

'A name to conjure with in Telugu Literature', **Vedam Venkataraya Sastry** was a literary giant, who dominated the Telugu literary field for over half a century between 1875 and 1929, the period which was a turning point in Indian history generally and particularly in literature and its renaissance. He was eminently fit to chalk out new departures in literature and made a remarkable contribution. He was a successful critic, teacher, commentator, speaker and creative artist and was a practical man who started his own printing press and published all his writings. He was a literary titan who, single handed, grappled Himalayan subjects and successfully performed what only vast academic bodies can achieve.

The monograph is a fitting tribute to the giant by this grandson, Vedam Venkataraya Sastry (Junior) who is himself a scholar of depth.

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VEDAM VENKATARAYA SASTRY

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

VEDAM VENKATARAYA SASTRY

By his grandson
VEDAM VENKATARAYA SASTRY (Junior)

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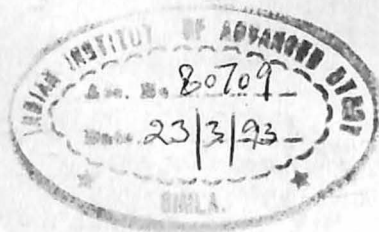
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PREFACE

My grandfather, Vedam Venkataraya Sastri, passed away in 1929, when I had completed only sixteen years of age. As such my knowledge of him as a literary personality cannot be either complete or perfect. I missed much of him. None of his contemporaries, either disciples or admirers, ever wrote any satisfactory account of him. I knew him more as a grandson than as a disciple but living closely with him, I gathered much from him in a casual manner and, after his demise more, in a systematic way, from his disciples. Comparing the knowledge thus gained and piecing together much material culled out from his records and newspaper reports, I prepared a connected biographical account. The late Dr. Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer approved it and in 1943 I published it, in Telugu, with a foreword by Dr. C. R. Reddi.

Thus it has fallen to my humble lot to write on my grandfather. The subject is vast and varied. Grandfather was an institution by himself and my account at best, can be, only a shadowy glimpse of the glory of a mighty literary giant that he was. Much is left for a study of his works and imagination thereon. My difficulty was also in presenting the subject besides giving a correct and true picture thereof. Many a controversial topic had to be avoided with care and much detail to be compressed. Hence this book has taken more of a biographical turn than a purely critical literary estimate. I am sure my readers would feel that there is room for betterment and the subject could be studied well from different angles. With this apology, I am placing this book, though small, before the public with the fond hope that this would lead to a better, and more elaborate study of grandfather's works with mine only forming an introduction.

I feel much obliged to the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi for giving me this opportunity to write in English for wider circulation. I have also to express my obligations to some of my grandfather's disciples and admirers like the late Sriman N. Ramadas Ayyangar and Sri G. V. Subrahmanyam, Advocate, both of Nellore who read this manuscript and made valuable suggestions.

VEDAM VENKATARAYA SASTRY (Junior)

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INTRODUCTION

'Vedam Venkataraya Sastry's is a name to conjure with in Telugu Literature', wrote the late patriot and scholar of Andhra, Sri. G. Harisarvottama Rao while reviewing a book on Sastry in *The Hindu* of Sunday, the 11th of December, 1938. This is perhaps the briefest and the most telling description of a literary giant who was a dominant figure in the Telugu literary field for over half a century beginning from the last quarter of the nineteenth century and ending with the first of the twentieth. The nineteenth century was a turning point and a creative period in the History of India in general and the literary field in particular. All our Indian languages took a new turn due to Western contact and Telugu was really fortunate in its great savants who were at once pandits of the old Sanskrit tradition and men of modern culture. Belonging to such a period of renaissance these pandits were eminently fit to chalk out new departures in literature and being one of such, the contribution of my grandfather, Vedam Venkataraya Sastry was remarkable. He made a great impression on his contemporaries by his depth of learning, vast and varied writings, practical and profound common sense with a fine sense of humour.

Son of an orthodox pandit he first studied English and later Sanskrit and Telugu—rather strange, due to circumstances. He became a Graduate and gave a new orientation to Telugu literature in the field of prose, poetry, drama, criticism and lexicography. A fine critic and an excellent teacher he edited many Sanskrit and Telugu Classics with elaborate commentaries in Telugu, enabling many students to study for themselves at home without a teacher. An interesting speaker, he kept vast audiences spell bound by his excellent lectures, at once entertaining and instructive instilling into them the grandeur of our glorious culture. A creative artist he wrote original dramas in Telugu besides translating some from Sanskrit and got them enacted both at College and outside giving a fillip to the Telugu Stage. A practical man he started a Printing Press of his own and printed all his writings in different sizes with varied and suitable types, well spaced out with punctuation marks and other easy guides trying to bring down the cost of books for larger and wider circulation. An entertaining conversationalist he attracted

by his spicy anecdotes not only his students, but a vast literary public who were constantly meeting him and learning from him with veneration. A man of common sense and clear thought his methods of approach were quick and time saving enabling scholars to make good progress within a short time with ease. With an excellent memory and vast study he was a walking encyclopædia capable of quoting offhand any passage either from Sanskrit or Telugu dispelling the doubts of his friends and students, then and there. A titan for work he always grappled Himalayan subjects and, single handed performed what whole academies alone could undertake and achieve. An orthodox Brahmin he opposed reformers who were misinterpreting Sastras in their zeal for quick reforms but was not, by himself, in anyway opposed for progressive changes in society. All this was due, not a little, to his knowledge of English and the Western type of education he received and the influence of the times.

1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The language of the Andhras is also called Telugu and its literature is in many respects a continuation of Sanskrit literary thought and tradition. Placed midway between the North and the South, i.e., the so-called Aryan and Dravidian cultures, Andhra developed a wonderful and fine blending of both. Having a Dravidian origin in its basic vocabulary and structure Telugu imbibed the vigour of Sanskrit thought and expression and thus created a new style with the best elements of both. Seats of Sanskrit studies also moved from Kashmir and Kanauj, Ujjain and Benares to Warrangal and Vijayanagara, Rajahmundry and Nellore so much so that every Telugu poet felt himself a descendant of Vyasa or Valmiki, Bhasa or Kalidasa and translations of great Sanskrit works were made and read out to vast audiences who heard with rapt attention, by eminent poets who had an excellent command over both Sanskrit and Telugu. The Telugu poet took his inspiration from and looked for guidance to Sanskrit masters and the Telugu epic or *Kāvya*, *Nāṭaka* or *Champū* was shaped after the Sanskrit models. Telugu grammar followed the Sanskrit method while Rhetoric was a complete importation from Sanskrit. Telugu poetic thought is almost a logical continuation of that of the Sanskrit poets and in fact many of the descendants of the Sanskrit masters rendered their thought into Telugu. In all technical studies, dance and music, art and science the Sanskrit *mārga* system formed the basis for the later *dēśī* superstructure, the terminology and guiding rules being Sanskritic while the execution i.e., way of expression or presentation, was moulded by the local or regional styles.

Though Telugu poetry appears to have had its start at about the seventh or eighth centuries A.D., as found in inscriptions, the first available book is that of Nannayabhaṭṭa, the Andhra *Mahābhārata*, composed in the middle of the eleventh century (A.D. 1050-1061), based on the Sanskrit original. Every later writer considered Nannaya as the *ādikavi* or the first Telugu poet and *vāk-anuśāsana* or ordainer of the language. Probably there was no *kāvya* worth the name before him and he gave the best model for poetical composition and set up a standard for fine style. All the Sanskrit *Itihāsas*, *Purāṇas*, *Kāvyas* and *Champūs* were rendered into Telugu as if

the whole nation was pursuing a regular scheme of translation. Metrical form of writing was the only mode of expression and writing in prose was not thought of. Even books on Arithmetic and Geometry were written in verse, probably to enable students to memorise easily. As the regional languages gained in strength and popularity, the dramas of the Sanskrit stage soon went into the background and lingered in small pockets of the earlier tradition. The *Yakshagāna* or the street dance drama, as it is popularly called, gained ground and is clearly seen from the Vijayanagara period onwards. The Telugu *Kāvya* style began to decline after the fall of Vijayanagara while *Yakshagāna* spread and improved both in music and its dramatic element, reaching its heights, in the seventeenth century in the South, (Tanjore and Madura) besides many parts of Andhra. Early attempts at writing prose are also seen in Tanjore and many parts of the South in the eighteenth century and it is only from the nineteenth century that modern prose began and quickly developed.

The later half of the nineteenth century witnessed great changes in the history of India and Andhra was no exception. The fall of the Mughals and the Peeshwas and the rise of the East India Company during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were powerful unifying factors and India achieved a political unity unknown before in her history—the dream of many a great ancient ruler of India come true. The establishment of the British rule under Queen Victoria consolidated and strengthened that unity and introduction of English as the common language and medium of education had achieved a uniformity in administration and a unity in thought and expression never before seen, even when Sanskrit was at the height of its popularity. The establishment of the various Universities on the British model led to a renaissance and opened a way for contact with the West, completely changing the Indian way of approach to literary and scientific studies. The introduction of the printing press achieved a greater measure of advancement in literary activity encouraging literature by leaps and bounds as no ancient patron of literature, no, not even Bhoja, nor Krishna-devaraya could ever have achieved. Many a rare manuscript that was a sealed book for scholars for over centuries was unearthed and published and made available at low cost. Many students who had to copy laboriously or get copied, many classics at high cost, could easily purchase books and form their own libraries. Life became

easy and travel and communications safe and quick. A greater understanding between different peoples brought about a sympathetic approach to all problems and many of the closed ranks in society began to loosen their grips lessening the rigidity of the so-called 'caste system'.

Research in Indian languages took a new turn owing to the development of new subjects of study like Indian History and Comparative Philology. Indian literatures got enriched in thought and expression by a different and better approach of the Classics due to a knowledge of the Western languages and literatures. Sanskrit and Telugu came to be studied at the Universities and graded text books were required in prose, poetry and drama. It is somewhat strange to note that Telugu, like Sanskrit, had not produced prose works to the extent of poems it has to its credit, probably due to the taste of the public who were more in the habit of hearing and not reading. Regarding prose, it will be surprising to note that there was an ocean of difference between the prose of the common man, used for communications or day-to-day business and the prose found in literature. The textual prose, with long Sanskrit compounds and alliterations probably intended as a kind of literary form for general reading and singing purposes was so antiquated or rigid, out of the way and unsuited for direct business purposes that even students of literature needed teachers to explain the passages. Drama of the 'Sanskrit stage' type is conspicuous by its absence. There was the Street drama, a combination of dance, poetry, music and dialogue enacted in open places without any stage or fixed equipment, entertaining the masses more than the cultured classes of society.

The new orientation started with the establishment of the Universities. Preparing the courses of studies on a par with the English classes the teachers of the Indian languages needed books to suit the different classes and this necessitated the production of graded prose books and varieties of dramas. Pandits became busy in preparing prose books and translating Sanskrit dramas besides selecting and editing passages from old poems for students. Thus, starting with prose story books and translations of Sanskrit plays our Pandits soon took to new forms like novels, essays of criticism, the short story besides short poetical pieces instead of long and heavy poems of the *Kāvya* type. More than all, the Western way of scientifically editing classics with introductions and punctuation

marks, paragraphing and subheadings added a new grace to Indian literary productions.

In fact the entire literary vision underwent a change and Vedam Venkataraya Sastry made a mark during this period as one of the leaders of literary thought and expression.

II. FAMILY AND PARENTAGE

Sri Sastry belonged to an orthodox Dravida brahman family known as that of the Vedams of Kausika Gotra of the Pudur Dravida subsect of the Nellore District in Andhra. Encouraged by the ancient Pallavas, Cholas, Chalukyas and other rulers up to the Vijayanagara period a large number of Dravida or Tamil speaking brahmans migrated to the Telugu country during the early centuries and received large number of *agrahāras* for their Vedic studies. They are spread all over Andhra and are now known as Dravidas—of Dimiri in Visakhapatnam, Kōnaseema, Pērūru, Ārāma in the Godavari districts and Tummagunta and Pudur in Nellore districts. Maintaining their Vedic tradition and social customs these Dravidas, except the last named, soon forgot their Tamil and learnt Telugu and, today count among leading writers of Andhra. Still speaking Tamil at home and spread over Andhra, Tamilnadu and Karnataka, the Pudur Dravidas not only pursued the Vedic tradition but devoted much of their attention to the development of Telugu literature as leading writers. During the Vijayanagara period some of them are seen as great Vedantists while some appear as staunch Vaishnavites and recipients of *agrahāras* for teaching the *Sribhāṣya* of Śrī Rāmānuja.

The Vedam family originally belonged to Tirupathi but migrating to Nellore obtained from a local chief the *agrahāra* of Mallayapālem in Kavali taluk and performed many *yajñās*. Vedam Venkataramana Sastry, born probably in 1817, left home while quite young, at the age of twelve to Kanjivaram, forty miles south of Madras, walking the entire distance and studied the Vedas in a Gurukula of one Sri Nivarti Venkatarama Sastry. Staying for over a decade there and completing his studies Venkataramana Sastry returned to his native village, got married and became, in 1847, the first headmaster of the Samskrita Āndhra Drāvīḍa Pāṭhaśālā, started by the Beri Chetty community in Muthyalpet, Thambu Chetty Street, George Town, Madras. He was teaching all the three languages while the famous B. Sitaramacharya who became later the first lexicographer of the Telugu language by his great book the Āndhra Sabda Ratnākara was the Telugu assistant. The Pāṭhaśālā grew into the present-day Muthyalpet High School where, later, Venkataraya Sastry also be-

came a headmaster about 1880 when English was introduced. Paravastu Chinnaya Suri, the great Telugu grammarian was a contemporary and a friend of Venkataramana Sastry.

Venkataramana Sastry had four sons and four daughters of whom Venkataraya Sastry was the eldest son. Born in Madras in the year Pramadicha, Margasira, bahula 6, Budhavara, on 21st December 1853 he was named after his paternal grandfather Venkataraya Sastry, (these names running in the family in alternate generations). The second son Venkatasubbayya died quite young at the age of twenty-five or so after passing his F.A. (later called Intermediate) and the third Venkatachalam Iyer, B.A.B.L., lived upto an age of sixty-seven and made a name as a great scholar and historian. Educated at Rajahmundry, Sri Iyer took his B.A., with distinction and was the recipient of the Gode Gajapati Sanskrit Prize of Rs. 400. Practising as an advocate at Nellore he utilised his spare time for Vedic and historical studies. His book *A Study of the Preliminary chapters of the Mahābhārata* published in 1922 had been extensively quoted by Winternitz (as V.V. Iyer) in his history of Sanskrit literature and utilised by Dr. Sukthankar of Poona in his critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*. His article on the location of the Seven Dvīpas of the Puranas found appreciation from the London Geographical Society. He contributed many articles entitled 'Āryāvarta', 'Bhārata Varsha', 'Tamils over three thousand years ago' and the like trying to suggest the original homes of the 'Aryans' and the 'Dravidians', to the Journal of the Mysore Mythic Society and passed away in 1931.

