

SELECTIONS FROM SRI SRI & OTHER ESSAYS

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Srirangam Srinivas Rao (Sri Sri) needs no introduction to anyone who reads or writes or does both in Telugu language. Sri Sri was synonymous to the revolution that shook up Telugu poetry in many ways. Most of the latter day poets have come under Sri Sri's influence at least once and they had to struggle to come out of it. Such is the magnetic power hidden in his poetry.

Sri Sri's poetic diction was distinctive when compared to his contemporary poets, the tempo set in the poems was electrifying and the themes were somewhat offbeat than the most prevalent ones of that era. With all these divergent factors, Sri Sri stood apart from the others.

Though Sri Sri does not need introduction, his writings still survive as research topics. Several research papers, thesis, criticisms were written and are being written as well. Avakaaya.com is glad to share an insightful series on Sri Sri wherein his poems, film songs have been translated into English and some of the contemporary critics and writers have penned their views/opinions/observations about Sri Sri.

This work can become the one-stop repository for non-Telugu students who wish to study the works of Sri Sri and understand the innate meanings of the powerful metaphors used by him.

Dr. Kallury Syamala, retired faculty of Humanities Dept. at IIT, Delhi has put in an excellent effort to do the translations and also to compile the essays written on Sri Sri in consultation with Dr. Addepalli Ramamohan Rao who is an eminent poet, critic and literary historian.

We extend our gratitude and sincere thanks to Dr. Kallury Syamala for choosing Avakaaya.com for publishing this literary work. We are sure that our esteemed readers will find this work as enticing and educating.

Thanks & Regards

Editorial Team

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Srirangam Srinivasa Rao – ‘Sri Sri’ (1910-1983)

A People’s Poet in Popular Culture

Syamala Kallury

Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, Sri Sri as is he is popularly known, is one of the most outstanding literary geniuses of Telugu literature in the 20th century. He is in fact considered by many, even by people who do not appreciate his political ideology, as a trend-setter. He shot to fame with the publication of his first collection of poems “**Mahaprasthanam**” in 1950.

Mahaprasthanam was a collection of forty poems written between 1934 and 1940, the hungry thirties as they were described in the socio-economic history of the times. The period covers the economic depression after the war and the consequent trials faced by the downtrodden across the globe. In more ways than one, this book ushered in a new beginning in Telugu literature. It is the first widely acclaimed book of poetry written by a Marxist public intellectual in Andhra.

This book was perceived as a statement against the prevailing literary trends wherein poetry was written for the elite and the intelligentsia of the times and the common reader was generally left out of the purview of aesthetic and artistic endeavours of the contemporary age. Poetry was constrained by the chains that bound it to the past by traditional meters and classical diction. Those who tried to break away from these trends tried to break free only from the restraining forms and so they too were seen as reactionaries. Sri Sri’s poetry at this time came as a welcome relief. He raised his voice loud and clear and swept people off their feet like a whirlwind. It was widely acknowledged that his poetry brought about a change in the manner in which poetry was perceived by the contemporary world in matters of form as well as content.

The themes that Sri Sri chose, made him the champion of the downtrodden- “What matters most is not the palanquin the king rode on, but the people who carried the king in the palanquin! He also asked pertinent questions like “Who are the coolies that carried the stones while a Taj Mahal was being built?” His concern was for the farmer who tilled the land, the factory worker who had to sweat it out in the *kharkhanas*. He became a role model for the generation of poets who followed him immediately after.

The progressive movements that shaped the course of Telugu poetry were given their first impetus by Sri Sri’s school of thought. If Gurazada was the father of Modern Telugu poetry, Sri Sri was definitely seen as the architect who shaped and moulded the course of literary movements covering the entire century, a force behind all the progressive movements that Telugu literature witnessed during the 20th century after the thirties.

It is said that while poets like Viswanatha and Krishna Sastry wrote with a subjective experience and imposed their sorrows on the world, Sri Sri took upon himself the burden of the sorrows of the world. His poetry reflects his concern for the common man. Prior to the **Mahaprasthanam** period, Sri Sri was an ardent admirer of poets like Devulapalli and it cannot be denied that though he took to writing with a political ideology as the basis after the thirties he was basically a romantic at heart. The film songs that Sri Sri penned till the end of his life gave him ample scope to articulate his romantic fervour.

In addition to *Mahaprasthanam* he published another collection of poems *Khadgashrushti*, which won the Soviet Land Nehru Award for poetry. *Khadgashrushti*, Creations of the Sword, was a collection of poems written during 1940-45 but published only after 1965.

When one looks at the times of Sri Sri’s advent with a historical perspective, one has to point out here two of the most important landmark events that marked the beginning of the twentieth century. One is the very well known and significant Spoken Word Movement in Andhra led by scholars like Sri Gidugu Srirama Murthy. His active and tireless efforts touring the whole of Andhra region advocating for the release of Telugu literature from the shackles of the highly sanskritised diction and promoting the use of spoken dialect as a medium for creative expression, brought in a much needed paradigm shift in the writing of the times in Telugu.

The second most important event was the advent of Gurazada on to the literary scene. In many ways Gurazada's foot print is often referred to as the one that led the way. He, not only actively believed in the spoken word as literary medium as advocated by Gidugu Ramamurthy, but was also one of the leading figures who spearheaded the social reform movements like abolition of child marriages and widow remarriages. His well known literary compositions the poem *Puttadibomma*, *Purnamma* and the play *Kanyasulkam* stand testimony to this.

However, though Gurazada's was the first voice of modernity, immediately after Gurazada there emerged a group of strong voices whose poetry represented an altogether new trend in literature. The new influences cast by familiarisation with English literature, especially the great romantics of English poetry, the award of first Nobel Prize to Asia and the emergence of Tagore as a major influence in all the Indian literatures changed the course of poetry in Telugu. A strong subjective element dominated the poetry for almost half a century.

These were the predecessors of Sri Sri who were his first major influences before he turned to Marxism. Thus, in addition to Sri Sri, Viswanatha Satyanarayana and Devulapalli Venkata Krishna Sastry, who preceded Sri Sri and Devarakonda Balagangadhara Tilak who wrote just after Sri Sri are often cited as some of the others who made their mark in Telugu Poetry in 20th century.

Each of them had a distinctive voice of his own, Viswanatha believed in the Sanathana Dharma of the Hindu religion and wrote extensively and effectively on his beliefs. He was awarded the renowned Jnanapeeth award for his epic **Ramayana Kalpavriksham**. This was the first Jnanapeeth for a Telugu poet.

Krishna Sastry was perceived as a poet of the Gandharva world for his highly aesthetic and refined romantic poetry. Urvashi was the divine nymph who was the heroine of his dreams and many of his generation were swept of their feet by his romantic outbursts in poetry. He wrote on love, separation and resultant sorrows. Apart from the themes, Krishna Sastry's poetry was known for its aesthetic grandeur and sublime poetic sensibility marked by extreme subjectivism. It was referred to as 'atmashraya poetry' by the critics of the day. The oneness that the poet felt with his inner sensibilities was so absorbing that the lovers of poetry easily identified themselves with his passionate poetry which also displayed an extreme refinement in diction.

There are others like Addepalli, Endluri, Jayaprabha, and Hymavati who have been writing with commitment to one school of thought or other and maintaining literary aesthetics at the same time. Sri Sri too, like many of his time, was carried away by this romantic whirlwind. But then he made a conscious effort to break away from this tradition and this called for an extraordinary quest for an alternative and the effort resulted in his lifelong passion and dedication for poetry for common man. His long monologue poem dedicated to his muse *Kavita! O, Kavita* reflects his struggles to identify a distinct voice of his own. The poem talked of the search, the heartaches, and the breakup caused in his poem *Kavita! O Kavita*.

Sri Sri took advantage of the monotony of the stereotyped poetry that was prevalent and while his language still remained highly sanskritised, his purpose of writing set a new paradigm. He started writing for the common man. His themes were not the sweethearts of the imaginary world but the workers and farmers who toiled day and night for fulfilling the bare necessities of life. He thus started a new trend in poetry and how his poetry changed the tenor of writing is something that needs to be re-examined. His times not only demanded his breaking away from the established poetic traditions, but also demanded of him an equally passionate belief which can replace the powerful trends that dominated the era.

Sri Sri successfully created through his search a viable and equally powerful alternative for the existing and dominant poetic trends of contemporary Andhra. Thus historically Sri Sri forms a bridge between the classical and romantic trends represented by poets like Viswanatha and Krishna Sastry; and progressive trends represented by the dalit and feminists writers of the later eighties. He spearheaded the revolutionary movements of the in-between seventies. However, today in literary circles it is widely believed with full justification that Sri Sri who advocated progressive thought in every sphere was strangely silent about feminist movement which began to take shape during that time.

While he had within him the heart and the passion of a romantic, the language and the imagery were drawn from the traditional world which he rejected in his themes. Some of his well known poems on a lost traveller, an old woman reveal his intense identification with the plight of the people who form the core of his concern. The humanism that latter day Telugu poetry reflects,

finds its seeds in these concerns. Sri Sri is thus a fountainhead whose poetry contained most of the modern trends the 20th century Telugu poetry witnessed after the 40s.

In a way this falls in line with the contemporary literary trends in the rest of India. Many poets in the Indian subcontinent were influenced by the Progressive Writers Association which made its mark during the first half of the 20th century.

A group of young intellectuals started this movement with the aim of addressing the needs of the common man in the context of the changing political, economic and social conditions. They believed such a concern for the societal needs expressed through art and literature can shape a nation in its formative years and guide its destiny through a progressive path. Spearheaded by English poets like Stephen Spender and W.H Auden it was successful in generating vibrant debates in cultural and literary circles of the times. Initially Indian writers who chose to write in English, writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Jyoti Ghosh, Pramod Sen Gupta and M.D. Tasir, taking advantage of his stay in England where this association held its first meetings, brought the debates and introduced the ideas of the Progressive Writers association in Indian literary circles.

This movement was not just witnessed by Urdu literature alone though it was one of main languages which was benefited by it, but many other Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu literatures as well charted their future course of writing.

The draft of the manifesto of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) was first formulated in London's Denmark Street in 1935 and was later circulated in Indian literary circles in England and India and amongst both Indian English writers and the writers of Indian languages.

Undoubtedly it shaped the future of Indian literature as well as Indian writing in English. The manifesto talked mainly of six resolutions, namely, to establish writers associations in various Indian literatures, to initiate steps to publish magazines and hold conferences in collaboration with other organisations to develop cooperation between various literary organisations of varying ideologies, to work for the acceptance of a common link language across the country, to protect the rights of the writers and to assist them in publishing their work and finally, to work for freedom of expression.

In more ways than one, PWA had close similarities with Marxist literary movements across the globe and its concerns emanated from the socio-economic depressions caused by First World War and the rise of capitalist economies and the resultant rise of Communism in the global scenario. It was for this reason many writers stayed away from this movement as they saw it as a protest movement.

In Telugu literature while one can definitely assert that Sri Sri was familiar with the progressive movements that were sweeping India and the world there were many others who did not join this movement both in Hindi and in other Indian literatures. Though towards the end of his literary life Sri Sri claimed that he was not familiar with Marxism as socialist ideology at the time of writing **Mahaprasthanam** the contemporary events thus tell us a different story.

He was widely read and appreciated due to the sheer novelty of his themes, his extraordinary sense of rhythm and his command over his literary heritage and language of his land. If there were hundred people who read him there were hundred others who were wary of his ideas. His poetry did not give him his daily bread too. Like many writers of his times, who were members of PWA, turned to writing for films for survival; Sri Sri too started writing lyrics for films. That kept him in the public domain as a poet constantly, though what he wrote for film was not akin to his avowed political ideology. There was criticism against him that a poet who promised to usher in a whole new world by bringing down the heaven bound chariot wheels of Lord Jagannatha to earth, forgot his dream and started singing laurels for a heroine who sleeps in his heart and provokes him in his dreams.

There were others too in PWA who resorted to writing for films for survival. The industry gave them the daily bread and poet Gulzar in Hindi cinema, unlike Sri Sri, continued to bring literary anthologies even after entering Bollywood as a lyricist and director. Sri Sri never turned to any other form of creativity other than writing songs in films. And he did not write anything as spectacular as **Mahaprasthanam** after entering the cinema industry.

