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Sri Sri And His Literary Works: Some Social Reflections

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to reflect upon the Sri Sri's great literary works mainly focusing on his scholarly works Mahaprasthanam (The Great Forward March), and Maroprasthanam (Another Forward March). The main objectives of this study are: to relate his thoughts to the then social realities; to know under what circumstances he became synonymous to Progressive and under what circumstances he identified himself to Revolutionary poets. The appropriate framework for this study had been developed on the basis of an extended critique of the available variants of the broad frame grounded in the Marxist Sociology of Literature and it is supplemented by a similar critique of the dominant frames from the domain of literary criticism, poetics and aesthetics. Sri Sri's works clearly and categorically mirrored the then social realities with great vigor.

KEYWORDS: Progressive Literature, Revolutionary Literature, Social Realities, Literary movements

Introduction

The decades of the 30s and 40s mark the phase of major ferment and dynamism, in India, and especially in Andhra. It is the period that witnesses the widespread despondency and frustration caused by Mahatma Gandhi's suspension of the nation-wide Satyagraha, following the Chauri-Chaura violence. It reels under the blow of the global economic crisis, which hit the peasantry and workers of the Andhra region with exceptional intensity. It witnesses the gathering clouds of Fascism and Nazism, Spanish Civil War, and the calamity of the World War II.

How are these turbulent, tense and dark decades breathing their specificity in the literary and cultural spheres of the Telugu speaking people? To recapture the spirit of the times, we may re-live it through the recollection of Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, popularly known as Sri Sri, whose advent in the literary sphere, as the poet of Mahaprasthanam (The Great Forward March), in 1934 marks the beginning, as it were, of a new era in Telugu Literature, especially poetry, which continues to be its central and decisive genre were today. Eight decades after the publication of Mahaprasthanam, Sri Sri, regarded Gurazada as the 'path finder' in Modern Telugu, and described his own role as that of 'path-widener'. And, as he put it in his characteristic sharpness, he was 'ruled' by Telugu poetry until 1934, but after 1934 (when Mahaprasthanam was published); he began to rule it (Anjaneyulu, D. 1984). Here, then, are his reminiscences of the days when this epoch-making poem came to be composed.

"In 1928, for college education I went from Vishakhapatnam to Madras. Our financial position also started its downfall from those days. All over the world, noises of hunger were heard. The decade from 1930 was also known as 'Hungry Thirties'. As a result of all these influences 'Mahaprasthanam' poems came out. That means, my family's financial status, Hungry Thirties, the literature that was available for my readings and my wanderings as an unemployed graduate have created a social awareness in me" (Sri Sri, 1980).

Sri Sri's presidential address (Sri Sri, 1955) to the fifth conference of Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), in retrospect, marks the beginning of a relatively active phase of the movement in Telugu Literature, till he moved over to the Revolutionary Writers' Association (RWA) in 1970. In his address, he underlined the over-riding importance of using the people's language in its living forms so as to communicate to the masses the core of the progressive vision. His critique of the existing state apparatus and this restrictive impact on free expression of the creative, revolutionary urges of the writers is direct, hard-hitting. Above all, his re-statement of the aim and direction of the movement was packed with urgency and impatience.

Sri Sri declared that, the aim of the progressive writers is to use people's language in all literary forms. A progressive writer should portray the conflict between two opposing views, one describing change and the other who finds change unnecessary and dangerous. He also exhorted the progressive writers to be wary of the forces that pull them back in their path of progressive literature. He added progressive literature

need not confine only to stories and poems, but it should try to absorb the scientific and technological progress achieved in European countries. Keeping this in mind the progressive writers should develop Telugu Language. He pointed out that the seeds of enlightenment sown by Gidugu Sitapati, Gurajada and Viresalingam have started yielding fruits.

After 1935, there was a swing to Leftism in Telugu Poetry. Sri Sri led a revolt against the Romantic Movement and led the progressive movement. It is interesting to note that Sri Sri also started his career as a poet in the classical vein, writing on the time honoured themes in traditional meters. But he quickly realized what he ought to do, the direction which not only he, but the corpus of Telugu Poetry should take. It is no overstatement of fact when he said that he had been directed by Telugu literature till 1930, and then he had started directing it thereafter. The publication of his Mahaprasthanam (Sri Sri, 1934) was certainly a landmark in the field of progressive Telugu Poetry in general. The voice of Sri Sri very soon found echo and voluntary applause among his younger fellows. Sri Sri became synonymous with modernism in Telugu Poetry.

