laxmi all about himself. He told her about Rajyam. He said it was she who wrote first to him and cheated him later.

There was nothing else between them except writing letters.



There was none dearer than Laxmi who came to see him out of pity and sympathy. He thought that to do what she did, needed so much of courage.

The man who allows himself to be cheated by one woman will be ready to be cheated by every other woman. Laxmi felt it was better for this handsome man to be deceived by her than by any other one. That's why she did not reveal how the circumstances favoured her in her daring adventure. As Laxmi agreed to marry everyone felt happy. Ranga Rao felt happier than any one else.

About the Writer

K. Kutumba Rao, born in 1909 at Tenali, studied M.Sc. at Benarus Hindu University. He started the Telugu monthly magazine *Yuva*. He wrote a number of articles on scientific matters. He wrote almost 240 stories and some plays. His most important works are *Suswagatam* (1934), *Karunyam* (1936), *Swagatam* (1937), *Illarikam* (1938), *Amayakuralu* (1939), *Chaduvu* (1946), *Talli leni Pilla* (1947), *Gaddu Rojulu* (1952), *Katha Vahini* (1954), *Dibba Rajyam* (1959), *Jeevitam* (1961), *Anamika* (1966).

About the Translator

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Dr. Sasi Kiran reads a lot – Telugu and English literary works – passionately. Pearl S. Buck's short story 'Refugees' is translated by her into Telugu 'Saranardhulu' and it got published in *Saakshi* Telugu daily paper. She writes articles to daily papers very selectively which are published. Presently she is engaged with academic writings. Her article "A Brief Survey of Translated Telugu Literature in English" has been included as study document to Lecture Notes on Indian literature with University of Sussex, UK. Her Translation – "Madhura Meenakshi" is published in *Indian Literature*, a bi monthly Sahitya Academy Journal. Her name is included as Language Editor and Reviewer in several online journals. She is a member of several Associations: IASTE, ELT@I, SIG, Elderdo etc.