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RANGA'S MARRIAGE

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About the Author:

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar: He was born on 6th June, 1891 at Hongenahalli, a town in the district of Kolar in Karnataka. His nickname Masti was derived from the name of the village where he spent most of his childhood. His first notable work, writing under the pen name of Srinivasa, was a collection of short stories titled *Kelavu Sanna Kategalu*. The themes of his writings include social, philosophical, and aesthetic themes. He held the prominent and prestigious position of the editor of the monthly journal Jivan between 1944 and 1965. He was a prolific writer having written about 120 books in the Kannada language and 17 in the English language. He was awarded the Jnanpith award in the year 1983 for the novel *Chikkavira Rajendra*. He passed away at the age of 95 in the year 1986. An award in his name titled “Masti Venkatesha Iyengar Award” had been given since 1993 to well-known writers of Karnataka.

Word Meanings:

Rare: Not common;

Breed: a particular type or kind;

Cartographer: a person who draws or makes maps;

Flea-pestered: annoyed or disturbed by fleas;

Rambling: speech or writing that continues for a long time without saying much and seems very confused;

Accountant: a person whose job is to check or keep financial accounts;

Muttering: complaints that one expresses privately rather than openly;

Commodity: a thing that is useful or has a useful quality;

Considerate: thinking of other people’s wishes and feelings;

Troupe: a group of performers who work together;

Bachelor: a man who has not married;

Chatting: talking in a friendly, informal way to somebody;

Threshold: the floor or ground at the bottom of a doorway, considered as the entrance to a building or room;

Curious: having a strong desire to know about something;

Glanced: to look at something or somebody quickly;

Embarrassed: feel shy, awkward or ashamed;

Shrivelled: to become dry or contracted in size;

Paraphernalia: a number of objects or possessions necessary for a particular activity;

Moss: a very small green or yellow plant without flowers that spreads over damp surfaces, rocks, trees etc.;

Suspicion: a feeling that something wrong or dishonest has been done even though there is no proof ;

Marvellous: extremely good or wonderful.

Summary of the Story:

The story primarily concerns itself with the marriage of Ranganathan or Ranga, the accountant's son of the village of Hosahalli, with Rama Rao's niece Ratna and the role that the narrator, Shyama, plays in bringing about the alliance. At the same time, it also throws light into the role of English as a language in a traditional Indian society and the prevalent concept of arranged marriages that define the way in which our society functions.

The actual story begins with Ranga returning to his village after staying for sometime at Bangalore. However, the narrator does not begin with Ranga's return. Rather the narration starts with a detailed description of the village of Hosahalli with its mango trees, creepers, and pond. There is also contemplation on the English language and how the language has become popular over a period of ten years. There were very few people earlier who could speak English and most of them spoke Kannada without intermingling the two languages in daily usage. Also, very few people then in the village could think of an English education for

their children and therefore Ranga's father, the village accountant, was the first in this regard. He sent Ranga to Bangalore to study and thus his return home was a big event for the villagers since they wanted to ascertain for themselves if any change has come over him. The crowd scattered after confirming that Ranga has not changed during his stay at Bangalore. The narrator in familiarizing himself with Ranga tries to ask him about his ideas regarding marriage. Ranga's concepts in this matter are quite advanced and educated and thereby he rejects the idea of an arranged marriage by proclaiming that he would rather remain a bachelor than make a wrong choice. Shyama, the narrator, is distressed that such a good and eligible boy like Ranga does not want to consider about marriage. He therefore makes a plan to get him married as early as possible.

Shyama has selected Ratna who has come to live in the village with her uncle Rama Rao after the death of her parents. He carefully plans so that Ranga meets Ratna while she is singing a melodious song. Ranga is mesmerized by her voice and is immediately enchanted by her voice. However, Shyama instead of encouraging him dissuades any engagement with her by saying that she is already married. While Ranga is immensely discouraged by such words, Shyama furthers his plan by including the local astrologer Shastri in his plan. He brings Ranga to meet Shastri who tells him that the cause of his worry is a girl and that there is every chance of a match if the matter is pursued further. These words of Shastri encourages Ranga and Shyama, playing the matchmaker, tells him that the earlier news that Ratna is married is a false one. They are eventually married and Ranga names his son Shyama after the narrator who has helped him in marrying Ratna.

Textual Question and Answers:

1. Comment on the influence of English - the language and the way of life - on Indian life as reflected in the story. What is the narrator's attitude to English?

