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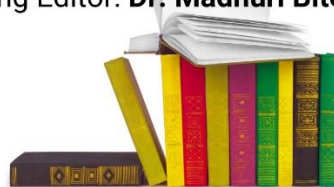
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Exit
(A Play in One Act)

P R Gopalakrishnan
Kerala.

Characters:

Shankar, 35, bank officer

Urmila, 30 His wife, homemaker

Mira, 6 His daughter

Rajagopal, 36 His friend, bachelor, software engineer

Lakshmi Urmila's mother

Shyammohan Urmila's brother

SCENE 1

A restaurant. It's late afternoon. Shankar and Rajagopal are having tea and snacks.

RAJAGOPAL: Tell me. What is the matter?

SHANKAR: I am confused. I feel something holds Urmila.

RAJAGOPAL: You mean?

SHANKAR: Someone closely follows her. Now and then she gets angry over nothing. In case she has a lost love and the man now tries to. . . ?

RAJAGOPAL: Any other indications?

SHANKAR: No. But I feel there is something up in the air. (*Pause.*) Could you help me?

RAJAGOPAL: How?

SHANKAR: Have an eye on her. There is no problem with your doing it as you are my close friend.

RAJAGOPAL: I should snoop on her? My God! How could I do it?

SHANKAR: Again I say there is no wrong in doing it.

RAJAGOPAL: No. I can't. (*Pause.*) However, if I chance to have any doubtful information about her I will convey it to you. But I am doubtful about doing even that.

SHANKAR: No problem. You may do it.

SCENE 2

After a few days. Shankar's parlour. It's about 10 am. Sitting on opposite sofas Shankar and Urmila are reading newspapers.

SHANKAR (*lifting his eyes up from the newspaper*): You are my moral wife?

Urmila is shaken and she places the newspaper on the tea table in between the sofas.

URMILA (*with a serious face*): What you mean?

SHANKAR: There is talk in the town in bad light of you.

URMILA: My God! What do they say about me?

SHANKAR: You are in liaison with another man.

URMILA: And you believe it?

SHANKAR: I don't know what to do.

URMILA: That means you have doubts about my loyalty to you?

SHANKAR: Would there be such talks in the town without some grounds? I am to have an answer from you.

URMILA: I don't know how to answer you without knowing what you heard about me.

SHANKAR: As I told you just now, they say you have a man.

URMILA: Do they give his identity?

SHANKAR: No. You are to open your mind on it

URMILA: I don't know how to open my mind on something bad about me lie hidden in your mind. (*Pause.*) Suppose I am not loyal to you.

SHANKAR: We should separate.

URMILA: So you are cooking up grounds for separation. That means my daughter's and my survival is at stake?

SHANKAR: It seems you are concerned only about *your* survival, I mean physical survival.

URMILA: Is there any other survival than the physical one?

SHANKAR: Not everything in life is physical. There is the mental side to many things in one's life.

URMILA: So there is a mental survival also?

SHANKAR: Yeah.

URMILA: Please say what the term means.

SHANKAR: It means whether you can survive mentally if your physical life is safe.

URMILA: I can't get you.

SHANKAR: Said simply it means whether you can have peace of mind when you are a moral failure and you succeed in hiding it from your husband.

URMILA: That means whether I can be duty bound to you and mentally bound to another man?

SHANKAR: That's exactly what I am concerned about.

URMILA: You mean I debauch with someone and go on happily with you?

SHANKAR: It seems.

URMILA: I say you are mad.

SHANKAR: You want to see me go mad?

URMILA: What I mean is you are driving yourself into such a situation. You have lost your power of discretion and dark thoughts have taken over your mind and they will lead you to nothing but insanity.

SCENE 3

After two days. It's morning. Shankar and Urmila are having breakfast in the kitchen.

SHANKAR: You are angry with me?

URMILA: For?

SHANKAR: My doubts on you.

URMILA: No.

SHANKAR: I feel you are moving off me.

URMILA: It's the other way. You are moving off me and you cook up grounds for doing it.

SHANKAR: I note with concern that now a days you keep off me as far as possible.

URMILA: Better to keep off you than engage in nasty talks with you.

SHANKAR: Your attitude gives rise to another doubt for me.

URMILA: Please say what it is.

