

# Translations



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## *Appa*

A Kannada one-act play by Chandrashekar Patil\*

English translation by Nikhila H.\*\*

*Avvaa* [A]: Basva

Basva [B]: .....

A: Basvaraja

B: .....

A: *E*... Basu...

B: .....

A: *Ela* Basya

B: Wait *avva*, I'm washing my hand after eating, why are you shouting as if a sword is coming to pierce your back?

A: Finish it quickly son.... Go and sleep in bed like a god, instead of narrating a *Purana* now.... you had your food?

B: It's over *avva*, done. I'll just go and pee and come, wait. Shall I go and pee or not?

A: Go son, go and pee. Don't start a drama now...

A: [to herself] This boy is another ...He has to ask everything .... Why? What? How? Why? Who? ..... By the time I answer him...

B: [enters pulling up his shorts] *yavva*... I came after peeing...

A: You came dear? You've done a golden work! You ate your food, also finished peeing. Now just go and coolly fall in your room... Understood? In the morning to get you to

wake up for school will be a herculean task.

B: (sing song) *yavva* tomorrow I don't have to get up...

A: What is this drama?

B: No *avva*... Tomorrow is a holiday... today you know there was a play in school? That's why tomorrow is a holiday.

A: Oh, that's good then.

B: *Yavva yavva*, you know what a nice drama they performed? You too should have been there.

A: How can I come? A woman...

B: Other women were there, no? That corner house Eerya's mother, father, his mother, sister, all were there. His mother sat in a corner and just dozed off with her mouth wide open.

A: You too are a sleepyhead... did you actually sit up and watch the whole play?

B: I too started feeling sleepy. But how to leave the play and come away? ... Also that Gowda is there, no..?

A: Which Gowda?

B: That person, *avva*

The one whose chappals make a *jirbarak* sound

A: The one who wears a chain around his neck

B: The one who holds a cigarette in his hand

A: The one who applies scented oil to his hair

B: Hun.. the same one *avva*.

He made me get up and took me to the tea stall.... He bought me *laddoo, bhel puri*... he said, drink tea, I said no.... then.....

A: Did no one say anything over there?

B: What will anyone say? Someone asked, 'Whose boy is this'? 'He is our boy', said Gowda.... He's so nice, you know.... Have you seen him, *avva*?

A: Basu.... Basu.... Which plays did they perform?

B: One, two.... *yavva yavva*...

A: What else.... Now?

B: *Yavva*.... Shall we also play a drama?

A: It's like a poet getting up in the middle of the night and blabbering! You're now going to make us play a drama?

B: Yes, *avva*. Now let us perform a small drama.... Say *hun*... *avva*, what will you lose?

A: Which play are you going to make us perform?

B: Which play? Wait a little... *yavva*, *yavva*...

A: *Aaa*?

B: When I was just an inch small you would tell me a story...

A: Just an inch small? How big are you now?

B: Now I am a foot tall

Then I will become a yard

Then I will become a meter

Then.... [Jumps on a stool and stands with outstretched hand]

I'll become this tall

I'll become taller than you.

A: Okay, you can become tall... When you were an inch, which story was I telling you?

B: That story, *avva*... Rama's story

When he was little

He saw *Chandappa* in the sky

And he threw a tantrum for getting it

Shall we play that drama?

A: [Grabbing him and carrying him on her hip]

Ay, my king.... [carrying him she goes near the window]

See..... see there... What is that?

B: [speaking childishly] That....that.... ball

A: No....

B: That.... That... marble

A: No....

B: That.... That.... *rotti*

A: No....

B: *Avva... avva....* What is that?

