

Desagati¹...

Part : I

Kalpanatha Desayi felt as if his ears filled with the sound of crying... something like a humming sound... May be it was still dawn... It was not clear for him... whether that weeping was in the dream or reality. He got fully awakened and listened to it attentively... Ham... it was Amrita only, weeping... Amrita the tender infant of hardly one year... was the great grandson of Kalpanatha Desayi... son of Manik Desayi, who was the grandson of Kalpanatha Desayi... Still it was not clear for Kalpanatha Desayi whether it was dawn or the day was broken already... In his nineties whatever the eyes of Kalpanatha desayi could see was just a haze...! He now felt as if hearing the chirping of the sparrows outside... but he did not find the prostrating sun on the floor of his room, projected through the window at the eastern side... Desayi assessed that it might be six o' clock. He thought... `whether this Manik and his wife... are they still sleeping or they are awaken... *Hum...* How could they wake up so early... they must be still in deep sleep...! Look... what sort of woman she is! One that could remain in deep sleep even when her tender infant is crying as if in deep agony! I told this hapless bastard then only... so convincingly... Look... look Manik... let you not fall into that trap laid by this red faced woman...! Our blood is of desayi clan... you go for a Brahmin girl or a Kshatriya girl... leave them if you don't like to have one among them... but at least go in for a girl of our own country... I said him earnestly... But who would listen to my words? He fell prey to her charming face and words, and went behind her as if tied to her *seragu*...! *Hum...* And do you know what did she tell about bearing a child...? She was complaining all the while, that she did not want to bear any child at all...! And both of them... herself and Manik planned to go to America... They are telling that they would admit the child to a boarding house of a very good kindergarten...! Where could be on the earth any kindergarten with a boarding to nurse a tender infants like our Amrit? Hoom...! Maybe... with these new generations such new hostels also might have come up to nurse such tender kids...! But tell me... are these maternal instincts... all polluted and destroyed...?

As if these were not enough, other day, this Manik Deasayi came to his grandfather, Kalpanatha Desayi, with a heartbreaking proposal... that he was planning to sell the hillock of *Dharamanatti*! Since that day Klapanatha Desayi had been boiling within like lava... Manik told his grandfather, mellifluously, `*Eh...* It is merely a piece of barren land... you know... it is full of stones and boulders only... And moreover, a number of people of Dharamanatti encroached and are cultivating, and holding major portions of the slopes of the hillock, never caring for our

permission... It is also very difficult to vacate them now, even if we try... The customer, who approached me... is a famous contractor of stone quarries... He assured me that he would look

1.Desagati, a small area, including a few villages, ruled by a feudal lord called as desayaru after all the matters regarding the litigations and dealings in the courts... He told that his men have been in politics and they will look after all such things... He also explained me his methods of vacating those illegal holders, occupying the land... Our concern, you know... is only to sign the sale deed...’.

Manik’s words conflagrated the viscera of Kalpanatha Desayi... ‘You...! Your self are saying it as a piece of barren stony mound...! Do you know... you... our son... that hillock is the only identity left of ours in *Dharamanatti*...? Even if by chance... if ever you visit our *Dharamanatti*... you should have to beseech and plead with the people of *Dharamanatti* to convince your identity... that you are a *Desayee*... and that you are Manik Desayee...! How could your contours remain imprinted in their mind... tell me you... a mortal...! But that hillock...! It is the hillock of *Desayees*... The *desagati* founded by our forefather would remain till the end of the sun and the moon... with that hillock... You my child... how dare you tell that you would sell that hillock...! Has she got even your blood changed thoroughly...?’ As Kalpanatha Desayi was engaged in such commotion and tirade, Manik Desayi came out of the room, grumbling in distress.

Kalpanatha Desayi became terribly disturbed by Manik’s stand regarding the hillock... and this Manik Desayi also felt fed up with the annoyance by his grandfather... He was convinced that he could not pull on anymore with such an impractical old man, and he decided to leave for America as early as possible... He decided to maintain two dadis (nurses), to look after Amrit and this old man, Kalpanath Desayi... With such conviction he started to prepare for his journey and began to going here and there for the arrangement of visa...

Klpanatha Desayi would often invoke the family god, Vitthala of Pandharapura, before his eyes and bemoan, ‘what times you are bringing for us... you Vitthala!’ It was Vitthala of Pandharapura only, escorted his forefather across the fully flooded *hiriholi*² and emboldened him to establish this *desagati* . Now he thought that, God himself should take care of this *desagati*... let him make or break the *desagati* founded at His insistence only... Shedding all his burdens to the shoulders of Vitthala, Kalpanatha Desayi went for his routine duty...!

His routine duty was nothing but voyaging through the times of those good old days of the establishment of the *desagati*... when his grandfather rode on the back of a horse and crossed the *Krishna* river fully flooded, and founded this *desagati* of *Dharamanatti*...! Kalpanatha Desayaru, an old man of more than ninety years, was frail... A *dadi*³ named Balavva looked after him... Breakfast, meals, tea and all were served to him in his room only... and she would escort him to the rest room and back to his bed... You know...the old age definitely affects the body... its mobility and speed diminish... but many a time, the vivacity of the mind becomes enhanced! Sitting with his body on the bed, his mind would ponder around the heaven and hell... *patala loka*, the abode of serpents and demons beneath this *bhuloka*... and all! It was exactly so with

Kalpanatha Desayaru also...! Kalpanatha desayi heard about the memories of his forefathers and

2. *Hiriholi*, meaning big river, Krishna river; 3. *Dadi*, a hired nurse, looking after an infant or oldage person;

the happenings in *desagati*, as young boy, narrated by the elders of the village... He also heard the stories of *desagati* narrated by his grandmother and mother... and the events of the family recorded by the *helavaru*⁴ of the family... These were sometimes coherent with one another and sometimes incoherent... But Kalpanatha desayi conglomerated all these to construct a coherent past... that was as true to him, as the pungency of chillies...! It made a capsule of past history of Dharamanatti *desagati*...! To tell you in simple terms... he made a cinema and kept it in his mind... Kalpanatha Deasyi would envisage that movie all the time... He would see it starting from any episode of the narrative... something like an unconventional reading of a book... like... reading the thirteenth page later after reading the ninety eighth page first...! It is same way, as you can keep off the reading of this story... if you do not want to read it at any moment of time... That way!

It was just a few hours after the day break... he came to the house of *Chimana*. Soon after he entered the house, frightened *Chimana*, suddenly closed the door and locked from inside. Paying no heed to her fright he went to the bed room and sat there on the cot... *Chimana* hurriedly followed him and took the turban from his head and hung it to the peg on the wall... While unbuttoning his shirt, she looked at his face showing all the fear on her face, and told complainingly, 'should you come openly like this during the day... in such a broad day light...? People spying are after your head... eager to carry news regarding your whereabouts to 'those'... in the hope to receive the award of silver bracelet from *Peshawes*⁵... And these *sepoys*⁶ you know...! They are wndering like stray dogs...! *Avvayya*...! Do you know what happened yesterday evening...? I was waiting for you at the door... and while waiting so... a sepoy riding on horse back... must be a *fouzdar*⁷ only... I suppose... he went staring at me with his pupils wide open so much... Looking at me he trigged his moustaches...! Look... I am terribly worried about you... I am rather terrorized!' *Chimana* told this with all her expressions and bearings... While she was narrating, he stretched his hands as to help her to remove his shirt... He did not show even a trace of anxiety on his face and he just smiled... Seeing his total noninvolvement, *Chimana* felt frightened... She turned towards the wall with the pretext of keeping his shirt on the peg. Then she sat by his side and showing her concern for him, spoke with frightened tone, 'Things appear not so simple and easy... they appear determined to catch you... you should be very careful...'. Showering all the concern, she moved closer to him and put her chin on his left shoulder... The vibrations in her warm breath smote on his tympanic⁵ membrane... and at once... that membrane recognized at once...! It felt redolence of the deception in her mind! A flash of fright passed suddenly over his face and it gradually gave way to a pungent vituperative smile... He suddenly dragged her to his front and hugged tightly as if to crush her to pulp... *Chimana*

4. *Helavaru*, a community whose profession is to keep record of family histories 5. *Peshawes*, rulers of Maratha kingdom; 6. *Sepoys*, soldiers; 7. *Fouzdar*, officer of rank of sub inspector; 8. *Dhoti*, a long unsewn worn by men around waist; 9. *Putali sara*, a type of gold necklace which consists of a chain of flat coin like gold plates; 10. *Capalahara*, a type gold chain

breathing deeply, started to move her hands around his waist to feel the purse tied around his waist...! He suddenly held her arms and pushed her slightly away from him, and holding her face in front of his... something like holding a mirror before oneself... he gazed into her eyes and laughed harshly... Ha hha hhaa...! The offensive inherent in his laughter battered on her integument... She was shocked and suddenly got her arms released from his grip, and slid back, and again sat by his side... She penetratively stared in his eyes... He then started to take out the jewelry covered at his waist under the fold of his *dhoti*⁸...! One *putalisara*⁹, two *chapalahara*¹⁰... there were about eight gold *chains*¹¹ and several *anklets* of silver (... must be worn at the ankles of some tender infants...!)... Look...! there are about twenty *guladalies*¹²... and hundreds of silver coins... He took them all in the cup of his two hands... and he started waving this cup of hands filled with jewelries before her face, in the air... as if performing *arati*¹³...! Doing so he laughed the same laughter that he laughed a few moments earlier... *Chimana*, again penetratingly stared deep into his eyes... *Ayyo*¹⁴...! There was an enormous amount of loathing... pain and suffering...! In addition there were threads of contempt and helplessness! His laughter picked all these emotions en mass and threw them directly over her heart...! *Chimana* suddenly stood up and hurriedly went to the kitchen, telling, 'You must be hungry... I should arrange for your lunch...'.

And, there in the kitchen, sitting before the fire place... she felt him sitting there also, by her side and roared continuously his horrific laughter...! She also felt... that the tentacle like appendages of his laughter projected into her mind... and picking every element of her emotions, memories and events in her life and all her experiences studded in all the layers of her mind... these appendages picking each of them, started assaying all those... one by one! Now her whole body, she felt... was filled with black turbid waters of fear loathing and discomfort...

