

V. SITARAMIAH

**Pampayatre**  
**AN EXCURSION TO HAMPI**

English Translation :

**Dr. S. RAMASWAMY**

Fellow, Silliman College, Yale University, USA

**RASHTRAKAVI GOVINDA PAI SAMSHODHANA KENDRA**

M.G.M. College, Udupi - 576 102

**KARKALA SAHITYA SANGHA**

Karkala - 574 104

**AN EXCURSION TO HAMPI** : English Translation of Kannada classic 'PAMPAYATRE', a travelogue, written by V. Sitaramiah (V. See.) and translated by Dr. S. Ramaswamy, No. 58 (203), West Park Road, Malleswaram, Bangalore - 560 055.

Published by :

**Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Samshodhana Kendra**

M.G.M. College, Udupi - 576 102. Ph : 0820-2521159 &

**Karkala Sahitya Sangha**

'Akshara', Tellar Cross Road, Karkala - 574 104.

Ph : 08258-231080

© English Translation : Dr. S. Ramaswamy

First edition : 2013

Pages : 118

Copies : 1000

Paper Used : 70 GSM Maplitho

**Price** : **Rs. 70/-**

Cover Page Design : **S. Nagendra Kumar**

Printed by :

**Netra Printers**

Bangalore - 560 018

## Author's Introduction

### I

This is a description of one day's experiences. I did not have an intention of writing this in the beginning. Still, thinking that there could be a document of memory of the event of the relationship between me and my revered friends, I have written this.

There is nothing new in this. Many great people, our own as well as foreigners, have expressed such thoughts. Mixing description with their own emotions, allowing their minds to play freely, such writing is rare among Kannada writers was the contributory reason for my undertaking. I do not know how the informed readers will react to the tradition of mixing up

in the same breath Gods and kings and scorpions and goblins.

There must be many defects in the descriptions found here. The narration of going from one place to another may be uninteresting. The descriptions may be excessive because of the greatness of the place or an emotional upsurge. The important thing is, I have made clear the thoughts and feelings that arose at that time in my mind according to my ability. Accepting it or rejecting it is the reader's job. Here and there irrelevant things may appear. It is not surprising that such things happen in such circumstances. When the mind is perturbed by contemplating subjects which stir one deeply, in such a state the mind won't be in a position to think about what is relevant and what is irrelevant. Therefore to expect that rule is unjust and unnatural. Also, when the eye is perceiving objects that engender enthusiasm, admiration and sorrow, exaggeration also may raise its head in some places.

Only, a bit of sorrow for not being able to totally avoid printing errors and punctuation.

If there are any merits here, they belong to the subject matter. They have come about because of the good company of affectionate friends. The short comings are my own. I alone am responsible for them.

I am grateful for the publishers of *Prabuddha Karnataka* for getting it printed seperately what was originally published in it.

Prabhava Samvatsara  
Ashvayuja Masa  
Mysore

V. See.

## II

My prose work *Pampayatire* was published before my first lyrics *Gitagalu* was published. For the first time it was published in four parts in *Prabuddha Karnataka*. It was a matter of great joy that it was printed in the same issues that Masti's *Subbanna* was. A book like

*Subbanna* was very important for Kannada story world. Its concentrated presentation, its inner insight and human life and the way it works, fairly recent life of household life in Mysore, its representation of how a hard and rigid life softened and attained beauty, its aesthetic sense and its presentation – such things had not been shaped in any of the short stories of this region. It was a matter of pride for me that my travelogue was published along with it – forever.

This is the fourth edition of this work. I have not attempted to add anything new. One or two words here and there may have changed. The style is that of writing before I wrote it forty seven years ago. The mind was trying to attain a certain maturity. It was not static; that which goes on all life. That was the beginning of practice. It became unusual because of the support of my friends. It attained a certain special lustre because of their friendship, because of the hidden layers of *The Ramayana*, the

greatness of the place and the history of the Vijayanagar times. I cannot say I have the boldness that I can write such a work now. Still, I feel that some more sophistication, word play and sensitivity could have been brought in. However, this is being printed one more time.

Sri M. Satyanarayana Rao of Geetha Book House, Mysore, since I came to know him in 1968 has been persisting that I allow him to publish it, and has brought it out. At this time when the cost of paper and printing are rising, the publishers have not been able to make this still better. But then, where is the limit for betterment?

Among the elders who accompanied me in my excursion, all others except Rayaru (D.V.G.) have passed away. If a little laxity is allowed, Yajamanaru is Bellave Venkatanaranappa. Venkateshaiah is T. S. Venkannaiah. Murthy is M. R. Srinivasa Murthy. Not that their entire personality has come out here. Neither is all that

is seen here is fully themselves. They are just fellow-travellers. I have mentioned earlier that this excursion was undertaken as soon as the Belagavi Literary Conference came to an end in 1925. Yajamanaru and Rayaru had served on the Vijayanagar Restoration Committee. They were the people who were as much devoted to that empire as they were in Sri Vidyanaraya who inspired its founding. Venkateshaiah was not vociferous in expressing his mind. Still he was deeply immersed in reverence and devotion. Murthy was closer to me in age. He was in the Government Education Service as the Headmaster of a school or an Inspector. Still, he was seven to eight years elder to me. He was an adept in the knowledge of really great Kannada epics and an honest and sincere teacher. Each one of my companions had reached the top level in their character and achievement. "They reach the spiritual attainment wherever they are" – *Ninthalli Shatsthalava Kambaraiah* – is a statement about the Vachana Saints. As I have seen it, all these

four people are of that stature. I have not met many people of that level. I have not seen any duplicity in them. In the path of my life many great people have guided me. I have tried to introduce them elsewhere.

I know their nearness, liveliness, level of conversation, exchange of ideas, their sharing of experience from the time of leaving Belagavi until we reached Bangalore. It was a celestial experience. I was only twenty seven years old then. I could imbibe only as much traditional knowledge as I could get at that age. It would be a great good fortune if I could have it now. Where could I get those days again? I am grateful to those forces which enable me to remember that experience for this another opportunity.

Rayaru is also perhaps bed-ridden for the past two or three years. No matter what the physical ailments that pain him, his mind, his powers of thinking, sense of discretion have

remained without diminishing. The heart has grown more mellow. All those discriminating powers, conceptual understanding of the world, deciding tendencies are alert. Those who visit him still enjoy his sense of humour and liveliness as ever before. His is the activity of giving joy to others and the sense of national responsibility in bringing about the good of the country. I ardently wish that these thoughts to be a leading light and pay my homage to it.

My thanks to those lovers of Kannada who read this with a fellow feeling. Since the beginning this book has brought me friends. Remembering that friendship thankfully I am bringing this out once again. I thank Sri G. S. Krishnamurthy who has printed this.

Bengaluru

February 14, 1974

V. See.

## Translator's Note

I was always fascinated by Hampi. The first time I went to Hampi was in 1954 when I was a young lecturer in Chitradurga. I accompanied the Scouts group on an excursion. We walked about and camped all over the place. We halted in Hospet and went to Hampi with a guide who knew the place very well. That was really educative. In my enthusiasm I even took some photographs with my old box-camera. They were small black and white pictures but it was quite a souvenir. Years later, when I had an opportunity to visit the Kannada University and then again, I visited Hampi, stayed in a hotel in Hospet and had a leisurely day-long expedition! By this time, I had read V. See.'s book and so my tour was very meaningful.

I have been a bit of a traveller myself and have always been fascinated by places of interest. Having written travelogues on England, France, Italy and Germany, I was astonished by the similarity between the ruins of Hampi and the ruins of Pompeii in Italy. Both the times I visited Pompeii, I was struck with this similarity. Pompeii was destroyed because of the eruption of the volcano, Vesuvius in 79 A.D. If Pompeii was destroyed because of nature's fury, Hampi was destroyed because of man's hatred and envy. It was a deed of wanton vandalism. That is what makes a visit to Hampi an excruciatingly sad experience.

V. See.'s *Pampayatre* was published first in 1927 and the sixth edition came out in 2004. My English translation is of the 2004 edition.

In recent years two remarkable books have come out on Hampi. When I was talking to Dr. Vasundhara Filliozat, it was mentioned that she has written a book on Hampi. Being a Kannadiga herself, her account of our own

Hampi is mixed with emotional involvement. Vasundhara is married to the Professor of Sanskrit at the Sorbonne in Paris, Dr. Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and her book *Hampi Vijayanagar : Histoire Et Legendes* is in French. She was kind enough to give me a copy of the book in 2011. It is a 159 page-book with more than a hundred photographs. The second book *Hampi (A World Heritage Site) : Discover The Splendours Of Vijayanagar* came out in 2010, published by Niyogi Books, New Delhi. It is a stunningly attractive book of 262 pages with more than two hundred breath-takingly beautiful colour photographs and maps. It is the work of two professionals. The text is by Subhadra Sen Gupta a travel writer of repute and the colour photographs are by the Internationally known photographer, Clare Arni. Each photograph is a gem and the full-page photographs can be framed and exhibited!

However, V. See.'s travelogue stands out as a masterpiece of narration. It is in three sections. The first section deals with the preparation to

the visit, the second, with the actual details of tour with a guide and the third, a dream-sequence – a Reverie – and conclusion. What makes it special is that all the five “pilgrims” are literary giants. The greatness and grandeur that was Hampi is described in a language that is extremely picturesque and grand, in keeping with the subject. It has not been easy for me to put it into English and I am aware of my shortcomings. However, this is my humble tribute to a great scholar and teacher. I thank the V. See. Sampada for giving me this opportunity. I am also thankful to the Publishers.

Ganesha Chaturthi  
9th September 2013

**S. Ramaswamy**

## Publisher's Note

Travelling is a common way of spending free time. In India travelling was mostly confined to pilgrimages and there have been examples of writing about the experiences of such pilgrimages right from ancient times. Travelogues are a common genre of literature also in the west and the expedition may not have any religious motive. Even imaginary adventures have been the stuff of many popular literary works.

The first ever successful travelogue in Kannada of the secular kind was perhaps *Pampayatire*, a travelogue by the late V. Sitaramiah (V. See.), who visited the ruins of Hampi in the company of the literary giants of his time. It became very popular and a great success.

*Pampayat* has now been translated into English by Dr. S. Ramaswamy, a three times Fulbrighter and a scholar of repute and it is a pleasure for Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Samshodhana Kendra and Karkala Sahitya Sangha to bring out this translation as a joint publication venture. V. Sitaramiah was a close associate of our Founder and Principal of MGM College, the late Prof. K. S. Haridas Bhat. We are bringing out this book as a token of our tribute to V. See.

We thank V. See. Sampada and Netra Printers, Bangalore for the DTP output and for executing the printing work in an exemplary manner.