SHANKAR: Yesterday you said *my* daughter about Mira? Why don't you say *our* daughter?

URMILA: When I feel you are moving off me, *our* daughter becomes *my* daughter for me for you will leave her also.

SHANKAR: No. There is some mystery about her also.

URMILA: What you mean?

SHANKAR: You are to answer my doubts on her also.

URMILA: You mean. . .

SHANKAR: Yeah. I have doubts about her. . .

URMILA: My God! Someone has poisoned your mind with dreadful stories about me and even about Mira and you can't get off them.

SHANKAR: You evade from answering my doubts on you and accuse me of consuming stories on you and Mira. Can't you state that you have not swerved from the path of truth?

URMILA: You question my integrity as a woman and ask for a slave-like statement. I can't submit to the demand.

SHANKAR: Are you sure you won't state on oath that you haven't cheated me?

URMILA: I say I won't make such an oath.

SHANKAR: Your adamant stand gives strength to my suspicions on you.

URMILA: You may take it anyway you like. I don't mind.

SHANKAR: That shows you are preparing to leave me.

URMILA: Better to leave a spineless husband than submit to his unmanly demands.

SCENE 4

After a few days. It's about 11 am. Rajagopal is walking a road. On the way he sees Urmila sitting under a tree by the road. He moves towards Urmila. Urmila gets up.

RAJAGOPAL: Hello, why you sit here?

URMILA: No idea.

RAJAGOPAL: May I know. . .

URMILA: I don't know where to go. My husband is likely to abandon me.

RAJAGOPAL: My God! What happened?

URMILA: He has nothing but suspicions on me. How could I then continue being with him? Better to part ways with a spineless man.

RAJAGOPAL: See, there are differences between husband and wife in many homes. One has to live through them at least for the good of their children.

URMILA: But he has turned intolerable.

RAJAGOPAL: You try to convince him of your innocence.

URMILA: It's too difficult. Someone has injected something poisonous about Mira and me into his mind. And, he doesn't open his mind to me.

RAJAGOPAL: You look haggard. Come. Have some food.

Pause. Rajagopal moves and Urmila follows him.

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A restaurant. Rajagopal and Urmila are sitting at a table by a sidewall. A boy comes to them.

BOY: What should you have sir?

RAJAGOPAL: Masaldosai and tea for both.

The boy leaves.

RAJAGOPAL: Please go.

URMILA: For days he has been torturing me with repeated questions on my fidelity to him. He says there is talk in the town badly of me suggesting I have a man. When I ask him for details he says I am to answer his doubts. It seems he has doubts even about the parentage of Mira. This doubt over my calling her *my* daughter instead of *our* daughter during heated exchanges of words between us.

RAJAGOPAL: It seems it's too much for you to bear. But there is no other go for you than go with him. (*Pause.*) Anyway, you return home now. I will talk to him soon.

URMILA: But please don't tell him about our meeting, for his fragile mind may take it badly.

The boy brings the ordered items and leaves.

RAJAGOPAL: Don't worry. I will try my best to make him see reason.

URMILA: I don't think it is that easy to manage him.

RAJAGOPAL: Don't worry. Have the food and go home with a composed mind. Try to avoid confrontations.

SCENE 5

The next Sunday. Shankar's parlour. It's 11 am. Shankar and Rajagopal are sitting on opposite sofas.

RAJAGOPAL: How goes it here?

SHANKAR: You mean?

RAJAGOPAL: Sometime back you told me something about Urmila.

SHANKAR: My suspicions are correct. There is talk in the town in poor light of her.

RAJAGOPAL: What do they say?

SHANKAR: They say she has a paramour.

RAJAGOPAL: Who could it be?

SHANKAR: That's the question.

RAJAGOPAL: There are grounds to support the rumours?

SHANKAR: As I told you, her now a day's behaviour is a pointer to my doubts.

RAJAGOPAL: Will you please elaborate?

SHANKAR: She often gets angry with me for no reason.

RAJAGOPAL: How is she on Mira?

SHANKAR: She is all love for her.

RAJAGOPAL: That's good. *(Pause.)* Doesn't she serve you?

SHANKAR: She is overdoing and that's another pointer towards her infidelity.

RAJAGOPAL: Shall I be frank with you?

