

The Fourth Monkey (Nalugo Koti)

J.P.Sarma

Now a days, Chandramma is not at all seen. In fact, I do not know her original name. I saw her fifteen years ago for the first time when, she used to go to school with books in her hand. The poor girl did not have chappals to her feet. Her clothes were soiled and unkempt. She did not have a bag to keep her books. She arranged her books carefully in a lined fashion on her shoulder. She was cautious to take care of the books lest they fall. She used to pass just in front of me.

Though her complexion was not fair, Chandramma looked charming with large eyes, a round mouth and two plaits. The girl's appearance indicated that she hailed from an indigent family. During the school days, both in the morning and evening, while going and coming back from school, she used to salute me with one hand by turning her head. That was the only introduction I had about the girl.

I christened her 'Chandramma' as I didn't know her name for sure. Truly, I did not know the names of children who passed by me. Some were involved in a loud conversation which revealed their names. Sometimes, during the middle of the day they would utter my name also. I did not like anyone among them. One or two whom I liked did not appear later.

Multitudes of children passed by me regularly. They did not look at me at all. Perhaps this led to my liking for Chandramma. Not that she had a charismatic face but her innocent face attracted me towards her. Maybe, her interest in education pushed me towards her.

Chandramma came to my notice thus. I just did not know whether she knew about me. The difference between us runs into about a century, yet, I am thus accustomed to her.

By the way, I forgot to tell you about me. Much time passed since my birth, living and death. Irrespective of other things, my mother used to din into my ears thus: 'The one who dies after rendering useful services to others, is truly fame worthy but not the one who dies like any others.' I couldn't comprehend her words then easily. But now I have understood them well.

The funniest part of it is that the words 'Late' does not appear before my name. Hence, I remain to be still alive. Besides, even in print the word is rarely seen. Instead, there appeared distinctly the Father of the Nation, Mahatma which were markedly visible and even audible. Though I repeatedly urged them not to call me like that they repeated the same words.

In reality as a child, I was rather mischievous and unruly. In course of time, I learnt ethical values from the society around me. Gathered much about the entire world through the books I read. Got much experience from every step I laid. I learnt very much about multitudes of noble men with whom I walked along generally. Except for that, I didn't conduct any noble deeds. Even now, I hold the same firm opinion.

I never appreciated the far away Britishers' rule us. Multitudes of people marched heroically to drive them back to their country. Having grasped the truth, I too joined them. In course of time, I did whatever I felt was good. I even conducted many instances of social service. I marched forward with a view to keeping up the self-respect of the masses.

My height was around five feet, and now, I am six feet. I recall, about fifty years ago, I was set up at the junction of four roads on an eight feet cement Block. In consonance with my age, a stick and spectacles accompanied me. Around me, a hundred feet park also sprang up in a circle. There were some five or six benches



besides some stray plants. The height of Ashoka trees was lesser than that of mine. I could see the four road confluence clearly. On a pole there was a lamp post studded with a sound box. It provided me with very good pastime. I used to listen to radio for three hours each both in the morning and evening from which I gathered what was happening in the country. In the evenings, people sat comfortably and indulged in chit chatting. In course of time, the centre was named after me.

Day by day I could see the area developing very fast and turned very busy. Small houses and shops rose into four or five storied buildings. On four sides, roads became very wide. Besides these changes, Ashoka trees grew like an unbuilt wall around the park, stretching their hands to the sky. The radio box disappeared. Elders never turned up. Instead, all and sundry visited me and did varied kinds of activity. Cigarette butts and empty bottles appeared more and more. In dusk, nothing was visible except for the whispers of the men and woman. One evening, Chandramma appeared along with a boy while coming from school. I saw him for the first time. The boy looked a little older than she. He had a beard and moustache. He was almost black in colour like Chandramma. He didn't have any charm. His looks were different and unusual. His eyes were drowsy and I did not have a good impression of the boy. On the whole, I did not like the boy. They went beyond Ashoka trees and settled down on a bench comfortably. Chandramma didn't notice me at all. She didn't even greet me. She sat beside the boy keeping the books aside. They had chit chat for a while and dispersed.