Some of his **Mahaprasthanam** poems were also used in films like *Jayabheri*, *Aakali Rajyam* and *Pratighatana*. He also wrote lyrics for *Alluri Sitarama Raju* based on the life of the well known revolutionary of the Manyam region who challenged the might of the British. The songs

have an inspirational and nationalist fervor and it is easy to get carried away by the reformatory and revolutionary zeal of his poetry. Sri Sri like many of his generation started writing for cinema purely for survival and his film songs too were marked for his unusual lyrical quality. Even the most popular one he wrote for the film Araadhana which eulogised the heroine of the hero's dreams, stood the test of time and is fondly remembered even today though in theme imagery and language it is quite uncharacteristic of Sri Sri to pen such a song. The love who sleeps in his heart and who eulogised challenges him in his dreams thus mesmerizes the lovers of music even today. Sri Sri's hold on public imagination continued to charm the Telugu poetry lovers because of his entry into cinema field.

It is not out of place here to go briefly into Sri Sri's journey into the world of popular culture. Though as a poet, Sri Sri mainly focussed on writing poetry based on his passion for poetry for common man, in cinema world Sri Sri exhibited a tremendous versatility and genius in writing lyrics for a variety of themes, situations, and scenes. It is easy to believe that his innate romantic fervour must have found expression while he was writing songs for films. The contemporary literary critics however did not appreciate his shift to writing lyrics for films. Though some of his **Mahaprasthanam** poems were used in films, at times verbatim, in movies like *Aakali Rajyam* and *Swarajyam (Nenu saitam- I too contributed)*, *Palleturu*, (polaalananni halaaladunni-after the fields are run through with ploughs), *Kanyasulkam (aanandam arnavamaite - if happiness is a canyon)*. In films like *Padandi Mumduku Ranabheri (Maroprapancham The other world)* and *Ummadi bratukulu (Sramaika jeevana - beauty of labour)* one finds the textual changes in the old songs probably done to suit the needs of cinema.

In addition to these, he wrote memorable lyrics for family-oriented movies like *Todi-kodallu*, Co-sisters in law (*naluguru kalisi panichestumte*, if people work together); *Bhaagyadevatha*, Goddess of Fortune (*madini haayi ninde -my heart is filled with comfort*); *Abhimaanam*, Affection (*tallini mimchina daivam-not all, No God greater than mother*) and so on. *Maangalya balam*, the power of marriage thread, *Iddaru mitrulu*, Two friends, are some of the other family-oriented movies.

His songs for mythological movies include *Nartanashaala*, The Dance Hall; *Krishnatulabhaaram* Weighing Krishna and nationalist songs appeared in historical films like

Alluru Seetharamaraju (Teluguveera, levara!), Telugu warrior, arise!); *Pettandarlu*, Feudal Lords and *Bobbili Yuddam*, The War at Bobbili. The poet who was never a part of the ongoing freedom movement or who never claimed any allegiance to Gandhian thought penned songs like *Ahimsaye ayudhamu, satyagrahame saadhanamu, Ramarajyame asayamu* (non violence is the weapon, satyagraha is the way and ramaraajya is the goal) and one whose addiction to alcohol claimed his health in his later life preached *kallu maanamdoyi baabayya, kallu terichi saagiraarandi baabayya* (Give up the drink fathers, open your eyes and march forward in life, fathers).

One can only say Sri Sri's life was an example of the dualities of life which he was constantly writing about in poetry. Whatever the compulsions behind writing these innumerable songs for films, it adds value to the corpus of Sri Sri's literary writings. The centenary year, celebrated in 2010, brought out every single facet of his literary life including film lyrics. Special mention should be made of one non-film song *O Mahatma! O Maharshi* a beautiful poem which effectively brings out through brilliant contrasting images dualities that surround the man in this world full of conflicts.

In late sixties and seventies Sri Sri guided the literary movements by giving his moral and vocal support to Digambara poets and the revolutionary poets. Many a time, as he grew older there were a number of people who used his name to be recognized as poets. He had another collection of poems named **Khadgashrishti** which cannot be described as a match to his first collection of poems. As mentioned before, he engaged himself in encouraging young poets and was instrumental in the birth of movements like the 'Digambara Movement and 'Revolutionary Writers movement' in Andhra Pradesh during the 70s. Many young poets dreamed of writing like Sri Sri with his inspiration. In this context Sri Sri's era can be described as one of the most defining moment for Telugu poetry during the 20th century.

In addition to poetry he also wrote a number of radio plays **Vidushakuni Atmahatya** being the most notable one, A Comedian's Suicide. All his letters and other prose writings too were compiled and republished by the shashtyabdipurti (60th birth day celebrations committee) committee. Vi ra sam (Viplava Rachayitala Sangham) the revolutionary writers' association also published the poet's complete works. Not many people are aware of his writings other than

poetry. However one should have no hesitation in saying that poetry was his first love and his beloved muse. One ardent admirer of Sri Sri, Mr. P Ashok Kumar plans to bring out a hundred volumes of and on Sri Sri out of which forty have so far released. There is a relook at his writing with the celebration of his birth centenary and as many thinkers and academicians paid tributes and called his poetic genius there was also a new insight into his poetry as the historic distance provided the necessary objectivity in way his work and times are thus far perceived. It can be observed that the aesthetic structures created by Sri Sri still stand erect even after the collapse of his political ideology. It in a way reasserts the poet's faith in poetry as his most beloved muse who gave sense and direction to his writings. His uncompromising and unconditional prioritization of aesthetic values over the political philosophy is the reason for his poetry standing the test of time. He never compromised on these literary values though he used his poetry as a vehicle to communicate his belief in Marxist philosophy.

During his life time Sri Sri never admitted that his poetry was written consciously to communicate his belief in Marxist ideology. In fact in the introduction to his reading of **Mahaprasthanam** for Videsaandhra Prachuranalu he clearly stated that in those days he was not aware that there was something called Marxist philosophy. On hind sight one might find it hard to believe that his poetry is not an outcome of a conscious socialist thought. While his first collection paved the way for a new poetics, it continues to influence the literary tastes of the youth even now. It is fitting here to recall the introduction that a contemporary like Gudipati Venkata Chalam wrote for Sri Sri's **Mahaprasthanam**. Like Sri Sri Chalam was also a radical thinker and revolutionary writer. He was known more for his radical writings on women's liberation and caste hierarchies in Hindu society. An atheist to the core, he began writing vehemently criticizing the superstitions in and around him but during the later part of his life he became an ardent believer in the spiritual greatness of the well known south Indian saint Ramana Maharshi and spent his life in the ashram of the guru in Arunachala hills. He wrote the introduction for **Mahaprasthanam** which was called a 'certificate of merit'. It was as critically acclaimed as the **Mahaprasthanam** itself, if not more. At one time Sri Sri believed that it was a mistake to ask Chalam to write an introduction to his first collection of poems as it attracted more critical attention than the Sri Sri's work .

What is it then that Chalam said about Sri Sri that merits the title ‘The Certificate of Merit?’ According to him he was alerted to the impact of Sri Sri’s poetry by another poet, “when the whole world is swept off its old dust by the new wave poetry of Sri Sri, what are you doing here in this dark corner, pining for women?” Till then Chalam was unaware of Sri Sri’s poetry, an unforgivable crime indeed! He read the poetry and loved it for its straight forward thought and vehemence. This poetry was variously defined by Chalam as ‘a battle cry that a poet makes till he achieves a compromise between his inner self and the world around him’, ‘With blood and tears Sri Sri’s created his new poetry as a tonic to the ailments of the world’. ‘The poems are the streams of blood flowing directly from the poet’s heart to those of the readers’. Like Chalam, Sri Sri was humane, and believed in atheism during the early part of his life. Like Sri Sri Chalam abhorred the caste discriminations. One thing that Chalam had and Sri Sri did not have was his sensitivity for women’s suffering. Similarly one thing that Sri Sri wrote constantly and Chalam was silent about was the socialist dream of classless society and the a faith in the assertion of the proletariat. Yet, if one reads Chalam’s certificate of merit one is immediately drawn to the many inspiring qualities of Sri Sri’s poetry highlighted by Chalam. It is widely believed and once admitted by the poet himself that at one time Sri Sri was even jealous of the popularity of Chalam’s introduction and was worried that it would surpass even the merit of his poetry and it could perhaps be the reason that in the later addition of the **Mahaprasthanam** this preface was not included. One should read it also to know and recognize how the poet’s of Sri Sri’s generation read one another and had no hesitation in appreciating the merit of a contemporary poet which a disappearing quality in today’s literary circles. Many poets and critics who followed Sri Sri believed that in order to appreciate Sri Sri they should condemn the poetry of his contemporaries like Devulapalli and Viswanatha. However, there is no doubt that Sri Sri stands out as a stalwart amongst his contemporaries because of his courage to chart out a distinct path to himself and by the courageous way he stood for his convictions that poetry should address the concerns of the common man.

1. Man! O Man

Sri Sri

In the movement of the zodiac

Amidst the changes of night and day

In the circles of the orbit

That rotates the planets,

The one that emerged from the

Will of the atom that

Moved ages ago

Man, O Man!

Worshipper of beauty

In poetry and sculpture, in an insect and a flower

In the lightning and the cloud

The worshipper of beauty!

The one who lives

The one who enjoys, mourns,

And despairs, the warrior!

The lover!

One who pines, meditates,
Who rejoices and renounces!

The one who reasons
Who in perpetual quest
Amongst the trees, ponds,
On the edges of water, in the snake holes
The one who searches!
The restless one, knowing no defeat!
Who looks up all the time! The great one!
Great traveller!
Man, O, Man!

The one who fights, envies, thinks narrow,
Alas man,
Oh, Man!
The one who fights for prevailing dharma,
The one who cannot tolerate injustice
Ideologue, Mahatma, Man!

In Asia, America, and in Europe
Africa and Australia

In the isles of the sea,

In the cities and towns

The rich or the poor

Young or old

While Black or Brown, Red or Yellow

Strong or meek

The one who lives and sings Man, O Man!

The one who belongs to one family,

Of one blood

Man, O Man!

The one who speaks several tongues

Who roams in several regions,

Who sheds multifaceted lights!

The good hearted one, the kind one

The one who travels rightful paths!

The one who crosses the deep seas

Deserts and climbs high mountains

The one who searches the high skies

And researches the stars

The thirsty one, the reflecting one!

The one who built bridges

Hospitals, museums,

Libraries, factories,

Trains, ships and planes

The one who achieved foresight and

Farthest hearing

Man, O Man!

The one who revels in aesthetic delights

Poet, dancer, sculptor, musician, philosopher

Scientist and thinker

The sorrowful one, the kind one

The one who can feel the pain of others,

The one who cannot lift a hand to kill an ant even

The Buddha and

Jesus!

Social animal, hard labourer,

The one who wears body as garb

The cloud that rains sweat

A member of a family of collective veins

Laborer, factory worker, O Man!

Wage earner, Gardener, farmer,

The one who lives in huts

Who lives on thin starch

The one endowed with many children

The eye of hunger, O Man!

The one who rebels and questions

The one who is not afraid to

Fall a prey to injustice

Prisoner

Rowdy

Murderer

Baby

Man, O Man!

2. Contrasts

Srirangam Srinivasa Rao (Sri Sri)

Lucky you people are!
You love light!
You hate shadows!
You have metal walls
Between good and evil!

Your thoughts move around
In a good room only!
The room was there even earlier!
That's why your life is
A full meal served on a leaf!
Your decisions are irrevocable!

Your ideas on good
Etiquette, manners,
Behaviour, quality
And values are all
Irrevocable, predetermined!
Straight are the lines of your glances!
If the lines distort you raise hue and cry!
The people on the other side of the line
Are all criminals!
All your courts, security, police
Are there to protect this line!
To protect only, all the prisons and gallows!

*** **

We are the unfortunate ones!
We travel in twilight zones!
On paths that have no borderlines!
We have problems and predicaments!
We see only darkness in light!
And fireflies of hatred!
One virtue amongst hundreds of sins!
One gruesome act amongst hundred virtues!
Every step of the way,
Only wide chasms, and wounds!
We have to make our own meal!
We don't get leaf plates even sometimes!
Our attraction is only for
The narrow lanes!