A: That...that .... Moon, *Chandappa*

B: *Andappa*

A: You're a good boy.... Say cha

B: *Cha*

A: *anda*

B: *anda*

A: *pa*

B: *pa*

A: *Chandappa*

B: *Andappa*

A: Go, go son... you are not at all a good boy

B: I'm a good boy.... I'm a good boy... you are not good

A: Ok then.... say - *Chandappa Chandappa Cheluva* - Moon moon beautiful moon

B: *Chandappa Chandappa Cheluva*, beautiful beautiful moon

A: Comes holding my sari edge

B: Sari edge....*Avva, avva*, give me that

A: What?

B: That *Chandappa* ... give it to me

A: That's far away

B: Fetch it for me

A: How can I?

B: Do whatever, but bring it.

A: This is such a pest.

Look, my king, look at that...sparrow cheeping sparrow.

B: Go *avva*

[Jumps down from her hip]

You don't know how to do a drama at all. You only tell stories. You don't do drama well

at all

A: Tell me how should I do?

B: You listen to me *avva*,

I will throw a tantrum, it seems...

Saying give me *Chandappa*, give me *Chandappa*...

You don't know what to do, it seems....

After that you butt my back four times

A: [bending, acting as if angry]

This handsome one wants *Chandappa*....where will I get *Chandappa* from?

Why don't you simply lie down, you *bewarsi*... you ate, peed, now simply come and fall into the cradle.

B: [crying and screaming like a baby]

A: Ay, my king.... don't cry. My munchkin ....

[cradling him in her arms, she sings]

Song: Play and come back my child

I'll wash the soles of your feet

With coconut water ..... I'll apply.....

B: [jumping from her arms]

*Yavvabbe*... do you know anything about what a play is? If you tunefully start singing and putting me to sleep .... who will do the drama?

A: What else should I do Basavaraja? I don't get anything about your drama.... why don't you simply sleep?

B: You're only after my sleeping... Why don't we do like this *avva*?

You butt me four times

I'll scream my head off

Then, from outside.....

A: Outside

B: *Appa* comes in

A: *Appa*?

B: Yes *avva*, *appa*

A: Means?

B: *Ayyo* my *avva*, you are as tall as a tree, you don't know what *appa* means?... You know that torn-ear Chandra ....

A: Hun Chandra

B: In his house there is a big man... tall....he wears long pants...

A: He ties a watch on his wrist ....

B: He hangs a radio around his neck ...

A: He keeps a flower on his ear...

B: Yes *avva*, that same one. It is him that Chandra calls '*Appa appa*'

Then, there is that Paramya, no? ....

A: Which Paramya?

B: That Paramya *avva*

He had once broken my slate...

As soon as school got over, I had tripped him over with my leg....

He had fallen down like teeth from his mouth....that dud

ran away pulling up his shorts....

He told me, 'your mother's...'

He said to you....

You started crying....

That same Paramya *avva*

A: Then?

B: There is an *appa* in his house also.

He had once participated in wrestling....

A: He had felled his opponent....

B: They had given him a silver bracelet...

A: Taken him in a procession...

B: Hun... He, he is Paramya's father... Did you get it now?

A: What next?

B: What means, three lice in your head next

A: Tell me, .... what has happened to your drama?

B: *Han...* yes... drama, no?

It seems you will beat me....

At that time *appa* comes from outside...

By the way.... *yavva yavva*....

A: *Aan?*

B: In this drama who has to play *appa*'s role?

[there is a knock on the door]

*Yavva*, who is there?

A: I will go and see, you just sit

Take this book, keep reading it.

[gets up in a hurry, adjusts the flowers in her hair looking at the mirror and goes towards the door]

B: [Reading aloud] Fourth lesson

This is Basava

She is Basava's mother

This is not at all nice, then....

[turns the page, and sings joyously]

Song: Come dear little bird

Come dear bird, colourful little bird

Come dear bird, flying bird

Come dear bird, flying bird

Come let's spend our time together

Mother has gone to the riverside

Father has gone marketwards

Let mother come, father too....