And now... here... *Venkobarao* sitting on the cot in the bed room... gazed at the jewelries held in the cup of his two hands for several moments... and then as though offering oblation to the sun god... he slowly poured them down over the bed...! Then looking somewhere horizontally seeing nothing... his fingers started to jumble the jewelries as an inadvertent reflection absent mindedly... He was mixing the jewelries as if squeezing the cow dung with water for besmearing the earthen floor... His mind was pondering something while his right hand was reflexively jumbling and tossing the jewelries... and then his left hand was rooted in sensuous comfort... being landed on the cushion spread on the cot! His mind was faltering in search of solution and it gradually became clearer... Then a faint smile appeared... but it also readily faded... He heaved a sigh with a long resonating exhale... And now... a firm decision appeared on his face...! Thereafter he submitted his back to the sensuous caress of the cushion on the cot!

11. Chains, gold chain worn in the neck by men and women; 12. Guladalis, a chain of black beads and gold beads worn by married women; 13. Arati, the ceremony of waving (around an idol, around bride and bridegroom, around the heads of people assembled at marriage, around king, etc.) a platter containing two burning lamps; 14. Ayyo, term expressing pain

Chimana consoling herself, kneaded the wheat flour and pressed *chapaties*... Remembering his liking for the roasted *chapaties*, she baked them to roast on the hot pan, applying sufficient ghee. While baking the *chapaties*, she took eight bananas and crushed them by squeezing with milk and jaggary... After these preparations, she washed her face and put a broad round *kunkuma*¹⁵ mark in the middle of her forehead... And then consoling the bosom in her bosom... She walked slowly... steadying her steps with deliberate attempt... and entered the bed room tiptoeing... and stood near the cot... She saw him lying on the bed with his eyes closed... Now, she put her hands on the bed at both sides of his body, and bent over him and called whispering, 'come for the lunch...'. He opened his eyes and found her broad face held near his... There were her broad expansive, pond like eyes... and... competing the width of the eyes, there was that broad round red mark of *kunkuma*, in the middle of her forehead...! 'Bhuk...' Venkobarao burst into a sudden, curt laughter...

Surprised by his sudden laughter, she asked, 'why...? why you laughed...!'

He teasingly told her, 'and... what is this...? You have put such broad and bold *kunkuma* today...?'

Chimana bent down further putting her chin on his chest and told delighted, 'Hum... If I apply such broader *kunkuma*... your *ayassu*¹⁶ increases...'.

On hearing *Chimana* Venkobarao burst into another fit of roaring laughter... *Chimana* felt a thrill of rapture by his laughter but Venkobarao suddenly stopped his laugh and said curtly...

'How does my *ayassu* increase by the *sindhur*¹⁷ on your forehead...? Are you my *garati*¹⁸...?'

Chimana was saddened and became silent... She heaved out a buzzing sigh...

'Hum... come... Let you have your lunch first... who knows what time you had your food yesterday...', telling so she stood up and pulled his arm and led him to the bathroom... She washed his feet and hands herself, and escorted him to the kitchen. She put a wooden platform near the fireplace, made him sit on it... and placed a plate before him... She took four *chapaties* and cut them into quarters and put them in the plate... over those pieces of *chapaties*, she poured a bowlful of semisolid ghee... Then she took a big bowl, and filled it with *shikarani*, bananas squashed with milk and jaggary. He laughed and asked jokingly 'what is this... am I a *vaggayya*¹⁹...? You are filling the bowl to its brim like the filling of the *doni*²⁰ of a *vaggayya*...! And... and, it appears... that you are doing it as if you are serving me the my last meal...!'. *Chimana* was at once frightened to her deep core by his words... and regaining her norm, she told weeping, 'Why should you talk like this to pinch my entrails...' and wiping her eyes... *Venkobarao* remained silent and unconcerned... *Chimana* took a piece of *chapatti* from his plate,

15. *Kunkuma*, red powder put on the forehead as round mark, indicates married status and husband alive; 16. *Ayassu*, longevity, span of life; 17. *Sindhura*, another term for *kunkuma*;

18. *Garati*, married wife of fidelity; 19. *Priestly community*, dedicated to diety *Mylaralinga*, who keep a large quadrangular begging bowl called as *doni*. The *doni* is to be filled to the brim with offerings by the devotees

dipped it in the ghee, and then immersing it in the *shikarani*, she tried to put it in his mouth, gazing at his eyes... Could she make out the sarcasm pooled in those eyes of *Venkobarao*...? Her hand trying to feed him trembled... and he... as if snatching, took away the piece of chapatti from her hand and dropped it in the plate...! She sat as a statue before him... As he ate chapaties in the plate, *Chimana* took two more chapaties to serve him. He denied.

`Why...? Are you well or no? Who knows when you had your meals yesterday... Take these two more...' while *Chimana* was still persuading, *Venkobarao* washed his hand in the plate and stood up wiping his mouth...

He walked to the bed room and sat on the cot... His bosom was filled with tumult... and it was boiling like the soaked burnt lime... But he did not show an iota of emotions or feeling on his face... His face was as plain as a wall that was white washed! Look... Now... now... it became as transparent as a glass... As if reaffirming something in his mind, he suddenly got up from the cot and took his shirt from the peg, and stood hesitant holding it in his hand... Then he again hung it to the peg and again sat on the cot... Now he stood up again... this time he took the sword from the peg... pulled out the sword from the scabbard and held its handle by his left hand... Gazing at its sharp edge, he moved his right index finger delicately over its edge... Unmindfully, he moved his finger for minutes... Then he suddenly uttered, `*Haa...!*' with pain... His finger was slightly slit by the sharp edge of the sword...

It began to bleed... Seeing the blood at the tip of his finger, he uttered some indistinct grumble that was loaded with anger and disappointment... Then saying `*Hum...*', he kept the bleeding finger in his mouth and sucked... He took out the finger from the mouth after a few moments and looked at the injury... The bleeding was thin... Now as though he realized... he decided something... And bearing a skeptical smile on his face, he put the sword back into the scabbard and hung it on the peg... He sat back on the cot, stretched his legs and lied flat keeping his head on the pillow... He kept his left hand on his forehead as to screen the eyes from excess of light... and kept his right index finger in the mouth... and kept on sucking...! For *Venkobarao*, it appeared that this sucking of the finger would only get him an solution for all his tumults...

Chimana after finishing her works in the kitchen, came to the bed room... There she saw him sleeping with his index finger put in his mouth! A gush of emotion of fondness suddenly sprung from her entrails and it completely filled her terrorized bosom... And that fondness of her for him, surprised herself! Imbibing such emotion of fondness, she tiptoed slowly... and stood by the side of the cot... She bent down landing her left hand on the bed at his right side... and in an intense feeling of affection, she advanced her right hand to caress his head fondly! *Venkobarao* suddenly opened his eyes... took out the finger from his mouth and caught hold of her hand advancing towards his face, firmly... Now it appeared as though the bleeding of his finger was stopped and bled instead in his eyes...! *Chimana* shuddered with fear... Her bosom suddenly drank all that tender feeling of fondness and now both her bosom and entrails all got filled with

the black waters of fright! Her beautiful red coral like lips were suddenly bleached and turned grey...! *Venkobarao* stared into her eyes with his blood shot eyes... Then he suddenly burst into a roaring laughter which was thoroughly impregnated with bitterness...

`Ha hha...Ha hha hhaa...!'

He tightened his hold of her wrist, and suddenly pulled her to his right side... Now *Chimana* was numb and laid at his right side... Now he pitched his right elbow on the bed and turned turned towards her... He released her right hand and landed his left hand across, by her right side... and lifted his head like the hood of a king cobra... He gradually brought his face towards her face... *Chimana* with the feeling of an intense fear and pain at the middle of her forehead, shut her eyes tightly... Now *Venkobarao* pushed his right palm beneath her head, lifted it and pressed his lips with force on her lips... Thereafter... he pressed his teeth... and he chewed her lips with a fit of violent emotion...holding them in rhapsody between his teeth...! Then... then... he moved over her... and then... then...

`Haaa...' moaned *Chimana* in a reflexive ecstasy...!

She actually felt... as if she saw... that... that... other bank of the river of an otherworldly bliss...! Her mind was all carried away by the flood of such a bliss... Immersed in such a overwhelming euphoria, she was lying there, on the bed, immobile with her eyes closed on their own...

Venkobarao got up, wore his dhoti, took the sword from the peg on the wall and pulled the sword from the scabbard and glared at its sharp edge... Don't know why... he intensely felt that the truth might be like this sharp edge of the sword itself...! And... now again, he was drowned in some vacillation... ! *Chimana* opened her eyes, and seeing the sword in his hand, she suddenly sprang up and sat on the bed... She was immersed in terrible fright... On seeing such frightened *Chimana*, his mind got again petrified... and was convinced of his decision! *Chimana* felt as if her body was anaesthetized... She earnestly thought to run away and escape... but her body was numb and didn't respond to her mind... *Venkobarao* bore a smile over his contorted face... Now hopes began to sprout in *Chimana's* mind... She also tried to laugh, but her attempt ended in vain... it looked as if she was weeping! (Look at this whimsicality...! The body and mind arise and stay together from birth to death... but look at the responses with each other!) The laughter on *Venkobarao's* face gradually became harsher and harsher... and amid his laughter only he roared...

`Hum... tell me... what time are they coming...?'

Chimana shivered with fear from the sole to the crown of her head... *Venkobarao* repeated the thunder! She tried and got her dried lips separated with much efforts and attempted to speak... Again the same thing...! She could only move her lips and that was all... no voice emerged! He thundered again...

`Humm...?'

Then suddenly the words slipped inadvertently out of her mouth...

`s..soo..n a..fte.r su..n s..se.t...`.

Now the eyes of *Chimana* also started to speak... they meekly stared at him and humbly prayed for mercy! That prayer of her only generated a terrible pain, shooting in his brainstem... and it gradually spread upwards and downwards, throughout his body... The muscles at his left temple hauled producing an immense pain...! And here... the neck of *Chimana* was fully numb as if anaesthetized... She slowly moved her hands as if to ascertain, whether her head was there, above her neck...! And at that... at that very moment... the sword of *Venkobarao* flashed and cut her neck...

`kachak...!`

And see... see...! The hands of *Chimana* didn't stop there... they touched her head as if trying to lift it...!

