

TELUGU LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Speaker : G. V. R. K. SHARMA M. D.

Harvard Medical School

TELUGU LANGUAGE

- A classical language of India
- Also called 'Andhra Bhaasha'
- Ranked 7th in Asia
- 14th in the world
- Spoken in the state of Andhra Pradesh

Telugu Language : Demography

- Also spoken in the adjoining regions of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Orissa and in the sizable diaspora populations of Malaysia, Fiji Islands, U.K and U.S
- Total about 80 million people



© Microsoft MapPoint and PlaneMad/Wikipedia

Telugu Language :Unique feature(s)

- The only Indian language where every word ends in a vowel ('AJANTA BHAASHA')
- Called 'Italian of the East ' by Niccolo da Conti, a Venetian traveller of the 16th century
- Heavily Sanskritized (close to 60%)

Telugu Language : Origins

- An Indo – Dravidian off-shoot
- Developed after Tamil and Kannada
- Rock- edicts and inscriptions dating back to 1st century A.D.
- Present literary form around 900 A.D.

Telugu Literature

- Nannaya was the first poet (‘Adikavi’)
- Shaped poetic format (‘vaaganusasana’)
- Wrote the first 3 canto’s of Mahabharata
- Trend-setter for all subsequent poets
- Words mainly Sanskrit-derived (‘tatsama’)

Telugu Literature

- An example of Nannaya's poetry :-

“The moon-lit autumn nights were lovely; the bright chains of stars in the cloudless skies made them lovelier. Replete with the scent of water-lilies wafted by gentle breezes, the nights were luminescent with moonlight scattered like camphor-dust.”

Telugu Literature

- Tikkana, an administrator, warrior, poet
- Completed Mahabharata(11th century A.D)
- Blazed a new trail using a judicious mix of Sanskrit- derived and indigenous words (Accha Telugu)
- Brought Telugu poetry closer to the public

Telugu literature : Thikkana

- A sample of Thikkana's poetry:

This is a 4-line verse called 'kanda padyam' (a meter not borrowed from Sanskrit), for which Thikkana is famous :

“ The arrows that have pierced your body can be removed and the wounds healed, but the words that have caused deep hurt cannot be removed by any means”

Telugu Literature

- Language of literary Telugu(Grandhika or Sampradayika) has been different from its spoken(vyavaharika) form
- The words, the meter and the contents mostly originated from Sanskrit

Telugu Literature

- Other poets followed in the foot-steps of Nannaya and Thikkana
- Nanne Choda, Yerrapreggada, Nachana Somana, Srinadha, Gaurana and Potana (11th to 15th century A.D.)
- All outstanding poets, they set the stage for the golden age of Telugu literature

Telugu Literature : the golden age

- Of Andhra history in general, and the literature, in particular (Vijayanagara empire of Krishnadevaraya : 16th century)
- Glowing accounts of Portuguese historians Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz

Telugu Literature : the golden age

- Full flowering of poetry with stalwarts like Peddana, ('Andhra Kavita Pitamaha' meaning 'Father of Telugu Poetry'), who wrote "Manu charitra"
- Pingali Surana (author of the first original kavya (classic) 'Kalapournodayamu') and Dvyardhi kavya, 'Raghava Pandaveeyamu' with each poem giving 2 meanings suitable for both Ramayana and Mahabharata – a rare scholastic feat

Telugu literature : golden age

- “It is difficult to compose a poem with two meanings; if the entire work is like that, is it not extra-ordinary scholarship? That too, in Telugu, which is wonderful! Who is there (other than me), that can combine Ramayana and Mahabharata (into one)!”

Telugu Literature : the golden age

- Other esteemed poets : Timmana(author of 'Parijatapaharanamu'), and Dhurjati (author of 'Kalahasti Mahatmyamu')
- Emperor Krishnadevaraya himself was a great scholar (author of 'Amuktamalyada', one of 5 best classics, 'Pancha Kavyas')
- Considered Telugu as the best of Indian languages ('Desa Bhaashalandu ..Lessa')

Telugu Literature : the golden age

Bhattu Moorthy ('Ramaraja Bhooshana') :
author of 'Vasu Charitra', excelled in 'slesha'
(pun) and metrical composition

Tenali Ramakrishna : renowned for his
ready wit and choice of words, wrote
'Panduranga Mahatmyamu', a classic

- After Vijayanagara empire (1336-1646 a.d) patronage shifted to Tanjavur (Nayaka's)
- Quality declined, most of the output a poor imitation of earlier works
- Vemana of 18th century, a welcome change from the tradition

Telugu literature : break from past

- Vemana, a social and religious rebel, used simple poetry to convey his message
- The meter he chose was 'AaTaveladi', a quartet-meter he handled with felicity
- No poetic embellishments or scholastic display ; easily understood & remembered
- So popular, every Andhra can recite at least a few of his hundreds of verses

Telugu Literature : Vemana

- A sample of Vemana's poetry:

“People may boast of pedigree or caste,
They may be arrogant with education,
But all are slaves to the rich “

- “Why provide colorful dress to the idol,
Bowfuls of food and fabulous temples?
Does God want food, clothing and shelter?”