SHANKAR: Why not?

RAJAGOPAL: To the best of my knowledge and belief Urmila is a very good character. Someone must have spread rumours about her with the intention of sabotaging your happy

married life. They do it out of jealousy. What I should sincerely tell you is that you should not give way to such rumours.

SHANKAR: My mind doesn't allow me to take things that lightly.

RAJAGOPAL: My dear Shankar, it's easy to do anything bad, but hard to do anything good. So always have the mind to do only what is good, I mean what the society takes as good. If you send her and your daughter out over your suspicions, how will the society take it? It will take it as a bad action of yours. *(Pause.)* Also, if you go for the extreme step, there may be a day for you when you will be all regrets for having done it. *(Pause.)* And, about Mira. Should you allow the innocent girl to suffer for your suspicions on her mother?

SHANKAR: Mira may be innocent. But in case she carries the guilt of her mother?

RAJAGOPAL: What you mean?

SHANKAR: No need for explanation.

RAJAGOPAL: Now I don't have anything more to tell you.

Rajagopal makes to the door with a serious face. Shankar opens the door and Rajagopal exits. Shankar walks back with a serious face..

SCENE 6

After two days. Rajagopal's office. It's about 11 am. Rajagopal calls Urmila over his mobile phone.

RAJAGOPAL: How goes you?

URMILA: *There is no change in his attitude. He is becoming more and more aggressive.*

RAJAGOPAL: The other day I talked to him. Something bad about you and Mira has gone deep into his head and he fails to throw it off from there. *(Pause.)* Haven't you asked your mother and brother to intervene?

URMILA: *They will reach here soon. Until then I should go smooth on him, they say. I don't know how to tolerate him until then.*

RAJAGOPAL: Restraint is the solution to many family problems. (*Pause.*) I will meet him again and do my best. (*Pause.*) Anyway, a break-up is to be avoided, at any cost. (*Pause.*) Don't lose hope. Let us work for reconciliation.

SCENE 7

The next Sunday. Shankar's parlour. It's about 10 am. Shankar and Rajagopal are sitting on opposite sofas.

RAJAGOPAL: How goes you?

SHANKAR: I am well, if it is not a problem.

RAJAGOPAL: You mean the issue with Urmila?

SHANKAR: Yeah. She is adamant and defying.

RAJAGOPAL: How?

SHANKAR: She is not in to go with me. I am sure there is a man behind her. Otherwise. . .

RAJAGOPAL: How it happens?

SHANKAR: See, as a wife she has to answer my doubts on her.

RAJAGOPAL: Doubts mean your suspicions like she has a man, etc . . .

SHANKAR: Yeah. Can't she clearly state she has not swerved from the path of truth?

RAJAGOPAL: When a man questions the integrity of his wife upon stray talks in the town how should the wife react? Do you expect her to state on oath that she has not swerved from the path of truth?

SHANKAR: I seek not an oath, but a statement to the effect.

RAJAGOPAL: Why the slave-like statement when she has not done anything wrong in her path.

SHANKAR: I can't get you.

RAJAGOPAL: Your demand is based on hearsays and fictitious thoughts. And, why should a person of integrity submit to such a demand?

SHANKAR: I only seek a simple statement from her. That she refuses to make it shows she has acted against my faith in her.

RAJAGOPAL: Your demand is nothing but a fallacy.

SHANKAR: Then, what is the way for settling the issue?

RAJAGOPAL: I feel some wrong ideas or fake information has, somehow, got into your mind and it takes shape as questions on her integrity. You have to push such stuff out from your mind.

SHANKAR: Could any husband have peace of mind when people talk badly of his wife?

RAJAGOPAL: Why should you give way to such stray talks in the town?

SHANKAR: Doesn't a husband have some rights on his wife?

RAJAGOPAL: It's not a question of one's rights or privileges over the other. A couple's married life moves smoothly on mutual trust and when there is breach in the trust the tie may breakup? I fear such a situation is developing here, without valid grounds at all.

SHANKAR: You are my friend. So far you talked as if from her side. Don't you have anything to say from my side?

RAJAGOPAL: I see the issue only from my side.

SHANKAR: I feel you find Urmila good.

RAJAGOPAL: Yeah.

SHANKAR: May I have a hypothetical question to you?