A streak of about three to four inches, about the middle of the sword, was smeared with blood... Oh... so much of blood there...! There the decapitated body itself was not bleeding this much... But the sword... as if itself was filled with blood... blood trickled continuously from the sword! For what reason god alone knows... *Venkobarao* did not want even a single drop of that blood to trickle on the floor... He started to turn the blade of the sword continuously not to allow it to drop on the floor... And what a watery blood it was...! It was not ready to clot at all quickly... And there, in the west... the sun was gliding rapidly... It was only about two hours for the sun to set...
`...they would come s..soo..n a..fte.r s..su..n set...!`

Venkobarao blew air... `Uff...` `Uff...` and simultaneously moved the sword rapidly. Hum... Any how... now it was the blood without any life... its commitment could be only up to the persistence of the life... Therefore... it was inevitable for it to clot anyway, even if very slowly...! In the beginning the uppermost layer... then the inner layers... one by one... it clotted slowly. He didn't leave it there... he knew the in-depth truth of that blood... Therefore he blew his warm breath repeatedly over that streak of blood, and got it completely clotted, forming a firm brown stripe on the sword.

Now he put the sword leaning against the wall and quickly put on his shirt... took his turban from the peg and pressed it over his head... Left the scabbard lying there... and picking the sword he rushed to the door... Putting on his shoes and leaving the doors wide open... he ran towards the cave where the horse was left with his attendant... His attendant boy was sitting near the cave with the horse grazing around... He saw *Venkobarao* running hurriedly towards himself. Thinking that the master is in some urgency and to know it... he started to run towards *Venkobarao*... *Venkobarao* signaled to harness the horse quickly... The boy ran back and started quickly to harness the horse... By then *Venkobarao* reached there and immediately took the reins in his hand... This boy served me honestly for years together... I should give him something... *Venkobarao* felt sincerely... But what was there on his body...? All the treasure hidden at his waist was poured over the bed of that infidel woman...! He felt sorry... He affectionately held the

arm of the boy and pressed it... and patted on his back... Then he jumped and sat on to the back of the horse... Eyes of *Venkobarao* and those of the boy both became wet... and both of them sent out elongated exhales mixed with a sigh... 'Usss...!'

Venkobarao then whipped the horse and it immediately galloped fast... The boy did not understand the cause for his grief and it gradually possessed him completely... He thought about his master fondly and he worried whether he would ever return back here or not... He sat there looking at the setting sun in a deep pensive mood...

Perhaps about half an hour after *Venkobarao* left, a loud shout calling the boy broke his introversion... and he looked up... Four *Peshawe sepoys*, sitting on horse backs gheraoed him... He could not run away even... One of the *sepoys* near the boy holding a whip in his hand, perhaps *fouzdar*... jumped down from the back of the horse and shouted...

'Hum... which side he drove his horse...?'

The boy meekly looked at the sepoy like a dumb... The sepoy thundered again. The boy then raising his left hand indicated the northward direction... opposite to that *Venkobarao* drove his horse... The *sepoy* thundered 'Hummm...', and jumped to sit on the back of his horse and gazing at the face of the boy, he raised the whip and thrashed that poor boy... The boy cried in pain, 'Ayyoo...' and tottered and fell down to the ground... The *sepoys* hurriedly drove away towards southwards... in the same direction as *Venkobarao* drove his horse... The boy forgot his pain and caught in shock, and sat down in gloom... He gradually drowned in sadness...

That evening... the whole night and the next day... the horse, with an unusual endurance, had kept on galloping continuously... The sun was sliding down there at the western zenith and the sky there was all crimson... The *sepoys* chasing him must be lagging behind at least by eight to ten *haradari*²¹... *Venkobarao* felt proud of his horse... To look at, it was as like any ordinary horse... But when *Venkobarao* sat on its back and his feet touched its chest... its spirits would be aroused and it would feel as if it had lost its weight and it could fly...! It would then gallop... as if it was possessed by a benevolent demon of some deer...! It rushed swiftly cutting the air like a speedy headlong spear... The dusk advanced and the dull light gradually turned into darkness... and darkness became more and more dense... Now it appeared as though the horse bore more weight on its front legs... That meant, the horse was climbing down a valley... *Venkobarao* thought. In the entire journey since last evening, *Venkobarao* had left the total responsibility of journey to his horse only... He held his eyes and ears attached to his back, to assess the movements of the chasing *sepoys* of *Peshawes*. That was why the horse, galloping, rushed straight like a headlong spear and did not turn left or right... It ran speedily with its head held stretched ahead...

The horse that was running with such an immense speed now suddenly stopped and raised its forelimbs above in the air, braying loudly `Ko..ho..ho...!'. *Venkobarao* at once lost his balance and he was about to fall back... But he managed somehow and didn't fall... He quickly bent forwards and hugged the neck of the horse tightly... Then, the tip of the sword in his hand jabbed the muzzle of the horse and this irritated the horse further... The horse wriggled violently and shuddered its head and neck... *Venkobarao* pulled the sword back and tried to pacify the horse by stroking at its neck and shoulder with his right hand... When he felt that the horse was pacified... he was shocked to see ahead a sight of a violently streaming broad river, fully flooded...! He felt as if his eyes were filled with darkness... *Venkobarao* in great consternation thought... where should I proceed now...? While he was in such a deep dismay and immersed in it... the horse slowly retreated... one... two... three... and... fourth step... and then it suddenly convulsed its entire body, and *Venkobarao* on the back of the horse was thrown off! He fell on the ground at a distance... and the sword in his hand also flew off and fell somewhere nearby... The horse started to run away in astray... *Venkobarao* shouting `ho... ho...' got up hurriedly, and in great dismay tried to follow the horse running after it... The horse was frightened further by his shouts and it went on galloping... and soon it got dissolved in the darkness...! *Venkobarao* felt blindfolded and he stood there still... like a pillar.

The cold breeze made him shudder... He could not assess even from which side he reached there... he looked around keenly opening his eyes widely... He stood with his back towards the river and viewed keenly with his pupils opened extra wide... he could not see anything even a few steps away from him... Now he fully relied on his ears and put them to work... Only the sound of violent flow of enormous flood could be heard... nothing else! As he put his eyes and ears alternately to work intensely for several times... he felt immense exhaustion... and he felt as though all the muscle in his body from head to sole were suffocated... He felt fidgety... and collapsed and sat down... The veil of his consciousness slowly slipped away... and he tumbled down there only, where he was sitting...

Whether it was the sleep or swooning... who could tell... god alone knew...! And he saw that blackman appearing in his apparition... Ham...! It is a mystery... how did he come there...! Did he arrive flying in the sky... or came on foot tiptoeing stealthily there...? *Venkobarao* neither saw him arriving on foot nor descending from the sky... He happened all of a sudden there, before *Venkobarao*... and he stood there at the plane of his conscience like a statue, keeping his two hands resting at his waist... He appeared there something like the precipitation of butter while churning the curds or like blossoming of buds into flowers! He was as black as charcoal... but he was so enchanting...! He was wearing a *dhoti* with broad red border... There was *upparani*,²⁰ with the border of gold threads, folded and hung on his left shoulder... And... what was there on his head...? Was it a crown or a long cap...? May be due to the darkness spread around... it was not clear for *Venkobarao*... *Venkobarao* had a faint thread of memory of having seen that dark man... Where it might be...? He tried to remember... but could not recollect... The black man spoke...

`Why... oh you a mortal...! Did you forget me so easily...! *Mee*²¹... I am *Vitthala*...' he said. *Venkobarao* still did not recognize him and said, `*Ham... ham...*` feigning as if recognized him, said, `*Namaskar...How are you doing!*'. *Venkobarao* was still in sheer confusion and he thought... what may be the work for this man with me... and... why should he come to me at these

20. *Upparani*, a shawl like cloth; 21. *Mee*, meaning 'I' in Marathi

hours of my misery...? *Vitthala* smiled and asked, `*Why, you a mortal...? It appears as though you are caught in great confusion... Are you frightened by the sight of this Krishna river...? Look at me... didn't I come here only after crossing that fully flooded Chandrabhaga river? If you plunge with confidence and swim... you can easily cross it...! And remember... it is inevitable also for you... Ham... one more thing... Don't go without the sword... carry it ever with you... also don't get the sword dipped in water to get it rusted...'* Now all of sudden a flash struck in his head... and he suddenly recognized that divine man... Oh...! It is He...! none other than that *Vitthala*²² of *Pandharapura*²³ himself...! *Venkobarao* suddenly opened his eyes and exclaimed in ecstasy... `*Tande*²⁴...!' and eagerly looked all around... But... No... Nobody was there...! There was only the dense darkness all around... The morning star was yet to appear in the sky... And just ten steps away... there was the flooded *big river* flowing torrentially... He recollected the words of *Vitthala* about his sword, and hurriedly got up and moved his hands along the surface of the ground in the surrounding... He felt the touch of it and picked it hurriedly...

Venkobarao walked towards the river... There was a small boulder about five feet away from the edge of the water course... He kept his turban and shirt on that boulder and kept the sword over them... He pulled his dhoti upwards, and tucked it in the way that it would not hinder his swimming movements... He took three steps into the river and dipped himself in the shallow water for once and stood facing the direction of *Pandharapura*... and prayed for the grace of *Vitthala*, chanting, `*Vitthala Vitthala Panduranga... Vitthala Vitthala Panduranga...*', folding his hands... Then he wrapped the shirt to his head and holding the sword at the back of his head, he fastened it tightly with his turban. It stood as a single horn behind his head! He saw that it wouldn't fall off and confirmed about it... Then again chanting *Vitthala... Vitthala...* *Venkobarao* walked with an enormous faith, in that torrential course of the river for a short distance... till the water reached his chest... and then... taking care that the sword fastened to his head would not dip into water... he plunged into the river, vertically, keeping his head above the water, and started swimming...

Part : II

When a cock in *byadara*²⁵ street crowed, the morning star did not yet show up in the sky... *Triyambaka Bhattaru* thought it was already dawn, and as per his daily routine, he got up, sat on the bed... rubbed his two palms one over the other, chanting *karagre vasate laxmi*²⁶... he had the auspicious vision of the right palm... He pushed the wick of the *panati*²⁷ and made its light increased... His daughter was deeply asleep on the bed near to his. The blanket on her body slid

22. *Vitthala, diety*; 23. *Pandharapura, a place in Mahara state, that is the centre of diety Vitthala*;
24. *Tande, o my father*; 25. *Byadara, name of a community, considered to be a marshal race*;
26. *Karagre vasate Laxmi...*, a hymn in which explains the locations of deities at right palm,
chanting this hymn the right palm is seen before seeing any thing else; 27. *Pranati, a earthen or
metal saucer-formed receptacle for the oil and wick of a lamp*

down to her feet... *Triyambaka bhattaru* smiled, and chiding her affectionately in his mind... 'a mad lassie... look at that blanket on her body... it would be there properly only till she gets asleep... The moment she is asleep, it slips down to her feet...'. He got up, pulled the blanket to cover her body... took his *dhoti* and a copper vessel kept by the side of his bed, and he readied himself to leave for the river for his bathing... He slowly opened the door, taking care that it would not make jarring sound to awake his daughter... then pulled the doors from outside and walked towards the river *Krishna*...

