Appendix
My Experiences with the writers

I came to know about Chudamani Raghavan only when I was given a copy of Chudamani’s *Yamini* by my research supervisor and was asked me to go through the book. I took the book and read it. I was very much impressed and decided to work on Chudamani. But finding her works was not an easy job. I went to Chennai and searched for her works, in different libraries and shops but in vain. When I contacted Macmillan Publishers for the writer’s address they were kind enough to provide me the address. Finally I set out on my visit to her. When I reached her home in Purushawakkam in Chennai, it was four in the evening and I could sense some kind of anxiety there. On enquiry, I was informed that she just then been discharged from the hospital. I met her two sisters and enquired about her health. They informed me that she had a kind of breathing problem and hence had been hospitalized for more than a week. When I told them the purpose of my visit, they were delighted to hear that a person from Andhra Pradesh is so much interested in their sister’s writing and wanted to do research on her. They further asked me about my earlier research. I told them that earlier I worked on R.K. Narayan and then I wanted to work on Chudamani Raghavan. They were equally happy to learn that research for Ph.D is going to be done on her. Then they took me to her. She was on bed unable to talk but she was keen and interested to listen to me. Once again I explained to her the purpose of my visit and my research. She asked me to come some time later. I met her after a month. By that time she had recovered and her servant maid informed that she was having her bath. I was waiting in the hall. After some time I saw her coming towards me. Clad in white saree, she reminded me of Mother Teresa. She
listened to me patiently. When I asked her to help me with some of her works, she said that her works are all on the attic and due to her ill health she could not pull them out at then. But then she asked me to give my address and said that if possible she would send me some. To my surprise she sent me 13 of her stories some in original and some translated stories. The friendship which started between us like this gradually started to grow. She used to feel happy whenever I sent her a greeting card and used to call me and wish me. After a few years when I became busy with my research and forgot to send her the card, she sent it herself. When I called her to apologise, she said that she could understand the hectic schedule of working women. Such was her consideration. She was very much upset when her elder sister passed away two years back and spoke in a disappointed way. When I translated one of her short stories “Gorgeous Silk Saree” into English, she didn’t readily give the permission letter. She called me and discussed the whole of one afternoon the different aspects of the story and only when the corrections she suggested were carried out, she gave me the permission letter. It shows how meticulous she was. It was shocking for me to hear that such a great soul passed away on 13th of September, 2010. After that I went to her house to collect a photograph of hers. The house was locked and a security was appointed. I happened to wait in the portico of the house. Only then did I notice that there was a nagalinga tree in the front yard of her house. The nagalinga tree which she portrayed in her “Counting the Flowers” is none other than this tree. This clearly shows her observation and how she was a writer who writes of the people and things around her. I was overwhelmed with these thoughts and left the place with memories of her. Her co-operation made me continue my work on her
and the same co-operation was extended by her executor Bharathi who readily gave me her photograph when I asked for it.

The same kind of co-operation was extended by Sri. Volga who immediately sent me a copy of “Bhinnasandarbhalu”, when I said that I was working on her. When I translated her “Godalu” into English, she readily gave me her consent for publication. She even agreed to give me an interview, but due to her health constraints and the Telangana problem which cropped up afterwards, it didn’t materialize. Thus both the writers helped their best possible to me to carry out my research. Since I could easily get much secondary sources on Shashi Deshpande, I didn’t seek her help. These are my personal experiences with the writers.
THE SILENCE WAS awful.
Even when the peon told her that the manager was calling her, she didn’t sense any difference. But Karthikeyan’s relaxed posture on the revolving chair with his palm under his cheek and the smile at her gave meaning to the silence.

"Sir, shall we start the dictation?" Bhanu asked with a sense of relief that she had disturbed the silence.

"Oh, sure."
"Then start, sir." She got ready to take down.
"That’s what I’m thinking of... I don’t know how to start it." He smiled broadly. He was the manager of the Chennai branch of a national level financial company. He was around fifty. Fifty was old age only in the stories. But in real life it was not old age... but the prime of one’s youth. That too to a well built, high-positioned officer in a dandy suit. His look pierced her body.

"Sir, will you think over it today and dictate tomorrow?"
"No, no Miss Bhanu. Let’s finish it today... You look so beautiful."

