

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

THE CHARACTERS IN THIS PLAY ARE COMPLETELY IMAGINARY
AND DO NOT REFER TO ANYONE LIVING OR DEAD.

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

- MISS KAVERI – Secretary of the Social Service Society of Kamalapur and a ‘dedicated’ social worker.
- MISS KALYANI – Principal of a women’s college and somewhat new to the ‘game’.
- MRS.JAYALAKSHMI – Looking for openings to perpetuate the memory of her late husband.
- RAO SAHIB RAMAYYA - Who has almost made it to the top from humble beginnings.
- V.P.IYER – Eminent lawyer of Kamalapur and permanent vice-president of all social service organisations.
- SUNDERAM – A somewhat eccentric journalist.
- AYYAPPA – Collector of Kamalapur district with a fixation on orphanages.
- KUMARASWAMI – Long suffering treasurer of the Society.
- MRS.VASANTHA ARUMUGAM – Sophisticated secretary of the International Service League of Kamalapur.
- MR.SHETTY – Vice-president of the I.S.L. and a more modern rival to the Rao Sahib.
- MR.KUMAR – The new Collector of Kamalapur – an unknown quantity.

ACT ONE

Scene one

THE ENTIRE ACTION OF THE PLAY TAKES PLACE IN THE MAIN MEETING ROOM OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY (KNOWN AS 'THE SOCIETY' FOR SHORT) OF KAMALAPUR. TIME, ABOUT THE YEAR 1960. THE ROOM IS INDIFFERENTLY FURNISHED WITH A FEW CUSHION CHAIRS, SOME CANE CHAIRS AND ONE OR TWO WOODEN CHAIRS AND A TABLE IN THE CENTRE. TO THE RIGHT IS THE OFFICE ROOM OF THE SOCIETY AND THE ENTRANCE HALL TO THE LEFT. THERE ARE ONE OR TWO CALENDERS AND TWO FADED PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE WALLS.

SINCE THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN THE FORM OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY, THE CHAIRS SHOULD BE ARRANGED SO THAT ALL CHARACTERS FACE THE AUDIENCE. BUT THE MEETINGS ARE INFORMAL AND THE CHARACTERS CAN MOVE ABOUT IF THEY SO DESIRE, FOR EFFECT. IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THERE IS A PROSCENIUM PROJECTING INTO THE HALL; IF NOT, ONE OR TWO CHARACTERS CAN BE IN THE FRONT ROW OF THE AUDIENCE AND PARTICIPATE IN THE MEETING ON THE STAGE. THIS WOULD GIVE A SENSE OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION.

AS THE SCENE OPENS, MISS KAVERI, A WOMAN OF INDETERMINATE AGE AND ANGULAR FEATURES IS PLACING PAPERS ON THE TABLE AND ADJUSTING THE INK STAND, PAPER WEIGHTS AND PENCILS. MISS KALYANI, A PLEASANT LOOKING WOMAN OF ABOUT FIFTY, PRINCIPAL OF THE LOCAL GIRLS' COLLEGE AND A NEW COMER TO KAMALAPUR, WALKS IN.

KAVERI: Ah! Miss Kalyani! Welcome to the Society! I am glad you are the first to arrive!

KALYANI: Yes, I try to be punctual and consequently, I waste a lot of my time.

KAVERI: (POUTING A LITTLE) I have a bone to pick with you!

KALYANI: But I thought you were a strict vegetarian. How can you pick a bone?

KAVERI: You will have your little joke! But this is serious. It is all this interference in the affairs of the Society by other people. After all, we are professional social workers.....

KALYANI: I am a new comer here, but I have already heard what people say. 'Of course, Kaveri is a professional social worker; she makes her living out of it.....'

KAVERI: (VEHEMENTLY) How can you say such a thing! How can anyone in their right senses say that about me! I have dedicated my life to social service and just because I am successful, people are jealous and say all sorts of things behind my back! But they dare not say it to my face! It is so frustrating! Sometimes, I wonder if it is worth all the trouble.

KALYANI: Look Kaveri, why don't you be a little more accommodating? Don't be fussy and domineering and superior. Give other people some importance, listen to them and try and adjust to their opinions.

KAVERI: You can afford to be magnanimous because, people respect you. They depend on you for admissions in the college for their daughters. But if I listened to their opinions for a single moment, you will find I am no longer the secretary of the Society. They will throw me out and elect one of their own gang.

KALYANI: Let me see; I understand you have been the secretary of the society for seven years, or is it eight? You are also the secretary of the Red Cross, the ladies Club, and captain of the Girl Guides and a committee member of the Y.W.C.A and Guild of Service and the International Service League. There is naturally a feeling that you are monopolizing everything and bossing over everybody.

KAVERI: But who is there in this town who knows anything about social service? Except you of course! To the other women, it is just a diversion from domestic work, a change to get away from their husbands and children and indulge in a bit of gossip.....

KALYANI: You mean we are the only two without either? Frankly, I wouldn't mind one or two children, but having a husband is too big a price to pay I think.

KAVERI: What extraordinary opinions you have for one who has to guide young, virgin minds! But please be serious Miss Kalyani! It is a matter of life and death.....

KALYANI: I am being serious. That is why I am suggesting that there should be a change. And it is not a matter of life and death!

KAVERI: (TEARFULLY) someone has been poisoning your mind against me! I know; I can feel it here! (SHE TOUCHES HER HEART) There is a conspiracy to get rid of me. It is all that Jayalakshmi's doing! Just because she is rich, she wants to have her own way in everything!

KALYANI: She is very generous you know; if it wasn't for people like her, most of the organisations you run would be defunct by now.

KAVERI: She has wanted to replace me for a long time. She has even called on the new collector to complain about me! But if she is elected, that is the end. I shall resign from the Society and see how she runs it!

KALYANI: That is not a very co-operative attitude, is it?

(MRS.JAYALAKSHMI, A GOOD-LOOKING WIDOW OF ABOUT FORTY WALKS IN)

JAYALAKSHMI: Good afternoon Miss Kalyani! (THEN SHE SEES KAVERI) Oh, Hullo Kaveri!

KAVERI: (POINTEDLY IGNORING THE 'HULLO') You two may have something.....er..... confidential to discuss, I shall go and receive the collector. (EXIT LEFT)

JAYALAKSHMI: What is wrong with her? She either ignores me or deliberately tries to snub me.

KALYANI: She thinks you want to take over the secretaryship and is therefore annoyed.

JAYALAKSHMI: I only wanted to help. After all, social service is not her monopoly, or is it?

KALYANI: Well, she seems to think it is.

JAYALAKSHMI: I don't like all this unpleasantness. I joined the Society only because Kaveri asked me to. And because I take an active interest and make suggestions, she doesn't like it. If she continues as secretary, I am going to resign.

KALYANI: Kaveri tells me you are determined to become the secretary.

JAYALAKSHMI: Some people met me the other day and said there should be a change in the secretaryship that we aren't doing any really useful work, that the accounts are not properly maintained and so on. Since I had the time, why didn't I take it up? I said I wouldn't mind being the secretary, if I was elected unanimously.

(KAVERI RUSHES IN WITH A MAGAZINE IN HAND. SHE IS SO EXCITED THAT SHE DOES NOT MIND EVEN JAYALAKSHMI)

KAVERI: Have you seen this? Here it is, all about the Rao Sahib! In the weekly Gong! They have just changed his name, that's all!

JAYALAKSHMI: Here, let me see.

(KAVERI HANDS THE PAPER OVER TO HER)

KALYANI: What is all this about the Rao Sahib? Who is he? Don't forget I am a new comer here.

KAVERI: Rao Sahib Ramayya is said to be the richest man in Kamalapur. He is a self-made man with very little education; he is very shy and giggles when women speak to him. The British gave him the title of Rao Sahib during the war. Though he gave it up in 1947, people still call him 'Rao Sahib'. They are now publishing his private life in the magazine under the title 'Khan Sahib Karuppiah'. It even refers to his habit of taking snuff and polishing his diamond rings with the end of his upper cloth! And more is promised for later!

(SHE SNATCHES THE MAGAZINE FROM JAYALAKSHMI AND HANDS IT OVER TO KALYANI. KALYANI GLANCES AT IT BRIEFLY)

KALYANI: I am surprised at you Kaveri, that you should be so excited about a scandal sheet!

KAVERI: But it is all true! It says, 'Next instalment, LOVE COMES TO THE KHAN SAHIB!'

KALYANI: I don't want to read such rubbish.

(SHE THROWS AWAY THE PAPER, BUT KAVERI PICKS IT UP)

KAVERI: I had better hide it in case V.P. comes. He is Rao Sahib's lawyer and friend and also vice-president of the Society.

(KAVERI TAKES IT INTO THE ROOM ON THE RIGHT AND RETURNS)

KALYANI: Yes, I have met V.P once or twice.

KAVERI: He is the vice-president of every social service organisation in town. He can't be president, because the collector has to be the head. But he is the vice-president for all of them, except of course the Ladies Club and the Y.W.C.A.

KALYANI: Is that why he is called V.P. – for vice-president?

KAVERI: No, No, he was named Varadaraja Pasupathi Iyer. It is just that he has lived up to his name.

(JUST THEN, RAO SAHIB RAMAYYA, THE 'HERO' OF THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE AND HIS FRIEND V.P. IYER A WELL- KNOWN LAWYER AND SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY, WALK IN. THE LADIES HIDE THEIR EXCITEMENT AND ASSUME A DEMURE EXPRESSION. KAVERI COYLY ADVANCES TO RECEIVE THEM)

KAVERI: Welcome Mr.Ramayya! We are so honoured! We never see you at our meetings.

RAMAYYA: (EMBARRASSED AT SPEAKING TO A WOMEN).....er....very good, yes, thank you.

KAVERI: (WAGGING A FINGER AT HIM) I know why you don't come! It is because you think we will ask you for a big donation. We will elect you as a vice-president and then you will have to come. You propose his name V.P.

V.P.IYER: That is not a bad idea Kaveri.

(SUNDERAM, A SOMEWHAT FRIVELOUS JOURNALIST COMES IN)

KAVERI: I wonder why the president is so late.