Sept. 19, 2013  
Udupi

**Prof. M. Ramachandra**  
**Prof. H. Krishna Bhat**

**This small book  
is gratefully dedicated  
to  
My Friends**

## An Excursion to Hampi

**H**ampi is a holy place. In such a place why there are so many scorpions, lobsters and crabs, only Lord Pampapati knows. That too ten-inch scorpions and a foot-long lobsters? Perhaps these people are fearless. For them, it is quite an ordinary thing. For us who had just arrived there that day, it was as if our bodies were being bored by a machine. God, why did we come here? How nice it would have been staying at the guest house in Kamalapura! What will be our fate if something untoward happens? My companions were regretting why ever they had brought me along. People who were there told us “Don’t be afraid Sirs. Lie down without

worry. Have faith in Lord Pampapati and go to sleep. What will these creatures Do?" Still we weren't courageous. Our hearts were fluttering. Putting out our bedding to air, shaking our clothes vigorously, emptying the pockets and unfolding our headwear, turning over our books, making sure that there were no serpents and scorpions, carrying everything to the inner sanctorum of the temple, in the light of a big lamp, one of us stood guard. The heart was fluttering. There was a lamp. We were in the vicinity of Lord Pampapati. Shouldn't we lie down in peace resigning ourselves to His will? No. Though there was verbal assurance, the mind would not listen. All of us ate and spread our beds—close together and lay down. It was agreed that there shouldn't be too much space between us. We lay down close to each other according to the agreement. A lamp was burning above near our five heads. It had been decided that it should be burning all night. Didn't know

whether such a resplendent sacred lamp was burning next to Lord Pampapati. We had made a condition that we must be alert if any misfortune happened. For some time nobody spoke. Mentally distancing ourselves from the poisoning creatures with determination, we spent about quarter of an hour without moving. Murthy suddenly jumped up, shook his shirt and dhoti, kicked around the bed clothes and approaching us, made us get up. He said “Get up, something fell on me and slithered away. My whole body became cold.” All of us got up in consternation like a clerk jumping up on hearing the sound of the footwear of the boss. We moved from the clothes. One of us held up the burning lamp. We three stood there in confusion not knowing what to do. My hair stood on end. Yajamanaru got hold of a stray stick that was lying around. We started looking around for whatever it was. None had the courage to touch the beds. Yajamanaru himself came forward—when the four of us said

“Be careful, Sir, we don’t know what it is.” Byragi Channaiah who was observing our consternation from a distance came there and looked everywhere. Nothing was seen anywhere. On shaking up the beds, in the dark there was something black which was crawling towards me. Channaiah looked. It was neither a snake nor a scorpion; “What is this Sir? Why are you so upset? Why are you dancing about madly on encountering a spider?” He started screaming with laughter, holding his knees. If anyone had talked this way in other circumstances we would have taken him to task. We, none of us would hesitate to do this. We controlled our anger, we the brave ones, stood there laughing. Rayaru said “Mr. Murthy, what a funny thing you did?” “What could I do Sir, something fell on me. For sometime, I was quiet. It started scampering about all over my body. It was only then I thought something terrible had happened though I was lying down quietly here. Then I got up.

It was not bad it was only a spider. Suppose it was something else? Just you look at this. I have never seen a spider this big.” Yajamanaru said “All of us are brave when there is no danger. It is because all of us are so brave that the job of uplifting our country is in this state” and gave a lecture. Even after all this our fright didn't quite subside.

Venkateshaiah said “Let the beds alone. You do as you like. I am not going to lie down.”

Yajamanaru - Then what do you do?

Venkateshaiah - I will spend the night just sitting or standing?

Rayaru - I also feel the same. Enough about God. Liberation has been obtained by the sight of the tail of a scorpion. As soon as it is morning let us leave and go to our town! I simply cannot stay here. What we have seen in the afternoon is enough. I am ready to pack up and leave right now.

Just about all of us, especially three of us were of the same opinion. But we thought "After come here all the way, it is not good if we leave without seeing the Pampa Lake and the temple of Lord Vittala Swamy." Discussing this, we concluded "Let it be morning. Then we will decide. Now is not the proper time." We made up our minds, took courage and lay down. The feeling of fright receded and talking about this and that, we gradually surrendered ourselves to sleep. I prayed to Devi Kolalamma and slept without fear. Because of the tiredness of walking about in the afternoon, it may be said that we slept well. Lord Papmapati's blessings. No one was stung by the tail of poison!

It was past seven when we got up. None of us knew that it had rained heavily all night. On going to the river to fulfil the morning ablutions, the river had swelled by about five feet. The flood was still rising. The slush on the

banks was still caving in. Since the flow of water was speeding, without taking the bath there, we bathed at the well inside the temple precincts and performed the daily religious ritual. How pure and holy was that water! The water level in the well had risen up saving us the trouble of drawing it up and we could just reach it. We bathed just like we would take it from a vessel. We were blessed by even the non-living beings with loving kindness!

Yajamanaru was very orthodox. He was not addicted to coffee or tea. I had brought a pound of coffee powder by going to the shop in burning heat from Hospet. It had not been possible the previous day to prepare coffee, drink it and go. In that afternoon Yajamanaru had realised the great disadvantages of it. He remembered how distressed he was utterly tired, withered like a dry *Aswatha* leaf and sleeping for three hours in the outer enclosure of Hajara

Ramaswamy temple. He said “Drink as much coffee as you want. Don’t later on pull long faces like the strings of a violin.” Our flowery faces were joyous and blossomed like the flowers of the spring season. How delicious the Hampi coffee was! People say that the nectar that the Gods drink is sweet. I can swear that had they tasted half a cup of coffee that we drank, they would throw down their celestial nectar-cups into the deep sea and would become coffee addicts.

Throughout the Hampi excursion Yajamanaru was our feeding angel. He wouldn’t eat food cooked by others in other places. He had brought with him every little item needed for cooking like *sambar* powder, salt, pickle and even little wooden pieces for the oven. God knows why he is obsessed with these small items. Where ever he goes, he carries with him this whole stupid *Samsara*. We used to think why couldn’t

he adjust to the easy food readily available? We are the modern present day generation of people. We can make any kind of adjustment that was required. We have no ethical commitments. Not squeamish about where we eat—even in hotels of whatever sort as long as the cooks are Brahmins. We who eat at 'Anand Bhavan' what does it matter to us? Whether if it is Bombay or England or even Nicaragua. We are not worried. How to expect a hotel in Hampi? If Yajamanaru hadn't cooked for us and fed us, our fate would be pitiable indeed. Would we be able to feed ourselves? We are all brave people. All of us were expert cooks. But none was active enough to actually do the cooking. If we were by ourselves, we would send for an old woman living there, get her the supplies, make her cook and would eat. On enquiry I found out that she was a distant relative—of four or five generations ago! We moderns are free people. We don't tolerate any restrictions. Our concept of happiness

is different, our methods are different. The methods and manners of the elders of old, they are different.

That day, we decided to perform *Abhisheka* for sage Vidyananya. We all bathed in the river with religious rigour and the *Pooja* took place. The 'Vidyananya Stotra' written by Rayaru was read out and dedicated to the sage. For the *Naivedya* offering, plantain and coconut was offered. Yajamanaru had prepared the special sweet-gram *Payasam*. We partook the feast—copra, plantains, dry resin and sugar. They were offered to ourselves—the lesser small Gods!

Then Yajamanaru served us food. Was it not a *Pooja* for sage Vidyananya? The entire gamut of special dishes were served. The *Payasam* was specially delicious with fragrance. The elegance of Yajamanaru belonged only to him. Rayaru couldn't contain his joy. "*Payasa* was 'class' *Payasa*, Sir. If you were also dining with us,

you would have known its excellent taste. What can we give you in return, Sir, for this treat?"

Yajamanaru : "Sit comfortably and eat to your heart's content. I have prepared quite enough. Don't feel shy." He said.

Rayaru : It is uncalled for to wish for you to have six more children like us. Still, I wish it. May your progeny increase and bring credit to your tribe.

Yajamanaru : It can be six or even ten. Will my age decrease? But look, not people like you. You are disobedient and unruly. Let it not be my lot to bring up children like you. It doesn't matter if they are virtuous like you.

Rayaru thought it was true. But not being able to say anything else, said "You see, Sir, I just wanted to express my satisfaction. I spoke as I couldn't contain myself. Forgive the trespass."

Yajamanaru : What can I do except forgive?

This was the final word.

Let it be so. Yajamanaru would cook delicious meals for us. If we were uninterested, he would perform other chores as well. When we felt that it was not right, not proper each one of us would do some chores like sweeping, washing the floor, cleaning the vessels eight times a day etc. Anyone would shed tears if he looked at us, looking at each other with lack-lustre faces with our hands on our waists, smiling faintly like a lamp that was about to go out, thinking about God's peculiar creation about the daily chores cursing fate to have brought us down to this level. But what to do? In our wordly existence only such activity is the major job. It was our wish that a sixty year old wouldn't feel unhappy in working for us. We had heard that eating out in other places in Hampi was dangerous. On account of that fear

our sense of duty would be strengthened. We felt respect for the womenfolk at home who had to remain at home doing only such things all the time. Even now one feels like crying when we finished the chores, came out with our hands on our forehead. "One should suffer the result of one's own *Karma*."

Since the facility of coffee was provided by Yajamanaru we decided to go to the Pampa Lake that day and go to the bungalow in the evening. Wondering how far it was and how much time it would take to return, it was decided to prepare the food and then go. By that time it was the hot sun of eleven in the morning. That too at Hampi. Yajamanaru stressed that before we started at midday, all the utensils should be cleaned up and everything kept in order. One can do any other thing like eating a stomachful, sleeping, wash the clothes; but to eat when not wanted and attending to chores immediately

afterwords makes one mad. Where is the sanctity for cleaning the vessels right after eating? Couldn't it be done later on? Couldn't someone else be asked to do it?... It is possible for you and I. But it is not so for Yajamanaru. It was the philosophy of his life that however small a thing it was, that must be finished immediately. By God's grace, it has happened only that way for him. Shall I tell you the special thing that happened? We went to the well to finish the job. Yajamanaru had noticed our growse. He got into our favour by doing a trick. It was bribery, what else? He lighted the stove, boiled the vessel full of water, called out – "Murthy, come here." Murthy went in. "Finish off the powder. Put it in. Who wants to take back that stupid powder?" I who was near the well pricked my ears. We carried the vessels inside with alacrity. By that time coffee was ready. All three of us eyed each other. We felt like prostrating to him and our belief in God and him strengthened.

Venkateshaiah, not wanting to exhibit our little weaknesses to elders, said “Come, Sir, get on. Let’s go. It is getting late. We have acquired enough strength to walk twenty miles today.” The rest of us exchanged meaningful glances to convey our thanks.