She sensed something wrong. Her instinct warned her that it would be dangerous to give place to it. Even her simple make-up did not diminish her grace. It was the sum of a twenty eight year old astounding feminine beauty. One could praise it with awe or desire it with lust. Karthikeyan was of the second type. Only for this reason, the steno who was there before Bhanu had given up the job.

Now it would be better to act natural.
"Is it any circular to be sent to the office, sir?"
"No."
"Is it about any new company asking for a loan, sir?"
"For your company... Sorry. I mean to say that I like your company."
"Sir?"
"My wife is unable to give me company. That’s the problem. She is a chronic patient. I’m an ordinary man with desires. Please think over my problem, Bhanu."
"Let me go, sir. I’ll come tomorrow." Bhanu tried to get up.
"Wait... wait. Sorry, there’s an ant on your shoulders."
Gorgeous Silk Saree

She didn’t know when he got up and came to her. Within a fraction of a second he was very close to her, driving away the imaginary ant on her shoulder. His hands still lingered on her shoulders.

Fear gripped her heart. Sweat scorched her even in that A.C. room. The next moment she suppressed her anger. Now fear or anger was of no use. What was needed was patience. Somehow she had to get out of that room.

“The ant has gone off, sir.” She tried to release her shoulder from his grip.

“I think this is a handloom saree.” Again he put his hand on her shoulders as if to test the quality of the saree. She was wearing.

“Yes, sir.” She drew away subtly. “Shall we have the dictation tomorrow? I want to go home. I have a headache.”

“Sit down. I’ll order for a coffee from the canteen.”

“No need sir. My mother worries when it gets late.”

“You always wear cotton, synthetic or a handloom saree. Isn’t it? Don’t you like a silk saree? I’ll buy a silk saree with complete golden thread work for you. You come to the hotel which I shall name. I’ll book a room for the night. A gorgeous, ten thousand rupee silk saree will be ready.”

Bhanu controlled her temper and the hands and fist which were ready to slap him.

“Sir, I am a subordinate working under you. Is it fair for you to take advantage of it and talk like this?”

“Are you going to talk like a film-heroine and say that you are like my daughter? Karthikeyan laughed heartily with his grey hairs shaking away.

“No, I don’t think that a man should act properly only with his daughter.”

“Wow! You talk well. I am happy that I can even talk to you. What’s your reply?”

Bhanu’s lip quivered. She burnt with shame and anger. ‘This is not my problem alone. This is the problem faced by many working women.’ With these thoughts she tried to console herself.

“What do you say, Bhanu?”

“Suppose, I refuse.”

“Just now I thought that you are very intelligent. Is your family ready to lose the three thousand rupees which you take home after all the deductions? I know your family position. What do you say Bhanu dear?” He touched her cheeks.

Controlling her impotent anger she replied patiently, “Today is Wednesday. Please give me leave for three days. I’ll give you my reply on Monday when I come back.”

THERE WERE two persons in her house. One was her father, the other . . . she herself.

Their was an old, tiled house in a small lane in Triplicane. Her father was a retired corporation clerk. The other members of her family were her mother, her grandmother (Father’s mother) and her mentally retarded sister, Sarasu. Was it possible to run the family with her father’s pension alone? There were the other expenses . . . house rent, electricity bill, medicines etc, etc. Though her three thousand rupees were a drop in the ocean of requirements, it was a much needed drop. Karthikeyan had guessed correctly.

Karthikeyan . . . The very thought of him made her blood boil. She had poured out the matter to her parents on returning home. Her anger had burst out as tears.

Her parents were shocked, enraged.

“Rascal! Let him go to the dogs! Let his tongue be slashed! You need not work under him anymore. Bastard! He wants to rob a girl of her chastity.” Her mother hugged her.

“Yes. Are we pinning our hopes on him? You can try for another job Bhanu! You post your resignation letter tomorrow itself. Rascal!” Her father fumed.

Though Bhanu knew that it was not that easy to give up her job, her parents’ words did soothe her grief.