Our sight goes only in circular lines!
With no beginning, no end!
We are the creatures of twilight!
Products of doubt!
Questions and questions!
Answers that never satisfy!

We have no walls!
Our job is to break them!

Agitation is our life!
Protest is our breath!
Rebellion is our philosophy!

Thorns, boulders and many more obstacles
Our step always goes forward!

The place you have is enough for you!
You are even prepared to go back!
Some of you!

We go forward!
And the world will walk behind us!

You die a contented death!
The world will forget you!

People who do not care for troubles
In the way of keeping their convictions will join us!

Those who change their convictions
In search of pleasures will go with you!

3. The Great Forward March

A different world

A different world

A different world is calling!

March forward

Push ahead

Onward we march!

Stamping the feet

Singing a song

Roaring from the depths of our hearts

Let's march ahead!

Can you not hear the

Waterfall from the other world!

March forward

All along the way offering

Your bleeding hearts!

Walk the pathways, streets

And cross the forts!

The rivers, forests, mountains and

Deserts, what can stop us!

Let's march forward, push ahead!

Onward we march!

The ones with rotten bones and aged bodies

The lazy bones, death be upon you!

The ones with boiling blood and

Soldiers with energy filled

Come on! Join the march!

Harom Harom Hara¹

Hara Hara Hara Hara

Move forward

Chanting Harom Hara!

A Different world

A great one

Pervades the whole earth!

Roar like a great wind,

Flow like a swift thought!

Burst forth like a dark cloud full of rain

Move on, March ahead!

Can you not see the burning

Tretaagni² of

the other world!

Eighty thousand Merus³ are

Leaping and jumping

The great seas are going round and round

In a great dance of destruction!

Is it the boiling oil, no!

It is a pond of hot blood

Leap high like Sivasamudra⁴ and Niagara

Jump and leap!

March forward

March ahead!

The gong of the other world

¹ Another name for Siva, This rhythmic chant is usually used when climbing great heights or on pilgrimages covering long distances

² Tretaagni:traditionally three kinds of agni garhapatyam, avahaniyamu and dakshinagni.Here Sri Sri might be referring to just the fire that burns during the day constantly

³ Meru: Mythical mountain that can fly

⁴ Sivasamudra: A waterfall in the current state of Karnataka

Is tolling tirelessly!

Like the snakes and reptiles

Go forward like a Dhananjaya⁵

Can you not see the dazzle of the

Crown of fire, of the other world

A different world!

The fluttering red flag!

The rising flames of the altars? (12-4-1943)

⁵ Another name for Arjuna the great warrior prince of the Pandavas

4. Victory Gong

I too have
Added fuel to
The fire of the world!

I too have given a tear to
The cyclonic storm of the world!

I too have added
My wild voice to the
Roar of the world!

*** **

When the summer's
Blazing Sun scorched the earth
I too burnt like an owl!

When the rains drenched the soil
I too have turned into
Drops of water flowing freely!

When the winter's biting cold
Seized I too screamed
Freezing and hungry!

If I stop in my tracks
Blazing winds, rainy clouds and snowflakes
Will turn into ashes
On this earth!

The colorful stars that peep from
The sky explode,
And rain down, bleeding!

All days shatter
And nights shut down
Engulfing the world in a great deluge!

*** **

I alone will occupy
The whole world
A time will come
When my crooning tunes
Fill the world!

I too will blossom as
A white petal
In the flower of the world!

I too will become
A string in the Veena⁶
Of the world
And lose myself in its music!

I too will rise
And flutter as a flag
Atop the palace of the world! (2-6-1933)

⁶ Veena: A stringed musical instrument popular in South India

5. One Night

Like a smoke that pervades
The whole sky,
The waxing moon of the fifth day
Rising scares me

Alas! On the desert sky
There rises a sandstorm tonight!
The spirits, invisible and shrewd roam free
Between the earth and the sky!
The sea screams loudly
With an open mouth!
The hillock lies still
Like an elephant's corpse!
The moon on the lonely sky
Looks like a camel
That has lost its legs!
Filling the whole universe like an ash
The rising moon of the fifth day scares me! (12-8-1933)

6. Rukkulu⁷

A puppy
A matchstick
And a toilet soap

Don't look down on anything
They are all full of poetry!

A piece of bread,
A banana peel,
A log of wood

Stare at you
Challenge you to measure their depth!

A door bolt
An Aarti⁸ tray
A horse's rein

What is not worthy of poetry?
Yes, the style is unfathomable!

Only you should have poetic inspiration!
Go on create poetic delights!
Can you not find a thin string of grace?

See if you have the sight
Write if you have the word

⁷ Rukkulu: Vedic hymns

⁸ Aarti: a platter used to offer incense to gods

The world is a maze!

And Poetry is an unquenchable thirst! (14-4-1934)

7. Incarnation

The metallic bells of Yama's
Buffalo clanged
Behind the clouds!

The ferocious canines of
Hell pounced
Breaking free of their leashes!

The seven horses of the Sun's
Chariot ran
Frothing at their mouth!

The angry lion of Goddess Kanakadurga
Yawned shaking its mane!
The elephant that Indra rides roared, challenging!

Nandikesa jumped and shouted
Giving his mane a vigorous shake

The Great Boar who rescued the Vedas
Stretched his tusk and trumpeted!

Labor pains for mother earth
Heralded a new birth! (14-4-1934)

(The rebelling vehicles of the Gods, signify a new revolution)

8. An Ode to Childhood

Sins, virtues and the ways of the world
Troubles, comforts, associated meanings
You are the flowers unaware of these!
The children of five six years!

If there is lightening
If there is rain
If there is a rainbow in the sky
You are the young ones
Who think that all these are for you!

Birds!
Children!
Who with no aim or destination,
Whistling away, fly
Here, there and everywhere!

On the green meadows
In the lotus filled ponds
In the fields, playhouses
In the arms of the father
In the lap of the mother
Dusty bodies, heavy hips
With fingers in the mouth and milky cheeks
Wherever one sees you are there
Your cosmic presence
As divine creatures
O young children!

Yours, and yours is the whole universe!
You're the destiny of the world!
Your smiles shape the

Bright dawns of tomorrow!
The queen of seasons, the spring,
Opens its magic window, for you!
The metal buffaloes breathe
The hot winds of the summer, for you
And the rainy season which
Engulfs the fields, villages, and all else
The clear nights, moon filled,
The snow filled winters
Cold and shivering
They come and go,
Playing hide and seek
For you
Today, like every day,
The Sun moves on the sky
The winds blow, the flowers bloom
I see multi-starred
Multi-colored ethers
Songs from all sides
You are the inheritors
For all these!
They shine on your lives too!

I look for the echoes of the tunes
Of my lost past,
The forgotten footprints of
My bygone childhood,
I sit here alone giving
Breath to the moving breeze
As the stringed veenas sing in unison
As I cajole the streams and the deer
Taking somersaults in the hell

Measuring the depths of vaitharani⁹

With no peace of mind

And with a lonely heart

In wonder-filled restlessness

Do you feel like laughing at me!

The little squirrels

The young children

This is my song!

Will you listen? (9-6-1934)

9. The Traveller

For work and for food

To live in a city

Started one traveller

Turning a deaf ear to

⁹ A mythical river man's spirit is supposed to cross after death to reach the higher realms of consciousness

The words of his mother
He walked for three days
Without respite, not knowing
Where to go
He wandered, lost
Like a boat tossed in an ocean
Depressed and piteous
He wandered aimlessly!

Heat of the severest nature
Rising temperature
Raised his body temperature too!
Scared was he,
Talking in dementia

Dark clouds
Ferocious winds
Rain and flooding waters
Darkness surrounding him
How tough was it for the traveller
Who had lost his way!

The mother who
With eyes glued to the door
Must be talking in her sleep
His eyes burning
The heat rising in flames
Aching head like needles piercing,
Night like a black boulder
Sitting on his chest
He dreams of his mother calling
Her form in his mind's eye

Listening to the calls that do not
Reach the ears
His disturbed mind ruminating

How tough it is
For the traveller,
who was upset, disturbed
And lost!

That was the end of his life!
The owls screamed in the dark
Rain stopped, giving way to a
Streak of lightning in the sky!
The roosters heralded a new morning!
One comet mocked from the
Clear sky
The clear wind plays
With the traveller's corpse!
The mother woke up
From a nightmare, her stomach churning! (18-5-1934)

10. An Old Beggar Woman

By the roadside, under a tree
Like the coals that have gone cold
Sat one old woman,
Groaning, and annoyed with the

Flies that surrounded her!

Her head is like one covered with lime

Wrinkled body

Eyes pale and lightless

A corpse seemed better!

She was laid up with disease

Not in a position to even beg

Winter was going to set in

A hapless old destitute woman was she!

Growing old, with her joints in disarray

Losing hope all, for future

Like a boulder on the roadside

She was lying there, on the roadside.

“If that granny dies,

whose fault is it?”

The mad winds moved on

Asking the question.

The dog did not reply,

Chewing a piece of bone.

One while pushing a fly off its course

Did not say anything!

Darkness engulfed

Dust rose up suddenly

One used up leaf¹⁰ claimed

“It is not my fault”

¹⁰ In south Indian culture food is served on almond or banana leaves on occasions

11. Losers

“What do the tired eyes see?”

A doomed dream,

A displaced heaven.

“What is it that crushes the frightened heart?”

Outside and inside-

Humans that have become enemies.

“Who would call the frustrated creatures?”

Misfortune, distress

Crazy hearts and untimely death!

12. The Vow

After running the ploughs

Through the fields

Producing gold from the earth

To make the world a welfare state

The farmers who work tirelessly

Sacrificing their strength

Sweat sacred and real

Can anyone put a price tag on it?

Tight, taut, veins

Vigorous arms

Dreaming of causing diamond rains

To increase the wealth of the world

The workers in the mines, jungles

And factories

Working

Dreaming

Like slaves to a rich lord

Polishing the jaws of the giant machines

With blazing burning drowning eyes

Tragic tears streaming down the cheeks

No trader can put a price on those tears!

Some despite innocence get trapped

Behind the bars due to misfortune

Some get crushed under the iron feet

Of metal demons, breathing their last breath!

Some resort to strikes as their empty stomachs

And their labours do not fetch food,

Some look for wells and pits

Their hard work in vain, life in despair

Many more, unfortunate ones

Orphans,

Restless ones

With long wails, extreme distress

Raise the banner of revolution!

Therefore, all the injustices of the world-

Burning hunger, crushing sorrow

Depravity, exploitation

To resolve them all, to banish them all

Carving new paths

Writing new songs

The new poetry that moves me
For the welfare of working masses
For the wealth of the labor world
In dedication
In consecration
In the three worlds
In the three time spans
To tell the working majority
Hard labourers
This incantatory truth
That nothing can match
The beauty of manual labor.
I will play the golden instruments
The real lives of the tragic many
I will trumpet the life music
Of the future Vedas
To the whole world!

Goldsmith's furnace
Fisherman's net
Weavers loom
All the instruments

That suggest work

Axe, saw, sickle, plough

The symbols of one thousand vocations

Will be

The meaning,

The wealth,

The life,

And the spiritual bugle

For my the new song, the new path

I shall write

Pledge

And create!

13. Auan!

If I fly sky high

Throwing sparks of fire,

Wonderstruck,

They!

If I crash down

Bleeding profusely

Mercilessly

The self same they!

14. *Adwaitam* Non Duality

If happiness is a canyon

And affection the sky,

We will see the peaks of happiness!

We will go to the depths of affection!

In the music of your bracelet,

In the nirvana of my life

The rollicking swings in your heat!

The raging fires in my heart

The blossoming buds of your thought!

The blazing sword of my love!

We will pour life into death!

We will put a ladder to heaven!

You are the queen of smiles!

I am slave of slave to addictions!

My sorrow that adds up,

Your joy that flowers on!

Spreads as gas poisonous!

Flows as honey in flowers!

We will mock the world!

We will rule the future!

You are the fine breeze of spring

I am the dew drop of winter!

The bird of your life ascends!

And the drum of my death breaks!

Into the blossoming gardens!

In the burning graveyards!

Goes round and round in circles!

Flares up again and again into storms!

We will rein in the time!

We will unbolt the doors of love!

I am the cradle of your joy!

