



OUR POETS LAUREATE

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POETRY AND THE PEOPLE

"I want art and literature that can speak to the millions", declared Mahatma Gandhi. True to this sentiment, the Madras Government have selected as Poets Laureate five luminaries who are essentially the peoples' choice. The appointments form a formal ratification of the popular desire of the masses, for these poets reigned supreme in the hearts of the people long before the institution of Poets Laureate—first of its kind in India—was considered.

Shelley described poets as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world". It is but fitting, therefore, that the "acknowledged legislators"—the men at the helm of State affairs—should hasten to pay their meed of tribute to these brother helmsmen. The new Poets Laureate are honoured not only for their dynamic role in the freedom struggle, but also for their paramount influence on contemporary literature. This is at once the privilege and the duty of a people's Government which has a vital stake in the cultural renaissance of the country.

"If thou hast two loaves, sell one and buy hyacinths to feed thy soul," counsels a Persian aphorism. These are days of biting scarcity and bitter want in the sphere of material goods; but let us be thankful to our Poets Laureate for providing hyacinths to feed our souls.

K. MADHAVA MENON,
Minister for Education.



Sri Namakkal V. Ramalingam Pillai, the Tamil Poet Laureate

I

*When falls the soldier brave,
Dead at the feet of wrong,
The poet sings and guards his grave
With sentinels of song.*

Tamil Nad in recent days was given a chance to evince its traditional love for song and thought, vindicate its belief in the

success of the freedom struggle and reaffirm its faith in the Gandhian creed of Truth, Non-violence, Work and Unity. And Tamil Nad rose to the occasion when the Madras Government crowned Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai with the laurels of the Poet Laureate. Every beat, every rhyme of the songs of the Namakkal Poet is born out of the blood and tears shed by countless martyrs, the harrowing years in gaol spent by the leaders and the mute despair that dimmed the gleam in million slave-born eyes.

Every poet of major stature has a special characteristic approach in invoking his Muse. Milton had his Biblical theology, Keats his Grecian mythology, Byron his Saracenic encounters; Kalidas revelled in seasonal festivals while Kamban chose the puranic epics. Nearer to our times, Tamil Nad produced two major poets who sought their inspiration in the one burning theme of three decades or more—the freedom struggle. They were Bharathi and Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai.

Ramalingam Pillai is a perfect example of the true Gandhian follower. It was not exigencies of party forces that made him subscribe to the various features of the Gandhian code. He accepted in its entirety every phase of the basic Congress programme, not because he was a sound strategist, but because he was a good soldier. Khadi, charka, prohibition, temple entry, village uplift, rural industries—these are articles of faith with him and so he sang of his faith in the poems that became the music of the independence movement.

Ramalingam Pillai was born in October 1888, in a simple middle-class family in Namakkal, a taluk in Salem district. His father Sri Venkataram Pillai was a head constable in the Moganur village thana. Ramalingam was the eighth and the seven before him were girls. There had been a son born before, but the child had lived only for a few minutes. No wonder the family hailed the birth of a son with fervent joy. The father gratefully recalled the words of an elder who had blessed the expectant mother: "The eighth son will rule the land." Little did they reckon that the lusty-lunged babe in the cradle was to rule Tamil Nad with a song on his lips!

Ramalingam's boyhood reflects the brightness of his later career, but there were no special indications of a divine devotion

to poetry. In fact, as a boy Ramalingam was more interested in visual than oral art; he took to painting with great zeal. But though he spent dry arithmetic classes drawing surreptitious sketches and cartoons, he did well in other subjects. He was a regular prizeman, particularly in Tamil, but painting for ever remained a passion with him.

After matriculating from a Salem school he joined the S.P.G. College, Tiruchirappalli. Here he won acclaim in sports and studies, but he left college barely after a year. About this time he developed ear trouble and despite an operation by Dr. T. M. Nair, he became partially deaf. The blindness of Milton inconvenienced him socially, but did not handicap his genius. But Ramalingam's deafness, like Beethoven's or Vallathole's, is a tragic event, as the keynote of his poetry is its sonorous rhythm, meant to be recited rather than read.

After leaving college, Ramalingam married Muthammal, daughter of his elder sister. This was one of those memorable marriages which begin badly and end as an idyll. There was a poignant finale too. After fourteen years of married life the couple had no children, and the elders advised another marriage, proposing a younger sister of Muthammal. Ramalingam Pillai was adamant, and refused to consider a second marriage while his wife lived.

"What if I die?" she asked. The next morning she passed away.

II

"As nightingales feed on glow-worms, so poets live upon the loving light of nature."

Ramalingam Pillai became a taluk office clerk and then a teacher. But his heart was not in his work and so he became a professional painter. A chance encounter with an influential client put him on the road to success; and in 1912 we find him receiving a gold medal from King George V at the Delhi Durbar for a painting of a Coronation scene.

Through the years the Muse teased him into sporadic efforts. Occasionally he would compose a few lines, but the fervent glow was lacking, the magic spark was absent.

And then came the period of storm and stress. The Congress Party had come to the first of many showdowns with the British Government, and Mahatma Gandhi led the nation in the new "War"—Satyagraha. Ramalingam Pillai, an active Congressman from 1914, hailed the struggle in his inimitable poetry. His particular genius needed this sharp drizzle of national upheaval to burgeon forth into flower—

"Without blade, without blood,

There comes a War,

Votaries of Truth

Join from afar.

Crouch not to shoot

No life to be taken

This new mode of battle

Has the world shaken.

No chargers, no elephants

No murder in the fray

Nobody to be the foe

No desire to slay."

III

"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." (William Wordsworth.)

Ramalingam Pillai's poetry fulfils only the first requisite of Wordsworth. The Salem Poet composed in the saddle, so to speak, and rarely waited for white-hot emotions to cool into convenient placid platitudes. The occasion found the poet ready with a song on his lips. When Rajaji launched the Vedaranyam Satyagraha in 1930, Ramalingam Pillai sang the song of the new non-violent technique and thousands of youths responded to the call. The song still remains a favourite martial tune with the non-violent soldiers of Tamil Nad. Spontaneous combustion can be an apt description of the poet's composing methods, for the fire of poetry was kindled in a flashing second by the spark of struggle. Not for him the long notes, the obscure allusions, the rejected rhymes, the revised drafts.