‘Job — A working woman. Wasn’t this a symbol of women’s liberation? Wasn’t this an achievement showing that a woman is an equal to man? There was no doubt about it.’ But Bhanu thought that this progress has not been moulded properly in our country. This is like raising a big tower without strengthening the foundation. She felt that most men are not able to see the work of a woman as a natural thing only because they haven’t been taught the fact that ‘Woman is an equal to man’ right from the beginning. Since the average man considers a homebound woman as a virtuous woman, he thinks that women who go out to work are worthless women. People like Karthikeyan conclude
That such a woman can be seduced for just a ten-thousand rupee silk saree.

Bhanu couldn’t sleep well all night. She tossed from side to side but couldn’t sleep. What should she do now? Should she give up her job? Wouldn’t it be an act of cowardice? Even if she didn’t agree to his proposal, her job would be gone. She could complain to the higher authorities. Though she might get justice at the end, would her family be able to manage till then?

Her head ached. She turned to the other side. Sarasu was sleeping near her. Sarasu was younger to her by four years. Her face was as vacant as her inner self. Tears welled up in Bhanu’s eyes. Putting her arms around Sarasu’s shoulders, she went to sleep for a while after dawn.

Her parents’ tone had changed by the next evening. Her mother asked her in a worried tone, “Have you posted your resignation letter?”

“Not yet, ma!”

“There’s no hurry. You can do it even tomorrow.”

Her father was walking to and fro. He said to mother, “I don’t mean that what the manager did was right. But these things can be expected in a society where women go out to work along with men.”

“Maybe. But ………..”

“Consider one thing. She was all alone in that room. He could have done anything. But he didn’t. So I don’t think that he is a complete rogue. It would be better if she tries to convince him. Now-a-days getting a job is not an easy thing. So is it wise to throw away a job on hand?”

“That’s true. A full three thousand rupees”

“Basic pay is four thousand. PF savings will also come at the end. The other deductions have their own benefits.”

“That’s true.”

“If she wishes, let her resign the job. That’s not the point. But we should also consider all these things.”

Bhanu heard everything. It was as if they wanted her to hear them all. Bhanu felt isolated. Gently stroking Sarasu’s hair she was looking vacantly somewhere, she was lost in thought. She should neither give in to Karthikeyan nor lose her job. At least for the sake of this sister. That night she came to a conclusion before going to bed.

**TUESDAY EVENING 6.30 p.m.**

Karthikeyan parked his Escort in the compound of a three star hotel at Adyar. He had avoided the well-known hotels purposely. His dress was not the usual one of a suit and tie, but an ordinary pants and shirt. His aim was to intermingle with others, which was important for the purpose of his coming.

He was as merry as a cricket... Bhanu had conveyed her consent the previous day with just a single smile. He made the other arrangements. He had booked a room in a hotel at Adyar which was far away from both his residence at Nungambakkam and his office at Annasalai.

When he said to Bhanu, “Why do you strain yourself unnecessarily in the bus? I’ll pick you up at the corner of your street,” she refused. He was anxious that she should find this address correctly.

He opened the cover of the card-board box kept on the passenger seat next to him. The golden thread work done on the body of the peacock-coloured silk saree shone in the bright light emitted from the entrance of the hotel. He himself had been to the Nalli stores the previous evening and purchased this saree costing around ten thousand and odd. He smiled within himself.

Karthikeyan got down from the car, locked it and walked into the hotel with the saree box. The corridor resounded with crowds and noise. The ceiling was dazzling with star-like lights. Every second there was a sound of the opening and closing of the lift. He registered his name at the reception and waited for her. She had not yet come. He was eagerly waiting for her.

The clock struck seven. She entered the hall! Clad in a white nylon saree, she appeared like a jasmine herself. Her hair gathered in a high coiffure enhanced her majestic looks. Her tall, slender figure seemed like the completion of womanly beauty.

Karthikeyan felt a hot current pass through his body. He approached her and held out the box to her. “A silk saree worth ten thousand rupees. It’s for you as I had promised.”

“Let it be.”

“Take it. Open and see it how beautiful it is!”

“It is sure to be beautiful.”

“Shall we go to our room upstairs?”

“What’s the hurry? Let’s eat something first.”

“We can order the room service. You come
upstairs. The room of Mr. and Mrs. Chellappan is right on the first floor.” He laughed, “Come!”