SUNDERAM: Well, collectors are only human. Apart from attending to his work and attending on ministers, he is also the president of the Prohibition Committee, the District Development Council, Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, the Red Cross, the Guild of Service, the International Service League; do you want me to go on?

KAVERI: No, thank you.

KALYANI: What is he like?

SUNDERAM: In the civil service, he is known as 'orphanage' Ayyappa. Wherever he has been collector, he has started an orphanage. I suppose there must be some psychological explanation for his preoccupation with orphanages.

JAYALAKSHMI: May be, he was one himself.

V.P.IYER: I can assure you he is very dynamic.

SUNDERAM: Yes, he not only lays the foundation stone for an orphanage as soon as he arrives, but he wants to declare it open before he leaves the town on transfer.

(A CAR IS HEARD. V.P. AND KAVERI GO OUT TO RECEIVE THE COLLECTOR AND PRESIDENT. HE COMES IN FOLLOWED BY TWO OFFICIALS. EVERYONE STANDS UP. HE GREETES THEM AND THEY ARE ALL SEATED, V.P.AND KAVERI ON EITHER SIDE OF THE PRESIDENT)

AYYAPPA: I am sorry to be late ladies and gentlemen, so I suggest we had better get on with the agenda without further delay. The first item is the minutes of the last Annual General Meeting. Can I take them as read?

SUNDERAM: If we are not in the 'red' sir.

AYYAPPA: (IGNORING THE REMARK) I notice one peculiarity here. The last A.G.M. was held two years ago. I should have thought that annual meetings were held annually.

SUNDERAM: Our 'years' tend to vary according to the term of office of the collectors sir.

AYYAPPA: Perhaps that is not fault of the collectors, but yours. The next item is the annual reports and accounts. I presume they have been circulated. Any comments and questions?

SUNDERAM: Yes sir; in the first place, the accounts have not been circulated, but the treasurer was kind enough to give me a copy. (KAVERI GLARES AT THE TREASURER KUMARASWAMI WHO HAD JUST COME IN) I find that more than fifty percent of the money has been spent on travelling. Are we a social service organisation or a travel agency?

(AYYAPPA LOOKS AT THE TREASURER)

KUMARASWAMI: The travelling expenses have been rather high because the secretary had to go to Delhi to attend a meeting of the Federation of Social Service Societies and again to Madras to attend a seminar on rural social service.

SUNDERAM: Is it necessary to go to Madras and Delhi to learn how to distribute milk powder to poor children?

KAVERI: In the first place, the trips were authorized by the previous president.....

SUNDERAM: You see why we have an annual general meeting only when a collector is transferred.

KAVERI: (VEHEMENTLY) I resent the insinuation; I demand an apology. If not..... if not..... I shall... protest!

V.P.IYER: (IN A BOOMING STENTORIAN VOICE) If I might be permitted to intervene in this somewhat unseemly and useless discussion Mr. President, we are gathered here, not to hold a post-mortem on what is past, not to dissect corpses, but to plan for a more glorious and noble future in the long history of our Society. As the great English poet has told us in his infinite wisdom, 'to do a great right, do a little wrong'. To Sunderam, I shall say, 'The quality of mercy is not strained if he is a little more tolerant'. To Kaveri I shall advice, do not be a wandering minstrel, but be a homing bird. But apart from all this, primarily, we are here to welcome our new president. I have been somewhat remise in my duties as senior vice-president. May I therefore rectify a grave omission and welcome you sir as president of our Society. Under your wise counsel, guidance and leadership, all omissions will, if I may coin an expression, be commissioned. Therefore, let us gird up our loins and with our backs to the wall and shoulders to the wheel, tighten our belts and march forward from one annual report to the next.....

AYYAPPA: Thank you Mr. Iyer. There is a lot of wisdom in what you say. It is more important to consider what is to be done in the future. I suggest that we approve the annual report and accounts and pass on to the next item..... er....all in favour.....Thank you.

AYYAPPA: (LOOKING AT THE PAPERS IN FRONT OF HIM) The next item is consideration of future work. I am told that this is not normally included in the agenda. That is probably why you have had no sense of direction in the past. Since I came to your district – and now my district – I have had an opportunity to go through the work of this organisation. While some useful work has been done, there is nothing tangible or permanent that will have a lasting effect on the community. Before I elaborate on my own ideas, I should like to have your views.

SUNDERAM: Sir, I have a suggestion.

AYYAPPA: Go ahead Mr. Sunderam.

SUNDERAM: Sir, I have been an honorary magistrate for one year. Most of the cases we have had to deal with have been of people committing nuisance on the roads. But there are no public conveniences anywhere in the town and we cannot really blame them. We are morally wrong therefore, to fine them. I suggest that we build a series of wash rooms at various strategic points in the town and help the Municipality in maintaining them. I have estimated the cost of one such convenience and it comes to about fifteen thousand rupees. If any philanthropist were to offer a donation of that nature, no doubt we could name it after him. We can invite the Governor or some such dignity to declare them open by pulling the chain.

V.P.IYER: Surely, you are not being serious!

SUNDERAM: Of course I am serious! It will keep our streets clean, provide a much needed facility to the public, and reduce the work of poor honorary magistrates.

V.P.IYER: If the high and noble avocation of social service were to descend to such low levels, I for one will have nothing to do with it! All I can say is, it's..... It's preposterous! Unnatural!

SUNDERAM: There is nothing unnatural or preposterous about a natural and necessary function!

AYYAPPA: Leaving aside for a moment Sunderam's somewhat eccentric suggestion which does not seem to have any supporters, I propose that we resolve to establish an orphanage in this district where parentless children can be brought up to be useful citizens of society with dignity and self-respect. Children are the backbone of our nation, an investment for the future. On a more suitable public occasion, I should like to elaborate on this theme. For the present, I suggest that an orphanage sub-committee may be appointed to raise a sum of one lakh of rupees and finalise the details of establishing it before our next A.G.M.

(SHOUTS OF 'HERE' 'HERE' FROM MEMBERS)

SUNDERAM: That would be after your departure sir.

AYYAPPA: (ANGRILY) I said annual Mr. Sunderam! (HE HAS A WHISPERED CONVERSATION WITH V.P AND CONTINUES) In view of my numerous responsibilities, it will not be possible for me to devote the time necessary for this project. I therefore suggest that Mr. Ramayya, a leading

businessman and philanthropist be the chairman of the orphanage committee. I also propose that Mrs. Jayalakshmi may be the secretary and treasurer of this committee.

(KAVERI WHISPERS SOMETHING IN V.P.'S EAR)

V.P.IYER: It goes without saying that the secretary will automatically be a member of all sub-committees.

AYYAPPA: The next item is the election of office bearers.

V.P.IYER: As members are aware, the work of the Society is increasing and is bound to increase with the new responsibility that has devolved upon us. Miss Kaveri has been carrying on all these years single handed and we are indebted to her. But it has not been fair to her. I therefore propose that in future, we should have two secretaries, Miss Kaveri and Mrs. Jayalakshmi.

SUNDERAM: Doesn't the constitution provide for only one secretary?

V.P.IYER: As a humble student of constitutional law Mr. Sunderam, and having studied the various constitutions of the world including that of our Society, I would not have made such a proposal if it was anti-constitutional. As the author of that document, I can say it is very flexible.

SUNDERAM: Like a piece of elastic!

V.P.IYER: Elasticity is a very desirable trait in constitutions as well as in people. Pity you do not have it. Anyhow, I also propose that Mr. Ramayya, in view of his new responsibilities in the Society, should be one of our new vice-presidents. The others will continue as usual of course.

AYYAPPA: I declare them all duly elected.

V.P.IYER: Thank you Mr. President for reposing your confidence in us. Guided by your example, inspired by your enthusiasm, led by your dynamism, we shall achieve great and noble things in the future. I should like to take this opportunity.....

AYYAPPA: Thank you V.P. It is most kind of you. But I have to rush to another meeting.

(HE LEAVES THE ROOM FOLLOWED BY THE OFFICIALS. PEOPLE START CHATTING WITH EACH OTHER)

KALYANI: (TO KAVERI) It is time you learnt to share responsibility with someone else Kaveri. You should learn to work together instead of forming cliques. It is bad enough in politics, but in social service, it is worse.

KAVERI: I knew you were behind it!

KALYANI: Yes, I was the one who suggested you should be made co-secretaries. Come with me. (SHE TAKES KAVERI BY THE HAND TO WHERE JAYALAKSHMI IS STANDING) you had better start by being friends from now on because you have to work together. Come on! Shake hands!

(JAYALAKSHMI STRETCHES HER HAND HESITENTLY)

KAVERI: I suppose as the senior secretary, I must forgive and forget.

(JAYALAKSHMI WITHDRAWS HER HAND AND MARCHES OUT. ALL OTHERS FOLLOW HER - ALL EXCEPT RAMAYYA AND V.P.IYER)

RAMAYYA: What is all this V.P? What is an orphanage?

V.P.IYER: Whatever it is, you are its chairman and also the vice-president of the Society inspite of the magazine article. You should be pleased with yourself.

RAMAYYA: Why did you get me involved with a whole lot of quarrelling women and scheming men? They will only touch my pocket.

V.P.IYER: Social service is very fashionable you know. It is the duty of all well-to-do citizens to come forward to help the weaker members of society.

RAMAYYA: I don't see you giving anything away!

V.P.IYER: To each unto his capacity, my dear Rao Sahib, as it says in the bible. I am the catalyst who by his mere presence and eloquence helps to promote service.

RAMAYYA: I suppose making speeches all the time is a very economical way of serving your fellow men.

V.P.IYER: Try it sometimes and you will know how difficult it is. As one experienced in such things, I can tell you a speech is like a baby – a pleasure to conceive, but hard to deliver.

RAMAYYA: Good Lord no! (CHANGING HIS TONE AS WELL AS THE SUBJECT) But you know I came here only because of that matter of Khan Sahib in the weekly Gong!

V.P.IYER: You mean the Weekly Wrong? I have had a word with the editor. He says his journalistic ethics are incorruptible - for anything less than two lakhs. Let me talk to Sunderam.

RAMAYYA: Where does that leave me?

V.P.IYER: Don't worry Rao Sahib, people don't attach half as much importance to it as you imagine.