It was the rainy season. The foot path to the river across the fields of black cotton soil was all miry... *Triyambaka Bhattaru* had to struggle to walk along to reach his regular bathing point at the bank of the river... He saw that the flood had swollen since the previous morning, and the waters were raised up to the edge of the broad flat boulder, where he used to keep his *dhoti* and copper vessel... He kept his *dhoti* there as usual, took water in the copper vessel and went for emptying his bowels... He washed the vessel rubbing with the soil... then sitting at the edge of the boulder stretching his legs into the river, he took water from the river in the copper vessel and poured over his head and body, chanting *Govinda Govinda*²⁸... While rubbing his body with both his hands, he inadvertently scanned across the river ahead, and he was shocked to see a strange animal swimming towards him... He exclaimed... 'Haa...!'. Just about fifteen to twenty feet away from him, there was some single horned monstrous animal, swimming towards him...! It was still before the dawn and darkness still prevailed... *Triyambaka bhattaru* could not recognize the animal clearly, and a wide range of monstrous animals readily appeared in his mind frightening him immensely... His legs began to shudder... and picking up the vessel, he was about to run away... Then he heard a lamenting wail and cry of that animal... 'Thambavo²⁹... tham.. baa.. vo...'. Haa...! It was human wailing...! *Bhattaru* got surprised and dropped the idea of running away... and kept the vessel back on the rock. Shouting loudly, *bhattaru* asked...

'Who are you...? *Kon*³⁰...?'

In response, the man in the river shouted... 'Mee... I... Venko...'.

But in the roaring sound of the flood of the river, it was not clearly audible. *Bhattaru* stood astounded and thought... who could be this reckless man, daring to swim in such a torrential current of water...? And there, this *Venkobarao* swam slowly and reached the boulder and held its edge... *Bhattaru* quickly pulled him over the boulder from the river... He saw in astonishment that the horn like structure over his head was a sword fastened at the back of his head! *Venkobarao* was breathing rapidly like the bellows in the hearth of a blacksmith, collapsed on the boulder and fell flat... *Bhattaru* was confused as to what immediate care he should take about that man... He was in confusion... as the man swam across the river, whether he should make

him drink water...? Let it be anything... I would drink him water, he thought, and taking water in his copper vessel, he trickled water into his mouth... *Venkobarao* drank sip by sip... Now the east slowly started to turn ochre indicating the sun rise... *Bhattaru*, now could see the stripe of dried

28. *Govinda*, one of the names of God Krishna; 30. *Thambao*, stop, halt in Marathi language;
31. *Kon*, means 'who' in Marathi

blood on the blade of the sword... Staring at the strip of that dried blood, *bhattaru* asked hesitatingly, 'Who are you sir...? What is this folly of yours...? Should you dare to plunge into such a torrential river...? You are lucky... I think it must be all due to god's grace... that you could reach this side of the river safely...?'

Venkobarao slowly opened his eyes, got up and sat on the boulder. On seeing the red color of the torrential water, he remembered the sword... He untied the turban and took the sword, inspected and kept it by his side... He wiped his body with the turban. *Bhattaru* was glaring at the sacred thread³¹ across his strong robust chest... He would once look at that sacred thread on his body and the very next moment would stare at the sword smeared with the blood... He asked:

'Where did you come from...? Can't you tell me all about you...?'

Then the spontaneous response of the man was... '...decapitating her I started... those barking dogs chased me...?'

This confused *Bhattaru* still more... He tried to grasp about that man from those grumblings... but *Umhum...*! Could not comprehend anything! Let it be so now... I would take this man to my home... Then I would enquire and know all about him later, *bhattaru* thought. Then he enquiringly told that man, 'By seeing you it appeared to me... that that... you have come from *Konkana belt*³². Are you *konkanasta*³³ or *deshasta*³⁴...?' The tongue in *Venkobarao*'s mouth was about to utter... I am *Maratha*... But it suddenly stopped itself. Swallowing the saliva in his mouth...he said '*Deshasta*...'. *Bhattaru* told, '*Ham*... I predicted... I predicted that... seeing the radiance on your face, I felt it must be so only... that... that you belong to us only...'. And then looking at the sword in his hand, *Bhattaru* said, '*Hum*... Come... let us go to our home...'. *Venkobarao* told, '*Yey*... no no... why unnecessary botheration for you...?'

'What are you telling... will it be a botheration if one of ours visits our house...? Come. And first of all you need some rest... have some rest first. And there after... it would be as you think...', *Bhattaru* telling so, pulled his arm and persuaded the man to walk with him to his home... As *Venkobarao* was walking by his side, strange ideas, plans and proposals sprouted and ramified in the brains of *Triyambaka Bhattaru*...!

As soon as they came to the home, *Triyambaka Bhattaru* gave a towel and *dhoti*, and told him 'First remove the wet *dhoti* on your body...'. *Venkobarao* looked here and there, and went to a corner of that hall, where there was an arch like recess in the wall. He placed his sword there, and changed his clothes. That recess was for the installation of *Ganapati*³⁵ idol on the auspicious day of *Ganesh chavati*³⁶. After *Venkobarao* changed his clothes, *Bhattaru* told his daughter in

32. *Konkana belt, coastal region where the people speak a language called Konkani;*
33. *Konkanasta, sect of brahmines inhabiting konkan region, and their descendents;* 34. *Deshasta, brahmines from the regions other than konkana belt;* 35. *Ganapati, diety with elephant face;*
36. *Ganesha chavati, auspicious fourt day of sixth month of Hindu calaender when Ganapati statue is anstalled and worshipped;*

the kitchen loudly,

`Leela... get this *rayaru* a copper vessel and *pancha patre*³⁷ for his *sandhya vandane*³⁸...'.
Venkobarao thought it almost came for his neck... and in order to avoid the tricky situation he told *Bhattaru*,

`Look *Bhdajee*... I stuck remained totally to this earthly life... *ham*... and... and... also I got entangled with the troubles of *Peshawe sepoy*s... *ham*... and what happened... I totally lost the touch of all these *sandhya vandane*... *pooja* and rituals and others... I led my life altogether in a different mode...`.

A strand of doubt struck in the mind of *Bhattaru*. as to his caste... But he did not give out any hint of it and said, `Is it so... It is all right... all right...Let it be so...`. And then again he teasingly told, `*Hum*... it is true... it is true you see... the hand engaged in the sword craft does not find delight in holding *teertha sautu*³⁹...`. Telling so he laughed for himself. Then calling *Leela* again he told, `*Leela*... get *rayaru* some popcorn flour mixed with milk and jaggery... poor fellow... who knows whether he had his meals last night or not...`. *Leela* answered `*Hum*...` from the kitchen and after sometime, she, a girl of fourteen - fifteen years, came from inside holding a bowl with popcorn flour in her right hand and a small copper vessel filled with water held in her left hand... She kept them before *Venkobarao*. *Bhattaru* told him, `*This is my daughter Leela... She is now the owner of our household... My wife passed away when this girl was just eight years old...*`. As *Bhattaru* was telling this, *Venkobarao* uttered an inadvertent faint cry... *Leela* returning after keeping popcorn flour and water, got alarmed by his sudden cry, and looked back. Then she hurriedly went inside... *Triyambaka Bhattaru* who was immersed in the memory of his wife could not notice this faint cry... There on the hunk of popcorn flour, was a lump of solid ghee... This again dragged the memory of *Chimana* to the surface and *Venkobarao* felt his throat choking... He forcibly swallowed the popcorn flour, drank water and stood up hurriedly...

He urgently needed to sleep... He asked for a mat, spread it on the platform just inside the main door... and slept. He slept for hours together... By the time he woke, the *pooja* and lunch of *Bhattaru* were over... After he woke up, he had his lunch. After the lunch, the first thing he told *Triyambaka bhattaru* was,

`Respectable *Bhadajee*... please arrange for a small room in this village for my residence... it is all unnecessary botheration for you...`.

Bhattaru feigningly told, `*Yeh*... where is the botheration... In fact having you as our guest is an honor for us...`, saying so he laughed, *Ha.. hha.. hhaa...*, and continued... `*Haam*... if you are really so much bashful... I shall make an alternate arrangement by today evening only...`. By

37. *Pancha patre, vessels associated with rituals and sandhya vandane*; 38. *Sandhyavandane, submitting salutations and oblations to the sun god, at morning, noon and at evening*; 39. *Teertha soutu, copper or silver spoon used during sandhyavandane and also used to give sacred water (teertha)*

`alternate arrangement' *bhattaru* intended to communicate some scheme of his to him... *Triyambaka Bhattaru* looked intently at the man, and understood that he could not catch it... Then he slid nearer that man and asked in low tone...

`All right... that will be done... Now tell me all about yourself... your village... your name... Tell me all...`.

Venkobarao wanted to tell... but his mind was crowded with disturbing images... of that infidel woman... her decapitation... that sword and the streak of blood smear on its blade... the flood of reddish blood like waters of the *Krishna* river... and that... that charcoal like black man... no... not a man... a *devaru*⁴⁰... hoom... *devaroo* only... *Vitthala* of *Pandharapura*...! His mind was fully occupied with such images that met him recently... these two days only... He felt disgusted... and thought, whether the life I lived before these two days is not at all valid...! Does it not belong to me at all...! And my experiences of whatever kind of the preceding years... are not my own experiences at all? How then I can tell about myself to this *bhattaru*...! *Venkobarao* was lost in these thoughts and sat still with his eyes closed for a while... He sent out an elongated exhale, opened his eyes and told apologetically, `Respected *Bhadajee*... please pardon me now... I would tell you about myself later... some other time... Now somehow I have lost all my enthusiasm...`. But *Bhattaru* had all the enthusiasm... He asked insistently...

`Will you tell me your name at least...` and laughed.

Venkobarao was caught in dilemma again... He thought for a while and said...

`*Rango Patavardhan*...!`

Yes... it was such an unexceptional artifice! *Venkobarao* himself felt jubilation on hearing the utterance of his own new name...!

