

P. V. Narasimha Rao's *Golla Ramavva*¹

Translated by
Dr. K. Purushotham
kpku61@gmail.com

The shootout in the dead of the night disturbed the tranquil ambience of the village. The bizarre and sensational waves of sound, fused in vacuum, penetrated into the darkness. The entire village, which was in stupor, got reverberated. The children and the grown up alike screamed. No one in one's drowsiness could ever understand what exactly had happened. There was an unknown anxiety, revulsion and a strange fear. But, everything was hazy. A great tumult was caused as though all the villagers were awake having undergone a shocking nightmare.

Due to the commotion, the streets wore a deserted look. Those, who wanted to open the doors and peep out, felt a paralytic effect in their hands. The only sounds they heard were chirping of the birds, fluttering of wings, barking of dogs, sounds of hoofs, chewing the cud, that's all. But, the villagers, though wanted to yell, couldn't even murmur as though a divine wisdom had dawned on them. No one had ever slept again in that fateful night. There were whispers, gestures, helpless gazes, inaudible prayers. The mothers became protective shields to their kids. They patted themselves and their kids, and used other practices of warding off fear. It was a strange calamity, a deadly dance of death, an unknown disaster.

~ ~ ~

It had been an hour. Darkness enveloped the village as usual. The sound of the crickets was piercing the ears in unison. Everything else being as usual though, no one could ever sleep again in the village that night. Golla Ramavva was sitting in darkness, trembling

¹ 'Golla' is a sheep rearing caste; names of lower castes are often used instead of surnames.

because of age and fear. A girl, aged fifteen, comforting in Ramavva's lap, asked, 'Avva, what was that sound?'

'Why do you want to know, you bitch? Why do you ask endless questions! You want to know everything.'

The girl had never risked asking again! But, after a while Ramavva started to mumble to herself, 'What do you know girl, the worst days are back again! I don't know how you are going to live in future. The *Turakas*,² Mislms are hellish. A few days ago they shot dead four people. They might have killed someone again, don't know what's going to happen.'

There was again silence. Both Ramavva and Mallamma lost themselves in thoughts. They were totally shorn of sleep. Ramavva in her seventies and Mallamma, who had recently come off age, had to spend their sleepless night.

Someone suddenly knocked the window, which was but a hole with moth-eaten shutters meant for ventilation. That was the window of their hut. They were startled. Without moving an inch, with bated breath, they were curious to know whether it was the wind or a cat that flapped the shutter. They heard the sound again, but this time they were sure someone was knocking the door. Scared, they were not sure what to do. There was a knock once again, rather strongly. As Ramavva started to get up, Mallamma grew fearful. 'I am frightened, *avva*,' the girl murmured.

'Just wait, let me find out if someone is out there,' Ramavva got up decisively. She could walk up to the window in habitual darkness. Opening the latch, 'Who are you?' she asked.

Even before she completed her question, someone passed through the narrow window, and closed the shutters. Ramavva was dumbfounded; at the other corner, Mallamma closed her eyes as though waiting to be stabbed. Nothing was visible in the darkness.

² Turakas, a Telugu word meaning Muslims, originated from Turks

Ramavva was reminded of the earlier incident. She thought it could be either a police or a *rajakar*.³ She thought her granddaughter, whom she had brought up and married off, would invariably be raped. Even by screaming, could she alert the neighbors? No! Who is not fond of one's own life? They too have grown up girls? No one questioned the *razakars* when they had raped a girl the other day. Who'll come to her rescue now?

Recalling the incident, Ramavva could visualize what was going to happen to her granddaughter. She had resolved to protect Mallamma from being raped. Did she rear her to be raped? She remained standing straight like a pole, seeming as though paralyzed.

He was about two yards away from Ramavva. He walked a couple of steps straight towards her even in darkness. She felt as though the sky had fallen on her. In another step, her life would come to an end. With great difficulty, Ramavva could say 'Ayya.'

Again he shut her mouth. She had prayed all the gods to protect Mallamma. Meanwhile he whispered, 'Don't shout. I'm not a thief, not a *rajakar*, not a police. I won't harm you. But don't shout.'

'Wah, what a trickster! He is pleasing us with syrupy words only to rape the poor girl! Wah! These demons can do anything! Yes. First they always speak pleasing. If it doesn't work, they adopt other methods. That's the sequence, isn't it?,' she thought to herself.

To be safe, Ramavva fell on his feet, 'I'm like your servant! You can behead me if you like, but don't harm the girl. Treat her as your sister, I pray you!'

'Why don't you believe me avva, I'm not such a person. I'm one of you people, a Telugu man,' he said.

