

## Towards a Translation Protocol: Telugu Literature in English Translation

**K. Purushotham**

Professor, Department of English  
Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India.

Abstract:

Lack of good translations is one of the reasons for low visibility of Indian literature in general and Telugu in particular. All the *bhasha* literatures need global visibility since each if it has its own poetics in the way it negotiates the modern nation. It becomes all the more important for translations to reject universalised, global and Standard English. What is needed in translations therefore is to explore the ways of bringing out the ‘interiority’ of the source texts.

Key words: Indian literature, Basha literatures, translation, literary necessities.

Bhasha literatures traverse a long way before they are archived for the posterity. Unlike the English publications, the Indian publications in regional languages do not enjoy the patronage of the readers in monetary terms. From getting published in the periodicals and small magazines, the authors struggle hard to self-publish their anthologies investing time and money. To add to this, the authors find it difficult to market or circulate their publications. Anthologisation, translation and publication of the bhasha literatures in English have a long way to go.

While most of the translations have been self-published, MacMillan, India brought out two novels as a part of its regional language novels project, for which Mini Krishnan was the series editor. Later, Ranga Rao’s two short story anthologies were published by Penguin India. OUP India brought out quite a few anthologies, most of which have been edited and translated by Velcheru Narayana Rao.

Literary journals too have been publishing translations. Central Sahitya Akademi’s *Indian Literature* brought out two special numbers on Telugu literature. Other journals that devoted the special numbers to Telugu literature include: *Revaluations* guest edited

by K. Purushotham and *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* for which K. Purushotham has been the Consultant Editor. Hyderabad based *Triveni*, a bi-monthly, has been publishing Telugu writings consistently giving opportunities to the budding first timers. Nidadavolu Malathi, a US based critic and short story writer hosts a website [www.thulika.net](http://www.thulika.net) in which she publishes eminent Telugu fiction translated into English. In spite of the recent spurt in the translations and publications, translations from Telugu to English however still lag behind when compared to Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada. Rajeshwar writes:

...we do have a large number of novels and short stories which are truly world class. There surely are many Tolstoys and Tagores among the Telugu writers waiting to be introduced to fame. The translators can play a major role in bringing them into focus and draw the world's attention to them...Institutional support can often do wonders. (Rajeshwar 23)

A similar view is echoed in Malathi's comment:

Before launching my website, I researched what was available in translations. My findings confirmed my belief that Telugu fiction had been conspicuous by its absence on the international literary scene. Very little Telugu fiction was available in the media and on the Internet, though there was considerable amount of fiction from other Indian languages. (Malathi 142)

The recent spurt in the translations of Telugu short stories into English evinced interest among the young scholars, researchers and translators to. However the translations are not free from the inherent linguistic and cultural problems. Ranga Rao writes: "Translation can be fun if you are not the author" (Ranga Rao 228). Plain translation or what may be termed the 'neutral' language fails the much nuanced sense of literature. However each translator emerges through the translation a protocol of sorts, stated or unstated explicitly. B.H Krishnamurthy and C. Vijayasree, editors of *Gold Nuggets* write: "An attempt is made to recreate the original specificities of stories located in different parts of Andhra and evoke the tenor of the rural life in stories that deal with the village life" (Krishnamurthy xii).

In recent times, quite a few Telugu works have been published. Rani Siva Sankara Sarma's *The Last Brahmin*, translated by Venkat Rao, has been published by Permanent Black. Orient BlackSwan published G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*, and Harper Collins' recent release of Y.B. Satyanarayana's autobiography, *My Father Balaiah* (original English, 2011) is the first Dalit autobiography from Andhra Pradesh to have been published. The Delhi based Navayana and OUP India have recently been embarked on bringing out the Telugu works in English translation. The former brought out an anthology of Gogu Shyamala's short stories, *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But...*, While OUP India and Penguin India brought out English translations of Telugu Dalit writing in separate volumes. Further, the OUP India brought out the translations of Vegunata Mohana Prasad.

## POETRY

The first concerted effort of translating Telugu writing into English dates back to C.P. Brown (1798-1884), who 'excavated' above 2000 verses of Vemana, and translated some of them into English under the title, *Verses of Vemana* in 1829. He took pains to collect Vemana's poems from different places in the Telugu speaking region. Since he announced cash incentive for tracing out the missing verses, a whole lot of verses, purportedly written by Vemana, were added to the corpus, varying in themes with contrastive world views.