Yajamanaru said “It isn’t my doing or yours. It’s all the influence of that large vessel over there.”

He never tells a lie. He speaks out unhesitatingly what he thinks is true whether others like it or not. Therefore many people don’t appreciate him. Weak people find it difficult to maintain the principle.

And then started a debate. In Yajamanaru’s view, it didn’t seem to find a solution. Our stomachs were bursting having eaten too much. In that heat, is it an ordinary thing to be able to drink a vessel full of coffee? You may laugh.

You are all disinterested people. My mother has scolded me many times – “You are always for having in your stomach what is in the vessel.” You may also scold me if you like. Hasn’t demon Ravanaśura himself said “What is congenital cannot be conquered?” God has created us this way. How can our efforts prevail over His will? Is it possible to quarrel with him, taking him to task – “Why did you create this?” We may. He too may be ready to quarrel? But our *Math* will excommunicate us. Their excommunication is far more fearsome than His anger. What I am saying, is it false?.... We are parents of daughters. We are afraid.

In order to find out what was on his mind, I finally told Venkateshaiah – “It is alright if we carry coffee today, as we carried water yesterday. We can drink it on the way when we feel thirsty.”

“See if you can carry it. There are two vessels.”

“Let each one carry them for some time.” Shall I tell you the truth? Not one of us liked to carry it. I said so for the sake of courtesy. What I said, if it proved a noose round my own neck? – Murthy said, “Let us drink a little here. And carry the rest.”

Yajamanaru : Get going if it is difficult for you. I will carry it myself.

Rayaru : It’s not proper. Venkateshaiah, get the cups.

The matter under discussion came to a head. Laughter was welling up in each one of us. Yajamanaru laughed it loud and long. It is auspicious for us if he is laughing and each one filled a cup of the nectar. We fulfilled our soul’s desire by drinking two cups each.

Venkateshaiah : Why should we carry this little bit left over. Hold forth your cup. Cold coffee will be no good.

“I had my fill,” I said. I pleaded as if I was pleading with God. But he wouldn’t listen.

“Stop this game. How can I believe if you say you had enough coffee?”

Despite my protests he filled my cup. What to do ? I drank it, closing my eyes, invoking the Medicine God : *Vaidyo Narayano Harihi*. The rest of the three did the same. I was the youngest of the company. The rest would be satisfied if I was. It is the way of the elderly.

\* \* \*

## II

Yajamanaru said “Now we can start can’t we?” We said yes and started. Two of us were wearing ordinary shirts and an *Angavastra* on top. Murthy alone was wearing a coat. All our money was in his coat pocket. Therefore he was compelled to have the pleasure of wearing the coat even in that burning hot sun. Two others were wearing only an *Uttariyam*. Three umbrellas for five. Only three had footwear. Two others never had used an umbrella in their lives. Two others had forgotten their sandals, one in Belgavi and the other in Gadag and were penitents, expiating their sins. What a hateful life it is to lose direct touch with mother Earth and cover

their heads sinfully from the shining Sun God, the source of all life and the God of Wind! That was their opinion. It must be said that they received the complete blessings of these gods.

We came out and called out, "Channaiah." Venkateshaiah said – "It doesn't look as if he has come back. He had mentioned in the morning itself that he was taking out some people from Dharwad." He was our guide there, a dear friend. Thinking that it wouldn't do if we waited for him, we took out a book on Hampi and started. We proceeded thinking, "Won't we meet someone on the way? Are we dumb? We will ask someone." By now it was about one O' clock. We went forth thinking every ten steps "It would have been nice if Channaiah was with us." We would console ourselves "It's O.K. He has lost the rupee that he could have earned." However, one thing was certain. We missed him.

In front of Virupaksha temple was the main procession street about a hundred or two hundred yards wide. It was wider than the hundred feet road in Mysore. It must have been full of people in the past. On either side stone *Mandaps*. On our left hand side at the end of the street a huge idol of stone Basava. It looks as though people in those days had no other business. Wherever there was a huge boulder they would carve the image of Basava, Ganesha, Hanumantha, Narasimha. Perhaps they never experienced the labour and enormity of the endeavour. Otherwise, would they carve six or seven feet-long Shiva Linga on a platform of fifteen feet width? Fifteen to twenty feet tall Narasimhaswamy! Fifteen feet Ganesha! They must have been mad. And do you know their names? It seems one of them is called *Sasuvekalu* (Mustard seed) Ganesha, the other *Kadalekalu* (Bengal Gram) Ganesha. I can't imagine how a *Halasinakayi* (Jack-fruit) Ganesha would be carved!

As we went on the road became narrow. If there was a Christian, he would have said it was the 'straight and narrow path to Heaven'. Hills all along. The ancients have carved steps so that the path can be made as easy as possible. But for the thorny bushes all along the way, what beautiful sights as far as the eye could see! Mountains that have stood there for hundreds of years, have witnessed the happiness and woes of the world, the auspicious and the inauspicious happiness, eyeing them, themselves unmoved, with equilibrium. The temple perched on tall platforms besporting with creepers, surrounded by the clouds on top of mountains, the meditation centre, the ashrams, the heaven kissing temple towers, one behind the other, scattered about lining up the distant skies, to the left nearby the gurgling liquid sound of the flowing river Tungabhadra, between us and the river the *Kadu Mallige* plants in full bloom, the pathways of stairs going straight for a little distance and then

suddenly, shyly, meandering zig-zag, appearing, re-appearing, disappearing in the midst of mountains teasing and playing around with us. We travelled on for a long distance, absorbing the revealing unusual beauty, enjoying the solitude of nature filling our hearts, listening to the sound of different birds and creatures, realising how lucky we were. While surging forward as if possessed, we did not notice various by-ways that broke away from our path.

Without the least tiredness, we went upto the Achyutaraya temple. There is a temple there for Lord Narasimha. The British Government has done some preservation work, even here, to the extent they could. We went inside and observed. We couldn't spare much time there. How could we afford a lot of time here with so much more to see. From there, many paths deviated. The usefulness of the handbook we had came to an end there. If we had continued

in the northern direction, we could easily have reached the Kodandaramaswamy Temple. But each one of us five had different ideas and couldn't agree with each other. Why are we invested with minds if we can't think differently? The Creator has made it that way as he doesn't want everyone to think the same way. Is freedom given because we should all be "Rubber Stamps" of each other? Finally, Yajamanaru and Rayaru said that they were wearing footwear and so would go forward, examine the path ahead and would tell us. The three of us stayed back. Murthy's foot was sore by the pricking of a thorn and looked like bleeding. It wasn't possible even to put a foot forward if a proper road wasn't found. Again we thought "If only that stupid fellow Channaiah was with us!" Those who had gone forward wandered a bit, found a by-path and called us. We had to tread that thorny way. If only Channaiah was with us! He knows all the roads. He would have taken us straight and

easily. It looks as though that if we try to do everything by ourselves, this is what happens. Ultimately we may succeed; but the possibility of losing the way is there. It is certain that the path would be difficult. It is like the lesson that is learnt directly face to face from a Guru gives superior education.

In ten minutes we came to the main road. By the time we reached there, Murthy and Venkateshaiah were exhausted. Just as in family life our mind is tormented and spoiled by even small problems, fill us with frustration and come in the way of good deeds and noble feelings, these dirty thorns had drawn our minds towards them and had troubled us. Life is not only happiness. There is tragedy. Perhaps the Lord created the world this way lest the people should forget themselves in immersing themselves in enjoyment forgetting this principle. Be that as it may, our two friends who thought that direct

contact with mother earth was a blessing did have an intimate experience of mother earth who showered her love on them. One should have seen the blood on the foot of Murthy who was fair.

A couple of yards ahead, there were two temples. One on the bank of the river was Kodandaramaswamy temple. The other at the foot of the hill the Lakshminarayanaswamy temple. Some among us “Why go there? There are a thousand temples like that here. Come let’s have a *darshan* of Kodandarama and then go forward. It looks as though worship is being conducted there.” Still, I was a bit inclined. Rayaru with a large heart said “Yes, let’s see.” My desire was fulfilled, thanks to his co-operation.

That is not a big temple. Outside there weren’t any carvings. There is no sculpture of any Jakanachari. The temple has been carved in

a single stone and it is an ordinary structure. The attention of researchers and pilgrims has not moved much in this direction. Inside there are three idols. Delicate made, one beside the other, beautifully carved. One the idol of Srimannarayana. On either side, the idols of Sridevi and Bhudevi. They were truly the Divine Deities. It is only if it is that way that devotion and love are engendered, isn't it? We were unfortunate. How could we have the good fortune of that happiness? Some idol breakers, destructionists, vandals unable to bear their beauty, coming from afar have, broken them up. I cannot say for certain that this must have been done by people of another faith. Our people's destructive powers are not negligible in this regard. As some individual has said a long time ago, it is not possible to see the wholeness of God in its fulness in this *Karma Bhumi*. The feet portion excepted, the rest of the figures, the bodies are not seen now. We have heard elders

saying that the holy feet of the Lord are visible only for those devotees who are earnest seekers in some corner. However, it need not be explicitly stated that by looking at only the feet, more than happiness, only sorrow is the result, though they are such holy feet. Otherwise, let alone the sight of God, even the sight of stone carving would not have happened, would it? Even the seven headed Serpent God who is like an umbrella above has not escaped the misfortune. The neck of the Lord Serpent has been cut off. It appears as though a couple of tongues, looking as though wanting to say something to their owner have been devoid of their life in the middle, and have been stilled. Even now, from a time-distance of three hundred years, the hind sight looking at this sight, an inexplicable, deep pain pains as though pierced by a spike. But at the same time the mind becomes anxious to approach those holy feet intermittently, with love, devotion, with a pure heart, with holy tears in the eyes,

wash and worship those feet with fragrant flowers and dwell there. As a poet has said perhaps the broken arcs in this world will be perfected into a round in Heaven! Why can't the Lord Himself bless us with a memory of those feet to stay always with us?

Up front now is the temple of Kodandaramaswamy. There was a noisy scene there. It seems God hesitates to dwell in such a place so noisy and with the priests performing so many kinds of worship. He is afraid of people. Looking out in that direction there was a very happy prospect! Channaiah was coming up like our good fortune personified! What need we fear anymore?

“Look Sir, he is coming here. How can we meet him if we look for him elsewhere?”

“Where had you gone, you son of a gun?” said Yajamanaru. “All the work of today was ruined waiting for you?”

Channaiah : They took me away. They wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. Coming even now was difficult.

Yajamanaru : Alright. Now you must come with us.

Channaiah : I have already taken them there. It is very far away. If I walk, my feet ache, Sir!