Such technique explains the quality of his works—of a lambent glow, pure and glistening. The poetry of the common man, his verse never deepened into mystic crepuscularism or metaphysical subtleties. Never was there a strained metaphor, a far-fetched image, a flamboyant simile. His word pictures were of action caught in a moment's magic eternity—as his vision of a world racked by war.

*“ Wail of mothers weeping
State of devils seeping.”*

Sincerity of emotions carried him from stanza to stanza, and the breathless haste of his lines lit up a flare-path of passionate appeal. Rarely does he descend into the method of arguing with the reader; not for him cold logic and disputing facts. He apparently believes, like the French philosopher Pascal “ that the heart has its own reasons which reason knows nothing of.” His poetic appeals are therefore directed straight to the hearts of his listeners.

And listeners they were, for Ramalingam's poetry is designed to be sung at a congregation, not read in cold print in a closet. A natural gift for rhythm, an ear tuned to rhyme, gives his lines the lilt of resonance that makes them echo and re-echo to dazzling patterns of sound-pictures. Yet he is no facile versifier who uses the aid of alliteration and metre to cover up poverty of thought or superficiality of sentiments.

His genius was concentrated upon the theme—not its objective possibilities but its subjective influences—and his emotional reactions raced into words as poetry.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once said : “ Words in their best order is prose. The best words in the best order is poetry.” Ramalingam's poetry is of the latter order—“ best words in the best order,”—but even had he lacked this intrinsic genius for beat and rhyme, he would still rank as a major poet by virtue of the depth, the passion, the sincerity of the feelings that he transmutes into poetry.

IV

“ Genius in the man of action is the apotheosis of charlatanism.” (Aldous Huxley.)

Ramalingam Pillai proved himself to be a genius, when his works like *Thamizhan Ithayam*, *Sangoli*, *Gandhi Anjali*, *Avalum Avanum* took Tamil Nad by storm. His short rhythmic pieces are so simple in their telling that even school-children can read, recite and remember them. Many of the poems are set to *ragas* for singing.

And yet, despite the Aldous Huxley dictum, he is also a man of action; and, naturally enough his poems reflect the robust realism of his outlook on life. He is not the traditional poet of moonbeams and cobwebs who fights shy of mundane contacts. Ramalingam Pillai was ever a soldier and never hesitated to plunge into the fray when his services were needed. He never sang of sacrifices from the safety of his pial; he courted imprisonment with the best of the land in the fight against Imperialism.

All along his verses came out in spate, sounding the tocsin for the patriotic to hear. Yet he is no fanatic anarchist, happy only when opposing established authority, fighting because it gives him greater pleasure to resist rather than to yield. He knew the significance of Mahatma Gandhi's constructive programme and many of his poems extol the Gandhian way of life. Like the Mahatma he is a pious and god-fearing man. His poems repeatedly praise the glory of God, and one poem particularly is a children's favourite :

“ What makes the sun shine
What makes the moon rise—
Fireflies in the dark night sky
Mirrored in our eyes?
Why the lightning, the deep thunder
What makes the heavy rain to fall?
Who doth act as Master-Spirit—
Should we not think about it all? ”

In similar humility he views with awe the great souls, including the towering leaders of our time. His hero-worship is born out of respect for their achievements and sacrifices, and his poems reflect, with radiant emphasis, the worth of their greatness.

Of Kamban, the epic poet, he says :—

“ Did he count, did he reckon, did he
Plan what he wrote?
Or without thought, from unknown lot,
Pour out lines we quote? ”

The description of V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, the steamship pioneer of Tamil Nad, is a graphic word-picture.

*“ Ringing speech, unmixed with evil, rising
From dark but grace-laid smiling face,
The short, squat figure folding his hands in salutation,
Round and rotund, turned, scooped and moulded.....”*

Again, the lines on Dr. V. Swaminatha Ayyar portray vividly the trials and tribulations of that great scholar in his searches for old Tamil manuscripts.

V

“ Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.” (Shelley).

Truth is the touchstone that marks the poet from the poetaster. It is the fundamental nature of a real poet to hit upon the truth, not through ratiocination, but intuition. The Muse reveals in a flash of lightning the veiled mystery of life and the poet proclaims a new truth to the world. It is this second sight that elects them to be “ unacknowledged legislators ” of the world.

In Ramalingam Pillai similar flashes of the eternal verities appear in frequent intervals. His appraisal of war's havoc is particularly forceful and he catches, with true poetic insight, the significance of war's end :

*“ Victory, Victory, do they shout
About the triumph there is a doubt!
All around throughout the world
At Ruin's door cities are hurled.
Agony won a Victory!
Anguish won a Victory!
Mischief, Malice, Fraud, Deceit,
Penury won a Victory! ”*

Finally his lines on the Mahatma, written a decade back, re-echo a fateful extract from Gandhiji's own words, whose significance we belatedly apprehend after the tragedy of the assassination :

*“ One side the sharp spear pierces,
Another the axe splits,
Cruel staves rain blows
And the gory wounds weep blood.....
Fierce traducers surround*

*Kicking—most horrible abuse.....
Fain would I bear this and more
Uphold my ahimsa
Preach anon the self-same doctrine
With happy countenance, smile playing on the lips,
Die my death.....This is my desire."*

VI

*"The bards sublime
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through corridors or time."* (Longfellow.)

It is a happy augury of the times that we are enabled to pay our tributes to a contemporary figure, a leading poet of our age. Poets usually vanish unhonoured and unsung, for their fame spreads only as the years widen the gap between their lives and the reading. Their value is reckoned only in terms of the years that their posthumous publications endure.

But now we have an opportunity of not only appraising the worth of a poet in the historical setting, but also of honouring him on the contemporary stage. We have his works before us to guide our judgment, curb our enthusiasm and mellow our criticism.

If, however, we err on the side of leniency in our estimate, we have the defence of able guidance on this point. For Sri C. Rajagopalachari, Governor-General of India, has said, apropos of Sri Ramalingam Pillai's poetry: "Indeed we should worship our old Tamil literature. But we should not fail to appreciate the modern poetry which reflects present-day impulses. We must treasure it with great care. It is a fresh flower. It should be handled with love, or it will wither."