Even after two days, I saw them walking on the road chit chatting happily. For two more days, they continued this practice. They went inside the park as usual and settled down on a bench. The boy took out pieces of chocolate from his pocket and gave them to Chandramma. She kept one in her mouth. Slowly, the boy laid his hands on her shoulder. Chandramma bent down her head shyly and threw aside the hand of the boy.

"I like you immensely. Do you also.....?" he looked at her. He even addressed her with some name which I could not understand.

Chandramma munched chocolate shyly but remained silent. The boy lifted the head of Chandramma and said "Do you feel shy? Even now, you look very charming", bending forward his face towards her. She got frightened and pushed the hands of the boy aside and adjusted herself by moving away from him. Having had a chat for five minutes, they disappeared from the scene.

After two days when it was deep dark they appeared again. The entire area was pitch black. Nothing was overtly visible. Books didn't appear in the hands of Chandramma. They settled down on the bench comfortably.

"We will soon marry." said the boy.

"Shit!" said Chandramma.

"Why? Wont you like me?" said the boy by laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Not that...., I have to pursue my studies further."

"Education does not bar our marriage?"

"That is not the issue....."

"I will earn money and look after you dearly."

Despite his assurance, Chandramma kept herself mum. I could not observe what exactly was obtaining there. "No.... No..." "Let it be, Let it be". I overheard whispers for a while which disappeared soon.

I had some ominous feelings. I was at a loss to understand what I should do. To help Chandramma, I was in desperation in my tall and worn out state. Later, I witnessed the visit of a couple of boys in two days, their whisperings and their disappearance.



One day, two more boys joined them. All their conversations were clumsy and drowsy. Chandramma's cries, vows and the hilarious cheers of the boys went on till midnight. I felt like giving a warning cry. Unfortunately, my mouth did not open. I wanted to hit them with my stick. My hand did not raise. Besides, my stick was missing. I didn't even have my spectacles. I was so desperate that I wanted to die again. But how?

I was reminded of the Three Monkeys. I remained silent in desperation. Chandramma did not appear since the event of that night.

A period of four or five years passed by. I forgot Chandramma completely. The world around me is totally transformed. I was in ruins. I felt that none seemed to think and care for me. Ten years ago, they decorated me pleasantly on my birthday. Some would sing songs by standing beside me; others would salute me; some others would make speeches. Now a days, such things did not happen. It appears as though days were running heavily for me. It was then a peculiar problem arose. It was when people entered the park in processions, some laid ladders against me jovially. Two persons climbed on me and poured one potful of milk. I practically got embarrassed and confused. An elderly person stood beside me and made a discourse aloud which received applause from the audience. Soon sweets were distributed and people dispersed.

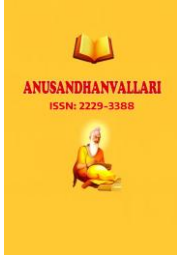
I could not understand why I was given a milk bath. The whole body of mine was sticky causing irritation. I yearned for a rain. The next day some more persons came. Their mood seemed to be unpleasant. Three persons climbed up to me, stood by me, adjusting space to stand, addressed the gathering in their own way. I saw that their idiom was harsh and abusive. After the discourse, they mixed a large bucketful of water with a pocket of milk and gave a bath to me nicely. Later, two more persons from the audience spoke loudly and gave a warning to others. For about a quarter of an hour, they made a hue and cry and went away whistling merrily.

Since then, I could not avoid milk bath once in two days. My whole body became sticky, causing me much irritations. I was perturbed and unhappy as milk was wasted. I got angry with them as I was helpless. After this comedy, I saw Chandramma after a long time, with a baby at her breast and a girl child walking by her. Her hair was disheveled, clothes were torn, looked untidy and unkempt without a bath for long. There wasn't much former glow in her face. I grasped in fury the plight of Chandramma by looking at her face. Besides me, others would also gather such impression of her easily.

There was a step near my feet. She sat down creating space on the step along with her children. There was a cup in her hands. I could not understand why she was sitting thus. In the meanwhile, came crowds in a procession. They warned Chandramma to leave the place. She simply nodded her head and did not move from there. Thinking that, she or her children did not pose any impediment to their work, the crowds became busy in their work. Soon, milk was poured upon me which trickled from the corner. Chandramma carefully collected the milk in her cup and quenched the hunger and thirst of her children. She tried again to collect the milk when my bath was over by them.