We : What does pain do? Come on. Are we going to ask you to come tomorrow?... How far is it from here to there?

There is no end to the selfishness of people. It's alright if our job gets done. What do we care about others?

Channaiah : It's four to five miles. It will be late by the time we come back.

We : Do you want to escape by giving the excuse of distance? You want to escape. No matter how late it will be, we must go there today.

Channaiah : It's not that, Sir... I will come. I only mentioned it is far...etc.

Agreeing to come with us, Channaiah walked forward. He in front. We behind. He pointed out a place, turned towards us and said "The water there is very deep. The day before yesterday, two people drowned there."

"Where?"

In front of Kodandaramaswamy temple, the basin of the river is very wide. It is as wide as a small lake, what with the water overflow. River Tungabhadra seems to humbly pay obeisance to the Gods and the temples, circumambulate them and go on. He pointed his finger and said – "There." On the other bank of the river, the servant of Lord Sri Rama was born on the Anjana mountain. On our left, the river flows making its way between two hills. The reservoir in front of us. Further on,

Tungabhadra hits the boulders, splashes the water, flows over them making a sound, and proudly flows on. Looking on it, how can feelings of sublimity do not arise in one's mind? Rayaru asked, "Channaiah, it seems there is a place called *Sanyasi Dibba*?"

Channaiah : Look there, Sir. That stone *Mantap* on the other side of the river.

We had already seen the *Mantap*. Like other mounds in its external appearance. What kind of people they must have been who lived there in a place inaccessible, cut off from the incursion of animals? - we had thought. Now, as soon as it was identified as *Sanyasi Dibba* the mind of Rayaru was completely absorbed in it. He just stood there contemplating it. For his mind, indeed for the mind's eye of all of us, it stood there like the holy shrine where sage Vidyaranya performed *Tapas*. Especially for Rayaru, who had infinite reverence and devotion, the

consciousness of place and time got obliterated and his mind was immersed in contemplation. He asked “Is there no path to go there?”

Channaiah : No Sir. It is possible if the hill on Anegondi side is mounted and descended. It is very difficult.

Rayaru : Does nobody cross the waters and go there?

Channaiah : I haven't seen anyone there. There is a lot of water. Such waters are in plenty of places here. There is no one these days who goes and stays there.

Truly it was an unreachable place. Otherwise would sage Vidyardanya choose a place like that for his *ashram*? How serenely beautiful, away from din and buzzle that place was! It is not possible to describe in words what an ideal place this abode of peace is, where one could contemplate on the concepts – the principles of the universe, improving the self-power with full

control of mind. Is'nt it here that the brave *Tapaswin* fructified the thoughts of uplifting the Hindu Dharma! Finalised the intention of establishing a Hindu Empire!

Looking at the landscape, the form and the beauty of nature at Hampi even common people will be enthused beyond control. What wonder is there in a *Tapaswin*-patriot got the idea of establishing a traditional Empire? It can be said that no other place in the world had the advantages of the combination of a *Satvic* Brahmin prowess and the *Rajasik* Kshatriya power as this place. We moved on forward. Rayaru was still absorbed in contemplation. None of us disturbed him. I thought, "Who ever would call him a *Nastika* (Non-believer)?"

Up front close by were the tall pillars of a stone balance where the monarchs would weigh themselves against gold and diamonds in the balance and give away in charity so much

wealth. Both Emperor Krishnadevaraya and Achyutaraya who followed him gave away in charity gold and other precious things. Who can say whether it was an act of nobility or a way of proudly proclaiming to the whole world their fame? Ours is a country of too much and too little. In the people here there is no middle path or balance and limits. It looks as though it is a curse given by the Creator to us, the people of hot countries.

Since we had no time to observe everything in detail, we moved on. A short distance away there was a large temple. We came to know that it was the temple of Vitthalaswamy. Outside a tall wall which formed the *Prakara*, an ordinary wall in Hampi except for the fact that it was twenty to thirty feet long and four to five feet thick. I don't know much about temples. I had only heard people praising it as the great Vitthalaswamy temple. I thought exaggeration was our National characteristic. But on entering

I realised that this was a wrong notion. From our approach, the entrance to the temple was from the south door. Channaiah sat at the door on the pediment eating sour mangoes. As soon as we entered the inner compartment, he spread the sheet taking from his shoulder and spreading it, in order to eat what he had left off. A band of monkeys came noisily grinning and playing around, quarreling. He also started sporting with them throwing the remnants at them and threatening them with a stick when they came too close to him. What did it matter to him? Wherever he was, that was his home. His weapon was his stick and the ragged rug was his total possession. Except these he had nothing he could call his own. "Poor fellow, he is very tired. Let him lie down for some time," said Yajamanaru. We also felt the same. There are three main things to be seen in that temple. The great hall; by its side the God's quad and the stone chariot in front. Inside the enclosure there

are many stone inscriptions. The archaeologists can study them and get to know critically many historical things.

After circumambulating the temple and when you stand at the front side, what an ensemble of form, what skill in architecture! It may not be an exaggeration if we say that there isn't another architectural wonder of Dravidian style. On either side of the staircase to ascend the great hall, beautifully carved imposing elephants with their front legs lifted up. These elephants also have suffered the same fate of decay as all the rest of Hampi. Their trunks have been cut away. On ascending, one sees rows of pillars all around, made with the sole purpose of creating beauty. A wide path of pillars till the door of the sanctus sanctorum. Beyond them rows of subsidiary colonnades. In the centre the stage. On every pillar, the carvings of mounted watchmen. On the top panels carvings related to incidents in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In

no stage decorations have I seen an ornamental curtain so beautifully heart-warming the manner. A desire to just move about right there from one side to another, one corner to another. The others moved towards the *Mantap*. They called out "Come on." I said "Yes, coming" and stole some more time to remain there, walking about a bit.

A question arose. Why so much beauty? Why did God give so much beauty in concentration here and impoverished other places? When He Himself is partial, why should we accuse ordinary people of partiality? – I thought. What an indictment of fate that such a beautiful structure, to suffer such a sad fate! I asked myself, is there no fulfilment for such beauty? There is no God's idol here. How can sacred fulfilment be here when Lord Vitthalaswamy, thinking that his Lordship should not rule over such beauty, stayed back in his poor abode of a temple at Pandarapur? I thought

how could sanctity exist at a place where God does not dwell? But then the thought was countered by another thought immediately. Beauty itself is God's form. Where is the need for other reasons to fulfil itself. Another trend of thought occurred. Did God think why He should dwell in the precincts of the kings of Vijayanagar who were proud about their own skill? Why should I form the platform for their prosperous mansion? It is true that this is the empire of our own meritorious people. But is it proper not to punish them, their own pride? Did He destroy angrily the empire that He Himself graciously granted, not being able to witness their activities for half a century? Let these feelings be. However, one shouldn't express inauspicious thoughts but the place didn't exude the holy spirit of a faithful and chaste woman. It began to look like the ravishing snare of a coquette out to conquer with ensnaring charm in vain. I couldn't stay there alone any longer.

In order to ward off bad thoughts, I went to join the others.

All of them had reached the *Kalyana Mantap* and were sitting in the middle admiring it. I saw that *Mantap*. It was mind-boggling. Its beauty would belittle the big *Mantap* of the temple, putting it to shame. Similar rows of pillars. A grand centre stage. On all four sides subsidiary stages. Each stone pillar had been formed with a single stone. Figures like lions, looking inwards on the lower panel. Four or five stone projections looking out in the middle panel; mounted soldiers. Same thing on all four sides. Intricate carvings of a variety of ornamental articles, carvings looking like the wings of a bird, stone rings on which lanterns could be hung, by the use of colours like green, blue, rose and red, giving a feeling of relief work augmenting the natural beauty as if everything, the whole thing had been draped. It looked as though a great melody had been freezed in stone. What can be said about

the love of art sense of beautiful decoration and aesthetic sensibility! What kind of architects they must have been who carved these things! What emperor's marriage hall could match this? What must have been the grandeur of those kings? It seems they would cover the temple of Pampapati with silver and gold sheets and protect them! It was the kind of work to surprise the world with an effort to do everything to last for ever? What a lot of great works in what a short time! I wondered whether it was not better to live gloriously and purposefully for a short time than to lead a long life like worms. Why do stupid people desire long life? If mere longevity is good, are not stones and boulders far superior than us?

I do not know which painter can paint his pictures in such a life-like manner. Variegated by the morning and evening colours, shining with a strange light with kaleidoscopic show, revealing new beauties every moment, the lovely

range of hills attaining life, assuming a consolidated shape have congealed here! Is not the person who can put life into lifeless stone equal to the Creator? I felt that if there was anyone who is a Creator in this world, it is not possible for anyone else except an artist – a poet, a painter, an architect, a singer – who in his own field is a supreme authority and they are truly Brahma, the Creator.

Yajamanaru and Rayaru looked at their watches. It was quarter past four. They said “It will be dark before we return. Let’s go. Move on.” Channaiah also said “Let us start.” We moved on with the permission of the Lord who had given life to that stone building though he was not there in an anthropomorphic form.

As in the case of the other temples, here also in front was the chariot street. Temples on all four sides. All these have been felled. The idols of the deities are lying about scattered

broken with head in one place, hands and legs in another, the face with staring eyes thrown about, thus the idols have been broken to bits and pieces. On top of them thorny bushes and shards grown wildly. Pigs and porcupines must have been dwelling there. Pushing up their ugly, repulsive heads and thorny bodies from among them, they are proclaiming that it is their permanent dwelling places, as if proclaiming "This entire place belongs to us now. You visitors must be careful." They are throwing about their sharp porcupine needles. The female demoness's wild laughter is heard everywhere, shouting its supremacy converting the whole place into a cemetery. What else is it but a burial place? In a fairy land where young, handsome, colourful, happy, attractively decorated young men and women were besporting themselves, now it is crawling with poisonous snakes, porcupines and thieves. Where there was a fragrant breeze, carrying the perfume of scented

flowers, now hot and prickly piercing wind is blowing. In a place that was being ruled by emperors equal to any in the world, now thorny bushes. In the palaces proclaiming pride and dignity, now the harsh and ugly sound of jackals crying and owls hooting, the loud laughter of the demoness. Where there were palaces, temples and shining big halls, now a heap of broken images and building that have fallen and still falling. The ruins everywhere in heaps and mounds proclaiming to the visitors their dilapidated condition, pillars and platforms speaking aloud their ruin. The greatness, the grandeur, pomp and glory of heavenly ambitions and dreams and their superhuman efforts to realize them are now but a crumbling cemetery.