You are the queen of my future!

The music of your bracelet

The nirvana of my life!

Happiness is the sky

Affection is a deep canyon!

We will mock the world!

We will rule the future!

15. History of Nations

Look at the history of any nation
What is there to be proud of?
The entire history of human race
Is one of exploiting the others!

The entire history of human race
Is one of looting from each other!
The entire history of human race
Are rivers of blood from the wars fought!

Full of the sense of the terrible
A congregation of demons and ghosts
The entire history of human race
Is roast-eating alive the deprived!

The mighty have turned the meek
Into slaves!
Murderers have made name
In history as rulers of the earth!

Search the whole earth!
Not a single place which is not a battlefield!
Past was drenched in blood
If not in tears!

Families that have gone cold
Crowds that were destroyed,
Groans of helpless people
Resound in the course of history!

Enmity, selfishness
Cunning, jealousy, competition
Fraud, impersonations
Have marked the course of history!

Chenghiz Khan, Taimurlene,
Nadir Shah, Ghajni, Ghoris
Whatever is the name
Each of them a great murderer!

Vikings, Huns,
Sindhis, Parsis
Pindars, Thugs have built
A bridge of swords across time!

In the dark age of ignorance,
In hunger, anger

People provoked by
Unknown force rose up in arms!

Everything is their achievement

They are the rulers of the world,

Established their kingdoms

Made and enforced many laws!

All these collapsed like a pack of cards

When other forces raised their heads

History was born

When these forces clashed with each other!

The prolonged deceit,

Exploitations of the mighty

Schemes of the rich

Cannot go on, even now!

The social order where

One man on the other

One race on the other

This atrocity cannot go on any further!

Ricksha puller in China

Mine worker in Czech

Ship slaves in Ireland

All the oppressed helpless ones,

Hottentot, Zulu, Negro-

Races across the continents

With one voice proclaim

The historical reality!

Why was what war fought

How long each kingdom lasted

Dates and documents

Do not give meaning to history!

This queen's saga of love

The cost incurred in that war

Politics and declarations

Are not the essence of history!

The stories that were lost, unseen,

In the dark corners of history must

Now be revealed!

A truth that cannot be hidden!

In the civilization around the river Nile

What was the life of a common man like?

In the construction of Taj Mahal

Who were the coolies that carried the stones?

In the battles fought for royals

What was the courage shown by a common soldier?

Not the palanquin ridden by the kings

Who were the people that carried it?

Taxila, Pataliputra,

On the shores of the Mediterranean,

Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro

Cave fronts of Koro-Manyan

In the twilight zones of history

How did man's story evolve?

What nation achieved what goal

During which period?

What sculpture, what literature?

What science, what music?

What light is the destination for this journey?

What dream and what victory its goal?

16. Kavita! O Kavita!¹¹

Kavita! O Kavita!

In my youthful ambitions

Surrounded by the aura of fragrant flowers

In the days when I thought of you as

A beauty that one can meet in auspicious moments

In a beautiful garden, a beauty unreachable!

The one that wanders on the paths of the sky!

For you, my life a tapas¹²

In my quest those minutes, that intoxication

Your form invisible surrounded as you

Were by the circles illusionary, feign.

Weren't there times when I pined for you in my

My cave, my pit, my darkness, in loneliness?

Under your influence

In my trained glances of perpetual pursuit

In trances tranquil

¹¹ An invocation to the Poetic Muse

¹² Penance

In my brain which hung like

Flowered arch of heaven

What roars what languages and what pictures

Passed through?

What colourful and strange shades of

Light and darkness did I see?

Through what energies did

My song acquire life?

The collectives of battle cries from all the corners

In sounds I had chosen for you;

In the cloudy midnight sky

Full of rain, the trumpets of the conch

The beat of the drums in the

Ferocious winds that reverberated in the

Waves of the mid-ocean;

That same night,

In the thick of the forests

Are they cries of different animals

Crossing the boundaries of any rhythm?

The deep inner endless music

Within the stars,

Earthquakes, the collapse of governments

Rebellion, war

Everything in your consciousness,

The appearing as of your cosmic form

Are they then the pictures that my mind's eye shows,

The commentaries I hear

When I think of you?

The diamond that blossomed in the pond of fire

The flying metal horse

The music of the drum

In the feverish cannon

What else did I hear?

In the sleepy midnight

The inner music of a young mother, dreaming-

Hugging her infant, just born,

The sound of the infant dreaming

Of an ancient life in strange sleep,

In the hospital the sound of the blood flowing

In the veins of a patient lying with closed eyes

With the trance of the surgeon's spell

In the twilight zones between life and death;

The mad ravings of an alcoholic

Slipping into a drain in an inebriated state!

The starving stomach of a prostitute

In wild demonic sex with half closed eyes

Her sad experiences erupt in music, terrible

The secrets that a head, beheaded, reveal

A mad man's crazy mind sees cinemas

And cries out, like a wolf

The workers who have gone on strike

The fires of hunger, the cries of the wives

And children of workers on strike

Screams! Cries of anguish

The words of one million stars

The songs of one billion waterfalls

A hundred thousand echoes of waves of the sea

I heard them! I heard them all, My Mother!

The things I saw and heard

They came

In great numbers

Crossing the graveyards like lexicons
Breaking through the chains of grammar
Leaving the tight python-like hold of the meter
They came, the words
In a fast pace, running, galloping
They entered my heart!
In that whirlwind circles of words
That manifested the change
In what streets I wandered
Going in circles when
In the music I thus created
My sins and weakness purged
And a joyous exhilaration filled my heart
I awakening for you and with all my senses alert
Whatever I wrote saw
Breathed, my life entering a trance like
State of Samadhi¹³
The inspiration that mesmerized me
Surrendering to that divine experience
The music that emerged by
The meeting of love under the star crazed...

¹³ Deep state of meditation

My veins as the strings of veena

The kiss of the divine music

At the end of my life, death at my doorstep

The procession of those instruments of music

That held me in the wild grip like an eagle's beak

The music transcends the joys and sorrows

A wonderful, profound, thoughtful, unparalleled

Solitary, unique, transient and eternal moment divine!

The Muse's heart who has given me this bliss

Melting my heart, Grace Incarnate,

Kavita! O Kavita!

Perhaps on the day

You created hunger feeding

My ego while I was in my mother's womb

Shapeless and sleeping,

Infusing life to my inner and outer senses

And sensibilities

As I entered this world

Experiencing the joys and sorrows

And as traveller and a mendicant was

In this world's journey

Going about in confusion

You, Kavita, appeared with a hand of assurance

Drew me into your fold

Made me clean and pure!

The Graceful and The compassionate,

Anupamita, One with no parallel

Aparimita, One who is limitless!

Kavita! O Kavita!

Now, today, can you hear the sighs

Behind my bold imaginations?

That I will write some things and

That my writings would reflect my world

My passion shall reach fruition and

My songs will reverberate in the hearts

Of my race as an incantation

I strive to bring my sky closer to my world

My ideas will be the sparks that light the diamonds

Which I shall share with my brethren

The ends of your stole

Fluttering causing waves

My word as your temple

My song as an offering to you

I will offer heartily

My creative fragrance sprinkled

As pollen from flowers!

Oho! Delight divine! Treasure trove! Mother! O Kavita!

Kavita! Kavita! O Kavita!

Films Songs from select films

1. Why Don't You Sing, Radhika

Film: Iddaru Mitrulu, Two Friends

Why don't you sing Radhika¹⁴, a charming love song

This night of the spring, this moonlit night

As life acquires its happy abandonment, tuning your veena

(Why don't you sing Radhika- *repeat first line*)

Loving you, remembering your song Gopala¹⁵

Listens to you hiding in some corner some corner

Knowing this, (why don't you sing Radhika, *Repeat first line*)

The one who loves his flute¹⁶, listens to the melody of your veena!

As he comes to you in love, in this auspicious moment (why don't you sing, Radhika)

¹⁴ Radhika Lord Krishna's beloved

¹⁵ Krishna the cowherd

¹⁶ Venugaana lola, Krishna who revels in his flute

2. Not Dream: Life is Valuable

Film: *Velugu Needalu*, **Light and Darkness**

Dream it is not, Life is valuable (*Repeat the line*)

Do not give it away to streams of tears!

If wind befalls a creeper full of flowers to the ground

Would you leave it, pitilessly?

Wouldn't you pick it, water it, help it to grow (Dream it is not...Repeat the first two lines)

Why do you want to surround yourself in darkness?

Why do you surrender yourself to trials to moan and cry?

Take the lamp of courage and move on! (Dream it is not... Repeat the first two lines)

As ocean hides precious pearls, sorrows hide comforts within

Nothing comes to you on its own!

Search and achieve, that is the way of the survivor! (Dream it is not... repeat the first two lines)

3. Telugu Warrior! Arise!

Film: *Alluri Seetharamaraju*¹⁷

Telugu Warrior! Arise!

Go on with determination

For the freedom of motherland, rise in revolt!

Do not be perturbed by the terrible killings in your way!

From today the laws unethical are to be banned

Don't get scared, don't get panicked! Sky is your limit!

Who is he, from whence has he come

The white man who has come this side?

The dacoit who loots our man and muscle power

The thief who steals our character and our lives?

Teach him a lesson fitting, chase and drive him out

Telugu Warrior! Arise! Telugu Warrior wake up!

Trumpet that this nation this kingdom is mine

Each of stamp your feet in unison, break the chains

Sharpen your knives, start your final war

Roar like lions! Go start your killings!

Vande Mataram! Salutations to you Mother!

Warrior of our freedom struggle! The Sun of our independence!

¹⁷ Alluri Seetharamaraju: a freedom fighter who lead the tribes of the Manyam forests against the British and struck terror in the hearts of the British with his guerilla warfare

Alluri Seetharamaraja!

Here, accept our worship, Raja!¹⁸

You who slept in the hearts of the white men

You who has rekindled the sleeping fire, of anger

Ready to sacrifice, ready to face troubles

We will follow you surely, fearlessly!

¹⁸ Also king his second name, Raju/a is a caste name which denotes warrior caste at one time.

4. Mangalyabalam, The Power of Marriage Thread

In the pathways of the sky there the beautiful moon
Meets the graceful star and swings with her, plays with her
The silver cloud forms as a curtain to give provide privacy
He hides again and again playing hides and seek
The beautiful moon plays hide and seek
A downpour, a whirlwind frightens and scares
Forever and ever you and I are one the same, so promising
The beautiful moon confesses his affection

Todikodallu, Co-sisters-in-law

The four people together forgetting the differences
Should start collective farming!
If four together start collective farming
We will get the yield more!
It is advantage to the farmer better!
It is so rare for one family to cultivate
Hundred acres of land, it is burden, unbearable!
But ten families can cultivate thousand acres easily
Kings, zamindars, one cannot find
In a land ruled by people!
One cannot exploit the other and eat well! (If four together)
This is the rule One person cannot monopolise
One person cannot become too lazy to work!
The Earth, the sky, the air, the light
Are properties for few can never be
Wealth they are, common to all!
Each man should give his full strength
And increase the grain, heaps and heaps
Each man should get whatever he needs
With no scarcity of food and clothing!

6. Punarjanma, Rebirth

Who art thou, who are you?

O, figurine full of life!

The *raga*¹⁹ of my life's music!

Who are you, who are you?

Who and who art thou?

Are you the queen that dances

In my thought, in my *sadhana*²⁰

Who and who are you?

Are you the honeyed moonshine

That has descended

Leaving the heaven, to this earth

Are you the rain of flowers

That has come as a downpour

When my poetic inspiration

Surged forth as dreams and waves?

Who and who are you?

In the new spring, in the garden called *nandanavanam*²¹

Are you the song that the koel sang? Who and who are you?

Are you the light emanating from the lotus

That blossomed in the pond of love

¹⁹ Tune in carnatic music is called raga

²⁰ Deep meditation

²¹ Garden of Indra located in heaven, like the garden of Eden

Is that the sound of your bracelet
Or the tune emanating from the veena of Vani²²?

Is that that the sound of your anklet
Or drum's beat from the waves of the ocean?

Come the figure beautiful!
Come light new and bright!

²² Goddess of learning otherwise known as Saraswathi

(A Non Film song by Sri Sri)

1. O Mahatma! O Maharshi!

O Mahatma! O Maharshi!