Venkataramana Sastry had to depend upon service alone for livelihood throughout his life as the old family *agrahāra* got divided in course of time through generations and not much was left for him for a living and maintain his family. Serving in Madras till 1856 he went to Andhra and served as Sanskrit Pandit in many government schools and colleges in the Visakhapatnam and Godavary districts and finally retired as the chief Sanskrit Pandit of the Arts College, Rajahmundry on a monthly pension of Rs. 25. Though he knew no English he was an enlightened philosopher taking keen interest in Biblical and Koranic studies and had liberal views. He was the author of a small grammar called *Laghu Vyākaraṇam* introduced in schools long before Chinnaya-suri wrote his famous *Bāla Vyākaraṇa* and a small vedantic book called *Ātmabōdha Vivaraṇa*, an interpretation of Sri Sankarā-

chārya's Ātmabodha. Peace loving by nature and reluctant to enter into controversies, he declined to oppose Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu at Rajahmundry regarding social reform and widow marriage stating his simple reason that because of Pantulu's propaganda Hinduism was not at stake and everyone had the liberty to propagate what he or she believed. Besides Venkataramana Sastry felt he was too elderly to oppose young men like Pantulu as adversaries. The cause of the orthodox was soon taken up by his son Venkataraya Sastry who was almost of the age of Veeresalingam as we shall subsequently see. Endowed with fine common sense, unperturbed even at the worst phase of his life, full of age and renown, recipient of the title of 'Vaiyākaraṇa Patañjali' from his contemporaries, Venkataramana Sastry passed away, peacefully, one evening, at the age of 83, in Nellore, maintaining normal health till the end.

III. EDUCATION AND EARLY LIFE

That early life, education and environment have a strong bearing on the later developments in the minds of great men is amply proved in the case of Venkataraya Sastry. Born in Madras in 1853 when his father was in service there, he moved and lived with his father in many parts of Andhra, getting thereby a good opportunity for seeing a large part of the country quite early and intimately. The family lived at Kakinada, Narasapuram, Podur, Visakhapatnam and finally at Rajahmundry. Keen observation, fine memory and an abiding interest in men and manners, life and language and much more the advantage of having a learned and experienced father at home provided Sri Sastry a rare opportunity of getting educated in a varied manner both at home and at school in the best way possible. Any peculiar expression that caught his ear and incidents in life formed the basis for his later day literary thoughts. As a boy of eight years of age, he casually heard his father narrating the story of Pratāparudra to his friends. This formed the basis for his great drama *Pratāparudrīyam*. His youthful experience of a near drowning accident in which trying to swim with his brother Venkatasubbayya in the large and dangerous waters of the Godavari from one side to the other, eventually saved by some boatmen has made an indelible impression on his mind. He wove the thoughts into a dramatic scene in the same drama *Pratāparudrīyam*. The scene describing the poet Vidyānātha as an expert swimmer who swam to the boats that were carrying the King Pratāparudra as a captive by the muslim invaders across the crocodile infested Godavari was reminiscent of the youthful escapades with his younger brother who was acclaimed as the best swimmer of his days among students. The characters like Pērigādu and Chekumuki Sastry were created and artistically improved by him from models he saw in life. Freely moving with one and all, and keenly observing either at study or at play he gathered much material about men and life. Songs sung by beggars and ballads by professional reciters made a very strong impression on his mind and created an abiding taste in him for folk lore and history.

Venkataraya Sastry could not learn from his father directly and

what he learnt was what he gathered when he heard the great pandit teach his pupils and talk to friends. Venkataramana Sastry was a strict teacher who never spared the rod and his caustic humour even at his sons made them avoid him. But the atmosphere created by the parent was more than enough to inspire literary taste in an artistic young son's mind. After their school career, when the sons, realising their folly, requested their father to teach them Sanskrit and put them in the way, the old Sastry turned down their request with anger that his sons had belied his hopes and left them to their fate. Stung to the quick young Venkataraya Sastry started studying Sanskrit with the help of books loudly within the hearing of his father making his mistakes well heard to provoke corrections from the teacher. Appreciating inwardly his son's determination and to keep up that interest in him the father taught his son in this peculiar 'behind the screen' method and thus laid the foundation for later scholarship which was thus completely self-acquired.

His career was a combination of private study and service. As the growing family required an additional earning member, young Venkatarayadu (for that was his name in School) soon after passing his Matriculation in the first class at Visakhapatnam in 1869, from the Normal School had to seek a teacher's job. For his teacher's training he had to come to Madras, and join the Normal School in the City, where among his teachers were the great B. Sitaracharya and Chadalavada Sitarama Sastry. In 1875 he took his F.A., but could find no post immediately as the Principal of the Arts College, Rajahmundry was not well disposed towards him. This was the beginning of his struggle in life. He never got his due reward for the merit he possessed. After much representation he was appointed as a petty teacher on a paltry pay at Srikakulam High School more as a punishment for his tiffness than doing him justice. Later he became the headmaster of the Taluk Lower Secondary School at Chōdavaram. This place has to be remembered for one thing, the peon, known as Perigadu, an arrogant fellow and a favourite of the correspondent. The name of an important character in Pratiaparudriya Natakam is Perigadu. The peon had to be brought round by strong disciplinary action involving a fight with the authorities concerned. Next, Venkatarayadu, became the first assistant at Hindu High School, Visakhapatnam and later Headmaster of the Town School, Rajahmundry. He earned a name as a good teacher and a disciplinarian.

It was in the year 1879 August 3rd, when at Rajahmundry, Sri Veeresalingam Pantulu delivered his first lecture on social reform and widow marriage. Venkatarayadu had gained in importance as a scholar and headmaster of the local Town School and came to be called as Venkataraya Sastry. As his father ignored Veeresalingam, young Venkataraya Sastry entered the field and opposed on behalf of the sanatanists. He met every argument of Veeresalingam quoting profusely from Sanskrit texts and emphasising that there is no sastraic sanction for widow marriage among Hindus.

After some time, impelled by a desire to study for the B.A. degree he found these activities a hindrance and came to Madras substituting his brother, Venkatasubbayya in his place at Town High School, Rajahmundry, as he too was well educated and had passed his F.A. It was some time before this that both the brothers were married, a turning point in their lives. Life cannot be all happiness and the affectionate brothers parted, but, alas, it was their final parting. Venkataraya Sastry came to Madras and owing to various reasons could not pursue his studies. Soon he heard the passing away of his newly married wife due to smallpox at her village and quickly on its heels, the sudden death of his beloved brother. It was a shock to Venkataraya Sastry, the first of its kind. I have seen him shed tears even at the age of seventy at the thought of that brother who was so devoted to him that he (the brother) declined to appear for his B.A. though well equipped, as his elder brother was not yet a graduate. Having lived together, played together, studied together the brothers were so attached to each other that it appeared they had one soul and mind in two different bodies. It was he who was with him at the Godavari incident.

At Madras, soon, Venkataraya Sastry became the headmaster of the Anglo-Vernacular School at Muthyalpet, the old Samskrita Āndhra Dravida Pāṭhaśāla having been raised to this standard with the introduction of English. He got married soon to Seshamma, daughter of Sri Alladi Sadasiva Sastry of Chillamur, a village near Nayudupet in the Nellore district and set up his family at Muthialpet in Madras. With an assured income of rupees forty a month he began to spend much money on purchasing books on Sanskrit literature and Sastras.

Even at Madras the widow marriage question did not leave him alone and all the orthodox men and associations of Hindu Sanatanists began to request him to address meetings to defend orthodoxy.

The reason is not far to seek. Veeresalingam Pantulu came to Madras as Telugu Pandit of the Madras Presidency College and started lecturing on widow marriage again. Sastry's lectures on Dharma Sastra were heard with rapt attention by many from all corners of the city and representatives of big Mutts and other religious institutions from the South also attended on deputation. He published his lectures in book form in Telugu called '*Strī Punarvivāha Durvāda Nirvāṇamu*' in 1883, with public aid and distributed one thousand copies free of cost.

IV. AS SENIOR SANSKRIT PANDIT OF THE MADRAS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

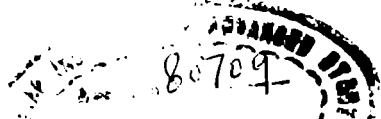
V. V. S., became a byword for Sanskrit and soon the authorities of the Madras Christian College invited him and offered him the place of the Sanskrit Pandit of the College in 1886 on a salary of Rs. 45 a month. He was drawing only Rs. 40 as headmaster of the Muthyalpet Anglo-Vernacular Middle School, and just then resigned the post on a point of prestige and was preparing to leave for Rajahmundry and find a teacher's job there. This happened on a Friday and when Dr. Miller of the Madras Christian College heard of it he hastened to invite Venkataraya Sastry immediately the next day, Saturday, and persuaded him to accept the Sanskrit Pandit's place with the offer of a higher pay. For Sri Sastry the teaching of Sanskrit was more attractive and pleasing than the additional income while the college also required one who could handle Sanskrit classes through the medium of English as students of different languages and nationalities were studying there. The late Sri Ongolu Venkatarangayya garu of Nellore, who was just then (1886) a Sanskrit student at the College, informed me once that the students were well impressed with Sastry's mastery of the various subjects and teaching ability through English. Soon the strength of the Sanskrit classes got doubled and a second pandit had to be appointed to help Sastry. Even members of princely families like the late Kantaraja Arasu of Mysore, joined the college for Sanskrit and became his students. The late Puri Sankarāchārya, Sri Bhārati Krishna Tirtha known then popularly as Venkataramana Saraswati was a favourite student who later continued his contact with Venkataraya Sastry for long. The late veteran politician S. Satyamurti, Dr. Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, A.V. Ramanathan who was one of the ministers of Mysore and later Dewan of Bharatpore, Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastry and a host of others felt proud of being his students. Sri A. V. Ramanathan spoke at the old boys' association meeting of the Madras Christian College in 1938, thus : 'The great Andhra patriot and scholar Vedam Venkataraya Sastry, was not only an erudite Sanskrit teacher but a great friend and guru to every student. He instilled in us a love of

Sanskrit and an appreciation of the beautiful and the lofty in our ancient literature.'

His mastery of English was such that at one time Dr. Alladi Krishnaswami and his classmates felt that the Sanskrit text for drama in his hands in the classroom, *Mudrā Rākshasam*, which he was then teaching, was an English translation by some Englishman and that Sri Sastry was reading that out to the students as he, being a pāṇḍit, was in no need of the Sanskrit text and could depend upon his memory for that. Their curiosity thus being roused they approached their teacher at the end of the hour and looking into the book were disillusioned as it was the very Sanskrit text and the English was all his own.

I heard of the above incident from Dr. Alladi himself some years ago. Presiding over one of the annual celebrations in memory of Venkataraya Sastry in 1938, under the auspices of the Progressive Union, Nellore, Dr. Alladi said, probably having the above in mind, as follows: 'He could translate into English a Sanskrit play like *Mudrā Rākshasam* off hand with such uncanny fluency that one would think he was really reading from an English text-book. His exposition was superb. He used to press into service his profound learning and the happy illustrations allusions and comparisons with which he made his comments left an indelible impression on one's mind. So thorough was his tuition that his pupils had scarcely anything to do on their own account.' (*The Hindu*. 24-12-1938)

For some years Sri Sastry was also handling classes in Indian Philosophy, occasionally teaching Bible also. He retired in 1910 as Sanskrit Pandit and the Superintendent of Vernacular studies. Though the College authorities wanted to continue his services for some time longer he declined their offer as he had started a printing press some months earlier, for the second time in his life, for publishing Sanskrit and Telugu books as an occupation after retirement. He would have retired much earlier had he not lost his savings to the tune of Rs. 3000 at the Arbuthnot Bank which became insolvent in about 1906. He served the University on its various boards of studies—Sanskrit, Telugu and Philosophy and was also an examiner in these for a long time even after retirement. He advised the University regarding its Telugu language policy, to maintain a strict standard, without allowing itself to be influenced by the various movements outside to water down the language and



to this day the Madras University is adhering to his advice though slightly relaxing in some matters. He prepared the graded selections in Telugu for B.A. and Intermediate and organised the courses of studies for the Oriental titles examinations also. It is interesting to note that he was examiner for Tamil also for one year but declined that, later, in favour of Telugu and Sanskrit. It is curious that he did not complete his B.A. He appeared for the first time in 1887 and passed in some parts but never found time to complete.

As a Sanskrit Pandit of the college he came into contact with many Sanskritists of South India like Prof. T. M. Seshagiri Sastry of the Presidency College, Madras who was also Curator of the Oriental Manuscripts Library.

V. EARLY LITERARY ACTIVITIES

Venkataraya Sastry's literary activities began the moment he entered Madras, for, he had already made a name at Rajahmundry as an opponent of Veeresalingam Pantulu and as Sri Pantulu also had come to Madras the controversies got revived. This has been already referred to in the previous chapter. In about 1883 soon after he became the Headmaster of the Anglo-Vernacular Middle School at Muthyalpet, he took over the editorship of the Telugu journal *Janavinōdini* run by the Madras Christian Literature Society from his former teacher Sri Chadalavada Sitarama Sastry. It was a monthly story magazine in simple Telugu prose with interesting Historical and Geographical notes intended for school and college students and run in three or four South Indian languages simultaneously. The story of Pratāparudra, later dramatised by Venkataraya Sastry, was first published by him in this Journal in about 1883.

He tried to maintain an up-to-date library at home investing his small savings on books and working almost eighteen hours a day. He was very active in many ways. Rising very early from bed he would daily translate into Telugu, at great speed, five or six pages of *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* before dawn. Making some friend read to him the original text, he used to translate into Telugu without looking into the original. His mastery of the original and ability to translate were such that by the time the reading of the text was over he would have completed his Telugu rendering and closed the notebook to the astonishment of the very reader. This translation was first published in *Janavinōdini* mentioned above and later in a book form. He felt his time so precious that he considered change of work alone as the best diversion. I learnt from the late Sri Ongolu Venkatarangayya that Sri Sastry's room was decorated with big placards with writings like 'TIME IS PRECIOUS', 'SAVE MY TIME', 'BUDHIH KARMĀNUSĀRINI'.

In 1886 he wrote and published, with English explanations, a small, pocket-size book on Telugu prosody called *Prakṛyā-Chandassu* meaning 'practical prosody' for beginners. This he rewrote in his later days removing the English portions and I published it in 1930 a year after his demise. In the same year, 1886, he

brought out also in book form, pocket-size, *Alankāra Sāra-sangraham*, on figures of speech in Telugu with word for word meaning for readers in general and students in particular. To make the general reader interested in Sanskrit studies he published the prose works *Bhōja Charitram* and *Vikramārka Charitram*, in pocket-size, with notes and translation. Impelled by a desire to publish such books in a series, he started in 1890 a printing press at home, Jyotishmati by name, and published in 1891, in book form, demy size, his entire translation of *Kathā Sarit-Sāgara* with the financial aid given by the Mahārāja of Venkatagiri, Sri Gopalakrishna Yachendra. The same year he also published his Telugu translation of Sri Harsha's Sanskrit play *Nāgānandam*. But this book was printed in some other press as he had to sell his press finding it incompatible with his literary work.

