

Surya Deva Raya

A 17th Century Love Story

By Ravi Kumar Paramkusam

My name is Robert Fernandes and people call me Bob. My masters sent me to India to guard Surya Deva Raya and be his personal bodyguard.

They provided me with a letter from the King appointing me to the personal guard of Surya Deva Raya.

I took the letter and reached Vijayawada, the working headquarters of Surya.

It is situated in a Mahal at the foot of Durga Hills built on 10 acres of land.

I showed the letter from the King to the guards and they let me in. I went and met the head of the armed forces and he introduced me to the Head of security, and he took me to the Surya Deva Raya and introduced me as his new personal bodyguard appointed by the King.

So, this way, I joined Surya and became his shadow from that moment onwards.

His daily routine is first thing in the morning he has a bath and climbs the steps to the Durga temple and first he visits Malleshwara Swamy and offers abhishekama and prayers and then visits Durga Devi.

Then he sits in the office at the palace and runs the region on behalf of the king.

He has around 10000 soldiers stationed in the area and other officials like accountants, etc.

They collect the taxes and deposit them in the khazana or treasury. The balance after meeting the expenses, they transferred to King's treasury.

All the officials come to visit Surya at his office and some come to give advice and some come to ask favours.

Surya weighs each one and makes a decision. He doesn't make rash decisions, but the matter requires urgent attention he takes the matters seriously.

He was known in the region as a just and reasonable administrator. He is just aged 25 and unmarried.

Some of the close confidante tried to persuade him to get married, but he would say if god made someone for me he would bring her in front of me. Until then I will wait.

As he was saying, one day as he was returning after his daily puja, he came across a girl climbing the steps to the temple. At first look, he was love-struck and asked me to get the details of the girl. I sent one of the soldiers with the group to find her details.

The soldier came after two hours with the girl's details. She is the daughter of Jayabheri, the city's administrator. She is the lone child and they named her Seetha. She helps her father in her office and seems to be well-learned.

I sent him back to get more details about her like what is her routine.

The information he brought was that she mostly works with her father and keeps to her house. It is in once in a blue moon incident that she has come to visit the temple.

It seems there is no option for Surya to come in front of her except to go and visit her at her father's office.

Surya was getting frustrated by Seetha not coming in front of him when he visited the temple. At last, he resigned to the fact that the gods were not willing for him to meet her again.

As a constant companion, I could see the change in him, he was frustrated by small things. He was not concentrating on work and kept brooding. He might have resigned to the fact that gods were not willing for him, but he could not forget her. It was the first time for him to be love-struck and he did not have close friends who he could confide in. When you are in a high position, the people who treat you as friends are only there for their own selfish reasons.

Seeing him like that I could not sit idle, I tried to find ways for Surya to go and see her once again.

After enquiring with different departments, I came across one complaint from a resident against the city's administrator. He came to the office with a complaint that the city was charging excessive amounts from him.

I brought this matter to Surya and reminded him that we could use City's administrator and Seetha would be there.

Surya said we will go and visit the Jayabheri office and enquire about the matter.

By the time we reached his office, Jayabheri left for lunch, and I sent a soldier to his house, which is nearby. He returned with a message, Jayabheri called us to his home.

We went to his house and I knocked on the door.

Jayabheri's servant opened the door and welcomed us inside.

Jayabheri came to the office room in his house thinking of some accountant from the king's office.

Finding Surya in the office he regretted calling Surya to his house, troubling him.

Surya replied it did not matter and explained about the matter brought to his notice.

Jayabheri replied he would look into the matter and reply.

Jayabheri offered Surya lunch which Surya declined. Then Jayabheri sent his servant to get some buttermilk.

Seetha came with a glass of buttermilk and offered it to Surya, which he took from her and drank it looking at her.

Jayabheri introduced her as his daughter Seetha and to Seetha as Regional Administrator Surya Deva Raya.

She did a namasthe to Surya and went inside.

They took his leave and returned to their offices.

Surya was in his office with the officials.

Seetha came to meet with Surya.

I asked her how come, she came to visit Surya.

Seetha replied, "My father had to go out of the city on urgent business and he asked me to take these papers to Mr Surya."

I asked her to wait a minute and went and informed Surya about the visit of Seetha.

He told the officials he would be back in a minute and came out and took Seetha to another room.

Surya took the papers from Seetha, and inspected and found everything to be in order.

Surya asked her some questions and he enquired about her.

Seetha told him she is the lone child of her parents, so her father treated her like a son and had her educated and she started helping him. Very few girls had an education in those times. As her father did not find a suitable match, she was not married yet. They are from the Shetriya caste and were finding a suitable match is very difficult these days.

Surya sympathised with her and they had a long chat and at the end of the chat, Surya asked Seetha to come and work for him as an assistant.

Seetha replied she would confirm with her father and come back.

When Seetha was ready to leave for her house, he asked to send her home in a horse-drawn cart.

I arranged for her transportation and sent her to her house.

Seetha came back after two days showing interest in working with Surya as her father gave her permission.

From the next day, she would reach Suura's palace by 7 am after having a bath and getting ready and both of them accompanied by security guards would climb the steps to the Durga Temple, perform abhishekam and return to the office and immerse in the routine works. Being learned in the administration her experience has come to good use for Surya. In a week, they became up-to-date with work.

One day Surya received an invitation from the king to attend a function at the capital. Surya invited Seetha to accompany him to the capital. She said she would take her father's permission to come with him.

Her father permitted her as he was also attending the function and asked Surya to accompany them.

They all went to the capital and attended the functions. Surya got royal treatment there and Seetha and Jayabheri too enjoyed the same treatment.

Jayabheri was impressed with the clout enjoyed by Surya, it seems that King Venkatapati wanted to make Surya his son-in-law.

Surya's father Rama Deva Raya had a hand in that. He wanted Surya to marry one of the king's daughters. But Rama did not tell his intentions to Surya at this time.

They all returned to Vijayawada and continued their work. During this time Surya and Seetha continued to work very closely and Jayabheri confirmed Surya as his son-in-law and let them work closely.

During one of these times, they came close and had their first night during a trip. That night brought them much more closure.

I will let Seetha reminisce about her experience.

Seetha:

We were called to Rajamahendravaram to check their collections, as the low collection of taxes was reported.

Surya arranged for a horse-drawn buggy for us to travel. We were travelling and chatting for most of the daytime. In the evening we stopped at a royal guest house. These were built beside the main roadways near towns or cities. It is for the convenience of officials travelling between cities. As repairs were going on, all the rooms were shut and only one room they made available in an emergency.

We put down our luggage and washed ourselves and they made arrangements for dinner in our room.

We had dinner washed hands and sat down looking at the records.