Answer: At the time when the story "Ranga's Marriage" takes place, the people of the village of Hosahalli are not very well versed in the English language. They speak mostly in Kannada and there is hardly any intermixing of English and Kannada in their daily usage. The time has changed now and very often people who have some idea of English language mix up the two languages in their conversation. The narrator relates an amusing incident where an old woman could not understand the meaning of the word 'change' when she comes to sell firewood at Rama Rao's house. His son while trying to pay her the amount of four pice for

the firewood says that he does not have change and asks her to come the next day. The old woman has no idea what he means by change and goes away muttering to herself. This shows the effect of the language on the daily life of the people. When the village accountant sends his son Ranga to study at Bangalore, the general perception is that English language or the English way of life changes a person completely. Ranga's return home is therefore a big event for everybody in the village since they feel certain that he has changed entirely in his manners and way of life. Ranga however has not changed during his stay at Bangalore as is evident from his still wearing the sacred thread and the way he offers his 'namaskars' to his elders. On the other hand, there has been a change in his mindset which is reflected in his mature views regarding marriage.

The narrator disapproves of the use of English language while using the native language Kannada. At the same time, he is also critical of Ranga's thinking which he feels has developed from his English education. He not only considers the usage of English as disgraceful but also feels that it causes unnecessary problems for those who do not understand it.

2. Astrologer's perceptions are based more on hearsay and conjecture than what they learn from the study of the stars. Comment with reference to the story.

Answer: The narrator through the story throws light on the fact that astrology bases itself more on information already available than on actual predictions. The narrator, Shyama, has already tutored the astrologer, Shastri, on what to say to Ranga once he comes there. Shastri repeats those very words but he uses his professional skill and theatrical power to lend an aura of mystery to his prediction. He therefore says that Ranga's problem is associated with a girl and the girl's name is related to something found in the sea. The paraphernalia like the two sheets of paper, some cowries, and a book of palmyra leaves that Shastri brings out is only to add to the atmosphere of mystery and make Ranga feel that there is some amount of work involved in the process of prediction. The astrologer also says that there is a possibility of Ranga's marriage negotiations being successful despite the fact that Ranga knows that Ratna is already married. All these facts only justify that astrologers predict with the help of hearsay and conjecture than their ability to really study sun signs and stars.

3. Indian society has moved a long way from the way the marriage is arranged in the story. Discuss.

Answer: In the story “Ranga’s Marriage”, the concept of arranged marriage is played out fully although the narrator makes Ranga feel that he has fallen in love in Ratna and it is a love marriage instead. Ratna is only eleven years old and is actually a child when she gets married to Ranga. At the same time, Ratna’s consent is hardly taken into consideration when the marriage is fixed. Ranga too very easily gives up his lofty ideas regarding marriage and eagerly marries such a young girl.

Today’s Indian society though still very conservative yet has changed in its outlook towards marriage. While the law has prohibited child marriage altogether, the society too takes into account the consensus of both the boy and the girl while arranging a match. Arranged marriages still remain the norm in the society and love marriages are very often frowned upon but the prevalence of love marriages is increasing in the society with young people taking their own decisions regarding marriage.

4. What kind of a person do you think the narrator is?

Answer: The narrator is presented as an interesting person who is very attached to his village and knows the place really well. This is reflected in his description of the village of Hosahalli and his obvious pride in describing the apparently mundane things like the creeper and the pond. In addition, he is an acute observer of human nature and incidents around himself which makes him reflect on various events that happen in the village. He is therefore critical of the use of English language in daily conversation and how the English way of life is corroding the traditional Indian values of the young generation. His disbelief in astrology is also presented through his manipulation of Shastri to bring about an alliance between Ranga and Ratna. He is also an efficient matchmaker and he goes about his plan of marrying Ranga and Ratna with precision and planning. He is also endowed with a sense of humour and therefore he takes obvious delight in telling Ranga that Ratna is already married just to increase his frustration and make him all the more infatuated with Ratna.

Very Short Answer Type Questions and Answers:

1. What is the name of the village in which “Ranga’s Marriage” is set?

Ans: Hosahalli is the name of the village in which “Ranga’s Marriage” is set.

2. Where was Ranga sent to study?

Ans: Ranga was sent to study at Bangalore.

3. What proved to the old lady that Ranga has not lost his caste?

Ans: Ranga still had the sacred thread or *janewara* on him which proved to the old lady that he has not lost his caste.

4. What did Ranga bring with him when he came to the narrator’s house in the afternoon?

Ans: Ranga brought with him a couple of oranges with him when he came to the narrator’s house in the afternoon.

5. What is the name of the play that Kalidasa wrote?

Ans: The name of the play that Kalidasa wrote is *Shakuntala*.

6. What type of a girl, according to Ranga, should a man marry?

Ans: According to Ranga, a man should marry a girl he admires.