We were ordered to hurry up. We did. Up front was the road leading to Anegondi from Kamalapura. We must turn left there. On this side of the river was Anegondi. We must reach the other bank by boat. The boats and the

boatmen were ready. We got into one of them and sat around. The boatman pushed the oars and started rowing. The Sun God also, like us had lost his strength and was setting. There wasn't the sharpness and burning fury of the midday. Except at the place where he was setting, everywhere else the rows of hills were shadowy and were slowly disappearing. The river flowing, making its way on either side of the hills, having been born a long time ago and still flowing, slow moving stream of yore, born somewhere, travelling nonstop, seeming to search for something. And we the humans, flowing down the river of life, also ancient, exhibiting our endeavours, withdrawals, loves, hatreds, jealousies and other primal emotions. We, making our row-boats, the habit of crossing the river of life hither and thither, staying and straying, spending time without thought of travel instead of straight heading to the ocean. It seemed we were bending and halting only where it was comfortable.

You, who are reading this may laugh. You may suspect that the screws in my head have loosened. I don't have the authority to object. Still, it is my opinion that if you went to that place, if you were observing it wonderstruck, your screws would also come loose, losing your mind. Look at anything out there. One way or the other it looks great. Nothing is quite ordinary. The fort, the dilapidated palace complex, idols, temples, the store houses, the wells and tanks, the place of assembly, relaxing areas look widowed of former glory of a courtesan – again the same feeling – not mundane. What can be said about the empress Goddess of Vijayanagara after four hundred years by tear-swept travellers who have gone there for a couple of days – by people burning up with intense sorrow about the great lady who is suffering it everyday – the heartburning state of a self-sufficient being now down-cast and ruined, lack-lustre faced and sad, filled with sorrow! How can we who had only

read about how she fell on evil days describe to other the mental agony on seeing this sorry state of affairs? The poisonous fire enveloping her did not reduce to ashes at a stroke but has been burning her up slowly and intermittently.

We reached the outer bank of the river. We proceeded forward across the province of Anegondi. What is the comparison between that ruined empire and this living province? Here people are living. Houses, streets, temple, agricultural fields are all here. This is also a capital and there is a king in charge. But when we passed through this place, they didn't seem alive. Like a flowing stream in a dream our minds were indifferent to the events of the outer world. As far as we were concerned, our minds were broken like the emptiness of Vijayanagar. Only the ruined beautiful empire was true. This living province was false. We and that empty world were mutually interested in the attainment of the state of love. Our minds were perceiving

only the broken images of worn out beauty. We left the town behind and walked further carefully. The broad street became narrow. On either side tall hills. Not much greenery on any hill. Only small and big boulders. Here and there, rarely a small tree. Sugarcane fields. The waters of the Tungabhadra rivers appearing from nowhere passing through the streams next to the gardens. Though we were thirsty we didn't want to drink that water. How can one want to drink this water when the clear ambrosial sacred water of Pampa Sarovar was close by? When we know that superior things are available, the mind refuses inferior stuff. That is the way of the world.

Somewhere here is the *ashram* of the noble Shabari who was waiting with great patience and eagerness like the *Chakori* bird waiting for nectar. She became immortal by waiting for Lord Sri Rama according to the orders of Guru Matanga. It was the place where Shabari waited for years together imagining his form in her

heart, seeing only him with eyes, saving every ripe fruit for him, storing every flower with which to worship him and rushing out to see whenever she heard even the sound of a rustle of an old leaf whether it was the Lord's feet that was sounding. That was the aged Shabari. These were the places where Vali and Sugriva fought for Kishkinda. The boulders were their stone weapons. The niche on the left was Vali's hiding place. This was the place of refuge where he was hiding with his four dear friends—the Rishyamuka refuge. This was the place where they would come out sometimes to sit around. Somewhere here was the place where Sita Devi bundled up her ornaments and threw them to indicate the path she had traversed, giving an indication to Sri Rama to identify her trail. Look, there is the place where Sugriva held court. It is here the blood was shed where the brothers fought fiercely. It is through this trail that Sri Rama and Lakshmana walked to the Pampa

Sarovara quite exhausted.... Up front are the palm trees, sugar cane groves, thickly grown *Honge* trees. As the heat of the sun diminished the oppressive atmosphere around lost its sharpness and gentle wind made its presence felt. A little later the breeze increased its speed carrying the fragrance of the nectar of the flowers. A number of carts carrying sugar cane juice and men besporting the effect of drink. Women trying to suck the juice by biting off the peel of the cane, singing happily bending this way and that, even before the juice wetted their tongue. Imitating them the cuckoos, half in intoxication, expressing an unknown emotion and other cuckoos replying to those songs. Starting from the lake, every moment, groups of *Krauncha* and *Balaka* birds flying in formation dividing the blue skies winging their way to their homes. Seeing and enjoying all this, the heart leapt up and a joy welled up beyond the reach of words. The intimacy with nature conquered us completely. A stone bridge in front. A little

to the left over there, at the foot of the Anjana mountain, there is dwelling the calm and quiet Pampa lake surrounded by soft greenery.

As soon as that heavenly lake was perceived, all bodily tiredness and small thoughts vanished altogether. A kind of dignity appears on seeing the full flowing river. Looking at the ocean, it is like looking at an endless expanse a great image shining in grandeur. It is no exaggeration, what was described by Kabandha, the enormous elephantine waves. An intoxicated commotion is experienced, looking at the rolling waves each one fighting with the other. Looking at waterfalls descending from hundreds of feet above, one sees the anger and fearful aspect of nature. Looking at this lake here, no such feelings appear. There isn't any kind of turmoil –

*Padmagandhi Shivam vari*

*Swadu sheetam anamayam |*

*Uddhrutya satataklishtam*

*Raupya sphatika sannibham ||*

When it is full, its circumference would not be more than a mile or two. Some philanthropic people have constructed steps on three sides. Flowering plants on the bank in a line – *Goranti*, *Mallige* and *Parijata* plants. By its side a temple for Sita Devi. Some four or five ascetics from the North who are dwelling here under the blessing of the Goddess under the protection of the king. They are the caretakers of the lake. Hills around the lake. To the north the Anjana mountain. On all the other sides the mountain ranges have descended up to the lake. These are the ever-living beings that have been here since the beginning of time. Though millenniums pass, these have remained unchanged, not minding the ever-changing transient meagre existence of mere mortals, always worrying themselves, fickle-minded and sad short-lived existence.

Silence everywhere. But that silence is not like the silence of any lifeless object. It is like

neither the silence of an idiot or proud man. There is no place for sound, that's all. There is no opportunity. The goings on of the world seem to have ended far beyond the boundaries of this part of the earth. There is no connection between the two things. Even the hills seem to have respected with honouring the lake with a noble sentiment. They have protected its peace. Everything seems to have paid homage to the patron deity of the lake. As the representative Sita Devi has established her regime from the sacred precincts, has organized all the external affairs and is reigning through her servants. They too have integrated themselves into the super-human, rare environment and have become one with it. A female deer that the *Sanyasins* are looking after is providing another holy dimension to the serene beauty of the place. The lake looks like a sage – a realized soul who has attained peace through ages of yogic practice and meditation, who has given up all worldly

attachments and is shining forth, tranquil and pure, irradiating the world.

The pure waters here are holy and transparent, purified by Lord Sri Rama drinking it. In its belly shining like a mirror the lotus flowers in full bloom all through the day are now folding up. The surrounding flora and fauna and the rows of hills seem to have fulfilled in being reflected in the waters of the heaven lake. Even the strong winds have become soft and mellow here, giving up their wonted force and are blowing gently, with reverence, over the lake. Even the lightning that flashes forth, lighting up the skies and going round the earth and heavens making them a single unit, must have paid its homage surrendering its brightness. It must have accepted defeat and accepted the discipleship of this lake. Even the loud - sounding reverberating thunder, not having the courage to come this far must have subsided and receded to some place. This lake looks as if it has seen

all this, all activities since time immemorial, appears to know nothing though knowing everything and has found inner bliss like a realized soul.

On the way we had bought mango fruits and sugarcane. We washed our faces in the lake, ate these, drank a lot of water and alleviated our thirst. It was evening already. The orange coloured sun was about to set in the distant western horizon. His red-mixed shine, circumventing the range of hills and penetrating the foliage was lighting up the surroundings. Shining through the clouds above, the sunshine had decorated them in a variety of ways. Above, the sky. The clouds coloured enchantingly. Below, the lake. In it the reflection, pale yet clear. The quietness around. The lake, the very personification of peace. What wonder is there in the mind forgetting itself? No desire to leave the place no matter how long we were sitting there. We must seek shelter before it rains. What shelter?

The *Sanyasins* invited us into the temple. There was no alternative. However, I didn't feel like going in and obtain the *darshan* of Devi Sita. This is the place where Sita, being abducted by Ravana was tearfully passing through, weeping! This is the place where Sri Rama, separated from his lady withered with sorrow! How can this place bring joy where she is spending time separated from her husband? How is it possible to feel happiness on seeing her here where her face is covered by sorrowing clouds? We didn't go in. We put a small coin in their palms, paid obeisance from outside and left. The *Sanyasins* must have cursed us. Let them. How can they know what was on our minds?

We returned the same way we had come. It was past six O' clock. The dark clouds had appeared in the sky and darkness was caving in. The trees and plants started shaking. We were anxious to reach 'Home'. We had started with the speed of an arrow. We smelt the onset of

rain along with the cold wind. The premonition made us afraid. Where to stay if the rain didn't stop the whole night? I who had no desire to eat unless feeling hungry, even I, began to feel very hungry. Augmenting the fear the lightning flashed, thunder thundered. It is not possible to describe its menace. Before a couple of steps were taken, it did start raining. Huge drops of water. It started pouring cats and dogs. The wind and the rain contending with each other. In this onslaught our umbrellas uncontrollably took their own courses. All the authority we had on them all these days flew away in a minute. They started misbehaving the way in which the people under subjugation suddenly rebelled. My umbrella folded topsy turvy. This additional show in addition to pouring rain. The hilarity of friends. I said "O.K., Laugh away." Still how could anyone behave differently, given the situation. I understood the delicacy of my situation, looked at them, looked at the umbrella and laughed

louder than them. Such situations can be met only through this method. Channaiah also started laughing loud and long and joined them. Seeing this I was enraged.

I shouted at him, "You fellow, why are you laughing?" My serious tone did not deter him. "What can I do Sir, laughter came compulsively." He was under no obligation to anybody. I cursed him silently and kept quiet.

Nearby was an old dilapidated house. Many people like us had gathered there. The clothes worn by all of them were dripping with water. The light clothes worn by us were hugging our bodies. The rugs worn by the farmers were trying to maintain their dignity. The black clothes worn by some, hugging their bodies started shining in the light of the lightning. The old men who had receded into corners were shivering with their heads in their knees. We the middle aged, our teeth were chattering involuntarily.

