

CHINTAMANI

By KALLAKURI NARAYANA RAO
[in 10 episodes]

["Chintamani" is one of the most popular poetic plays. Though the subject, when written in 1912, was very topical (the subject being the Profession of Prostitution and its unsavory effects on human society). Though the subject is no more valid, it is still popular because of very interesting characters and catchy poetry.]

1. The scene is set in Bilwamangala, a rich Brahmin lord's bed chamber. His wife Radha is reading for him an excerpt from Tikkana's "Mahabharatam". They are in the midst of a discussion about the relationship between man and wife. There are men who disrespect women, says the husband. There are also wives who do not do their duties as a wife properly. Meanwhile Damodara, Bilwamangala's friend arrives to listen to Radha's reading of Bharatam everyday. He also participates in the discussion. Meanwhile the husband hears his father calling him from inside the house. He goes in and comes back saying that his father wants to hand over all the business to him from that day onwards and he has to get ready. He says that there is nothing more desirable for a child than obeying his father and giving him rest and peace of mind in his old age. He also promises that there will not be any hindrance to the poetry-reading sessions.

2. The second episode focuses on the way of life the prostitutes spend. Chintamani, the prima donna, is arguing with her avaricious mother, Srihari about their mutually opposing points of view.

Srihari rebukes her daughter that she is unnecessarily kind to her latest lover, Bhavani Sankara, even after he has become a pander. Chitamani argued that she can not send the man out all of a sudden, after having spent all his property for them. Srihari gives her some lessons regarding their profession in which sympathy is the worst quality. Chitamani questions the veracity of such an attitude and asks her mother as to how they have behaved with their consent in her prime. Srihari explains how people of her ilk misled the man when they can give money and squeezed whatever they could give and leave them in the lurch when found poor and so useless.

Meanwhile Chitra, Chitamani's foster sister, enters to announce that Subbi Setti, a rich businessman of the town arrived. Srihari is extremely pleased to have a new and rich suitor to her daughter.

Srihari goes to Subbi Setti and welcomes him and tells him that Chitamani has been pinning for him for many months. She also accuses him for his improper selection of another prostitute all these days. Subbi Setti, an ill-mannered and silly man, laughed at her remarks.

Chitamani also accuses him of his misdemeanour and allures him. Even at the first meeting she bewitchingly takes away the diamond rings from him to the utter dismay of Subbi Setti. On hearing that

someone has suddenly come to the house, Srihari sends him away through the rear door.

3. The encounter is now with Bhavani Sankaram, a long time suitor of Chitamani. He has already spent all his wealth on Chintamani and is searching for creditors who lend him money. He comes into Chitamani's garden from the rear side fearing the presence of Chitamani's mother, Srihari in the main hall.

Bhavani asks Chitamani why she is all decked up that morning. She says angrily that a new suitor is expected. Bhavani apologises. Chitamani accuses men that however pure a prostitute is men are always suspicious. Then he asks what is Subbi Setti is doing at her house. She again taunts him. Bhavani says that he would have enquired from Subbi Setti about the reasons for his visit, but meanwhile he encountered an old friend. Chitamani enquires whether he came with money at least that day. She says that she cannot face the cruel words of her mother. Bhavani says that he has approached many of his friends and acquaintances, but everyone showed a deaf ear for his request for loan. He also gives a long list of the wealth that he has bequeathed to her. Chitamani agrees but counters by saying that she has also been very liberal to him. Bhavani agreed and hopes that the friend who has come upon that day will be an answer to all his ills.

She explains the great qualities of his friend, his riches, his large heartedness and his scholarship. Chitamani saw him earlier and enquires whether Bhavani would bring the man to her. He replies that his friend, Bilwa Mangala, is known for his uprightness and

will not come to a prostitute's house. But she insisted that somehow he should bring him, only to seek answers to her doubts as Bilwamangal is a great scholar.