A: [comes in from outside]

Basu, that's not so nice. Read something else

- B: [flings his book away]  
Tomorrow I have a holiday. Why should I read?  
Yavva, who was it at the door?
- A: No one
- B: Then someone knocked *kat-kat* on the door?
- A: No one, I said.... leave it.
- B: Yavva, yavva
- A: Aan?
- B: Every day I get these false dreams.
- A: What dreams?
- B: I am sleeping in the room...  
There's a big forest....  
A cave in the forest....  
I'm all alone in the cave...  
Someone gives me a *laddoo* there...  
Someone gives me *bhelpuri*...  
Yappo, I scream out loud...
- A: Scream and?
- B: I scream...  
Then someone knocks *kat-kat* on the cave door  
I open my eyes....  
You are not there at my side...at all....  
I hear some people talk in whispers  
Some bubbling laughter  
I get scared and close my eyes tight  
Again, when I open my eyes  
You are by my side.
- A: I am right by your side all day, Basu.
- B: During the day, but what about night...?



A: *Ye haremi....*

B: *Yavva Yavva*

A: What?

B: The other day in school, a funny thing happened. Have I told you?

A: You've told me, now just go to sleep.

B: What have I told you, tell me?

A: This is a *berki...* is my baby, my mixed breed

[she kisses him]

B: What's a *berki*?

A: *Berki* means good boy

B: That's why master keeps calling me '*berki, berki*', all the time.

A: Which master?

B: My master

A: Who is your master?

B: It's him *avva...* Kulkarni master

He has a sandal-paste mark on his forehead....

A: He wears a Nehru jacket....

B: He plays Krishna in the drama...

A: During the day, he hums to himself....

B: He giggles *pisipisi...*

It him *avva...* he's the one who calls me a *berki*. Something funny happened the other day. Have I told you?

A: You haven't told me son, you haven't.

B: There is that crooked Hanuma, no? His mother's name is Hanumi. It's so funny, no?

A: Hun, Hanuma's mother is Hanumi, so?

B: The other day, there were a number of people sitting on the platform at Gowda's, playing cards. At that time, Hanuma and his mother both came that way. They were off somewhere. Loudly I sang...

Song: Hanuma-Hanumi together

Went to the cotton field together...

Like that, I started singing. Then, someone who was sitting on the platform said, '*le* Basva, come here'. I went. They said, '*le* Basva, if Hanuma's mother is Hanumi...'

A: If she is...?

B: 'If Hanuma's mother is Hanumi, what would Basava's mother then become', they said....

A: *Aan*?

B: I told them immediately

Everyone started laughing loudly

Kulkarni master said, 'what a *berki* he is!'

Paramya's father said, 'yes, so it is'.

Gowda said, 'he is a good son of a bitch'

Hanuma said, 'your mother's...' He went cursing so...

A: [silence]

B: It's great fun, isn't it?

A: Basu, has your sleep flown away?

B: *Aithpplata!* Sleep flies, it seems.

Is it a sparrow to fly?

A: Enough of your mischief. Just fall to the bed now.

B: Then, you must tell me a story

A: Which story should I say?

B: Tell me a nice one.

A: Hun... Which story should I say?... *Han*, I remember

When in my tummy, I had heard a story

B: In tummy?

What does it mean, *yavva*?

A: It means.... when you were in my tummy

B: Was I in your tummy?

A: *Hun*, you were in my tummy

B: [touching stomach]

Here?

A: Yes, here.

B: *Yavva, yavva*

A: What?

B: Was I in your tummy?

A: Yes, you were

B: You know what?

A: What?

B: Who came and put me into your tummy?

A: Basu, Basu.... should I tell you the story or not?

B: Tell, tell, tell. If I speak again and interrupt, you can poke my cheek, okay?

A: Okay... listen then.

B: Okay... say then.

A: Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was a king it seems.

He was a very big king.

He had a daughter

B: He had a little daughter...

A: Is that so? Don't interrupt. Just go on listening to the story.