Which is darkness? Which is light?

Which is life? Which is death?

Which is virtue? Which is sin?

Which is hell? Which is heaven?

O Mahatma! O Maharshi!

Which is truth? Which is untruth?

Which is transience? Which is permanent?

Which is one? Which is many?

Which is cause? Which is consequence?

O Mahatma? O Maharshi?

Which is white and which is black?

Which is mine? Which yours?

Which is moral? Which is immoral?

O Mahatma! O Maharshi?

Which is non violence? Which is violence?

Which is comfort? Which is discomfort?

Which is gain? Which is loss?

Which is good? Which is evil?

O Mahatma? O Maharshi?

Which is dream? Which is real?

Which is bitter? And which is sweet?

Peace! Only one peace!

Shanti! Only one Shanti!

O Mahatma! O Maharshi!

Sri Sri's **Mahaprasthanam** – A Realistic Assessment

Dr. Addepalli Ram Mohan Rao

(Translated by Syamala Kallury)

There is invariably an alternative to the Capitalist society. The construction of this alternative society seeks to establish equality amongst its people, a self sufficiency in political and economic spheres, in addition to giving the language an identity of its own. This aspect figures in Marxist ideology and in Lenin's successful application of these revolutionary principles in a very comprehensive manner.

This point was well understood by the intellectuals who followed Karl Marx, and the progressives and workers who understood the success of Russian Revolution during the struggle for independence in India too. After the success of the Russian Revolution writers, poets, and practitioners who understood the politics of the progressive movements were attracted towards Marxism. While the freedom movement was in full swing, many other radical movements were simultaneously on the rise, the Marxists familiar with the nature of British imperialism could understand that whatever the outcome, the British political, constitutional, linguistic, and commercial interests would not cease to impact this subcontinent when they leave this country; on the other hand it may lead to further deterioration and so they started working towards a movement in this direction with a clear political thought from 1920.

Around the same time, Sri Sri was deeply engrossed in the romantic trends that were sweeping Telugu poetry at that time. With the impact of his study of international literary movements, of the all pervasive economic depression in the world around him, of his observations of social disparities he started composing his magnum opus **Mahaprasthanam**. Despite the fact that he had no direct involvement with Marxist principles when he started, his natural attraction to the genesis of social revolution embedded in it provided the impetus for writing this anthology. Though the poems he wrote contained the early influences reminiscent of the traditional and western stylistic trends, he gradually evolved his craft by writing poems that actually promoted the Marxist thought actively in a unique style of his own. They have in due course attracted people who were close to communist political thought and acquired the status of instruments of

propagation, providing the background rhythm and at times, captivating slogans for their articulations, paving the way for popularity amongst the masses. Hundreds of other poets began writing, imitating his style.

Sri Sri paved the way for a new direction in **Mahaprasthanam**. This provided the basis for the construction of a new social order. His study of the new trends in literature at both national and international level gave him a new perspective to develop a technique and style of his own. This essay intends to study these trends in detail.

One must have a style of one's own to reflect his poetic thought. Sri Sri, who was deeply influenced by the romantic poetry movement, believed that poetic diction and style alone cannot bring about any marked change. It must achieve a synergy with the new thought in a very holistic manner. Sri Sri, who realized that even after Gurazada introduced the reformist reality, Telugu Poetry went back to the worship of the beautiful, sought to bring in a new reality to his poetry. He understood the difference between the sociological ideologies that governed of Gurazada's times and those of his times and carved out a path which was totally his own bringing a new reality to his poetry. That is socialist reality and it does not mean reflection of communist ideology in every letter and word of the poem. How can there be communism without society? When there are diverse social realities we should appreciate the progressive trends in these diversities and reflect them in our writing. Thus evolves socialist reality in literary representations. Unless one understands this, one cannot appreciate Sri Sri's poetry.

It raises the question; during the days when Romanticism ruled literature was there no realism in literature, to which the answer is obviously in the negative. There were many romantic poets who visualised through poetry the contours of realistic poetry. Kavikondala, Adivi Bapiraju, amongst others, can be cited as forerunners for this kind of poetry. If one tries to determine the essential difference between the romantics and Sri Sri, one can say, it is easily his vision of the world. Poets before Sri Sri might have presented some truths occasionally, but their poetic vision in its entirety was characterised by a worship of the beautiful.

In the early days of Romanticism one of its pioneers composed a long poem called **Ramyalokam** laying out the perspective of beauty which characterised the romantic poetry. Sri Sri's aesthetic vision was quite different from this. However, he never wrote exclusive poems, articles, or theoretical treatises explaining his distinct perspective. **Mahaprasthanam** manifests

itself as his authentic voice, articulating his unparalleled theoretical position in rhymed poetry. That a new consciousness should emerge in poetry first arose in Sri Sri with the emergence of **Mahaprasthanam** which he articulated with great intensity.

The reality of the poetic definition: It is not unusual for poets who are conscious of the fact that they are giving a new direction to poetry, to articulate it through their poetry. This has always been a practice right from the times of Nannayya, the first poet in Telugu literature. Sri Sri too tried to define the contours of his poetry as soon as he decided on the directions he had decided to take.

Prapanchamoka Padmavyuham

Kavitvamoka teerani daham

(The world is a maze

And poetry, an unquenchable thirst)

To call the world a maze itself is to recognize the complex nature of the world and its conflicts which reminds one of a war strategy, (The padmavyuha is a labyrinthine battle formation; it was strategically put to use by the kauravas in the Mahabharata war to kill Abhimanyu) the suggestion being that poetry should reflect the conflicts of life on a war footing. Only then can it become a thirst that cannot be quenched. It places the realities in front of the poets but does not provoke them into a war against these realities. But Sri Sri by using the terms like padmavyuh and maze, suggested the nature of his rebellion against an established social order.

Sri Sri also ushered in a new style in the technique of poetry. He was quite aware of it. He never got carried away by the excitement of his new ideology and turned poetry into mere sloganeering. Such poets are called 'conscious artists'. He says,

Avunavunu silpamanargham

Undaaloysi klavitaasam

Kaanivoyi rasanirdesam

(Yes, technique is of great value

One should have poetic inspiration

Go on, set the direction for poetic delight.)

Excitement can influence creation of poetry but that alone cannot help create a great poem. It should have aesthetic appeal and impeccable technique to have the right appeal. Otherwise poetry would not have the power to bring in any change in society. This fact was repeatedly asserted by Marx and many other thinkers who followed him.

When Sri Sri started writing **Mahaprasthanam** poems there were certificates of appreciation as well as brickbats. Sri Sri was undeterred by both. He knew his goal of setting new direction to poetry.

Rāni, rani,

Vaste rani,

Kashtāl, nashtal,

Kopāl, tapāl, sepal rani

Vaste rani

Titlu, rātlu, patlu rani

Rāni! Rāni!

Kāni! Kāni!

Gānam, dhyānam,

Hāsam, lāsam

Kāni, kāni

Kaāravi! Pavi! Kavi!

(Let it come, let it come

Difficulties, losses

Anger, depression, curses

Let them all come!

Abuses, trials and struggles

Carry on, carry on!

Let them come...

Song, meditation

Laughter, grace

Carry on...

The Sun of Arts! The diamond sword! O Poet!)

One has to move forward facing all the adversities if one wants to chart out a new path. Sri Sri is particularly fond of end line rhyme scheme which is reflected here. He may use them out of fondness elsewhere but in poetry written for social cause (not going into surrealism) he achieves the thematic richness just by this use of end-line rhyme.

Kalaravi! Pavi! Kavi!

Not just end rhyme one can see rich semantic depth in the use of words in these lines. Ravi is another name for Sun. In romantic poetry the cool radiance of the moon is of the primary importance, but in progressive poetry the bright radiance of the Sun is what gives it the power. Pavi is the weapon of Indra, the Lord of Heaven. It is a diamond sword, believed to have formed from a thunderbolt. This also symbolizes Sri Sri's sharp vision along with the rays of the bright Sun.

The one poem which clearly spells out the direction that Sri Sri had set for himself in poetry and his new writing is *Nava Kavita*. In this, through various similes he suggests that for any new ideology - poetic inspiration is essential. In fact, he creates these similes in a long list. It is Sri Sri's unique talent that he can take one idea and express it with a beautiful, natural and *spontaneous* ease in chain-words through multiple images, metaphors, and symbols. This evocative manner of expression, Sri Sri claimed, he had learned from T.S Eliot. He wrote a poem

on a Telugu poet of the middle ages, Vemulavada Bheema Kavi, and used this technique to describe his poetic talent

Garalapu mudda

lokamu

Avaghadda maha sani kotla

Sammetal

Karu nayāgni...

A mass of poison

This world

Crores of hammerings

By Sani, the negative planet (Saturn)

The whole of his Nava Kavita reverberates with this kind of chain images. While for Romantic poetry tranquility is considered the main forte, for progressive poetry inspired vision that comes from his fervour forms the backbone.

Kadiledi kadilinchedi

Māredi, mārpinchedi

Pādedi, pādinchedi

Mumumduu kadilinchedi

Paripūrnapu bratukichchedi

Kāvāloyi navakavanāniki!

(that which moves, catalyses
that which changes, transforms
that which sings, triggers song)

the nudge of momentum that moves forward
that which provides complete life

that is the need of the new rhyme

The poetry that appeared before him did not move or touch any one. It took one to the depths of one's soul, but was not meant to change anything in society. It did not sing or cause music in any heart. In short it cannot go into the masses. But the last three stanzas focus on a changed perspective of a poetry that cannot move, change, sing, awaken. Sri Sri believed that poetic inspiration alone can bring about this kind of metamorphosis. Thus he laid the foundation for a new concept through his aesthetics.

Great Indian Middle Class Reality

The middle class of Sri Sri's times is not like the one we have today. The middle class of those times lived in poverty. There were instances where people used to end up in debt and were driven to suicide. Sri Sri knew the problems of the middle class by direct experience. This direct personal experience of living the middle class life had given him not just a clear vision of the reality, a sensitivity to the sufferings of the downtrodden, but to include the struggling middle class along with working class in his poetic vision. His works *Sandhya Samasyalu* (The Problems of The Twilight) is a testimony to it, *appula bādhalu, biddala ākali ātmahatyāprerena* ("The debt troubles, the hungry children- provocations to suicide") are the common scenes in the middle class families of those days. The 50s film *Sansāram* (Family) totally reflects this theme like a mirror.

His *Navakavita* (New Poem) highlights Sri Sri's expertise in the use of diction. There were three characters in this verse narrative of a kind - one student, one employee, and the last, a family man. All three of them were middle class representatives. First day of the month is like a festival for them as it gives them a chance to receive their salaries and spend it on that one day. That the student and the employee choose to go a film, eat sweets and savories is a reflection which is a typical middle class mindset that celebrates the first day of the month. The question of choice and the excitement of it are all related to poverty, to an inability to buy things at will at other times. So the student goes to watch two movies, the employee eats both a sweet and a savory.

The three people- the student, the employee and the family man - all have problems and the poet's use of the verbs for the three of them are different.

Samasya tagilindi – oka vidyarthiki

Samasya kaligindi – oka udyogiki

Samasya ghanibhavinchindi – oka samsariki

A problem encounters a student

A problem happens to an employee

Problem consolidates to a family man

In all the three instances it could easily be problem 'happening'. But Sri Sri uses verb combinations to suggest the difference in the complexity of their situation. It reflects the poet's choice of appropriate verbs and his skill in the usage of these verbs.

Working Man's Reality:

The labour stands for people who work very hard and do not get adequately paid for their work. Factory workers and farmers especially come in this category. For these people the exploitation by the masters is the main issue and so Marxism preaches rebellion of this working class. Sri Sri was the first poet who had a belief in the fundamental concept of the ideology relating to working class and the dialectic interpretation of history through this. His poetry emphasized to very effectively. The first poem that comes to mind in this context is his *Desa Charitralu - History of the Nations*. One special feature of Sri Sri's technique was that he always chose his style in a such way that he created a harmony between his poetic inspiration and style. It was a new technique in those days. His times marked the emergence of blank verse in Telugu poetry and Sri Sri could use this form to his advantage. That is how he displayed a talent in his stylistic structures. *Desa Charitralu* is a poem he had written at one go in one major inspiration. In this inspiration he created lines of 6-8 syllables each and wrote four line stanzas as ideas following each other. There is an undercurrent of labor exploitation at global level in this poem.