Concentrating on Sanskrit dramatic studies he brought out his translation of Kalidāsa's *Abhijñana Śākuntalam* in 1886, after teaching it at the Madras Christian College and getting it enacted for some years by his students. In 1897 he published his epoch making original Telugu drama *Pratāparudriyam* which took the Andhra public by surprise and storm. Unsparring a critic as he was, like Dandin, he also brought out, both as pamphlets and articles in journals exhaustive criticisms of the works of his contemporaries. In the monthly magazine called *Amudrita Grantha Chintāmaṇi* of Sri Pundla Ramakrishnayya of Nellore, he published an article, thoroughly reviewing an edition of some Telugu Pandits, of a Telugu *kāvya*, called *Vikramārka-charita* an ancient classic, by Jakkana, a poet of the fourteenth century. He issued it soon in the form of a book and called it the 'Prathama Kinkīṇi' i.e., the first bell in his 'Śāradā Kāñchikā' i.e., girdle or golden belt he was offering to the goddess of learning, meaning thereby that he intended to publish a series of such critical studies of literature. The same year he published his major book of criticism which took not only his contemporaries by storm but busily engaged Telugu research scholars for over half a century trying to gather material to refute his arguments. It was the second *Kinkīṇi* in his 'ŚĀRADĀ KĀN-CHIKĀ' a voluminous criticism of over three hundred pages, where, in the unworthiness of the Telugu translation of Jayadeva's *Prasanna Rāghava Nāṭaka* by Sri Kokkonda Venkata Ratnam Pantulu, a Telugu Pandit of the Madras Presidency College, and a leading writer of the day, was exposed and the excellence of the original

well brought out.

The list of publications given above showing the literary activity of Sri Sastry provoked such a storm of opposition to him in Andhra that it brought about, in its reaction, a revolution in the thought and outlook of scholars. This needs some explanation as it was a turning point in the life of Venkataraya Sastry and Telugu literature as well. What he could not brook was the misinterpretations of Sastras and a wrong approach to literary criticism by opportunists and seekers of cheap popularity. Not that he was totally opposed to social reform or literary novelty or any kind of change but only twisting of the original texts to suit modern purposes he totally disapproved. A thorough Sanskritist as he was, he could never reconcile himself to slipshod and slovenly renderings from ancient masters. In prose, drama, criticism and poetry he favoured definitely something quite new, modern and a clear deviation from the earlier, much trodden, Prabandhic path of the old. But he wanted the link with the past be unbroken. He wanted the grand superstructure of modern literature to be solidly laid on the bed-rock foundation of our ancient literature and culture.

Necessity is the mother of invention and modern Telugu prose rose more out of a need for a simple and communicative language than to any particular person's deliberate action. The change over to modern life made it imperative for writers to create new forms of literature on western models and it is not any movement from within. Story and Novel, Drama and Criticism took the western way due to contact and not the logical development of any original Indian or Andhra thought.

Telugu prose got simplified even during the time of the kings of Tanjore, Madura and Pudukkota in the seventeenth century while the old Prabandhic style was adhered to only for conventional and musical purposes. Stories from the Puranas and even historical accounts were written in communicative prose more simplified than the bookish. Curiously enough, the southern prose, maintaining archaisms like the *anuswāra*, appears to be the forerunner of Chinnaya Suri's nineteenth century prose and nearer to the spoken language of the South whereas in the Circars vast changes occurred showing an ocean of difference between the two. Pandits became leaders of new prose styles and the first departure was by Chinnaya Suri. Then a host of others wrote for Schools and Colleges each trying to further simplify, maintaining a general standard for entire Andhra.

Some like B. Sitaramacharya tried to avoid Sandhi (i.e., combining certain words as of old) and shorten their sentences. The process had gone a long way before Veeresalingam and Venkataraya Sastry appeared on the scene. Though not bold enough to become completely modern like Gurujada, nor incorrigibly orthodox like Kokkanda Venkataratnam Pantulu of the older school, Veeresalingam started sliding down from the style of Chinnaya to a simpler one in the course of his writings, more useful for general writers and journalists.

A contemporary, Venkataraya Sastry wrote equally simple but more poetic prose with different shades according to the subjects he dealt with. With an immensely wider range he wrote narrative and communicative, direct and dramatic language with varying styles to suit different purposes. The prose of his *Kathā-sārith-sāgara* has the poetic flavour of the original. Though the original is in the form of verses he felt the need for original modern prose works and rendered the bulky volume of eighteen Lambakas, or cantos, into simple prose achieving thereby many purposes. As a translator he wanted to be true to the original, bringing out its full sense with all the figures of speech and poetical fancies and all that the original stood for. At the same time he made the work read like an original book of stories. Though the present-day High School student may find it somewhat difficult, the contemporaries (1891) felt it an innovation and an achievement. For one who wants to study the Sanskrit original also this translation serves as the best aid as it follows the original closely, line by line and word by word.

As a prose writer Venkataraya Sastry is seen at his best in his dramas where he wrote to greater effect. Telugu drama of the stage type is a product of the nineteenth century as Yakshagana or the open-air street dramas were reigning supreme in the middle ages. In spite of the existence of the Sanskrit drama the regional languages did not take to it until the modern period. The zeal and the hurry to be early in the field made many translators overlook the very purpose of drama and the spirit of the Sanskrit stage. No doubt prose got simplified and verses less terse and more direct but a uniform language, both in prose and verse marred their writings. They showed no difference in language for the speeches or verses or songs of the different characters of a play. A king and his servant, a pandit and a villager, a woman and a man, a boy and

an old man would all speak alike, the same language, high flown and grammatical, unbecoming their characters. Probably none of these authors ever expected their dramas to be produced on the stage. Venkataraya Sastry realised that a drama is more for the stage than the classroom and while translating *Nāgānanda* and *Śākuntala*, followed the *Prākṛita* scheme of the *Bharata Nāṭya śāstra*, as found in the original texts and utilised the spoken language of Andhra in all its variations in a graded manner for all minor characters of the plays. Accordingly noble characters spoke as in the original good language, grammatical and polished, while women and menials spoke as persons in our homes and society speak. This innovation was felt as an eye opener and was appreciated by many. Pandits appreciated it and congratulated Sri Sastry. Besides, many pandits felt it as something beyond their reach as writing in different spoken dialects needed observation and great artistic ability. The remarks of Sri Gurujada Apparao, though made for a different purpose, in his preface to his second edition of his *Kanyāsulkam* are worth noting here.

‘I cannot understand how modern writers fail to see the merits of spoken Telugu, its softness which elicited the admiration of foreigners and its range of expression. At this moment, the best prose in the language is in the spoken dialect. Strange as it may sound, Telugu prose owes its origin and development not to the patronage of kings or to the influence of foreign literature, but to the exertions of a curious Englishman who stimulated compilations of local histories in the vernacular during the early years of the last century. The Mackenzie collections, no doubt, comprise tracts of unequal merit but for rhythm, flow and directness some of them beat the best works in the literary dialect; and, what is rare in Telugu literature they reflect the mind of the people and bear the impression of the times. Unconsciously possibly, Rai Bahadur K. Veeresalingam Pantulu garu rendered great service to Telugu by issuing as the first volume of his collected works, adaptations of English acting plays and farces of Indian life written in vernaculars of various degrees of purity; and the choice does credit to his shrewd commonsense, because that first volume contains his very best work, in fact his very best work that took the public by storm. The credit of deliberately introducing the vernacular into drama in keeping with Sanskrit tradition belongs to my friend V. Venkataraya Sastry garu whose *Pratāparudrīyam* owes not a little

of its charm to dialogue in the dialects. I believe my play is the first ambitious work in spoken dialect and certainly it has not failed, but success or failure of individual authors is no test of the capacity of a language.'

The *Pratāparudriya Nāṭaka* came out as the best illustration of the *pātrōchita* language giving the author an excellent opportunity to give full play to his creative genius. Taking a traditional story he developed it into a magnificent literary saga introducing many situations and characters suited to a big size drama of ten acts.

History says that king Pratāparudra was taken captive in A.D. 1323 when Warrangal fell to the besieging forces of Ghiazuddin Toghlik Sultan of Delhi and Southern states were falling, one after another into the hands of the Muslim invaders. Pratāparudra never returned to his state but Andhra traditional accounts say differently. According to one account he passed away on his way to Delhi on the banks of the Godavary. Another account states that leaders of the Kamma and other communities rescued him from captivity but still, being ashamed of his defeat and captivity, though for a short time, he committed suicide on the banks of the Godavary. The name of the brahman minister Yugandhara is not seen among contemporaries and poets of the Kākatyā period like Manchana and Mārana mention Yugandhara as a minister of Udayana of great antiquity. But strange to say a traditional story as preserved in the Mackenzie manuscripts has come down to us that Yugandhara the brahman minister, rescued Prātāparudra from imprisonment by a stratagem, behaving like a madman in Delhi surrounded by his men and army all in disguise. Having heard the story from his father Sastri developed it, created a variety of characters, high and low, intelligent and stupid, kind and wicked and gave the play a political colour of achieving things by espionage as in the Sanskrit play *Mudrārākshasa*. Having its scene of action at Warrangal and Delhi during the early Muslim period in Indian History, the drama ends with a strong note on Hindu Muslim unity, long before anybody else thought of the idea. More than *Mudrārākshasa* the drama strongly resembles Bhasa's *Pratijnā-Yaugandharāyaṇa* but without the love element.

Sri Sastri made certain alterations to the story he heard his father narrate. While the king becomes a captive in war, in the play he becomes a captive while in hunt. After a hard day's hunt Pratāparudra was fast asleep in some lonely corner in the Godavary

forest when the Muslims took him captive. Though Udayana was also taken captive while in the forest he was fully aware to the situation and was overpowered by numbers. This does no credit to the valour of the hero and hence the change. The similarity lies in this that both the kings were rescued by their ministers feigning madness. While Udayana's enemy was a Hindu and really friendly Pratāpa's was a Muslim and hostile. It is a matter of wonder that, long before the discovery of Bhāsa's plays, similar idea occurred to Sri Śastri. This may be due to the tradition that was found in Andhra but the story of Udayana was known through *Bṛhatkathā* and other sources. Bhāsa was only a name in Sanskrit literature until Sri T. Ganapati Sastry discovered the plays at Trivandrum in 1909 and published in 1913. But Bhāsa's play is meagre and the development of Sastry is all his own. Bhāsa stands nowhere either in the range of conception or in the execution of the play or its dramatic denouement.

The Madras Christian College Magazine of September 1898 has reviewed *Pratāparudrīyam* thus—'We cannot but congratulate him upon the happy choice of the subject he has made. We must congratulate him also on the success with which he has accomplished his task. We shall content ourselves with saying that *Pratāparudrīyam* by itself would suffice to answer those who seek to belittle the literary intellect of South India. The drama however marks a new departure in Telugu Literature. Secondly the drama is the work of one who has before now tried his skill in the interpretation of the Sanskrit dramatists and had made a name for exactness of rendering and for his high attainments in Telugu composition both in prose and verse. Further, he has studied the dramatic art with special attention not only for the gratification of his own scholarly instincts but also with a view to the practical application of his studies and researches in the representation of the Classical Sanskrit dramas. He has also cultivated a knowledge of the drama as understood by the masters of the West. A work by such an author should certainly evoke the interest of the educated public.'

This epoch making drama was dedicated by the author to his patron, the Mahārājah of Venkatagiri who had financed his *Kathāsarīth-sāgara* earlier and was making handsome cash contributions to his publications frequently.

It was in the same year (1897) that Sri Gurujada Apparao published his *Kanyāsulkam* completely written in the spoken dialect

of Visakhapatnam. As its theme was a social one the language eminently suited the subject. Though a later generation, almost a decade or two later, acclaimed it as the starting date of the *Vyāvahārika* (spoken dialect) movement, the contemporaries took it as one following the *Pātrāchita Bhāshā* movement only. The Amudrita Grantha Chintāmaṇi, a contemporary literary journal already mentioned, reviewed the book as one following the views of Venkataraya Sastry, without the least idea of the *Vyāvahārika* movement intended by the author at that time.

A word about journalism in Telugu may not be out of place here. It was during this period that Telugu journalism took shape and literary criticism was encouraged. Pandits started their own journals to attack and reply their critics and to propogate their views. Messrs. Poondla Ramakrishnayya and Vaddayar Veerana-gayya started in the year 1885 a monthly journal called the *Amudrita Grantha Chintāmaṇi* or 'the desire yielding jewel of a journal for unpublished books'. Besides publishing rare and unpublished manuscripts it was the forum for the literary activities of eminent Telugu scholars. Veeresalingam Pantulu, Vaddathi Subbarayadu, Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu, Kolachalam Srinivasa Rao, Vavilala Vasudeva Sastry, Kokkanda Venkataratnam Pantulu, Rajah Sri Vikramadeva Varma, Mandapāka Parvatiswara Sastry and a host of others were among its contributors. Prominent of them was Venkataraya Sastry whose articles on the *Āndhra Mahābhāratam* and other subjects were special features. Kokkanda Venkataratnam Pantulu maintained a fortnightly called *Āndhra Bhāshā Sanjīvinī*. Veeresalingam was the editor of *Vivēkavarāhīnī*. Besides there were other journals called *Śasilēkha*, *Āndhra Prakāśika*, *Sūryālōkam* and *Kalāvati*.

The critical reviews of Venkataraya Sastry on the writings of his contemporaries created a hostile atmosphere against him and those pandits organised an association called The Āndhra Kavi Paṇḍita Sangham on an all-Andhra scale with a view to destroy Sri Sastry's literary prestige. It was a period of transition and pandits were indulging in personal attacks vehemently in all their writings. It was the order of the day. But Sri Sastri unlike others gave also more information of a comparative nature bringing his vast study of Sanskrit literature to bear on the subjects. He clearly demonstrated how a Sanskrit drama has to be studied and rendered into Telugu. He stressed on a very important point, the *Kavi*

hṛdaya, or the intention of the poet, an insight into which is essential for interpretation and not the verbal meaning.

Scholars from all over Andhra attended the meetings and watched the outcome. The purpose of the very convention was to taboo the use of colloquial dialogues in dramas and ban the drama *Pratāparudriyam*. Sri Gurujada attended the meetings wishing Sri Sastry to triumph while Sri Veeresalingam kept aloof. Much to the relief and pleasure of the public, Sastry ably maintained his position by his citations from *Bharata Nāṭya Śāstra* and Sanskrit dramas.

After this triumph Sastry published in 1900 his review of an edition of the *Kāvya, Kālahasti Māhātmya*, edited by some pandits of the opposite camp. In 1901 he brought out as a monograph, his arguments on the language issue in the dramas and called it the 4th Kinkini in his *Sāradā Kāñchikā*. The book is named *Grāmya Bhāṣhā Prayōga Nibandhanamu*. Reviewing a reprint of this book in the *Hindu* on 8-1-1935, the late Sri G. Harisarvottama Rao remarked thus :—

‘This book is one of those old productions in which our scholars disputed one another on what to us look rather very simple matters. The use of Telugu colloquy in drama is the theme. Venkataraya Sastry employed in his dramatic compositions colloquial Telugu for what he chose to call inferior characters. It was on the analogy of the Sanskrit drama which fixed Sanskrit as the language for higher characters and detailed several Prakrits for other characters. The presumption there was that Sanskrit was the standard speech of the cultured and the Prakrits were the vulgar forms differing in degree from class to class. It is noteworthy that for women of the royal household and of the ministerial household and women of the prostitute class Sanskrit is prescribed, while it is prohibited for other women. Venkataraya Sastry on this analogy, used granthic Telugu for cultured characters and different shades of colloquy for others. This position was attacked by his contemporaries who stuck to what they called grammatical Telugu and in the place of Sastryar’s graded colloquial Telugu employed an artificial non-Sanskritic pure Telugu for the inferior characters. A battle royal raged between these schools, both of them being strict adherents of authority. Venkataraya Sastryar practically won the day with this criticism. However orthodox Sastryar was in his literary outlook, he rendered immeasurable service to Telugu literature

by his exposition of the dramatic art. Quoting Sanskrit authorities, he has for ever laid down in this quaint production ; (1) that in Telugu as in Sanskrit as well as in every language including English, the drama must aim to be within the reach of all ; (2) that Prakrits were living speech and living speech in Telugu colloquy was appropriately employed in dramatic literature ; (3) that the affectation of reality of scholarship is a very sorry substitute for the universal instantaneous and irrepressible delight of actual life and (4) that “*auchitya*” and “*rasa*” i.e. propriety and the quality to effect are the results to be achieved by the successful dramatist. As a result, on this particular theme the book deserves to be read by all lovers of Telugu literature. It abounds in quotations from standard authorities in Sanskrit, Telugu and English including Monier Williams, Wilson, Weber, Professor Cowell, Dutt, and Hrishikesh Sastri.’