“Which room on the first floor?”

He turned back abruptly on hearing the voice and froze.

“Mr. Karthikeyan! Meet my friend Mrs. Karthikeyan,” said Bhanu. The fair complexioned, beautiful, healthy woman clad in a green dotted saree, was probably forty-five. A charming face with sharp eyes, Kumkum shone on her forehead and on the parting of the hair. She looked at Karthikeyan silently for a second and said, “Last Friday, Miss Bhanumati met me at our house. She told me all that had happened. Though her voice was gentle it had a streak of sorrow.”

Karthikeyan was red in the face. ‘Had that hussy gone straight to his wife?’

“Even today when I came here on Bhanumati’s advice, I had a slight hope that my husband is not that type of man. I thought that this girl had misunderstood something and had got frightened. I thought that everything would become clear. It has.” She became silent.

‘Damn it!’ Anger and the shame of being caught red-handed before his wife made him shiver and sweat. He looked at Bhanu with anger surging up.

Now his wife spoke calmly, “Look here, Karthik! Your plans have failed. If out of frustration you oust her from the job or harass her again, I myself will complain about you to your M.D., at Delhi. And this is not just a threat.”

Bhanu approached her. “Thank you Mrs. Karthikeyan! I came to you hopefully in a helpless condition. You’ve vindicated my hopes. I have no words to thank you. If this hadn’t been a public place, I would have touched your feet.” She cleared her throat.

“Shall I take leave of you sir? Present that saree to your wife here. She alone has the right to wear it. Bye, Madam! Bye, Sir! We shall meet in the office tomorrow.” She went away.

Karthikeyan’s face had become pale. He was not able to look at his wife’s face. Somehow he managed it finally.

“Vimala...I...”

“Not here. You’ve booked a room for us in the name of Mr. & Mrs. Chellappan. Haven’t you? Let’s go there and talk. I’ve to speak a lot to you.”

(Translated from the original Tamil by N.S. Vishnu Priya)
DISTRESSED BY HEADACHE, Ravathi put aside the file, she was working on. It was 3 p.m. Typist Bharati, sitting next to her said; “In winters time ceases to move after 3.00 p.m. It takes ages to reach 5.00 p.m.”

Revathi quietly smiled and said, “I have a severe headache. So, I plan to take leave and go home.”

“Why take leave for two hours? Why don’t you just leave by permission?”

Overlooking Bharati’s suggestion, Revathi wrote the leave letter, “It’s better to apply for leave especially when we have them. Even if we ask for permission once in a year, that old man will grumble that women always think of our domestic problems and plan how to take permission and go home instead of doing our duties,” Rama support Revathi.

Revathi looked at her and smiled as if appreciating her views. She handed over the leave letter and stepped out of the office. At that time there wouldn’t be much crowd at the bus stop. Even the buses would be empty. Sure that she could easily get a seat, her feet automatically gained speed. There she felt surprised when she saw. Chandrika : ‘Why is Chandrika standing here, at this hour?’ She asked : “Chandrika, didn’t you go to office today?”

Chandrika raised her head. On seeing Ravathi she hesitated a little… Dull faced, reddened eyes, lost in thought. Revathi took a close look at her.

By that time the bus also came. She did not feel like getting into the bus leaving Chandrika alone, in that condition.

“Chandrika! The buses towards your house are rare at this odd hour. Why don’t you come with me, take rest for a while and then go?”

Chandrika looked blankly at her, as if unable to speak.

“It’s all right. You can stay till evening and then go.” She grasped Chandrika’s hand and walked towards the bus in haste.

The bus was empty. After both of them got seated, she again looked at Chandrika, searchingly. The manner in which Chandrika got into the bus without a word, denying or pulling her hand back, surprised her.

“Are you unwell or something?”

When questioned, she summarily replies that she was well and started gazing out of the window. Her gesture was as if was in no mood to answer questions.

“What is the matter? She looks worried? Has she fought with Ravi? Had she planned to come to me? When I haven’t invited her, could she have come?”