`Look *Rango Patavardhan*...` *Bhattaru* began to tell... (he put an extra emphasis on the word `patavardhan' every time he uttered it!), `...somehow I developed a conviction within these two three hours that... you have a great skill in the art of sword craft... you have entered this village holding the sword smeared with blood! And you see *Patavardhan*... I must tell you one more thing that... that I have very good practicing knowledge of *Jyotishya shastra*... the science of foretelling... You know... while you were taking rest, I just calculated and drafted the horoscope of the *muhurta*⁴¹ you entered this village after swimming across the flooded *Krishna* river... Hum... Why should I hide what the horoscope is telling about your arrival here...! *Patavardhanajee*... do you know what that horoscope is telling...?`

How could that man *Rango Patavardhan* know! In fact he was totally disinterested in this discourse of *Bhattaru*, and screwing his eyes he yawned repeatedly... *Bhattaru* took a pause looking at him intently and then continued again with his *jyotishya shastra*...

40. *Devaru*, the god; 41. *Muhurta*, the auspicious moment, unit of 48 minutes;

`Look *Patavardhanjee*... You have entered this village in *amrita muhurta*... an auspicious immortal moment...! The horoscope drafted of that *muhurta* tells us... that... that you have the *yoga*⁴² to become a king of this *Dharamanatti* province; it tells that you would establish a *desagati* here...!'

When *Bhattaru* was telling in the tone to enthuse that man called *Rango Patavardhan*... what did this *Rango Patavardhan* do...? Not caring that he was a novice in that house of an unknown gentleman, not caring that he was sitting before a respectable elderly man who was helping him... and heeding to none of the ethics and etiquettes to be followed by a guest... he started to laugh harshly as if to ridicule *Bhattaru* and his *jyotishya shastra*! He laughed and laughed roaringly... Ha.. hha.. hhaaa... to such an extent that he himself felt it enough... and then controlling, he uttered, `Ham... respected *Bhadajee*...'. He intended to tell something but he immediately changed his mind and stopped... He introspected in silence for a while perhaps... and then he again began to speak,

`...Ham... respected *Bhadajee*... tell me... are there *garadimani*⁴³ in your village...?'

The most eccentric laughter and equally absurd irrelevant question of his stunned *Triyambaka Bhattaru*... Not that... not about the faith in *jyotishya*... leave it... let us even take this *jyotishya* and this foretelling... all... all these as falsehoods only... Ok... let it be so only... But the suggestion that... `you will become a king and that you will establish a *desagati* here'... are these to be taken so drily... so unenthusiastically... and should they be ridiculed like this! Pooh! Shouldn't he feel happy in his mind at least? *Bhattaru* thought so and sat in silence... When *Bhattaru* remained silent, *Rango Patavardhana* repeated his question...

`Aren't there any... *bhadajee*...?'

Bhattaru told grimly, `Uhum... there is'.

Then *Rango Patavardhan* continued to enquire about the irrelevant *garadimani* only... `Who practise wrestling in *garadimani* in your village?'

Bhattaru answered sarcastically, `Who else...! those good for nothing *byadara* youths only...! Who else will have leisure for such activities?'

`Respected *Bhadaji*... Now you can tell about your *deasgati* narrative...' told *Rango Patavardhana*. Now his tone was all imbued with enthusiasm. *Bhattaru* got surprised and he amazingly stared at *Rango Patavardhan*...

Rango Patavardhan jokingly told, `If I would become a *desayi*... then you only would be our *karabhari*, the administrator of the *desagati*...!' and laughed heartily.

Bhattaru regaining his enthusiasm, told, `Don't laugh *Patavardhan*... You take it for granted... It is impossible that my predictions could ever become a falsehood!'

‘Then tell me your predictions respected *bhadajee...*’ asked *Patavardhana*. *Bhattaru* exhaling noisily, slid further nearer *Rango Patavardhana* and started to tell almost in whisper... as if giving a solemn key note address...

42. *Yoga, coincidence of time and events*; 43. *Garadimani, the house of gymnasium and training the art of wrestling*;

‘Look *Patavardhan...* whimsicality is reigning in our areas... Somebody comes with a troop telling - I am *saradara*⁴⁴ of *Peshawe...* and he demands *chowth*⁴⁵. Then another fellow comes telling... I am *subedar*⁴⁶ of *Adilashahi* of *Bijapur...* and tells to shell down the expenses of the troops... Who knows whether these are genuine *saradars* of *Peshawes* and *subedars* of *nawabs...* or else mere robbers! Is not it...? And either of these *Peshawes* or the *Navabs* of *Vijapura* should collect the *chowth* or expenses of troops... whatever they may call it... and that too once in a year... isn’t it...? But these troops visit frequently... several times in a year...! What could the people do...? Suppose we do not fork out... they squeeze out our life out of our body...! When each one of them visited... every time we accumulated all our means of livelihood and would hand it over to them... Taking all that we give, they accuse and grumble that it is very less... kick us and drive off... Our miseries are not over... It is only about these *Peshawes* and *Navabs* of *Vijapur...* If this is one type... the miseries of *Pindaries*⁴⁷ are of different severities... To tell you about their atrocities *Patavardhan...* we get filled with chill and shudder...! They come all of a sudden like a bolt from the blue, whenever they would find it convenient and feel to raid us... riding on the horses they drive fast... *Tak... Tak... Tak...* raising dust to the sky all along the road to our village... they would tear into our houses...! They loot everything except our teguments...’. While *Bhattaru* was telling about the *pindaries*, *Rango Patavardhan* felt... whether this *bhattaru* caught my identity... and whether he is telling about me only...!

Bhattaru continued... ‘Today morning also... when you came swimming across the river with the sword fastened at the back of your head... seeing your sword I suddenly recalled the drastic memory of those demons only...! I thought and consoled myself... if you were a robber you should have come in a troop... how could you come all alone...’.

On listening to these stories of *pindaries*, *Rango Patavardhan* laughed feigningly... and he thought... whether this narrative of *Bhattaru*, of becoming a *desayi* would get realized or not... but one thing is beyond doubt... that... there would not be any difficulty for me to survive in this area. ‘*Hum...* let this *bhatta* of *juttala*⁴⁸ devise his drama... If it works... why should I shirk...!’ thinking so, *Venkobarao* conceded the *jyotishya* of *Rango Patavardhan*, and readied himself to play his role.

By *dangura*⁴⁹, public announcements were made... ‘listen to these orders... listen to these orders... one from each house in our *Dharamanatti* village should come to *chavadi*⁵⁰ in the evening...’.

The people thought... our *upadhyayaru*⁵¹ has sent asked us to come for something... We must go...’ and they promptly arrived in the evening at *chavadi*. There in the *chavadi...* a mat was -----

44.Saradara, office bearers in the army; 45.Chowth,tax of 25% of the income or production; 46.Subedara, office bearer in army;47.Pindaries, robbers; 48.Juttala, tuft of hair left at the crown of the head at the ceremony of tonsure; 49.Dangura, public announcement system in villages. A man goes with tabor and bangs it to draw the attention of public and then announces loudly; 50.Chavadi, a village hall for meeting of village officebearers; 51.Upadhyayaru, priestly class person, treated as the teacher for all regarding religious and social matters;

spread on the platform and a *lodu* was kept aligning the wall. A robust man was sitting reclining his back on to the *lodu*! And before that man, at the edge of the platform, *upadhyayaru* was standing like a mouse... with his body bent... 'Haaa...!', the people of Dharamanatti exclaimed... While he should be sitting like this and our *upadhyayaru* is standing like this... it is clear... that... this man must not be any ordinary person... he must be the *Peshawe sarkar* himself... they thought so and whispered among themselves... They worried vehemently... Oh god *Vitthala*...! What more new curses you want to shower over us...! They contemplated all the while with fright. Then that master, sitting reclining on the *lodu* gave a signal for them to sit down... They were then stuck in a new problem... how to sit when our *upadhyayaru* himself is standing! Then *Bhattaru* turned towards them and indicated to be absolutely silent by holding his index finger across his lips, and signalled them to sit down... Then the people sat down wherever they were standing without making much noise... The people who sat there, had their tongues vanished... and they had their eyes widened and occupied their entire face... and their ears... enlarged to the size of a winnowing pan...! When all the people got settled, *Bhattaru* submitted his respects to the man reclining on the *lodu*, by bending his body above the waist and folding both his hands together... The man reclining on the *lodu* smiled, and waved his hand indicating his permission to proceed.

Then *Triyambaka bhattaru* who was recognized by the people of the village as *upadhyayaru*, started to weave the net... thread by thread...

'You the people of Dharamanatti... it is all known to you... that we... the citizen of Dharamanatti province are all suffering a lot... Robbers' menace here has become intolerable'.

All the people nodded in acceptance...

'...Last year our beloved *Venkappa Giddareddi* was killed mercilessly by *pindaries*... and a year before *Kashappa of Kalasappagol* was hacked to death. Seeing all these I was very sad and thought all such miseries of our people can be stopped if we have a *desayaru* to protect us'. People shouted 'yes... yes...'. *Bhattaru* feigning alarm on his face indicated the people to be silent... and continued further...

'With such an idea... I wrote an appeal to *Peshawe sarakar* of Pune, requesting to send us a person as *desayi* and make arrangement to save our lives and properties... My request reached *Peshawe sarakar* and considering my humble request, they have sent a brave *desayaru*... While hurrying to our village riding on the horse through a thick forest... a big tiger came jumping to his front... *Desayaru* jumped from the horse back and stood with the naked sword in his hand... That tiger was perhaps all happy feeling that it got its food for the day! Intending to eat this brave man, it roared and jumped over him...'

People listening to *Bhattaru* were all in awe! Being convinced that his artifice is working, *Bhattaru* narrated further with more enthusiasm...

`...*Desayaru* waited for the tiger to come within the reach of his sword... and when that tiger jumped over our *desayaru*, he moved quickly like the lightning in the sky... escaped... and swung his sword like a flash of lightning... and the head of that tiger was found falling... there... fifty feet away!'

He enacted all the drama in it...