Nailunadi nāgarikatalō

Samānyuni jēvanmettidi?

Taj Mahal nirmananiki

rāllettina cūlilevvaru?

What is life like for a common man

In the civilization surrounding the Nile river?

Who were the coolies that had carried the stones

While Taj Mahal was under construction?

The depth that this poem acquires is also because of the question answer mode he adopts in the form. It gives strength to the thought and provokes the reader into thinking,

In the warfare that aims at imperialist goals

What is the courage shown by an ordinary man?

Not the palanquin that the king rides

Who were the people that carried it?

Palanquin is a symbol of a feudal society which was constantly used by romantic poets as a thing of beauty. Here Sri Sri did not choose vehicles like the chariot but consciously chose a palanquin as it needs to be physically carried by the workers. This is one way of expressing his rebellion against the romantic trends that preceded his times in poetry and his desire to establish a just social order. He carved a path for himself and moved into the progressive age in literature with this strong intent to write on issues relevant to the working class of society.

Sri Sri created this effect by starting his poem uniformly with a 'ja' gaṇam, use of metrical foot with one short, one long and again a short syllable. This is a common practice in ancient Telugu poetry and Sri Sri was influenced enough by this technique to use it to his advantage. Another poem in this trend of writing for a social cause is *Pratijna*.

Polālananni (po-laa-la nannee)

Halāladunni (ha-laa-la dunnee)

Ilātalamlō (i-laa-ta lamlo)

Hemam pindaga...

Vilāpāgnulaku

Vishādaasrulaku

Khareedukattee

Sharābulēdoyi

Sramaika jēvana

Soundaryaaniki

Samānamainadi

Lēnelēdani

Preparing the fields

With ploughs

On the earth's surface

Producing the golden grains

Cries of anguish

Tears of tragedy

No trader can

Evaluate!

There is no beauty

Equal to the one

Of hard labour...

The beauty of this poem lies in the initial 'ja' ganam of each stanza illustrated above. This poem moves with a tempo from the beginning to the end and the movement matches the theme. The end comes with words, '-Bhāvam, bhāgyam, prānam, prānavam – idea, wealth, life, and pranavam which stands for omkāra. With this omkāra the boundless and breathless energy of the poem comes to a rest.

Similarly, another poem which used the blank verse with dexterity is *Vaadu* (He, the word 'vaadu' in Telugu carries a derogatory or accusatory tone with it). 'He' is the exploiter in the poem. Veedu the antonym stands for someone close to us whereas vaadu talks of an enemy, that fellow who is antagonistic. This poem reveals the realities of exploiter and the discontent of the workers. This is closer to the masses and Sri Sri appropriately uses the language of the masses in this poem.

Vaadu is divided into three sections, with six lines in each. The last two lines of each section capture the essence of the previous section and the poem proceeds in the question answer mode between the workers and the masters. In the third section, it reaches a climax making four lines into questions and answers. He used the internal rhyme scheme and end rhyme in the alternate lines. We may not recognize them as rhyming lines as we read the lines as they merge so effectively with the central theme of the poem. There is a movement which shows the progress in an evolutionary step after step. This is part of the structural beauty of the blank verse. The first part talks of the work ethics and the second part highlights the traditional ethos. The third part emphasises the exploitative nature of this relationship and how the exploiter uses the first two to his advantage. Tradition is stronger than work and this invariably leads to the violence inflicted in society on a common worker. Thus, he brings out the reality behind the master-worker relationship in feudal society by using the diction and style that is suitable to the theme and achieves a synergy between the form and content.

Poverty and a Realistic Representation:

The economic situation during the great depression had a deep impact on Sri Sri's poetic psyche making this a predominant theme in his poetry. Though the awareness of poverty was not new to poetry, ancient as well as modern, Sri Sri's poetry displays these social dilemmas in a more pronounced manner. One comprehensive look at his poetry reveals that his focus is more on poverty than on class struggle.

There is a poem titled *Bātasāri* (Traveller), which tells the story of a son who leaves behind a poor, old mother who lives in the village and spends her last breath looking forward to his return. The boy leaves, turning a deaf ear to his mother's pleas, in search of livelihood. The mother wakes up from a nightmare, stirred by a twitch in her stomach. The suggestion at the end of the poem reveals it all.

Kallu vākita nilipi choosey

Palletüillo talli emani

Palavaristondo?

Talli piliche kalla drusyam

Kalla mumdu gantuleyyaga

What the mother in the village

Her eyes glued to the door

Must have been dreaming...

The picture of a mother calling

Dances before his mind's eye.

He starts the poem with the theme of a mother deserted by a loving son. He effortlessly weaves the story with his ideology he brings the story to the end. One is reminded of Gurazada's *Puttadibomma Purnamma* as he also attempts a similar movement in it. The issue of migrant labour in city spaces is a common sight in today's world and Sri Sri aesthetically weaves the story into his ideological fervor. A beggar woman, Losers, Auan, and Madman (*Bhikshuvariyasi*, *Parājitudu* (Loser), *Auan*, and *Unmādi*) are all other examples written highlighting the poet's concern for poverty.

Reality of the Terrible:

The next aspect of reality that Sri Sri portrays in his poetry is the sense of the terrible that he uses to bring home the real world he sees around him. He says in one of his conversations that he likes the sense of the terrible, one of the nine emotions in the Sanskrit poetics. This terrible

appears both in style and in the thematic representation. The poem *Avatāram* (Incarnation) is a series of terrible images portrayed in an order. Sri Sri must have acquired this with the influence of theories like Dadaism in the West where one can see poetry being created through the portrayal of imagery depicting the terrible. A poem titled *Abhyudayam* (Progressive Thought) is an example.

Evaro, evarevaro, evarevaro

Talavirabosuku

Nagnamgā nartistunnāru.

Bhayodvignamgā vartistunnāru!

Nede, eenāde, eenāde

Jagamamtā Balivitarthi

Narajaatiki parivartana

Navajēvana shubha samayam!

Progressive Movement!

Someone, someone, someone

Open locks, hair let down
Is dancing naked!

Moving in fear, terrified are they!

Today, only today

Is celebration day, balivitarthi!

The day the human race transforms

The auspicious time when new life starts

The morning of progressive movement!

The imageries described in a row are not the reality of the class struggle, but a representation of the sense of the terrible that precedes a new beginning and a new era. The new life emerges from the destruction of the old from the terrible scenes of chaos, thus foresees the poet the future of human race. His exquisite style combined with the imagery depicting the horror that precedes the onset of the new social order gives him the unique distinction of a poet who can juxtapose poetry and aesthetics; the harsh images combined with ideological vigor bring forth the reality that he visualised. In the poem *Jagannadha Radhachakraalu* (The Chariot Wheels of of Lord Jagannadha) he says -

Natadhoorjhati

Nitalāngi pagilindata!

Nitaalaagni ragilindata!

Nitaalaagni, nitaalaarchi

Nitalākshi patālumani

Prapamchānni bhayapettimdi

The fire of the dancing Siva

Bursts as Volcano

The fire smolders,

The fire,

Bursts out creating for

a scare, for the whole world

Jhatak, Phatak

The dance of destruction

Violence unchained

The poisonous gases released

Destructive energy unleashed

Destructive energy unleashed

Violence unchained

Poisonous gas, machine gun

Torpedo, tornado

That is anarchy that is war!

It will be decided either way!

The images continue in the same vein,

Dagapadina tammulaara,

Mee bhadhalu nenerugudunu

My cheated Brethern cheated,

I know your suffering

Starting with oneness with the sufferings of the suffering brethren he moves into a series of images creating a powerful impact achieved with the same relentless speed.

Thus the novelty of Sri Sri's poetry rests entirely on the depiction of various kinds of reality he sees around him. It shows class consciousness, class dynamism, and class struggles in a cosmic dimension and at the same time highlights many other realities in a society that a common man has to negotiate with. The dazzling style of his writing lends his ideas a new expressive dynamics. These emerge as the foundation stone for a new poetics that Sri Sri started and was later emulated by many of his contemporaries then and now. There is no dispute as to the truth that Sri Sri was the first poet to raise his voice in this manner. This is a fact of testified history.

Sri Sri's Experiments in **Mahaprasthanam**

Navin

Sri Sri is popularly called a *mahākavi*- a great poet, in his mother tongue Telugu. One may be a traditionalist or a modernist; there is no disagreement between them in accepting Sri Sri as a great poet.

Sri Sri's greatness as a poet rests on his major work, **Mahaprasthanam** (The Great March). It is an anthology of his poems written in the decade of the hungry thirties between 1930s and 40s. Besides poetry, he wrote short stories, literary criticism, book reviews, his autobiography, works that can be described as non-fiction.

Sri Sri was basically an experimentalist. He was greatly influenced by new trends and experiments that had taken place in the West, particularly French and English literature. Swinburne and Edgar Allan Poe in poetry and Maupassant in prose were his 'three sages' as he said several times. Later Maupassant yielded place to Baudelaire who introduced Sri Sri to symbolism and impressionism. As well known Telugu critic K.V Ramana Reddy says, "the young poet gave himself up thoroughly to French and English experiments in poetry and passed through a great gamut of modernist trends ranging from Impressionism and Dadaism to Surrealism. He tried bold experiments with Telugu verse and achieved a mastery over meter and technique in the process.

Sri Sri started as a romanticist and in his early days was influenced by Viswanatha Satyanarayana and Krishna Sastry - the two great romantic poets of his times. His first anthology of poems was **Prabhava**. All the poems in **Prabhava** were written in a genre called padyam with meter and the poetry was full of pompous phraseology as Sri Sri himself confessed later. Romanticism or bhava kavītvam was the main trend in Telugu poetry during nineteen twenties. Being very young Sri Sri too fell in love with romantic trends in poetry. But very soon he began casting off the romanticist influence on him. He was also disillusioned and disgusted with the

metered poetry or *padya kavita* with its rigid insistence on *yati* and *prasa*²³. In its place he started writing in the *mātrā* meter and later took prose poetry and verse.

This was the first experiment that Sri Sri brought into Telugu poetry - casting off rigid *padya kavita* in favour of poetry in *mātrā chandassu*. Writing poetry in simple *mātrā* meter and later prose poetry, Sri Sri liberated Telugu Muse from the clutches of metered poetry. Chalam a fire brand contemporary of Sri Sri and a revolutionary writer of the times said, “Sri Sri had successfully broken the spine of metered poetry in Telugu”. He had also bid goodbye to pompous phraseology and pedantic style of writing poetry. This was the major change that Sri Sri brought in the technique, expression, and style of writing poetry.

When it came to content also, Sri Sri had brought to poetry a revolutionary change. Prior to Sri Sri, the two most predominant themes of poetry were unrequited love and the resultant melancholy of the poet, and patriotism and the spirit of nationalism. With the advent of Sri Sri there was a change in the themes the poets had chosen for Telugu poetry. For the first time, Sri Sri talked about the exploitations of the working class by capitalists. The common labourer became a focal point in his poetry.

The Progressive Writers Movement for which Marxism provided the base started in English poetry during the decade of the hungry thirties (1930-1940)²⁴. Poets like W.H Auden and Stephen Spender were pioneers of this movement in England. They had published a manifesto of Progressive Writers Movement in 1928 which was called “The Manifesto of the London Progressive Writers”. Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, a good friend and contemporary of Sri Sri and a poet in his own right brought this manifesto to India to Sri Sri’s notice. After reading this manifesto Sri Sri became a changed man. He began to consider himself a progressive poet. The class struggle, the ultimate victory of the working class, a socialist society - combined with Marxist philosophy - provided the themes for his poetry from 1933 onwards.

²³ Meter and rhyme

²⁴ A term normally used to denote the great economic depression of thirties

The great depression of 1929 brought a gloom to the capitalist world. Everybody thought the fall of the capitalist regime was imminent. The Great Depression continued up to late 1930s. Unemployment of millions of workers, the closure of thousands of factories, and the collapse of stock markets led to the near total destruction of the capitalist regimes. The poor and the middle class were the worst victims of this depression, which widely swept through Europe. There was hunger and despair everywhere. While the capitalist world was on the brink of a disaster, the Socialist world - represented by Soviet Russia - was free from the effects of the depression. All the intellectuals of the day felt that socialism was the only way to mitigate the sufferings of the affected people. An egalitarian classless society is be possible, it was thought, only under socialism. So all the writers and artists of the day embraced the progressive ideology and started writing poetry advocating socialism as the only ray of hope. Sri Sri was the product of this world wide Progressive Movement.