Under ordinary circumstances Chandrika visiting her was impossible. Revathi felt she had a puzzle to solve. Chandrika, visiting her was impossible. Chandrika, who made ‘living separately’ a condition for marrying Ravi,
always stayed away from her. She even never allowed Revathi to get close to her. After the marriage, in the second month itself, they moved to a separate house. Even during the first month, she didn’t stay for at least ten days in her mother-in-law’s house. She was busy visiting and staying with friend and their honeymoon.

After getting separated from her mother-in-law, she never gave a chance to Revathi to interfere with her family matters. Under no circumstances she would seek Revathi’s help. Though it was difficult for her to manage the home and job all at a time, she never allowed Revathi around. Revathi’s friends and relatives felt shocked. Not able to control themselves some of them even asked Revathi, “You’ve only one son. How is it that your only son and you live separately in the same town? Even if you had stayed together for a year or two and got separated thereafter due to some differences one could possible understand. Shall we scold Ravi... or advise him?” They pestered Revathi for a several days.

Revathi faced their anxiety coolly... and never said a word against Chandrika, her daughter-in-law. She used to support Ravi by saying, “It’s better to get separated in the beginning itself than quarreling for two years and then getting separated. Now, at least, we won’t have hatred for each other.”

It went on like this for four years. The distance between Revathi and Chandrika neither increased nor decreased during this period. If Revathi went to their house on some Sunday evening, they too visited her sometimes. Except when Chandrika went for delivery to her parent’s for a month, Ravi never stayed with his mother. Chandrika even bought up her son with pains, but never asked for Revathi’s help. And now... if that Chandrika had thought of coming to her, Revathi felt not only surprised but also happy. She felt that it was unnecessary to wait till reaching home to know the truth.

“Why have you started at an odd hour? What about the office?” Revathi raised her voice to overcome the noise of the bus.

“I had applied for leave from office, and am returning from Sharat’s school.”

With Chandrika’s reply, Revathi’s face blackened. So, Chandrika hadn’t planned to come to her. Sharat’s school was near her office. She was returning after paying the school fees. She has interrupted her unnecessarily. But her accepting the invitation readily was no less surprising. She could have escaped by saying that she would come some other day. Revathi’s nature was to be content with what she had. May be, because of this, she felt happy for Chandrika coming with her. Once again she looked askance at Chandrika. Chandrika pressed her lower lips with her teeth and sighed heavily.

“There’s something wrong. Poor girl! She has some problem,” Revathi mused.

She felt concerned for Chandrika. Most often she used to sympathize with her daughter-in-law. Whenever she went to visit her son, she felt sorry for her daughter-in-law. Chandrika never returned home before seven. By the time she came, she would be much tired. Immediately she would put some rice in the cooker and rush to have her bath. They would dine with the curries left over in the morning. She would often not even have the time and patience to warm the curries. Those curries would be cold and tasteless. How could they retain the taste? In the morning if they got up at seven, they should get ready by nine. She would prepare coffee, tiffin, lunch... all alone. Probably she was not used to all that work in her student days. She was slow in doing her work. Maybe, she was not used to work but she was not reluctant either. She did one work after the other slowly and patiently.

In fact Chandrika felt uneasy whenever Revathi’s arrived. She had thought that her mother-in-law didn’t like her house, her manners, her cooking, her method of serving and eating. She felt like standing on thorns till her mother-in-law took leave of her. Revathi didn’t understand why Chandrika felt uneasy like that. She neither scolded her not expected any under respect from her. Though she felt like cleaning Chandrika’s house several times, she did not do it, since she thought it would be like finding fault with her or scolding her. She drank the coffee given in a stained cup silently. Even when her mother-in-law drank coffee silently, Chandrika would not feel comfortable. She would look critically at her mother-in-law, who washed the cup till all stains were gone.

The bus stopped. Both of them got down and started towards home. Chandrika was walking tiredly and slowly. Even if she was unwell, she would neither
stop working nor take leave. In the early days after Sharat’s birth, one day Revathi had been to Chandrika’s office. She had worn a sweater. She couldn’t give it to her for long. So she thought of handing it over at least in the office. When she went there, Chandrika was not there in her seat. After ten minutes she came from the bathroom. Her face looked tired. Looking carefully at her face, she understood the matter. She had milked herself get rid to excess in her breasts. Revathi was deeply moved. “Couldn’t you apply for leave for one more month?” She asked softly.

