

SRI KALYANEYAM

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From the original in telugu by
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SRI KALYANEEYAM - ENGLISH

OM AVIGNAMASTU

SRI KALYANEEYAM
My journey with Singeetham

SINGEETHAM LAKSHMI KALYANI

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SRI KALYANEYAM

*Poojyaya Raghavendraya Satya Dharma Ratayacha
Bhajatam Kalpavrikshaya Namatam Kamadhenave*

THE YELAMARATI FAMILY

I am Kalyani. My full name is Lakshmi Kalyani. I was born on October 9, 1936 in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. My parents were Sri Yelamarti Vittal Rao and Smt. Prafulla. But many did not know the name of my mother. We are Kannada Madhwas. Since there occurred repeated deaths of 4 to 5 infants to my grandmother, my mother was popularly called "Pullamma" by people. But my father used to call her "Pullilu". My childhood days were spent mostly in Kakinada, Rajahmundry and Vijaywada. After 5 to 6 years of my age, we moved to a town named Allur in Nellore district. My father had been working as a teacher in a school. After three years, we shifted to Nellore. My father was working in St. Peters High School in Nellore. My first younger sister, Suseela was born in Narasipatnam in 1939. After three years, my mother gave birth to third child. It was a girl baby but unfortunately died after 3 years due to liver dysfunction.

Later my mother gave birth to a baby boy. On the occasion of the birth of the grandson, my grandfather who was then working in Madras had come over all the way after submitting his leave application. The naming ceremony was performed by my father on a grand scale despite of his low income. His students contributed a lot by offering plantains, fruits, milk and curds on this occasion. Everything was brought from their houses. In those days, people used to feed cattle in their backyards. Everyone was happy at the ceremony. But that happiness was short lived. The little one too died after 14 days. Due to shock and depression, my grandfather's health started deteriorating. Varied treatments in Madras failed and he too expired in few days. Such was my childhood where I had to come across these traumas.

My Grandparents

My maternal grandfather's name was Sri Parshi Venkoba Rao. And my grandmother, Smt. Parshi Kamala. My paternal grandfather was Sri.Yelamarti Subbarao and my grandmother Smt. Lakshmi Baiamma. But I never happened to see my paternal grandparents. My grandfather had passed away when my father was a child, shortly followed by death of my grandmother. My maternal grandparents and I like each other to a great extent. When he was alive, he used to dream of educating me in Madras. When I got married and came to Chennai, I got reminded only of him. This way I felt that I made his soul rest in peace. My grandparents used to stay in Madras after long years of stay in Narasipatnam. They used to visit us in Nellore quite often and spend some time with us. My grandparents did not have sons. My parents did not have sons. I too don't have sons. Three daughters for my mother and two for me; two sons and one daughter for my first younger sister and three daughters for my youngest sister. These three daughters have daughters too. My youngest sister has four grand daughters in all.

My father's own sister was Sita. My father's aunt's (his mother's elder sister's) daughter was Kalyani. He was very fond of her. My aunt was jealous and said to him, "Is she more for you than me Annayya?" Kalyani's inlaws belonged to Visakhapatnam. Kalyani gave birth to three daughters and died at a very young age. Hence my father joined his mother's name "Lakshmi" and his cousin's name "Kalyani" together and named me "Lakshmi Kalyani". But I was called "Lakshmi" by everyone before my marriage. I became a "Kalyani" only after my marriage. After the proposal was fixed, my father in law, before starting from my father's place said, "Okay then Kalyani, we will take leave." When I shared this with my grandmother, she said with a smile, "Then in your inlaws place, they will call you Kalyani".

Through generations it had been a joint family set up at my grandparents' house. Good or bad, everybody had to meet under the same roof. In those days, since both mothers and daughters used to have their due dates almost at the same time for giving birth to their babies, there would be two separate cots arranged for them. And it was a tough task of attending to both by the people around them. Moreover no proper medical facility was available. Deliveries were performed by midwives. Parshi was a very well-known family. When my grandmother (belonging to Parshi family) expired, the entire family members, brothers, sisters, their families and relatives got together at my uncle's, Sri Parshi Seshagiri Rao's, residence at Vijayawada.

Since I belong to Yelamarti family and not Parshi family, mixing with Parshi family members during the funeral was a taboo. Yet unknowingly I used to play with all the kids and we never felt it as a funeral and went ahead fighting with each other too. It

was a wonderful phase when we never knew the meaning of sorrows.