**Sri Satavadhani Chellapilla Venkata Sastri, the Telugu
Poet Laureate**

“కవనార్థం బుడయించితిన్, సుకవితాకార్యంబె నా వృత్తి, ఈభిషమద్దానత
రింతు.....”

Sri Chellapilla Venkata Sastri, by choosing whom as the Telugu Poet Laureate the Government of Madras have honoured the verdict of the public in Andhra Desa, is one of the twin-poets,

known as Tirupati Venkata Kavulu, who as poets, scholars, dramatists and above all as Satavadhanis, have rendered the greatest service to Telugu literature during the past fifty years.

Sri Venkata Sastri was born in 1870 in Enam (French Territory) in an illustrious Brahman family. But he really belongs to Kadium, a village in East Godavari, where he settled and lead his life. He studied Sanskrit and Telugu under Sri Charla Brahmayya Sastri. Sri Venkata Sastri then had to go to Benares to perfect his Sanskrit, which in those days had predominance over Telugu, so far as scholars were concerned.

Sri Venkata Sastri began his poetical career very early in life, when he began to display the wonderful art of 'Satavadhanam' along with his colleague, the late Sri Divakarla Tirupati Sastri, an equally eminent scholar and poet. Andhra Desa was fortunate in having this wonderful and harmonious alliance between these two people in the matter of 'Avadhanam' and poetical works. Our Poet Laureate's regard and love for his late colleague Sri Tirupati Sastri is such that ever since the latter's demise in 1919, he would publish his works signed 'Tirupati Venkateeyam'. The literary works of the 'twins' always bear the names of both, irrespective of the authorship.

The main factor that contributed to the wide popularity of these twin-poets not only among poets and scholars but also among illiterates is the wonderful art of 'Satavadhanam', which they displayed throughout Andhra Desa for nearly 20 years. The art of 'Satavadhanam' which is peculiar to Telugu language and literature requires not only poetic talent but also scholarship, creative genius, capacity in 'Asukavitvam' and above all prodigious memory. For nearly twenty years they toured "from Gadval to Chennapuri" displaying this wonderful art, honoured by Rajahs, Zamindars, scholars, poets and the common public.

Wherever they went they met thousands of people anxiously waiting to see and experience something hitherto unknown. In those days wherever one went one could hear their sweet poetry and one could come across their disciples, and references to their "Avadhanams". Their tours ranged from villages and towns to courts of Rajahs and Zamindars. Astonished and delighted by their 'Asukavitvam, avadhanam and scholarship,' Rajahs and

Zamindars conferred on them honours as presents of 'shawls to processions on elephants'.

“వినుగు నెక్కినాము, ధరణీకులు మొక్కిగ మొక్కినాము”

“సంపరిచితిమి రాజ్యసాధనముల పూర్వ కవులకన్నను నిరాఘాటముగను...”

“రాజులకుల మదిగాక రాజు బంధువులము, కవిరాజులము, పదుగురుగలట్టి కులము వారము మా కెందు నందువలెదు.”

But though the twin-poets honoured many a Rajah or a Zamindar and were honoured by them in turn, their attachment to scholars and poets was greater. Among those who had the greatest regard and appreciation for these poets may be mentioned the late Sri Ananda Gajapati of Vijayanagaram, and Sri Krishna Rao, Zamindar of Prolavaram. In this way the poets displayed during a period of 20 years not one or two but hundreds of 'Avadhanams'. Mrs. Annie Besant and many foreigners praised their skill. The twin-poets have written a number of books (*Gunturuseema*, *Geeratham*, *Nanarajasandarsanam*) describing their activities in the field of Satavadhanam; the joint work of Sri Venkata Sastri, the intellectual giant and Sri Tirupati Sastri, the great scholar as 'Satavadhanis'.

The art of 'Satavadhanam' and the 'Asukavitvam' which is an indispensable feature of the former, is not unknown in the history of Telugu literature. The late Madabhushi Venkatacharya was considered to be an expert in this art and Bhattumurti who dates back to the golden age of Sri Krishnadeva Raya was well-versed in this art. But it can never be disputed that it is the Tirupati Venkata Kavulu that elevated for the first time in the history of Telugu literature, the 'Asukavitvam' to a higher standard and transformed it into a creative art. The 'Satavadhanam' displayed by the Tirupati Venkata Kavulu throughout Andhra had a tremendous effect on contemporary Telugu letters and encouraged many a young enthusiast to emulate them.

These 'Satavadhanams' gave an impression to the people that poetry too can be a honoured profession in this world, that a poet too is fit for honour, that there is no greater creative art than poetry. Among the various titles which Sri Venkata Sastri, now possesses, nothing is dearer to him than the title 'Satavadhani'.

He considers it as his personal property and he has made it a part of his name. He signs himself as 'Vem. Sa. Satavadhani'; such is his pride in his "personal acquisition".

Sri Venkata Sastri's literary activities do not end with 'Satavadhanam' which of course is the main factor for making him widely known throughout Andhra Desa and the outside world. He is equally a great poet and dramatist and an eminent scholar both in Telugu and Sanskrit. Some of his Sanskrit works are *Srungara Srungatakam*, *Dhaturatnakaram* and *Kalishahasram*.

All the literary works bear the names of both the poets. The following are some of their most important works comprising 'kavyams' and dramas: *Buddha Charitra*, *Sravananandam*, *Panigruheeta*, *Devi Bhagavatam*, *Lakshanapariniyam*, *Srinivasavilasam*, *Elamahatmyam*, *Vikramarkadeva Charitram*, *Chandraprabha Charitram*; the dramas *Pandavajananam*, *Pandavodyogam*, *Pandavaswamedham*, *Pandava Rajasuyam*, *Pandava Vijayam*, *Pandava Pravasam*, *Mudrarakshasam*, *Mruchakatikam*, *Balaramayanam*, *Geeratham*, *Gunturseeema*, *Nanarajasandarsanam*.

Among the kavyams, the *Buddha Charitra* and *Sravananandam* are most popular and are noted for their cultured style. The six Pandava dramas present the whole story of Mahabharata and are very popular on the Telugu stage. There is hardly anyone in Andhra Desa even among illiterates, who is not familiar with the poems in these dramas like

“అదిగో ద్వారక; జండాపై కపిరాజు; బావా ఎప్పుడు వచ్చి తీపు; దగ్గర లేరు
మామయను దండ్రియి మొ.వి॥”

Their racy style have impressed even illiterates. The dramas like *Mruchakatikam*, *Balaramayanam* though translations from Sanskrit, impress the readers even as original productions.