“No it isn’t possible. There’s much work in the office Aunty.”

“Then why don’t you take tablets to drain the milk?” She asked hesitantly.

Chandrika thought that her mother-in-law was criticizing her. So her face turned black. “I’m breast-feeding the child both in the morning and at night. Sharat won’t drink bottle-milk at night,” she told uneasily.

Women getting crushed between motherhood and career were not new for Revathi. But she felt very bad for not being of any help to her daughter-in-law in time of need.

“I don’t like it to be said that women don’t work properly. I want to prove that women work excellently.” Revathi heard Chandrika telling once to Ravi, when he scolded her for taking heavy work on herself in the office. Hearing this, Revathi’s heart melted. Ravi would not understand those feelings. But why couldn’t Revathi understand? Many people had said these words to her several times. They had told that nothing was more foolish than appointing women for jobs. Though she had tried hard not to be told so, they said it.

Even if women come and work with full pregnancy or heavy bleeding or draining their milk they are supposed to give their children, they have to hear such words. It’s enough if a small mistake is done. It dawns on men immediately that nothing is more foolish than appointing women.

When Revathi understood how hard Chandrika was trying not to take any such blame, she felt like hugging her to her heart. But Chandrika wouldn’t let it happen.

A small look or a word of affection from her mother-in-law would throw Chandrika into fidgety. Some panic would be seen in her eyes. Seeing such reaction, Revathi began to stay aloof from her affairs.

Revathi opened the door and walked into the house. Chandrika followed her. On entering the house, Chandrika’s grief under control so far poured out all of a sudden. She controlled and threw herself into a chair. Her mother-in-law’s house would be the same whenever she comes. It would be soothingly cool and clean. How is it possible for her to keep the house so tidy always?

“Why don’t you wash your face?” Revathi said Chandrika got up and went into the bathroom. Even there, it was the same. Even her bathroom was as clean as the drawing room. Bucketful of water, soapbox looking new. No soap stains anywhere. Though the soap had shrunk to half its size, it seemed new. In her mother-in-law’s house either the soap or the soapbox would not soak in water. But in her house the soapbox would be filled with water always. The soap after getting soaked in water for long would come into the hand in pieces.

While Chandrika washed her face with cold water and came out, Revathi was standing holding a towel. Though it was an old towel, it was also stain free. How was it possible to keep such an old towel so white and clean? Chandrika wiped her face. Revathi went into the bathroom.

“Should she tell that she will get aborted this time? Will she stop working? Ravi always criticises her for her job. Has he told her that if she stops working, they can live happily? Chandrika says that she cannot rely on his income and can’t run home without working. Has this problem blown up to the extent of taking a decision to get separated? If, it’s so, she’ll not support Ravi. She’ll exhort Ravi only. Chandria is a good girl. A girl of self-respect! A girl who works hard and respects work. It is easy to find girls who look after domestic chores and cook well. But it is difficult to find girls with self-respect and trying to safeguard it. Persons like Ravi can’t understand the value of such girls. They just seek pleasure. How can a person who doesn’t have the necessity to think about self-respect and struggle understand their value?

Revathi washed her face, wiped it with the towel and spread it on the wire. She looked for Chandrika’s towel. It was lying on a chair wet as a heap. Revathi took it, shook it hard and spread it on the wire.
Volga

“Aunty! How are you able to do all the work so nicely? How do you remember to dry the towel immediately after wiping the face? How can you keep this towel so white even after it has become old? How do you maintain the house so spick and span?”

Chandrika spoke even before she could understand what she was talking. Revathi smiled a little and kept quiet. What could she say?

“How can anyone answer all that in one sentence, if they are asked all of a sudden to tell about the manners, which they learnt over a lifetime?”

How could she explain the entire struggle she had undergone to learn those manners, when her husband deserted her with a one-year child in hand and in search of livelihood?