7. Whose niece is Ratna?

Ans: Ratna is Rama Rao’s niece.

8. Why did Ratna come to stay at the village with her uncle?

Ans: Ratna came to stay at the village with her uncle because both her parents had died.

9. How old is Ratna?

Ans: Ratna is only eleven years old.

10. Which musical instruments does Ratna know to play?

Ans: Ratna knows to play the veena and the harmonium.

11. What kind of a story allows you to tell a story within a story?

Ans: *Harikatha* allows you to tell a story within a story.

12. What kind of a name did Shastri say the girl that Ranga loves has?

Ans: Shastri said that the girl that Ranga loves has a name of something found in the ocean.

13. What kind of a couple according to the narrator are both Ranga and Ratna?

Ans: According to the narrator, both Ranga and Ratna are a childish couple.

14. Why did Ranga invite the narrator to dinner his house?

Ans: Ranga invited the narrator to dinner his house on the occasion of the third birthday of his son Shyama.

15. What custom did Ranga follow in naming his son as Shyama?

Ans: Ranga followed the English custom in naming his son as Shyama.

Short Answer Type Questions and Answers:

1. Why did not the narrator name the story with mouth-filling names like “Jagannatha Vijaya” or “Girija Kalyana”?

Ans: The narrator did not name the story with mouth-filling names like “Jagannatha Vijaya” or “Girija Kalyana” because it is not about Jagannath’s victory or Girija’s marriage. The story concerns itself with the marriage of Ranga and so it is named simply as “Ranga’s Marriage”.

2. Why is Hosahalli not mentioned in any map or geography book?

Ans: Hosahalli is a small village in the state of Mysore. The geography books do not mention it because the English sahibs who probably do not know that such a village exists have written most of these books. The Indian writers mostly copy the English sahibs and therefore they too do not mention about it. Thus, when the geographers do not remember to mention the village, it can hardly be expected from the cartographers to put it on a map.

3. Describe the incident which took place at Rama Rao’s house when an old woman brought firewood to their house.

Ans: One day an old woman brought firewood to sell at Rama Rao’s house. His son came out to pay for the firewood and he asked the old woman the price for it. When she said that he has to pay her four pice, he replied that he has got no ‘change’ and asked her to come the next day. The old woman not knowing the meaning of the English word ‘change’ went away muttering to herself. Even the narrator did not know its meaning and came to know about it only when he asked Ranga.

4. Why was Ranga’s homecoming a great event for the village?

Ans: Ranga, the son of the accountant of the village, was the first person from the village to go to study at Bangalore. Most people believed that an English education

would change him completely and he would be a different man on his return. Therefore, when Ranga came to the village after six months, everyone rushed to his house to see what transformation has come into him. Even the narrator himself went to find out what was happening there. Thus, Ranga's homecoming was a great event for the village.

5. What were Ranga's ideas about marriage? Do you find any change in them at the end of the story?

Ans: Ranga did not have any faith in the arranged marriage system prevalent in the society. He believed that a man should marry a woman whom he admires and who is physically and mentally matured. He would marry only such a girl otherwise, it would be better for him to remain a bachelor. But after meeting Ratna, his views change drastically and he marries an eleven year old girl without taking into consideration his own earlier views regarding marriage.

6. Why was the narrator distressed to know that Ranga has decided to remain a bachelor for life?

Ans: The narrator considered Ranga to be a generous and considerate fellow. He would make a good husband and it would be a fine thing to have him marry, settle down and be of service to the society. He was therefore distressed to know Ranga's views on marriage and his decision to remain a bachelor for life.

7. Narrate briefly about Ratna.

Ans: Ratna was the eleven-year-old niece of Rama Rao. She used to live in the town but because of the death of both her parents, she had come to live with her uncle in the village. She knew to play the veena and the harmonium and had a sweet voice. Shyama, the narrator, thought of her as the perfect match for Ranga.

8. How did the narrator bring about a meeting between Ranga and Ratna?

Ans: The narrator asked Rama Rao's wife to send Ratna to bring some buttermilk from his place. It was a Friday and therefore she was attired in a beautiful saree when she came to his house. He asked her to sing a song and in the meantime, he sent for Ranga. When Ranga came there, she was singing oblivious of the fact that Ranga was listening to her. Ranga did not want her to stop singing but he was also curious to see

the singer and so he peeped in. Ratna came to know of his presence and immediately moved inside overcome by shyness. This was how the narrator brought about a meeting between Ranga and Ratna for the first time.

