

Malegaon, once a town with a strong working class tradition of national and democratic movements, has been

turned into thanks to the powerful vested interests on both the sides of communal divide.

literatures, but it is doubtful that any other Indian literature experienced such a drastic mutation.

OBITUARY

A Colossus of the Past Generation

K Balagopal

TO those who were young in the fifties and sixties, Srirangam Shrinivasa Rao (Sri.Sri) is the poet, the ultimate personification of poesy, especially in its angrier moods. The more emotional among them have even declared in their tributes that all was vacuum before him and all is again vacuum after him — a sentiment that he himself would probably have rejected, though it is in tune with his immodest *vermis* which proclaimed that "before 1930, Telugu poetry led me, but after the thirties I load Telugu poetry"; or, in a more crisp and vein; "this century is mine".

But he was essentially a colossus of the past generation. Born in 1910, he was something of a childhood prodigy, producing both prose and poetry in the traditional fashion at quite an early age. Mo grew up in an atmosphere surcharged with the sharp contradiction between the past and the future. Social reformism fighting certain medieval Hindu customs, also parallelly generated a new literature and a new diction. Gurajada Appa Rao, native of Sri Sri's Visakhapatnam district, wrote what remains to this day the finest modern Telugu play, 'Kanyasulkum' (bride-price). Poetry, shackled for centuries by metre and prosodic artificiality, was learning to break open and take the form of free verse and the content of idyllic romance or social criticism. Sri Sri's first literary mentors were Viswanadha Salyanarayana, a prodigious scholar of crassly brahminical vintage and an opponent of the least taint of progress, who was to later win the Jnanapeeth Award, and Krishna Sastry, a Toman tic poet to end all romantic poetry. Sri Sri was later to say that it took him a decade to liberate himself from their influence. In later years he was also to recognise the influence of the first Hush of 'middle class' reformism, which, as in most parts of the country, was of elite — even zamindri — inspiration.

Nevertheless it was not in this period that Sri Sri came into his own, but in the second flood of modern ideas — the avalanche of progressive thought of the Hungry Thirties. Unlike a Mulk Raj Anand, Sri Sri was not an expatriate

student in England in those days, but he was as powerfully impelled by those times as anybody else. Indeed, no better confirmation of the materialist theory of literature is needed than that the sharp contradiction between capitalist depression and socialist stability should have generated identical strains of thought with identical intensity of impulse in expatriate students in London and an obscure young man living in an obscure town in coastal Andhra. Sri Sri at that time was not unacquainted with modern trends in Western literature like Symbolism and Surrealism, but it was well before he heard of the London-based Progressive Writers Association of India that he wrote the first of his poems that would later thunder across his dear 'Visalandhra'; throughout the thirties he wrote a series of powerful poems, not so much illuminating as igniting the minds of youth and tearing to shreds the decayed shell of putrefield feudal culture. It is impossible for an Indian to render into English the power of Sri Sri's early poetry; the English we were Naught by our colonial masters was meant for efficiently 'putting up' memoranda in triplicate, and not for translating the sound of dynamite, Sri Sri himself has tried and failed rather badly to share his poetry with English-speaking Indians of other states. But what makes translation of Sri Sri particularly difficult is the profusion of allusions to Hindu mythology in his poetry — a trait that frequently led him into debate with leftist critics. The shattering birth of the future is imaged as the hounds of Hell breaking their chains and surging forward; or the lion of Uurga tossing its manes and the elephant of Indra trumpeting in challenge, etc. The very title of his most famous collection of poems, 'Mahaprasthanam', is a reference to the Pandavas' journey to heaven at the end of the Mahabharata.

Like an earthquake that makes riven out of valleys and mountains out of deserts, the birth of Sri Sri changed the visage of Telugu literature beyond recognition. He broke the back of traditional poetry, and turned free verse from contemplation of idyllic beauty to heralding the new world in Grc-and-brimstone language. He himself recalls that contemporaries like Nazrul Islam

The thirties, as we know, were not only hungry but also pink. A pale version of Marxism affected the Afro-Asian intelligentsia, from temporary expatriates like Jayaprakash Narayan and Jawaharlal Nehru to pucca native, and made 'radicals' out of them. As Kosatnbi leniarks somewhere, the quality of the 'Marxism' they imbibed no doubt accounts for the fly-by-night character of their radicalism and the subsequent vicissitudes of their political fortune-hunting. What was true of the politicians was also true of the literateurs. A roll-call of the poets who in those days wrote thrilling verses about the Spanish civil war and Stalingrad, will certainly reveal an astonishing variety of opportunism, confusion and plain venegacy. Sri Sri was one of the few who stood with the times — however haltingly and painfully — to the end. Apart from his personal character, one reason for this was no doubt his close involvement with the left movement. At the time of the mid-tenm elections to the state assembly in 1955, Sri Sri was alone among the stalwarts of the Progressive Writers Association to take the side of the CPI, which was fighting an all-out battle with the Congress. He canvassed activiely, against the vituperative personal attacks of a solid phalanx of literary eminent who all got together with the sole aim of defeating the eoinrmists. The crushing defeat the CPI suffered caused a nervous breakdown in Sri Sri and he had to spend some days in psychiatric care. Later at the time of the indiscriminate arrests of left communists in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian border war, Sri Sri, as President of the AP wing of the Civil Liberties Union haeded by N C Chatterjee, worked hard to rouse public opinion against the government's onslaught on those who dared to criticise the Indian stand on the border issue.