The year 1900 closes a great epoch both in the literary history of Andhra and the career of Venkataraya Sastry. A change is definitely visible. The days of heated gigantic controversies were over and the feeling of triumph in the literary field has elated the spirits of Sastry. But soon the strange ways of providence spelt their effects on his high spirits. The passing away of his father Venkataramana Sastry in 1900, though at the advanced age of 83, was a great shock to him. Soon came in the following year, 1901, the untimely death of his esteemed friend Prof. T. M. Seshagiri Sastry and a literary scheme they had intended to execute together had to be abandoned. In spite of these disappointments and setbacks Sastry continued his literary activities and published in 1902 his commentary in Telugu on Kālidāsa’s *Mēghasandēśa*, entitled *Padaprayōjanikā* and called it a ‘*Chēti*’ or handmaid, to Mallinātha’s *Sanjīvinī*. It was his class notes he had been teaching for a long time and it brought about clearly the excellence and greatness of Kālidāsa in using the appropriate word to convey his idea.

In 1904 Sri Sastry published his second original drama, *Ushā Parinaya*, a melodrama after the pattern of the Sanskrit Nāṭikas utilising his ‘*pātrōchita bhāshā*’ to the best advantage. The story, this time, is taken from the Bhāgavata and Harivamśa, a popular theme with the Yakshagāna writers. Bāṇa, an Asura, was giving trouble to the Devas who thereupon, approached Lord Nārāyaṇa for help. They also contrived at creating a situation of conflict between Bāṇa and Lord Kṛishṇa an *avatāra* of Nārāyaṇa. Aniruddha, a grandson of Kṛishṇa is made to fall in love with Ushā,

the daughter of Bāṇa in a dream and similarly Ushā with Aniruddha. Ushā's friend Chitralēkhā, by her miraculous powers, brings about a union of the lovers at the palace of Bāṇa taking away Aniruddha from Krishṇa's palace. Coming to know of this, Bāṇa imprisons both Aniruddha and Ushā in two widely separated islands in his territory. In order to rescue his grandson Krishṇa goes to Bāṇa's place, punishes Bāṇa and gets the lovers united. The Devas get relief from Bāṇa. Strictly adhering to the rules of Sanskrit dramaturgy Sri Sastry gave many modern touches without prejudice to tradition. In versification also he achieved a combination of the *kāvya* style of poets like Peddana and Bhattumurti and the easy, direct and conversational style of the drama. The *kāvya* type of imagery is well utilised in delineating the *śringāra rasa*. The Universities which hesitated to prescribe *Pratāparudrīyam* readily prescribed *Ushānātaka* as text for the B.A. degree examination. If translated into Sanskrit this drama would stand on a par with the *nāṭikas* *Ratnāvalī*, *Priyadarśikā*, *Swapna Vāsavadattā*, or even *Mālavikāgnimitra*. Sri Sastry dedicated this drama to the memory of his friend Prof. Seshagiri Sastry.

VI. REVIVAL OF HIS PRINTING PRESS

Reviving his Printing Press some time in 1909, a few months before retiring from the Madras Christian College, Venkataraya Sastry started a series of publications both in Sanskrit and Telugu. At that time there was a revival of Sanskrit studies and many a modern English educated man felt the need to learn Sanskrit. Lack of proper teachers who could adjust themselves to the requirements of this new type of disciples was keenly felt. There were also no guide books for self-study. Stressing the need for studying Sanskrit for a proper understanding of our culture and pointing out how it was gaining in popularity in the West, while being neglected at home due to historical reasons, he evolved a scheme of graded books for private self-study of old authors, in prose and poetry, with word for word meaning and explanations in Telugu. These publications were very helpful to learn Sanskrit by persons of any standard in any walk of life at any time they liked without the trouble of finding a teacher.

This scheme was in his mind even when he first started his press in 1890 and brought out the simple Sanskrit prose works like *Bhōja Charitam* and *Vikramārka Charitam* as pocket size books with notes. Now after retirement he found time to execute the plan without interruption. Reprinting his editions of these books with additional notes and change in size, he added Telugu translations also. From 1910 onwards the printing press functioned well for some time. He published the first six cantos of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśam* and *Kumārasambhavam* with meanings and Mallinatha's Sanskrit commentary. *Amaram* or *Amarakōśa* and *Śabdamañjarī* with *Dhātumañjarī* and *Samāsakusumāvaḷī* were printed next as a beginner has to memorise them to get at the rudiments of Sanskrit grammar. In fact Bhandarkar's Sanskrit grammar for beginners is an explanatory one combining *Śabdamañjarī* (book of nouns) and *Dhātumañjarī* (book of verbs) in the manner of Henry's Latin Grammar with additional material to help European scholars to learn Sanskrit easily. *Samāsakusumāvaḷī* explains Sanskrit compounds. As the Indian traditional way of memorising lexicons was more time saving and easy, besides making one strong in Sanskrit, Venkataraya Sastry recommended it. Expecting the student to

have derived some grounding in Sanskrit with sufficient ability to comprehend a *ślōka* after a study of the above books he intended his publication of *Bilhaṇīyam* with notes as an introduction to later *Śringāra kāvya*. *Mēghasandēśa* with elaborate notes, to pave the way for a higher step to appreciate the mind of the great Kālidāsa, was already published. His next publication, the three *Śatakas* (centuries of verses) of Bhartṛhari with Telugu notes and the old Sanskrit Commentaries along with the Telugu poetical translations by mediaeval Telugu poets offered guidance and immense scope for study for Telugu translators and students of comparative study. He published *Hitōpadēśa* and *Daśakumāra Charita* with mere translations only. Having thus brought the self-taught student to a stage when he can easily comprehend the meaning of any passage in Sanskrit he published the mere text of *Pañchatantra*. For a study of the Sanskrit Drama he edited the simple play *Priyadarśikā* with word for word meaning, translation and notes explaining dramaturgy and concerned technical terminology. For the convenience of the student he printed on the same page, in the upper half, the original Sanskrit on the left side and the translation on the right and in the lower half of the page he gave the notes and the comments. He also prepared a separate Telugu translation of that play for stage and University purposes.

A note about his translations of Sanskrit Dramas also has to be made here. The translations of *Nāgānandam* and *Śākuntalam* served the double purpose of stage and study. The language scheme and the verses in different metres succeeded on the stage while the translation closely following the original word by word helped the student to understand both the meaning and spirit of the original. Early translators in Telugu like Nannayya and Tikkana rendered the *Itihāsas* and the *Purānas* rather freely, taking the sense of the original, occasionally elaborating or reducing where the original seemed redundant. The mediaeval translations too followed the same method sometimes taking more liberties. The *prabandha* period left off translating and gave free play to the muse of the authors. The modern writers as they took up dramas had to be very close to the originals and this made their task rather difficult calling for a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the original Sanskrit and greater ability in Telugu composition. Venkataraya Sastry has established, as already said by the reviewer in the Madras Christian College Magazine, a name for exact rendering of Sanskrit

works into Telugu. What aill a commentator has to say on any Sanskrit piece i.e., the general meaning, inner meaning, figures of speech, pun on words, prosodial beauty, alliteration, philosophical import—all these are brought out in the translations of Sri Sastry, some times making the translation more terse than the original. But viewed as a literary exercise it is a great feat and Sri Sastry has earned a name for his exact translations. Besides being so wonderfully faithful to the original he has made his renderings appear as original compositions. Another point to be noted is that he would consult various editions and manuscripts and determine the reading first before attempting to translate and this also needed special scholarship. There were many translators in the field like Veeresalingam Pantulu and Narasayya Sastry. But as they did not aim at this kind of exactness and only thought of being within easy reach of their readers their translations did not serve the purpose of students who wanted to study the Sanskrit originals critically.

The next step in the study of Sanskrit is rhetoric which is related to literature. For *rasa*, *bhāva* and the like, he edited with notes *Amaru-Śataka* (popularly known as *Amarukāvyā*) and *Rasamañjarī* of Bhānumisra purely devoted to define and illustrate the classification of the heroes and heroines in Sanskrit (erotic) literature and later fully translated Viswanatha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (published long after his demise). He also published with notes *Pushpabāṇavilāsa*. Due to many hurdles in life he could not achieve all these at one stretch and life was not such a smooth sailing for him. Some time after 1919, he had to dispose off his press. When he was nearly seventy years of age, to complete his translation of the works of Kālidāsa and Sriharsha, he rendered into Telugu *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramōrvaśīyam* and *Ratnāvalī*. His translation of *Uttararāma*, *charita* of Bhavabhūti had the unique feature of containing an elaborate introduction touching incidentally on the other plays of Bhavabhūti also. His discussion of the drama is also noteworthy in that he established the '*karuṇā vipralambha*' view successfully against the '*karuṇa rasa*' view. His essay on Sanskrit drama called *Bhārat-ābharata-rūpaka-maryādalu* gives a detailed account of not only the history of Sanskrit drama but also his views and experiences as an original dramatist, translator and stage director.

Reviewing Sri Venkataraya Sastry's translation of *Sāhityadarpaṇam*, The Federated India of Madras (1-4-1936) said the following: 'This is a Telugu translation of Viswanātha Kavirāja's famous work

on rhetoric by that prince of Telugu scholars, the late Mr. Venkataraya Sastrulu. Viswanatha Kaviraja a Bengali (more truly an Oriya) Pandit of the 14th century, held a unique place in the domain of Sanskrit poetics and Venkataraya Sastrulu has done a distinct service to the cause of Telugu letters by translating this famous writer's work.'... 'The book will, we feel sure, fill a real void in the realm of Telugu scholarship. In as much as Telugu is highly sanskritised not only in diction but also in thought and sentiment, the Telugu writers of old have borrowed rules wholesale from the Sanskrit *lākṣaṇikas*, and hence in order to have a proper grasp of Telugu literature, the beginner has first to acquire the *Alaṅkāra Śāstra* in Sanskrit. Authoritative Telugu books on rhetoric are ever so few ; and even in the case of the well-known books like the *Kāvyaālankāra Sangraha*, or the *Kāvyaālankāra Chūḍamani*, one must confess that they are often inadequate and sometimes faulty. Hence the imperative necessity to depend upon the Sanskrit originals. But this is a thing wellnigh beyond the ability or the scope of an average Telugu scholar of today. To him therefore, as well as to the general reader, translations of the type we have before us come very handy. There are not many of the kind. Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaaprakāśikā* was, we think, translated a few years back, by the late Avvāri Subrahmanya Sastry and Āndhra Sāhitya Darpaṇa now published belongs to this rare but useful genre.

'About the translation itself, it is unnecessary to say much. Mr. Venkataraya Sastry's name has always been associated with profundity of scholarship as well as lucidity of expression. In the present work both these estimable characteristics have been exhibited to great advantage. The original sloka has been meticulously translated into simple prose and is then lucidly explained, so much so, even the veriest beginners will find no difficulty in understanding it.'

Coming to Telugu publications of Sri Sastry during this best productive period (1909-1913) of his life, mention has to be made of the ancient *Kāvya Pārijātāpaharaṇa*, *Bhīlhaṇiyam*, *Kāvyaālankāra Chūḍamani*, *Harischandra Charitra* (*dvipada metre*), *Sārangadhara* (*dvipada*) and *Vijayavilāsamu* and *Sārangadhara* of the famous Tanjore poet Venkatarāju with notes. In 1913 he published his monumental Telugu commentary named *Sarvankasha* on the Classic *Śringāra Naishadha* of the famous Telugu poet Srinatha, a work which in turn was a translation of the great Sanskrit classic *Naisha-*

dhiya Charitam of Śrī Harsha of Kanauj of the 12th century. I reserve my note on this commentary to a later chapter as much has to be said of the writer as a commentator in Telugu. Varied were his activities during this time and he was also connected with many public literary associations. He was the Secretary for sometime of the Āndhra Sāhitya Parishad and led the opposition to the Vyāvahārika movement that was started by Messrs. Gurujada Apparao and G.V. Ramamurti Pantulu. He was for two years the editor-in-chief of the Sūryarāya lexicon of the Āndhra Sāhitya Parishad. Besides these, he was the President of the dramatic association called the Āndhra Bhāṣhābhīmāni Samājam of Nellore that enacted his dramas under his direction.

VII. THE VYĀVAHĀRIKA MOVEMENT OR THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE VERSUS THE WRITTEN

There is practically no nation whose state written language is also its spoken, day-to-day, speech. Perhaps English may be nearer the average but not completely the same and differs from the colloquial. Educated men do speak a polished grammatical language while the uneducated masses do not care for that of the higher classes and also have a traditional slang. It is so in all countries and nations and also in India, where due to history there is a multiplicity of dialects and Sanskrit was the language of the educated until the advent of the Muslims. Then Persian became the Court language and many Hindus learnt Persian besides, Urdu, the language of the military camps. Regional languages also developed and the process of change in the spoken languages was such that soon a disparity was felt even in the regional languages between the spoken and the written.

In Andhra, where at one time Prakrits and Sanskrit reigned supreme, Telugu became the State language and as poets wrote, for a long time, only poems, prose, the day-to-day business language, i.e., inscriptional prose, differed widely from the prose found in the *Kāvyas*. As I have already stated in an earlier context even the prose of the eighteenth century was poetic. Ever since Chinnaya Suri wrote his *Nīticandrika* a regular attempt was made by writers to simplify the language from the old poetic bookish style to something close to the spoken one of the higher classes keeping a standard common to entire Andhra. Slowly certain old expressions disappeared and simpler ones found favour in their places. The new feature is the *ardhānuswāra* i.e. the half zero in the place of the full one, which was fully pronounced in earlier writings and became silent later.

There were two 'r' s—the *laghu rēpha* and the *śakaṭa rēpha* or double 'r' resembling cart wheels. Śakaṭarēpha is of a Dravidian origin and is used only in Telugu words. Its parallels are found in Kannada and Tamil. The sound of both is the same as that of the Sanskrit 'r'. These two, *ardhānuswāra* and *śakaṭarēpha*, were great stumbling blocks to rising pandits and writers, but no one was bold enough to break conventions and traditions. Besides,

another major problem was the *sandhi* or the coalescence of two words into one word, a proper knowledge of which was necessary for the purpose of composition.