Sri Venkata Sastri was born at a time when Sanskrit and English had predominance over Telugu and when Telugu poetry had no due recognition from scholars, who were generally proud of their knowledge of Sanskrit. To Sri Venkata Sastri goes the credit of rousing the morale of Telugu poets and making Telugu poetry regain its lost stature. The one main characteristic of his poetry is that while it retained what was excellent in old poetry, it did not ignore modern trends. This harmonious amalgamation of the old and new, laid down a clear path to modern poets of the

future. As one critic has said, the age of the Tirupati Venkata Kavulu marks the end of the old poetry and the beginning of modern poetry. Our Poet Laureate never allowed the rules of grammar and old conventions to restrict the flow of his poetical stream; he boldly transgressed on certain occasions the rules of grammar and conventions with fair justification, thereby showing great poets cannot sacrifice the beauty of their poetry merely to satisfy hidebound rules.

“వ్యాకరణము యొక్క-త్రోవ, మహాకవులొక్కత్రోవ” “తెనుగునకున్న వ్యాకరణ దీపము చిన్నది” “కవుల మిప్పటి రూల్సుకు కట్టుడటము, ఘనము పండిత రాయాది కవులు చూపు త్రోవలంబట్టి పోదుము దేవు నైన లక్ష్య పెట్టము మాకు వల భులు లేరు.”

Such boldness is very rarely seen among poets. Though he is a great scholar both in Sanskrit and Telugu and by culture of the old type of pandits Sri Sastri is no opponent of the use of colloquial language in writing. We find all his recent contributions to various journals only in colloquial language with a technique of his own.

Sri Venkata Sastri is a good conversationalist. He can render his audience spellbound with his perennial source of knowledge on varied subjects and hold them for hours together. He has also to his credit a special unparalleled method of reading poems in a particular tune.

Sri Venkata Sastri has innumerable disciples spread all over Andhra Desa, some of whom have already made their mark in the history of Telugu literature. Among them may be mentioned Sri Pingali Lakshmikantham (till sometime back Reader and Head of the Department of Telugu in Andhra University) and Sri Katuri Venkateswara Rao (Editor, *Krishna Patrika*), the joint authors of the famous '*Soundaranandam*'; Sri Viswanatha Satyanarayana, a great modern poet, scholar, story writer, and novelist; Sri Veturi Prabhakara Sastri and Sri Satavadhani Veluri Sivarama Sastri, eminent research scholars and poets.

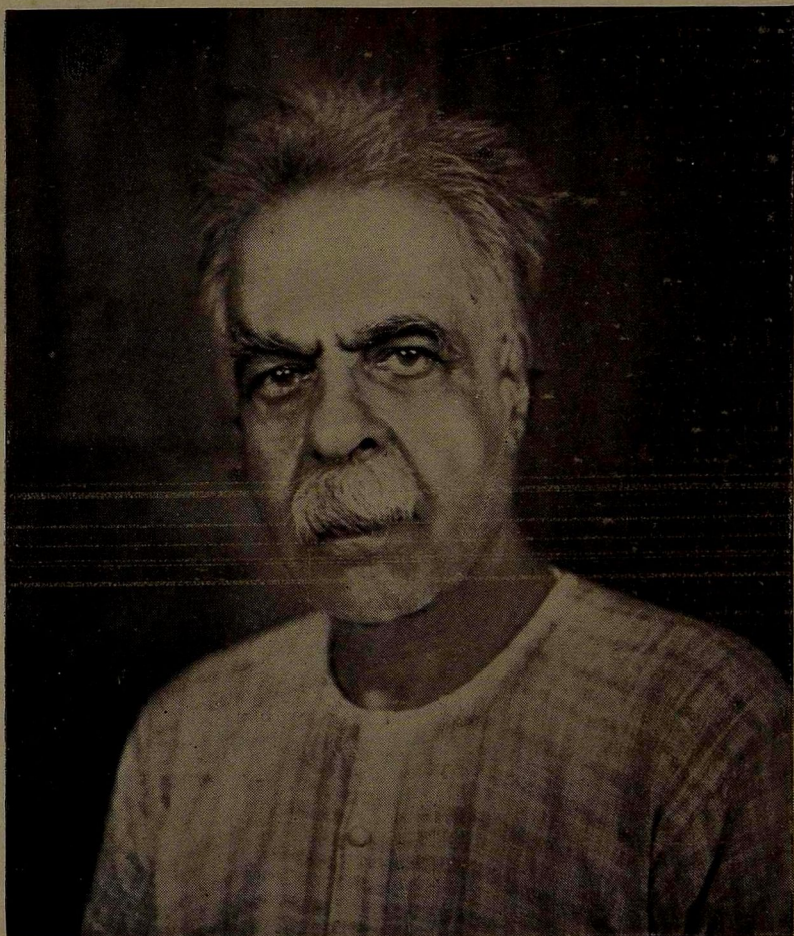
Though he devoted the major part of his life to the cause of the aesthetics of Telugu poetry he is not unaware of what is happening around him and elsewhere in the world. His recent contributions to journals bear testimony to his interest in burning topics like war in China, temple entry of Harijans, communism in Russia.

He is now eighty, emaciated, crippled and bedridden. But it is surprising to note that the pen which he took up 60 years ago still continues to be active to prove his words that "he is born to be a poet and that poetry is his profession."

(కవసార్థంబునయించితిన్, సుకవితాకార్యంబు నా వృత్తి).

He is able to write with his own hands in the same old beautiful script with the same vigour, creative genius and scholarship as of old.

Let the Almighty bless him with many more years of happy life of such literary activities!



Sri M. Govinda Pai, the Kannada Poet Laureate

The coveted honour of being the first Kannada Poet Laureate in the history of Free India has been conferred on Sri Govinda Pai

of Manjeshwar, South Kanara District. South Kanara has been noted for its poets past and present. The galaxy of poets like Ratnakara Varni, Parti Subba and Muddana who enriched Kannada literature and distinguished themselves in their individual treatment of poetic art paved the way for the budding poets. Muddana, the most versatile prose writer and poet, was the first to encourage the present Poet Laureate Sri Govinda Pai.