B: Where should I go?

A: Is that so?

[Angrily]

Can't you just listen quietly, saying *hun.... hun....*

B: *Hun.... hun....* okay?

A: *Hun...*

That daughter grew up to become a big girl...

She grew up and reached the age of marriage....

[In between, Basava: *hun..... hun....*]

Princes from all countries started making a beeline for the princess

That princess was very beautiful...

She was so beautiful that....

B: She was a terrific beauty, no?

A: Hun, a terrific beauty

B: Was she as beautiful as you, *yavva*?

A: You can think so....

B: Were her eyes like these?

[touching her eyes-chin-lips-cheeks]

Her chin like this?

Her lips like these?

Her cheeks plump like these?

A: Basu, you are not a good boy.

B: But *avva*, you said, she was beautiful, that's why.

A: *Hun*, listen to the story

B: *Hun*, tell me the story

A: All the princes made a beeline for her....

But that princess knew the art of sorcery

One prince came....

She swung the end of her sari over him...

You know what happened to him?

B: What happened?

A: He turned into a seed

The next prince came

She turned him also into a seed

This way, she turned them all to seeds

[As mother is narrating the story, slowly, very slowly, the stage becomes engulfed in darkness. Basava falls asleep on the stool itself, saying *hun-hun*. After his *hun* stops, *avva* alone narrates the story to herself.]

Keeping all the seeds in a bottle

She covered it with a lid....

Then one night she went to the palace....

There she dug a bed in the earth....

[It is pitch dark on stage]

And sowed the seeds in it....

Every night she nurtured them with water and manure....

After nine days, the seeds sprouted and a tender shoot came up....

It grew and grew and became a bigger plant....

One fine day, after some time - after nine months

The plant flowered.

[slowly light comes on stage]

Just one flower it seems....

God alone knows how many petals it had

Each of

its petals had a different colour

Each petal was a different colour

How many colours there were, who knows?

The princess herself was puzzled

Which colour was which seed's

Which colour which seed -

[The stage is now suffused with light. In place of a small child, there is a young boy. He is sleeping in the same pose on the stool. On the stage, there is no other change. In the timepiece, it is showing 10.30]

A: Basavaraja, Basavaraja, why did you fall asleep? Listening to the story, did you get a headache?

B: [Gets up slowly. He's a pant-shirt clad young man. His hair is all tousled. His eyes indicate sleeplessness. His voice is of a defeated man.]

No *avva*, after a long time, I myself asked for the story. Why would my head ache?

A: Then....listening to the story why did you lean your head against your hand and go to sleep on the stool?

B: No *avva*, it looks like my hand has fallen into this habit. Even as I just sit, my hand goes to my forehead. Even in college, it's the same.... so also in the park.... even in the cremation ground, it happens....

A: Speak something nice.... why talk about cremation ground, cremation ground?

B: *Avva*

A: What?

B: Shall I ask you a question?

A: *Aan?*

B: A question

A: Question?

B: Question

A: Go ahead, ask

B: You tell stories very well, isn't it?

A: Oh.... is that your question?

Shall I tell you one more story?

B: No *avva*, I don't want another story.

A: Means?

B: You tell me the old story, the one about the princess

A: *Hun*

B: Each petal had a different colour

Every petal had a different colour.... isn't it?

*Avva?*

A: What?

B: Does the flower have a mouth?

A: Flower having a mouth? You mad fellow.

B: I know *avva*, Flowers don't have mouths

[Suddenly].... If flowers had mouths...?

A: If they had mouths...?

B: If they had mouths....

In the garden of the princess

When the wind blew like that

Black petal

Red petal

Rose-coloured petal

All the petals would together be calling out *avva, avva*....

Whose colour is mine?

Whose mine?

Mine?

They would ask pulling at the edge of their *avva*'s sari....

After each petal's turn got over

The flower would ask

*Avva avva* my.....