9. Describe the meeting between Ranga and Shastri, the astrologer.

Ans: The narrator has already told Shastri what to tell once he brings Ranga to meet him. Consequently, Shastri makes some astrological calculations and starts by telling him that the cause of his worry is a girl whose name has something to do with the ocean. When the name is ascertained to be Ratna, he further adds that there is every possibility of Ranga's marriage proposal being successful. Despite Ratna being known to Ranga as a married woman, he sticks to his words and says that his calculations are correct.

10. How did Ranga honour the narrator and why?

Ans: Ranga was grateful to the narrator for having brought about his alliance with Ratna. As a mark of respect and honour to the narrator, he followed the English custom and named his son as Shyama after the name of the narrator.

11. Describe the quality of the mangoes of Hosahalli village. (H.S. First Year, 2015)

Ans: There are some mango trees in the village and the raw mangoes that these trees bear have an extremely potent sour taste. The sourness is sure to go straight to one's head if even a bite of it is taken.

12. Describe the narrator's experiences of tasting a raw mango from the mango trees growing in the village.

Ans: The narrator once took a raw mango home from the mango trees growing in the village. A chutney was made out of it and the whole family tasted it. They suffered from severe cough after that and the narrator had to go to the doctor to get a medicine for cough.

13. Does the narrator approve of using English words while talking in one's mother tongue? If not, why?

Ans: No, the narrator does not approve of using English words while talking in one's mother tongue. He considers it to be disgraceful along with creating confusion for those who do not understand the language.

14. Why were the people surprised to see Ranga after his homecoming?

Ans: People were surprised to see Ranga after his homecoming because he was no different from the Ranga who had left the village six months earlier. They had expected to see some great change come over him due to his English education but were disappointed to find no such change in him.

15. Why was the narrator impressed by Ranga?

Ans: When Ranga met the narrator for the first time after returning home, he greeted him and did the namaskara respectfully in the traditional manner. He even bent low and touched the narrator's feet. This made the narrator feel that Ranga was different from the present-day boys and knew how to respect his elders.

16. Why did the narrator tell a lie about Ratna's marital status?

Ans: The narrator was not very sure about how Ranga would react after meeting Ratna. When he saw the curiosity of Ranga to know about the girl who was singing, he decided to find out the truth. He lied that Ratna was married a year ago and on seeing Ranga's disappointed face he realized that Ranga was genuinely interested in Ratna.

17. "His face shrivelled like a roasted brinjal". Why did Ranga feel so?

Ans: Ranga, on hearing Ratna singing, became instantly attracted towards her. He wanted to know more about her and if possible marry her too. But when he asked the narrator about Ratna, he was told that she was already married a year ago. This information made him very disappointed and thus the narrator commented that his face shrivelled like a roasted brinjal.

18. Describe the incidents that led Ranga to form his ideas on marriage.

Ans: Ranga knew an officer who got married only six months earlier. The officer was thirty years old and his wife was twenty-five. They would be able to talk to each other

lovingly and understand. If he married a very young girl, she might misunderstand his loving words as those spoken in anger. He had also seen the play *Shakuntala* at Bangalore. Ranga questioned as to what might have happened to Kalidasa's play if *Shakuntala* were a young girl like present day brides. There would have been no possibility of Dushyantha falling in love with her. These incidents made him realize that he should marry a matured girl or remain a bachelor for life.

19. How did Ranga feel when Ratna stopped singing after seeing him?

Ans: The narrator describes Ranga's experience as like that of eating the best quality mango. One buys it and tries to savour it slowly from the peel to the juicy flesh inside. One does not want to waste any part of it. But suddenly before taking another bite, if the mango slips out of the hands and falls into the ground, there will be acute disappointment. Ranga felt the same emotions when Ratna stopped singing.

20. Why did the narrator get angry with Shastri? What happened after that?

Ans: When Shastri saw the narrator with Ranga, he exclaimed that he had not seen him for a long time. The narrator, having forgotten his plan with Shastri regarding Ranga, got angry and was about to say that he had seen him that morning itself. But Shastri was more quick-witted than him and stopped him from by doing so. He completed the narrator's sentence of "only this morning" by adding that that he had finished his work that morning and had now come to meet him. The narrator realized that his plans for Ranga would have turned futile if Shastri had not intervened at the right moment. He was thereon careful in saying what he wanted to say.

21. What happened when the narrator met Shastri after Ranga's marriage proposal was accepted?

Ans: The narrator met Shastri in the evening after Ranga's marriage proposal was accepted. He told Shastri that he had repeated everything taught to him by the narrator. There was no suspicion in Ranga's mind regarding this and the narrator satirically called the *shastra* to be marvellous. Shastri did not like such words from him at all and said that he could have himself found whatever necessary form the *shastra*. He developed on the hints given to him by the narrator and it was not wholly a case of mere repetition of what had been taught to him.