At the age of 16 Sri Pai was able to digest the Shakespearean dramas and do a metrical translation of the two acts of "Twelfth Night" which was read and encouraged by that Master Poet of Karnataka. The poetic genius of Govinda Pai was revealed for the first time in his two short poems contributed to the monthly *Suvasini* of Mangalore in about 1902. From that time he wrote, it appears, off and on and all have appeared in one Kannada journal or another.

In many ways Govinda Pai is a unique personality and occupies a notable place in contemporary Kannada literature. His writings have appeared in every leading journal of Karnataka. His poems as well as research articles adorn almost all special numbers, commemoration volumes and scholarly magazines. His reluctance to travel, his stay-at-home habit and his refusal to be praised and publicised have prevented the general public in other parts of Karnataka from coming into close contact with a personality of rare distinction, and with one of the greatest living research scholars and poets of Karnataka.

Sri Govinda Pai was born on 23rd March 1883 at his maternal grandfather's house in Manjeshwar, South Kanara, which is at a distance of 11 miles from Mangalore. He is the eldest son of the late Timma Pai and Srimathi Devakamma. He comes from a well-known Saukar Bappai family of Mangalore. He belongs to the Vaishnava section of the Saraswat Brahmins which forms one of the five divisions of the Northern Brahmins known as Pancha Gowdas. Sri Pai's ancestors having been exiled from Goa, scattered themselves almost all over the West Coast in the North and South Kanara Districts and further south as far as Cape Comorin in about the middle of the 16th Century during the tyrannous rule and the religious persecution by the Portugese who were the rulers of Goa.

After finishing his primary education at Manjeshwar Sri Govinda Pai moved to Mangalore to take up his secondary Education. After matriculating from the Canara High School, Mangalore, he joined the Government College, Mangalore, for further studies. Thereafter in 1901, he married Srimathi Krishna Bai Kamath of Mangalore. For three years he had to discontinue his studies on account of his father's death. Again he resumed his studies and joined the Madras Christian College and came out first in English in B.A. He also secured a high Second Class in Sanskrit. Owing to eye trouble he could not appear for his optional subject, mathematics, and for some years he was distracted by illnesses as well as loss of some of the nearest and dearest at home. At last he gave up his attempts to complete his studies.

As a poet Sri Govinda Pai has taken a new and revolutionary step, that of writing and publishing poems without "prasa" the alliterative second letter of each verse which had all along been looked upon as the *sine qua non* of poetry. Why alone Kannada, of all Dravidian Poetry? Forthwith there rained a heavy downpour of adverse and even abusive criticism; but Sri Pai stood as a bulwark against the bitter criticism and never yielded to his opponents. In 1916 he first adapted the European, especially the Shakespearean sonnet into Kannada and has since written several of them.

In 1928 he wrote a poem "Gommata Jaina Stuti" in praise of the three Gommata colossii in Karnataka, and the Jaina Godhead whom they represent. It was his first work that has been published in book form. It is composed in Sanskrit metres in which however the time-honoured "prasa" is conspicuously absent. In 1930, he collected all his lyrical poems which had been scattered here and there and published them in a book form along with 50 verses translated from Fitzgerald's English version of the "Rubaiyat" of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam. He called that book "Gilli Vindu" or "A Flock of Parrots". Next year in 1931, he wrote a poem "Golgotha" in blank verse on the last days of "Jesus Christ" which first appeared in journals and thereupon came out in book form in 1937.

His constant study of Buddhist works in Pali made him contemplate and write a poem about the last day of Buddha. This

poem is named " Vaisakhi " or the " Full moon day of Vaisakha ". This blank verse composition shows the poet's religious tolerance and cultural outlook. His description of nature is superb. In Vaisakhi he showed his love of nature. He paints an evening in the following word-picture :—

" Sun descends, heat subsides, breeze blows, ' evening-jasmine ' blossoms, herd returns towards homestead, small birds hidden in the leaves of the trees owing to heat of the sun come out and cry, kite circles, cuckoos say, ' Khuhu kuhu '—and Kembotha bird asks ' Kah kah ' (in Sanskrit who-who).

" Don't force your religion or kingdom on others. Those who respect others' religion and independence as their own, that religion, that nation, that independence will spread like sky—Those who destroy others' dharma and independence, their dharma, nation and independence will perish like raising waves—therefore don't suppress others, otherwise the result of that will be self-ruin—neither long life nor progress."

These are the lofty sentiments expressed by our Poet Laureate. There are a number of yet other shorter and longer poems scattered in various Kannada journals which are awaiting collection and publication in book form. About 50 or 60 of them seem to be connected with the sad demise of his dear departed wife. He calls them " *Nanda Dipa* " or " *Eternal Flame* ". The poet himself expresses : " Lamp lit up by the sorrow for my dear departed wife, which is unquenchable as long at least as I am alive and set up before God—in other words, it is an offering of songs to God—in memory of her whom he has been pleased to take away from me." The pathetic yearning of the poet's heart is well brought out in these elegies which will give him a place among the foremost elegy writers of the world.

Later works written on particular occasions like " *Quit India* " and assassination of Gandhiji and so on have earned for him a high place among the national poets of the day.

The history of his forefathers made Sri Govinda Pai turn to historical research. After a thorough study of Portuguese history of Goa he began to search the Indian inscriptions in order to find out names of Saraswats. Ultimately he wrote some articles in

English under the caption "Flashes from the Past". This is his first approach in the field of historical research.

From 1926 onwards he has engaged himself in doing regular research work in the history of Hindu India in English and of Karnataka in Kannada. Altogether he has written 25 research articles in English on various subjects, namely, deciding the dates, genealogy, chronology, literary antiquity, religion, grammar, philology, history and allied subjects. The articles on some Kannada passages in a Greek farce of the 2nd century A.D., Ptolemy's Hippokousa and Haiga Haiva (North Kanara district) are particularly worthy of mention. His research articles in Kannada exceeded more than 100 in number.

Sri Govinda Pai is not only a poet but he is a good dramatist too. His "Hebberalu" (Thumb) of 1946, a one-act verse-drama with a chorus after the manner of Greek dramas, is well appreciated for its logical argument. It is based on the story of the "Ekalavya" which has been narrated in the Mahabharata. Besides his poetic genius and high research acumen, Sri Govinda Pai knows more than 22 languages, both European and Indian.