RAJAGOPAL: Please go.

SHANKAR: Do you find her good enough to be your wife?

RAJAGOPAL: The question deserves no answer.

SHANKAR: I feel you are sympathetic towards her. So another hypothetical question. Suppose we separate. Will you now be generous enough to take her as your wife?

RAJAGOPAL: Though hypothetical, it is a bad question and it too doesn't deserve answer.

SHANKAR: You are great for, unlike me, you are compassionate and generous.

RAJAGOPAL: Thank you for the compliments.

Rajagopal exits with a serious face and Shankar looks towards him with a similar face.

SCENE 8

The next day. Shankar's parlour. It's 11 am. Shankar is seated in one sofa and Lakshmi and Shyammoohan in the opposite sofa.

SHYAMMOHAN: What's the problem between you and Urmila?

SHANKAR: You please ask her.

LAKSHMI: We have talked to her.

SHANKAR: No fault with her?

LAKSHMI: Not at all. (*Pause.*) Do you find fault with her?

SHANKAR: I do.

SHYAMMOHAN: Please go.

SHANKAR: There is talk in the town in a negative light on her.

LAKSHMI: What do people say about her?

SHANKAR: You ask her whether she is a loyal wife to me.

SHYAMMOHAN: Do you feel she is not?

SHANKAR: People say she is not.

SHYAMMOHAN: I should know whether *you* have reasons to question her loyalty to you?

SHANKAR: When people question her loyalty to me I need an answer from her.

SHYAMMOHAN: Why should you play to the tunes of the people on your wife, especially when they are badly on her?

SHANKAR: I belong to the society. So I can't keep off its stand on my wife.

SHYAMMOHAN: That shows you have lost faith in her *for* the society.

SHANKAR: No problem, if you take it that way.

SHYAMMOHAN: In your opinion what course of action we should have on the issue?

SHANKAR: Let her ask my forgiveness.

SHYAMMOHAN: Forgiveness on what action of hers?

SHANKAR: The charge that she is not loyal to me.

SHYAMMOHAN: How could she seek forgiveness on charges someone somewhere you say has drawn against her?

SHANKAR: Then let her state on oath that she has not done anything in violation of her pledged loyalty to me.

SHYAMMOHAN: She is not going to make such an oath. She would rather seek separation from you.

SHANKAR: So she is to part ways?

SHYAMMOHAN: Yeah.

SHANKAR: Can't she seek at least my unconditional forgiveness?

SHYAMMOHAN: No.

SHANKAR: See, she is my wife. Can't she give way to my rights on her?

SHYAMMOHAN: You are not for any genuine right on her. So no question of her yielding to your unmanly demand.

Shankar is in confusion. .

SHANKAR: So she is leaving me?

SHYAMMOHAN: If you can't respect her dignity it is her only course of action.

Urmila enters and stands before the three characters.

SHYAMMOHAN (to Urmila): He seeks nothing less than unconditional apology from you.

URMILA: I was listening to the talks. I can't apologize without valid grounds for doing it. Rather my daughter and I would leave him. (Pause.) I am leaving my husband now itself. I will pick up Mira from her school on the way.

(Turning to Shankar): Thank you very much for the so far life with you. Goodbye.

Urmila makes to the door and Lakshmi and Shyammohan follows her. Shankar has a serious look on the moving figures.

SCENE 9

A Sunday, after a few days. The parlour of a hotel room where Urmila, her daughter, mother and brother are staying for the time being. It's about 9 am. Rajagopal enters and Shyammohan receives him. They both take seats on opposite sofas.

RAJAGOPAL: So it is over?

SHYAMMOHAN: Yeah.

RAJAGOPAL: Her future is a question?

SHYAMMOHAN: Yeah.

RAJAGOPAL: It happened so suddenly. (Pause.) If you don't mind I will suggest a way out for her and Mira's survival.

SHYAMMOHAN: Please go.

RAJAGOPAL: I feel like adopting Mira as my child and taking Urmila as my wife.

SHYAMMOHAN: Thank you very much for your generosity. Urmila may gladly accept you, for she has very high opinion about you. But, if we go with it how will Shankar take it? He may make you the villain in his story against Urmila and people may also have the same

view. Also, it may affect the friendship between you and he. If you and Urmila can weather the situation, we may consider it.