Telugu Literature: break from past

- Gurajada Apparao & Gidugu Ramamurty championed the cause of spoken Telugu
- Gurajada's 'Kanyasulkam', a play in which spoken Telugu is used with telling effect
- Gidugu silenced orthodox classicists with his writings & speeches; made way for spoken(vyavaharika) Telugu as a valid and preferable literary medium

Telugu Literature: break from past

- Classical era retreated, but with a flourish. Viswanadha Satyanarayana, a colossal literary figure with a wide range of works in classical genre, received the Jnanpeeth award for his 'Ramayana kalpavrikshamu'
- Devulapalli Krishnasastry's 'Krishnapakshamu-Urvasi' stands out as lyrical romantic poetry ('Bhavakavitvamu')

Telugu Literature: the modern era

- Sri Sri, short for Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, hailed as the harbinger of modern poetry ('Navayugavaitalika', 1911-1983)
- 'Mahaprasthanam' an anthology in blank and rhythmic verse, employed spoken Telugu, addressed the plight of the common man and set the tone for all modern telugu poetry

Telugu Literature : poetry of Sri. Sri

- “When you look at the history of nations
What is there to be proud of ?
The entire history of mankind
Is one of oppression and exploitation”
- “The strong subjugated the weak,
Murderers became emperors
and made a name for themselves;
No place where a battle hasn't been fought
The past is drenched in blood or sweat”

Telugu literature: Prose

- Most literature, till the advent of modern era, was a combination of poetry & prose (called 'champu') in classical Telugu
- 'Pure' prose, in the form of novels, essays or short stories began only in 19th century
- Gurajada, the advocate of spoken Telugu, wrote exemplary short stories (in addition to the play 'Kanyasulkam' and poems in 'Matrachandassu')

Telugu Literature : Prose

- Gudipati Venkatachalam ('Chalam') railed against orthodox practices in the society and espoused the cause of women in his novels and stories
- Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao ('ko. ku'), a prolific writer whose stories and essays gave an expose' of the middle class
- Chaganti Somayajulu ('Cha. So.'): master of the short-story with the proper idiom

Telugu Literature : Prose

- Rachakonda Viswanadha (Ra. Vi.) Sastry considered the most powerful writer, both in terms of the language and the message (hence called “Sri Sri” in prose”)
- Wrote mostly in the north-eastern dialect (Visaakha MaanDalikam) highlighting the plight of the lower classes. His novels :- ‘Alpa jeevi’, ‘Rattalu-Rambabu’ & more

Telugu literature : recent celebrities

- C.Narayana Reddy (ci.na.re): writer of wide range who balanced the traditional with the modern; 2nd Jnaan Peeth awardee
- Devarakonda Balagangadhara Tilak : noted for sensitive lyrical blank verse
(‘Amritam kurisina raatri’, a lovely anthology)
- Other note-worthy writers : Gunturu Seshendra Sarma, ‘Ajanta’ (Penumarti Viswanadha Sastry), ‘Digambara poets’,
Boyi Bheemanna, Mohanaprasad (‘Mo’)

Telugu literature : recent trends

- Feminist poetry : Problems of women in the society addressed without inhibition
Savitri (1949-'91, 'Dacoits', 'Housewife')
Kondepudi Nirmala,('Labour Room', 'Thadisi Mopedaina katha') describing the travails of women during child-birth
Jayaprabha : asking women to rebel against conventional morality ('chintala nemali', 'Paita')

Telugu literature : current trends

- 'Dalit': literature of the oppressed
Addressing untouchability, child labor
political exploitation, Naxalite movement
- Does not employ classical language or meter
- Free use of slang
- Noteworthy writers:
Endloori Sudhakar 'vartamaanam' (the present)
Sivasagar : 'NaDustunna charitra' (the current
history)
Khader Mohiuddin: 'PuTTu maccha' (mole)
Darise Sesi Nirmala : 'Dalituralu' (the
oppressed woman)

Telugu : Avadhanamu

- Literary feat known in Sanskrit
- Currently in Telugu and Kannada
- A test of the powers of memory, ready versification and the ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously
- Depending on the number of tasks, it's an 'Ashtavadhanam' (eight), 'Satavadhanam' (hundred), 'Sahasravadhanam' (thousand)

Telugu : Avadhanam

- one who performs is 'Avadhani'
- one who tests is 'Pricchaka'(questioner)
- Questions are literary and demand prompt versification observing rules of prosody
- Restrictions are placed re: use of certain syllables or letters in specific locations
- The topic of the question, the meter and other constraints may vary for each verse

Telugu : ashtavadhanamu

- The avadhani is not allowed to versify all four lines at a stretch; after the first line is done, the 2nd pricchaka comes up with his question to which the avadhani responds in verse with a new line, moves on to the 3rd, and so on till all (8) questioners are satisfied. The avadhani then recites all the first lines of the 8, does the 2nd line of each verse in a similar manner (round-robin) till all four lines of each verse are done.

