

Viswanatha  
satyanarayana – the  
legacy of telugu  
literature essay



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About Viswanatha Viswanatha Satyanarayana, the Poet Laureate of Andhra Pradesh and winner of InanPith Award, is undoubtedly one of the greatest scholar-poets of Andhra. An octogenerian with continuous and untiring literary activity extending over six decades, Viswanatha Satyanarayana has had the good fortune of living with writers of three generations. The first generation of elders are his seniors in age at least by 20 years. They include his Gurus also. The second generation consists of contemporaries mostly of his age with a few others. The third generation consists of writers who are Juniors to him by 20 to 40 years.

These three generations represent writers of Puranic and Prabandhic style, moderns who wrote in the same style and those of the Bhavakavita school of poetry, and all the rest who tried to improve upon it or revolt against it. All these writers, whether they agree or disagree with Viswanatha, respect his unquestioned authority. In scholarship and learning he is on par with the ancient scholar-poets. In tradition he is in line with Nannaya, Tikkana and Srinatha, the great masters of Telugu poetry. The ideal of his poetry is the nearest approximation to the prayer " Lokaah Samastaah Sukhino Bhavantu. I am also add that it does not confine itself only to man but includes all living creatures. It reminds us of the Sanskrit benediction, " Samno astu dwipade sam catushpade. " It can be stated without exaggeration that he tried every literary form and excelled in it in a unique fashion Birth On September 10th 1895 at Nandamuru, Krishna District, in an affluent Vaidik Brahmin family, that a child was born in a scholarly family with perhaps neer thought that the child was soon to become the uncrowned monarch pervading the entire orld

of become the uncrowned monarch pervading the entire world of Telugu Literature.

And then they christened him to be known as Satyanarayana to follow after their family name Viswantha. Jnanpith Award About Jnanpith Award A cultural And institute promotion devoted of to contemporary oriental literary research writing Jnanpith has sponsored the highest Indian Literary Award of rupees one-lakh for the best creative writing in Indian languages. Jnanpith has during the preceding eleven years honoured with its Award thirteen topmost creative Indian writers: G. Sankara Kurup.

Satyanarayana, Bishnu De, Ramedhari Singh Dinker, D. R. Bendre and Gopinath Mohanty (jointly) and V. S. Khandekar, and P. V. Akhilandam. Jnanpith has brought out Hindi editions of most of the Award-winning works, namely: Otakkuzhal, Ganadevata, Ramayana Darshanam, Nisheeth, Chidambara Sanchayan (in six Indian languages and in English), Bazeme Zindagi Range Shaeri (selections from Firaq's Gul-ENagham), Smiti Satta Bhavishyat Tatha Anya Shreshtha Kavitaen, Sanchayita (selections from Jnanpith has concentrated on such literary and cultural publications as other publishers hesitate to undertake because of commercial unprofitability or other difficulties and has set an example by maintaining a high standard of production and also by respecting the rights of authors and yet pricing its publications low to encourage reading of good literature. Jnanpith has done pioneering work in the field of original research on oriental subjects, particularly on the neglected branches of Indology, and has set a high pattern

for scientific editing of ancient works in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pall, Apabhransha, Tamil, Kannada, etc.

Jnanpith has thus made a valuable contribution towards cultural integration of the country through the medium of literature; it has published a series of titles with this set objective. Courtesy: TRIVENI Journal April-June 1977 edition Representation The Andhra Cabinet appeared to have been represented at the function more than adequately. Besides the Chief Minister, I could recognise only two ministers. A friend counted four more. Are they running a parallel Government in the Indian Capital or what?

President Giri, who turned up in a brown close-collar coat arrived on time. Sometimes he has a habit of keeping people waiting; at the recent international women's conference, which he was to inaugurate, Mr. Giri arrived 45 minutes late). Viswanatha himself came in his usual (white) dhoti and kurta, a grayish-green shawl wrapped around his none-to-healthy frame for protection from the chilly breeze of that November evening. We thought that the poet would sit next to the President. But Dr. Karan Singh was sandwiched between the two. The Chief Minister didn't sit next to Mr. Giri on the other side either.

