CHAPTER IV

MONEY VERSUS VALUES
While 'Javni', 'Akkayya' and 'Nimka' concerned themselves about the plight of women in society Raja Rao's two powerful stories — 'The Little Gram Shop' concerned itself with the conflict between money and values. It is the acquisitive instinct of a person that gains a prime of place in the story. 'In a Client' the practical nature of an old man in dealing with his client is very well brought about.

In 'The Little Gram Shop' there is the depiction of a man in his greed for money. Bania Motilal who fosters the acquisitive instinct does not bother about comforts in life. He in his interest in the acquisition of wealth, lives in utmost misery. Having hailed from a village he sings, begs and eats the food he gets.

Motilal saved money without enjoying any life. In a way he led a life of self exile. He died soon without enjoying any life. His unworthy son Chota and his concubine Venku wasted the resources saved by Motilal. Like a typical Indian wife Beti Bai Bania's wife submitted herself to her husband's tyranny and
inhuman treatment. Rati the daughter-in-law of Motilal, lives the life of a slave.

The Motilals led a miserable life as they did not spend money at all. The customers hurled words of abuse on the Bania. Some called him a swine, others the son of a donkey. Some others hated the peevish nature of the Bania. They abhorred the Bania prospering at the expense of the people in society. The Bania soon was knocked down by a motor and immediately killed. In fact, the customers became critical of the greed of the Bania.

Narasimha a native of Hyderpur, narrates the story of Ananda, his school fellow. The narrator tells his friend about the humble beginning of Motilal. Though Motilal reached Hyderpur without any money, he prospered well in his little gram shop. He started lending huge sums of money to rich people. In the beginning Motilal,

"lived like a sacred bull of the street which wonders far and wild and eats whatever it finds. He lived by begging".¹

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¹ The Little Gram Shop, p.63.
Motilal ran his shop consisting of

"A small Varandah some ten feet by fifteen, which opened directly on the road. In one corner was the grocery. Small drawers, some fifty or so were fixed into the wall, each filled with pepper, ginger, or sesame seeds".²

He dealt with sugared gram, the fried gram, the Bombay gram cakes and all almonds. He rared a little green parrot which cried out 'Ram, Ram', to all the clients. It appeared as though the parrot was repenting of the sins of Motilal. Even at the age of fifty, Motilal comforted himself with his hookah. Eventhough he suffered from asthma he kept himself awake night after night. The prolonged illness made him irritable and nervous. With a little provocation, he would beat his wife and would pounce upon the customers. He is worried about his missing son for he feels that he has missed considerable amount by way of dowry for his son.

Betí Bai promises,

"to do anything to be great like that famous ancestor of her husband".³

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2. Ibid, p.64.
3. The Little Gram Shop, p.69.
She desires to become fabulously rich in the twinkling of an eye. One is drawn towards her songs of Krishna, which she chanted every morning.

"To Yashodha's beloved little one,
Blue as the autumn cloud,
To Krithum, then,
victory, victory".  

This shows the faith of this woman in God and religion. According to Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah one sees in the portrait of this character,

"Raja Rao's uncanny insight into the Indian women's mind and heart ....
the simple folk's innate sense of art in actually living, with no sophistication, no self consciousness".  

Towards the end of the story Chota the son of Motilal, spends money like water. One fine morning the son of Chota is seen presiding over the shop with all his vices.

The uniqueness about the story is that it depicts the lives of three generations of an Indian

4. Ibid, p.70.
family. The structure is tautly knit as Anand is present throughout as an undetached observer. The final observation made by Ananda is gripping:

"They said Beti had died a few months ago of old age, and it was Venku who sat on the gram platform".  

Thus Anand the narrator weaves various threads into one and dwells upon the greed of Motilal who ignores human values at the cost of wealth.

The story presents Indian sensibility in that it depicts the life of the common man in a village where alms giving is part of one's own life. Secondly, it concerns itself with the routine and mechanical life of a bania who makes it a point to earn money at the cost of others. Venku the daughter-in-law of Motilal, continues to run the shop left by her father-in-law. So man can lead the life of contentment as long as he lives in a village in spite of his starvation. But he leads a miserable life amidst his wealth in a city. In a way, this theme recurs in his another powerful story 'A Client'.

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6. 'The Little Gram Shop', p.81.
'A Client' is an amusing story about the marriage broker Nanjundayya who tricks a young man into an early marriage. The story begins with Ramu's encounter with Nanjundayya. Ramu a poor brahmin boy, finds it very difficult to continue his studies. By losing his self-respect he washes his cloths, cleans the vessels, cooks his own food, sleeps the floor and spends uncountable hours waiting at the doors of Sundaresha. He is very sensitive and takes offence at any overt expression of sympathy such as Nanjundayya. He is conscious of the fact that he is a brahmin and so he controls his feelings about his girl friend Jayalakshmi. The more he thinks about her the more will be the forbidden secrets in him. He is forced to think of his examinations. He follows Nanjundayya blindly and reaches the retired police commissioner's bungalow.

Nanjundayya with his powerful speech over­whelms Ramu, his innocent victim. He talks about Ramu thus:

"he knew his trade much too well to lose hope. When he had tackled hundreds and hundreds of 'modern young men' of Bangalore, what did
Nanjundayya creates a sense of self confidence in his client. Soon he makes enquiries about his parents and others and claims a distant relationship with family. Luckily for Nanjundayya the lies are not yet exposed. To keep the novel interesting Ramu is kept ignorant of Nanjundayya's motives throughout. But they are revealed to the reader through an inside view into the mind of the old man who feels unsettled by Viswanath's comment upon his profession.

A typical man of professional experience he sheds tears and tells Ramu thus:

"I have placed all my hopes in you — your father was a great friend of mine. I would like to see you a big man, a rich man and married to the daughter of a man of money and distinction".  

Ramu however thinks that the old man is full of ripe wisdom. He doesn't think of marriage at

the moment. The old man proposes that they walk together towards Dodpet. When they reach the house of police commissioner, Ramu realises that he has been trapped. He sees the girl dressed like a bride. He gets the doubt whether the girl would marry him at all.

An element that draws our attention is the flow of speech of Nanjundayya. The writer has provided with the necessary atmosphere that suits the main events in the play. Everywhere one sees an atmosphere of intrigue. Even the college premises are not free from the gullible young men and women, who become victims to viles of Nanjundayya.

The story is most interesting because it presents the humorous world of college students who lead a comfortable life on one hand and the hard life on the other. We pity Nanjundayya as an old man who wants to eke out his livelihood. There is a contrast between the vision of the glorious future of Ramu and the comic life of Nanjundayya. There are many clients who become slaves of money. Naturally they come across many clients from colleges. This story lacks in any dramatic action.
The two stories 'The Little Gram Shop' and 'A Client' in a way, draw our attention to the materialistic nature of man; while 'The Little Gram Shop' concerns itself with the greed of Motilal, 'A Client' deals with the worldly wise nature of an old man. While Motilal cheats his customers, Nanjundayya leads young men astray. Thus the two stories have almost similar themes.