

## EVOLUTION OF SRI SRI FROM TRANSLATOR TO TRANSCREATOR IN TO POESY: A RHAPSODY

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**Abstract:** Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, popularly known as Sri Sri is the harbinger of new age in Telugu poetry and heralded a new epoch in it. This trend-setter to the Age of Revolution in modern Telugu poetry, wrote his magnum opus *Mahaprasthanam* which earned him fame as the father of Progressive Poetry, and many other poems depicting man's struggle for existence. In his novel direction to Telugu poetic field, it boldly sang about the woes of the downtrodden and found the earlier syllabic metres constricting. This gave scope to Sri Sri's creative genius to use new metres in his poems.

**Introduction:** Sri Sri showed that new reformist and progressive ideas and thoughts can be corresponded to common people by these new metres which became a fit vehicle for communication. Such style and metre were not used in classical Telugu poetry. He wrote visionary poems, reflecting the contemporary issues which affected the everyday life of a common man. He was influenced by the writings of Gurazada Appa Rao and the native folk forms. Sri Sri considered Gurazada as the 'path-finder' in modern Telugu, and described his own role as that of 'path-widener'. And, as he put it in his characteristic sharpness,

*He was ruled by Telugu poetry until 1934, but after 1934 (after his tour de force Mahaprasthanam was published) he began to rule it (Anjaneyulu D., P. 56)*

He started his poetic career as a poet in classical vein, writing on time-honoured themes in traditional metres. Telugu poetry, by then, had reached an almost decadent stage, and Sri Sri realized that the prevailing economic discontentment and the disillusionment following the emergence of political freedom are to be channelized for the class-war. Though he was carried away by the romantic whirlwind, like many of his time, he made a conscious effort to break away from this tradition, and this called for an extra-ordinary quest for an alternative. This effort resulted in his life-long passion and dedication for poetry for common man. He celebrates common man in his poems and fits into the grove of Walt Whitman's phrase, *en masse*. He burns with empathy and brotherhood for all – high and low, rich and poor and noble and vile alike.

A peep into Sri Sri's advent with a historical perspective shows two important landmark events. One is the significant Spoken Word Movement in Andhra in the beginning of twentieth century. It was led by scholars like Gidugu Srirama Murthy, who advocated for the release of Telugu from the shackles of the highly sanskritized diction and promoting the use of spoken dialect as a medium for creative expression. The second is the advent of the noted poet Gurazada Appa Rao on to the literary scene, becoming the first voice of modernity.

The new influences by familiarization with English Literature, especially the great Romantics of English poetry like Shelly, Wordsworth, Keats, Blake, etc., the award of first Nobel Prize to Asia, and the emergence of all-time-great-Rabindranath Tagore as a major influence in all the Indian literatures changed the course of poetry in Indian languages that included Telugu. Henceforth, a strong subjective element dominated the poetry for more than half of the century.

Sri Sri certainly did not favour the tedium and prosaicism of the then prevailing stereotyped poetry. His long monologue poem *Kavitha O Kavitha* (mentioned henceforth in short as *Kavitha*), lays bare the struggle he had undergone to own the poetic inspiration, by breaking away from the monotony. This poem, dedicated to his muse, shows the importance of poetic art. It also mirrors his struggle to identify a distinct voice of his own. The poem talked of the search, the heart-aches and the break-ups in the process.

When the poet was young, he dreamt of her beauty, but was unable to clasp that beauteous form with flirtatious movements; so he languished in his dark cottage. In the source language, he says

*na yuvakashala, sumapeshala suma geethavanamlo  
Ninu nenoka sumuhurthamlo*

...

*andani andaaniviga  
bhaavinchinarojulalo*

....

*Nee roopam kaanaraananduna  
Na guhalo, kutilo, cheekatilo  
Okkadanai srukkin rojulu leva?*

In his Telugu version of the same, Sri Sri expresses his pain, but not with equivalent usage of the terms used in Source Language (SL):

*I was young I was green / There was nothing to be seen*

...

*In my hope in my dream / I thought I saw your  
crepuscular car*

*How beautiful you were / How beyond my reach*

In English version, *To Poesy: A Rhapsody* (mentioned from henceforth in short as *To Poesy*), his self-

translated version of *Kavitha*, the vague image of the 'lady' is summed up in a single word *crepuscular*, whereas in Telugu, this is described by dark images like "cave, pit, darkness," etc. Sometimes it is easy to understand the meaning of each individual word in a combination of words, even synonyms or denotative words. Any possibility of translating this new combination of these supporting rhythm of *Na guhalo, kutilo, cheekatilo / Okkadanai srukkina rojulu leva?* In English it would mar the sense and beauty of TL. He transcreates the 'torment' he has undergone in search of this inspiration as there is no equivalent translation.

The same is extended in the description of the image of the lady at the start of the poem (by using nearly ten adjectives in Telugu, but only four to five in English), or, in portraying the child-birth and the mother's dreams in maternity ward at the latter part. The first stanza in *Kavitha* is rich in concrete descriptive images that evoke the figure of 'lady', the personification of poetry, with consonance and alliterations:

*athisundara vinuveedhullo viharinche andani  
andaaniviga...*

...