Chandramma looked angrily at the dispersing crowds. Nobody cared for her. One or two might have glanced at her but ignored. I must say that it was somewhat a happy day for me. Since then, Chandramma would come to me regularly. Sometimes, nobody came forward to conduct a milk bath for me. Chandramma waited till noon repeatedly looking for the crowds. She left the place aimlessly with her children cursing.

Four or five years passed. A marked change that I perceived was now a days nobody visited me. Anyone who came by chance would gaze at me questioning, "Who is this old man?" Soon they left the place in their busy ways. Unlike the previous times, there never had been lectures or milk baths. There sprang up four or five people standing tall like me at other places in the town. Meetings and milk baths were shifted there. I overheard many a time when the old persons were discussing this. I felt extremely happy as I got relief from my sticky body.



Gradually, Chandamma too reduced her visits to me. Yes..... What would she gain by coming to me? Even my spectacles are totally broken. Somebody stole or took away my stick. I witnessed a few scars of beatings on my body.

I thought it was my birthday. One elderly person stood before me. Saluting me, he muttered thus: “Mahatma.... The entire nation has gone to dogs. We are in a helpless plight. You must be reborn again.” Lastly, for about fifteen minutes he went on murmuring something. He shed tears pitifully looking at me empathetically. I laughed at him. “Oh mad cap! What can I do even if I come back? Recall the creation of the images of the three monkeys by Subodh Gupta. There are my messages on them. You I do not remember them. After a lapse of so many days, I express my own doubts about them. They are: one monkey closed its ears but can talk and see; the second one closed its eyes but can hear and speak; the third one closed its mouth but can see and hear. All three together could talk, hear and see, yet they preferred to remain stock-still.

I continued “Even if I come back I will remain as the fourth monkey, closing all my senses. If I don’t, those three monkeys will force me to do so. Have you understood? Without discharging your duty in your hands properly, “Why do you ask me to come again?” I uttered the last sentence seriously.

I just do not know whether he listened to me at all. He nodded his head and looked at his left hand index finger. There was a black dot on it, but the finger lost its movement. Perhaps, he recalled that his index finger was sold away and he left the place in a hurry.

Translated from the original Telugu Story ‘Nalugo Koti’ by Prof. P. Suneetha.

Biographical Note

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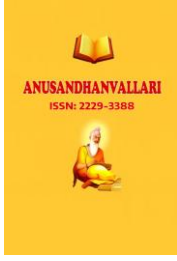
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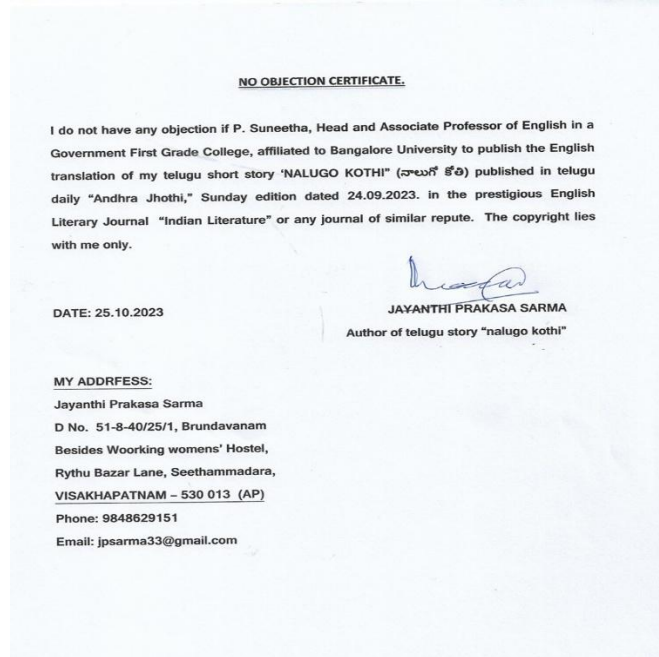


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