Many pandits realised these and Venkataraya Sastry was not behind them. Attempting at simplification to eliminate difficulties in expression he advocated *visandhi* or avoiding cumbersome combination or coalescence of words for which he found sanction in ancient Sanskrit grammars. But this did not satisfy the extremists who wanted a complete revolutionary reform of introducing the spoken language into all writings. It was Sri Gurujada Apparao, the author of the play *Kanyāsulkam*, who advocated this view and was soon followed by Sri G. V. Ramamurthy Pantulu. Though *Kanyāsulkam* was published so early as 1897 (in the same year when *Pratāparudriyam* was published) there was no such movement for the use of the spoken dialect then and it started from about 1911-12 when *Kanyāsulkam* was reprinted. My grandfather who so strongly advocated the use of different shades of the colloquial language in his dramas on the basis of *auchitya* or propriety, completely condemned it as having no standard for general use as even the cultured people spoke differently in different districts. Besides, he feared that the language would degenerate and pave the way for complete neglect of the study of the ancient Classics of the times of Rāja Rāja Narēndra, Krishṇa Dēva Rāya or Raghunātha Nāyaka. He gave out his views in detail in 1912 at a conference at Nidadavolu wherein he gave a graphic description of the spoken dialects of the different regions of Andhra with their local differences and variations.

Sri G. V. Apparao wrote to him on 2nd June 1912 thus :
‘Dear and respected friend,

I was very much gratified when you told me at the Madras conference that you went with me a long way, though you differed with me on some points. Though there may be difference of opinion on the practical solution of prose diction, it would be impossible for us to differ on questions of authority. We go to the same original sources. That is why I admire you. You generally exhaust any subject which you discuss. But I cannot say the same thing of pandits generally. Judgements are, in their case, a matter of purely sentiment and they do not take the trouble to examine Sanskrit traditions. I was amused to read in *Desamāta* (...’s Paper) a sentence whose meaning I put into English. “One or two

persons advocated the use of *grāmya* in dramas, but pandits have condemned the practice". Where are the pandits? I should like to see them. Of the other persons who assembled at the Pachayappa's I wonder how many deserve that name.

'It appears you spoke at length at the Nidadavolu Conference. I am anxious to learn what you said, at least your chief arguments and general conclusions. Unfortunately your speeches are not reported in Madras papers. Only *Āndhra Prakāśika* gave a report of the meeting at which you spoke on Sandhi. The one or two sentences in which your views were given were written in a Telugu which I did not understand. I shall feel obliged if you publish your Nidadavolu speech in some Telugu weekly—at least the gist of it. Sir, please take some trouble for my sake and for the sake of Telugu and write to me briefly what your views are, how far we concur and where we differ.

Yours very sincerely,

G. V. APPARAO.'

P.S. 'Dear and respected friend, in continuation of my letter of this morning—which prose works and poems of the present-day do you offer as standards? May we take your *Kathāsarit Sāgaramu* as a standard for prose and your dramatic works for poetry, say *Ushā*?

'How far have you deviated from the rules and precedents of the language of the older poets? What is your test of correctness? Do you think it possible, I mean, is it a practical measure to secure a fairly common standard of correctness among prose writers? What is your opinion of the solution of Veeresalingam Pantulu of a prose diction for Telugu? Do his followers follow any intelligible fairly uniform standard? Granting that to scholars accustomed to literary forms, serious writing in the spoken dialect sounds undignified, does not the popular prose of the present-day with Veeresalingam at its head offend the sense of propriety of both the pandit and the Western scholar?'

Yours very sincerely,

G. V. APPARAO.

In a letter dated 12th, June 1912 Apparao says as follows—'Please accept my sincere thanks for your note of the 9th inst. I have the first edition of *Kathā Sarit Sāgarām* at home. Please order

your publisher to send me a copy of the new edition when it is out by V.P.P. I have not yet received the booklet which you promised to send as a specimen.

'Your remarks about yourself show your modesty. None of us can altogether shake off the habits and sentiments of a life time but original thinkers like you who combine real scholarship with literary power are able to chalk out new paths to meet new conditions and to save literature from stagnation. So I want to study your writings. Your poetry is quite in the grammar and diction of the old poets. In prose you have certainly deviated, but what I fail to understand is how you can make common cause with persons like Mr. Vavilikolanu Subbarao who takes on one hand an extreme position in prose and reflects a decadent taste in poetry and with writers of the Veeresalingam School on the other and from whom there is greater danger to the old literary dialect than from persons who advocate cultivation of dialects. I think as a leader it is your duty to examine the merits and defects of that school of prose which is in greater vogue than the Classical style that you advocate.

'I await with interest your pamphlet on Gramya I hope you have recovered from the fatigue of the journey to Nidadavolu.'

Yours very sincerely,

G. V. APPARAO.

P.S. 'I Just now recieved your pamphlet. Please accept my best thanks for it. I wanted to read the presentation of the opposite views. I shall try to meet your objections. We differ little on questions of authority. I am afraid I did not make myself sufficiently intelligible at the Conference. You meet contentions in a shape in which I did not raise them.

'I admire you for many things especially for the atmosphere of historical romance and literary patriotism with which you have developed the story of Pratāparudra. Perhaps those times were as prosaic as ours as all present is for a present generation ; but you have succeeded in idealising characters and institutions. Few so called critics understand the merits of the drama. Telugu critics grovel in the mud of grammatical accuracy and the minutia of artificial art. Admiring you as I do, I should be loth to cross swords with you. But you have left us no alternative. Therefore, I crave your permission as Pāṇḍavas craved that of Bhishma. If I succeed

in convincing you even to less than the least extent, it can be with your help.'

With kind regards,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

G. V. APPARAO.

In another letter dated 8th Jan. 1914 from Coonoor he says as follows—'I have to ask you one question : you used in your plays various class dialects on the ground of *auchityam*. Why did you omit the best of them i.e., the language of the cultured brahmans ? Is there no use for it anywhere ? Does not the same *auchityam* require that characters of a certain social standard use it ?'

Nothing is known about the replies to these letters but without going into details, suffice it if I say that grandfather did not accept the view that the colloquial language of the educated classes might be introduced in the place of the standard *Grāndhika* language uniformly understood all over Andhra, as the colloquial of the higher classes has no standard or uniformity. He led a counter movement and saw that the Government and the Universities did not disturb the existing curriculum of study of the standard Telugu. Hence the movement of Apparao failed. Grandfather opined that the independent man in the street is free to use his own language but educational institutions should impart education only in a standard language and teach classics. The spoken tongue needs no teacher and cannot be standardised. In his lecture, later published as a pamphlet called '*Grāmyādēśa Nirasanamu*' he has brought out clearly the differences in the meaning of various expressions in different regions and showed how one word used in a good sense in one part of the country has a bad connotation in another. Besides, due to carelessness of the people words get corrupt and even mutilated, conveying one thing for one person and something totally different to another. Also the colloquial language of the highly educated cannot rise to the level of the *grāndhika* style that was getting polished from the time of Chinnaya Sūri.

Though many writers acclaim Veeresalingam as the father of modern prose, Apparao never liked that prose as evidenced by his letters quoted above. He appears to have liked Chinnaya Sūri better than Veeresalingam though the former was the first of the

orthodox school. His was a complete dead vote in favour of the colloquial language. With all his so-called pioneering activity and influence over his contemporaries Veeresalingam was not the person whom either Apparao or G. V. Ramamurti felt as the one that had to be brought round to agree with their views. They felt anybody was an easy prey to their influence or arguments but Venkataraya Sastry was the doughty antagonist, who had to be won over at any cost and whose conversion to the new thought would mean volumes to their credit. An orthodox person agreeing to a modern theory is equal to sastric sanction and adds weight and sanctity to the change. This is clearly seen in those letters of Apparao.

Sri G. V. Apparao passed away in 1915 and Sri G. V. Ramamurti became the champion of the *Vyāvahārika* movement. While Apparao tried to win over Venkataraya Sastry through friendly persuasion and personal appeal. G. V. Ramamurti took an offensive way of finding fault with the writings of Sastry and established a theory thereon that as the old Grandhika language was impossible even for such a great teacher as Venkataraya Sastry, it had to be rejected in favour of the spoken language. Venkataraya Sastry, though there was no controversy or dialogue between him and Ramamurti stated his view that he is not the standard but the language and the grammar are the standards, and if mistakes, or lapses are found in his language they have to be rectified or corrected. It is wrong to destroy the entire structure of a standard language and use dialects in its place simply because the best of the pandits too, is not up to the standard. But the attacks of Sri Gidugu are more in the nature of research wherein new discoveries and fresh knowledge set at nought many old views but not the standard language.

It was in 1919 that Gidugu Ramamurti found his first opportunity to attack Venkataraya Sastry. The Andhra Sahitya Parishat met at Nellore with Sastry as the President for the year and the Presidential address was the target of attack first. Sri Sastry, without mentioning names found fault with the language of some school and college books and literature in general. Sri Gidugu found in the lecture references to Veeresalingam's works and started his investigations. In 1921, he gave a reply stating that the attack was not justified. Later, he started justifying Sri Kokkanda Venkataratnam's works of 1897 and also criticised Sri Sastry's edition of Sringāra Naishadham. Sri Gidugu in 1921, had the advantage of advanced research and many manuscripts newly discovered. It took

nearly three decades for scholars of the type of Sri Gidugu to study and defend Sri Kokkanda, but only partly and the views of Sri Sastry held the field all the while. Research is different from the personal attacks in his writings. He wanted Sri Sastry to reply but aged as he was (67) and sick and fallen on evil days, Sri Sastry did not plan any major defence nor attempt to justifying himself. He expressed his opinion personally that if research can show his attacks of old as unjustified he would feel happy over it as addition to knowledge. But he felt that he is only partly answered and much remains to be studied. Nobody can completely defend either Kokkanda or Vceresalingam. It is not enough if a few words are found correct. Gidugu, after all, found certain word forms correct with the help of new manuscripts and study but that does not exhaust the entire literature and that is no argument for abandoning the standard Telugu prose. In his commentary on *Āmuktamālyada*, a poem by Kṛṣṇa Dēva Rāya, Sri Sastry has demonstrated that Sri Gidugu has not properly grasped the meaning of many terms and committed basic blunders.

Now, though the people at large, in a revolutionary spirit are writing in the colloquial language, educationists are faithful to Venkataraya Sastry and are maintaining the chastity of the standard language both at the High School and College levels. I can compare grandfather's attitude to literature here to that of the great British Parliamentarian, Edmund Burke to the American and French revolutions. Burke upheld the former and supported their cause while he was completely against the latter. Now, from this distance of time, we see the truth. Among the present-day prose writers of Andhra, historians and literary writers find the standard *grāndhic* language more suitable for expressing higher thoughts and nobler sentiments while newspaper writers, politicians and rising poets with modern views are inclined to write in the regional colloquial languages of the Sarkars often difficult to be understood by many belonging to other regions of Andhra.

VIII. DRAMATIC ACTIVITY AND THE ĀNDHRA BHĀSHĀBHIMĀNI SAMĀJAM

Another important factor in the life of Sri Venkataraya Sastry was his dramatic activity as a literary pastime. He was not only a playwright but a stage director as well. Unlike other writers he had the stage in mind and adjusted his writings to suit the stage. Even so early as the eighties of the last century it was his practice to see that every year his students at College enacted the Sanskrit Drama prescribed for that year. Thus he saw *Abhijñana Śākuntalam*, *Nāgānandam*, *Priyadarśikā* and the like enacted year after year. He successfully got enacted Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāma Charita Nātaka* which was considered by many of the western way of thought as unsuited for the stage. It was such a grand success with Sastry's trained students doing it so perfectly, that the Madras public called it as '*ati-Śākuntalam*' i.e., even better than *Śākuntalā* of Kālidāsa in creating the *rasa* or feeling among the audience. Even outside the educational limits associations of Sanskrit lovers enacted these dramas and the reputed advocate and Sanskrit scholar, the late Sri T. S. Narayana Sastry of Madras, used to act as Sri Rāma in *Uttararāma Charita* under the direction of Venkataraya Sastry.

Immediately after the publication of *Pratāparudriyam* some educated men at Nellore attempted to stage the drama. The early attempts were, however, failures for want of proper direction. Scholars like Sri Poondla Ramakrishnayya, Gunupāti Yenadi Reddi and a host of others organised into an association called the Āndhra Bhāshābhimāni Samājam for enacting the dramas of Venkataraya Sastry alone. For, it was then considered that the plays of other authors, for want of the dramatic colloquial language, were unfit for the stage. They felt that Venkataraya Sastry was *the dramatist* and the other playwrights were nowhere. The Samājam attracted enlightened graduates, poets, writers and many of the old students of Sri Sastry who happened to settle down at Nellore. Sri Sastry was made the president of the Samājam and under his direction it started enacting his *Nāgānandam*, *Śākuntalam* and *Pratāparudriyam*.

The revival of drama gave a goodbye to *Yakshagāna* and Parsee dramatic troupes which made a hit with their fine display of dress,

scenery, curtains and stage craft increased the popularity of drama. In Andhra each district came to have its own dramatic association and many of the Zamindars patronised them. Already the Puranic plays of Sri Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu were popular in Rayalaseema (Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah and Kurnool districts before the creation of modern states.) Madras city, capital of the province, was a great centre of activity in the dramatic field. The Madras Suguna Vilasa Sabha was making a name for its cultural activities. Of the persons who distinguished themselves in it the late Rao Bahadur Sambanda Mudaliar was prominent. Mention also has to be made of Sri Vedam Venkatachalayya (alias Nallayya), a cousin of Sri Sastry who became a leading member of the Sabha as an actor, dramatist, director and make up specialist, guiding its destinies. One can see, even today, adorning the walls of the Sabha premises at Mount Road, Madras, the life-size oil painting of Sri Nallayya whom many a senior make-up artist in the Madras film field to day claims as his guru.

Pratāprudriyam soon became popular not only in Madras and Nellore but all over Andhra. Surprisingly enough, highly educated men, advocates and graduates, pandits and cultured writers organised themselves into dramatic associations. It was a period of transition and though an orthodox brahman was looked down upon for taking part in dramas as an actor, there was no objection for one if he was a disciple of Venkataraya Sastry and acted under his direction. Sri Sastry never appeared on the stage as an actor but his activities created such an impression in Andhra that many thought that he himself was appearing as Yugandhara in his *Pratāparudriyam*.

The Samājam took up the fourth play, *Ushā Pariṇaya* in 1904 and *Priyadarśikā* in 1909. No woman took part in these performances and in fact it was only after 1930 that women entered the stage (and later the screen). Strict discipline was maintained and, as president, Venkataraya Sastry would not permit his dramas to be put on boards unless all the actors were found perfect. In one of his letters to a member of the Samājam he wrote thus : ' the play will not be staged unless the actors are made to be thorough with their parts in every way. You should keep sound health. If necessary cod-liver-oil will strengthen the voice.'

Venkataraya Sastry published his third original drama, second historical one, *Bobbiliyuddha Nāṭakam* in 1916. There was a change

in the language probably to suit the subject. It was more direct, simpler, nearer to our times and, as pertaining to Andhra, full of local touches. Even the verses were of a different mould from his earlier productions like *Pratāparudrīyam* or *Ushā Nāṭakam*. The *prabhandha* or *Kāvya* touch disappears and a local Zamindari atmosphere sets in. Even the characters, though historical and a step removed from our present-day life, come so near us and are so life-like that our sympathy goes to them all the more. But the printed book created a different impression even on fine critics and men of taste. The late Sri D. Venkatarama Reddy of Kavali, a reputed novelist, author and critic, and a best friend of Venkataraya Sastry wrote to the author expressing his disappointment and regret at 'the wanton sacrifice of that superb and pregnant diction to ponder to the tastes of the rabble'. But subsequently he changed his opinion after seeing a performance of the drama on the stage and after giving a full and second reading of the play at leisure. He wrote to Sastry thus: '..... Ever since Bobbili was published I had no opportunity of attending the drama staged. Yesterday I had been to Nellore on some business. After finishing the work I went to bed. At about 12 p.m., I heard some music emanating from the Town Hall. At first I thought it might be some cinema performance. I waited some time. Then I went to the Town Hall side simply to satisfy my curiosity. At the entrance I saw the board. On reading it I came to know it to be a performance of Bobbili by Samajam. Without even purchasing a ticket I went direct into the Hall. Fourth Act was just closing. Mr. Sivaramaiah was there. We were there till the close.