The credit for popularizing progressive poetry as a distinguishable movement among writers, students and the like should undoubtedly go to Sri Sri, who heralded a new epoch in Telugu Poetry. For progressive writers, free verse is the favorite medium. The prevailing economic discontent and the disillusionment following on the emergence of political freedom are to be canalized for the class-war. He declared in 1940 -

"Unrest is our life; Agitation is our breath; Rebellion our philosophy"

It is no wonder that he had latter became a revolutionary poet. Whether he is a progressive or revolutionary, he is essentially a poet with a mastery over expression.

Sri Sri is lucky in having a band of followers, which is one of the reasons, why Progressive poetry has become popular.

Sri Sri's Mahaprasthanam (1950) (a compilation of 40 poems) though actually written in the thirties, all the poems in general and the poem Mahaprasthanam, in particular, achieved a powerful vogue in the forties. The poem Mahaprasthanam had an electrifying effect on future poets as well as people in general. The Mahaprasthanam book contains 'forty' poems. It starts with title poem "Mahaprasthanam" and ends with "Jagannadhuni Radhachakralu".

When Chelam was asked, in 1940, to write the Fore-word for Sri Sri's book "Mahaprasthanam" Chelam promptly replied "I don't have weighing stones to weigh poetry". Writing about Sri Sri's progressive poetry, Chelam says "Sri Sri has made New Tonic by mixing blood and tears to this 'Old World'".

Chelam asks- If you have guts to listen and withstand -

"Noise of the vultures' wings,

Uproars of these violent oceans,

Din of the vehement tempest" (Sri Sri, 1937).

Then open the book Mahaprasthanam.

Sri Sri inspired many young writers as well as the modern writers through his poems. He was the 'Father of Progressive Telugu Literature (PTL)'. His first poem came out with his own tone was 'Jayabheri' (Trumpet of Victory) (1933). This was the first 'Progressive Poem' written by him after leaving 'imaginary poetry'. By this poem, one can understand the author's awareness of social-consciousness. He says that he also added a twig for the fire of world, by writing such a progressive poem-

"I too, for the fire of the World, offered a living,

I too, for the creation of the Universe, Shed one tear,

I too, for the uproar in the world,

Gave a mad cry, raising my voice high"

After completing Jayabheri, Sri Sri found beauty in social-life. Instead of going madly for supersensory beauty, Sri Sri understood that the poetic-objects are available in the surrounding beautiful lively-nature (society) (Narayana Reddy, C. 1967). After digesting the available national and international literature, he created a historic poem, Mahaprasthanam (Sri Sri, 1934). This poem is the foundation stone for progressive literature. Mahaprasthanam poem starts with Maroprapancham which means Another World, it is not a heaven or hell, and it is there in this world that is a socialist society. He thundered-

"We reel and roll, with a song in our soul; Our galloping hearts shall reach the goal; The choice is dear, the hour is near; The voice of another world is clear, the hour is near; Thrilled in the call, of the water fall, Of another world we march onward".

"Our blood in floods shall drench all roads; We leap the deep and sweep all shores; Reshaping geography again; Remaking history again, Nor deserts nor forests nor hills nor rivers; Our forward march shall halt or reverse; East and West and North and South"

He ended his thirst, wishing for another world.

"Forward March, Oh onward surge, Ahead let's always forge, Hail comrades denounce the useless, Dust and dirt of an age gone by, See before us rise the glories, Mankind's hope lit spire of fire, Come like serpents, Come like grey hounds".

He says everything is fit for poetry. Sri Sri, in his poem, Pratigna (vow) (1937) says-

"For the fire of lamentation, For the tears of sorrow, Price determining, 'noble' is nowhere!"

And also following Marxian philosophy, he took an oath to dedicate his poetry for the poor and working class-

"The new poetry which is moving in me, For the prosperity of working class world, For the fortune of labor-class world, I will offer".

Sri Sri's Deshacharitralu (Histories of nation) (1938) reflects the 'Dialectical materialism' of Marx and Engels.

In this poem, he boldly expressed his views about real histories of nation. He pointed out the country's history-

"Look at any country's history, What is in it to feel proud? Entire history of mankind, Wrapped up with the foreigner's persecutions"

He portrayed the history of mankind-

"Entire history of mankind, Movement of mutual offerings"

"Entire history of human race, Wet with the flood of battle blood"

"Entire history of mankind, Is to exploit the poor"

"The powerful enslaved, The Weaker race"

"Man killers as rulers of this world, In history, raised in fame"

Marx urged the workers of the world to unite for abolishing the system of exploitation. Influenced by Marx's ideology, Sri Sri wrote-

"Rickshaw puller in China, Mine worker in Czech, Ship worker in Ireland, All the down trodden and distressed".