RAMAYYA: You should be married to my wife!

(Scene Two)

(THE SAME ROOM, ONE MONTH LATER. IT HAS BEEN CLEANED UP AND TIDED A LITTLE. THERE IS A TABLE CLOTH ON THE TABLE AND SOME SIDE TABLES HAVE BEEN ADDED. THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MAIN TABLE. MESSRS RAMAYYA, V.P., SUNDERAM, KUMARASWAMI, KALYANI, KAVERI AND JAYALAKSHMI ARE SITTING ABOUT, FINISHING WHAT IS OBVIOUSLY A SUMPTUOUS TEA. THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ORPHANAGE COMMITTEE IS ABOUT TO START)

SUNDERAM: Now that wealthy people have started taking an interest in social service, at least the quality of the tea has improved.

V.P.IYER: You are a cynic Sunderam. You do not know how to enjoy the good things of life. Social service need not be the dry desert of digestive biscuits and luke-warm coffee. A little gastronomic titillation would do more for social service than all your ideals and indigestion put together. (HE TURNS TO RAMAYYA) Thank you for an excellent tea Rao Sahib. Begun under such auspices, I am sure the orphanage will be a great success. Shall we commence the business of the meeting?

RAMAYYA: Yes, we ought to get down to business; that is, whatever you consider this orphanage business is.

KAVERI: I have a very strong complaint Mr. Chairman. I ought to have been consulted before the meeting was fixed. As everyone knows, today is hospital day.

JAYALAKSHMI: I have telephoned the District Medical Officer and he has agreed to its postponement.

KAVERI: But you can't do that without consulting me! After all, I am still the secretary of the Society!

JAYALAKSHMI: No, we are co-secretaries. And I am the only secretary and treasurer of the orphanage committee!

SUNDERAM: Choose your weapons ladies.

RAMAYYA: No, No, let us get down to business instead.

SUNDERAM: It comes to the same thing in the end.

V.P.IYER: Thank you Mr. Ramayya. Very wise words indeed!

KAVERI: Alright, I shall ignore it this time. The first thing is to prepare a project report outlining the objectives, functions and cost of the orphanage. When I was in Delhi.....

JAYALAKSHMI :(INTERRUPTING HER) The first thing is to explore ways and means of raising one lakh of rupees which is the target the president has set. The balance sheet of the Society shows we are overdrawn in the bank account.....

KAVERI: We are not over-drawn; we are under deposited!

SUNDERAM: What is the difference?

KAVERI: If you don't know the difference, then you should not talk about finance!

JAYALAKSHMI: As I was saying, we are over-drawn to the extent of fifty six rupees and a sum of rupees ninety seven, as cash in hand with the treasurer.

KUMARASWAMI: No! No! Not with me. Miss Kaveri has always dealt with the cash. I have only kept the accounts and the vouchers.

KAVERI: The procedure has been necessary.....

JAYALAKSHMI: Anyhow, no activity of any sort can be considered in the precarious state of our finances.....

KAVERI: I have been told by an American authority that a service organisation should never have a bank balance. If you have money you have not spent, how can you go round asking for donations?

V.P.IYER: This sub-committee has been formed to start an orphanage. That is our objective; for that purpose, money is necessary. Let us keep to that point, shall we ladies?

RAMAYYA: Yes, I suppose we should consider it. But business is bad just now. We should keep that also in mind.

KALYANI: We should have a flag day Mr. Chairman. It enables a large number of people to contribute and not just a few wealthy individuals. At the same time, it gives us publicity.

RAMAYYA: A flag day, whatever it is, is a very good idea Miss.....miss.... And if we get one lakh from it, we need not do anything else.

KALAYANI: We won't get anywhere near that sum, After all, Kamalapur is only a small town.

KAVERI: We cannot do without donations altogether. There are many who are always willing to help out. Take our chairman for example.

RAMAYYA: I am not a very good example I am afraid. You should stick to flag days.

V.P.IYER: Miss Kalyani should be entrusted with the organisation of the flag day.

('YES' 'YES' FROM THE OTHERS)

KAMARASWAMI: How about a concert by Mrs. Rukmani? We don't have to pay her anything, only expenses, if it is for charity.

SUNDERAM: That is only because; there is no income-tax on 'expenses'. And they come to more than any fees. No, with all the local talent there is, we should organize a variety entertainment.

KAVERI: Mr. Chettiar of the Lakshmi Picture Palace can be persuaded to give his theatre free for one night.

SUNDERAM: Provided you let his daughters dance.

RAMAYYA: The only thing is, the tickets should not be priced too high. Business is bad and you may find it difficult to sell them.

SUNDERAM: We have forgotten one thing so far. I think we should open a new bank account to be known as the Orphanage Committee Account and the treasurer Mrs. Jayalakshmi should be authorized to operate it.

KAVERI: I have been the secretary of this Society for seven long years and no one has found fault with my handling of its finances. Why should there be a separate account now?

SUNDERAM: In that case, why was Jayalakshmi appointed secretary and Treasurer?

KAVERI: (VEHEMENTLY) This amounts to a no confidence motion against me and the treasurer Mr. Kumaraswami. If so, I shall.... I shall... protest!

SUNDERAM: Let us take a vote on the subject.

RAMAYYA: No! No! That is not democratic. Let us consult our president and take his advice.

V.P.IYER: The chairman is quite right. During my fifteen years as senior vice-president of this democratic organisation, I am proud to say that not once has a vote been taken. We are not going to break that record now. I shall ascertain the president's wishes on the phone.

(V.P. GOES TO THE PHONE IN THE NEXT ROOM)

JAYALAKSHMI: We can do so many other things. We can have a bridge drive, we can have a series of discourses by the famous Bharat yogi.....

SUNDERAM: No! Yogis these days are more expensive than film stars.

KAVERI: We should have an art exhibition and charge an entrance fee. My sister Ganga paints; you know modern art. She only copies from Picasso, no one else! If she sells any pictures, she will give ten percent to the orphanage.

SUNDERAM: One saving grace about modern art is, you know things can't be as bad as they are painted!

KAVERI: What do you know about the finer things of life, you..... you..... pen pushing meddler!

SUNDERAM: At least, if I copy from my betters, I keep quiet about it!

KALYANI: That is enough you two! We can do so many things, but none of them will make any money worth the effort. After all, that is our objective.

(V.P. RETURNS TO HIS SEAT)

V.P. IYER: I have consulted our president. He agrees with Sunderam that there should be a separate orphanage account and Jayalakshmi should operate it.

SUNDERAM: Hear! Hear! The first time the old boy has agreed with me!

KAVERI: And the last time I should think! Anyhow, in view of our president's clarification, I withdraw my protest.

KUMARASWAMI: Two things are necessary to open a bank account. One is a suitably worded resolution by this committee and the other is some money with which to open it. I don't think they will agree to open it with an overdraft.

SUNDERAM: That is easily done. Let us take a collection among ourselves, starting with a handsome donation from the Rao Sahib.

RAMAYYA: (ALARMED) I am afraid I am not handsome!

KAVERI: Nonsense! You are beautiful Mr. Rao Sahib!

V.P.IYER: Let us leave donations as a last resort. Instead, let us explore every avenue, pursued every trail, and seize every opportunity.

SUNDERAM: Of course, the chairman can always make up any shortages later.

RAMAYYA: Yes, you are right. I have always been pursued by shortages, particularly since the war.

JAYALAKSHMI: Mr. Chairman, I am prepared to make a donation of ten thousand rupees.....

(HERE! 'HERE!' AND 'VERY GOOD' FROM THE OTHERS)

JAYALAKSHMI: (REPEATS) I am prepared to make a donation of ten thousand rupees provided the orphanage is named after my late husband.

V.P.IYER: Your offer is most generous of course. But don't you think you are placing rather a low value on the immortality of a noble soul?

SUNDERAM: It amounts to spiritual devaluation!

JAYALAKSHMI: I know my husband's value V.P. I have already built ten bus shelters – all of them named after him – at one thousand rupees each. Now, I want to diversify my husband's memory in various avenues such as transport, education, family planning, maternity centres, and of course orphanages.

V.P.IYER: As I have already said, your donation is most generous and we are grateful. But as far as naming the orphanage is concerned, it is perhaps a little premature...

SUNDERAM: Like picking a name for the baby before you know if it is a boy or a girl.

V.P.IYER: (IGNORING THE INTERRUPTION) I am not sure whether constitutionally, we are competent to decide it. It will have to be decided by the main committee with the president's concurrence.

JAYALAKSHMI: My offer was conditional. I wish to perpetuate the memory of my husband and I am willing to spend some money for that purpose; within reason of course. But not otherwise.

SUNDERAM: Which leaves the question of opening a bank account exactly where it was before?

KALYANI: We have been talking and talking without coming to any conclusions. Can't we at least put those decisions on which we are all agreed so that we can go forward?

V.P.IYER: Miss Kalyani is quite right of course. Now, let us see, we are going to have a flag day; we are going to have a variety performance. If we appoint one committee for each of them.

SUNDERAM: You never commit yourself V.P. do you? You are always committing yourself. We don't want any more committees. Let Miss Kalyani and Kumaraswami get on with the job.

V.P.IYER: In the International Service League, a world-wide organisation of which I also happen to be a vice-president, committee always means 'come to tea'. So, you see Sunderam, there are different connotations of the word.

KAVERI: The secretaries – at least I – will give you both whatever help is necessary.

KALYANI: I will need some money for preliminary expenses such as printing posters, making flags, etc. Can you let me have some money from the cash you have?

KAVERI: How can you draw from the funds of the Society when you have just decided to have a separate bank account? How can you ask me for money?

SUNDERAM: Indeed, a supreme example of co-operation!

KAVERI: You don't know anything about procedures; so shut up!

JAYALAKSHMI: I shall advance whatever money is required and open a bank account also. It can be adjusted afterwards.

KAVERI: Of course, if people have money to throw away, it is a different matter altogether!

SUNDERAM: We could publish a souvenir. If companies give advertisements instead of donations, they can write them off as expenses.

RAMAYYA: Yes, you cannot have advertisements and donations.

V.P.IYER: A Souvenir?