The lost English Book

As mentioned earlier, while my father was a teacher in St.Peters High School, I was studying in Girls Training School. During my 5th or 7th grade, I had lost my English textbook. I searched at every nook and corner of my house but in vain. When I confided to my parents, they scolded me for my carelessness. After three days, I was passing through the compound to my classroom with my friend, Sarojini. On the way from a distance I happened to notice a familiar paper on the ground. Being suspicious we went near it. It was the paper that I used for wrapping my English textbook. There was a label with my name "Y. Lakshmi Kalyani" written on it but the book inside was missing! I said, "Sarojini, look. It's the wrapper of my book." "Then it was Pushpa who took your book.", she said. I was a bit frightened to tell this to my teacher.

My daring mother

After sharing this news at home, they asked me, "Have you told your teacher?" I said that I didn't. The following day I went to school as usual and was writing on my desk in my classroom. The teacher was sitting on her chair. Suddenly I heard the voice of my mother. I looked up and saw her outside. She came to the school. How did she know my classroom? I could vaguely hear my teacher's voice asking her, "Who is your daughter? What's her name?" My mother said, "There she is, Lakshmi Kalyani", pointing towards me. "Three days back, she lost her textbook. Yesterday she could find only the wrapper."

The teacher started checking the bags of all girls and then it was a student named Pushpa's turn. The girls however knew the fact that she stole other's things. Pushpa boldly argued with the teacher that the textbook was hers. On flipping few pages, the teacher noticed my name "Lakshmi Kalyani" on one of them. She scolded her and gave me my book. I was awestruck at the courageous act of my mother, who without any formal education dared to enter my school and find my classroom. Due to the death of many infants, my grandparents were overprotective about their two daughters and never sent them to any school.

My second and youngest sister was born in the year 1947. Her name is Rakhuma. She is 11 years younger to me. Hence she never showed any sign of fighting, instead treated me with respect. However as their age progressed, both my sisters used to fight with each other. Being the eldest, I had to sort out things between them. Suseela sighs, "You listen to sister but why do you argue and cry with me? And you even give false complaints to parents."



Mother's struggle

At this point I would like to share something. When Rakhuma was 20 days old, my mother was admitted due to some illness in the American hospital, the same place where she gave birth to Rakhuma. She had to stay there for a month. Her speech had fallen for a couple of days. Her left hand was swollen and did not function properly. People of the town blamed the child to have been born in an inauspicious time. Once she recovered and was back home with regained speech, the same ill spoken tongues of the town started praising the child this time.

Schooling period

My sister kept growing. I changed from Training Middle School to St. Joseph Girls High School. I studied there upto my 10th grade. This shows that we spent quite a few years in Nellore.

My father was M.A.B.Ed. He was slightly frustrated at being stagnated at high school without stepping up into lectureship despite of being qualified with M.A. B.Ed. He tried hard for it and finally joined as a lecturer in W.G.B (West Godavari Bhimavaram) College in Bhimavaram. The college is presently called, DNR (Dantuluri Narayana Raju) College. Due to our education, we initially did not shift to Bhimavaram. My father had to stay there alone. My vacation period after my 9th grade filled with shifting to Bhimavaram. However since my youngest sister was only four years old, we found no hurry to put her in school till the age of five as per the tradition that followed those days. We appointed a home tutor till her 5th grade. I pursued my tenth grade called SSLC in ULCM Christian School.

Days before Marriage

After I completed my schooling, I had to join a college. But my father was reluctant to admit me in a co-educational institution. Being strict, he never liked us moving with the opposite sex and blushing was a taboo. But of course we were allowed to go to shops and movies with our mother. But not with our friends. My father encouraged us with few activities like learning typing, music or my sister with her dance in women's association, "Mahila Mandali". Rakhuma gave dance performances too. She gave several dance performances in and around the town taking up the role of Goddess Kanyakaparameshwari along with a girl named Kalyani, daughter of the then ACTO, who took up the role of Lord Shiva. Both of them earned a good reputation. Suseela and I took up to singing both light and carnatic music in the Mandali. We were trained by a music tutor, Sri Uppalapati Suryanarayana, disciple of Sri Chembai Vaidyanathan Bhagavathar. I was also appointed as a joint secretary of the Mahila Mandali for a few years.