She tried to keep her house and her things as clean, dirt-free and stain-free. She tried even hundred times harder to prove that her mind and body were pure and spotless. Both she and her house were pure and clean. But nobody knows how she hated that purity and cleanliness. She felt like filling her house with dirt and mud. She felt like applying mud and dirt all over her body and convulse with laughter. She felt like questioning the society, ‘I won’t be pure. What can you do? Why do you care for me? Will you feed my son or me a morsel of food once a day?’ But she couldn’t do anything. She allowed that madness to wither off within her mind and kept calm, pure and spotless.

She waged an endless war with her mind and body to remain like that. She tortured them a lot. She quelled their uproar mercilessly.

How will Chandrika understand all those things? How can she explain those things to this mad girl, who never allowed her to get close? But if she allowed Revathi to tell her all these things at least once, it would be nice. Revathi has a firm belief that Chandrika will understand her. She looks at Chandrika with an emotion as if to open her heart before her then and there itself.

A SMALL layer of tears had welled up in Chandrika’s eyes. ‘Why? What’s her problem? Has anybody said anything? Has Ravi hurt her with his hasty words? Has he beat her?’

If that were true she would teach her son a by lesson by slapping him. Revathi placed her hand on Chandrika’s shoulders. Tears from Chandrika’s eyes rolled down her checks. Revathi asked worriedly, “What happened, dear?”

“Aunty! They have expelled Sharat from School. He doesn’t study well. He failed in all subjects. He makes a lot of mischief. It seems he wounded a boy’s head with a stone yesterday. Today they called me and told me that they are expelling him from school.”

Revathi understood the matter and her anxiety diminished. Chandrika could not control her grief. “Aunty! Don’t I know how to bring up children? I am doing my level best. He doesn’t change. I am unable to change him any more. Ravi scolds me that I don’t know how to bring up children. What shall I do?”

“Useless fellow! In his childhood, he was more naughty than Sharat. He had broken countless number of children’s heads. Was he intelligent, at least? A dullard.”

“Is it true?” A surprise sparkled in her eyes reddened with sorrow.

“It’s true.”

Revathi explained… mixing imaginary mischief to Ravi’s real mischief.

“In fact Sharat’s school is not good. They only beat the students and do not teach them in a proper manner to develop interest in education. Let’s take him out of that school. Recently I read about a good school in the paper. They won’t beat children there. Children needn’t carry heavy loads of books to school. Home work won’t be given. Let’s take him to that school.”

“Is there one such school really?”

She asked doubtfully if her mother-in-law was telling all that just to console her.

“Wait I’ll show you.” Revathi brought and old newspaper and showed her the news about the school. The panic on Chandrika’s face vanished.

“Don’t worry over Ravi’s words. He is a man. What does he know of a mother’s problems?” Chandrika’s face brightened on hearing Revathi’s words. Revati didn’t want to lose this opportunity. She talked and talked. She talked until Chandrika realized that both of them are women.

“I was scared of mother-in-law even before my marriage… in fact, right since childhood. Mothers-in-law would trouble their daughters-in-law. Wouldn’t they? I used to hear that daughter-in-law committed suicide not able to bear the torture of their mother-in-law. Even
before Ravi’s meeting, I had decided to stay away from my mothers-in-law. When I came to know that Ravi is your only son and you have nobody else, my fears doubled. I feared that you might want to have control over your son. I thought that you might torture me fearing that I’ll get control over your son. After seeing you, I felt even more nervous. I feared that you would criticize me and make fun of me no end. I used to feel nervous whenever you come home. I feared that you might find fault with me. That’s why I always tried to stay aloof from you.”

Revathi looked at Chandrika with affection and pity. Had the society that painted feminine features of mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law on women, completely erased the natural human feature in her? How distorted had the human relation become? How malignant had the human relations become, that friendship has not been possible between two human beings for four years? Chandrika with a light heart looked at her mother-in-law in a friendly way, with affection for the first time in her life.

Revathi said, “The face is smeared with kajal. You cried like a mad girl. Go and wash your face.”

Chandrika went into the bathroom and washed her face with soap. She wiped her face with the towel given by Revathi and shook it well before spreading it on the wire.

“Let it be. Put it there. We can dry it later. From today onwards I’ll also try to be lazy. Let’s see what happens,” Revathi said snatching the towel from Chandrika’s hands.

“No Aunty, it’s just a habit. That’s all. Otherwise it’s always better to do all work then and there,” Chandrika said spreading the towel on the wire.