SUNDERAM: Let me explain what I mean V.P. It will be photographs on art paper of our president and the two vice-presidents, and of course committee members. It will have a small write-up – something modest – about their contribution to the service of the poor and the needy, perhaps a few personal touches about their qualities of head and heart, a few articles about our town, its history and culture; in short, a great monument of lasting value.

V.P.IYER: Wonderful, my dear chap! A truly great idea! After listening to your panegyric about public conveniences at the last committee meeting, I had given you up for lost. But I am glad to note that you are still capable of creative effort. We approve it whole heartedly.

KAVERI: I hope my picture will be a full page one.

V.P.IYER: There you are Miss Kalyani! You cannot accuse us of procrastinating. We have taken three important decisions with three enthusiastic members in charge. Now it only remains for me to thank our chairman and the two charming secretaries, not only for their valuable co-operation with the work of this committee, but with each other.

(PEOPLE BEGIN TO DISPERSE. ONLY V.P.AND THE RAO SAHIB ARE LEFT BEHIND)

RAMAYYA: (VERY AGITATED) V.P., have you seen the latest?

(HE HANDS OVER A COPY OF THE WEEKLY GONG)

V.P.IYER: (READS ALOUD PORTIONS OF THE ARTICLE) Oh, this is good Rao Sahib!

‘During the past twenty years, there has been a succession of young ladies, each one getting younger as the Khan Sahib got older! But Alas! Loyalty was the one quality that was conspicuous by its absence among those young ladies’

.....Listen to this!.....

‘However, the Khan Sahib has been extremely careful to ensure that none of his escapades reached the level of a public scandal. Only once was he threatened with a law suit by Miss X. She sent him a lawyer’s notice accusing him of being the father of her child and claiming maintenance as well as compensation. But it was amicably settled. After that somewhat unpleasant experience, the Khan Sahib has been careful in every way.’

..... You know Rao Sahib, sometimes, I envy you; your flair for that sort of thing is quite amazing.

RAMAYYA: You know there is no truth in all that rubbish!

V.P.IYER: I helped you to settle that paternity suit you old rogue! You mustn’t tell lies either to your God or to your doctor, and certainly not to your lawyer.

RAMAYYA: (ALMOST CRYING) Come on V.P.! How are you going to get me out of this mess!

V.P.IYER: I have made progress; I have found out from whom the author gets his information.

RAMAYYA: Who is it?

V.P.IYER: It is that driver you sacked.

RAMAYYA: That rogue! And after all I did for him too!

V.P.IYER: If you must have nocturnal escapades, it is better you learn to drive yourself rather than trust to the tender mercies of a disloyal driver.

RAMAYYA: It is all over now.

V.P.IYER: Go on you old philanderer!

RAMAYYA: I believe the people in the club are referring to me as The Khan Sahib. How long can I put up with it? And after this, you don't know what I have to put up with at home!

V.P.IYER: Yes, pleasure is becoming more and more expensive in every way. I can see it in my profession every day. It is all this inflation I suppose. But I have already sent for your driver. So, relax and find another young lady to amuse you.

(HE PATS THE RAO ON HIS BACK AFFECTIONATELY)

ACT TWO

Scene one

(THE SAME ROOM. ONE MONTH LATER. KALYANI, KAVERI AND JAYALAKSHMI ARE DISCUSSING THE ORGANISATION OF THE FLAG DAY)

KALYANI: What kind of a design do you think we should have on the flags?

KAVERI: The symbol of the Society is three 'S's linked in the form of a triangle. They stand for Social Service Society. It has always been our symbol.

JAYALAKSHMI: But since the money is to be for the orphanage, don't you think we ought to have a baby on it. It will be more appealing.

KAVERI: No! Over the years, that symbol has come to mean some thing as V.P. will explain to you. Orphanages may come and go, but the Society goes on for ever.

JAYALAKSHMI: If the orphanage goes, I go too.

KAVERI: That may not be a bad thing.

KALYANI: Don't quarrel girls. We will have the Society's symbol on one side and a baby on the other.

KAVERI: But the symbol should be in the front!

KALYANI: The only trouble is that the proprietor of the People's Printing Press wants to have his advertisement on the flags. But I have said no. Only the posters can say 'with the compliments of the People's Printing Press', in small letters.

JAYALAKSHMI: What does he say to that?

KALYANI: He says paper is very expensive and he can't do it free. So, I have agreed to pay the paper cost, but the printing will be free.

KAVERI: What about the collection boxes?

KALYANI: The only organisation which has collection boxes is the International Service League. So I spoke to Mrs. Vasantha Arumugam, the secretary about borrowing them.

KAVERI: Ah! The glamour girl with the air hostess' smile!

KALYANI: You don't seem to like her very much.

KAVERI: She is so artificial! Her smile, just like her make-up is put on for the occasion. Further, she has so many firsts to her credit.

KALYANI: What do you mean?

KAVERI: Well, she is the first in Kamalapur to cut and perm her hair, to use lip-stick and to wear trousers. But more than all these, she is the first and only divorcee. Almost an exhibit!

KALYANI: If marriages were made in Japan instead of in heaven, perhaps they would be more durable.

KAVERI: But hers was not made in heaven! Whom the registrar put together, the judge has put asunder.

KALYANI: You are being very catty.

KAVERI: Not at all! But you must give credit where it is due. I am told she claims to spend all her alimony on social service.

KALYANI: Well..... I suppose it is better than spending the Society's money on travelling expenses.

KAVERI: (HURT) How can you be so cruel?

KALYANI: That is just to teach you a lesson. You shouldn't be cruel to others. By the way, was it a mixed marriage?

KAVERI: No, just a mixed-up marriage.

KALYANI: Why are you so anti-Vasantha?

KAVERI: Don't you see, we are two organisations divided by the same objectives.

KALYANI: Well, the feelings seem to be mutual. She says, the last time she lent the boxes to the Society; it took her six months to get them back. And some were badly damaged it seems, indicating the someone had tried to open them illegally to get the money out.

KAVERI: Just because she has been in England, cooking and washing for her husband, she puts on airs.

KALYANI: I told her that two organisations with similar objectives should co-operate with each other, but she says that the two secretaries are not on speaking terms.

KAVERI: We should have nothing to do with the League or with that woman. Last time they sent some milk powder from UNICEF, the League cornered the whole lot and we didn't get any. I heard afterwards that some of it found its way into the bazaar!

KALYANI: She also said that you were thrown out of the I.S.L.

KAVERI: That is a lie! I resigned on grounds of conscience.

KALYANI: No wonder she wouldn't let us have the tins! I will have to ask V.P. to speak to the president and get them.

KAVERI: We should have our own tins. Then we can refuse to lend them to anyone who asks.

KALYANI: Frankly, I am bewildered by your idea of social service.

KAVERI: (CHANGING THE SUBJECT) What are you writing those numbers for?

KALYANI: I am going to number the tins so that I can keep track of them.

KAVERI: There is no need to go to all that trouble. You know people are honest.

KALYANI: It is not a matter of honesty only. It is a matter of right procedure. By the way, we need a lot of people to go round collecting on the Flag Day. How many can you muster?

JAYALAKSHMI: I wouldn't go collecting!

KALYANI: Why not?

JAYALAKSHMI: What will people say if decent family women go round the streets asking men for money?

KALYANI: I can assure you it is considered very respectable. In big cities like Delhi.....

JAYALAKSHMI: But Kamalapur is not Delhi.

KAVERI: I will go collecting if you like. I don't mind what people say. Perhaps the Weekly Gong will take a picture of me pinning a flag on the Rao Sahib's chest and publish it along with the Khan Sahib story.

KALYANI: How about getting V.P. to sell some flags to all the lawyers in the district court?

KAVERI: Oh! No! V.P will have nothing to do with collecting money, unless of course it is in his professional capacity. He has said so many times.

(KUMARASWAMI COMES IN)

KALYANI: How is the variety entertainment coming along?

KUMARASWAMI: I didn't know there was so much talent waiting to be exploited in this town. I have enough offers to have a programme for about seven hours.

JAYALAKSHMI: Why don't you Prof. Narasiah to help you? Amateur singing and dancing can get very boring after some time. His students are very good in Shakespeare.

KUMARASWAMI: I am sorry to say I have.

KALYANI: Why sorry?

KUMARASWAMI: He wants to do one scene each from Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello. He also wants tiffin to be provided at every rehearsal and taxis for the girl students so that they can get home safely after dark.

KALAYANI: But those are very serious plays for an evening of light entertainment!

KUMARASWAMI: When I said that to the professor, he says he will do something from Congreve and Sheridan and something called 'She Droops to conquer'.

KAVERI: Are they English or American? Now-a-days, only things from Hollywood appeal to people.

KUMARASWAMI: I suggested something more modern, but the professor says that no decent English has been written after the 18th century. By the way, Sunderam insists on being what he calls the master of ceremonials at the concert.

KAVERI: Oh, Mr. Kumaraswami, I forget to tell you. My sister Bhavani wants to sing at the concert. She needs half-an hour. But if Sunderam has anything to do with it, she won't!

KAVERI: Oh, yes! We are five talented sisters, Bhavani sings, Ganga paints, Bhagirathi writes and Sindhu.....

JAYALAKSHMI: I suppose she fiddles!

KALYANI: Why don't you call your house The Punjab, the land of the five rivers?

KAVERI: We, all of us have a great affinity to water. That is why we have been named after the five most holy rivers of India.

KALYANI: Ordeal by water!

KAVERI: But you can't have Sunderam for that sort of a job. He will tell shady jokes. After all, ours is a pre-eminently respectable organisation.

KUMARASWAMI: What sort of jokes?

KAVERI: I don't know. He hasn't told them to me!

KUMARASWAMI: I expect he will repeat them from the Reader's Digest.

KAVERI: His jokes won't be very digestable for that audience! And don't tell me he will copy them from the Illustrated Weekly either. His stories would be much worse if they were illustrated!

(SUNDERAM, V.P.IYER AND THE RAO SAHIB COME IN)

SUNDERAM: What illustrations?

(THERE IS AN EMBARRASSED SILENCE WHEN THE LADIES LOOK AT EACH OTHER)

KALYANI: I must be off. I have a hundred and one things to do.

