

Donkey

by J. Kaval

The sun was already up in the sky and the earth was feeling its warmth

I was on the way from my village Guniagrahara towards the city. I have to collect the prize money for my short story that won the contest conducted by Bindu National Daily in collaboration with Kathalok Academy for Creativity.

At M.S.Palaya junction I found a commotion near the Sri Krishna Hotel that has often provided me breakfast. I suddenly stopped and parked the bike nearby stationery shop. I approached the crowd and paved my way into the centre of scene. I saw an old woman aged over seventy lying near the sewage close to the entrance to the hotel. Her walking stick already broke was near her in the drainage. Her tiny pouch where she used to keep her panmazala and money was intact on her midriff. Blood was oozing from her mouth. An array of ants started arriving to eat out her. Dirty water laundered her tattered body.

The pedestrians looked at the crumbled dead body and slowly turned away murmuring:

“Poor old woman! Thank god, she’s dead.”

“What a pity! She ended like an old bitch on the street”

“Hare bhai, if you don’t have lot of money you will also end up like her in the street”

“Like her there are hundreds in the Garden City.”

I heard people commenting and whispering.

“Please inform the police”, an agitated youth said.

“Kindly contact the city corporation”, a gentleman added.

Nobody was coming forward to do anything. Not even the owner of the hotel. No one wanted to get involved with the police.

I also wanted to flee from the scene. But I could not. I knew her from the last six months.

Her name was Rajalakshmi. I saw her at first near the BEL inter-junction signal. She was begging at every motorist stopped there. She was neatly dressed and mannered. She was asking for a rupee with a sort of dignity.

One day I met her in front of the mini supermarket at Jalahalli Complex. I asked about her. She revealed. Her husband died of acute Asthma four years ago. Her son Damu was working as a gateman in a factory in Peenya industrial area. Her daughter-in-law, Sumathi was a coolie, manual laborer. They lived in a one square room thatched with tin sheets in a slum near Gokula the railway line. She said she was happy

and contented till Damu got his third child with in four years of a love marriage. Damu could not care for his mother's personal needs such as dress, soap, oil and pan. So she started begging. Later on it became her profession as family pressures increased. I used to see her often on my way to the city. Once I met her in front of the post office. She looked tired. I offered her boarding and lodging in a home for the aged. She refused. She said she loved her grandchildren, she could add something to her family's income and she was collecting around hundred rupees per day by begging.

Perhaps she did what she had wanted to do till she breathed her last.

I asked the auto-rikshawallahs in the junction to help me to carry the dead body to a hospital. They were afraid of police and unwilling. I called the local parish priest for some assistance. He was so busy to respond to such trivial things. I called up the Little Sisters of Charity for their Ambulance. They said they would send. It never came. I could not contact the local Musaliar the leader of the Muslim community. I was told by the bystanders he was busy with the marriage of her daughter. Finally I phoned to my friend Dr. Mathew a poet and an IPS officer. I explained to him my predicament. He readily sent his jeep with his choukidar

We took Rajalakshmi to M.R.hospital. The doctors pronounced 'brought dead' and issued death certificate. We took her to her slum near the railway line. There nobody ever knew of a Rajalakshmi and nobody identified her. We could not find her one square house hut though there were plenty on either side of the railway track. Finally we carried the dead body to the Victoria Hospital run by the Government.

"Saab, I have to leave now. It is already three pm. Major Saab has an appointment with the Chief Minister today at four pm."

"Thank you, sir. Tell your Saab that I will call him later."

The driver left. I sat on the broken bench on the verandah of the Victoria Hospital not knowing what to do and how to do hoping for the archangel to appear.

© 2011 J. Kaval