*Avva*, did you get the meaning of this?

A: I have just begun to understand, Basavraja

You go on with the story. What happened next?

B: What happened next? Nothing happened

The flower did not grow a mouth.

The princess did not open her mouth.

Everything is simply a fantasy, *hun*

A: Why do you talk like this Basu? Where have I fallen short in your upbringing?

B: Fallen short? Not at all *avva*

*Avva*, we were very happy earlier, isn't it?

A: Earlier means?

B: When I was an inch

When a foot

When a yard

[Stands up]

Now I have grown so tall

I am now taller than you

But you still continue to remain the same.

Every day you would tell me a story

I would perform a play

Story.... Play.... Story.... Play....

A: *Aan? Hun*, story... play....

[humming]

Play and come back my child I'll wash the soles of your feet....

Ay, my cutie pie.... See there, see over there, what is that?

*Chandappa Chandappa Cheluva* - Moon, moon beautiful moon! Holding the sari edge....

B: *Avva avva*

A: *Aan?*

B: Why did that time of story-drama go away *avva?*

Now if you tell me a story, I get a splitting headache

I don't feel like even performing a drama

*Avva*, do you get my seething agony?

A: I'm getting it, Basu

B: With this seething agony

Weighed down with limestone

Do you want me to swim across the stream?

A: What shall I say Basu?

B: *Avva*, Chandra and I were in the same class.

We also played together.

Once you know what someone asked?

A: What did he ask?

B: He asked if we are both brothers. My heart came to my mouth. Then he gathered



himself and said, 'Looked at from the back, you both have very similar walking styles'.

Chandra said, 'Not really so, but we are both like brothers'.

A: Then?

B: Then what? In the same way

Yesterday they invited me to Gowda's house

They offered tea

They spoke this and that with great warmth and intimacy

While I was leaving, they gave me 10 rupees

I said, 'I don't want, don't want'

They said, 'Take Basavraja, you are like a son of this house'

I just hung my head

I started walking in the direction of home

*Avva*, did you get the meaning of this?

A: I am getting it, Basu

B: *Avva* you know, when I was little, I would get a dream, everyday

A: Yes....

B: A cave...

I'm alone in it....

Eating *laddoo*.... *bhelpuri*....

Beatings....

*Yappo*... *yappo*....

Knock-knock.... *kat-kat*...

No no, the cave door would not open.... not open at all

*Avva*, at that time the cave was as big as my room

Now the whole world is a cave

The cave is in my head, in my eyes, in my body, in my mind

When I sit, the dream

When I stand, the dream is there

When will this dream end *avva*?

A: Your friend....

B: [angrily]

Friend, friend, friend, I don't have any friend, *avva*

I am alone

All my friends have long names

They write their names

They write their father's names

They write their surnames

They write them all.

I.... *hun avva?*

A: What?

B: There's a big void in my name

Thinking if anyone by chance were to ask me, what would happen

I roam around alone

At night I groan

Like a skinny bat

I look for corners

I walk around alone

One the way there are a thousand beggars

*Yappa, paisa...* they say

When they say *yappa*, in their eyes, I see my face

In their palms I see my palm-lines

They call anyone they see as *yappa* and take money

And they are cool and without a worry....

A: Basu...Basu... what has happened to you?

B: What has not happened to me?

What else remains to happen to me?

*Avva*

A: What?

B: I'll ask you a question, give me an instant answer

Who is my father?

A: [silence]

B: Is it Chandra's father?

A: [silence]

B: Is it Kulkarni master?

A: [silence]

B: Is it Gowda?

A: [silence]

B: *Avva, avva....* speak up, my *avva*

The flower has grown a mouth, open your mouth and speak *avva*

I stand at the door of the cave and call out my father, *yappo*

Draw the bolt and open the door *avva....*

[looking at the timepiece]

Now there will be a knocking on the door... *kat-kat*

I will be right here. You open the door, *avva....*

You just point out my father to me

I'll go fall at his feet

I'll embrace him

I'll attach his name in front of mine

And take pride in it

Tell me *avva*.