`*Desayaru* then immediately jumped to the back of the horse and drove fast towards *Dharamanatti*... Our elders always say... you know... good acts would always meet a hundred and one obstructions...! So it happened now also... *Desayaru* drove fast his horse... comes and sees here... that our *Krishna* is in full spate! The confederates of *Deasyaru* advised... *Rao Saheb*... let us drive back and return to *Pune*... the river is in full spate... it is fully flooded... They incessantly persuaded him... sir... it is not proper to cross this river now... *Desayaru* then told them, 'No no... who knows... what all sufferings are bothering my people there... It is not good to make further delay...' telling so *desayaru* got down from the horse, handing over the horse to their confederates, readied himself to cross the torrential river by swimming... His men tried to prevent such adventure of our *desayaru* and tried to convince him in several ways... 'No sir... it is so turbulent and swift flowing torrential stream... It is not at all safe to swim across...', '*Rao saheb*⁵²... it is an unknown river for you... there may be violent whirlpools in the middle that can pull down and drown anything... Please do not plunge', 'No *Rao saheb*... the waters are very violent... please do not plunge into these waters...'. They all pleaded with folded hands... But *desayaru* handed his horse to his confederates and told them all to drive back... Sending them all back, *desayaru* plunged into the violent waters of our *Krishna river* and swam across... In the early morning when I was taking bath... I saw him swimming across the river and coming to this bank of the river... I was wonderstuck... who should be this brave man swimming across such violent waters... I thought... if ever *Peshawe sarkar* sends us such a brave man as our *desayaru*... all our miseries would end... While I was contemplating like this, *desayaru*, with sword in hand appeared before me...! My legs were trembling... Standing before me, he asked me solemnly... 'which side is *Dharamanatti*...?' I thought... Oh...! It is all over... It would be the end of our villagers...! Though reluctantly... I had to indicate the direction of our village... He further enquired... 'there is a person called *Triyambaka Bhatta*... do you know that man?' I got horrorstuck... and thought that it came to my neck only... I decided to accept whatever god bestowed on me... and I meekly told him... '*Rao saheb*... it is me only... Please show mercy, if I have committed any mistake...'. *Desayaru* patted on my back and told, 'Don't get frightened... You wrote an appeal to *Peshawe sarkar*... didn't you...? *Peshawe sarkar* sanctioned your request and sent me as their representative to save you from all hardships, and to run the *desagati* of *Dharamanatti*!' I got excited... I tell you the fun... I actually felt like dancing in jubilation... Ha ha haa...'

Envisaging the dance by their *upadhyayaru* before their mind... the people also laughed with *Bhattaru*... He suddenly feigned alarm and stopped his laugh and indicated to be silent with

dilated eyes and finger on the lips! All the people suddenly fell silent... Then *Bhattaru* concludingly told,

`The God has ultimately opened his eyes on us... We got the bravest *desayaru* for Dharamanatti Desagati...`.

52.Rao Saheb, a title awarded by Peshawes as well as Company sarakar

When *Bhattaru* gave such a colorful description... all the people there became excited... they all started to hail the new *desayaru*... and shouted slogans... *Udho Udho... Changa bolo... Changa bolo...! victory to our new desayaru... victory to our new desayaru!*

When *Vitthala* himself decides... what worry can be there to the mortals even if they forsake ! The speech of *Bhattaru* using so much of fiction and imagery was not only to clear all the doubts that may arise in the minds of the people... but instead, it was intended to infuse fear and devotion about *desayaru* in the minds of the people! It was so necessary because... to establish *desagati* lot of funds were required... and who should bear it...? It could not be any other than the people of Dharamanatti and surrounding areas only... In the beginning only a troop of soldiers was to be raised... and that too without paying a pai as remuneration! When the situations were demanding so how else this *Bhattaru* should speak! His eloquence mesmerized the people... and Dharamanatti *desagati* stood up...! Instead of the boys going to *garadimani* and practising the tricks of wrestling, they started to practise the sword craft... throwing spears aiming at the targets and to learn many other skills of warfare... Blacksmiths of the Dharamanatti stopped making sickles and agricultural implements and started hammering the red hot iron to make the spears and swords... And the Carpenters in the village... started to fix wooden handles to the spears...

There came up a talk of building a *vade*⁵³ for the residence of *desayaru*. *Desayaru* himself rejected it and told, we would look into that business some time later... People hailed the sacrifice of *desayaru* very much... they rejoiced, feeling... *Aha...!* The doors for our fortune are opened... we got a fatherly person as our *desayaru*...! The owners of three neighboring houses at the main road of Dharamanatti vacated their houses on their own, and shifted to live in small huts... These three houses were slightly modified and joined together to make a temporary *vade* for *desayaru*... They brought red soil and smeared it on the outside of the house... Then they poured lime water in stripes at regular distances over these red walls at the outside... The inner surface of the walls was all smeared with white burnt lime. On these white walls, the women folk of the village drew wide varieties of designs of creepers and flowers... *swastiks, shankhus and chakras*... and what not... and decorated the make shift *vade* for their *desayaru*. Those three houses built up of mud walls were hailed with pride as the *vade* of *desayaru* by the people of the village.

There after... they began to worry again... that... how can our *desayaru* sleep on the floor only...! They felt immensely that there should be a cot in *vade* for *desayaru* to rest comfortably... Why delay they told themselves... and immediately went to the carpenter of the Dharamanatti and told

him... `Oh... you our carpenter master...! You must know that there is no cot in *vade* of *desayaru* for him to sleep... Now what you should do immediately is... leave all the works of yours... and take up immediately to make a cot with beautiful carvings of all the creepers and flowers...'. That carpenter definitely knew that the work of *desayaru* is the work of *desagati* and as good as the work of God himself...! And he also knew that if he could make a cot for *desayaru*... it would be cared as the pupil of one's own eye! And he was even eager to work for that leaving all the works that he could leave... But the bad luck of that carpenter was that... his father didn't teach him the skills of making a cot and taught this poor fellow only the skills of making bullock carts and agricultural implements like plough, tillers and etcetra... Cursing his father he expressed his inability to make that propitious cot on which *desayaru* himself would sleep... And for that the carpenter master felt terribly sorry...

As it went so... four men of the troop immediately ran to the neighboring village Kalakoppa. There was a super skilled carpenter who could make a beautiful cot... But that carpenter was also busy making bullock carts... When these boys went there to the carpenter master... he was carving a design of creepers on the nave of the wheel... These boys stood silently watching keenly the skill of his carvings... The carpenter master looked through the corner of his eyes at these stranger young boys that came and stood there silently... Stopping his carving work for a while, he stared at them and raised his eyes, as though asking `what have you come for here...?'. These boys told... `it is so and so carpenter master... A cot is to be made urgently to sleep comfortably for our *desayaru*... Come to our village... Select the best quality of the teakwood tree... and make a cot that should be hailed by the whole of the *aare nadu*⁵⁴...'. The carpenter master told... `Let this work in hand be over... There after I shall try to get some leisure to come to your village... Now it is not possible'. The boys of the troop told swaggeringly, `You can't say like that... that you can't... Do you know... it is the work of *desayaru*...'. It is said that... these skilled workers are real raving ones... And more over he thought, these young irresponsible boys were trying to frighten himself... the highly skilled carpenter like him...! Soon the anger of the carpenter started dancing on the tip of his nose... and he told...

`You fools... get out from here this very moment... Are you telling me about your *desayi*...? Where did this *desayi* come from? There was none so far... Even though you have one that might have come from the sky itself... Tell me... in what way can he compel me...?'

These boys of the troop were something like vigorous bullocks that were fed with rich fodder but not put to any exerting work... and their age also well fitted them to be rude... and more over... their arms that practiced sword craft and gymnastic exercises were eagerly waiting to be engaged in some scuffle... And above all, there were arrogant utterances of the carpenter that challenged their *desayaru* only! What more do you expect for those boys to act rudely...! Firstly they dragged him out of his workshop to the street and thrashed him... and then they tied both his hands together at his back... As his wife was wailing loudly... these boys dragged and brought him to Dharamanatti... They thought, why this silly fellow chiseling the wood should be taken to *desayaru* himself... and they took him to the carpenter's workshop in Dharamanatti and threw

him there... On knowing that some boys of Dharamanatti highhandedly dragged the carpenter of their village, the elders of Kalakoppa came in a group to Dharamanatti to make an enquiry... There, when they met with hundreds of youths of the troop holding spears, the elders of

53. *Vade, palatial bungalow of desayi and other officials*; 54. *Aare nadu, region inhabited by Maratha people*

Kalakoppa felt as if they were losing their lives... And they asked politely... why so *yappa*... what so *yappa*... and so on! The boys of the troop ordered them, 'Come with us...' and escorted them to the house of *Karabhari Triyanbhaka Bhatru*...

The elders of Kalakoppa wondered why those boys were taking them to the house of *bhattaru*... There they saw this *bhattaru* sitting on a cushion with a sense of self-esteem, reclining on a *lodu* placed on the cushion... *yeh*... what is this...! Isn't he the same man who used to come to our houses for *satyanarayana pooja*⁵⁵... and other rituals in our houses...! Isn't he the same man we used to visit to enquire for the auspicious days and for *muhurta*... and others...! Then he used to sit on a mat of grass drawing threads of cotton by spinning a spindle for sacred thread... Isn't he the same man...! The elders of Kalakoppa village felt all the things there as totally mysterious... After bringing them to the presence of *Karabhari*, the boys saluted and reported the details to him. *Bhattaru* listened to them and told them... 'All right... keep waiting outside'. The boys saluted again and went out to wait there. The elders of Kalakoppa village glaring at the boys holding spears in their hands standing outside and then staring at the *bhattaru* sitting on the cushion reclining over the *lodu*... became stupefied. *Bhattaru* told them to sit down. They hesitating sat there where they were standing.