(SHE COLLECTS THE LABELS SHE HAS BEEN WRITING AND DEPARTS)

V.P.IYER: Well, how is everything going? I thought I will come and give a few suggestions in case you are in difficulties.

KAMARASWAMI: We decided on a two hour programme for the entertainment, but we find there are far too many items.

V.P.IYER: That is nothing to worry about. The programme can always be extended by an hour. When people have paid good money, they are entitled to a good dose of entertainment.

SUNDERAM: You sound as if you were prescribing a good dose of castor oil.

V.P.IYER: I am a respectable lawyer of some eminence, well versed in the subtleties of the English language, not one of your pill-peddlers!

SUNDERAM: I suppose they will both have the same effect in the end.

V.P.IYER: I also consider it necessary to have someone to preside over the function. It will add dignity and distinction to the occasion. A few well-chosen words of appreciation by a senior... er...member would be appropriate.

SUNDERAM: Someone like the vice-president I suppose?

V.P.IYER: Not a bad idea my dear fellow. I find you do come out with some good suggestions, occasionally.

JAYALAKSHMI: Don't you think we should give some mementos to the performers? After all, they are giving their time and talents free, for a good cause.

KAVERI: What kind of mementos?

JAYALAKSHMI: Something is silver perhaps, small cups or plates.

KAVERI: Every artist should be given two complimentary family tickets, entitling them to bring their families.

SUNDERAM: Why, have they all got two families each? I thought bigamy was illegal. Isn't that so V.P.?

V.P.IYER: I don't give any professional advice at a mere social gathering. If you have any problems, see me in my office.

KAVERI: Everyone has friends as well as relations! And then, there are the committee members. all, we give our service free; we are dedicated to the cause. Should we not bring our families also?

V.P.IYER: What is of the utmost importance is to invite all the leading officials. No function is complete without them.

RAMAYYA: Quite right! We should not leave out the income tax, sales tax and excise officials.

V.P.IYER: As one who is well-known to all the officials of the Government and as vice- president of almost all the service organisations, I shall of course take full responsibility for the distribution of all complimentary tickets. The first two rows should be reserved for them.

SUNDERAM: I thought we were here to explore ways and means of selling tickets. All we have done so far to distribute a few hundred of the best seats free!

V.P.IYER: You do not understand either diplomacy or public relations my dear fellow. By the way, how is the souvenir coming along?

SUNDERAM: It is the same thing there also, too many offers of contributions and too few advertisements. I am hoping our chairman might start off with a full page advertisement, that is, the front inside cover.

RAMAYYA: But I have nothing to sell to the public! What can I advertise?

SUNDERAM: As chairman of the orphanage committee, don't you think your photograph should be there?

RAMAYYA: You were going to publish it in any case!

SUNDERAM: But it would look much nicer if your picture was supported and sustained by your . It is only one thousand rupees.

RAMAYYA: That is too much!

SUNDERAM: You wouldn't have it said that the chairman of the orphanage committee wouldn't give a miserable one thousand rupees for a cause which he was promoting, would you?

RAMAYYA: But who is going to say it?

SUNDERAM: Well.....er.....Khan Sahib Karupiah might say it. He is very generous you know! He has promised to take the back cover page for one thousand rupees.

RAMAYYA: (VERY AGITATED) What are you talking about? Are you trying to humiliate me? V.P. You talk to him!

SUNDERAM: No, No, Rao Sahib, I was only joking. The editor of the Gong was saying that he might take a full page in the name of the Khan Sahib, if you didn't.

RAMAYYA: You want to play your silly pranks at my expense! Alright, I will take a full page for a thousand rupees, if that Khan Sahib business is kept out of the publication.

SUNDERAM: It is done!

RAMAYYA: And don't call me Rao Sahib in print! As a patriotic Indian, I gave up my title in 1947.

SUNDERAM: As chairman of the orphanage committee, don't you think you ought to send an appeal to the business community of Kamalapur to contribute liberally?

RAMAYYA: You draft something and show it to V.P. If he approves it, I will sign it.

KAVERI: You know my sister Bhagirathi writes poetry. She has won many prizes at college. She has just completed a poem called 'The Greatness of the Ganges'. You can have it for the souvenir. Considering it is for charity, she won't charge you for it.

SUNDERAM: But why don't you collect some advertisements?

KAVERI: It is not my job, is it? I am not the secretary and treasurer of the orphanage committee, am I? I am only the poor secretary of the Society who does all the donkey work!

JAYALAKSHMI: Poor co-secretary, you mean!

SUNDERAM: I have decided that anyone who wants to have an article or a poem published in the souvenir should collect at least one full page advertisement.

KAVERI: There is no policy decision to that effect!

SUNDERAM: As far as this publication is concerned, I take all policy decisions. You ask V.P. He is the constitutional expert.

KAVERI: Then, you won't get either a poem or an advertisement from me! I shall register a protest with the president!

V.P.IYER: Look Kaveri, you are well-known as a good – I may even go so far as to say dedicated – social worker. I am sure if you go round to some of the business people.....

KAVERI: (COYLY) Of course, if I am asked nicely and politely..... But why doesn't Jayalakshmi do it?

SUNDERAM: She doesn't want to have a poem published in the souvenir.

JAYALAKSHMI: As a matter of fact, since it has been almost decided that the orphanage will be named after my husband, it would be appropriate to have his photograph as well as a short sketch of his life in the souvenir.

SUNDERAM: Then you should also get some advertisements.

KAVERI: From the sari shops at least!

JAYALAKSHMI: You know as well as I do that it is not decent for a lady - particularly a widow- to go round asking for money.

V.P.IYER: I should like to offer some help with the souvenir my dear chap. That is, those aspects of the publication that deals with literary or cultural matters. As you are aware, I have often expressed many lofty ideas on various subjects, but they have been somewhat ephemeral, because of the nature of the communication. I feel however, they ought to find a lasting and more permanent place in the form of an article in your commendable effort. As you know, I do not concern myself unduly with the commercial and mundane aspects of social service. But where it is related to the more delicate and refined areas, my services are readily available.

SUNDERAM: What do you have in mind V.P.?

V.P.IYER: You might care to publish an article on the learned profession of law.

SUNDERAM: Something headed 'The Law Is an Ass'?

V.P.IYER: (VERY HURT) You play the fool even in the most sublime moments of thought.

SUNDERAM: No offence V.P. But I thought it would make a catchy title for an article on law. Don't you have a sense of humour?

V.P.IYER: A Sense of humour can be very hazardous in my profession.

SUNDERAM: And in my profession, if you don't shock people, they won't buy your paper.

V.P.IYER: I have also brought a copy of my photograph for publication as well as my bio-data for your use.

(HE PRODUCES BOTH FROM HIS POCKET. SUNDERAM INSPECTS THE PHOTOGRAPH)

SUNDERAM: This picture must have been taken when you completed your law finals. Haven't you got a more recent one?

V.P.IYER: I don't go round wasting my money on photographs! Do you think I am a film star? If you want a more recent one, send round a photographer to my house. You can charge it to the souvenir expenses.

SUNDERAM: No, we will leave it as it is. It matches Kaveri's picture. She looks as if she has just finished from St. Francis Convent High school.

V.P.IYER: I don't presume to understand you Sunderam. The task that the orphanage committee had entrusted to you is a serious and responsible one; I may even say, a noble one. You should bring to your duties a sense of dignity and decorum. But you insist on making fun of things that most of us consider serious and even sacred. I don't know how you make any money out of your job.

SUNDERAM: In the same way as you do V.P. Don't you realise, every profession is a conspiracy against the rest of the community.

V.P.IYER: Be that as it may, I have been thinking a lot about this publication of yours. It can't be a priced publication. On the other hand, you can't distribute it only to the advertisers and contributors like you distribute sweets to school children on Republic Day. I think we should have a function to release the souvenir by some dignitary. I could welcome the chief guest, explain the objectives of the Society and the orphanage, perhaps mention the salient features of the publication. As the creator of the souvenir, you of course will propose a vote of thanks. If the function were to be preceded by some light refreshments, we would also ensure a respectable crowd.

SUNDERAM: All that costs money V.P. Our objective is to make money, not spend it.

V.P.IYER: Don't be so mundane, my dear chap!

SUNDERAM: Thank you for all your suggestions V.P. Now I have to go out and get some advertisements.

V.P.IYER: I can't understand the younger generation. They are always preoccupied with money! Can you?

Scene Two

(THE SAME ROOM. ABOUT TWO MONTHS LATER. THE ORPHANAGE COMMITTEE IS MEETING TO TAKE STOCK OF THEIR EFFORTS. AS THE CURTAIN RISES RAMAYYA AND V.P. IYER ARE HAVING A CHAT BEFORE THE OTHERS ARRIVE)

RAMAYYA: Have you seen the Gong this week?

V.P.IYER: No

RAMAYYA: Another instalment has come. Here, read this!

(HE HANDS V.P.THE MAGAZINE)

V.P.IYER: (READS ALOUD)

'Our hero is god-fearing, if nothing else. He has always made it a point of honour to donate his favourite deity, five percent of his income on which he has paid income tax and ten percent of the income on which he has not. After all, God did not pay any income tax and he too should be given some incentive. Yes, he considered God not so much as the ALMIGHTY, but rather as a junior partner in his business.

But his divine partner got a bonus on occasions too. For example, when after considerable prayers and fasts, his wife conceived and gave birth to a male child, the Khan Sahib presented to his ten percent partner, a silver swing. But being the prudent man that he was, he had the chains of the swing tested in the local engineering college so that they were thick enough to bear the weight of the idol, but no thicker'.

I did not know all this you old rogue! After all, I look after your legal problems just as God looks after your moral problems. My job is more difficult and I am certainly more successful. So, you should make me a ten percent partner too.

RAMAYYA: When nothing appeared for the past few weeks, I thought it would stop altogether.

V.P.IYER: I think they are stretching it out as long as possible.

RAMAYYA: And there is nothing I can do about it?

V.P.IYER: Well, I have had a discussion with your driver. If I get him to sign a statement, then we have a hold on the editor.

RAMAYYA: Will it then stop?

V.P.IYER: I hope so.