Those who were taking shelter there – two hens, four sheep, ten sugarcane sticks and people like us – in all sixteen people, the elders, the youngsters, men, women, Hindus and Muslims. It was quite a representative crowd. No one could criticize that the Brahmins were excessive in number as we, the innocents, were only five in number. God's grace.

On a mud mound two or three were sitting with their rugs close to them. Among them two were Reddys. (Andhra Agriculturists) One was kneeding tobacco and the other chewing it, sitting like lazy lubbers. An other one was a Muslim. He was their leader. He was sitting there making jokes, caressing his long beard, chewing tobacco, removing pieces of it from his teeth and spitting right there. He was clever. He had not been caught by the rain. The rain subsided when someone was recounting how someone had been murdered there the previous

year. We left the place and came to the street. We trudged along. The darkness of black rainy clouds augmented the darkness. Rayaru said – “Who can walk another six miles in this darkness in that street. Let us spend the night here and leave in the morning.” He was not accustomed to walk long distances. He was used to walking slowly. The road was not smooth either. Fear also. No one had any clothes except what we were wearing. Even that was wet. Hunger striking from within. No matter what time it was, if we reached ‘Home’ we could sleep in our beds. Rayaru’s suggestion was not accepted. He had to bow to majority opinion. We went three big shops on the main street and asked. Even for four annas not even a single candle was available. Yajamanaru said “What can we do? Let’s walk carefully. Even the boatmen may go away from the river bank.” Within ten yards the tax officers of Anegondi were coming towards us with the cash box. We requested them in all

sorts of ways to appease them. They said they would return in ten minutes and went into town. But they didn't. Still we cleared our minds that we had told them about our crossing and reached the shore. There would be no impediment for our journey from their side. But there were no boatmen. They had all gone to the other bank. On the other side at a distance were their homes. It looked as though they had lighted up a fire and were dancing to the beat of the drums. We shouted to them. First, individually and then collectively. We shouted as loudly as we could. We cried out that we would pay them. This magic word worked and a boatman rowed to us and took us to the other bank. We must consider it a great favour. It was a strict order that after the tax officers left, boats should not be operated. He had acted courageously because of the offer of money.

We got off and told Channaiah to show us the way and followed him. He too who was

leading couldn't see the road ahead sometimes because of the dark. Then only the light of the *beedi*, that he was smoking was the torch. The anxiety to reach home, the fear, the agitated mind, the rain, the darkness, the emotion – all these had established the sway over us. We had traversed the same road two or three hours earlier enjoying the beautiful objects, praising them with joy, commenting on them. But now only fear and darkness inside and out. All other feelings had vanished. What did it avail, the courage being given by Channaiah. Unseen territory. The time moving slowly. Fear of robbers. The possibility of stumbling, falling and breaking our legs. The path was lighted up only by sporadic lightning. Even that light was frightening. The stray stones seemed in that light like crocodiles with open, ravenous mouths. The dry trees looked like devils with open arms.

Yajamanaru said “It is good to have a pistol with us at times like these.” True, it is only at

such moments that we remember pistols. But how to maintain pistols. You have to spend money on buying cartridges. How could we get the skill to hold and use them? Who can give license to everyone? By God's grace we have been given protection by the British Government and the job of maintaining physical happiness and peace is being carried out in whatever manner at least to this extent. Otherwise what would happen to us? Saving and protecting us is their responsibility. As long as their heads are sound we don't have any fear. No matter where you stay and where you go, you have no fear. I said "There is no fear, Sir, we are six."

"No matter whether we are six or sixty. Remember last night?" – the answer came. My bravado sank. Besides, an elder's words of sixty-year experience was not untrue, we knew.

Murthy "Why are you afraid when Srikantiah and I are here? I am used to the stick, pistol

and jijitsu. What can creatures do? If mischief makers come, isn't Srikantiah alone enough? Didn't you see the other day on the way to Devarayana Durga? – we shall go as we did that night by clapping our hands together” and started clapping.

I was angry. I couldn't tolerate Murthy making fun of me this way. Is it enough for courage if a man is tall and fat and weighs a hundred and fifty pounds? If one appears physically weak, why shouldn't there be courage and strength? Say, what is difficult about making fun? Who can't make fun? I thought even if Lord Vishnu comes tomorrow and stands in front, is it difficult to hold him to ridicule and send him packing to where he belongs? One thing I must boast about. Though I am not lacking in strength and courage, I have more of self-esteem. It is my feeling that most people are like that in the world. Some show it openly while others keep it under control. That's all the

difference. It is my opinion that there is no mean fellow who will not get angry if he is told "You are a coward" and one who will not be happy if he is told "You are brave." Anyway I started surging forward with great enthusiasm. For some time it continued. However, the steps began to be increasingly heavy, without any ado. Gradually it started being tired. I taught the feet in many ways. But if it was their decision to put me to shame without discretion, what could I do? Since the darkness of the night was dense, nobody was in a position to laugh at my discomfiture. Murthy wasn't used to keep his mouth shut about me. He didn't mind hurting my feelings. He said "Keep pace with others, man. Let's reach home safely. Don't stumble and fall, breaking your leg!" That was the time... I started grumbling aloud in his hearing and walking along. None of us felt like talking. Talk and emotion had receded somewhere into the subconscious. Some unknown force was

suppressing, was pushing us down easily as if happy during a bad dream.

“Where are we now, Channaiah,” asked Rayaru. He said “The place which I showed earlier. The place Sita Devi threw down her jewel ornaments. We have reached that place.” I have already mentioned that above clouds, thunder and lightning were having a field day menacingly. Now it thundered fiercely as if to reduce all the bones and joints in the body to a pulp. The awesome effect was such that it was ten times more terrible than the earth under our feet was shaking powerfully enough to throw us up fifty feet into the sky. All our hearts pounded. The fierceness was such that it would set the entire place on fire with the shafts of lightning. How is it possible to describe either the picture or experience by using the pen? Suddenly green palm trees caught fire and burned with the brightness of the sun. It was like the resplendence of a hundred Washington lights all ablaze

simultaneously. It took ten minutes for the fire to subside, the sparkles to stop and turning red. My God! What a sight it was! The vibration of the nerves set in at that time made the body to shake and shiver for half an hour after that. Never had I experienced such a thing earlier.

As we went on, the path narrowed between two huge boulders. For about ten to fifteen yards it was like a tunnel. We had no light. Couldn't see up front. All the sticks in the box of matches had been struck away. They were, as you know the match sticks of our time. They don't ignite properly. Powerful wind blowing the night darkness against the face. The heart beating loudly, more than a hundred and fifty times per minute like jingle bells. The body shaking with wetness and cold. The teeth were chattering. The experience can never be forgotten – as long as we are alive. Channaiah lighted the last *beedi* which he was keeping behind his ear. It is not possible to communicate verbally the help

rendered by his *beedies* – especially to that last *beedi* – which was the saviour. It begs all sense of gratitude. It created reverence even in the mind of Yajamanaru. What can be said beyond that by anybody? In that narrow passage more than one person could not walk at a time. We followed one behind the other in a queue following the light of the *beedi* and rejoining the main road. It was as if a big load had been taken off from our chest and we could breathe.

In another quarter of an hour the rain stopped. A peculiar music started throughout the road. From between the crevices of the rocks by the roadside frogs jumped out freely, making a music far beyond the *Saptaswaras*. Accompanying the frogs were the insects and other creatures contributing their own sounds. Till today I haven't been able to understand the inner concept. I still haven't comprehended how these water creatures, the frogs are able to be on land, dwelling among rocks come out the

moment it rains and how they survive, in what form on land, scorching with heat. I had asked this question when I was a boy. They had not answered properly but had said something just to be saving face, not knowing the answer, thinking that it was below their dignity to confess their ignorance. Then for quite some time I had thought that they would fall down from above along with the rain. Even now I am not sure I know the answer. I can't swear I know. No matter what the theory now all the silent area was bristling with the sound of living presence. The feeling of suppressed fear gave way to the awareness of life on earth around us. I was surprised that so many innumerable fellow living beings were living in this waste land. In the midst of this all, a mongoose or a wild cat would sometimes cross the road. The green shining eyes of the cat would shine in the darkness like fire and reveal its cruel face and whiskers. Also, now and again, a big frog would appear below

the feet of Yajamanaru or Rayaru and they would jump aside. There another frog would find itself below their feet. They would swear at it and shake their umbrella up and down. Fearing this they would allow passage.

In the midst of all this another mishap took place and worried me for some time. One of my chappals got angry and the thumb strap disengaged itself. I don't wish even my enemies to suffer this outrage. In that rain and slush each chappal was heavy like a ton of metal. Even Lord Adishesha (A Thousand-tongued Serpent) might find it difficult to describe. Who can tell who Adishesha is and whether it is easy or difficult for him to describe? With all my effort, the more I tried to swim forward with my chappals, the more difficult it became and was pulling backwards. I surging forward and it pushing backwards. And oh, it came to the notice of Murthy. He is born only to tease me. You must be careful to take him to any place

where you have to maintain your dignity – an elder at that! How can I presume to take him. It is very difficult indeed. It is not possible even for the four-faced Brahma to shut him up.

“What is your problem. You are falling back?”

I : You proceed forward. I will follow you slowly. We have, after all come to the road in front of the temple.

Murthy : Why don't you say what happened?

I caught hold of his shoulder. (He was head and shoulders taller than me.) I whispered “The footwear is torn. The thumb strap has come loose.”

Murthy : What is the big problem? take it into your hand and walk or tie it to your ears! It is proper punishment for you. Why did you laugh so when we stepped on a frog?

I also thought so. Instead of behaving with decorum at an elder's discomfiture, because I

laughed, God has punished me. It's all immediate effects.

I pleaded "Please be silent. If Yajamanaru overhears this, I will be ridiculed.

Would he listen? It is an illusion.. I took the footwear into my hands.

Murthy : Now at least, walk fast.

I : Wait. What happens if we go slowly? There is nothing waiting for us there.

Murthy : Your delicacy is unnecessary and uncalled for as it is unprecedented. Venkateshaiah, look at this man's fate. It seems carrying his footwear in his hands is a shame. Hereafter, since your head is heavy, keep it aside and come. Who is going to laugh at you in this darkness even if you keep it on your head?

What I had tried not to happen, did happen. My face fell. What had to happen did happen.