About his own plans and works Sri Govinda Pai sincerely expresses: "I have also planned some other longer and shorter plays and poems. But let me speak no more of those babes yet in the womb of time, for when and whether at all they will see the light of the day is known only to their inspirer."

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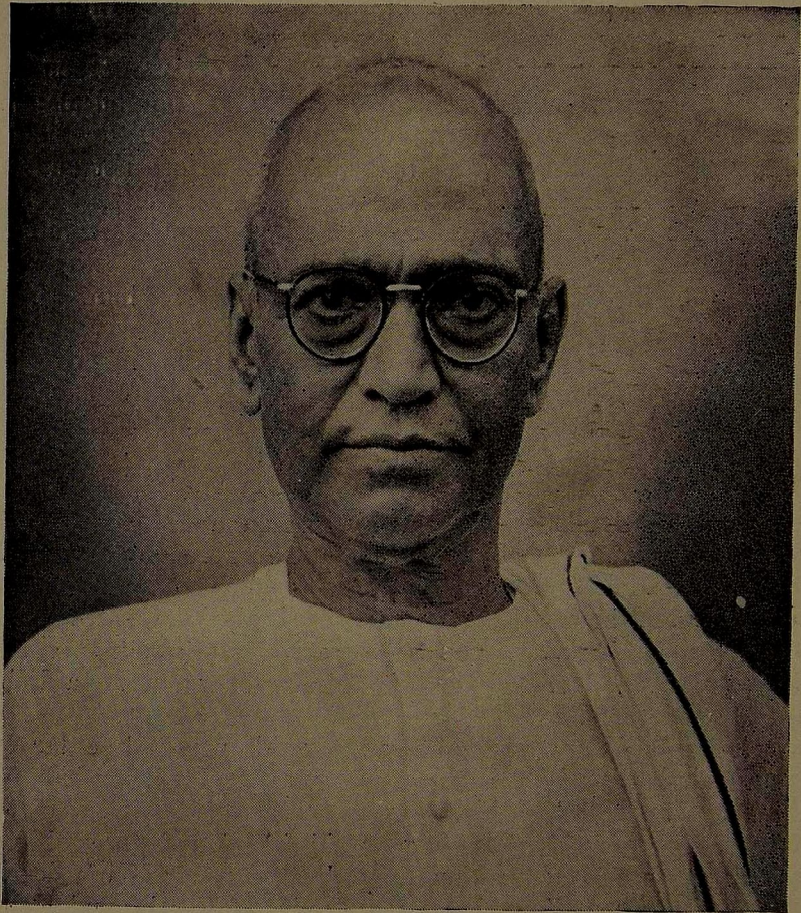
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**Sri Vallathole Narayana Menon, the Malayalam
Poet Laureate**

Vallathole is a household name all over Kerala. Among the first-rate poets of Malabar, he is the most widely known and read.

Receptions held in his honour and congratulatory addresses presented to him by the All-Kerala Literary Conference at Nileswar in April and other public bodies in various parts of Kerala later show that his appointment as Poet Laureate has met with universal approval.

He enjoys an all-India, nay, even international reputation. His charming personality has endeared itself to one and all; there is hardly any place worth mentioning in the West Coast which this Prince of poets has not visited and in which he has not addressed a gathering. In every sense of the term he is the *poet of the people*. He loves his countrymen who love him in return intensely and delights in cultivating intimate contacts with them. Scholarly or literary aloofness has no charm for him. In his presence all feel perfectly at ease—children, young folk and elderly men. There is a child-like simplicity in his manners and behaviour that has made him the 'idol of Kerala.' This admiration, nay adoration, is not confined to the literate or educated class alone.

He is a favourite of the illiterate too. A rickshawala once declined with thanks when the poet offered him his fare. The privilege of having taken such a distinguished customer was more than his fare. He departed after paying his homage to the poet with a reverent bow—no small gain! To raise a lakh of rupees to found the Kalamandalam for the revival of Kathakali which is the poet's second love and the pride of Kerala was never a difficult task for Vallathole.

Besides being an excellent canvasser, his personal contact was deemed an honour by all whom he approached for contributions. Who could say 'no' to this rare propagandist who wins you by his smile, enters your house as a good old friend and entertains you by his humorous conversation, himself though hard of hearing. Since Elzuttacchan, the epic poet and Saint of Kerala, and Kunjan Nambivar, the great satirist, no other man of letters has won the affection and regard of their people through his personality and art like Vallathole—a rare distinction no doubt!

Both by birth and association, Vallathole has inherited the best cultural traditions of Kerala. He hails from the same place

in South Malabar (Mangalam near Tirur) a part of old Vallathunad, whose memory was rendered sacred by the birth of two great literary giants of Kerala, viz., Ezuttacchan and Meppattur Bhattathirippad, another poet-saint who performed the miracle of curing his paralytic attack by praying before the Lord of Guruvayur and composing his famous Hymn in Sanskrit collectively called Narayaneeyam.

The family of Vallathole (house name) in which the poet was born once supplied Prime Ministers to the Vettathu Swarupam (the latest being Konti Menon Karyakkar), an ancient Royal family (Ponmani taluk) well-known as patrons of Kathakali and hundred arts, that became extinct through the vengeance of the Zamorin who could not tolerate their alliance with the Portuguese. His mother Kuttiparu Amma was an enlightened woman herself, having had the advantage of a classical education. The poet's father Katuthot Mullessari Damodaran Moosad was noted as a connoisseur of art and a brilliant conversationalist.

In his early days Vallathole came under the influence of his uncle, Ravunni Menon, a famous scholar, physician and brahmachari. Later he had the good fortune to study *tarka* (logic) under the great scholar Kaikkalangara Rama Variar who was a giant in intellect and an erudite scholar in Sanskrit. These eminent teachers could only lay the foundation of Vallathole's education and literary career. The superstructure was supplied by his own indefatigable efforts and innate genius for poetry.

Even as a boy of fourteen or fifteen Vallathole had started writing poetry. The poet comes at the close of a generation, which in the Malayalam literary field was dominated by Kerala Varma, Venmani Nambudirippad, Kathalli Achuyata Menon and Kodungallur Tampurans. Trained in the classical mould these luminaries—great in themselves—took to literature more as a pastime than as a genuine passion. Narrative poetry was their favourite sport. *Samasya Puranam* and *Ottaslokam* clothed in *Sringara* or *Bhakti* sentiment were their diversions. As a novice Vallathole also fell into this groove. Here is a specimen of his juvenile composition cast in this mould. It invokes the blessings of Siva.