RAMAYYA: You know V.P. I have been thinking. These articles started appearing on the day the orphanage was conceived. And it comes in the paper every time there is any activity regarding the orphanage. It looks as if the orphanage and these scurrilous writings are somehow related.

V.P.IYER: An interesting speculation Rao Sahib, but a bit far fetched.

RAMAYYA: I think it will stop only on the day the orphanage idea is given up. Anyhow, you must do something quickly.

V.P.IYER: What, stop the orphanage! That is hardly possible.

RAMAYYA: No! I mean stop the articles! Do something. Apart from anything else, my wife is driving me crazy.

V.P.IYER: Send her on a long pilgrimage to Banares. By the time she returns they will stop.

RAMAYYA: You must hurry!

V.P.IYER: My dear Rao Sahib, I am not Perry Mason and Kamalapur is not Los Angeles.

RAMAYYA: I don't know what you are talking about!

(SUNDERAM WALKS IN)

V.P.IYER: Ah, here you are dear chap. Have you done anything regarding the matter I spoke to you about the other day?

SUNDERAM: What matter?

V.P.IYER:er.....about speaking to the editor.

SUNDERAM: Look V.P. If the Rao Sahib thinks that the articles refer to him, it is only his guilty conscience.

V.P.IYER: I have got hold of that driver you know. And he has signed a statement – at my dictation.

SUNDERAM: Oh! I will speak to the editor again.

(KAVERI AND KALYANI COME IN)

V.P.IYER: Well, now that we are all here – almost all - let us take stock of what we have achieved.

KALYANI: On the Flag Day, we collected 8270 rupees and fifty paise. Expenses came to a total of rupees 1532 and 25 paise. The balance has been credited to the orphanage account.

KAVERI: When we had a flag day a few years ago, we collected more.

KALYANI: That is because you collected donations as well.

V.P.IYER: You have done well, Miss Kalyani.

KALYANI: We should send a letter of thanks to all the helpers, particularly the secretary of the International Service League for loaning us the tins. They have all been safely returned.

KAVERI: She only let us have them under collector's orders!

(KUMARASWAMI AND JAYALAKSHMI COME IN)

SUNDERAM: Ah! Here is our musical expert. Let us hear what he has achieved through his great efforts.

KUMARASWAMI: Not much I'm afraid. The accounts are not complete because the ticket books have not all been returned.

SUNDERAM: How much money have you received so far?

KUMARASWAMI: I have received 10520 rupees and the expenses come to five thousand rupees.

V.P.IYER: (AGHAST) Five thousand!

KUMARASWAMI: I had to rent or buy everything from curtains to commodes.

SUNDERAM: Commodes?

KUMARASWAMI: Yes, the principal dancer nearly walked out because it had not been provided.

SUNDERAM: I hope it was commodious to accommodate.....

V.P.IYER: (HURRIEDLY) Never mind Sunderam. But who are the people who have not returned the tickets?

KUMARASWAMI: Well, almost everyone in this room.

SUNDERAM: I think we should each of us render an account of how many tickets we took, how many we sold and return the unsold tickets along with the money.

KAVERI: Don't be ridiculous! You know it is impossible. I took five books of tickets and distributed to five people. Until they give me an account, how can I give you one?

SUNDERAM: Alright, we will give you twenty four hours to return the unsold tickets along with the money. Now, let us start with our chairman. How many tickets did you take Rao Sahib?

KUMARASWAMI: I gave the chairman one hundred tickets of fifty rupees each.

RAMAYYA: And I passed them on to the manger of the Kamalapur Club. He must have an account I suppose.

SUNDERAM: Let us telephone him.

V.P.IYER: Such unseemly hurry is totally unnecessary my dear chap. The members of the Club are eminently respectable people and they can be trusted for a small matter of fifty rupees,

SUNDERAM: I don't have the honour to belong to that exclusive preserve of high class respectability. But they seem to be just as negligent about paying for their tickets as anyone else.

RAMAYYA: No! No! Everything will be alright. I will speak to the manager.

SUNDERAM: Alright. V.P., How many tickets did you take?

V.P.IYER: You are well aware that I was only responsible for the distribution of complimentary tickets. Needless to say, none were returned and all were used. You will find that all the officials were well satisfied with my handling of the situation.

SUNDERAM: I might have known!

V.P.IYER: May we now have an account of the Souvenir publication Sunderam?

SUNDERAM: Well, I have collected 18900 rupees through advertisements and a balance of 2400 rupees still to come. Expenses of printing has come to Rs.7500 and the money had been paid into the orphanage account.

KAVERI: I wanted a few extra copies of the Souvenir and I was told none were available.

SUNDERAM: Since the objective was to make money, I did not see the point of printing too many copies.

KAVERI: But my sister contributed a poem and I wanted to distribute it among our friends. It is embarrassing for me to explain that though I have been the secretary of this organisation for seven long years, we are too stingy to print a few more copies.

SUNDERAM: Each contributor was given two copies. After all, it was not the complete works of Shakespeare!

V.P.IYER: I think there is a lot to be said on both sides. My own modest effort at literary composition was so abridged in the interests of economy as to be totally unrecognizable. So, instead of crying over spilt milk. Let us consider the future.

RAMAYYA: Yes, let us do that.

V.P.IYER: From all the activities so far, we have approximately 18000 rupees so far. Even if Kumaraswami is able to get all the tickets accounted for, it is doubtful if we will exceed a total of Rs.25000. On the other hand, our president has fixed a target of one lakh. The question is, what do we do?

KALYANI: We can't have another flag day.

SUNDERAM: We can't publish another souvenir.

KUMARASWAMI: And we certainly can't have another variety entertainment! One in a lifetime is more than enough.

KAVERI: I have a wonderful idea! Let us collect donations!

RAMAYYA: Business is bad just now.

RAJALAKSHMI: My conditional offer of Rs. 10000 is still open.

SUNDERAM: There is nothing sacrosanct about one lakh. We can start the orphanage with a smaller sum.

V.P.IYER: I think the time has come to report back to the president, the results of our efforts and take his advice and counsel.

RAMAYYA: Yes, let us do that.

ACT THREE

Scene one

(ONE MONTH LATER. MRS.VASANTHA ARUMUGAM, A SOPHISTICATED YOUNG WOMAN, HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE KAMALAPUR BRANCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEAGUE AND MR. SHETTY, THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE ARE CONVERSING, WAITING FOR THE OTHERS TO ARRIVE)

VASANTHA: The orphanage should have been ours by right! The mistake we made was in having our Annual General Meeting as a farewell to the departing collector. An official on transfer is no asset to anyone.

SHETTY: In social service as in life, a hearty welcome pays richer dividends than the fondest farewell.

VASANTHA: I can kick myself for my generosity. And I had to surrender those tins under the new collector's orders!

SHETTY: Did you see their variety entertainment?

VASANTHA: I wouldn't have missed it for anything! It would have been screamingly funny if it wasn't so pathetic! I invested a precious twenty five rupees of the League's money in order to attend it.

SHETTY: As the secretary of a sister organisation, they ought to have sent you a complimentary ticket, particularly after you lent your collection tins so magnanimously.

VASANTHA: You know I won't say anything about a sister organisation unless it is good. And oh boy! Is this good!

SHETTY: Oh?

VASANTHA: Sunderam with his silly antics, poor Kumaraswami running round all over the town for a commode without knowing what it was and the curtain coming down in the middle of Bhagirathi's singing! It was good enough for a London Music Hall! And Sunderam said of her singing that the river Bhagirathi was in spate!

SHETTY: You seem to have enjoyed yourself.

VASANTHA: And now I have to co-operate with people like Kaveri as a penance for such enjoyment I suppose. Her motto is, 'Do unto others before they do unto you'.

SHETTY: You should learn to get on with various types of people. That is the secret of success in any sphere of activity, particularly when you want to make use of other people's money.

VASANTHA: I don't know how they made Rao Sahib, the chairman of the committee. I believe he still doesn't know what an orphanage is. What can he possibly contribute?

SHETTY: Perhaps a few orphans.

VASANTHA: And that V.P. Iyer who does nothing but make pompous speeches! I am glad he doesn't often come to our meetings. He thinks that loud noises from the chest are important messages from the brain.

SHETTY: Don't underestimate V.P. He is a shrewd and clever lawyer who has got the Rao Sahib out of many a difficult situation. If you were ever accused of a serious crime and you were guilty, you should choose V.P. as your lawyer. So many murderers are walking the streets of Kamalapur as free men because V.P. happened to defend them.

(THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY HEADED BY V.P. IYER AND RAMAYYA WALK IN. VASANTHA AND SHETTY GREET THEM. BUT THE ATMOSPHERE IS CERTAINLY COOL)

V.P.IYER: What do you think about the international situation Mr. Shetty?

SHETTY: The climate seems to be in favour of co-existence between warring nations or shall I say organisations? Cooperation is very much in fashion.

KAVERI: For my part, I will go to any lengths to establish co-existence and non-violence. Even fight if necessary.

SUNDERAM: I suppose that is why we are all here, the tiger and the lamb drinking out of the same trough.

SHETTY: You can do so if you like. Personally, I prefer a cup.

SUNDERAM: Particularly if it is someone else's I suppose.

(A FEW MORE OF THE LEAGUE MEMBERS COME IN AND TAKE BACK SEATS AND SIT ON THE WOODEN CHAIRS AT THE BACK)

SUNDERAM: I knew it was a take-over, but I didn't realise it was an invasion as well.

VASANTHA: Only five of us are full members of the orphanage co-ordination committee with voting rights. The others have merely come as observers. This is permitted in most international organisations such as the UNESCO, UNIDO, UNICEF and of course, the I.S.L. You too could have brought some observers from the Society if you were aware of international conventions.

SUNDERAM: But we are only country bumpkins!

VASANTHA: Shall we begin the meeting V.P.?

V.P.IYER: Well, yes. As members of the orphanage committee are aware, it was decided at a joint meeting of both our organisations under the president ship of the collector Mr. Ayyappa that the orphanage committee should be reorganized to include members of the league and immediate steps should be taken to establish an orphanage. Mr. Shetty was appointed as joint chairman of the reorganized committee along with Mr. Ramayya. As vice-president of both organisations, I am happy at this union of hearts and marriage of minds in the cause of service.