Illustrating the idea that the real science of history must deal with the people, Sri Sri wrote-

"Whichever war fought for whichever reason, Whichever kingdom survived for whichever period, Dates and documents, These do not make the purpose of history".

"In the civilization of Nile River, What was the life pattern of common man? For the construction of Taj Mahal, Who were the hired labourers that lifted the stones?"

Sri Sri, in Vyathyasam (Discrepancy) (1937) portrayed the difference between the poor and the rich, identifying himself with poor class. Sri Sri said, that the Justice, Jails, Defense Forces etc. are all to safeguard the rich people-

"For safeguarding the line alone, Places of Justice, defense force,

Jails, guillotines, Inevitable, the line must be safeguarded"

In 'Jagannadhuni Radhachakralu' (Wheels of Jagannadha's (Vishnu's) Chariot) (1940), Sri Sri wished that the revolutionary power (an incarnation) is coming to end the injustice in this world-

"The sinners, The deprived people, The deceived brothers, Don't cry, don't cry! Have come, have arrived, Jagannadha's chariot wheels, Chariot wheels, chariot wheels, Oh come, Come! Oh come! Come! This world is yours, You rule your kingdom!"

Only, after he finished the poems in Mahaprasthanam, the progressive writers association was established. So, many young writers, inspired by his poems, started writing progressive poetry. In many of his poems, we can find the Marxian approach. It gave inspiration to young writers and prorogated them to fight against the age old traditions and customs.

Some of the writers from the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) were separated and formed an association called Revolutionary Writers' Association (RWA) under the president ship of Sri Sri. As he remarked in his presidential address: "Those people, who change their opinions and who are loving lust for comforts, support the wicked rulers and have gone with the inactive progressive writers movements. But those people, who won't bother the difficulties just for their opinions sake, have come to the revolutionary writers' movement".

The bourgeoisie press published the RWA as 'Naxalites in literature. It is a fact that the Progressive literature was woeful to many including Sri Sri. The formation of RWA then became a historical necessity. It was the armed struggle of Srikakulam supplied the immediate impetus to the birth of the RWA. The peasant struggles in the districts of Khammam and Warangal also added their own share of inspiration for writers and artists sensitive enough to react to the fresh stirrings.

Sri Sri's "Maropasthanam" (Another Forward March) (1980), a compilation of poems, is a master piece in which there are 34 poems. Maropasthanam is the little poem in which the author Sri Sri asked afresh 'What is Revolution?' His interest on Mahaprasthanam and Maropasthanam in which he differentiated between a progressive and revolutionary are worth mentioning.

Concluding Reflections

Sri Sri's "Maropasthanam" is the last significant collection of his poems,

a decade before his death in 1983. His Mahaprasthanam inaugurated his meteoric career as a poet, and as the leading spirit of the Abhyudaya movement. He is the unifying thread linking pre-revolutionary era of Telugu literature, with its revolutionary era. Simultaneously, he is about the most concrete manifestation of the inner tensions, contradictions, and utopia-ideology casing of the recent 'experiments' in revolution. He is, for instance, the spirit of the Abhyudaya movement, but also the one who repudiates it totally when he inaugurates the Viplava (Revolutionary) movement in 1970. Neither of the two movements could contain nor assimilate him, through both, he retains his identity as a poet unscathed. He is simultaneously in and out. He concedes he is not a 'janakavi' (people's poet), but of them, and for them. He is deeply rooted in Telugu Desham (country), yet totally open. Our interest, therefore, centers on the ironic circumstance that four decades after his call for Mahaprasthanam, he has to pose afresh the question: "What is Revolution?"; "Where is Revolution?"

Here are his answers: "Where is Revolution? Sitting in your heart, Hiding only in our eyes"

And finally, one may ask: How does he demarcate Abhyudaya literature from Viplava literature? His answer is simple-

"Progressive writing is the writing of CPI and

Revolutionary is the writing of CPI (M-L)"

Is he, then, implying that the distinction between the two rings on pure externality-viz-specific party-affiliation? Is he affirming the famous unity of literature- praxis (political)? Or is he suggesting, without saying it in so many words, that as a form of creativity and as a force of transformation, the Abhyudaya literary movement continues to run its course uninterrupted, even though under a new label? Whichever way one chooses to understand him, for purposes of our inquiry, the emergence of Viplava marks the end of domain of exploration.

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