He was speaking chaste Telugu. Ramavva had never heard any *Turaka* speak chaste Telugu; they would speak broken Telugu. She started to think seriously. For a moment, she

³ The *Razakars* were a private [militia](#) organized by [Qasim Razvi](#) to support the rule of [Nizam Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII](#) to resist the integration of [Hyderabad State](#) into the [Dominion of India](#)

felt secure. This is like a miracle! This idea gave her strength and support. Though a stranger, though suspicious, she decided to believe him. It was not conviction, but a freedom from conviction. It was the only weapon of idea struck in times of exigency. How could she afford to miss it?

Ramavva, who fell on his feet, slowly got up fondling his knees, waist, chest, shoulders and face. He was wearing shorts, but no shirt. His body was wedged with caltrops, thorns, and stuck with blades of sedge, grass, bulrush. She felt these while fondling him as though her palms were viewing with eyes. His skin was full of bruises. Her palms felt the wetness of bleeding. There were traces of desiccated blood. His body was hot with fever, face full of sweat. Gasping for breath, the young man was moaning. Ramavva felt, he was a refugee suddenly stumbled upon in exigency.

She got disturbed. There was a perceivable change in her attitude. Ramavva, who had prayed him to spare her granddaughter, was now saying, ‘What’s this? What made you become like this? Tell me, my son.’

‘Avva, it’s a big story. First of all, let me hide somewhere. I’ll go away after some time,’ said the stranger.

‘Oh! You’ll go away? Certainly you’ll go, why not? In this condition, you’ll go straight to the heaven!’

He had not uttered a word. Ramavva called out, ‘Oh Mallamma, do you hear me, you bitch! Go and light the lamp, quick. Are you asleep, you, useless girl!’

The young man said, ‘Please don’t light the lamp. The police are searching for me, they’ll catch hold of me.’

‘Enough don’t speak. Even before the police takes you away, it appears the goddess of death will take you away,’ reprimanded Ramavva.

Mallamma lit the lamp. Ramavva spread a country blanket on the floor. She looked at him; he was thin and slim. He seemed eighteen with tender moustache, gentle. His body was flexible like vine. His face was tender. Ramavva grew wonder struck.

‘You look like an emperor, my son! Why are you in trouble now? Lie down on that blanket. Why do you look shocked? Mallamma, you bitch, go and boil some water. Come on, be quick. Come here, bring the lamp. Place the cot between the lamp and the door. Place the blanket on the cot, have you? Yes, exactly the same way. Cover the lamp with something allowing a little light on him. The rest of the hut must all be dark. That’s how it should be, yes, exactly the same way. There’s a spark in you, girl! Now, yes sit beside him. Remove the thorns off his body. O my goodness, feeling shy of touching him? Hell with your shyness. Alas! He’s lying like a corpse! Don’t you pity him, you daughter of a bitch? Hmm, that’s it, let him not feel pain!’ Ramavva interspersed scolding with instructions.

Mallamma executed Ramavva’s commands swiftly. While the young man was in a semi-conscious state, Mallamma was removing thorns one by one. He felt as though he was in a new universe. Ramavva started again. ‘Have you removed all the thorns, you girl? You are working hard you, girl. You’ll go to heaven. Okay, balm his wounds with a cloth dipped in hot water. Wipe off the blood stains!’

Within moments, Mallamma’s nursing relieved him of pains. Meantime Ramavva brought him something to eat. She murmured, ‘Get up, my son. I got *gatuka*, maize, for you. Did you ever taste *gatuka*, my dear? Can you ever imagine how tastefully I cook? Are you scared of polluting your caste by eating my food? Whether you are a Brahmin or anybody, save your life, first. Eat.’

The young man got up and sat. He smiled at Ramavva. He savored it like anything. Ramavva’s words proved right in word and spirit. He could regain strength. His face

blossomed with sparkle in his eyes. Ramavva was satisfied. While fondling him with affection, she found a hard object in his pocket. Taking it out, she asked, ‘What’s this?’

‘It’s a revolver, avva!’ said he.

‘Why do you need it, my son? Did you want to kill us?’ asked Ramavva.

‘No, my mother, it’s for killing your killers, I’ve killed two policemen tonight. The same police who had earlier killed four of your villagers.’

Ramavva’s face changed beyond description. Initially, a bit of fear, later slight guts, and then a sense of enthusiasm, and subsequently, pleasure of triumph—clearly noticeable on her face.

He was keenly observing her face. He regretted for having revealed it to her. What’s she going to say? He felt he would be shown the door, since he thought, ‘Who will allow shelter to someone who killed policemen?’

After a while, Ramavva started to speak, ‘Only two? But, why have you left out the rest of the two, my son! You’ve done only half the work.’

The young man fumbled and got amazed. He buoyed in the fictional sky of pride. ‘Give back the revolver, my mother, I’ll kill the rest of the two,’ he said.

Seizing back the revolver, Ramavva said, ‘Enough, whatever you’ve done is enough. Reckless boy! Why do you want to antagonize police, you nasty chap?’