'The performance was splendid. The merit of the Drama has become vivid to me then only. I felt very happy indeed. Mr. Sivaramayya told me that the previous portion also was splendidly enacted. I am sorry I was not present then. The delineation of the characters, the spirit and language showed the master touches very clearly.

'The actors also deserve our thanks for having done their best. Probably Bussy would have done better if he had delivered the speech with a foreign intonation. His character was life-like.

'Pathos, heroism, valour, determination have aroused in the minds of the audience corresponding feelings. In short, the performance was a splendid success. I am constrained to say that I was wrong when I expressed some time ago that Bobbili was inferior

to Pratāpa.

‘How far has **Āmukta* progressed? I long to see *Uttararāma Charita* enacted.

Yours obediently,

D. VENKATARAMA REDDY.’

At the same time when the text of Bobbiliyuddha was going through the press, Sri Sastry's patron, the Maharaja of Venkatagiri, Sri Rajagopala Krishna Yachendra, a liberal patron of letters met with an accidental death while out on a tiger hunt and it was a great shock to the author. It also deprived him of the critical appreciation of that learned patron. The book was particularly intended to praise the Velama community of Zamindars in South India to which the late Mahārāja belonged and his demise just then was all the more sorrowful. It was also a pity that another friend, Gurujada Apparao also passed away a year before, and was no more to pronounce his opinion either on the dramatic prose, the verse or the plot. Being a friend of the Mahārāja of Vijayanagaram he would not have liked to characterise Vijayarāma Rāja a bad and intriguing person as was depicted in folklore and in the play and Rangaraya as the paragon of virtue. Due to the rising nationalism public opinion changed. Writers wanted to show the two Zamin-dari houses more as friendly, avoiding unpleasantness and to put the blame either on the French Governor or his deputy or on Hider Zung his adviser and the Nizam's deputy. In an earlier letter Sri Apparao has written—(17th July, 1914) ‘About your projected play on the siege of Bobbili—It is a pity that you did not complete it. I hope you have not said anything derogatory to Vizianagaram. I have got much material for a history of the period and I shall gladly place it at your disposal, if you complete the play. The material will prove that Vijayarāma Raja was a patriot. He wanted to drive the French out of Circars and asked Bobbili to co-operate. Bobbili did not.’

Somehow Sri Sastry could not avail himself of the material that was with Sri Apparao but for the second edition has made some changes.

*(*Āmukta* is a shortened form for *Āmuktamālyada*, a *kāvya* in Telugu by Sri Krishna Dēva Rāya and Sri Sastry was preparing a commentary on it then.)

The Hindu, dated 19-2-1935, stated in a review as follows : 'The publishers have done well to issue the present edition of this great drama by the late Vedam Venkataraya Sastry. The play was enacted several times during the life-time of the author. As it was being staged changes in the dialogues suggested themselves to the author. In this edition all these changes have been incorporated. Though there are other dramas in Telugu based on the same story, Mr. Venkataraya Sastry's work in sheer powerfulness of dialogue and literary vigour is unrivalled. Particularly, the scene describing the terrible battle between the forces of Rangarāya, the ruler of Bobbili, and the Mughalai army is superbly done and will rank equal to any of its kind in the dramatic literature of the world'.

Professor Pingali Lakshmikantham of the Andhra University, while speaking at one of the 'Jayantis' of Sri Sastry spoke highly of this drama and the following is an extract from a report in *The Hindu*, dated 16-1-1936. 'The great Kalāprapūrṇa was a national poet. If, in the history of Telugu literature, Srinatha attempted by his works *Palnāti Veera Charita* and *Kāṭamarāju Kathā* to write on national themes, the late Kalāprapūrṇa produced two master pieces, *Pratāparudryām* and *Bobbiliyuddham* with a truly national setting portraying contemporary life in a manner that had not been achieved by later writers. The poet's genius lay eminently in the drama and in criticism. Mr. Lakshmikantham referred to Mr. Sastry as a man of great scholarship and as one of those who contributed to Andhra renaissance'.

The Samajam functioned up to 1925 and as the performances gradually became more literary entertainments than paying factors it had to be wound up after the celebration of its Silver Jubilee that year. Actually there was no formal dissolution, but as many of its members were old and prominent members predeceased the President, the Samajam ceased to function. The last performance of the Samajam was the translation of Ratnavali enacted on the night of the Silver Jubilee day in 1925. Venkataraya Sastry after his Bobbili, translated *Ratnāvalī*, of Śrī Harsha and *Mālavikāgni-mitram* and *Vikramōrvasiṃ* of Kālidāsa. Of these *Mālavikā* could not be enacted but *Vikramōrvasiṃ* was wonderfully produced on the stage in 1922 several times. These three dramas were translated by the persuasion of Sri. D.Venkatarama Reddi of Kavali for whose satisfaction even *Uttararama Charita* was enacted with success.

After 1925 these plays were not so frequently enacted though

they did not lose their popularity. Instead of full performances, select scenes were being enacted on occasions. Of all the ten dramas of Venkataraya Sastry his *Pratāparudrīya*, *Bobbiliyudha* and *Śākuntala* still hold the field while the others are being studied at the Universities.

IX. THE NONPAREIL COMMENTARIES

After the transfer and shifting of the Sūryarāya dictionary office to Pithapuram in 1915, grandfather resigned his editorship and reverted back to his printing press. But, business proved a failure, and debt plied upto the tune of five to six thousands of rupees. He finally decided to dispose off his press, clear the debts and live peacefully with the balance of the sale proceeds until some other source of income was found. The after-effects of the Great war with the increased cost of living made matters worse. He felt it wise to have his books printed at some other press and be content with the sales thereof. In 1919, the entire press was sold and all debts cleared to the last pie. His income was from the sale of his publications and some rent for some portions in his house. He felt much of his time also saved as there was no press to be looked after which suffered for want of attention when he was working at the Lexicon Office.

Though he published his commentary on *Sringāraṇaishadham* so early as in 1913 he had already in his mind a plan for a similar edition of *Āmuktamālyada*, a *Kāvya* written by the famous emperor-poet Krishṇadēvarāya. In fact, he originally planned to write on *Āmukta* first but the work proved to be more difficult than it appeared to be at the outset and he brought out his commentary on *Sringāraṇaishadham* first. Circumstances also favoured *Naishadha*. Sri Rebala Lakshminarasa Reddi of Nellore, a liberal patron of literature, the donor of a big Town Hall at that place, financed its publication without questioning, even once, the enormity of the printing cost. He heard grandfather lecture about his commentary one day at Nellore. The next day he gave an interview and placed in the hands of my grandfather the entire money. Within a few months the big volume saw the light of the day. The dedication of the commentary to the Reddy patron in 1913 was a red letter day in grandfather's life and the history of Nellore.

Dr. C. R. Reddy wrote to grandfather thus : 'I suppose it is beyond question that yours forms the greatest commentary that has so far appeared in Telugu and that it will be probably a unique one of its kind for all time to come. . . . today the Telugu world could boast that a modern scholar has beaten the ancients at their own

game in a decisive fashion.'

Sri Gurujada Apparao wrote thus : ' I congratulate you on the completion of the work. It is invaluable to the student of Telugu literature. *Naishadham* cannot be understood by average scholars without such a gloss as you have given. You have done what nobody else could have done so well. I am sorry that the gentlemen with whom you have chosen to throw in your lot (though you have more in common with us than with them) decided not to print my minute of dissent. Therein I gave a critical estimate of the prose writers of the day and distinguished your work from that of the illiterate rabble. Your friends are never tired of singing the praises of inferior artists like . . . and it is only recently there is a halting acknowledgement of your claims. For the first time I boldly showed up the utter worthlessness of the prose which, uncritical and unscholarly persons were blindly holding up as model. Your friends never did you ordinary justice. An old friend from the opposite camp, that is, your humble servant, has given you your due as a scholarly writer.

• If you glance through my minute of dissent you will find what I said of you. Mr. Lakshmana Rao* once said that I flattered you. It is he who flatters for his own purposes. I proclaim my views from house tops and they are always my honest convictions.

' Why don't you do one service to Telugu ? May I request you to write the story of the *Mahābhārata* in a blend of old and new forms such as is used in commentaries, tales etc. You may say in your preface that the book is not meant for school boys, that it is meant for the illiterate or whatever you please. I shall print it.

Yours very sincerely,

G. V. APPARAO.'

The Maharaja of Venkatagiri gave an interview to my grandfather and spent several hours with him discussing the merits of the commentary. Grandfather wrote thus : on 11-3-1914, in a letter to his brother Sri. Venkatachalam Iyer of Nellore ' My dear brother, a long cherished interview with H. H. of Venkatagiri took place on Monday last. He expressed great pleasure and approval

* Sri K. V. Lakshmana Rao was a great historian of Andhra.

of my commentary on *Sringāranaishadham*. His appreciation and search ran through the entire work, syllable after syllable ; it is erudite and highly logical and critical. His praise of my labour is in the superlative degree even to the minutest detail . . .’

Writing about grandfather in an article in *Triveni* (May-June 1929) the late Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya, M.A. of Nellore remarked thus :

‘What impresses us most with regard to his genius is its stupendous almost superhuman dimension. He is truly a literary Hercules, perhaps the last of the giant’s race. This is seen not only in the mass of his output but in the very nature of his undertaking. The editing of more than two dozens of leading classics in Telugu and Sanskrit with the most exhaustive notes and commentaries, the translation of some seven first-rate Sanskrit dramas and of *Kathā-sarīth-sāgaram* and the composition of three original plays and some other Telugu works, are for sheer mass, sufficient to impress one with the magnitude of the Kalāprapūrṇa’s genius. But our wonder must be considerably enhanced when we learn that the above include many a work which singly might have been the life achievement of an individual—nay a whole Academy—and might be enough to ensure its author’s immortality. Such are, for instance, his commentary on *Mēghasandēśam*, the editions of “*Naishadham*” and “*Āmuktamālyada*”, the “*Prasanna Rāghava Vimarsa*”, and at least one of his original dramas, the *Pratāprudriyam*. His genius is cut for great achievements : and his “giant nerve” does not feel satisfied unless in grasping with the mightiest issues. The editing of the toughest classic such as “*Āmuktamālyada*” the writing of a ten act play “more epic than drama”, or the valiant fighting single armed against a whole army of pandit-opponents, alone affords proper exercise for his high talents. The rest for him is a mere child’s play. We have it on his own authority that he wrote many translations and even original works of lighter vein by way of recreation and relief in the intervals of serious preoccupations with a principal concern. A bubble of a lyric, a sentimental short story, a sketchy farce, a rambling causerie are not in his way. Only a colosseum would his art like to construct or reconstruct ; only an Ilium would his shafts care to demolish’.

Now a word about the poem *Sringāranaishadham* itself as the reader, at least the non-Andhra, will be curious to know what is its speciality in Telugu literature. Srīnātha, its great author, lived

in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth and found favour and honours at the Royal courts of the Reddi Kings of Andhra and Rāyas of Vijayanagara. His grandfather was a great poet at the court of the last Kākatiya king, Pratāparudra and the governor of a principality on the east coast of the Nellore district of Andhra. Telugu literature, by the time of Srinātha reached a turning point. Upto the end of the thirteenth century it was a period of mere translation into Telugu Verse from Sanskrit and the translation of the *Andhra Mahābhārata was just completed, a decade or two before the birth of Srinātha. Some writers rendered Sanskrit plays into Telugu as Kāvya. Rājasēkhara's '*Viddha Śālabhañjikā*' was written as *Keyurabāhu Charitam* by Manchana (1300 A.D.). Pinaveerabhadra wrote the *Sringāra Śankuntala* based partly on Kālidāsa. Other poets were rendering *Purāṇas* into Telugu, of course as poems. For the first time *Srinātha* translated into Telugu verse a *Kāvya* from Sanskrit and his *Sringāra Naishadha* is a close rendering into Telugu of Śrī Harsha's (12th Century) *Naishadhiya Charitam* that was being read with great interest in the Telugu country. Srinātha's contemporaries were the famous Sanskrit Commentators Mallinātha, Kāṭya Vēma and the poet Vāmana Bhaṭṭa Bāṇa. Andhra, under the Reddi Kings was the seat of Sanskrit learning vying with the courts of the Velama Naiduś of Telangana and the Rāyas of Vijayanagara.

After translating Sālivāhana's *Śapta Sati* and some other works and composing an original work called the *Haravilāsa* on Śiva, Srinātha translated Naishadha. Unlike earlier poets he rendered verse for verse and in many places line for line. He combined two or three slokas into one Telugu *padyam* and expanded at times one sloka into two or three *padyas*. Certain difficult verses bearing five meanings, i.e., same verse capable of yielding five different kinds of interpretations describing gods in the guise of Nala, were abandoned, being difficult for translation. He took care to reproduce the excellences of Śrī Harsha's book and his diction became the model for later writers of the Prabandha School of

* Started by Nannayya Bhatta in the middle of the 11th century, only three cantos were done by him. Tikkana Somayaji translated the rest, fifteen cantos, in the middle of the 13th century. Either Nannayya left the Aranya Parva incomplete or portions were lost, for Erranna completed some chapters of Aranya Parva in the middle of the 14th century.

the period of Krishṇa Dēva Rāya. Grandfather in his commentary has brought out the comparative merits of both the original and the translation besides explaining many sastraic points, *Vēdic*, and *Purāṇic*. The commentary in print runs to 1000 pages in Royal octavo size in small type.

Soon after the publication of *Śringāraṇaishadham* in 1913 grandfather started his work on *Āmuktamālyada*. The Mahārāja of Pithapuram on perusal of a copy of the commentary on *Naishadham* gave, unsolicited, a donation of Rs. 1200 towards the cost of the printing and publishing of a commentary on *Āmukta*, soon after its completion. The task took an enormous extent of research involving time and labour and the interruptions that came in the middle coupled with the after effects of the Great World War raised the cost of publication four times or even more. But, somehow, the Mahārāja was not prepared for this change of events. His Secretary wrote in one of the letters to grandfather thus: 'About *Āmuktamālyada* the Rajah wants me to write to you to say that he would like to have it just like your *Vijayavilāsam* in size (if possible even a little smaller) (200 pages Demy size). If necessary he says it may be split up into two volumes. *Naishadha* he considered to be very ponderous and unwieldy. He would be glad to know your views.'

But the text being so tough and the readings so difficult and varied, a thorough research became necessary. Several years were spent in study. From 1914 to 1919, until the press was sold, grandfather was not free to take up the actual writing of the commentary and it was in 1920 that he could complete the work. The introduction also became a big volume running to some hundreds of pages covering many topics like the authorship—controversy and the merits of the book, peculiarities of grammar and usage and the Vaiṣṇavite philosophy.