Telugu literature established itself through translations into English in the subsequent periods. Major translations of poetry include: Chaya Devi's *Modern Telugu Poetry*, Dasarathi's *Duel with Darkness and other Poems* translated by S.S. Prabhakar, Vegunta Mohana Prasad's *This Tense Time: An Anthology of Modern Telugu Poetry(1915-1980)*, Narayana Reddy's *Vishwambhara* translated by Amarendra, Sarma's *Airborne and other Poems* translated by Adapa RamaKrishna Rao, Seshendra Sharma's *Turned into Water and Fled away*, Sri Sri's *Miscellany* translated by K.V. Ramana Reddy, *Sumathi Satakam* translated by C.N. Srinath and T.V. Subba Rao, Velcheru Narayana Rao's twin volumes on ancient and twentieth century poetry, besides a few others.

The credit for globalizing Telugu poetry undoubtedly goes to Velcheru Narayana Rao, who published in English translations as many as eight volumes, from the classical

poetry to the modern, and all of them brought out by international publishers that include Princeton university Press, University of California Press, Columbia University Press, OUP, among others. That the Telugu poetry is taught and researched in the western and European universities is primarily due to the efforts of Prof Velcheru, who still continues to teach, translate and explore Telugu poetry.

The individual enthusiasts and university based translators like Velcheru Narayana Rao, Alladi Uma, Sridhar, P. Jayalaxmi, Amarendra, D. Kesava Rao, V.V.B. Rama Rao, Kalluri Shyamala, S.S. Prabhakar Rao, Adapa Ramakrishna Rao, B.V.L. Narayana Rau, K. Damodar Rao, K. Purushotham, among several others have been translating and publishing anthologies out of their interest in translations.

## SHORT STORIES

Until the formation of the Sahitya Akademies at the state and the central levels, the publication of the literary anthologies was centred in the hands of the privileged few. While the State Sahitya Akademi gave way to Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad, the Central Sahitya Akademi has been publishing the Telugu short stories on representational basis. It has so far brought out quite a few important anthologies of Telugu works. The first of it was *Andhra Katha Manjusha* printed in 1958 under the editorship of Swamy Shiva Shankar Shastri. The Akademi also brought out *Telugu Katha* in 1986 under the editorship of D. Ramalingam comprising stories from 1935 to 1982. Similarly the National Book Trust, India published *Katha Bharathi* in 1973 under the editorship of Vakati Panduranga Rao and Purana Subramanya Sharma comprising twenty seven stories. It is notable that Kala Bharathi reprinted the volume in 1982.

There is no need to state specifically that magazines have been particularly instrumental in promoting short stories. Umakantam published his stories in his magazine, *Trilinga* in 1913-1914. Rayasam Venkatasivudu published his stories in *Telugu Janana*. Achanta Venkata Sarma published his notable stories in *Kalpalata*. Other magazines, which provided platform for short stories during this period, are *Suvarnalekha*, *Sahiti*, and *Bharati*. Between 1916 and 1920, after the First World War, the printing of the magazines slowed down due to the high cost of paper and printing materials. Andhra Seshagiri Rao's comment underscores the close relationship between magazines and the progress of the short stories.

The Progressive Writers' Association (ARASAM), Guntur brought out five volumes of short stories with the title *Katha Sravanthi* edited by Penukonda Laxminarayana. Singamaneni Narayana anthologised *Seema Kathalu* in 1992, setting a new trend in the history of anthologisation of Telugu short stories. This anthology marks the beginning of publishing anthologies from the regions concerned. Kethu Vishwanadha Reddy and Pollu Satyanarayana published *Chaduvu Kathalu* comprising stories about the importance of education. Revolutionary Writers Association, Vishakapatnam published nine volumes of short stories titled *Suvarnamukhi*.

Kalipatnam Rama Rao published *Ruthupavanalu* (Monsoon) in 1996. Similarly an anthology titled *Kathambam* was brought out in 1996. Virasam published *Raathi Puvulu* (Stony Flowers) and *Manakalam Kathalu* (Stories of our Time). Jayadheer Thirumala Rao's *Shtreevada Kathalu* (Feminist Stories) and Bhargavi Rao's *Inkaana, Ikapai Chelladu* mark the beginning of bringing out anthologies based on modern literary movements. R. Chandra Sekhar Reddy and K. Laxmi Narayana brought out *Dalita Kathalu* in 1996, besides publishing seven volumes of *Dalita Kathalu*, having classified the stories into as many sub-themes. Vasireddy Naveen edited an anthology of short stories published by Hyderabad Book Trust. Other firms that published short story anthologies include the Story Sahiti, Vedagiri communications, Vahini Book Trust, Hyderabad, Visala Sahitya Akademi. Jagityala, Rama Publications, Ananthapuram, Jesta Literary Trust, Vishakhapatnam, Vanguri Foundation, America, Visalandhra, Prajasakti Publications, among others. Other literary organizations like Virasam and Janasahiti edited and published anthologies of short stories enriching the genre.