The young man said, ‘I am a volunteer of the State Congress, which is fighting the Nizam,’ he sounded like making a speech on politics.

But, Ramavva intervened, ‘But where is fighting? The people in the villages are themselves playing host to those Turaka policemen. What do the poor get in the fight?’

‘The Congress struggle is by the poor alone, my mother,’ said the young man.

‘Whether you belong to Congress, or other party, why should young people like you fight?’

The elders live in the city discussing with the King. They provide the leadership.’

‘Hey, I can’t understand all that. The elders while away the time in negotiations, while the young ones are instigated against the police! The young ones carry guns on the shoulders only to turn their wives widows!’ Ramavva said in a vexed tone. She asked him to sleep.

‘You, Mallamma! Let’s both stay put sentries to him till morning. If at all you doze off, look I will bang you, hmm,’ she alerted Mallamma.

~ ~ ~

It was getting late for milking the buffaloes. The tethered buffaloes were longing for their calves; the calves were wailing. The regular life chores of the village had at once come to a standstill. It looked as though the deafening silence reigned in the village since time immemorial.

Both Ramavva and Mallamma were keeping sentry. The young man was fast asleep. The villagers were so scared that even a sound of pin-drop would scare them; there was no sound of pin-drop anyway. The young man, responsible for the dreadful incident of the night, alone was sleeping and nobody else. What for, for whose sake, why? Everyone knew it all. It was an old story, anyway.

Ramavva was thinking of the four innocent people, who were shot dead earlier, but, it’s the turn of the now. No wonder if the police set the village on fire. It would be better if all the villagers were killed at once than the police entering houses, killing and raping, and the neighbors not protesting. If it continues, everyone in the village would fall victims. It’s better either to live or to die than to die the death of a dog! Ramavva groaned while fondling

the young man's head, 'Oh, what a boy! One doesn't know how many people will have to die like this one.'

Suddenly she heard the sound of a vehicle, then the marching sound of shoes all around the house. She heard scolding and abuses, the sounds of whip in between. Someone was uttering, 'O, don't kill me, I don't know, I'm like your servant, please beat me not.' The screams were heard unto the sky. People were being dragged into the streets. The village, which was like a cemetery a while ago, resembled *Yamaloka*, hell.

Mallamma shivered out of fear. The young man had at once woken up. The village, which was in stupor, got startled. The young man took out his revolver, and loaded it. Ramavva's condition was indescribable. It was neither fear nor anguish; not sorrow at all. As she heard the screams outside, she grew more emotional. The young man got up quickly, and walked swiftly near the door. When he was about to unlatch the door, Ramavva stopped him asking, 'Where do you want to go?'

The young man fumbled. The man who can live amidst bullets, the hero who is capable of tackling even the demons, the courageous lion that defies even a catastrophe, had now dithered when the old lady in her seventies questioned him. His heart quivered, but, setting his throat right, he said, 'What do you mean, my dear mother?'

He continued, 'The matter has to be settled forever here and now. When the innocent people are being thrashed, should I hide myself? How long can I do so? Moreover, you may have to suffer because of me, let me go out, avva!'

Ramavva did not utter a word. She pulled him back; he followed her silently. The din outside increased. The sounds of the shoes were approaching the hut. Someone at a neighbor's house was heard asking, '*Ramidhan girnee ki gudsee yahee hai*,' (Is this the hut of Ramidhan's flour mill?).

The young man tried once again to go out. But, Ramavva pulled him back, snatched the revolver from him, put out the lamp. She called out Mallamma, ‘Hey girl, bring a *dhoti* and bed sheet. Hey, boy, cover the bed sheet over you. Quick, what happened? Why are you taking so long? Mallamma, give him your bangles. The fellow is thin and slim; your bangles will suit him on his arms. Hmm, that’s it. Hey girl, hide this fellow’s trousers. *Haa*, now you look like a shepherd boy? You must speak exactly like a golla man.

‘Okay,’ said the young man.

Since he was used to this practice, the boy could sport the get up of a golla man with ease. When he was ready to escape, suddenly there was a knock on the door banging repeatedly, ‘*Darwajaki khol!*’ (open the door), someone yelled from outside.

The sounds of shoes were heard to be taking position around the house. What then? There’s no chance of escaping now. The young man wanted to take back his revolver, but had no courage to snatch it from Ramavva. Ramavva whispered, ‘Mallamma, set the cot in the corner, and spread the country blanket on it. My boy, go and sleep on it, quick.’

The young man didn’t know what to do. He felt he was destined to be caught. He was not sure sleeping on the cot would save him. Having no other go, he slept on the cot. Again, they banged the doors, ‘Do you open the door or not? Open quickly. *Haramjadee!* We’ll peel off your skin! Open the door! Otherwise we’ll break the doors open.’