“We all have some shortcoming. Don’t worry yourself over that,” Revathi said getting into the kitchen to prepare coffee.

Chandrika followed Revathi into the kitchen. She had something else to tell her mother-in-law. But she felt uneasy and hesitant to tell it. On the other hand, her conscience was shouting that it was unlawful not to tell it even after developing such a friendly bond. She rehearsed within herself till her mother-in-law prepared coffee. Both of them came to the front room with coffee cups.

Chandrika took a sip of coffee and said, “Coffee is very tasty, Aunty! Would you mind staying with us? Shall we all live together?” She asked softly, her head bent down.

Revathi smiled.

“No, my dear! I like this way of life. I felt troubled in the early days of your marriage. But now I feel this way of life is nice. I can do whatever I want, whenever I like. I needn’t worry that I’m troubling anyone. I like to stay like this without troubling anyone or being troubled by anyone. Actually you have helped me indirectly. In these four years I have been utilizing my time according to my wish. Before that I had other responsibilities too. When I can’t look after myself, I’ll surely come to you,” Revathi tried to thicken their bond by reducing Chandrika’s guilt.

For the first time Chandrika looked at Revathi as a human being... and not just as a mother-in-law.

(Translated from the original Telugu by N.S. Vishnu Priya)
To Vishnu Priya,

May you march from success to success in your career.

Wishing you a Year filled with HAPPINESS and PROSPERITY

With warm good wishes,
from Chudamani

Happy New Year! 2007

Ms. Chudamani RagHAVAN
No. 27 Dr. Alagappa Road
Chennai 600 004 (Tamil Nadu)
R. Chudamani

No. 27, Dr. Alagappa Road,
Flowers Road P. O.
Chennai-600 084
Phone: 26412164
Code: 044

Date: 14:07:20...

Ms. Vishnu Priya
4-746, II Marabria st.
Greamsptr.
Chittoo (AP) - 517002

Dear Ms. Vishnu Priya,

Thank you for your letter and the copy of my story "The Tambura Player". I tried to call you at the number you have given me, 9440742308, but couldn’t get the connection. Has your phone number been changed? If so, please give me your new number.

My story "Brennie's Mother", published in Indian Literature, was an original English story and not a translation. The magazine had mistakenly labelled it as a translation from Tamil. If you don’t mind including original English stories in your anthology, you may use it. Two other stories were published earlier in Indian literature which were both translations from Tamil originals. I shall send these to you. I shall shortly send you about 10 or 12 stories in all, consisting of both original English stories and translations (ptd)
from Tamil. Some of these translations were done by others and some by myself. I have extra copies of all these stories. So you may keep them all till your work is over, no matter how long it takes.

Please don't bother to enclose a stamped and self-addressed envelope. Whenever there are any papers and stories to be sent to you, I shall do it myself. It will be my pleasure.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

R. Chandramouli
Ms. V. S. Vihaman Priya
4766, II Maqaiwa St.
Greamspet
Chittoor (R)
-517002
Tel: 9440742308

Dear Ms. Vishnu Priya,

You must have received my letter of the 13th
by now.

I am herewith sending you 10 of my
short stories. Added to the 2 which you already
have with you, ("The Thambura Player" and
"Srimani's Mother"), there will be 12 stories in all.
These consist of both original English stories
and translations from Tamil. I hope you will
find at least some of these stories useful for
your study. If you want to change any
of these stories for others, please let me know.
I think you once said something about
the stories being collected as a book. Could you
kindly elaborate?

Thanking you, and with best wishes,
Sincerely yours,
R. Chudamani
Dear Vishnu Priya,

Received your letter at 8.9.05.

Thanks for your compliments on my works.

I am sending another story in translation which is going to be published by an American University under the editorship of Prof. Paula Richman.

Some of my stories — I think the stories from ‘Women Unbound’ are translated into Tamil by renowned Tamil writer Ms. Tilakavathi. Into English you can try one story and send it to me. If I feel satisfied, I can give the permission.

You can try from my short story anthology ‘Bhima Sandarbhalu’.

I thank you collected all the translated stories.

My novel Swetcha also is in English published by NBT India.

With best wishes.

Volga

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