" May God, with ashes all over his body
 Who haunts burial grounds
 Conceals the Ganges in his tuft
 And adorns his forehead with the Moon
 With a retinue of ghosts with untidy hair all round and a
 cloth of skin
 Grant me my desires."

This involuntary effusion, though revealing no high sentiment, however, gives a vivid picture of the God. The alliteration that appears in the original composition shows also a good command of simple idiomatic Malayalam, not ordinarily expected of a youngster.

Two literary types were in fashion in those days. One was the boat song (*Vanchipattu*), which is a special feature of Malayalam poetry which owes its inspiration to the crystal streams and wide backwaters of Kerala. Boat provides the only means of transport in them and boating is an inevitable item of sports from ancient times in the West Coast. All the leading poets like Ullur, Kundur, Oravankara and R.P. composed a boat song each with a Puranic story as theme.

Vallathole entered the competition last. But his *Tapati Samvaranam* is easily the best of the lot. Its rhythmic beauty and vivid narration bear the marks of Vallathole's unrivalled mastery of the technique of poetic composition. The young poet now won recognition and patronage came from above. A major work like the translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana* was then engaging the attention of the young poet. Kerala Varma blessed it with an appreciative introduction and Appan Tampuran with a detailed foreword.

Mr. Nalappadan, another leading poet of Kerala, in his biographical sketch of Vallathole gives the poem the highest praise. 'Anyone who reads it cannot forget it in his lifetime.' Its later exit from the literary world is therefore a surprise. Many have forgotten it. In the complete edition of Vallathole's works to be undertaken hereafter it is hoped that the compiler will collect the poet's earlier works or at least recover the *Tapati Samvaranam* from oblivion.

Another type of composition which the poets were keen on producing was the '*Mahakavya*' on the Sanskrit model. *Ramachandravilasam*, *Rugmangadacharitam*, *Umakeralam* of the late lamented Ullur came in quick succession. Others were in the making. Vallathole rose to the occasion with his magnificent contribution entitled *Chitrayogam*. It raised a controversy. "Good poetry but a bad story" was the general trend of criticism on it. But it gave the impression that Vallathole's muse is growing from stage to stage and is not stagnant.

Some had to bid good-bye to the poetry as they found the process of production of a *Mahakavya* has exhausted their resources. But Vallathole emerged triumphant fully prepared to undertake greater ventures. In fact these were only the training ground which enabled the future Vallathole to come out in full bloom. He was yet to discover his genius which only sparkled here and there in the labyrinth of productive activity. The translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana* was in itself an education.

At the end of that major work his ear began to give trouble. No treatment was of any avail and he was denied the use of that organ for ever. This calamity has its own reactions on his outlook, temperament and expression. The poet as he lost active contact with the outside world naturally turned inward and found that his genius was still struggling for proper expression and illumination. The first outburst was a lamentation *Badhira-vilapam*, literally lamentation or elegy of the deaf.

In the first stanza he cries with a pang that his ears have ceased to function and remain only as an adornment to his face. In another context he says that he is obliged to avoid company which he sought once with eagerness. The tragic irony reaches its highest watermark when he imagines the cause of his deafness.

*"In my eagerness to win a poet's fame
I have written bad poetry and caused pain to the ears of
great men*

*The sin of that indiscretion might be the cause of my ear-
trouble."*

While the truth is the reverse of it, the reader can only console the poet by crying with him.

Another event that awakened the poet's genius was the national struggle for Independence that was making rapid strides under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. As a born Nayar he loved fighting for a good cause and he responded with dynamic zeal to the clarion call of the apostle of Ahimsa. His first notable production touching on this gigantic upheaval was "My Teacher," acclaiming Gandhiji as his teacher. These two lines picture Gandhiji in the most characteristic manner.

"My guru triumphs as an incarnation of Yoga

His sacrifice is gain; his humility is elevation."

The fight for freedom called forth two essential qualities from its camp followers, i.e., the natural desire or will which strengthens determination to achieve independence and the courage to fight for it without caring for the consequences.

The determination to defy convention and achieve independence was brought out in an earlier poem *Aniruddhan*, which followed his lamentation. Here the story of Usha and Aniruddha is rendered in its final stage. Aniruddha accepts the invitation of Usha to visit her in secret in the night. But at the palace gate Bana's sentinels detect his entry and offer battle. He has to fight single-handed and furiously to redeem his honour. But the odds are too much for him. He suffers defeat and is imprisoned.

Usha, though unhappy at the unexpected turn of events, summons courage as befits a heroine who has fallen a victim to foul play. She is glad also that Aniruddha has given a good account of himself by facing his enemies alone and receiving only the minimum personal injury. Thoroughly dissatisfied with her father's policy, she sends for his minister and asks his permission to visit Aniruddha in jail—a glaring defiance of convention and palace etiquette. His objections were negatived on the ground of Aniruddha's heroic defence of himself which will justify the devotion of any queen to him. She manages to extract his consent and sees her lover. She apologises for her father's shortcomings and informs him of her willingness to go with him and induces him to escape.

He is made of sterner stuff. He is the grandson of Lord Sri Krishna who will certainly come to save him by challenging Bana

direct and he won't get out as a thief unnoticed and cast a slur on his grandfather's honour. He asks her not to remain in jail for a moment and spoil her reputation. She returns. The poet ends here dramatically. Aniruddhan forms an important landmark in the poetic career of Vallathole. He gives up the narrative form and takes to the dramatic method which is more effective in its approach and appeal. This poem of about 50 stanzas was welcomed as a masterpiece that marked Vallathole out as a future Mahakavi.

The sentiments expressed by Usha and Aniruddhan are refreshingly new and full of vigour. In answer to the Minister's objections Usha says :—

*Aryaputra (Aniruddha) came in response to my invitation!
He did not come of his own accord.
One commits the crime and another goes to jail.
Is that the law of Bali Vamsa?*

Aniruddha consoles Usha thus :—

*" Oh! My Love! you are above my life.
Don't cry, my breast can stand thousand arrows from
the enemy."
But a tear drop from Usha's eye
Is too strong for Aniruddha to resist."*

It will be seen that Aniruddha gave a new message of independence that extols pure love as a supreme gift containing in itself justification enough to defy human convention or usage. It also conveyed a special significance to the social make-up of Kerala. To turn this mental attitude to the political field was an easy task.