4. Bilwamangala at his office Bhavanisankaram comes to see him. He still thinks that Chitamani loves him and he takes Bilwamangala to her home to appease her and gain her favour.

Bhavani comes to Bilwamangala with a charade – a question to answer. This puzzle was put to him by Chitamani. Bilwamangala easily solves it. Bhavani runs to Chitamani's house to appraise her of the answer.

He comes back running and informs his friend that in order to get more clarifications of her doubts, she herself has come to see him. A puzzled Bilwamangala unwittingly welcomes her.

5. Chitamani is already attracted towards Bilwamangala whom she has seen earlier. Bilwamangala is also enamored of her beauty. She seeks him several questions and he answers all of them unhesitatingly. Admiring him, she removes a diamond necklace and puts it around his neck. Bilwamangala is puzzled. He is hesitant.

He also wants to give her a present if she answers his question. When he is about to ask him the question, he hears his father calling him. Agitated, Bilwamangala asks Chitamani and Bhavani Sankaram to leave the place by a rear door. Their admiring looks and Chitamani's over indulgence bothers Bhavanisankaram who suspects that all is not well.

6. Next day Bhavanisankaram meets Bilwamangala to enquire about the previous evening's experience. Bilwamangala is all in praise for her beauty. Bhavani then offers to take him to her place. But Bilwamangala is afraid because people might see him. Bhavani, then, offers to take him during the night, for at that time no one can see them. He also promises to inform her of his friends coming. Bilwamangala accepts the offer gladly.

7. Chitamani's house. Chitamani is eagerly waiting for the arrival of Bilwamangala. Meanwhile Subbi Setti comes. She and her mother are very much agitated. Subbi Shetti is sent away forcibly when the two friends arrived.

Bilwamangala also gives Chiramani a puzzle to solve and she rightly solves it. The puzzle is about what is contained in a box. When she resolves it, he offers the box to Chitamani. She opens it. There is a diamond flower in it.

Daringly, Chitamani comes closer to Bilwamangala and asks him to promise her that he would fulfil her one wish. After enquiry she says that she wants to learn Kama Sastra from such a learned man.

The loser, Bhavanisankaram is extremely unhappy at the turn of events.

8. When Bilwamangala usurped the complete attention of Chitamani, Bhavani is unhappy and becomes philosophical and advises people not to be lured by such sweet-smiling women of loose character.

To the same main street comes Subbi Setti. They exchange their experiences. Bhavani thinks that it is the mother who is the villain, though Chitamani by herself is good. Subbi Setti doesn't believe it. Subbiseti says that Bilwamangala is constructing a seven storeyed building for her.

When Bilwamangala and Chitamani are talking about the new house, Chitra comes with the news that their mother has handed over Subbi Setti to Police. Chitamani requests Bilwamangala to use his influence and see that Subbi Setti is released. Bilwamangala agrees.

9. Radha, wife of Bilwamangala, bemoans her fate and the negligence of her husband, not only towards her but also towards his business duties. Bilwamangala comes in an angry mood. Radha questions him as to his vexation. He is further angry and says that Chitamani is suffering from severe headache and all this is because of Radha's ill-will towards her. Radha is extremely sad because her husband dismisses her from his presence even while taking his food.

Radha becomes desperate and asks husband why he is such a changed man now. He says that his attention is completely centered around Chitamani. Radha asks as to what is wrong with her. Bilwamangala replies that to be a wife is her misfortune. Radha cries for her fate. Bilwamangala also pours out his next saying that Chitamani has binded him with her allurements. He says he is also unaware of when he will come out of this infatuation.

When he is about to leave, his friend Damodara enters. He follows him to talk to him.

10. Damodara advises his friend of the wrong track in which he is going. Bilwamangala says that this is the only one he is aware of now. Damodara tries to plead with his friend that his wife's goodness does not deserve the present treatment meted out to her. He also says that the prostitutes would ultimately ditch the suitors, for which Bilwamangala says that Chitamani is above all such ordinary people and she is devoted to him. Damodara laughs at his friend's foolishness. He counters every virtue that Bilwamangala attributes to Chitamani.