Bhattaru explained all the happenings thread by thread... as he did on the day of arrival of Rango Patavardhan... He concluding his eloquence, said '...the representative of *Peshawe* is as good as the *Peshawe* himself... You are lucky that our boys have brought you here to me... Instead of bringing you here, if they had taken you there to the presence of *desayaru*... I tell you... it would have been a disaster... You know... he is a man of terrible anger. And more over... he has a resentment, that the red color of the blood smeared on his sword should never fade...!'. On hearing the narrative of *Bhattaru*, the elders of Kalakoppa village lost their feet! They pleaded politely begging pardons for their carpenter... 'Rayaru... that foolish carpenter has spoken without understanding the things... Please bear with it for once. We would advise him properly... We would take utmost care that any such irresponsible conduct would never happen from the side of our village...'. *Bhattaru* agreeingly said 'Hum...', and as if remembering a forgotten matter, suddenly, he asked them, 'and... *ham*... you are from Kalakoppa... no...? *Desayaru* planned to raid your village tomorrow with all the the troop... By coincidence of time, and luck, I must say... you have come here... Now what you should do is... by tomorrow evening... you should collect two gunny bags of jowar and one bag of wheat from each house in your village... And accumulating all these, you should bring them in bullock carts and submit to *desagati* stores. Remember... this should be done by tomorrow evening only... *Ham*... who is *gouda*⁵⁶ of your village...?' *Bhattaru* asked authoritatively. A lean sapless oldman from the group stood up

and folded his hands, and told meekly, 'It is me *sarkar...*'. *Bhattaru* told him emphatically, 'Look *gouda...* it is all your responsibility... How many houses are there in your village...? Our men here would count the bags and tally with the number of houses in your village... Submit the

55. *Satyanarayana pooja*, a popular ritual observed by all communities, in which the diety *Satyanarayana* is worshipped;

account clearly... It is better if the bullock carts with the bags of grains reach Dharamanatti by the evening... Otherwise it would be the will and wish of *desayaru...* Do you understand?' The *gouda* nodded meekly. 'All right... you can all go now... *Ham...* about that carpenter... he will remain here for a month or so... After finishing his work here, we will send him...'. They all went carrying a weight of gloom in their hearts!

Without taking the troops of army... the Dharamanatti *desagati* got tributes from Kalakoppa... Now the *desagati* spread over to two villages...! After this, the work of the troops of army became full fledged... they started getting their allowances also... The *Karabhari* of Dharamanatti *desagati* sent letters to the *goudas* of eighteen neighbouring villages... Except one, most of them thought - why to invite unnecessary scuffle... if the troops come, there might be friction and loss of lives... and therefore, they themselves collected food grains and money from the villagers, and sent all to Dharamanatti in bullock carts... Only the *gouda* of Hanchinal village tried to give a jerk to the *desagati...* The troops raided the village... The *gouda* was dragged violently along all the streets in the village... The tone of his painful lamentation entered into each house in the village... then it pierced into the ears of men, women and children in the houses... and from their ears it percolated drop by drop into their entrails... and ultimately got pooled there in their entrails! Look then...! In each house the *adakala*, earthen vessels piled one over the other, holding the treasures in their bellies got unpiled and each vessel vomited its riches... The locks of iron and wooden boxes keeping the jewelries and other riches safe, got themselves automatically unlocked... and the riches in them were poured out... The people hurriedly brought all they can give... except their lives... They ran hurriedly towards the *chavadi...* carrying all filled in bags and rattan bowls... and poured on the floor, before *dandanayaka*⁵⁷ who sat in *chavadi*. The boys sorted out jewelries and silver coins and filled them in separate gunny bags... The villagers quickly arranged more than twenty bullock carts to transport all these bags filled with jewelries and the bags of jowar and wheat to Dharamanatti. *Karabhari Triyambaka Bhattaru* arranged those jewelries in the bags to be brought and poured before *desayaru...* *Desayaru* stared at those *putali sara*, necklaces, anklets, *guladalis*, *bugudies*⁵⁸ and all... he gazed on the the heap of jewelries and silver coins for several minutes... Gazing them all *desayaru* got aroused it appeared... And even his mind might get stirred and might have become unsteady...! He suddenly burst into a peal of laughter...! The boys of the troop got astounded by such hoarse laughter of *desayaru...* *Karabhari* feeling alarm signaled the boys to go out from there immediately. They slowly moved out silently. After their exit, *Karabhari* got all the jewelries and wealth lifted and kept it locked in the treasury... *Desayaru* was still in his

hysterical laughter... *Karabhari* keeping the key of the treasury tied to his *udadara*⁵⁹ at the waist, slowly left the *vade*.

56. *Gouda*, village chief; 57. *Dandanayaka*, chief of armed forces in *desagati*; 58. *Bugudi*, gold ornament worn at earlobe; 59. *Udadara*, gold or silver chain or dark thread tied at the waist

Part : III

... When such things were happening in Dharamanatti *desagati*, what all the things were happening there at the northern country...? The *Peshawes* were dreaming of the throne of Dilli... And there in Dilli, a minister organised a coup and decapitated two Moghul emperors, and occupied the throne himself... He invited *Marathas* to come and rule the throne of Dilli! The *Peshwes* had been enjoying the comfort of the soft cushion of the throne, and relishing the taste of the ruling... They dreamt with their eyes open and stared upwards towards the sky... And they started to feel intensely that, when Dilli itself is inviting... why should it not happen...! But like a fly falling in the *kheeru*⁶⁰, Ahmad Shah Abdali of Afghan came in the middle! *Peshawes* deciding to swallow the throne of Dilli by whatever means, headed towards the war of *Panipat*... When such grave momentous events were taking place there towards the north... who would care this tiny *desagati* of Dharamanatti at the southern bank of the *Krishna* river! But amid all such happenings, *Karabhari Triyambaka Bhatta* took loads of grains and wealth as *chowth* in large number of bullock carts to *Pune*⁶¹ and submitted the tribute of Dharamanatti *desagati* to the *Peshawes*. *Peshawes* became very happy by this unexpected tribute from an unexpected corner, and they readily gave a *sannadu*, the licence, recognising the *desagati* of Dharamanatti and the appointment of *Rango Patavardhan* as the *desayi* as requested by *Triyambaka Bhattaru*. He handed over that letter to *desayaru*... *Desayaru* in confusion asked 'what is this...?' *Bhattaru* explained all in detail. After listening to *Bhattaru*, he gazed at that letter and began to laugh... *Bhattaru* thought that *desayaru* was happy and therefore he was laughing... *Bhattaru* also accompanied in the laughter... But gradually the laughter of *desayi* went on extending and gradually became hysterical and harsher... As he was in his hoarse laughter only... he signalled *bhattaru* to move away... *Bhattaru* hesitatingly left the place. Who knows, up to what length of time *desayaru* laughed there after!

At the time of issuing the licence, *Peshawes* put conditions as well, that whenever need arises Dharamanatti *desagati* should send troops of soldiers. Therefore the size of army of Dharamanatti *desagati* had to be increased. And they also built a fort of mud wall... This fort had six large entrances and a few secret entries as well... The door facing north, towards the river was the main entrance... On entering through this door, one finds a temple of God *Vitthala*... a structure built of white stones... It had beautiful carvings on its walls and *shikhara*⁶³. The statues of *Vitthoba* and *Rukumayi* were installed in the sanctum sanctorium of the temple. They were so lively that one should feel that they would start walking very next moment! After the temple,

there arose a palatial *vade* as the residence for *desayaru*. It was a structure built up of mortar... it had spacious durbar hall for regular conferences and assemblies, female apartments, bath rooms etc... all built for the best taste! It was as good as the palace of *Peshawes* in *Pune*... In addition to

60.*Kheeru*, a sweet dish; 61.*Pune*, the administrative head quarters of Maratha kingdom; 62.*Sannadu*, licence, a letter of recognition or permission; 63.*Shikhara*, pinnacle in the shape of inverted cone, usually sculptured above sanctum sanctorium of temples;

the fort, temple and *vade*, a few residential houses were also built within the fort to accommodate *Karabhari*, *Triyambaka Bhdaji*, *dandanayaka*, *Kalloji* and some other officers of *desagati*. The grandeur of these houses depended upon the grades of the officers occupying them... And tell me... how could all these happen...? *Peshawes* gave just a *sannadu* and not a tree of money... Then it was the people only who had to bear these extra burdens of expenses. Our *smrities*⁶⁴ and *shruties*⁶⁵ say that '*Raja pratyaksha devata*...', that is, the king himself is the god visible on the earth...! But where do you find obeisance by the people towards such sacred sayings...? As the people had to pay four paisa more as tax, an outcry was raised... The grandfathers in the houses would take their grand children importunate for stories, on their laps, and would narrate the stories of demons... 'once upon a time there was a kingdom called *Dharamanatti*... That kingdom was ruled by a demon... The demon would always hold... this much l-o-ng sword in his hand... And at the tip of this sword, there would always be a bleeding head, stuck...! And this demon king had a man eater as minister... He had a large vessel like head and a l-o-ng tongue extending up to a hundred feet... He used to sit quietly spreading his tongue on the road... Whenever the people, in confusion, stepped on this tongue, he would suddenly pull the tongue back into his mouth... and crush and swallow the poor people pulled into his mouth along with his tongue...! The demon king had a woman eater as his *dandanayaka*... He would lay traps closer to the wells and at the bathing points for women at the bank of the river... The cords of the trap used to be spangled with gold necklaces, bangles, ear rings and many other ornaments... Women going to fetch water to the wells and those going for bathing to the river... would get attracted by the ornaments. Those who venture to pluck the ornaments would get trapped... and they would be swallowed by *dandanayaka* and the demon king together...!' Stories like this... or their variants were told by the grandparents to their grand children in each house... As you know... tales have no head and no tail... Such head less and tail less stories ran throughout the *desagati* of *Dharamanatti*...! When things were happening in this manner, *desayaru* started to show undue fondness for *dandanayaka* *Kalloji*, and his mind got inclined towards sensuousness... *Karabhari Triyambaka Bhatta* thought ... it all slipped off from my hands... *desayaru* exceeding his limit and it is becoming all beyond my control...

On one side, there were people who became almost contemptuous about *desagati* and on the other side, was this sensuous indulgent *desayaru*... never thinking about the feelings of the people... *Karabhari* got disturbed by such situation and would think about hundreds of solutions for this problem... He would compare and weigh the plausibility of each solution... Ultimately breathing confidence, one fine evening he came to *desayaru*. *Desayaru* was in the company of

dandanayaka and they were both engaged in some sensuous design... On the arrival of *Karabhari*, *dandanayaka* felt the entry of an irrelevant person at rapturous moment...! Thinking of *Karabhari* as a dog in the manger... he stood up screwing his face, and went away, saluting *desayaru*... *Desayaru* also felt uneasy... He feigned a friendly smile, showing the chair signalled him to sit down. *Bhattaru* sitting on the chair, started slowly to pitch the words to weave a trap...

64. *Smrities, mythologies and shastras*; 65. *Shrities, Vedas, Upanishads*

He narrated how the *desagati* was installed... how it grew and how it became wealthy... After a lengthy narrative he asked the main question...

`*Desayaru* should please answer this question... what was the causative factor for all these happenings...?'

Desayi felt that, this *bhatta* is speaking braggartly... Does he believe that everything happened because of him only...? And what about my sword...? Was it totally an insignificant one...? *Desayaru* thought contemptuously... Thinking so *desayaru* he became very angry... But *Bhattaru* put an all together different theory and *desayaru* was rendered fully unarmed by it...!