22. Was Ratna a victim of the arranged marriage system? (H.S. First Year 2015)

Ans: Ratna can be considered to be a victim of the arranged marriage system. Her marriage has been fixed without taking into consideration her wishes and pleasure. The narrator decided that she should marry Ranga without thinking that she did not know Ranga properly or that she is very young in age.

Long Answer Type Questions and Answers:

1. Give a description of the village of Hosahalli.

Ans: Hosahalli is a non-descript village in the state of Mysore that does not find any mention in any geography books or maps. The narrator ascribes this problem to the English sahibs who know nothing about the place and hence do not refer to it in the books. The Indian writers merely followed their English counterparts without thinking much about it. However, the narrator tries to correct this situation and takes obvious pride and pleasure in describing about the village. He feels that the village is an integral and important part of the state of Mysore and compares it to the filling of the sweet *karigadabu*.

The narrator describes the mundane things that are probably found in any village but he says that even these ordinary things of Hosahalli are extraordinary in their nature. There are some mango trees in the village and the raw mangoes that these trees bear have an extremely potent sour taste. The narrator and his family suffered from severe cough and had to take medicine when they ate a chutney made out of these raw mangoes. He then describes a creeper that grows in the very fine water of the village pond. Not only are its flowers very beautiful to look at but the leaves also serve as an excellent plate for any meal.

2. How did the narrator come to know about Ranga's views about marriage? What did he do once he came to know his views?

Ans: Ranga returned home to his village which became a great event for everyone to come and look at him. The narrator also met him and after Ranga offered him his namaskar, he blessed him wishing for his early marriage. That afternoon Ranga came

to meet the narrator with some oranges for him. After talking about for a while, the topic moves into marriage and the narrator asks Ranga about his ideas regarding it. He replied that he was not going to get married right away, as he had to find the right girl for him. He also said that in order to marry he needed to find a girl who was mature enough for marriage. A man, according to Ranga, should marry a woman he admires rather than opting for the arranged marriage system. He cannot marry a very young girl who had not yet outgrown her childhood. If these conditions were not fulfilled then it would be better for him to remain a bachelor.

The narrator was very much distressed on hearing such views from Ranga. He decided that he could not allow Ranga to remain unmarried and therefore he himself should do something about it. Accordingly, he formulated a plan for him to meet Ratna whom he felt to be an ideal wife for Ranga.

3. Describe the events that unfolded at Ranga's home due to his homecoming.

Ans: A large number people from the village gathered in front of Ranga's house on hearing about his homecoming. They wanted to have a glimpse of Ranga to find out what changes have come into him because of his stay at Bangalore. The narrator too joined the crowd to find out what had happened and said that there was no monkey performing for them there. A young boy, whom the narrator termed as a fellow having no brains, retaliated by asking him as to why then he was also present there. The narrator ignored his remark thinking that good manners had become outdated. Ranga, on seeing the crowd gathered before his house, came out with a smile to greet them. The people gathered there were very much surprised to see that he was the same Ranga who left for Bangalore six months back. An old lady present in the crowd even went forward and ran a hand over his chest. She wanted to confirm whether he had maintained his caste at Bangalore and thus searched for the sacred thread. She was very much surprised to find it still intact on his chest. Once the crowd was satisfied that he had the same hands, legs, eyes, and nose, they scattered away from Ranga's house.

4. “English integrates India as a nation or it belittles the expressions of native speakers”. Elucidate with examples from the lesson “Ranga’s Marriage”. (H.S. First Year 2015)

Ans: The narrator begins by talking about the prevalence of the English language in his native village of Hosahalli. He says that the language was not very prevalent ten years earlier and very few people understood the importance of English. But the scenario has changed and there are many who can be found talking the language on the streets. The narrator says that the usage of the language has brought a big problem for those who cannot understand the language as native speakers have started to frequently mix English language with Kannada. The case was different earlier when people used their mother tongue without any mixing with the English language. The narrator describes a funny incident which throws light on the problem of free and indiscriminate mixing of the two languages. It so happened that one day an old woman brought firewood to sell at Rama Rao’s house. His son came out to pay for the firewood and he asked the old woman the price for it. When she said that he has to pay her four pice, he replied that he has got no ‘change’ and asked her to come the next day. The old woman, not knowing the meaning of the English word ‘change’, went away muttering to herself. Even the narrator did not know its meaning and came to know about it only when he asked Ranga. This incident elucidates the problem of native speakers of the language and how English belittles the expressions of native speakers.