His friend asks him to stop this persuasion because he is too deeply involved in his amorous life and there is no use. He even pushes him back not to accompany him as he wants to go peacefully to Chitamani's house.

Damodara feels sorry for his once virtuous friend and curses the institution of prostitution and its practitioners.

11. Vasudeva Murthy, father of Bilwamangala is very sick. He is eagerly waiting for his son's arrival. After several messages, he arrives finding fault with such unnecessary bothering. His wife tells him that she sent messages because his father is not well and he will not survive to see the day.

The father wakes up hearing his son's words. He chides his son for his ill-treatment of his wife who is the very embodiment of all virtues. He asks his son as to why this blindness to his own state of affairs. He finds fault with Chitamani for being responsible for the entire mess in their lives.

Bilwamangala is angry for his father's words and is about to leave the house. His wife pleads with him that it is not fair to leave her alone in the house with the ailing old man in such a torrential downpour.

Meanwhile the father, after a deep cry, collapses. Bilwamangala is for a moment sorry that his father died. There was a thunder. Bilwamangala gets up to go because Chitamani is afraid of thunder and lightening. Radha begs him to stay behind. But her pleas fall on a deaf ear. Bilwamangala leaves saying that he will come back next morning.

Radha is utterly saddened. She becomes hysterical. She curses the prostitute profession for disturbing the peaceful life of families. She feels that her father-in-law is asking her to accompany her as there is no place for them in the world. She says she is coming but before going she wants to touch the feet of her husband and take leave of him. She collapses.

12. Chitamani is praying to Lord Krishna and then feels that He is asking her to come to Him. She says why keep her in such a shameful life. She pleads with Him to take her away and goes into same kind of slumber.

Krishna appears. He says that he commands the lives of the people based on their past and present lives. Man is a queer being for as long as he gets what is desired. He will not think of God. He is so selfish that he is not concerned with his neighbour. But I tend to excuse the small wrong doings of my devotees.

This Chitamani, though followed a life of sin, is at least kind and concerned. She goes through a conflict of good and bad and is always sorry for doing things that she is doing.

Let her realize the wrongs, find solace in me and let Bilwamangala also realize his fate through her.

Chitamani gets and asks Chitra as to the whereabouts of Krishna. Chitra is fumbled. Chintamani says that she saw Krishna asking her to come out of this sinful life. She also said that Krishna ordered her that from that day onwards, she should not make the lives of virtuous people miserable.

13. When Chitamani came out of her dreamy world, she hears the door knock. Chitra opens the door. It is Bilwamangala, completely drenched in the rain.

Chitamani wonders why he came in the dead of this night leaving her sick father alone. He says that he has left the world. Chitamani feels sorry. She sees blood smears on him and asks what these stains are and also how he could come in to the house when the main door is closed from within. Bilwamangala answers

that he crossed the back wall with the help of a rope. But when they actually went there they found a snake, dead. They realize that Bilwamangala had the snake as the rope to climb up and cross into the house.

She then asks him how could he come crossing the river. He said that he tried for some wooden piece. She found some piece but he now remembers that the object was soft. They went and realized that it was a human being. On careful observation they found that it was none other than Radha, Bilwamangala's wife. Chitamani said that Radha served her husband not only while alive, but also after her death.

Bilwamangala says that in love for Chitamani that made him like this. Chitamani observes that he did not know her real identity. She comes back leaving all her make up. She says that several men have gone through her possession looking at her present disposition which is an eye-opener to Bilwamangala he sees his fault and bot of them vow to propagate henceforth about the evil effects of prostitution and their way of life.

Chitamani calls all her earlier suitors who lost all their money due to her and gives away all her money to them and spends the rest of her life in worshipping Lord Krishna.