What if someone is there or not. Our mind hesitates to do certain things because of our cultural necessities. I thought about what I should do. The chappals were also very old. It had been further spoiled on account of that day's travel. It looked as though it wouldn't come back to normal without it being dried in the sun and rubbed and polished with oil and all. All these niceties had to be performed only it had to be wrapped with paper or cloth and preserved the whole of next day and taken home! We ourselves are not looked after properly. Then who is going to take care of the chappals? – I thought. If the inner debate that took place within me, weighing the pros and cons with logical skill and expertise and the war that went on had been conducted in the presence of others, I would have been bestowed the honour of *Mahamahopadhyaya* (A traditional Doctorate title) in Logic and Rhetoric. Once the mind said “Don't throw it away. It could be repaired by

paying two rupees.” At another time, the mind would answer : “Who wants to carry it to Bangalore? It has also served for four months. Its age is also ripe. No one has established a repair workshop for chappals. Let it be. Everything has to serve only for the destined period of time.” Finally, this argument won. It was but natural. Realizing that Murthy who was walking freely next to me would make a big issue of it, I quietly slipped off the slippers silently down a street side rock and walked freely. Soon we reached the temple.

We changed our clothes first and rested a bit, ate a little and then we went in order to sleep. It seems even before we had started on our excursion in the afternoon, Venkateshaiah had told the old woman. When we were about to go to bed, she brought five tumblers full of hot milk mixed with *Badam* and *Kesari*. Rayaru said “Wonderful.” Yajamanaru said “Great. May you have eight good sons.” I approved and

looked at Murthy. He was enjoying himself holding the tumbler with half-closed eyes with his mouth and moustache contracted and said : “The person who thought about this deserves a grant of *Jahagiri* (A piece of land as gift). Ours are evil times. Fifty years ago at the time of the Maharaja some court people would, without reservation have granted a *Jahagiri*.

Venkateshaiah said “It would be more tasty if a little less sugar had been added and heated up.”

Rayaru said “If you are so particularly delicate about your taste, how to live? You are always complaining no matter what. You see how *Masala* has been added to the *Khova*. He is finding fault even with this.”

Venkateshaiah : Then is what I said wrong?

Rayaru : How can you lie? It is true. No need to probe it further.

What is evidence against truth? If there is, will it stand? Everybody had to accept it. Everything done by Venkateshaiah is such. He doesn't talk much. If one word is enough, he doesn't utter a single syllable more. It is so even in his writing. Like Yubert. The matter of an entire book should be reduced to the length of a page. An entire page to a sentence. An entire sentence to be reduced to a word. His style is so epigrammatic. Expansion brings him unease. He does things faultlessly or gets it done that way. What he does with his right hand is not known to the left hand. We the rest of us, enjoying our milk, wiping our lips, thanked God for saving us from the difficulties of the day and praising Lord Pampapati, sank into sleep. That day I realized "There is happiness if you suffer difficulties." It became clear that day that if you wade through slush and mud in hunger you will get *Kesari* milk.

\* \* \*

### III

**D**reams throughout the night. The band of music, the soldiers carrying silver wands and the people with lights are proceeding forward. The Vaidic priests have joined wearing dhoties around the waists, wearing tufts of loose hair and with an *Angavastra* on their shoulders. A gold vessel; two of silver; four of copper shining having been washed clean. Next to the torchbearer is a *Dasari* with a yellow decorative mark on his forehead, striking the cymbal and blowing the conch. The Brahmins, incanting the Vedas aloud have started from the north entrance and are proceeding to the river. A little ahead is the shining river, flowing smoothly. One or two

people have descended the steps in the direction of the image of Basava. To the left as well as the right for about two furlongs, the spread and flow of the river is seen. Since there are hills on both sides, the rays of the setting sun have become mild. Only the middle of the river is lighted. The evening sun has spread all over and is shining the bodies of people, the vessels being carried and the golden tower of the sanctum sanctorum, the silver roofs of the *Mantaps* and the variegated colours of the water of the river. The Brahmins have offered worship to the river, come to the shore and are preparing to return. The *Dasari* is blowing aloud the trumpet. One other person is sounding the big bell and the trumpet. The musicians of the *Nadaswaram* are playing their instruments aloud, with enthusiasm. The procession is reaching the temple. In the sanctum sanctorum, an aged and resplendent priest is saying "Come quickly. The king has sent word that he will be arriving early today."

This picture ceased here. Now thousands of citizens are standing in the outer hall wearing the traditional costume. Everywhere the lamps are burning in the brass containers. The centre path is open so that even the people who are standing at the door can have *darshan* of the deity. Fragrant smell of flowers, fruits, incense is emerging from the sanctum. The sacred bath (*Abhishekam*) for the idol is over and everyone is eagerly awaiting. Meanwhile the sound of the trumpets. Immediately the emperor arrived. Two male elephants are fanning and are moving backwards. Emperor Krishnadevaraya, tall and dignified is wearing a red silk dress, wearing ear ornaments is coming to the *darshan* of the Lord. Walking beside him are the bearers of gold and silver staff. The flatterers waving resplendent clothes, are praising his great deeds. The instruments are playing; the Vedas are being chanted; the bells are ringing; the singers are singing. The king's face is glowing, freshly

anointed, resplendently. The *Mahamangalarathi* for Lord Virupaksha is taking place followed by the chanting of *Mantrapushpa* and benediction for the king and the distribution of *Prasada* (sacred food). There is no noise anywhere. The food is being distributed by several people from several directions. It is so silent now that one can hear even if a hair falls to the ground. It is followed by the exit of the king first, then the ministers and then the others moving towards their homes. The worship follows and then the door of the temple is closed...

All through the night the dreams never stopped— following each other. After a dream is over there is another. Sleep never came though so tired that day! A little shut eye and then another dream follows. The procession of the king and queens starting from the temple goes into the palace. There is no logic or continuity to these dreams. There is no time-space restriction. It is about four in the afternoon. Now the

vignettes of the seraglio. There, their relaxation, play, pride, egoism, jealousy, insults and contempt. Or a game of chess, or playing with dolls. Women playing the instruments – the Veena, the Rudraveena, Sarangi and Flute. They are all flowers of the king's harem. Everyone of them capable of pleasing an emperor and reigning. A song here singing aloud. A love song of a lady love addressing her lover. A *Raga* of separation and a song of fulfilment. Elsewhere self-forgetting absorbing melody. A song while singing that accompanies glancing at someone to make him endear herself to him. Song that coquettishly stealing glances looking and yet not appear to be doing so, pretending to adjust the necklace, adding meaning to the words, improvising spontaneously. There are those women who are like the dull moon resting their elbows on their thighs, like blooming spring roses, sighing with their heads bent. Women who are gently pushing back with their fingers their hair which is

mischievously and repeatedly falling forward on to their cheeks and obstructing their eyesight. Some lovely ladies lifting their heads and seem to be seeing something with surprise but really seeing nothing, appearing and disappearing in a moment; pouting their red lips and smiling. Beauties who are half reclining on their beds, watching their lower lips coloured by betel leaf redness, watching their reflections in mirrors on all four sides. This must be the queen, here. Decked with green and red sprouts, tall and dignified, her chest region is shining resplendently decorated by a diamond ornament, augmenting her natural beauty. This mansion filled with fragrance has slave girls fanning all around. A lovely slave girl here who is fixing the toe-ring sitting at her feet. A beautiful portrait of Rati and Manmatha (the God of Love). Another of playful Lord Krishna. Everywhere oil paintings of the beloved king. Now the dream moves to another hall.

There some are wearing ornaments; some others are getting their fixed properly smearing with scented oil and making fun of each other. At that time another approaches the parrot says "Tell me what's going on in the mind of our lady. I will decorate you with a pearl necklace. I will give you fruit. I will give you a kiss." The beauty who is getting flowers ornamentally fixed feigns false anger and chides her. At that time the parrot comes flying down, sits on her shoulder and puts its face against the lady's and plays about.... The river Tungabhadra is flowing next to the seraglio. It is about eight at night. There are marble steps to descend into the River. The autumn moon is shining up there illuminating the steps, the river, and the surroundings. The river is reflecting the shine in small waves and scattering it in a thousand ways. After the wind stops the reflection stands still once again. Now it looks as though the starlit sky descending to the earth, has fallen into the waters and the blue

sky has been spread out at the bottom of the river. The ladies are descending slowly, along with their companions to enjoy the moonlight. Their foot-rings are making a jingling sound. They are playfully adjusting their dresses, setting right the flowers that they are wearing, smiling at each other, sing songs adding their own improvised words, gesticulating as if they are performing *Arati* to each other's faces. They are coming down to stretch their feet into the water. What pictures! It looks as though all the experiences of the world are contained in these happenings. Poor things, they think that they are going to remain so for ever!

Is there no end to these dreams? Waking up and sitting up wanting to think about something else, another dream comes even with eyes open. Now it is not the seraglio. There is no lilting laughter of lovely ladies. This is the celebration of Vijayadashami. The *Durbar* of Ramaraja. A

thick crowd of people everywhere. The officials moving about with alacrity. The people in the *Rajpath* as far as the eye can see. All along ornamental pillars and decorations. The Hindu horsemen are sitting on horses four to a row. The horses are a rare breed from Arabbistan, Burma and Persia. Even the Muslim emperors are envious of the horses of Vijayanagar.

Everything is moving at a swan's pace. The military are armed. They are moving towards the *Durbar* hall one behind the other endlessly, like a line of ants, with a drawn sword in one hand and the reign of the horse in the other hand. The shine of the drawn swords is like waves of lightning. Rows and rows of whispering audience expecting the arrival of the king. In the middle from time to time the shout of 'Silence'! Rest for a little while. On the raised, decorate black stone pediment at one end, facing the east is the diamond throne. By its side a little

to the behind are sitting chairs. On the lined up marble pillars are carved elephants and lions. On the raised elephant trunks are garlands of pearls and flowers, and silk bunches. All along the path for the king is spread Persian rug, on top of it red soft cloth is spread out. The next moment the trumpets and conches sound. The greetings of victory from a million people. The praises of the courtiers. The *Mantrapushpa* welcome from the Vedic scholars. Then for the next five minutes silence, while the king and the courtiers sit down. The crown elephant and horse come up and salute by bending down, from a distance. Other shows like the exhibition by the wrestlers take place.

Then the *Chandrayudha* the Royal sword is brought. The *Purohits* (Priests) and audience on the platform, the chiefs, and the king stand up. The king worships it respectfully on his knees, holds it in both his hands, touches his forehead with it, places it on his head, stands up, raises

it by the right hilt and waves it about. The people shout "Victory to the king, Victory to the Lord of Vijayanagar, Victory to Ramaraja." After all this is over, on a sign from the Maharaja the Chief Minister comes forward and reads a proclamation. The face of the ninety year-old king, even at this age, without any wrinkles on his face, the rosy, resplendent face of the king has a serious brave look. However there is a slight veil of a shadow. The cheeks indicate a firm resolution. A wide forehead. Firm eyebrows. *Kumkum* (vermillion) mark between the brows. The eyes are flashing. A stance like a bow. Though it is a time of celebration, an attire ready for war. The hard look on the face, proclaiming hardness itself. The steely sharp sentences of the proclamation read by the Chief Minister. The astonishment of the people. They are looking at each other curiously.