It is now necessary to add a paragraph on *Āmuktamālyada* as on *Śringāraṇaishadham* to show clearly the difficulty felt by the commentator in editing the classic. The compound word *Āmuktamālyada*, the name given to the poem, means 'the story of the damsel who gave (to the Lord) the garland she herself had adorned once.' It has also another name '*Vishṇuchittīya*' or the story of Vishṇuchitta. Krishṇadēvarāya, the Emperor poet of Vijayanagara, who ruled between 1509 and 1529, was of a religious disposition and a staunch devotee of Lord Venkatēśwara of Tirupathi. Taking the

stories of the Vaishṇavite saints (Āḷwars) Vishṇuchitta (Peri-Āḷwar), Āṇḍal (Gōḍādēvi) Vishṇuchitta's foster daughter and Yāmunāchārya (Āḷavandār) he composed a beautiful devotional epic illustrating the Vaishṇav Philosophy of *bhakti* (devotion). He dedicated the work to his favourite deity, the Lord of Tirupathi (Venkateswara) after conquering much of South India, Orissa and parts of the Deccan. Like *Naishadham* it is a long poem of seven cantos but has no Sanskrit original to help by comparative study. It was the period of the Telugu *Prabandhas* where a poet takes some story and develops it according to his ability bringing in, as per situation, all the eighteen or more, descriptions, needed, as per convention for a *Prabandha* or *Kāvya*.

Of the details of the story taken from the ancient Vaishnava lore—Vishṇuchitta or Periyāḷwar, an uneducated gardener of Lord Viṣṇu's temple at Villiputtur was a great devotee. Strangely, at the command of the Lord, he goes to Madura and overthrowing his adversaries professing other religions establishes Vaishnavism and converts the Pandian king. After his return he discovers a child in the garden and she becomes his foster daughter called Gōḍā. Vishṇuchitta was also an expert in making garlands for the deity. After some years, when the child grew into womanhood, she stealthily used to adorn herself with the garlands intended for the deity, look at her image in the garden pond, and put back the garland as before in the basket. The unsuspecting, old Vishṇuchitta, one day found a long human hair in the garland and discovered the truth. Blaming his daughter for the discourtesy to the Lord he prepared a fresh garland and offered that to the Lord. Strangely enough the deity rejected that and asked for the one with the hair of the damsel Gōḍā, for, the Lord understood that Gōḍā was in love with him and he had loved her in return. Later, Gōḍā goes to Srirangam with her father and joins the Lord as a reward for her devotion. The story of Yāmunāchārya is dovetailed into this main story along with many other shorter stories by way of illustration of the same *bhakti* ideals.

Krishṇadēvarāya had an unceasing military career and was a great conquerer. From the moment of his accession to almost his last day he was in a fighting mood. With a well-equipped army, he had conquered almost the whole of South India including Orissa within the first ten years of his rule but found time, in between battles, to compose verses extempore in the company of his court

poets Allasāni Peddana, Mādayagāri Mallana and Mukku Timmana who accompanied him to the camps. But his verses unlike those of his chief court poet Peddana are in a peculiar style, terse, halting, brizzling with unusual technical words of local usage and abounding with grammatical peculiarities. Either for want of time to compose or due to his regard for Peddana he has incorporated in his introduction and some parts of the text the verses of Peddana from the latter's immortal work *Manucharitra*. The intimacy and mutual regard between the Emperor and his court poet were such that, even within a short time after the demise of the Emperor, popular imagination ascribed the authorship of the poem *Āmuktamālyada* to Peddana along with other works. Ever since, Telugu poets and ancient commentators have ascribed the authorship to Peddana even though the text says explicitly that Krishṇa Dēva Rāya is the author. It has become an unavoidable feature in any introduction to a modern edition of *Āmuktamālyada* to discuss about the authorship—a vexed problem. Some modern editors went to a ridiculous extent of stating that the Rāya, being a king, and hence an inferior artist, not good either at composition or grammar blundered hopelessly and hence is the rightful author. Peddana, they argued wrote better and a different style and hence could never have written such a clumsy poem and ascribed it to his patron. After a careful study of all the aspects of the great poem grandfather proved that the Rāya was no inferior artist and the so called inaccuracies or blunders are in a large number of cases only scribal errors and in other cases correct usages misunderstood as wrong, for want of careful study. He proved that, in fact, the Rāya was a great scholar and being widely experienced in life, his descriptions of men and nature are masterly and appealing. It does no credit to the Rāya to say that he is the author because his book is second-rate. Grandfather has tackled the authorship question very dexterously stating that as the work exhibits material inaccessible to Peddana in certain matters and similarly beyond the reach of the Rāya in some, and as the Rāya has freely used the verses of Peddana from *Manucharitra* it is likely that the Emperor wrote with the collaboration of the Court poet. He opined that *Āmuktamālyada* in the main is the work of the Rāya and Peddana has given some final touches where needed. As the authorship problem and the literary estimate were interconnected, the commentator had to traverse the whole range of Sanskrit and Telugu literatures making a comparative

study, answering incidentally many points raised by the leaders of the ' Vyāvahārika ' School of Telugu writers. Besides, the commentary brought out the poetical excellences of the book and explained many sastraic points on religion and philosophy.

Dr. C. R. Reddi appreciated not only the commentary but the stand taken by my grandfather about the authorship. But the publication was delayed for over a long period. Grandfather completed his commentary in 1920 writing day in and day out—availing the facilities available at Madras like the Oriental Manuscripts Library. As the Mahārāja of Pithapuram was not enthusiastic enough to take up the commentary for publication, grandfather had to seek other sources of help and was biding his time.

X. HONOURS AND DIFFICULTIES

Public recognition and honours came to grandfather rather late in his life. Though a literary gaint and well-known in literary circles, it did not occur to anybody to honour him in public and he never asked for any. Celebrating the *ṣaṣṭipūrti* or the presentation of a *ṣaṣṭipūrti* Volume was not in vogue then. While the commentary on *Āmuktamālyada* was nearing completion the Andhra public became alive to the great services rendered by grandfather to Telugu literature. The first body that honoured him was the Andhra Sāraswata Parishad. In 1919, it conferred on him the title of Mahōpādhyāya, presented a costly embroidered shawl and a purse of Rupees one thousand one hundred and sixteen at Madras. It also passed a resolution recommending to the Government to confer on him the title of Mahāmahōpādhyāya. Next, the public and the Progressive Union of Nellore, honoured him with the title of 'Abhinava Mallinātha' for his great commentaries. In the year 1922, the late Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales, paid a visit to India and in that connection the Madras University honoured many eminent oriental scholars. A durbar was held in the Senate House on the Marina and the selected pandits were honoured with two gold embroidered shawls and a costly golden Khillat or Tōḍā (an anklet) with two lions' faces meeting at the centre in true oriental fashion, to be worn on the left hand. Grandfather was first chosen for Sanskrit but some other pandit who was proficient only in Sanskrit had to be provided for. A last minute change was made requesting grandfather to accept the first place in Telugu as he was equally proficient in both. Feeling doubly honoured at this suggestion, grandfather gracefully accepted the change and was honoured at the hands of His Royal Highness, the prince of Wales for proficiency in Telugu on 13th January 1922.

Soon after the above event, when grandfather appealed at Nellore in one of his lectures for funds for the publication of his commentary on *Āmuktamālyada*, there was a unanimous request from the audience that grandfather should shift his residence from Madras to Nellore, his native town and settle down there permanently, as he no longer had any work at Madras. Grandfather appreciated the idea but expressed his concern about a good house to live in

and also to keep his library and stock of publications. Besides, he was also faced with the problem of income, as the sale proceeds of books was irregular. There was a suggestion that subscriptions should be raised to help grandfather to purchase a house. A house was selected at Ranganāyakulapet in Nellore, on the banks of the Pennar river near to the Temple of Ranganātha Swami on the main Trunk Road. It was arranged to acquire immediately the house by raising a loan mortgaging both the Madras and Nellore houses for a sum of Rs. 5000 to a former student of grandfather. By March 1922 the family shifted to the new house at Nellore. While feeling glad for the change of events in his life, grandfather felt that he was beginning a new phase of life at Nellore with the mental obsession of a huge load of debt. How strange it was for him who wanted to live in peace by selling his very printing press for clearing his debts that he should again get what he did not want. But at the time he did not feel the burden so much, as he expected his friends, admirers, and former students to rally round and collect enough funds for clearing the debt treating that as a public cause.

His entry into the new house was with a good augury because, just then, the Jagadguru, Śrī Swāmi Bhāratīkrishṇa Thīrtha, Śāṅkarāchārya of Śāradāpēṭha (of Dwaraka Mutt), at Gujarat, not only honoured grandfather with six titles, 'Mahāmahōpādhyāya, Vidyādāna-vrata-mahōdadhi, Paṇḍitarāja, Vēda-Vēdāṅga-śāstra-jāla-mahōdadhi, Sanātana-dharma-ratnākara, Sarvatantra-swatantra' but also arranged for a monthly grant of Rs. 150 from the mutt funds. A public meeting was arranged in the Nellore Town Hall, with a grand procession from our house at Ranganayakulapet to the Hall nearly two miles away. A deputy of Śrī Śāṅkarāchārya came to Nellore and made the presentation. Grandfather was really in high spirits overjoyed at the timely help of the great Śāṅkarāchārya, who too was his former student at the Madras Christian College and later a disciple studying various sastras.

Now that a regular source of monthly income had been assured all the friends of grandfather were much relieved, as their burden had become limited to discharging of the debt on the house alone. But, grandfather was not destined to enjoy all this happiness. Events took a different turn. The Śāṅkarāchārya soon entered into politics and his Mutt got involved in some litigation. The promised monthly remittance could not be sent regularly. On 14th Dec. 1922, grandfather suffered the worst shock of his life in

the premature demise of my father, his only son, after a brief illness, when he was penniless. Inscrutable are the ways of providence and the next morning grandfather received a decent remittance from the Swamiji with an apology for the delay. It was a timely help. Later the affairs of the Dwārakā Śāradāpēṭha got further involved in litigations and the monthly remittance had to be completely stopped. The prospects of an early discharge of the loan on the houses began to recede, as the gentlemen who originally undertook the task of raising the necessary money by subscriptions could not organise themselves into a body for concerted action. The activities of the dramatic association also were not encouraging and the Andhra Bhāshābhīmāni Samājam fell into debts having incurred series of losses in many of its performances. Soon grandfather felt disillusioned. He felt the debt a Domacle's sword, hanging over his head. Whenever he thought of a new venture the big debt that had to be discharged in his old age loomed largely before him. In fact his books, notes and letters to friends reveal that he wanted to write many more dramas basing on general Indian History and folklore, besides editing a large number of Telugu and Sanskrit classics. He got many such books interleaved and prepared notes. But every good thought and attempt was interrupted by the reminders from the creditors. He was afraid that he may have to loose both his houses if any legal action was pressed against him and the thought of leaving his grandchildren not only penniless but roofless, was agonising him.

Either due to the mental worry or some development in his physic, grandfather had an attack of dysentery and soon was in bed for over a month. It was even felt that he might not survive the attack but somehow he got round. Though he was cured he was never his former self. After this ailment he could no longer sit patiently for an hour. He always needed rest and reposed on his cot. He grew his beard as he could no longer bear the touch of the barber's razor. He who once felt that old age dared not approach him, felt that he had suddenly grown old.

Amidst all this turmoil, the idea that his commentary on *Āmukta-mālyada* still remained unpublished was haunting his mind. Money had to be found for two purposes, both for printing the book and for maintaining the family. Some of grandfather's friends were making independent attempts to collect funds. Friends like the late Sri T.V. Sivaramayya, a great lawyer, philanthropist and

patron of literature, were occasionally honouring him with donations of Rs. 116, a traditional figure to honour a great pandit. The late Sri Gunupāti Yānādi Reddi, an ardent admirer and disciple who was annually supplying rice to the family, free of cost as his Gurudakshina, increased the quota and began to organise an association of the Reddi community of Nellore to collect funds to discharge the loan on the house. With the small amounts thus trickling in, grandfather started printing the commentary slowly. In 1924, he paid a visit to Gadval (in Kurnool district in the then Nizam's territory) and had an interview with the Mahārājah Sri Sitārāma Bhūpala Rao who donated Rs. 600 towards the printing of the book besides the usual court honours of two shawls and a golden Tōdā. The Pandits of the courts were much pleased at the erudition of grandfather, the like of whom they stated, they had neither seen nor heard of before.

“इह गधीनी शास्त्रे गैर्वाणमन्थजालेषु
अमन्त्रमन्येषु तथा नहि दृष्टः श्रुतचरो वाऽपि ॥”

Slowly by small donations the printing of *Āmuktamālyada* reached one-third of its length when Sri Y. Ramachandra Reddi, a philonthroplast of Nellore, came forward to finance the printing of the rest of the book costing several thousands of rupees in fond memory of his late first wife, Srīmathi Śrīdevi. As the printing was being done at Madras for want of a good press at Nellore, grandfather shifted the family again to Madras. He had one of his eyes operated upon for cataract. It was only a partial success. With great difficulty he saw the commentary through the press and it was published in 1927. Dr. C. R. Reddi presided over the function of its release to the public and expressed his pleasure to be associated in presenting this immortal work to the public. He was then the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University and moving a resolution in the Syndicate he had the title of ‘Kalāprapūrṇa’ (an honorary doctorate degree) conferred on grandfather who thus became the first recipient of the degree. The editor of *Krishna Patrika* the reputed journalist, the late M. Krishna Rao remarked that it was the degree of Kalāprapūrṇa that gained in merit by being conferred on such an eminent scholar rather than the scholar getting a recognition of his merits therefrom. On the same day the Bezwada (now Vijayawada) municipality bestowed on grandfather

the Freedom of the City of Bezwada, a unique and rare honour. It was a red-letter day in the history of Andhra and in the life of grandfather. His disciples enacted his drama *Pratāparudrīya* on that evening and the troupe was from Ellore 'The Great Indian Theatre' headed by the great actors, Messers Munjuluru Krishna Rao and K. A. Varaprasada Rao.

Though grandfather achieved his life's ambition of bringing out his monumental masterpiece, of a commentary on *Āmuktamālyada*, financially he made very little progress. He was nearing seventy-three years of age and the future of the family was his daily worry, almost making him spend sleepless nights for fear that the family may be driven out one day by the auction of the houses by the creditors. It was at this juncture that the attempts of Sri Gunupati Yanadi Reddi bore fruit and he succeeded in gathering donations to the tune of Rs. 10,000 and, discharged the loan on the house requesting the creditor to accept Rs. 7500 only in full settlement, in December 1928. Grandfather's aged mother who was nearly 102 years of age, passed away soon after hearing the good news and Sri Yanadi Reddi, not being content with discharging the debt of grandfather made further attempts at collecting donations to honour him with the rare honour of '*Kanakābhishēka*' or bathing in gold, as was done in the past under Vijayanagar Kings to the great poet Srinātha in the fifteenth century. But as ill luck would have it, grandfather passed away at Madras after a brief illness, at the age of seventy-six, on the 18th of June 1929, much to the grief of Sri Yanadi Reddi and his supporters, the members of the Reddi Sangh. The news was shocking to the entire Andhra and for several months the topic occupied the dailies and the Journals of South India. The *Kanakābhishēka* of grandfather could not be performed and Sri Yanadi Reddi utilised the balance of his collections for our family and for printing some of grandfather's unpublished writings.