SUNDERAM: You have conspired to get the Society in league with service.

V.P. IYER: No. As usual you have got it all wrong. It is the League which is in service with Society. As I was saying, this augers well for the cause of social service in our great city. Since Mr. Ramayya has been presiding over these meetings in the past, I shall now request Mr. Shetty to preside over this meeting as a sign of that unbreakable unity.

(HEAR! HEAR! FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE LEAGUE)

SHETTY: Thank you V.P. And thank you Rao Sahib for your generosity. First of all, I would like to congratulate the members of the Society for thinking of starting an orphanage and for making valient, if somewhat unsuccessful efforts at collecting money for the purpose. It is not their fault that the target was no where near fulfilled.....

SUNDERAM: Mr.Shetty, we have twenty five thousand rupees collected by the Society in the orphanage account. May I know how much the League is going to contribute?

VASANTHA: It is not merely a question of money. It is a matter of organisation, or expertise in the chosen field, of planning and execution. For example, you have not thought of a location, not prepared a tentative budget, not considered the rules of admission of children. And then, there are the problems of adoption. There is a great demand for adoption of orphans from childless couples, particularly in Europe and the United States and a number of legal problems involved in such adoptions. As an International organisation, we in the League take a Global view of the situation.....

SUNDERAM: In short, you contribute nothing!

SHETTY: It must be realised that the League is merely trying to help a sister organisation in distress. Let Mrs.Arumugam submit a statement which will reveal the contribution of the League to this project as well as the methodology of execution. A discussion after that may be more useful.

VASANTHA: The first step in planning a project of this nature is to match our plans to our resources.

SHETTY: Mrs. Arumugam, our competent and energetic secretary has devoted considerable time and thought to this subject. I would like her to present her major conclusions so that we might consider and approve them.

VASANTHA: With the resources we have at our disposal, no capital expenditure can be undertaken. At the same time, you are aware that our Government is keen on rural development. It is the 'in' thing now. Studies by voluntary workers of the League has revealed the little known fact that orphans are distributed exponentially and not at random. That means there may be more orphans in the villages than in the cities.

SUNDERAM: Rubbish! Your jargon doesn't fool anyone. There are no orphans in the villages. Some aunts or uncles are always ready to look after parentless children.

SHETTY: (SEVERELY) You may be a good journalist Mr. Sunderam, but I venture to suggest that your knowledge of social problems cannot be as deep as that of the teacher of the Kamalapur

school of Social work, of which I happen to be the chairman and Mrs. Arumugam, the honorary director.

SUNDERAM: It is not a matter of 'deep' knowledge; it is a matter of elementary common sense.

VASANTHA: As I was saying, ninety percent of our population live in the villages. It is our duty to improve their life through service and dedication. Further, if we have an orphanage in a village our expenses will be much lower.

V.P.IYER: You have killed two birds with one stone Mrs.Arumugam! It is a master-stroke of planning, if I may say so.

VASANTHA: As some of you – at least the members of the League - are aware, we have been doing a lot of social work in the village of Sirumudi. It is an ideal place for locating the orphanage. It is within easy reach of Kamalapur and the population is highly co-operative. It happens to be the ancestral home of our chairman Mr.Shetty which is a great advantage in that his prestige and influence would help the orphanage to have a good start. But more than all these things, Mr.Shetty has promised to place a nice and convenient house at our disposal for our use as an orphanage.

SHETTY: Of course, I shall have to charge a rent for the premises; otherwise, there will be all sorts of legal complications later on. I propose to charge a rent of one rupee per annum.

V.P.IYER: I shall match your generosity with one of my own. I shall draft the lease deed without any legal fees.

VASANTHA: Now I come to the resource personnel.

KAVERI: What or who is resource personnel?

SUNDERAM: People who run the show and share the loot.

VASANTHA: To engage a matron and Ayah from the city will be difficult and expensive. But we are arranging for the staff also from the village and Mr. Shetty has promised to help. The children will be brought up in a home atmosphere rather than be institutionalized.

V.P.IYER: The scheme has been thoughtfully planned, carefully conceived, and I have no doubt, will be thoroughly executed.

SUNDERAM: I think the whole scheme is an attempt – and I am sorry to say a successful attempt – to get hold of the money collected by the Society and waste it in the way the League wants. I am totally opposed to the whole thing and am walking out as a protest. (HE WALKS OUT)

SHETTY: After that exhibition of bad manners, I suppose there is nothing more to be said. May I take it that the scheme has your unanimous approval?

V.P.IYER: There is something more to be said Mr. Shetty. I should like to apologise on behalf of the short tempered member of the Society.

SHETTY: You are very generous V.P. I wish we all had your magnanimity both in forgiving him and in offering your apologies.

VASANTHA: I understand from the collector that the Governor is likely to visit our district next month and he has promised to include Sirumudi in his itinerary. I request that myself and my co-secretary..... er..... Mrs. Jayalakshmi may be authorized to make all arrangements to celebrate the occasion of the inauguration of the orphanage in a grand manner.

KALYANI: It seems to me that we are forgetting one important essential Mr. Chairman. The question of the orphans still remains. You will find it is not easy to get fifty orphans at short notice, particularly in the villages.

VASANTHA: I am fully aware that orphans are the raw material of which orphanages are made. And every effort is being made to locate and collect them.

KALYANI: May we know what efforts and with what results?

VASANTHA: Well, I am writing to various societies and service organisations to sponsor candidates. I am also preparing guidelines and norms for selection and admission so that there may be no legal complications later. I am sure V.P. will help me with all that.

V.P.IYER: I shall be delighted.

KALYANI: And how many orphans have you got so far?

VASANTHA: I must confess that in this particular area, people have not been very co-operative. The catholic nuns are running an orphanage, but they refused to divulge how and from where they got the babies. They even refused to lend us a few for the opening ceremony. The District Medical Officer was hardly more cooperative and raised all sorts of legal difficulties about guardians, registering the orphanage and so on. Even if we do all that, we may not get more than one or two per month.

KALYANI: So, what happens to your idea of starting an orphanage with fifty children?

VASANTHA: An orphanage, like Rome is not going to be built in a day. But I do have one piece of good news. A woman has just had twins whom she is unable to support. And the D.M.O. has said we can have them after completing the legal formalities. If only more people had twins our problem would be solved easily.

KALYANI: But don't you think that will conflict with your role as the secretary of the family planning association?

SHETTY: If the worst comes to the worst, we can always get some children of suitable age from the village itself on the day of the opening ceremony, so that it would look respectable.

KALYANI: And the twins won't be so lonely. And in the end, all your scientific jargon comes to this-borrowing babies for the occasion!

V.P.IYER: Surely, we cannot let His Excellency the Governor declares open an empty orphanage!

SHETTY: Quite! But there is one problem that I ought to mention and that is, the house in Sirumudi may need some repairs to make it suitable for an orphanage. Now, I have donated the house in my capacity as joint Chairman of this Committee. I wonder if the Rao Sahib would consider having it repaired in his capacity as the other Chairman. This will save considerable money and enable it to be used for running the orphanage when it gets going.

(EVERYONE LOOKS AT RAMAYYA)

RAMAYYA: Certainly, I will do it.

SHETTY: (SOMEWHAT SURPRISED) That is very generous of you Rao Sahib.

RAMAYYA: But only after it is irrevocably transferred to the orphanage committee.

SHETTY: Oh! Well, if there is no further business, we can conclude the meeting I think.

(PEOPLE BEGIN TO DISPERSE. ONLY RAMAYYA AND V.P. IYER ARE LEFT BEHIND)

V.P.IYER: That was a clever move on the part of Shetty to get you to repair his house.

RAMAYYA: He thinks I was born yesterday!

V.P.IYER: Shetty has scored one over Rao Sahib; he has managed to get the Governor to his village. But hasn't got his name in the Weekly Gong as you have done.

RAMAYYA: Here, read this. (HE HANDS OVER THE MAGAZINE)

V.P.IYER: (READS ALOUD)

'Our hero knew that if he was honoured by the British Government with a title, his position in Kamalapur Society would be assured. So he went to the collector of the district Mr. Slater and expressed his desire to help in the war effort in as humble a manner as possible. The next time the Governor of the state visited Kamalapur, a big reception was held and various donations announced. Mr. Karuppiah headed the list. And in the New Year honours list that followed soon after, he found himself as Khan Sahib Karuppiah.

'A number of functions were held and tea parties given in honour of the latest addition to the galaxy of title holders. Prominent citizens were invited to these functions and some at least among them discovered qualities of head and heart in our hero. This was soon followed by the membership of the Rotary Club, and such other organisations. When at last, the Kamalapur Club, that exclusive preserve of the British ruling class was 'Indianised' after independence, the Khan Sahib was admitted to its sanctum. He had at last arrived.'

Not bad Rao Sahib, it is almost complimentary. Don't you agree that I have had some effect on the editor?

RAMAYYA: I suppose so. But when will it stop altogether?

V.P.IYER: It is all settled. There will be only one more instalment.

RAMAYYA: Why one more?

V.P.IYER: The editor says that you cannot suspend a literary biography in mid-air. He has to round it off somehow.

RAMAYYA: I hope the last one won't be the worst.

V.P.IYER: Oh, no, it is purely for the purpose of satisfying his readers.

RAMAYYA: It is strange. The idea of the orphanage was first suggested on the day of the first instalment. And I suppose the last instalment will appear on the day it is declared open.

Scene Two

(THE SAME ROOM THREE MONTHS LATER. THE NEW COLLECTOR MR. KUMAR HAS CALLED FOR A COMBINED MEETING OF ALL SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANISATIONS. SINCE IT IS A LARGE MEETING, THE AUDIENCE SHOULD BE TREATED AS PART OF THE MEETING. BUT ALL CHARACTERS SHOULD BE ON THE STAGE. AS THE CURTAIN RISES, RAMAYYA, V.P. IYER AND SUNDERAM ARE ON THE STAGE)

V.P.IYER: Ah, Sunderam, what about that matter?

SUNDERAM: It is all settled. The last instalment will appear today. It should be in your hands tomorrow. It is what one might call a happy ending.

