

## The Chinked Armour of Swami Sadachari

Swami Sadachari, the local Brahmin astrologer of Adyarkuppam, a small village in the south of Tamil Nadu, picked up the daily Tamil News Paper from his pouch at day break and ambled slowly into his living room glancing perfunctorily at the headlines in the front page. He was one of the few literate people in the village and was therefore a member of the village *samithi*.

Seating himself slowly in an armchair he muttered, “ Shiva, Shiva” under his breath as his arthritic knees hurt him, and propping himself up comfortably against the cushions he opened the journal to the religious page and scrutinized it seriously. The whistle of the pressure cooker in the kitchen made him pause momentarily.

“Ratnam, I Think the *idlis* are done. See to them dear!” he called out to his twenty three year old daughter who came hurrying from the courtyard, just having swept and watered it.

As he saw his lovely daughter moving about the house and attending to all household duties he remembered his wife, who had died in childbirth “She resembles Sharada so much” he sighed softly. His eyes moistened at the memory of his wife and the happy days they had spent together. He had married late and his wife was still young but the elders had consented to the marriage as the bridegroom came from a respectable family.

Ratnam brought her father a cup of steaming coffee thus interrupting the reminiscences of the latter. Smiling, Swami took the offered mug and took a sip of the hot drug. The warmth permeated his body and tickled his nerves. He watched his daughter arrange the flowers in a vase as he sipped slowly from his cup. He noticed for the first time the curves of her figure, the loose wisps of hair escaping from her plaited hair, the soft red lips that broke into a beautiful smile, displaying a set of pearly white teeth, as she smiled unconsciously, rapt in the flower arrangement. "She's charming indeed," he gasped, as he looked upon his daughter as a woman for the first time. Carried away by his emotions, he felt young again and felt a strong attraction towards the woman in front of him, the woman who resembled his wife so much. He wanted to touch and feel her against him, for a moment he was no more a respected astrologer or a father, he was a young man in love with the woman before him. Swami crept softly behind Ratnam and smelled the whiff of sandalwood about her. The jasmine in the hair gave off a refreshing perfume that lured him. The memories of his wife had broken fresh desires in him and he was no longer master of his emotions. He stretched his arm to touch the fair slender shoulder when the sudden pealing of the doorbell brought him back to his senses.

Ratnam moved to open the door and was surprised to find her standing so close to her and looking at her strangely. The latter gave a hesitant smile of embarrassment, guilty of having such profane thoughts. He stumbled towards the armchair in confusion and composed himself to receive the first client of the day. He determined to get Ratnam married as soon as possible as he no longer trusted himself with her.

Sadachari convulsed with fright at the memory of the event and drew the curtain across the window. He then went into the kitchen to make himself a cup of strong coffee, a diversion that may help in forgetting the past temporarily.