An important development in the anthologisation is the efforts of Vasireddy Naveen and Papineni Shiva Shankar, who have been bringing out volumes of anthologies titled *Katha* every year, and they have so far brought out twenty one anthologies of short stories beginning from the year 1990 without a break.

## **Katha Nilayam**

The most outstanding contribution to the archiving of the Telugu short story has been the establishment of 'Katha Nilayam' (Abode of Stories) in Srikakulam by Kalipatnam Rama Rao, who is endearingly called Kara Mastaaru. Rama Rao, winner of

Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, established 'Katha Nilayam' in 1997 to preserve the Telugu stories for the posterity. Now it has been turned into a research centre attracting scholars from different parts of the country. It houses more than 12,000 books, most of which were published between 1900 and 1910. An important feature of the Nilayam is that as many as twenty thousand rare and old newspapers and photos of famous writers are preserved in the abode of the short story.

Himself one of the doyens of Telugu short story, Rama Rao founded a trust for the management of Katha Nilayam. Telugu Akademi published, with the support of Katha Nilayam, *Katha Kosam* in 2005, providing the details of 2,110 writers. They are attempting to digitalise 3.5 lakh pages of the anthologies making the Telugu short stories accessible to the readers and researchers.

Similarly Silicon Andhra is also launching a pioneering initiative of taking Telugu story across the world by launching Katha Nilayam with the website [www.kathanilayam.org](http://www.kathanilayam.org). Katha Nilayam is assisting in this project. The prototype of the online kathanilayam.org was launched in the Telugu University Auditorium, Hyderabad.

## Translation of Telugu Short stories

Translation of Telugu short stories into English include Bharadwaja's *Phantom Quintette and Other Stories* translated by Purush, *Modern Telugu Short Stories: An anthology* translated by Patanjali and Muralidhar, Sastry's *Pleasant Surprise and Other Stories* translated by A. Muralidhar, S.M.Y Sastry's *The Officer and the Milk Maid: A Collection of Stories*, M.V. Sastry's (ed) *A Generation of Telugu Short Stories*, Vaasamoori's *Here and Beyond Amalapuram*, Panchakesa Ayyar's *Tenali Rama*, Narasihma Murthy's *Telugu Kathaa Sudha: Nuurella Panduga*.

Other works of Telugu short fiction in recent times include: Alladi Uma and Shridhar's *Women Unbound* and *Ayoni and Other Stories*, Ranga Rao's *Classic Telugu Short Stories* and *That Man on the Road*, Patanjali and Muralidhar's *Modern Telugu Short Stories*, M.V. Sastry's *A Generation of Telugu Short Stories*, Bhadriraju Krishnamurthy and C. Vijayasree's *Golden Nuggets* and Alladi Uma, Sridhar and Suneetha Rani's multi-genre anthology, *Vibhinna: Voices from Telugu Literature* published by Sahitya Akademi.

## NOVELS

The first and foremost work to have been translated into English is Unnava Laxminarayana's *Malapalli*. Other novels translated are: Veerasalingam Panthulu's *Fortune's Wheel: A Tale of Hindu Domestic Life* (Rajashekhara Charitra) translated by J. Robert Hutchinson, Vasireddy Sita Devi's *The Burning Moonlight* (Mandutunna Vennela) translated by D. Ramalingam, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao's *Sundaram Learns* (Chaduvu) translated by V.V.B. Rama Rao, Dasarati Rangcharya's *The Lesser Deities* (Chillara Devullu) translated by Chakravarthi Seshacharya, *Janapatham* (Path of Absolute Truth) and *Mayajalataru* (Fancy Lightening). Vishwanatha Sathyanarayana's *Veiyipadagalu*, Buchibabu's *Chivaraku Migiledi*, *Asamardhuni Jivayatra*, Rachakonda Vishwanatha Sastri's *A Man of No Consequence* (Alpajeevi) translated by Achanta Janakiram, Naveen's *Bed of Thorns* (Ampasayya) translated by D. Ranga Rao and *Dark Days* (Cheekati Rojulu) translated by K. Jagadeeshwar Rao and Naveen and R.S. Sudarshanam's *Tree of Life* (Samsaara Vriksham) translated by the author himself.