Journalism and I

Once an idea struck my father. I had an uncle, Sri P.S.Rao, who was working for a daily newspaper called "Andhra Janata" in Hyderabad. My father insisted me on working as a correspondent of Bhimavaram for that daily newspaper through my uncle's recommendation. Without attending large meetings or visiting outstations, I used to get the external information by attending several meetings and functions across the town and my ladies club and send them for publishing in the daily newspaper. I spent money on postage stamps but never got anything in return from Hyderabad. And my father would say, "Is money that important? You would get a practice in journalism." But I never imagined then that his encouragement on my writings would pave the way for my bright future.

Okay now, I wasn't admitted in a college. I used to be adamant with my father that he should teach me lessons and would never leave him free. He would laugh off saying, "Would you like me to stay with banian and dhoti or let me wear a shirt and pant?" Many male students take tuitions from him at my house. I used to secretly take down notes standing behind the door. My father never knew. Then my mother told him everything. From then on, he started raising his voice higher and taught them. He used to get the question papers from the college, make me answer and get it corrected and evaluated by other lecturers in the college. My subjects were History, Economics and Politics. Though he was a history lecturer by profession, he used to get my History, Economics and Politics papers checked by Sri Anjaneyulu, Sri Hanumantha

Rao and Sri Patnaik respectively. They would say, "Sir, your daughter is definitely far ahead of our students" to my father. When my father shared these, I could feel his guilt. It could be perhaps due to my disappointment for not attending a regular college. On the other hand when I scored less or failed, he wouldn't complain.

My classmates after the college, visited home and praised my father telling, "Your father is so punctual and never takes an off. It is wonderful that he doesn't discriminate both the sexes. He supports complete education and employment opportunities for both men and women equally. Then why didn't he send you and your sister to the college?" I had to control my tears for such unexpected questions and managed off with instant manipulated replies.

Atleast my major subject was History Main but for my sister, Suseela, it was Literature Main. Even she studied through private coaching and cleared all the papers. I thought to myself, "Isn't she great?". The moment I cleared all my papers, my father wanted me to do B.A. in Telugu again through private coaching. Sri Digumarti Satya Ramayya, younger than my father, offered to teach me Telugu. He came up with a proposal to ask my hand for his younger brother convincing my father that Madhwas and Telugu Brahmins do integrate and hence my wedding could be performed. When my father asked me whether I was willing to study B.A. Telugu, I said, "I had enough of it with 2 years of intermediate and 2 years of B.A. History through private coaching. I am no more interested in earning extra degrees." This was because during my first year, I felt frustrated as I couldn't clear the English paper. After my wedding, Rakhuma was admitted in D.N.R College High School and thereafter she had automatically moved over to the college. Though married, I wasn't bold enough to ask my father, "How could you put her in college?" He got me married the moment I completed my college but my sisters continued with B.Ed in Guntur and were even allowed to stay in hostel.

At one end, my father was very strict and at the other end he was filled with fun too. Be it marriages or History conferences, he always went alone. Once he was having his food. Throughout the meal time, it was mandatory for all of us to sit in front of him and keep talking to him. Once while having his lunch, Rakhuma asked him suddenly, "Always you seem to travel alone. Why don't you take us along with you?" And his reply was, "Your husbands will do that". And she hit back saying, "Then why don't you take mother with you?" We never expected her to ask him such a question. My mother, Suseela and I stayed aghast. We were feeling quite tensed. Being the youngest and the most pampered one, she was very bold enough. All of our eyes were focusing on his reaction. Immediately my father burst out with

laughter. And with that, we too joined the laughter. All he could say was, "How shrewd you are!" However the reply given to my sister came to be true after my marriage.

Appagaru and his Harmonium

My father played harmonium very well. It was one of his hobbies. He played in orchestra group during the college cultural activities. He used to be the convener too. But people who never knew him started identifying him as a "harmonist". He then withdrew himself from playing it in the college. My mother also played harmonium well. She stopped playing after giving birth to Rakhuma due to her illness and pain on the left arm. If we happen to play it for fun, she would press the reeds harder and play it. Looking at her interest, her uncle gifted her Harmonium.