CONCLUSION

Venkatarama Sastry was a great figure in Telugu Literature for over half a century, from 1880 until he passed away in 1929 full of glory and achievement. He could have done more had circumstances and fortune favoured him. Though by birth and make up he was a pandit of the old type, thorough going and orthodox, he became completely modern and upto date by education and contact. Son of a pandit he inherited many of the qualities of the old type memorising old lexicons and rules of grammar. Though careless at the beginning he soon realised the importance of Sanskrit and without directly sitting at the feet of his father learnt indirectly much of the traditional knowledge exhibiting his flexibility to adapt himself to the whims and fancies of a teacher. Being born in a poor family and forced to earn from a very early period in his life he was also trained in the school of trouble and adversity. Having a clear mind and a fine memory he could remember men and matters and utilise his experience. He did full justice to any matter he took up and never left anything incomplete. While the old Sanskrit orthodox method made his knowledge deep, his knowledge of English and College education and contacts gave him a scientific way of approach as found among the masters of the West. Conservative to the core, he was also liberal to the extreme. He was conservative in the sense that everything best in our traditional knowledge and culture has to be preserved and perpetuated. The foundations of these qualities were laid in him at a very early period in his life, as a boy, destined to become a literary giant. His contemporaries each exhibited a rare quality but he was a composite genius of all those qualities in one.

Good literature he appreciated in any form, whether of the folk variety or the University pattern. More than a modern extremist poet he listened to ballads and folklore and was of the opinion that real poetry cares neither for grammar nor purity of language. What appeals to the heart has a permanent value and this he proclaimed in a loud voice. The Sanskrit way of thought approved of this and the ancient writers on rhetoric and *alankāra* sanctioned it in the dictum that a sentence that has *rasa* is a *Kāvya* (वाक्यं रसात्मकं काव्यम्). The same principle he extended

even to drama. His literary views were based on sound common sense, and he felt that anybody was at liberty to write anything provided it appealed to the readers. Telugu literature abounds with folklore and many poems were composed in the spoken tongue. Old ballads depicting the valour and heroic deeds of many a prince, almost like echoes of the tales of Rajasthan and Scottish ballads have a vigour of language and a sentimental appeal unsurpassed by any other form of literature. Grandfather knew many of them by heart having heard them in his early youth with rapt attention. He utilised the knowledge to advantage in his dramas. He approved of the composition of '*Yenki pāṭalu*' a poem in the colloquial language of the simple life of a gardener and his love and appreciated the '*Bhāva Kavita*,' movement (Lyric poetry, as they called it) proclaiming that it had high literary value like the Prakrit *gāthas*.

While fighting for the permissibility of the colloquial language in dramas on the analogy of the Sanskrit plays he stood against its introduction in schools and colleges for prose writing even as a '*Śiṣṭa Vyāvahārika*' (the spoken language of the cultured). Being more practical minded he opined that any kind of language can exist, and subserve its limited purpose, but the standard language alone has to be maintained at the University and High School levels as education means study of the Classics and not bazaar literature that needs no teacher. Thus he was moderate in his views on language and never an extremist. He laid great stress on the study of Classics and worked for their revival.

His methods were more like constitutional approaches than being arbitrary or revolutionary. In fact his dramatic colloquy was felt revolutionary when he began its use and even G. V. Apparao would have failed had he begun his movement for the spoken language in the nineteenth century then. If Venkataraya Sastry had not broken the barriers of the older conservatives in a sastraic way and paved the way for a new approach Apparao would have been in the woods even in 1911. A period of 14 years (1897-1911) had softened the ground. Many who have not properly understood the logic of his views accused him that he had either changed or 'forgotten' his original stand in favour of the colloquial language when he opposed the movement for the introduction of the spoken dialect. Time has proved that though people, in general, use the regional language, the *Grāndhika* or the standard language has its position unaltered and, Vedam Venkataraya Sastry's views are still

respected by great writers in all the great educational centres.

His prose exhibits a variety not found in the writings of others. Style varies according to the subject and the readers intended. Words and structure also change from book to book depending on the subject matter. There is so much to choose in Venkataraya Sastry's writings that, practically for all writers he has models. His *Kathāsarit Sāgara*, *Daśakumāra Charita*, *Vikramārka* stories and *Bhōja* stories, *Hitōpadēśa* and the like have individually a speciality of their own while his dramas show greater variety over a wider range. Some of the passages in the dramas are couched in such a fine sentimental language that they move the audiences to tears while his humour makes them roar with laughter. His three dramas, spread over a period of two or three decades, also show a change and mellowness in the writer that we wish we had more of his dramas to see his originality.

The commentaries exhibit a variety of topics and are a mine of information for the student and pandit as well. He has not only utilised his extensive knowledge of Sanskrit and Telugu literature along with *Śāstras* and *Purāṇas* but taken into account modern researches touching history and geography and even epigraphy. In deciding the textual readings he exhibited a rare insight suggesting suitable emendations that coincided with manuscript discoveries later. He aimed at *Kavihṛdaya* or 'what the poet really meant'. The reason for this excellence is due in no small measure, to his ability as a teacher. It appeared as if he was a born teacher as he at once understood the limitations of his students and the difficulty of the subject and imparted knowledge in the appropriate manner. He would train up students either for deep knowledge in any subject or for a mere passing of an examination. He was systematic and thorough going in his writings and even G. V. Ramamurti Pantulu, while reviewing the *Sūryarāya Lexicon* felt that the *Lexicon* would have fared better if grandfather had continued as its editor and seen to its completion.

As a conversationalist at close quarters he was brilliant. Anecdote is the spice of talk and he had an inexhaustible fund of anecdotes to tell. It is really a pity as the late Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya lamented that Venkataraya Sastry lacked a Boswell to record his talk. Besides anecdotes, humour was his forte. Any subject, even Grammar at his hands found a silver lining of humour. He would make one roar with laughter by his lectures, himself remain-

ing serious. He also had a method in his lectures and they expanded like concentric circles. He would first give the main points of his talk and expand them in such a way that if he were stopped for want of time abruptly in the middle, the lecture would not suffer and there was the full satisfaction of having delivered the entire matter intended for the lecture. Perhaps, the expansion, by way of illustrations only suffered. Either for five minutes, fifteen or thirty minutes or for an hour this method worked well making the audience comprehend the subject all the better.

As a man he was a good friend to many a person that came into contact with him and had a loving heart. One would find his remarks harsh but he had 'nothing of the bear but its skin.' He never cared for money and allowed his borrowing friends to repay him at their leisure. In fact, some of his friends after his demise, having borrowed from him several years before, paid back to me his grandson. His daily routine and habits were directed to enable him save his time for study and literary work. Every minute he felt as precious. One cannot see him spending his time on any topic without purpose. He was always seen with a book in the left hand and a pen in the right. He not only utilised the day time but even nights. With the help of Candle lights, he would sit up to late hours. He was also up before sun-rise and being a coffee addict as it were, even in the early eighties of the last century, would prepare coffee himself to get the proper flavour. In his room, beside the study table he had a separate corner for preparing coffee and many of his friends who knew his coffee hours used to meet him just at that opportune moment to have a real taste of coffee. His coffee habit got a proverbial fame in Andhra though his opium habit was not much known. Working day and night he felt the need for other tonics also, and was taking Cod liver oil in all its combinations along with many Ayurvedic preparations. He continued to have candle lights even after the introduction of Electricity as he had no confidence in its unfailing supply. He could thus continue his work even when current failed and for writing purposes was having three or four large-sized fountain pens into which he would empty whole bottles of ink at once to save time and maintain an uninterrupted flow of ink and thought. Though observing the religious rites of a brahman he never made a show of religiosity and would visit temples on rare occasions only.

Fair in colour almost bordering on a reddish hue, of medium

height and good physic, with a long nose and benevolent eyes he looked like a Rajput in his last days. His body became bulky with a Johnsonian touch and grandeur. Impartial old age crept in and made easy job of his overworked frame. But he had left behind his clear foot-prints on the Telugu literary world. That he had to fight his way among the luminaries of his time against stiff opposition makes his life all the more sublime.

IMPORTANT DATES OF EVENTS AND WORKS

- | YEAR | SUBJECT |
|--------|--|
| 1853 : | December 21, birth of Vedam Venkataraya Sastry. |
| 1875 : | Venkataraya Sastry passed his F.A. |
| 1879 : | Veerasingam Pantulu delivered his first lecture on 'widow marriage' and Venkataraya Sastry opposed him. |
| 1883 : | Venkataraya Sastry published his book condemning 'widow marriage'. |
| 1886 : | Vedam Venkataraya Sastry was appointed as Sanskrit Pandit at the Madras Christian College. |
| | <i>Publications :</i> Telugu (1) <i>Prakriyā Chandassu</i> , (2) <i>Alankāra Sāra Sangrahamu</i> , Sanskrit (3) <i>Bhōjacharitam</i> , (4) <i>Vikramārka Charitram</i> and (5) <i>Bilhaṇiyam</i> (or <i>Chaura panchāsikā</i>) with Telugu notes. |
| 1886 : | <i>Pratāparudriya</i> story—first published in <i>Janavinodini</i> . |
| 1890 : | V.V.S. started his press 'Jyotishmati'. |
| 1891 : | First edition of the Telugu translation of <i>Kathāsarith-Sāgarām</i> —published. |
| 1891 : | Telugu translation of <i>Nāgānandam</i> —first published. |
| 1896 : | Telugu translation of <i>Abhijñāna Śākuntalam</i> —first published. |
| 1897 : | <i>Pratāparudriya Nāṭakam</i> —first published (<i>Kanyāśulkam</i> of G. V. Appa Rao—first published) in April. |
| 1898 : | Jakkana's <i>Vikramārka Charitra-Mudraṇa Vimarśanam</i> —published criticising the editor. |
| | <i>Āndhra Prasanna Rāghava Nāṭaka Vimarśanam</i> —published criticising the translation of Sri Kokkonḍa Venkaṭa Ratnam Pantulu. |
| 1899 : | 31st April—Dramatic Association called <i>Āndhra Bhāshābhīmāni Samājam</i> was organised to enact the plays of Venkataraya Sastry. |
| 1900 : | <i>Kājahasti-Māhatmya Mudraṇa Vimarśanam</i> —published, criticising the editor. |
| 1901 : | <i>Grēmyabhāsha prayōga Nibandhanamu</i> —published criticising the views opposing the use of colloquy in Telugu Dramas. |
| 1901 : | <i>Mochākusumāmōda Vichāramu</i> —published. |
| 1901 : | Demise of Prof. T. M. Seshagiri Sastri. |
| 1901 : | <i>Ushā Nāṭaka</i> —a Telugu play published. |
| 1902 : | <i>Meghasandham</i> —published with Telugu notes. |
| 1908 : | Jyotishmati press—revived. |

SANSKRIT PUBLICATIONS

- 1909 : *Pushpabhāṇa-vilāsam*, *Amarakōsam*, *Sabdamañjari*, *Bilhaṇiyam*—published with Telugu notes.
- 1910 : Retirement from the Madras Christian College.

YEAR	SUBJECT
	<i>Raghuvamīa</i> —first six cantos published with Telugu notes.
	<i>Kumāra Sambhava</i> —published with Telugu notes.
	<i>Amaru Kāvya (Śataka)</i> —published with Telugu notes.
	<i>Rasamañjari</i> —published with Telugu notes.
	The Three <i>Satakas</i> of Bhartṛhari—published with Telugu notes.
	<i>Priyadarsika</i> —published with Telugu notes and Telugu translation in dramatic form.
	<i>Hitōpadēśanī</i> —published with Telugu translation.
	<i>Dasakumāra charitram</i> —published with Telugu translation.
	<i>Vikramārka charitram</i> —reprinted with Telugu translation (also translation published as a separate book).
	<i>Bhōja charitram</i> —reprinted with Telugu notes. (also translation published as a separate book).
	<i>Pañchatantra</i> —Text only.

TELUGU PUBLICATIONS

- Pārijātāpaharanam*—text only, critical edition with proper readings.
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|--------------|
| <i>Āndhra Bilhaṇiyamu</i> — | -do- | |
| <i>Jñāna Vāṇīṣṭa Rāmāyaṇam</i> — | -do- | |
| <i>Sārangadhara charitra</i> — | -do- | (with notes) |
| <i>Vijayavilāsamu</i> — | -do- | („) |
- Sārangadhara* (Dvipada metre) critical edition with proper readings.
- Harischandra* (Dvipada metre) -do-
- Kāvyaṅkara Chūḍamaṇi*—text only—reprinted.
- 1912 : Opposed the *Vyāvahārika* movement of G. V. Appa Rao and published his speech delivered at Nīḍadavolu as *Grāmyādēśa Nirasanam*.
- 1913 : Commentary on *Sringāra Naishadha*—published.
- 1914 : November 18th, shifted to Nellore with his printing press 'Jyōtishmati.'
- 1915 : December—returned to Madras with the press and took charge as the first editor-in-chief of the *Sūryarāya* Telugu Lexicon.
- 1916 : Demise of his patron Sri Gopala Krishna Yachendra, Maharaja of Venkatagiri.
- 1918 : Resigned the editorship of the *Sūryarāya* Telugu Lexicon.
- 1919 : Sold his press.
- Translated and published *Mālavikāgnimitra* of Kālidāsa into Telugu as a stage play.
- Awarded the title of *Mahōpādhyāya* by the Andhra Saraswata Parishat with a purse of Rs. 1,116.
- President—Andhra Sāhitya Parishat.

YEAR

SUBJECT

- 1920 : *Vimarśa Vinōda* on certain readings in some Sanskrit and Telugu classics
Tikkanaśōmayāji Vijayamu—Lecture on Tikkana.
 Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāma Charitra*—translated and published with an elaborate introduction on all the works of Bhavabhūti.
Āmuktamālyada—commentary written.
- 1921 : *Vikramōrvaśi*—translation published.
Ratnāvali—translation published.
Sāhityadarpaṇam—translated but not published.
Hitōpadēśa—translated as *Champū*.
- 1922 : Honoured by the Madras University when (the Late) Lord Windsor visited India as Prince of Wales.
 Shifted to Nellore again—Debt on houses.
 Honoured with six titles—*Sarvatantra swatantra*, *Mahāmahōpādhyāya*, etc. by the Sankaracharya of Dwaraka.
 Lost his only son Venkataramana (Sastri).
- 1923 : President 'Andhra Mahā Sabha' (Political), Chittoor.
- 1924 : Honoured at Gadwal by the Rajah of Gadwal.
- 1925 : Shifting back to Madras for printing *Āmuktamālyada*.
- 1927 : *Āmuktamālyada* with commentary published (Dr. C. R. Reddi presided at the meeting),
Kalāprapūrṇa title awarded by the Andhra University.
 'Freedom of the City of Bezwada' granted by the City Council of Bezwada.
- 1928 : Sri Gunupati Yanadi Reddi cleared all the debts of Sri Sastri and proposed a *Kanakābhishēka*.
- 1929 : June 18th, 5-45 a.m.—demise of Venkataraya Sastri at Madras.

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(Available in Book form)

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|--|---|
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| 2. Dharanikota Venkata Subbayya | <i>V. V. Sastri Jeevitacharitramu as an Introduction to Andhra Sāhitya Darpaṇamu.</i> |
| 3. Gurram Venkata Subbaramayya | <i>Venkataraya Sastri Sanskriti</i> (published by the author). |
| 4. Venkataraya Sastri Śatavārshikōtsavasanchika (centenary volume) | Contribution by various writers and published by Progressive Union, Nellore. |
| 5. A. P. Sahitya Akademi | Lectures by four speakers :
1. N. Ramadas Ayyangar.
2. M. Kothandarama Reddi.
3. Vedam Venkataraya Sastri (Junior).
4. D. Venkatavadhani. |

