

'Saraswathi Putra' Sriman Puttaparthi Narayanacharyulu

A precocious poet—a fourteen-language-polyglot, the author of the finest lyrical piece in modern Telugu literature, a composer of 7000 songs, an exponent of dance and the writer of more than a score of poetical and prose works—all this sounds rather a tall order for one man to accomplish, but, believe it, these are all the facets of one man.

The man Sriman Puttaparthi Narayanacharyulu—is a phenomenon on the contemporary Telugu literary scene.

Born at Penugonda (Anantapur District) in Andhra Pradesh in the year 1914 to scholarly parents, the poet in Sri Narayanacharyulu found expression in a poem called "Penugonda Lakshmi" — when he was a mere lad of twelve years. The very same poem was later prescribed as a text book when Sri Narayanacharyulu took his Vidwan Examination in Telugu

Leaving school abruptly,— one is reminded of Rabin-dranath Tagore here—Sri Narayanacharyulu got by-heart whole dramas of Shakespeare and Milton's "Paradise Lost" even he knew not their import. This amazing feat of memory power was by no means a freak

happening – he did the same with entire Sanskrit Kavyaas when, at the Tirupati Collge of Oriental studies, some students made fun of this “18 year old boy” beginning Sanskrit alphabets. Later on, thanks to a lectre by James Cousins on Keats, Sri Narayanacharyulu’s mind turned to Shelley and Keats. This, as well as the interest in Soofism, led to his writing “Shajee”, apoignant poem of love.

An actor of feminine leads in his school days, Sri Narayanacharyulu cultivated the arts of dance and music, and even gave a few dance recitals as a boy.

When in his thirties he came under the influence of the great Maharashtra Bhaktas like Tukaram, Gnaneswar and Eknath, as also under the influence of the revolutionary - turned - saint Arvind Ghosh, he established an ashram in a grave - yard and lived for some time the life of an ascetic. Thes period of retreat made him compose 7000 songs and set 400 of them to music. Sri Narayana-charyulu lived in Rishikesh, where, impressed by this poet and musician, late Swami Sivanandaji blessed him with the title of “Saraswathi Puthra”.

His encounter with the famed ‘Rama Charita Manas’ of Tulsidas resulted in an intensely emotional poem called “Sakshatkaaram” (The Revelation) and even now Sri Narayanacharyulu confesses, he can live for days without food but not without reciting Rama Charita Manas every day.

Then came the magnum opus of this multi-faced genius – a song called “Sivathandavam” – a song the like of which was never sung in the tongue of the musical Telugu – a song that presents before every mind

the great cosmic dance of Lord Siva—and in this ‘Kriti the poet and the musician, the dancer and the devotee in the person of Sri Narayanacharyulu mingled exquisitely to produce a masterpiece.

Of ‘Sivathandavam’, said Sri Sivasankara Swami; the renowned poet of Andhra desa— ‘here is the brightest jewel in the necklace of Andhra Saraswathi. The imagery is extra-ordinary, the meaning deep as ocean and idea noblest. in the modern Telugu literature this is a matchless lyric Kavi Samrat Sri Viswanadha Satyanarayana -- the Colossus among Telugu literati opined “Sri Narayanacharyulu is a great poet and scholar. In ‘Sivathandavam “his poetry flows fresh”.

Wherever Sri Narayanacharyulu addresses a gathering the singing by himself of a portion of his ‘Sivathandavam’ has become a major attraction and to see and listen him so is an experience worth cherishing indeed.

All Sri Narayanacharyulu’s poetry is, however, not mere devotion and imagination. Contemporary impact is not lost on this sensitive soul. Mention needs be made, in this context of ‘Agni veena’ (a collection of verses by the poet and his wife Smt. Kanakamma), ‘Megha-Dutam” (the author’s most beloved work)—modelled on Kalidasa’ famed epic a tale of a disillusioned a man who fought the evils of money and was imprisoned. ‘Gandhi Mahaprasthanam’ — the story of the Nation’s Father.

Sri Narayanacharyulu’s unpublished ‘Pandari Bhagavatham’ is a monumental work of 24.000 couplets. His ‘Jana Priya Ramayanam’—yet to be completed is hailed by those privileged to listen to it, asa work

that may well be the best of Ramayana versions in the Telugu language. Sri Narayanacharyulu is rated as an authority on that golden age of Telugu literature, the reign of Sri Krishnadeva Raya, the Emperor of Vijayanagara empire and his 'Prabhanda Nayikalu' is noted for its charm and his unpublished 'Social History of Vijayanagar Empire' reveals his acumen for historical research.

Though he had no formal education in English Sri Narayanacharyulu wrote a remarkable collection of English verses titled 'Leaves of the Wind'. It was hailed by Sri Harindranath Chattopadhyaya as 'a book of sensitive poetry', 'Sivakarnamrutham', is his contribution to that language of Gods Sanskrit.

With the mania that he has for learning languages he acquired mastery not only over all the four languages of South India viz. Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam but also over Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, and Pali – the last, for the sake of reading Jain, Buddhist literature. The list does not end there, Sri Narayanacharyulu went on to learn Prakrit, Greek and Latin as well. And a couple of years ago he was reported to be busy in mastering Russian, thus adding one more language to the list.

He had translated, while working on the Etymological Dictionary at Trivandrum, Sri Viswanadha Satyanarayana's Telugu novel "Eka Veera" and a few of late Gopichand's stories into Malayalam and also brought into Telugu a set of Malayalam plays. He has also done Dr. Kosambi's 'Bhagawan Budha from Marathi and 'Kabir's Sayings' from Hindi to Telugu. As a linguist he mentions of the fundamental unity of all Indian languages and the vital integrating force of Indian culture.

This individual whose learning and literary output almost sound as those of an institution, leads a simple but hard life as a school teacher in the small town of Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh.

An idealist of independent views. Sri Narayana-charyulu had to enter into literary controversies with his contemporaries, but even while differing, dignity never deserted him. Impulsive as only a true artist can be, he has been swept off his feet by many a tide in his life, but his essential sincerity and devoutness afford him an inner peace and calmness that irradiate this great personality.

About to reach his sixtieth year shortly Sri Narayanancharyulu's achievements so far, only provoke all the lovers of Telugu literature to hope for much greater things from him. (Mar. 72)—