`*Desayaru* should please contemplate it... It is all the benevolence bestowed upon you and us by *Panduranga* of *Pandharapura*... If his blessings were not there... there would not have been this *desagati* here, and you wouldn't have been *desayaru* as well...'

Desayaru stared at *Bhattaru* but *bhattaru* did not care it and continued to knit the trap neatly...

`God has given every thing... but the people of *desagati* are devoid of maternal affection...'

`What this *bhatta* is telling... Does he mean that I have become a thorn in the flesh of the people...?' a doubt arose in the mind of *desayaru*. And here *bhattaru* was running his press mill uninterruptedly...

`There is a saying... there can't be a better taste than that of salt and no relative can be as better as mother...! If the *desagati* has no mother, the people would think ill about *desagati* and *desayi*... Even if the king showers benevolence over the people... the people hesitate to send out their daughters into the streets, if there is no queen in the female apartments of the *vade*,...'. *Desayaru* was completely overwhelmed and he told, 'please tell me *karabharijee*... what should I do now...?'

Karabhari Triyambaka Bhattaru told, 'I thought that my duty pertains only to the governance of *desagati*... I thought I should think only about managing the happenings in *desagati*... out side your *vade*... I must be a fool... I never thought that the *vade* is subsumed in *desagati* only...'. Telling so *bhattaru* laughed... Ha.. hha.. hhaa... and then continued his oratory,

`All right... Let it be so. Nothing to worry... Now you have to do only one thing... arrange for the arrival of your *Rani saheb* immediately to *Dharamanatti vade*...'

Hearing the words of *Karabhari*, *desayaru* produced an inadvertent screech... `ham...!'. *Bhattaru* surprisingly asked `Why...? What happened...?`.

Meanwhile *desayaru* babbled, as if frightened, `I am not married... I don't have any *rani saheb* of mine...`.

Bhattaru told with ease, `If you are not married yet, marry and bring a *rani saheb* now... Why should you be scared about that...'. *Desayaru* felt as if he got entangled in some chaos and he appealingly told, `*Karabharijee*... you only plan and do whatever you think is better...'. *Bhattaru* had a thread of doubt regarding the caste of *desayaru*. With much effort he got rid of it from his mind, and he ultimately made up his mind... Beating about the bush for some time... he ultimately finalised the plan... The daughter of *Karabhari Triyambaka Bhattaru*, a sixteen year old young blossoming girl, *Leela*... would enter the *vade* of *desayaru* as the *Rani saheb* of *Dharamanatti desagati*. *Desayaru* requested... `*Respected bhadajee*...let there be simple marriage... I do not want much pomp and show...'. The thorn of caste was anyhow bothering *bhattaru* also... therefore he readily accepted the suggestion... And on one auspicious day, auspicious *nakshatra* and *muhurta*... *Leeladevi* came to the *vade* sitting in the palankeen... entered the *vade* and took charge as the *rani saheb* of *desagati*. *Karabhari* now had become the father in law of *desayaru*... Now the *vade* got a new pomp... In the temple of *Vitthala*, festivals were celebrated daily... and the priest of the temple would daily come to *vade* to give the *teertha*⁶⁶ and *prasada*⁶⁷ of the deity to the newly wed royal couple.

Part : IV

Hum... and next... the narrative is both of grandeur as well as of decline... Yes... The grandeur of *desagati* was prevailing even at the time of my father, *Ambharish Desayaru*... By the time of his old age, the age of decline of *desagati* began. What would happen if *Vitthala*, who inspired the establishment of the *desagati*, himself left it to disintegrate? Who else could protect it then...? The red faced demons had eaten all our kingdoms... They had swallowed even *Peshawes* and *Bhosales*... not using their teeth at all... Then what about this tiny *Dharamanatti desagati* for them...! Let it go... What did our own people do after the departure of those...? Fools...! As the oxen would go round pulling the grinder in the mortar grinding mill... these fools are repeating `their' folly...! Our own people contributed to the drowning of the *desagati*. *Hum*... they say it is democracy...! What does it mean...? They say it is by the people and of the people... and say all the people together govern the state...! It is all nonsense talk...! If you are ready... now only... I will take you to *Dharamanatti*... and I shall ask the people of *Dharamanatti* to assemble in the school ground... You only do lecturing and tell them convincingly... that... ours is *prajarajya*... the democracy... it is ruling by the people for the people of the people... and all that... that the people themselves... including our *holyara* *Rama*, are together ruling... all the people including our *Rama*, have their share in this governance... Tell all these things in threadbare detail and convincingly... Do you know... after listening to you... they will all laugh aloud... and then they

will tease me only... They would say... this our old man... due to his old age must be suffering from lunacy... look here... he brings this inexperienced immature fellow to tell us something, that has no head nor tail...! He is saying... *Holyara* Rama has also his share in this the governance...! Ridiculing me and you, they will all walk off...!

66. Teertha, holy water used for bathing of the diety; 67. Prasada, material substance that is a religious offering

By such talk of these people, do not infer that they are proud of their *desagati*...! No... not at all... Mortals... greedy mortals... I say! They want to lose nothing... and they greedily want to gain only... even by illegal means...! Just for the sake of gaining, they would accept democracy... If they are going to lose something, they go on grumbling and accusing... Do you know, the moment they knew that *desagati* was dissolved and democracy has come... they all took away the neatly cut stones in the walls of the fort and *vade*, and used them in building the compound walls of their courtyards. Leave these common people... Look at these representatives of ours winning the elections... Do you think they ever remember themselves as the representatives of that Rama...? Instead, each one of these elected ones become kings themselves! *Hum*... what is the use of criticising them...? Look at this... my own grandson... He is not aware of his birth in *desayi* lineage... His blood has turned watery... He married a girl from the very race that had liquidated our *desagati*... And he says... `Dharamanatti hillock is just a stony barren land... and I will sell it!` Let us not worry even about this... do you know what hazardous plans he is devising... He wants to admit this *Amrit Desayi*... the tender sprout of our *desagati* tree... to a kindergarten boarding and then would leave India for America...! If he wants to bow before the ones that have destroyed us... what can anyone do...? We are lucky that he is not intending to take away my *Amrit* also to America... I am keeping all my hopes on *Amrit* only...

`*Ham*... What is time now...?' The sunlight falling in the room indicating that it is already after noon... *Ham*... in the early morning that tender infant *Amrita* was screeching... Why was he crying god alone knows... The child would never get the affection and fondness of his mother... All the needs of the child would be attended by that *dadi* Anasuya only... Now the child must be sleeping... he is not weeping. His *dadi* might have come... *Hum*... by the by... why did my nurse not come yet...? Or thinking that I am still sleeping ... she might not have come into my room...? Thinking so *Kalpanatha Desayi* called loudly... `Balavva... Balavva... *Umhum*... she might not have come...'. He felt his entrails heavy... `Somebody should escort me to the toilets... Let me call the *dadi* of *Amrita* only... `Anasooya... yeh Anasooya...`.

`What is this...! Since morning there has been no sign of anyone... Even I am not served with my morning tea...! Is there anybody in the house...? Anasooya... Balavva...' The loud call of *Kalpanatha Desayi* did not get any response. Worryingly he felt... whether this bastard *Manik* has already left for America without telling me anything... Suspicion prevailed in his mind... *Balavva* told him the other day, that for last three days *Manik* was wandering like a dog without turning to the house even, for getting visa... Have they already gone away...? *Kalpanatha*

Desayaru got frightened... He began to call loudly... `Yeh... Manik... Maneek... Balavva... Anasuya...'. Nobody responded... Any sound of laughing or weeping of Amrita was also not heard in the house... In the morning he was screeching... Whether they took away that child also with them... When such a thought flashed, Kalpanatha Desayi became terribly alarmed... `Amrita... Ambanna... Don't go away... you our scion... *Desagati* is all depending upon you my child...', Kalpanatha desayaru lamenting in despair, got up from the bed... Who knows, how he got so much of energy... as you know, he was totally depended upon his nurse, even to visit the rest room... Now holding his walking stick he staggered and moved from his room to the hall... The bed room of Manik was left open... He called loudly... `Maneek... Maneek...'. Who would answer his calling when nobody was there...! He went into the room... It was all vacant... and even the doors of all the empty cupboards there were left open... Staggering only he came back to the hall and moved from there into the room of Amrita... As he entered the room, there was the cradle at the right side door... He bent forward and peeked into the cradle... The child was not there... He walked a few more steps ahead towards the cot... `Ah...! *Vitthala* has not left my hand...' he rejoiced. Yes... the child was asleep lying on the cot...! Kalpanatharaya desayi felt elated... He consoled himself... if that bastard wanted to run away... let him go astray... It is enough for me... that he has left behind this tender scion of the *desagati* for me... This great grandson of mine would sustain the *desagati* till the Dharamanatti hillock and the sun and the moon last on the earth...! Thinking so, he fondly called the child...

`Amrita... you my child... Ambanna...!',

Steadying his steps, he sat on the bed... He intensely felt that Amrita was the total motivation of his life... With great affection and also with pity... for he was a forsaken child... Kalpanatha desayi with utmost fondness, lightly caressed the forehead of the child... and he shockingly pulled his hand...! The body of that child was as cold as the ice itself! *Desayaru* in great consternation calling him `Amrita... Amrita...' put his hand on his chest... There was no breathing and there was no beating of the heart...! Ayyo... what happened to our scion... what happened to my child...! Which scorpion stung or what snake bit this tender infant...? Did she, who was reluctant to bear the pregnancy had herself squeezed the neck to choke our future *desayi*...? Tell me... tell my Ambanna...! Speak to your great grandfather...! Please speak *bala*... please speak... Kalpanatha Desayi lamented... He tried to lift the child with his frail arms and he could not... He bent over the body of the child and brought his face closer to that of the child... The smell of stale milk struck his nose... Straining his pupils...with much effort he tried to look keenly... Then Kalpanatha Desayaru suddenly screeched and swooned... he fell down from the cot unconscious...

There the face of the child emitting the smell of the stale milk... was infested by swarm of ants! His honey tinged tender lips... his eyelids of his blackberry like eyes, and the nostrils of his champaka bud like nose... all... all were eaten by the ferocious biting ants... Wherever the ants have eaten... there, whitish tissues were exposed... And... and... the face of Amrita was totally disfigured...!