Evenings were meant for relaxation with music, songs and Harmonium. Suseela had a great voice and was especially fond of Hindi songs. She had great memory. My father taught us ragas through Indian film songs of K.L.Saigal, Pankaj Mallik, Babul Mora, Piya Milan ko jana, "Aaja aaja" from Anmol Ghadi and so on. For eg., for Yaman Kalyani Raga, the correlated song would be "Radha Sametha Krishna" and for Bhageswari, it was "Jaag dard ishq jaag" which he taught us. After marriage too, my husband and I used to discuss ragas of all the classical films that we saw. My father would make my sister sing 6 to 8 songs and my turn would be at the last which I felt was mere eyewash. Being disappointed, I would walk away. Innocently my mother exclaimed, "When your father is calling you, why do you walk away?" Ofcourse I am a good singer too.

Chandamama Ravey

As already mentioned about my father, he was taking active role in college culturals and was also a convener. When Rakhuma was hardly 7 to 8 years old, my father along with a Chemistry lecturer Sri Veerabhadra Chari composed a tune for a song, taught her the song and made her practice to sing in the college culturals. The name of the song was "Chandamama rave O jabili rave". There was a stupendous response with voice of the students screaming "Once more". She stood still on the stage and didn't know what to do. The chemistry lecturer prompted her to sing again and she did it again. Varied comments like, "Who is that little girl?" and "she is lecturer Vittal Rao sir's daughter" spread among the spectators. Being one of them, I was overwhelmed with extreme happiness. I couldn't wait till I shared the news with my mother and grandmother. They were extremely delighted and took "dishti" (the ritual of driving away the evil) on Rakhuma. Infact there was a line, "Prakrutikanta ki andam prati jeevi ki soundaryam" (the beauty of the world is the beauty of every being) but she was unable to pronounce the word "prakrutikantaki" and hence the

word was replaced by “lokamantaki” (synonymously the same). She was awarded with a silver medal for this song by the management. After she grew up and returned back to the same college for her graduation, she took part in various poetry recitations and won many prizes.



No leave

Regarding his strictness, my father never allowed us to take leave to attend weddings or other functions. Even if we had a chance to attend, we were forced to return the next day. If not, he would mail us by threatening that he would ask the teacher to delete our names from the register. Except during illnesses, we were not allowed to take leave. But surprisingly I was alone allowed to visit my aunt (my mother’s sister) during my vacations. My aunt and uncle did not have children and hence took care of me like their own daughter. My uncle, Sri Kameswara Rao was working as an ACTO. They used to have a transfer once in 3 years and I enjoyed traveling with them. People mistook me to be their own daughter at once. They took care of me really well.

Since my mother was sick, after my grandfather’s demise, my grandmother stayed with us. Thereafter my youngest sister and I got closer to her more than to my

mother. It was the time when I was in Nellore studying in 5th or 7th grade. I was bitten by a scorpion on my ankle. Initially soon after the bite, I did not feel the pain but the next morning, the pain was unbearable and started burning. Both my mother and grandmother tried out with all kinds of home therapies but in vain. My foot grew red and swollen. Anxiety and fear developed in them. I laid down continuously on the bed and found very difficult to walk. We even heard that scorpion bites were common in Nellore and many of them led to death. My grandmother being orthodox, cooked food in “madi” (a custom to keep oneself in a distance without being touched by other people or objects of everyday use to avoid polluting oneself) and after serving lunch to the family members came straight to me, placed my legs on her lap and gave a gentle massage. Frankly speaking, I experienced warmth and comfort more on her lap than the medicines. Everyday my grandaunt, Nagarajamma, visited me. It took a week for me to recover. Those were the days when I skipped going to school too.

Responsibilities being the eldest

My father would engage himself with his notes and printing guides. I would help him by taking down the notes as he dictated. I would also get tired sitting for a long hours. Being helping hand for my mother too in the kitchen, I was called there too. I was literally sandwiched between the two. Having born as the eldest, I was blamed for all that had happened and even those that hadn't. Looking at my plight, my grandmother would say, “Let us hope that she is happy atleast after her marriage”.

Let me share our pet names. I am “Peddammalu”, Suseela was “Chinnammalu” and Rakhuma “Papalu”. Once my father called “ammalu”. Now who among us should respond? Suseela was clever enough to send me telling that I was the elder one. Even today many of my relatives aren't aware of our real names. In addition to this, my extended families consist of many Kalyanis and Rakhumas. Whenever we happen to make a call, the response would be as “Which Kalyani?” When I reply, “I am Kalyani from Madras”, then they would say, “Oh you mean Peddammalu”, even today.