She yawned as though she had just woken up, made sounds of stretching her body to suggest that she had just woken up. Ramavva began to mutter, ‘Who is there, you, fellows/ you are banging the door in the dead of the night, wretched bastards!’

‘We’re police, here,’ voice came from outside. But, Ramavva didn’t seem bothered to listen to them. She murmured, ‘Hell with the times, day in and day out, they have been vexing us,’ and asked the girl in hushed voice, ‘Hey girl, set the cot right.’

She addressed the men outside, ‘Do you want to rob me? What’s there to be robbed of this old widow? Rob the rich. Why do you bother me? You seem to break the door. Why don’t you wait?’

‘Mallamma, go, and lie down beside him, without a word of resistance. Quick, do it as I say,’ she whispered to her.

‘Now, break the doors, ho, you fellows. If you’ve no patience to wait till I open the door, break them open, enter the house; you can take away the jewels from this hut.’

She directed the boy, ‘You chap, move close to her and lay your hand on her. Let them not suspect you.’

‘I’m so weak I can’t do anything, this bitch, Mallamma is not yet awake, O Mallamma, O Mallamma! No use, they can’t get up, and I can’t locate the lamp in the dead of the night,’ she intended to be heard by the men outside. She continued, ‘When there’s so much of bustle in the street, they’re snoring, what do I do with this unruly daughter of a bitch? My son and daughter-in-law died leaving Mallamma to my fate. If beaten, she shouts, and if not she can never fall in line,’ Ramavva cried.

People, who gathered outside, spoke variedly. While one suggested to spare her, another accused her of being smart. However they decided that the hut had to be raided. The murmuring was still going on. Ramavva said, ‘Wait, I am opening the door.’

‘*Thoddevo re darwaja* (break open the door),’ when the restless police waiting outside commanded, Ramavva unlatched the door. Two policemen suddenly fell one over the other as they surged forward when she had opened the doors. Ramavva screamed aloud. When they got up, she pretended to have fallen down, and started wailing, ‘May you become dumb! Go and search the house yourselves, my grandchildren are sleeping in the cot. I’m here in front of you, there you have the earthen pots, platters and tumblers, *tali* around the girl’s

neck, armlets on the boy. Take away whatever you want to, kill us, if you like to; you can kill me, kill him; shoot at her even before she is widowed. Kill both of them at once. Take away whatever you want to.'

Mallamma looked around rubbing her eyes. The young man too got up, and sat on the cot yawning lazily. The policemen looked at them. Ramavva continued, 'What more do you want to do? Why don't you kill me with guns, how long do I live anyway?'

Pointing at the young man, the police asked, 'Who's he? Is he a Congress man.'

Ramavva shouted, 'you are asking, who he is? We're not prostitutes to allow somebody to sleep with our women. If we ask the same question, how do you feel? Why do you insult us with such questions? Why don't you kill us all at once? I've never heard any one speak like you. You have insulted me today; I must hang myself in shame. Ask everyone in the village; you may find out if he is my granddaughter's husband or not. But, why do you insult us? We are not *that* kind of people, my lord! Can an outsider escape from my hut? Don't I hand him over to you? Ask anyone about me!'

The police got surprised at the change in her: aggressive in the beginning, appeasing now. The police was clueless about what to do.

'Go away, my lord, there's no one over here. I'll behead myself if what I told is a lie. I'll not run away, I live in this village forever. You can crosscheck my word with anyone.'

The police got up, and said, '*Acha*, I'll come back after conducting *panchanama*, postmortem of the dead police. Let me trust you. You should be here, or else I'll shoot you, understand?'

The head police started to go. Ramavva sat on the cot with the young man sitting on one side and Mallamma on the other side. The young man said, 'Avva, you're not an ordinary woman, you are *Bharatmata!* (Mother India)' said the young man.'

‘You, young boy, are you giving me a sobriquet? I’m Golla Ramavva, that’s all. Now get going. I’ll take Mallamma to her in-laws’ place. The sun is rising; *mmm*, get lost.’

The young man had already learnt that the command of Ramavva was irrevocable.

~ ~ ~

About author: The short story *Golla Ramavva* was written in Telugu by **P V Narasimha Rao**, the 9th Prime Minister of India. It was published in 1949. (Ref: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._V._Narasimha_Rao)

About translator: Dr. K. Purushotham is a professor of English and currently serving as the Registrar of Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana. He has ten books, a good number of publications and translations to his credit. *The Oxford India Anthology of Telugu Dalit Writing* (authored and co-ed), OUP: New Delhi (2016) and *Interrogating the Canon: Literature and Pedagogy of Dalits*. Kalpaz: New Delhi (2015) are his recent publications. (Ref:http://www.kuwarangal.net/web/resume/faculty/44_Purushotham_K._Profile.pdf)