The Chief Minister is reading the proud letter written by the Sultan Adil Shah of Bijapur.

As the letter is being read, the face of the king is becoming more and more cloudy and angry. He is glancing from time to time at the soldiers holding the hilt of his sword more and more firmly, the emotional upsurge is seen. Just as the dark, rainy clouds in the sky resembling a herd of elephants get to be red making them look like hot copper and assume a fierce expression, so is the king's face making it fearsome.

On the left corner there is the smile of the Pathan Commander expressing hatred and contempt. He is also holding firmly the hilt of his sword in answer to the king looking at him with partly in affection and partly with anger. There is a contemptuous expression in the turn of his lips. The reading of the letter is over. Immediately the angry king, with a firm voice is saying – “Did you hear, hear these words, you Commanders and citizens? Has the prestige and honour of Vijayanagar gone away? Don't we

have strength in our arms? My God, what vanity! Have the worms crawling under the feet of the lion got drunk? They seem to have forgotten how many times they have been powdered to dust under the stamping feet of Vijayanagar. Let it be so. Here is Ramaraja to curb the pride of these villains. Brave heroes and soldiers, now you have to show your bravery in the battlefield. The time has come to protect the honour of a great empire. It seems all the five have joined – all the five of the Bahammani Kingdom. Let them join. Let them add four more. Let them come together. What can any number of weak papers do in the force of the whirlwind? It seems they will bring the Muslim army, invade our empire, dethrone me and destroy this kingdom. It seems they have already sent an army to the borders and sent it to the fort. Citizens, you know what an amount of hatred and envy they have towards us. Demolishing sacred temples, destroying *Dharma*,

killing cows. They are sworn enemies of your chaste women, your religion and your national honour. They have provoked us and come. They will transgress and rush forward. This is their declaration of war. The announcement of occupation. Their pride must be broken. We can't keep quiet. I know that no one of you is a coward. Patriots! Come on. Take an oath that we are not cowards and will not recede. You *Vaidics*, go and perform deeds of peace, let the priests perform worship. Your chanting alone will make the enemy run away." All the soldiers take out their swords from the sheaths and bowing in the direction of the feet of the king, all the aged and the young are saying with one voice – "O King, we will never be cowards. Till the last drop of blood remains in the body and until the last breath, we will follow you and win victory."

The assembly came to a close. In a short while the assembly hall was empty. In the dense

darkness is heard the ugly denigrating, screeching cry of a demon and even that stops. There is the sound of laughter. The voice of that young Pathan. That face. That victory cry is his. Yes, his own.

In a moment there are cries everywhere. The crying of women and children. The sound of cannon. The piercing of swords and daggers. Thousands of people are fighting, cursing. The cry "Water, water." The sound of the wounded falling to the ground. The loud cry of horses and elephants. Broken heads. Severed limbs. Streams of blood. Everywhere the din of battle. Human beings converted into demons engaged in destruction. Burning houses and building. Falling walls, pillars, temples and towers. Horses and elephants running amuck. The head of Ramaraja fixed on a spear. A band of soldiers celebrating. In another moment, the flag of Vidyanagar fallen on the ground, the glory of

fortune and tireless bravery traduced to the earth and the abode of Goddess Lakshmi becoming a cemetery. I woke up crying aloud.

I felt Murthy waking me up – “What happened? Did you have a nightmare? Get up.” I was more conscious of the sights I was seeing than that.

“Hey, get away, careful” –

He woke me up “What misfortune happened, Srikantiah, what is this madness?” He rolled me over and woke me up.

I said “Murthy, this is what happened.”

“What happened today? It happened four hundred years ago. Just you sleep,” he said. I looked at my watch. It was only half past two.

It was not my fate to sleep that night. And then there were no more horrible dreams. Other dreams took over. Now all the dreams were from

the *Ramayana*. The army of monkeys; the battle between Vali and Sugriva. Sita Devi throwing down her ornaments when she was being abducted in Ravana's chariot. Another time, the dream of the *ashram* of Shabari, her waiting for Lord Rama. The wailing of Sri Rama. Lakshmana consoling him. Thus hundreds of images from the *Puranas* appearing. It was not possible to know why all this was happening.

After the night was over, preparations to leave took place. By the time we got ready, the carts which we had sent for arrived. We packed up and placed our things in the carts. For the last time we went into the temple, got *Mangalarati* performed and came back. Before getting into the cart, we paid Channaiah, received his thanks and gave him a certificate! There was a discussion before giving the certificate whether we should. Couldn't his natural good behaviour and his work ethic enough to recommend him? Who are we to certify to his character when he

was so dutiful, ever smiling, service minded and selfless person? Rayaru said “It is not necessary.” Channaiah pleaded “It is not like that, Sir. Others like you who come here will see my credibility. I am not particular about the money that you give. It is just that I must guide people who come here properly and must give them satisfaction. Why else do people like you come here, Sir, from far away? There are two or three others here. But they are not trustworthy. I mustn’t speak about it. You can yourself make enquiries.” “It is not surprising. It could be true. Alright. Venkateshaiah, please give me the fountain pen” Yajamanaru said. He asked Rayaru to write. Rayaru was an expert in writing. Everybody was afraid of his pen. They feared his proficiency. He wrote and read it out. “Is it alright?” he asked. “It is fine, Sir. Writing like this will release from jail even a robber.” said Channaiah. We took leave of him and sat in the cart and started.

We left that beautiful abode which gave us so much happiness and sorrow just in two days, the experience of the history of two hundred and fifty years. The cart trudged along the ups and downs of the peaceful cemetery. The bones in the body started singing. The water in the vessel was shaking about. The space below used to get cold. Remembering some story fear appeared. Let it be. It is good that we spent some time there. True, that was not enough. But where is the limit? We were not satisfied. It requires at least a week to see the place. One must roam about among the ruins, as one likes. One must see its wonders. Its landscape must be observed, the beauty of its river and the streams must be enjoyed from the top of various hills. One must see with one's own eyes the million rays of the rising and setting sun, the mind must be washed and the heart must be elated. One must sit here and there, recognize the various places, imagine the events that have taken place there, invest

them with life and bring them back to life. Our friend's elder brother has described beautifully the loveliness of the Penugonda region. One must sharpen one's tools on the rocks there and fight with them. One must get ready to fight for new life. One must indulge oneself in thought night and day and visualize sage Vidyaranya. We were contrite that this was not possible for us. But at least, we had a look at Hampi and enjoyed its beauty. It is fortunate.

On either side of the cart road, *Masjids* and dilapidated temples. Barren land without a touch of greenery anywhere. Broken fort walls lined up next to the hills. We travelled through these and reached Hospet by three O' clock in the afternoon.

Before the train arrived, I went to the restaurant and sat drinking tea. It was more than five-six days since drinking tea. In our country, tea drinkers and coffee drinkers are enemies –

always arguing. The coffee drinkers are more in number. Therefore theirs is the upper hand. They have no sympathy with tea. People like me are very few in our country. That is why our country is in such a sorry state. There are very few people who drink coffee in the morning, tea in the afternoon, cocoa in the evening and plenty of milk at night. Indeed there are very few who can relish all this with equal pleasure. They are the upper crust. The fame of our country has remained still because of us. We are not given to hate and envy. I can say that there are no such intolerant people as coffee drinkers!

Now, it was a cup, two, three should be enough shouldn't it? My mind did not tell me anything either for or against. It was ambiguous. What is the extent of the debt to the railway canteen? You tell me. Meanwhile, Venkateshaiah came in search of me to tell me it was time for the train to arrive. Don't I know his secret? He

joined me. So, two more cups. A voice was heard at the back – “What is the sin I have committed that you should excommunicate me like this? Trusting you is ruinous.” It was Rayaru. He said “I say, bring one more cup of tea.” The waiter looked at my face. They also looked at me. What should an innocent man do when he is stared at like a culprit? After returning victoriously from the conquest of Vijayanagar, are five cups of tea too many? These people don’t understand, I thought. Meanwhile the whistle of the Railway Guard was heard. We boarded the train quickly.

The train started. Venkateshaiah said, “What is this I say, wipe your face. It is dripping.” Murthy said “What else happens? He must have been Sage Agastya previously. If you continue this way even the remaining bones in your body will melt away.” I stared at him. Still, I bent down my head. I turned towards the window.

He would say something if I turned towards him. Let people say what they want. So don't turn that way. Who will say I will go to hell for small transgressions?

Everybody started looking forward and backward through the windows. Those sights got dimmed in the bright light and wavy shine of mirages. Other things of the mundane world, memory of people and duties appeared before the mind. They went on changing from minute to minute. The outer world of cottages, fields, trees, walls, vegetation, plants came running and disappeared as the train was moving. In the surge of daily routine sights and sounds the thoughts about Hampi and Vijayanagar stopped, gradually. I felt like looking back on them and salute them. But supposing someone noticed it and laughed? By the time I stopped thinking thus, I heard Venkateshaiah and Rayaru taking a deep breath and exhaling. Could it be my

imagination? – I thought. Before this no special feeling was expressed on their faces. Still, suddenly we looked at each other's faces. Everybody had the same expression. We fell silent. Murthy was putting his face out of the window and was gazing.

Rayaru said "The excursion to Hampi has come to an end."

"By the time we come again those hills would perhaps have become powder," said Venkateshaiah withholding snuff between his fingers.

Yajamanaru said "Tomorrow, we will be in town. Who knows what would have happened? It is ten-twelve days since we left town.

The excursion was over.

\* \* \*

## Dr. S. Ramaswamy

Dr. S. Ramaswamy (b. 1932) obtained his M.A. first class in English Literature and received the Gold Medal from Mysore University in 1954. He obtained his Ph.D. from Bangalore University (1973). He was three times a Fulbrighter, at the University of California, Los Angeles (1964-66), again a Senior Fulbright Fellow in California (1988) and a third Fulbright at the Universities of Yale and Texas (1991), when he was made a Fellow of Silliman College, Yale University. He earned his Masters Degree in American Literature from the University of California (1966) and won the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa International Award in 1965. He was a Shastri Indo-Canadian Scholar at McGill University, Montreal (1989). He was twice a British Council Scholar at Oxford (1983) and London (1989). He has ten books and more than two hundred papers in English to his credit. He has been widely published in the areas of English, American, Commonwealth and Comparative Literatures and Indological Studies in Professional Journals. He has studied Sanskrit traditionally, and has researched in Harvard and Heidelberg. He is a Life Member of Indian Association for Canadian Studies, Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies and Hon. Member of the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India.