A: Basu.... Come here

[holding him by his shoulders]

Sit here

[He sits]

Let me tell you a story.

B: Story? A story again?

A: *Hun*, story, the story of the princess

B: Okay, tell me

A: *Hun* listen

Each of the petals was a different colour

Every petal had a different colour

Yes or no? Say *hun*...

B: *Hun*, what next?

A: What next? Three lice in your hair next!

B: Stop this teasing. Go on with the story.

A: Where should I go?

B: *Avva*, will you tell the story or not?

A: *Hun*, listen

All those days, the flower

Was a flower....

Then each petal, petal by petal began to fall off....

The princess collected all the fallen petals

And kept them in the bottle....

The flower dried up and seeds formed...

The seed turned to fruit....

The fruit grew...

Ripened....

Rotted...

Rotted and became what?

B: What?

A: It rotted and split open

After it split open, all the seeds came out it seems....

The princess showed them to the petals in the bottle.....

The petals were wonderstruck....

They said *Avva avva*, it seems

B: *Avva avva*

A: Go on listen, Basu. When you were in my stomach....

You know what when-you-were-in-my-stomach means?

B: I know, *avva*. Do you think I am such a dud? ... Go on tell me.

A: When you were in my stomach, every night I would get dreams

All kinds of dreams....

B: What kind?

A: A prince had come

You know how his eyes were?

B: How were they?

A: Just like yours

I quickly gouged out his eyes

[touching his eyes chin nose again and again]

Again, another prince....

You know how his chin was.... just like yours....

And again, yet another prince

And I tore his ears from him.

In this way, every day from a prince....

B: Every day?

A: Yes. Every day.

After you were born, the dreams stopped

You are my dream

You are my prince

You are my cutie pie

You are my *appa*....

B: *Avva*, I may well be your *appa*

But who is my *appa*?

A: Shall I ask you a question?

B: Question?

A: Yes, question

B: Ask

A: Who is the *appa* of the flower?

B: The *appa* of the flower is the seed.

A: Who is the *appa* of the seed?

B: The *appa* of the seed is the flower

A: What is flower?

B: Flower is seed

A: What is seed?

B: Seed is flower

A: Then who is your father?

B: My father is the prince

A: Who is the prince?

B: Prince.... I

[At the door there is a knock, *kat-kat*, and *avva* gets up immediately]

A: Who is your father?

B: I am my father.

[*Avva* goes towards the door. The knocking is continuous]

B: I am my father

I am my father

*Avva*

[He looks around, *avva* is not there]

*Avva..... avva....*

Is it no more than a story?

[Curtain falls]

### **About the author**

\* Chandrashekar Patil, popularly known as Champa, who died last year at the age of 83 years, is a well-known poet, playwright and public intellectual, who wrote mostly in Kannada, but also has a published volume of his English poems. He began his career in the modernist Navya movement, but soon identified himself with Bandaya (revolt) movement. The little journal that he was editing *Sankramana*, became the forum for new movements. After retiring as English Professor from Karnatak University, Dharwad, he held many important positions, such as President of Kannada Sahitya Parishat, and Chairman of Kannada Development Authority. He received the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi award for Poetry in 1989, and the State Government instituted Pampa Award in 2009. The present play *Appa* (Father) was published in 1969.

### **About the translator**

\*\* Nikhila H. teaches Film Studies in The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has translated a couple of short stories and an article from Kannada to English for anthologized volumes. The present translation was a working translation to enable the performance of the play in English under the direction of Tharakeshwar V.B., Professor, Department of Translation Studies, The EFL University, Hyderabad, and it was performed by research scholars of the same University. The play was performed on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2022 at Mye villas, on the occasion of the 96<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Nikhila's father, K.V. Subbarao.