RAJAGOPAL: I will talk with Shankar before proceeding with it.

SHYAMMOHAN: That's good.

RAJAGOPAL: I am to meet a friend soon. Please call me after considering it.

SHYAMMOHAN: Sure.

Rajagopal makes to the door and Shyammohan opens the door.

SCENE 10

The same day. The parlour of the hotel room. It's 4 pm. Urmila, Shyammohan and Lakshmi are seated in sofas.

LAKSHMI: I think we consider the proposal positively. He is well employed and generous enough to extend a shelter to Urmila and Mira.

SHYAMMOHAN: Yeah.

URMILA: I feel he is very sincere and broadminded.

SHYAMMOHAN: Otherwise he will not have put up the proposal. *(Pause.)* But, if you go with him people may say he was your paramour and your breakup with Shankar is an outcome. Shankar also will have the same view. So you both should be careful about his reaction.

URMILA: When my husband divorces me for no reasons of mine, I have the right to remarry and to choose anyone as my husband. Still, neither Rajagopal nor I will proceed with the proposal at the cost of the friendship between the two.

SHYAMMOHAN: That's good.

SCENE 11

A Sunday, after a few days. Shankar's parlour. It's 10 am. Shankar and Rajagopal are seated on opposite sofas.

RAJAGOPAL: So it happened?

SHANKAR: Yeah. I was helpless.

RAJAGOPAL: I am too sad about it. (*Pause.*) My last request. Is there any chance for reopening the issue?

SHANKAR: Not at all, for she was leaving me.

RAJAGOPAL: Suppose there is a move from the other side?

SHANKAR: I don't think they will do it. And, as she was leaving me I don't have any kind feelings towards her. So such a question doesn't at all arise for me.

RAJAGOPAL: The legal proceedings?

SHANKAR: Let her move the court. I will not put up objections.

RAJAGOPAL: I am concerned about their future. I should like to know whether you will object to my doing anything aimed at their welfare.

SHANKAR: Why should I?

Pause.

RAJAGOPAL: Are you sure?

SHANKAR: Yes.

RAJAGOPAL: I feel like adopting Mira as my daughter.

SHANKAR: In effect you propose to marry Urmila?

RAJAGOPAL: Yeah. (*Pause.*) If you have reservations about my doing it I will not venture into. . .

SHANKAR: No problems at all for me. You may proceed. Don't you remember my hypothetical questions to you in this regard when we met last?

RAJAGOPAL: I do. Your questions were really moving me. *(Pause.)* Will my action in anyway affect our friendship?

SHANKAR: Not at all. In fact, I should congratulate you for your broadmindedness in doing it.

RAJAGOPAL: Shall I take it as your last word?

SHANKAR: You may.

RAJAGOPAL: Thank you very much. *(Pause.)* Will you be frank with me on another point?

SHANKAR: Definitely.

RAJAGOPAL: Do you now have the feeling that I am the suspected villain in your married life?

SHANKAR: No. You will never be a villain in my life. *(Pause.)* In fact, I am happy that, though late, you are having a family. That the bride happens to be my former wife is a coincidence. I have nothing against you over the happenings.

Shankar gets up and extends his hand to Rajagopal and Rajagopal takes it.

SHANKAR: Best wishes for a happy married life. Please convey my best wishes to Urmila.

RAJAGOPAL: Thank you.

Rajagopal gets emotional and Shankar notices it.

SHANKAR: Go home happily and make preparations for the coming event. *(Pause.)* It's time for rejoicing for me also, for I have a new wife. She is my colleague.

Rajagopal is in surprise and he blanches, but concealing his feelings he makes to the door. Shankar follows him, opens the door and Rajagopal exits. Shankar closes the door and walks back with an air of triumph about him.

CURTAIN

Third-person Biographical Note:

P R Gopalakrishnan was born at Mulanthuruthi, Travancore-Cochin (now Kerala), in 1950. He had his schooling at Chottanikkara and Mulanthuruthi, Pre Degree and B Sc (Mathematics) at the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Kochi, and a Post-graduate Diploma in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. For 28 years he was on the service of the erstwhile State Bank of Travancore. He resides at Chottanikkara, Kerala. Some of his writings have been published in 'The Criterion'.