Mini Krishnan certainly deserves appreciation for commissioning and publishing Kesava Reddy's *He Conquered the Jungle* (Athadu Adavini Jayinchadu) translated by C.L.L. Jayaprada, with a foreword by T. Vinoda, G.V. Krishna Rao's *Puppets* (Keelubommalu) translated by D. Kesava Rao and Mahidhara Ramamohana Rao's *Swarajyam* (Kollaayi Gattithenemi?) translated by Vegunta Mohan Prasad with an informative introduction by Alladi Uma and M. Sreedhar. Mini published the first two with MacMillan and the third with OUP 2011. To this category may be added Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* (Antaraani Vasantham), translated by Alladi Uma and M. Sreedhar and published by Orient BlackSwan. Gita Ramaswamy translated Devulapalli Krishnamurthi's *Life in Anantharam*.

As with poetry, Sahity Akademi undertook quite a few translations of Telugu novels that include: Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao's *Sundaram Learns* (Chaduvu) and Unnava Laxminarayana's *Malapalli*, both translated by V.V.B. Rama Rao and Ra.Vi. Sastri's *Beware, the Cows are Coming* (Govulosthunnayi Jagratha) translated by Alladi Uma and Sreedhar. By any reckoning, going by the number of Telugu novels that the Akademi published in English translation, are far below and discriminative.

The rest of the translations, some them having been brought out by the Dravidian and Telugu universities, are self-published, and lack in quality of translations, editing and promotion in the scholarly and literary circles. Except the love of labour by the enthusiast translators, nothing else—editing, fine-tuning, contextualizing, globalizing—goes into the making of the book. What is missing in them is the whole lot of professional editing that the corporate publishing houses invest in.

With information available about twenty two novels in English translations, the Telugu novel in English still lags behind. Hundreds of master pieces are neglected and waiting to be translated into English. The novels that have been translated may therefore be described as stray attempts, either reluctantly initiated by publishers or enthusiastically undertaken by the translators.

## **Telugu Criticism and Theory**

There has been a large body of Telugu criticism and theory with a tradition set by the early Telugu scholars. However most of their critical works remain unknown outside the Telugu speaking domain. Only with the emergence of translations and publishing theory and criticism of bhasha literatures, the non-Telugu readers could get to know the richness, density and originality of the Telugu writing. The publications of Telugu criticism in English being a recent trend, credit for Telugu linguistic scholarship in English goes to Bhadriraju Krishnamurti, and criticism of both modern and classical writing to Velcheru Narayana Rao. Both of them writing extensively, reached out to the non-Telugu Indian and European readers.

## **Theses/dissertations**

With about thirty three thesis/dissertations carried out on thematic and comparative studies, the research on Telugu literature carried out in English has been on wide ranging topics. Major themes and genres in comparative studies include African, American, British, European literature in English translation, literary theory, aesthetics, Hindi, feminism, ideology, Indian English Writing and avant-garde writing. Going by the titles of the studies, some of the works are ground breaking, instead of being run on the mill. In this respect, the research proves to be contributory to theory and criticism of Telugu language, literature and

culture. The research contributes to the understanding that Telugu literature is national in character, and not regional.

## Translation Studies

With twenty eight theses available on translation studies, the topics are wide ranging from translating Telugu Texts to the study of translation problems with focus on both language and literature, machine translations, translation of textbooks, media texts, translation of region texts, dialects and translation of glossaries. Interesting work on translation studies has been carried out at the centres for translation studies at University of Hyderabad and Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University and Department of English, Kakatiya University.

What is deplorable is lack of institutional support in the form of projects and incentives to translators, which would have sustained the interest, and helped bring out better translations. Sahitya Akademi, Telugu Akademi, translation departments of P.S. Telugu University, Dravidian University, E.F.L. University, University of Hyderabad, having a lot of public funding to their advantage, are yet to set a bench mark in the domain.

In conclusion, it may be said that the translation of Telugu short stories into English has moved from the periphery to the center-stage. It has also been attracting increasing research interest. The advance of translation goes beyond the issue of Source Language (SL), Target language (TL) and encoding and decoding. The translators are now preoccupied with the representation of culture, nativity, idiom and other inherent features of the source text. Regarding the nature of translation itself, there has been a debate whether translations should be in reader-friendly, standard/global English or be localized with regional inflects representing the native idiom.

However, no translation can substitute the feel of the original Telugu writing. Ranga Rao, an accomplished translator of the Telugu short stories writes about his experiences as a translator: “Call it fate. How else can I explain this extended involvement in literary translation?” (Ranga Rao xi). Yet, translations are the only means of knowing about the culture and life of the people outside one’s language community. As a part of this linguistic and literary necessity, the domain of Telugu translations in English has a long way to go.

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