Sri Sri took the Telugu literary world by storm, compelling everyone to acknowledge his astounding mastery of diction and an entirely new meter. His command over language, usage of a torrent of words was unseen and unheard of, in Telugu poetry. The reader was simply dazzled and spell bound with his diction and the images he created with his words. That was why he was called '*Sabda Brahma*', creator of words.

Thus both in form and content Sri Sri's poetry was an experiment. He had thrown open poetry to the common people. Poetry writing and reading was made simpler and less pedantic by Sri Sri's entry into the literary arena. Every young and budding poet in Telugu started imitating Sri Sri after Sri Sri's **Mahaprasthanam** was published in 1950. Arudra, Tilak, Kundurthi and a host of others were deeply influenced by Sri Sri's experiments. The era of Sri Sri which started in the late 30s continued up to late eighties. Sri Sri used to say that up to 1930s, Telugu poetry had driven him, but from 1940s onwards he had driven the Telugu poetry. It may sound as boasting but there is an element of truth in it.

Beginning with *Jayabheri*, the Gong of Victory (in 1933, there came poem after poem of reverberating rhythms for a full decade. The appeal of these poems of **Mahaprasthanam** was to the young and to the brave. Mankind's great march towards a classless society formed the central theme for all these poems. Besides *Jayabheri Pratigna* (The Vow), *Desa charitralu* (Histories of the Nations), *Jagannatha Radhachakralu* (The Chariot wheels of Lord Jagannadha) *Kavita! O Kavita!* (Poesy! O Poesy) and the title poem *Mahaprasthanam* (The Great March) can stand in comparison to any great poem in world literature. Both in form and content these poems are outstanding. Rooted in his native tradition, Sri Sri nevertheless kicked the doors wide open to experimentation in verse. His association with the Progressive Writers Movement yielded good results. But his experiments with surrealism did not find favour with the readers and critics alike. It had a brief spell and its novelty soon faded because of its obscurity. His experiments with light verse like limericks and nonsense verse such as '*siri siri muvva*' too are unique experiments in poetry in their own way.

Sri Sri's Mahaprasthanam: A Dance of Destruction

Kondreddy Venkateswara Reddy

Translated by Syamala Kallury

Sri Sri had ushered in new era in poetry by blowing his victory bugle after denouncing both the classical and romantic trends in poetry in 1933 itself. He 'rose to great heights as the flag of a tallest skyscraper called the world'. (*Bhuvana bhavanapu bavutaane paiki lestaanu*). He kept to the tune of the changing times and created the music of a waterfall through his **Mahaprasthanam** anthology. As it is impossible for one to walk back into the past this poet destroyed the old world order in poetry and moved towards the future paving a path for himself for a new order and creation of new pathways for poetics. He thought that poetry is not something that lulls the society and puts people to sleep but is something that can awaken them from a slumber. It depicts how a large section of people are exploited and were boiling over bitten by the serpents, the feudal lords. This is the unique feature of the poems in **Mahaprasthanam**. His was the poetry that sought to clean and purge the pollutants in the contemporary society and he did so with great élan. That was the main reason why he was regarded as the pioneer and a poet who gave a clarion call to new age in poetry.

Sri Sri's first step towards progressive thought bypassing the traditional schools in contemporary poetry: Sri Sri was born in an orthodox brahmin family and had thoroughly studied and acquired scholarship in ancient poetry and emerged as a prominent poet of a genre called padyam, a metered poem, well known in his times. He wrote as a romantic, pining for the passionate arms of the imaginary damsels in his initial years. There were modern poets like Viswanatha Satyanarayana, who lived in traditional thought often referred to as sanathana dharma (Eternal Dharma) and wrote excellent poetry, and poets like Krishna Sastry who eulogised romantic thought by descriptions of imaginary heroines and their clinging arms. Sri Sri walked this path of subjective poetry for some time in his initial years of writing but soon realised his was not the path that glorified either of these schools. He moved towards progressive poetry in search of a new identity for himself in poetry as well as in society.

The emergence of a new world order through the Dance of Destruction:

Sri Sri had always been an experimentalist and an anarchist. If he ever felt that his genius and scholarship were not appreciated he did not hesitate to totally sever connections with people, however intimate they were. His passion for a new world order taught him to look deep into the contemporary literary scene scrupulously. He, as a poet, rejected all traditional thought and emerged as an exploding volcano. In an effort to attract poets and literary personalities of his times he had declared, which may not be totally true, nevertheless, "Having overcome the lexicons that were like graveyards, breaking through the chains of grammar and securing release from the serpentine bondage of meter, I started creating poetry for a new world". He saw himself as a poet who reached out to the Muse that was suppressed under the iron heels of classical diction and emerged as the destroyer of poetic egos that have dominated the literary field thus far. He struggled to establish himself without hunger and without sleep, dreaming of poetry as the driving force of his life. He created in his **Mahaprasthanam** with an intense and a passionate command over his diction a world where a poetic thought moves and causes movement, a thought that can awaken the society from slumber. He became the voice of the muse to create the new way that he carved for himself. The Poetic Muse who was dancing to the tunes of the rich, who was being used as an instrument of oppression on the working classes and who was always wandering in the high skies was brought down to the earth by Sri Sri. He infused new life into the dying craft of poetry. He built a temple for this new muse that he had thus far adorned as a flowery arch on the gates of heavens, with his new diction and technique. He consecrated the working man as an object of worship in this new temple.

Sri Sri was initially tired and frustrated as he had to always stand behind poets like Viswanatha who excelled in the art and craft of poetry or that of Krishna Sastry whose romantic genius far exceeded any of his contemporaries. Also, he could not suppress his quest for an identity that is different from these stalwarts. He announced his decision to rebel against the traditional literature and turned his ideology into a war weapon to use it against the old world order. He went into an adventurous journey with only his frank and unusual language as an inspiration. As rightly pointed out by another revolutionary of his time, Chalam, he broke through 'the barriers of constraining diction and the stranglehold of meter, imagery, and descriptions by breaking its backbone'. He created music with his new perspective and the one who cannot hear this music was 'like one old in mind and spirit with rotting bones', the later quote being a line from Sri Sri's own poem.

He was only an admirer of Marxist thought when he wrote Mahaprasthanam.

Sri Sri never claimed, anywhere, when he talked of **Mahaprasthanam** that he was writing this in the context of Marxist thought. As he was quite well versed in world literary trends it could be expected that he must have been inspired by the ideology. His initial intent must have been only to write differently from the others of his time. Addepalli also says that Sri Sri never said that either his poetry or literary criticism was ever influenced by Marxist thought. He must have been only an admirer and was not involved with the party. But his lines in the anthology reflect the Marxist principles and later became torch bearers for this thought. Gradually he was branded as a Marxist poet. In 1968, thinkers like Ra Ra (Rachamalla Ramachandra Reddy) decided to examine his poetry only through the Marxist lens.

If, around 1934, Sri Sri was a committed communist and if his aim was to propagate the Marxist ideology he would not have requested Chalam to write the foreword for his **Mahaprasthanam**. For he knew that Chalam was not at all known to have had any respect, interest or love for the poetry of his times. He was only interested in uplifting the women's position in the contemporary society Sri Sri would not have asked him to write the foreword and this clearly establishes that Sri Sri was not an avowed communist at this time.

His life and focus were more on the aesthetics of Poetry rather than on the communist ideology. He wrote inspiring the hot-blooded young soldiers to see the dazzling lights of the crown of fire, the shining glory of the red flag, and the ascending flames of the yagnic fire. If in the process spouses, sons, well wishers all may go; and troubles, losses, anger and curses may come, let them all come. He extols that they should not be afraid of anything. He calls himself a revolutionary song and his inspiration was the ear hangings that adorn the ears of an ascetic. He says with supreme confidence that he was an impenetrable fort and a heaven and his path was inimitable and did not say that the path was the Marxist path. He used the illusion, mystery, and Vedanta philosophy as synonyms for fraud. He asked the indifferent people to assess the value of the sweat of farmers and factory workers. There was no trader who can evaluate the tears that stream down the face of these sad people. These ideas were no doubt very close to communist thought. That is the reason Marxists became close to Sri Sri and they admired his poetry. But Sri Sri himself did not ever place the political philosophy above his love for the aesthetics of poetry.

He was not committed to those principles and did not invite the Marxist interpretation of his poetry.

The traces of traditional trends would not leave even after the poetry burst forth as a tornado: Though Sri Sri claimed that his poetry was not affiliated to any meter, Adepalli says, one finds a sense of rhythm that takes one to a great height and that in fact is his meter in poetry. He achieved newness through this meter. One can say that Sri Sri was the poet who formulated free verse meter. His poetry was written in what is called 'mātra chandassu' and keeping to a rhythm.

His poetry also abounds in sanskritised idioms and phrases. The light of the fifth day of the rising moon, (*bahula panchami jyotsna*), *In the evening (pradoshamandu) etc.* Similarly he used numerous images of the Indian puranic literature like the metal bells of Yama's buffalo, the canines of hell, Nandikesa (Lord Shiva's vehicle), The Boar- the original incarnation, the scholar of Vedas etc.. A number of such phrases merge naturally with his new aesthetics and give new meanings. The mythological lore appears as new experimental expressions. In other words, the imagery of the puranas comes in a new garb, complimenting the old and the new.

His poetry which bursts forth as the dance of a whirlwind and sends his ideas in all the four directions like the sacred horses of the holy fires and they spread like wind's waves, and fragrances. He extensively used highly sanskritised ideas and idioms to bring out the best of his creativity.

Sri Sri confidently asserts that his poetry melts the high heavens, it laughs in a dance of destruction, it crosses the barriers of the forts, and it reaches the cosmic heights. The worlds with bugles, the ashes of holy vermilion, the garlands of hibiscus flowers; all these images come in highly sanskritised diction used by the poet to his advantage.

However he also says that his poetry touches the margins of affection, the depths of joy, and re-invents life by giving fresh breath to death. It places ladders to reach the heaven. It reins in time.

Sri Sri's idea of newness lies in his belief that he should stand by the oppressed and exploited sections of society: '*All the orphans and all the restless ones will rise blowing the bugle of revolution in a long and intense voice*' and '*his poetry would be dedicated to the welfare of the factory workers and working class.*'

Sri Sri describes the condition of the downtrodden in one of his poems thus, ‘we are all slaves, we are all the wheels turned by the buffaloes that go round extracting oil in oil mills from sesame seeds, we are all dead bodies. Fraud in front of us and fraud behind us, to our right and to our left, fraud all around!’ so saying he asks the question ‘Is ours a life?’ in a tone of contempt. They provoke the reader into thinking and awaken his conscience.

While depicting the real nature of the nations and their histories, he says, ‘the entire history of human race is of oppressing the others, like rivers of blood flowing during the battles fought, the mighty have become famous by exploiting the weak and the downtrodden’. He further asks, there is no land anywhere on the globe that has not been drenched in tears and blood. It is not an exaggeration if one says that there is no other Telugu poet in the first half of 20th century who could speak out with such vehemence and power.

Nevertheless, this poet did not just gift wrap troubles and tribulations as give to the poor, but gave them hope and faith in the future. The ones who were miserable, deprived, and bitten by the serpents of suffering were assured of the arrival of the chariot of Lord Jagannadh which will relieve them of all strife. He gives a clarion call, asserting that these wheels of the chariot were the torch bearers for a new future and thus awakens them with the bugle revolution.

All the suffering of the world was his: Chalam says in his introduction to **Mahaprasthanam** that while Krishna Sastry recited his suffering to the world through his poetry Sri Sri made the suffering of the world his.

True, he wrote his poem *Oka Raatri*, One Night, in 1933. In the poem, he says that the moon of the fifth night in the rising cycle scares him. It spreads all out far and wide and pervades like a smoke across the sky. It appears as if there is a sandstorm in the desert of the sky. The air is full of clever spirits and the sea was roaring with a loud open mouth. The lone moon appears like a camel whose legs are severed. The universe is covered in white ash – all these images speak volumes about the poet’s concern for the contemporary world situation which was full of uncertainties, sorrows, exploitation, lootings, oppression- the impact of the white race on the globe.