After Aniruddhan and Gurunathan—Vallathole's genius took a new turn. His inner personality speaks in every line he wrote later. The nationalists of Kerala found his poems immensely useful in their propaganda. His one poem was worth months of propaganda. There is hardly any item—non-violence, temple entry, Harijan uplift, charka, khadar—which did not receive additional emphasis from him. His poem on " Flag Salutation " is now sung all over Malabar during Congress processions. It begins :

*" Not enough, Not enough.
The flag of Bharata Devi
Must rise higher and higher."*

Space hardly permits a detailed study or criticism of Vallathole's poetry in all its aspects. Both in quality and quantity it is unequalled and unsurpassed.

We shall, however, conclude with a brief reference to two prominent traits of his character which supply the keynote to his poetical outlook.

He is every inch a Keralite. His ready response to the National Call is the direct outcome of his consciousness of and admiration for the martial traditions of Kerala which as a Nayar he expressed and respected. He asks his countrymen in various poems whether the blood of their heroic ancestors is still not running through their veins. This underlying note constitutes the special charm of his poetry to the people of Kerala. But his love of Kerala is no impediment to his national outlook. It only enriches and illumines the latter. His poetic imagination enables him to view Bharata Varsha as a bigger entity of which his own birth place Malabar, according to him, is a necessary part—nay, an important part.

In the cultural make-up of a Keralite a love of Art is an essential ingredient and Poet Vallathole has this to a pre-eminent degree. Their Kathakali is the noblest product of this trait in their character. It is therefore, in the nature of things that Vallathole became a lover of Kathakali Art. I was for long thinking that Kathakali is his second love. But as he grows older his second love seems to encroach on the province of the first.

His endeavours to revive the Kathakali Art and give it a new lease, have been almost superhuman. The publicity he has given to it has brought it to the notice of Art lovers all over the world. The vigour of its dance-technique, the subtlety of its facial expression, the rhythm and force of its movements are its unique features, that have secured for it recognition all the world over. For this recognition the people of Kerala are indebted to Vallathole.

May our Poet Vallathole live long (he is already 71) to gather fresh laurels and distinction and show the beacon light of oriental culture and art to the whole world !



**Mahamahopadhyaya K. S. Krishnamurthi Sastri,
the Sanskrit Poet Laureate**

Mahamahopadhyaya K. S. Krishnamurthi Sastri was born in Kattuputtur, a village in Musiri taluk in Tiruchirappalli District. His father Venkatasubramania Iyer belonged to a family noted for its religious and literary pursuits. He had his elementary education in the Kulittalai High School. Though he was very mischievous as a boy, even at that age he impressed his teachers by his wonderful powers of memory. The routine of the school never attracted him. But "on the day of reckoning", he would snatch the first prize.

He was, from his boyhood, very much interested in Harikatha Kalakshepams and other religious discourses and he never missed any of them in his village. As ill-luck would have it, his parents were deprived of their income and his education had to be

interrupted. Young Kittu (pet name), therefore discontinued his studies in the High School. With great difficulty, he was later on admitted into a Sastra Patasala, an event which marks a turning point in his life. Had it not been for this, he would not have had the opportunity of learning Sanskrit.

His first Guru was Bhuvaraghavachariar of Karur Patasala under whom he had his higher studies in Sanskrit. His quick grasp made him progress rapidly in his studies and at a comparatively early age he could appreciate and even teach Kalidasa's works like the *Raghuvamsam*. As his talents were of a high order, prominent people of the locality gave him all encouragement and help. Endowed with the gift of a good voice, his recitations and his discourses were well attended. Three years of study at Tiruvadi made him a good scholar in Sanskrit. His histrionic talents too found scope in the dramas staged in the Patasala.

Even as a student, he started composing poetry in Sanskrit. Some of his poems were highly commended by Sri Sankarachariar of Kamakotipeetam and other patrons. Sanskrit classics captivated him and he sought one Guru after another. After leaving Tiruvadi, he sat at the feet of Sri Gopala Sastrigal of Kumbakonam and from there went to Chidambaram, another seat of Sanskrit learning. After such study, he grew into a full-fledged Sanskrit scholar specially proficient in grammar, and a poet.

An occasion arose for him to exhibit his talents for versification when the Government conferred the title of Mahamahopadhyaya on Sri Leela Dandapani Dikshidar and a public reception was held to honour him in that connexion. Krishnamurthi's poem in praise of Sri Dikshidar was applauded by the audience who predicted that he also would one day attain that distinction. The prophecy was fulfilled in 1946 when the Government of India awarded him also the great distinction.

A greater honour was in store for this great scholar and poet and that came through his appointment as the Poet Laureate in Sanskrit by the popular Government of this Province. Several honours have come to him in addition to this. His Holiness Sri Sankaracharia Swamigal of Kamakotipeetam, and His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin, who are all great scholars themselves,

have recognized his high merits in token whereof the titles of Satkatha Kanteerava, Vyakarna Stapaka and Panditharaja have been conferred on him.

Sri Sastrigal is now 54 years old and is Chief Professor of Vyakarnam in the Rameswaram Devasthanam Patasala at Mathurai. Even though he had more attractive offers, he prefers the dignity of a teacher to other lucrative jobs. He is the author of twenty poems most of which have been published in Sanskrit journals and many of them have been issued as separate booklets also. His poem called *Prakrithi Vilas* which is a collection of eight poems dealing with various aspects of nature like night, the mountain and the breeze, etc., has been highly appreciated.

The *Mahatma Vijaya*, another work of his, is a *Champu* poem, which deals with Mahatmaji. Sri Sastri is the author of various other works like *Sathi Vilasa Kavya* of the highly classical type dealing with epic themes.

He writes Sanskrit with extreme felicity. His style is simple and his language chaste. His poems are melodious and full of refreshing ideas. There is variety in his poetry, vitality and freshness in composition.

May this great poet and scholar be blessed with many more years of useful life continuing to shed lustre and culture!