My innocent mother

My mother was an innocent woman. She wasn't educated in a regular school. But she was well knowledged. She was fond of fictions, detective novels and my father's books in History. At times she was humorous. Her humour told her innocence. According to her, all that was white was milk and black was water. Such was her mind. She was always frightened of my father. She was a happy go lucky person. But she was equally determined and brave. She was gullible. She consoled others. But she

bottled up her emotions, sorrows, problems and frustrations within herself. She shared them with none. People said, "Pullamma was innocent. She was a good woman."

Her goodness made her live with tumeric and Kumkum (the symbolic representation of married woman when her husband is alive). In the year 1983, during the month of Karthika after Deepavali was the time when she passed away. None of us expected her to be alive for such a long period due to the illness that struck her after Rakhuma was born. When she was admitted in the hospital, I went along with my father carrying hot water and milk bottle with me. Men weren't permitted in the wards at all times. Hence I had to take them in while he waited outside in the hall. I went past the hall and entered the room. My mother's mouth was wrapped with cloth strips and she was held tight by two nurses, each on either side of my mother. I started shivering at the unbearable sight. The nurses sent me off telling that children weren't allowed inside. I cried and ran to my father without realizing the broken bottle of milk that spilt throughout the pathway. He consoled me and took me in back to the ward again. As long as my mother was admitted in the hospital, my grandmother and her younger sister (my grandaunt) named Nagarajamma stayed with my mother as attenders. The baby room was next to it and Rakhuma was made to sleep there. My grandaunt complained of nurses diluting milk with water. The nurses refused the milk brought from home. Since Rakhuma was very weak, she was given bottled milk and porridge made out of Sago.

Powdering Sago was a big task as there were no mixers those days. By the time Rakhuma completed one year, she suffered with chicken pox. Hence my grandmother named her as Goddess Gowri of omen.

After my marriage, my grandmother noticed my husband's good will, kindness and politeness. Once Rakhuma was lying down on her lap and my grandmother told her various tales and she happened to say, "Your sister might have offered golden flowers to the Almighty during her last birth and hence she has got a wonderful husband. How good your brother -in -law is!" For this, Rakhuma immediately replied, "In that case, can you buy those golden flowers for me? I too want a husband like sister when I grow up". Admiringly, my grandmother laughed at her innocence.

My father and his services

My mother and father were related to each other and hence they had common relatives who were close to both of them. Hence they used to visit my place quite often. They were more affectionate to my mother than to my aunt. My aunt expired

in the year 1981 and with that depression, my mother had passed away in the year 1983 when she was 62 years old.

My father did his M.A. in Presidency College, Madras. He did B.Ed too. For the research he undertook in 1978, Karnataka University honoured him with a doctorate (Ph.D). However this came too late for his age. This made him sad very often. He published his thesis in the form of series of books under the title "Education and Learning in Andhra Under East India Company." For this, the Andhra Government gave him a grant of Rs.5000. My youngest sister had completed her B.Ed by then. Rakhuma and her husband, A.V.Ramakrishna Rao helped a lot in the book for proof correction.

In those days, he nurtured few "weekly bachelors". His income was in very meagre amounts. Yet he took care of two or more students. That is, a student per day, once a week had lunch in my house. Irrespective of the approval of the family members, he made my mother serve them with variety of dishes. Despite of this, he even helped them in the form of money or books. He even took tuitions to some for free. Once when a student who was getting trained for IAS entrance did not turn up, he searched for his address and went to his house. Due to his struggle during his childhood for education after losing his parents, the word "education" was enough for him to help anybody who wanted to seek it.

My father performed many pujas, Satyanarayana Vratha, chants and Sandhya Vandanam. He had also participated at various religious luncheons in Ramakrishna Mutt without fail. He performed the bhajans at home and taught us too. Apart from us, a commerce lecturer, Sri Seshavataram's children, children from the Garimella family would also join us. Sri Garimella Suryanarayana prepared "swarnakalpabasma" (made of gold) out of ayurvedic medicines. A Swamiji named Sri Trakshyarananda from Calcutta made his yearly visit to Ramakrishna Mutt in Bhimavaram. My father would often invite him for "bhiksha" and arranged musical sessions in the evenings. All of us sisters would sing many songs. Sri Bhadrappa, who attended regularly, played Tabla and my father, Harmonium. Swamiji would look at me and call me "Anandamayi". My parents felt quite happy.

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @

<http://kinige.com/book/Sri+Kalyaneeyam+English>

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