V.P.IYER: To a sordid episode.

SUNDERAM: Anyhow, Shetty is cleverer than any of you. He has had his house in the village repaired at our expense and has had the honour of getting the governor there also.

V.P.IYER: He has merely reversed the Rotary motto. It is what is known as self before service.

SUNDERAM: Any how, that was a nice speech you made at the opening ceremony V.P.

V.P.IYER: Thank you my dear chap. I didn't know you appreciated classical English.

SUNDERAM: That quotation you gave with reference to our social workers,

'Water-lily springs from mud,
From cow-dung sprouts the lotus bud',

I thought it was most appropriate. What I wanted to know was, who is the water-lily and who is the lotus bud among our ladies.

V.P.IYER: You should not take literary allusions too literally. As a matter of fact, I was thinking more of the mud and the cow dung.

SUNDERAM: That is even batter.

V.P.IYER: You see, we all of us feel that our efforts at serving our fellow men have been fully consummated by the establishment of the orphanage.

SUNDERAM: Even when it has been done by somewhat questionable means?

V.P.IYER: As a lawyer, I am not concerned with ethics, only with law. And nothing illegal has been done; no law has been broken. And ends always justify the means.

SUNDERAM: Well, all I can say is Vasantha's ends certainly do not justify her jeans!

V.P.IYER: My dear Sunderam! A discussion of female anatomy is totally unwarranted in the present circumstances. It is not on the agenda!

(KALYANI COMES IN)

KALYANI: I must say those twins are very lucky.

SUNDERAM: What twins?

KALYANI: You know the twins we got for the orphanage. They might have been born as orphans, but they now seem to have silver spoons in their mouths.

SUNDERAM: How is the orphanage?

KALYANI: I was there last month. But there are only the twins, no other children.

(SHETTY AND VASANTHA COMES IN)

RAMAYYA: Have you transferred your house to the orphanage committee yet, Mr. Shetty? Because you wanted me to repair it. Well, I am waiting.

SHETTY: (EMBARRASSED) There seems to be some technical hitch Rao Sahib, about the transfer.

RAMAYYA: (SMILING) Well, don't say I didn't offer. But I understand you have already had it done with the funds of the Society.

SHETTY: Just to get it ready for the function you know.

(KAVERI, JAYALAKSHMI AND KUMARASWAMI AND A FEW OTHERS COME IN)

KAVERI: What is the new collector like?

SUNDERAM: He is a dark horse. Comes straight from the secretariat.

KAVERI: But why has he called this meeting? What is the point of calling us all together? What has family planning or orphanages got to do with S.P.C.A. or Prisoners Aid Society? If he is any good, he should wait for us to call on him and arrange meetings at our convenience.

SUNDERAM: I agree. It is like calling for a peace conference when the war is not yet over. Many are not even on communicating terms with each other and by the time this meeting is over, more will be so, I should think.

SHETTY: Give credit where it is due. The new collector is making a valient effort at bringing people together.

SUNDERAM: He can take a horse to water, but even a collector can't make it drink.

KALYANI: We ought to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

KAVERI: In all my years as a social worker, this is most unusual. No papers, no reports, no agenda. What are we going to discuss?

JAYALAKSHMI: No one seems to know.

KALYANI: No one except V.P. perhaps.

VASANTHA: Yes, he has had two meetings with Mr. Kumar, and this afternoon he has that special grin that indicates knowledge that has been denied to us.

(THE COLLECTOR MR.KUMAR PRESIDENT OF ALL THE ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED THERE ARRIVES. V.P.RECEIVES HIM AND THEY ARE BOTH SEATED IN THE CENTRE)

V.P.IYER: "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a red letter day in the history of social service in Kamalapur. For the first time in our history, all service organisations have been brought under one umbrella so to speak. People moving in different directions have been made to move in a single direction. People who have been crossing each others' paths for years - I might even say in a lighter vein, crossing swords - have now to go on parallel lines that will never meet. The credit for inspiring this unique feat goes to our dynamic new collector. I stand before you to welcome him on behalf of all the organisations present here and offer him our enthusiastic cooperation and request him to address us."

KUMAR: I haven't reputation for oratory and flowery language like Mr.V.P.Iyer. I am used to plain speaking. Therefore, I will be brief and to the point in what I have to say (PAUSES) During the last few days I have been going round and inspecting various activities that have been undertaken to improve the condition of people in this area. I deliberately did not want any one of you to accompany me because; I did not want a stage-managed show. I regret to say that many of these activities seem to exist on paper only. To give an example, I visited a so-called orphanage in the village of Sirumudi. There were only two orphans there. But for the fact they happened to be twins, there would have been only one. It was run by an illiterate woman who should never have been entrusted with new born babies. Perhaps, the only good thing from the point of view of the village was that a number of relations of the so-called 'matron' were being fed there every day. Though we have an impressive looking orphanage committee, it is surprising that not a single member – not even the secretaries have paid a visit to the institution under their care since it was established.

KALYANI: I did visit them last month.

KUMAR: So I was told Miss Kalyani. It is a pity the other members did not have your sense of responsibility. Next, I come to the family planning Association. This is one of the major objectives of Government policy. Yet, I find that this association can be identified by only its impressive letterhead and by nothing else. (HE PAUSES. PEOPLE LOOK AT KAVERI AND VASANTHA) Now, I come to what may be called the operative part of my speech. I would suggest that the family planning association should be reorganized so that it becomes an active and progressive force for the implementation of Government policies. The present secretary Mrs. Arumugam is perhaps too busy with her other activities to devote much time for this. I therefore propose that we appoint Miss. Kalyani as secretary. I myself, as president will take considerable interest in its work. There will be two vice-presidents, Mr.V.P.Iyer and Mr. Ramayya to represent the business interests. Every association here will nominate one member to the committee so that it will obviate elections.

SUNDERAM: Including the S.P.C.A.?

KUMAR: (IGNORING HIS REMARKS) In order to provide some immediate funds for the association and to prevent further waste of money, I have decided that the orphanage committee should be wound up and the funds standing in its name may be allocated for family planning. In fact, I have already taken the liberty of closing the orphanage at Sirumudi and transferred the twins to the Guild of Service orphanage at Kamalapur. Now are there any questions?

SUNDERAM: Sir, in the past, most of these organisations have been functioning in a democratic manner. If the orphanage is to be closed and its funds diverted, should not the orphanage committee be consulted?

KUMAR: If the orphanage committee were so serious about their responsibilities, should they not have run it better and with more orphans instead of feeding Mr. Shetty's farm workers? I understand that even the Governor, when he declared it open suggested that a family planning clinic would have been more useful.

SHETTY: Sir.....

KUMAR: If there are no more questions, I shall take it that my actions have your approval. I shall take up the reorganization of other areas of work at our next meeting.

V.P.IYER: It now remains for me to propose a vote of thanks to our new, dynamic and..... er..... popular collector for his interest in our work, for the enthusiasm he has generated in us and the speedy manner in which he cut through the trappings of procedural red tape in order to achieve our purpose. It may be that some of you feel he has been unduly harsh in closing the orphanage so recently opened with so much fan fare and trumpets. If so, we are all at fault for allowing it to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Therefore I say, I come to bury the orphanage not to praise it. But unlike Mark Antony, I make bold to claim that the good that men do survives after the death of institutions. So let it be with the orphanage. We honour those who started it, honour for their vision, our thanks for their effort; but our tears for what is inevitable. (HE PAUSES AND KUMAR LOOKS AT HIS WATCH) Therefore I say, the new collector has brought to his work dedication, determination and.....

SUNDERAM: Dictatorship!

V.P.IYER: And delicacy to the task of reorganizing social service in Kamalapur. From now on, family planning is to be our objective, the inverted triangle our symbol and our flag! In the future, we shall give up going round in circles or trying to fit round pegs in square holes and instead, concentrate only on the three sided figure. On behalf of all of us present here, I can assure Mr. Kumar that we will advocate family planning on every conceivable occasion and propagate it from every possible platform.....

KUMAR: Thank you Mr. Iyer. I declare the meetings closed. (HE WALKS OUT. OTHERS START TALKING ANIMATEDLY)

KALYANI: That was a breath of fresh air!

VASANTHA: More like a gale I should say. What does he expect us to do? Drop all our own interests and do his donkey work?

KAVERI: I hate to think what he will do at the next meeting. I must ensure the hospital day is organized regularly. Have any of you any magazines to distribute to the patients?

SUNDERAM: I will give you a bound volume of the Weekly Gong. The Khan Sahib story should be of interest to all the patients.

SHETTY: I will have to speak to the minister to see if this gentleman can be transferred back to the secretariat.

(THEY ALL DISPERSE. ONLY THE RAO SAHIB, SUNDERAM AND V.P. IYER ARE LEFT BEHIND)

V.P.IYER: Alright Sunderam. Stop playing the fool. What about this last instalment?

SUNDERAM: The Khan Sahib was born on the day the orphanage was conceived in this room, if you remember. Well, I regret to say that he passed away along with the orphanage in the early hours of this morning. This is what the last instalment says.

(HE READS FROM A COPY HIS BRIEF CASE)

Khan Sahib Karuppiah

A Sad and Sudden End

‘We regret to record the sad and sudden death last night in a motor car accident of Khan Sahib Karuppiah. As readers are aware, his biography has been appearing as a serial in these columns. At a condolence meeting held this morning many people, including Mr.V.P.Iyer, the eminent lawyer, paid tributes to the sterling qualities of the Khan Sahib.

The Khan Sahib was a self-made man of humble beginnings who had risen to a position of prominence through hard work and enterprise. He was a philanthropist who supported many charities and was well known in the social circles of the town. It is reported that the Khan Sahib had learnt to drive only recently. This had been necessitated because his previous driver and confidante whom he had sacked for insubordination evidently tried to blackmail his erstwhile employer over certain pardonable indiscretions in his life. While the Khan Sahib successfully overcame this problem, he decided not to place himself in such a position in future as to be threatened by a mere driver. But unfortunately, he took the road a little too early and pressed the accelerator instead of the brake with fatal consequences.’

V.P.IYER: After that, I suppose there is nothing more to be said.

SUNDERAM: Except ‘Amen’.