Narasimha Rao was asked to tell the audience about the prize-winning 'Ramayana Kalpavrikhamu'. That evening Mr. Rao looked more like a scholar and so much less like a politician. He spoke in chaste Hindi except for three words ('Katte, Kotte, Techche') which is used to explain to the gathering how good the Telugus were at reducing the essence of the great epic into

three simple words. Like Vent, Vidi, Vici. Characterisation It's impossible, said Mr. Rao, to describe that a marvelous Job Vishwanatha has done of it.

The Rama of Tulsidas and the Rama of Valmiki are Juxtaposed in the Rama of Vishwantham he added. The Chief Minister went on with his discourse on the intricacies of Kalpavrikshamu. Little kids in the hall began to weep. A few souls coughed a bit, Someone quietly walked up to the CM, slipped a watch near his notes on the table and left. Mr. Rao got the hint. He was embarrassed. How can any one tell you about a book like Ramayana in ten minutes? He Smiled and rather hurriedly inished his speech and went back to his seat. Between Mr. Rao and the Kavisamrat, three others spoke the President, Jnanapith President (Mrs. Rama Jain and Selection Board Chairman Dr. Karan Singh. Mr Girl's Speech was, as usual insipid. He appears to have been a trade union leader for too long. He refuses to distinguish the difference between a labour union meeting and a literary-minded people's gathering. " The paramount need of the country at the present juncture, when it is facing external danger and serious internal problems caused by the influx of the refugees from across our border, is the protection and reservation of the national integration at all costs. " he said. Now how many times before did we not hear this kind of crap?

This to a gathering of people who are supposed to be the elite. Must they be told thing like this at a function where your are honoring a literary genius for his creative contribution to a rich and beautiful language? Everlasting value Dr. Karan Singh's brief speech was on the other hand, remarkable for at least one point he made. The greatness of epics like Ramayana, he said, lay in the fact that they were capable of being ' creatively reinterpreted by generations

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of writers and yet retain their original flavour. He won a big applause. Dr. Singh also garlanded Vishwanatha and put tilak on his forehead.

The ' President then presented a statuette of Vagdevi, the symbol of the award and a white envelope containing a one-lakh rupee cheque to the poet. The citation read just before the presentation, said in part: ' As a poet of classic vision and virility, as a novelist and playwright of deep insight and impact, as an essayist and literary critic of force and felicity and as a stylist of rare ' range, Mr. Satyanarayana has carved for himself a place of eminence amongst the immortals of Telugu literature. His ceaseless creativity and versatility have kept him for these 30 years in the forefront of contemporary Telugu literary scene... The 76-year old poet appeared to feel rather uneasy. Through out the ceremony (it lasted more than an hour) he was seen shuffling uncomfortably in his seat. He would exchange a few words with his neighbors (Dr. Karan Singh and Mrs. Rama Jain) occasionally; he could take out something from his kurta pocket and put in his mouth, would lean back in his chair and breathe heavily. When the speeches were made in

Hindi he would look thoughtful. The sound of English would bring a flicker of smile on his dark-brown face or an occasional nod. It was now the poet's turn to make a speech, the acceptance speech.

The man who ' slipped in numbers as numbers came? So he said, quoting Pope The man whose literary life spreads over 53 years. The man, who has so far written 24 poetical works (Four of them in Sanskrit). 56 novels, 23 dramas, seven volumes of literary criticism, three ballads. Two Sanskrit

dramas and one collection of short stories and who is still at it, was now to speak, A critic said that Vishwanatha combines in himself the qualities of an eminent poet, a great lyricist, an outstanding novelist, a pleasant short story writer, a skilled playwright, an objective critic, a profound scholar, a voracious reader and a powerful orator. We witnessed his oratorical power and were pleased. A 3, 000-word text was distributed in advance in English, but he did not read it fully. He began with a ' Sloka' in praise of Mrs. Rama Jain; he even presented her with a shawl. He promised to speak at least in four or five languages' but spoke in only three English, Sanskrit