There is another poem titled *Baatasaari*, A Traveller, in which a village boy who goes to a city looking for some means of livelihood goes to town and does not return, and ends up as a dead

body and how his mother too breathes her last waiting for her son's return, All the trials that this traveller faced in the city as recited by the poet reminded the poet of his early years in Madras.

Another poem is *Bhikshuvariya*, A Beggar Woman, he questions the society as to who is responsible for the death of an old woman who had grown so old that all her bones have become brittle and she had lost the will to live. The ones who are satisfied with small pleasures look at the situation and feel happy like dogs which have got bones to munch on and if exploiters look at this they feel like chameleons that run over flies aptly thus describing the mentality of the society.

If a man flies to the sky with his own effort, the same world which looks at him with wonder, burns with jealousy and hatred when he collapses bleeding profusely, he feels sad at the double standards in society in the poem *Auan!*

In *Keka*, scream, *his* voice reverberates with the clatter, a fiery and coarse clanging of the multiple voices he hears. He reveals the inner darkness of his heart, the dark physical hunger of his body and the darkness that surrounds him in his room. He identifies himself with the suffering of the world and his response flows out as poetry.

Mahaprasthanam as a ray of hope for the world of literature: When Chalam says for the Telugu people who ask in defiance, what is all this poetry, what is its use, how does it help the world, Sri Sri's poetry is a fitting reply. Just as in the process of evolution even when the species change their forms, they retain some old remnants, Sri Sri's poetry continued to strengthen itself with the classical Sanskrit diction and mythological images though he chose new paths. The manner of using these, in fact, enrich his poetry in a strange new way giving a new and modern tilt to the old images in keeping to his new outlook. He lived in utter poverty between 1930 and 1950 suffering the impact of the economic depression that gripped the world during that time. Though he did not touch upon the contemporary national issues **Mahaprasthanam** highlights the experiences of real life around him. He not only detested economic inequalities, but also condemned social evils. One should not make the mistake of associating with it with the modern perspective. It is a hot, blazing and boiling pond of blood. It is a fiery mountain ready to explode. For people who can understand and apply themselves to the lives of different strata of society, it is an assurance of confidence in life; and a struggle for existence.

Today dalits, minorities, and women allege that Sri Sri's progressive thought was not inclusive of their concerns as they were of the impression that Sri Sri was the exclusive property of the communists. But Sri Sri did have concerns of all these elements. He was a poet who taught the world that one should never look down on a puppy, a match stick, and a soap cake (*kukkapilla, aggipulla, sabbubilla*) as there is poetry everywhere and in everything; only, one should have the eye to see it – (the words rhyme and follow one another with an ease and spontaneity, while being immediately recognisable as every day, mundane things in telugu, actually proving his point). Could such a poet discriminate among humankind?

There is one truth that stands out and that is true for all times “the world is a maze and poetry is an unquenchable thirst.” The world will always be a maze if one wants to find solutions to its problems , poetry should always be an unquenchable thirst. The problems cannot be solved and the thirst can never be quenched.

Yes, true! Yes, it is true! Sri Sri is a great poet and **Mahaprasthanam** is great work of art. Yes, what you said was true. Sri Sri was a great poet with an intense and a passionate command over his diction, poet of his era and his **Mahaprasthanam** was his dance of destruction.

Sri Sri's Poesy: The Ore and The Alchemy

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Or say that the end precedes the beginning

And the end and the beginning were always there

Before the beginning and after the end

And all is always now

-T.S.Eliot

It would be a platitude to say that Srirangam Srinivasa Rao is a genius and a multifaceted literary personality. All his poetic output, before he produced his magnum opus **Maha Prasthanam**, had been the result of a strong urge in him to write poetry echoing Devulapalli V Krishna Sastry²⁵ and Viswanatha Satyanarayana²⁶, insofar as poetic diction is concerned. If Platonism provides a treasure house of concepts for Devulapalli to adopt for his own ends, staunch traditionalism blended with modernism remains the hall mark of Viswanatha's poetry. Sri Sri was well aware of his falling under the spell of these two great poets and tried to come out their grip by searching for his own voice.

It was around 1930s that Sri Sri began making experiments with an intent to create a poetic diction of his own which demanded not only assiduous labour on the part of the poet but also in-depth scholarship in the art of writing poetry. Digesting all the techniques

²⁵ Devulapalli Venkata Krishna Sastry: A contemporary of Sri Sri who wrote in the romantic idealism mould in the order of Shelley and Keats.

²⁶ Viswanatha Satyanarayana, Another contemporary who won Gnanapeeth award for literature, known for his traditional mode of writing poetry.

of the renowned poets of his age - both Indian and European - who are reputed for distinction in style, Sri Sri experimented in the poetic diction of the Telugu language by exploring the expressive possibilities of the language both semantically and syntactically; which would later be acclaimed as through and through individualistic. As he was thoroughly conversant with the then latest publications of Georgian poets like Masfield and Burns, it was but natural that he was on the side of the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed in those hungry 30s.

If we glance at the formative influences of Sri Sri, we will recognize is the influences of a large repertoire of classical literature of yore both in native and foreign languages alike. He worked hard to attain mastery on the meter that could be subtly adapted to express his fervent revolutionary spirit. Besides the French and the Russian poets, Sri Sri was very much influenced by the British poetic generation of 1917- T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound Thomas Moore, and Williams – all born within five years of each other. What Eliot says of Ezra Pound - “he simply did the next thing”- is also true of the poetry of Sri Sri because the poet has imbibed all that is living from the poets of the past and the present.

The Salt Water Ballads of John Edward Masfield influenced Sri Sri in his earlier days and he was particularly enthralled by Masfield’s poem, *A Consecration*, in which the poet brings home his ideal of writing poetry,

*Not of the princes and prelates
With Periwigged charioteers...
but – “of the halt and the blind
in the rain, in the cold
of these shall my songs be fashioned
my tales ice told.*

The influence of these lines is explicitly discernable in the oft quoted lines of the **Maha Prasthanam**

Prabhuvakkina pallaki kadoy Adi mosina boyeevvaru...

(Think not of the palanquin the king is riding but of the men who carry the palanquin)

Sri Sri says that the poems of Masefield, in general and this poem in particular, has had a lot of influence on his poetic form and content. As he was deeply absorbed in reading the English ballads – ballads of A.C Swinburne and Masefield -their influence is explicit in the poetry of Sri Sri. Particularly the influence of the ballads of Swinburne such as ***Triumph of Time*** provoked him to write a poem on Swinburne in **Maha Prasthanam**. Compared to John Keats there is a force in the Ballads of Swinburne and this force has lent a kind of aureole to some of the verses of **Maha Prasthanam**. As a young poet Sri Sri developed a fondness for the **Barrack Room Ballads** of Rudyard Kipling and Kipling’s Ballads left an indelible impression on the poet’s mind. In so far as the purpose of writing poetry is concerned, Sri Sri himself had acknowledged his debt to Kipling in motivating him to champion the cause of the underdog. During this formative period of his life Sri Sri was influenced by the two great dramatists of France and America - Anatole France and Sinclair Lewis. Their influence helped him to emerge as a poet. Another great English poet whom he admired most and acknowledged was W.W Gibson. His poem ***I even I*** inspired Sri Sri to write his first poem in his mother tongue adopting *matra chandas*²⁷ for the free expression of his thought. The poem was titled in Telugu ***Nenu Saitham*** (Even I). This poem with its word melody produces a harmonious effect in the mind of the readers with the vast sonorities of vowels and consonants.

Sri Sri’s thirst for innovation of novel techniques in poetic creation was never quenched with experiments. He also wanted to explore the possibilities of expressing his thoughts through the sonnet form in Telugu. All great English poets like Shakespeare, Milton, Keats,ylan Thomas experimented with the sonnet form. It is a lyric poem in single stanza (8+6) consisting of fourteen Iambic pentameter linked by an intricate rhyme scheme; an octave (8 lines) rhyming a b b a a b b a and a sestet (6 lines) rhyming c d e c d e and Sri Sri made his experiments in Telugu following the English model with a change of rhyme scheme in the last two lines. He wrote only one sonnet in English. Another great American poet who influenced Sri Sri very much throughout his life was Edgar Allan

²⁷ “Matra chandas is a meter in which it is not the number of syllables that determine the arrangement, but the sum of the syllabic quantities per verse. In total 16 quantities must occur and it does not matter how they are divided up”(From ***Sound and Communication: An aesthetic cultural history of Sanskrit Hinduism*** by Annette Wilke and Olive Moebes, p1044)

Poe. Poe's influence on the French symbolist poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine and Mallarme in general and Baudelaire in particular is what appealed to Sri Sri and he regarded Poe's staunch opinion that "a long poem is always a contradiction in terms" to be convincing. He believed that epics were the products of an imperfect sense of Art and their reign is no more. As a great poet Sri Sri is thoroughly conversant with the writings of Poe; it could be surmised that like Poe, he (Sri Sri) also would have comprehended how a poem fails to satisfy the poetic sentiment if it lacks 'momentum' in spite of all the brilliant things wreathed by a poet.

It was Edgar Allan Poe who made a study of the 19th century French poet Pierre Jean De Beranger and holds the opinion that his (De Beranger) poems "sparkle and excite but, from want of continuity, failed deeply to impress."

One can easily agree with this view. In his book **Moodu Yabhayilu** (Three Fifties) Sri Sri covertly expresses his idea of an epic poem by a subtle mocking tone: he makes a tongue in cheek remark on the **Ramayana Kalpavruksham** of Viswanatha Satyanarayana by saying that nobody would venture to read the epic in spite of their reverence for the great epic poet.

He was also influenced by the contemporary poets around him even in the days when his cap of misery was to the brim. He was very happy with the poetry of Mirzada Kempe, a Latvian poetess, so much so he wrote an article on her in English with the title "**A Great Experience**". It would not be a repetition or reiteration to say that Sri Sri had a large repertoire of everything that is related to poetic craft which helped him fashion his unsurpassing poetic style and thus become a trend setter of the modern poetry.

As early as in 1930s he was deeply drawn towards surrealist poetry by reading Andre Breton's "**Manifesto on Surrealism**" published in 1924. To put it succinctly, the burden of the movement was a revolution against all restraints on the free functioning of the human mind. To them unhampered operation of the deep mind is the source of valid knowledge and art and they turned to *automatic writing*. Davi Guscoyne's **A Short Survey of Surrealism** (1935) and the poetry of Dylan Thomas, Louis Argon and others

influenced the great poet Sri Sri so much, that he wrote a **Matala Moota**, **Adhivastavikula Pravesham** (A Bundle of Words: An Entry of the Surrealists)...etc
The aim of such writings was to explore the state of mind between sleep and waking and to present natural or artificially induced hallucinations. Sri Sri **Swarga Bhairavam** (Dog of Heaven) is one of the best rendition of Francis Thomson's **Hound of Heaven**. He had extensively studied the existentialist philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and it helped him look at life from a different perspective; perhaps he would have understood the triumph of life over time.

As a lyric writer Sri Sri achieved an unreserved rapport with cinema audience with his songs and he had given depth and enrichment by using this platform but without losing the popular appeal. Like W.H Auden and Stephen Spender he wrote songs without losing the flavor of literature with a spell of music in their composition. Since Sri Sri had a firmer grip on Marxist ideology and more ability to put this into a new kind of verse, his syntax always has a low of fervent communism. His songs are also no exception from this rule. His style even when taking a highly personal stand and tone can express abstract and public truths inspiring the readers to revolt against the existing morals which are largely bourgeois in nature.

To emerge as a great poet, according to the Indian aestheticians and rhetoricians, one needs to have three distinct qualities – *pratibha* (merit) *vyutpatti* (etymological derivation) and *abhyasa* (practice) of which *pratibha* is primarily the innate potential which is like an Ore that helps to produce an urn (artistic creation), with the secondary aids of *vyutpatti* and *abhyasa* and Sri Sri has in him these three primary requisites to the brim and so the alchemy of his unsurpassing genius turned everything into pure gold.



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