But the real test came with Naxtlbari. and — closer home — Srikakulam. The late sixties and early .seventies were a period when the biggest names in the progressive writers movement laced the challenge of a total reevaluation of all that had happened in the left movement in our country, particularly since 1951: sacred theories, resolutions and assessments were called into question, and what were set up as memorable monuments were beheaded and revealed as mere mummies. As literary enthusiasts in town after town of Andhra got ready to celebrate the

tieth birth year of 'Mahakavi' Sri Sri

1970, he and his fellow progressives re thrown a challenge by students Visakhapatnam, close to the Sritulam tribal revolt, to decide whom they were with, the revolution or reaction. Sri Sri and a handful of others see the revolution, and thus was on the Revolutionary Writers Association (Virasam), of which Sri Sri was Under-President and a member till death. Always ready to adapt himself to the needs of history, he took cue from younger comrades and attempted to simplify his poetic diction and imagery. Though, being in the world at Madras, far away from the arena of peasant struggle, he could not fully consummate the mutation. In one of his best pieces after 1970, at a time when Nagabhushan Patnaik sentenced to death, he wrote:

The white man then called you
Bhagat Singh
The black man now culls you
Naxalite
Everyone will tomorrow call you the
morning star,
Inquilab, Inquilab, Inquilab
zindabad!

True, his relation with the revolutionary movement was never very harmonious because (in his own words) he remained an extremist in literature and a moderate in politics; he was of a generation that had thrilled to the ringing sound of the Red Army, and could not fully get over the feeling that the Soviet Union represented a model for ever and always. As recently as last year he defended the Soviet stand on Afghanistan, only to publicly recant later. A bigger blemish on his indecisive attitude towards the urgency, which he also repudiated a public confession subsequently. At a times he would disarmingly quote his comment on Gorky, that he was a literary genius, but an idiot in politics.

Nevertheless, Sri Sri's contribution to the revolutionary movement was more symbolic. In the early seventies, he assumed the role of a tireless leader against the repression and the aftermath of Srikakulam. Writing an angry note of protest to the home minister of AP against the arrest of three revolutionary writers, he gave the address as: c/o Nagabhushan Patnaik wherever he may be. (At that time Patnaik was in jail at Visakhapatnam, sentenced to death by hanging.)

In the company of a few other workers, Sri Sri struggled to rouse public opinion against the sentence awarded to Bhoomaiah Kishtha Gowd. In these tireless

efforts at an advanced age, which took him to all obscure corners of the state to fight for democratic rights, he revealed himself as something more

ANDHRA PRADESH

Police Rule Continues

M Shatrugna

THE rape and torture of Parvathamma, 35, by the Vikarabad police on June 18 and 20 brings out that the change of government in the state has made little difference to police atrocities on the poor. The police indeed constitute a parallel government. Parvathamma and Mahboob, both hamals, were arrested after their employer, a prosperous commission agent, allegedly lost cash and jewellery worth Rs 90,000 on June 15.

Parvathamma had been working as a hamal-cum-domestic servant in the commission agent's house for the last two years. Her duties involved lifting and shifting of heavy gunny bags for which she was paid 10 paise per bag. As she could not handle the heavy bags alone, she sought the help of another woman hamal, Ramulamma, with whom she shared her earnings. Parvathamma earned about Rs 5 per day. She also attended to domestic chores in the commission agent's house, though no payment was made for this. This type of *vetti* is still very common in the Telengana region.

On June 13, the commission agent went to Tirupati, leaving the house in the custody of Lakshmaiah (his munim), Mahboob, Parvathamma and Ramulamma. Actually he had locked the main entrance to the house and the four were supposed to stay outside the house, in the verandah. Parvathamma had, however, informed her employer well in advance that she would not be available in Vikarabad during his absence as she had to attend a marriage in Hyderabad. Accordingly she left Vikarabad for Hyderabad. On June 18, a posse of policemen arrived at the place where she was staying in Hyderabad and took her away. No reason was given for her arrest. In the jeep, on the way to Vikarabad, she was questioned about the alleged theft in her employer's house. After reaching the Vikarabad police station, the Circle Inspector allegedly took her to his house and raped her. She was abandoned outside the house around 4 am. Shocked, humiliated and helpless, Parvathamma trekked to her house. She was so ashamed that she did not disclose what had happened to anyone

than a 'Mahakavi': he was a revolutionary heart and soul, even if the tantrums of genius made him waver frequently and perilously.

and even went back to work.

On June 20, late in the evening the police caught Parvathamma once again and took her to the police station, ostensibly for interrogation. She was put in a jeep and taken towards Tharoor police station, 20 km away, by the circle inspector and four constables. On the way, at Ananthagiri Hills, she was allegedly raped by one of the constables. At the Tharoor police station Parvathamma was beaten with lathis and leather belts. The torture continued the whole night and early next day she was brought back to the Vikarabad police station. Meanwhile, Parvathamma's shocked parents had rushed to the police station wanting to know what had happened to their daughter. A battered and humiliated Parvathamma was handed over to them. The entire town observed a *bundh* on June 23 in protest against the police atrocity and administrative inaction. The enraged people of the town took Parvathamma to Hyderabad to seek justice from chief minister N T Rama Rao.

A team of civil rights activists which visited Vikarabad on June 27 found that Parvathamma had made a representation to the Vikarabad division sub-collector and sought his help. Except referring her for a medical check-up at the local government hospital and sending her clothes for medical/chemical examination, the official expressed his inability to do anything. The other suspect in the alleged theft case, Mahboob was also tortured at the Vikarabad police station and had to be admitted to the Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad as an in-patient. The civil rights team failed to trace him and the local people suspected that Mahboob was still in police custody. A meeting with the sub-collector in Vikarabad convinced the team that the entire case had been handled from Hyderabad and the local civil administration had been unaware of the goings-on. Not surprisingly, the demands for a judicial enquiry and suspension of the concerned police personnel, made by the local action committee, have not been accepted by the government.