*Chiradeekshaa sikshaasameekshalo*

This beauty of sound-play is missing in *To Poesy*. The image of the lady is not much seen, as the emphasis on time spent by the poet in search of this 'lady'. He says

*My life I laughed away /... / my life I loafed alone /... /  
dedicated consecrated /  
to you to you to you*

There is a repetition of words like *seeking seeking seeking, to you to you to you, etc.*, instead of recreating the rhythms of the original. They are rather odd to the structure of English language, but the poet has used it to create rhythmical balance. In SL there is a lofty use of sound devices (like alliteration, assonance and rhyme), adding a haunting mood to the poem, which is lacking in English. By alliteration he was successful in drawing the attention of the image of the beautiful form of the 'lady' like *sundara suswandanamanduna*, or the terrible image of the deadly battle *jwaram dwaninche mrudanga naadam, etc.*

Sri Sri was influenced by the poems of Masfield, ballads of A. C. Swinburne, Rudyard Kipling, etc. W.W. Gibson's poem *Even I* inspired Sri Sri to write his first poem in his Mother tongue adopting *maathra chandassu*, for the free expression of his thought, and titled it as *Nenu Saitham*. *Maathra Chandassu is a metre 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 doesn't matter how they are divided up (Annette-Olive, P.1044).*

Another important tenet in translation process is Sri Sri's conception of organic form. The true pleasure and meaning of a poem does not come only in technicalities of a poem like the traditional metre, rhythm, but such ornamentation comes in the way of fluency too. This is seen in both the Source and the Target languages:

*Matumaayala natanalalo neeroopam  
kaanaraananduna... (Kavitha)*

*In my hope in my dream, I thought I saw your  
crepuscular car... (To Poesy)*

In the above two versions the poet has so clearly expressed his early 'grappling' with poetry. He was immersed in the experience of life as in an ocean, and wrote from the very depth of that experience, the obscurity of the form of Poetry, which overlapped his thoughts and cluttered his mind with the *syillogistic illogic*. Coming to the conception of organic form, this is the new paradigm, the new shift, break of traditional barrier that Sri Sri ushered in his poetry and reflects in these lines:

*Naa vinnavi kannvi vinnavinchaga / maatalakai  
vethukaadagabothe avi...*

*Smasaanlavanti nighaathuvulu daati / vyaakaranaala  
sankellu vidichi*

*Chandassula sarpa parishvangam vadhili / vadiga  
vadivadiga veluvadina,*

*Parugidina naa yedhanadugidina*

But this does not mean that Sri Sri has done away with rhyme, rhythm and metre. In fact, he heightened the aesthetic effect of his poem by using concrete images of a lady, in large measure by using sound and literary devices.

The whole poem is not a transcreation, or, totally out of original (Source) mould. Sri Sri believes that poetry must hold a mirror to reality, and therefore contemporary life must be the subject of poetry. Hence while he voices the dismal conditions of the different sections of the people in the society, he translates it almost *verbatim*:

*Chaavu bradukula sandhyaakaalamlo kannulu musina  
rogaarthuni...*

*Magnified closeup of the patient chloroformed in the  
twilight of life and death...*

*And*

*Padupu katte raakshasa rathilo...*

*Of the metropolitan prostitute locked in the act of the  
carnal...*

Depending on the SL text to be transferred to another language, Catford distinguishes between two types of translation. One is the "full translation", where the entire SL text is transferred into TL. Every part of SL is replaced into TL text material. The second is the "partial translation" where some SL parts are kept in the original form. This procedure is common in literary translation, where some lexical terms are sometimes left untranslated. Further, if translation is

done by involving all levels of language, there results a total translation which Catford defines as

*Replacement of SL grammar and lexis with consequential replacement of SL phonology /graphology by non-equivalent TL phonology / graphology (1965, P.22)*

To some extent Sri Sri followed this type. To him, it is the meaning, the argument and the subject of the poem that determines its rhythm, its language and its form. He had his views of a poet and poetry. The poet is 'maker'; he makes images and poetry is, "image-making". The highest poetry may not provide sensationalism, may not evoke quick emotional responses. Its effects are slow, but they are lasting and profound. It can cheer up the young with beautiful imagery of a lady (though it is the personification of poetry) and horrify the tyrants (when describing the dark truth of the society). This is what Sri Sri had achieved in his *Kavitha O Kavitha* and its Telugu version *To Poesy: A Rhapsody*.

There is vast scope for the works of Sri Sri to be trodden deeper to get the nuggets of literary treasure, either in the translational studies or literary studies. As translation is an act of enriching target literature and language, a process of making known the 'text'

and/or the author, researchers in this area have an opportunity to bring out the genius of this versatile writer cum translator cum transcreator, who, in his transcreation, has truthfully brought out the core substance of the Source poem, as there was no need for him to *adopt the very soul of his author, which must speak through his own organs (Tytler, P.)*, because he himself is the author and the translator.

It can be safely said that poetry was Sri Sri's first love and 'beloved Muse'. A literateur finds the aesthetic structures that this great poet has created still stand erect. In a way it 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 political philosophy is the reason for his poetry standing the test of time.

Indian aestheticians and rhetoricians endorse three distinct qualities to be qualified as a great poet: *pratibha* (merit), *vyutpatti* (etymological derivation) and *abhyasa* (practice). Sri Sri had in him these primary requisites to the brim; and so the alchemy of his unsurpassing genius turned almost everything to pure gold.

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