Telugu : ashtavadhanamu

- During the versification, which is the main test, one of the questioners may keep ringing a bell and the avadhani has to keep track of the number of bell-rings
- Attention may be diverted by a 'pricchaka' who intervenes at random with irrelevant ('aprastuta') queries that the avadhani has to answer with ready wit or repartee

Telugu : avadhanamu

- At the end, the avadhani will have to recite the 4 lines of the verse intended for each 'pricchaka' in proper sequence (having observed all the prescribed restrictions), respond properly to the 'aprastuta' (irrelevant) questions and give an accurate tally of the bell-rings!
- The more the # questioners, the greater the challenge and the greater the credit.

Telugu : avadhanamu

- In the modern era Divakarla Tirupati Sastri and Chellapilla Venkata Sastri (‘Tirupati Venkata Kavulu’), in addition to being well-known playwrights, are the most famous avadhanis whose prowess is legendary
- Current avadhanis are many: Madugula Nagaphani Sarma, Medasani Mohan, Garikipati Narasimharao, Rallabandi Kavita Prasad and many others who have performed ashta, sata, sahasra, and dvisahasra avadhanams

Telugu script, grammar and prosody

■ The script is close to Kannada

■ Vowels ('Acchulu'):

అ ఆ ఇ ఈ ఉ ఊ ఋ ౠ ఎ ఏ ఐ ఒ ఓ ఔ అంల ం :

■ Consonants('Hallulu') :

క ఖ గ ఘ జ చ ఛ జ ఝ ఞ ట ఠ డ ఢ ణ

త థ ద ధ న ప ఫ బ భ మ య ర ల వ శ ష స హ ళ

Telugu Grammar

- Derived from Sanskrit ('Tatsama') e.g.'simha'
- Modified ('Tadbhava') e.g.'singamu'
- 'Desya' : regional ('Accha Telugu')
- 'Gramya' : also regional, but slang

- Case of the nouns by adding suffix or prefix
డు ము వు లు etc. according to the case
e.g., 'nannu', 'neetho', 'meeku' etc.

Telugu Grammar

- Gender('linga')

'Mahat('pum') : male;

'Mahati'('stree'): female;

'amahat'('napumsaka'): neuter

- Number('vachana) : Singular('Eka')

- Plural('Bahu')

- Tense('kaala'): as in English

- 'Sandhi' : joining 2 words

e.g., 'meeru'+ 'evaru'= 'meerevaru' ('who are you?')

Telugu Prosody('chandassu')

- Meters from Sanskrit with minor changes
Utpalamala, champakamala, mattebha,
Sardoola, sragdhara, bhujangaprayata etc.
- Meters indigenous:
Seesa, kanda, aaTaveladi, ThETageethi etc
The rules require arrangement of letters in a
uniform manner with rhyming of the 1st letter
of each line with another letter of specific location
(yati and praasa)

Telugu 'Chandassu' ('Desi')

- Meters constructed, not based on letters but on groups of syllables; verses are not as rigid as the Sanskrit-derived meters
- 'ShaTpadi (from Kannada), RagaDa, Mutyaalasaram (popularized by Gurazada, Rayaprolu Subbarao and Sri. Sri.), e.g.,
'DesamanTe maTTikaadoy
(A country is not a piece of land)
DesamanTe manushuloy'
(A country is its people)

Telugu prosody : current status

- Most of the current poetry is ‘Free Verse’ (‘vachana Kavita’), feasible for anyone, or Blank Verse(‘geya kavita’) which requires some command of the language
- Very little is in the form of ‘Desi chandassu’) and even less in the form of rigid meters because they require sound knowledge of the language, the grammar and prosody

Telugu : contribution to music

- In Karnatic (South Indian classical) music a vast majority of compositions – kirtanas, varnams, padams, javalis, thillanas – are in Telugu. Many vaggeyakaras (composers) enriched the Sastra (science), sampradaya (tradition) and Sahitya (literature) of music (already in vogue) by their devotional and romantic compositions suitable for gana (song) and abhinaya (dance)

Telugu : contribution to music

- Foremost among them is Tallapaka Annamacharya (15th Century A.D.) who composed over 30,000 kirtanas in praise of Lord Tirupati Venkateswara (of these only about 8,000 are available and only a few hundred are set to tune). The compositions are outstanding both for their literary merit and devotion

Telugu : contribution to music

- Many great vaggeyakaras followed Annamaya; well-known among them are Tyagaraja and Syama Sastri (Dikshitar mostly used Sanskrit) of the 19th Century, who, till the discovery of Annamaya's works, were considered to be the most important contributors to the Sahitya of Karnatic music.
- Kshetrayya's and Sarangapani's padams, rich in Telugu idiom, are used for Abhinaya

Telugu literature : 'Sataka Sahitya'

Sataka (A hundred verses)

- First Satakas in Sanskrit ('Amaru' Sataka and 'Subhashita Trisati' ('good words in three hundred verses') by Bhartrihari ; later in Kannada and Telugu
- Verses, by definition, are in one meter
- Last lines or words('makuta')) are the same and usually dedicated to a favorite deity (ishta daiva)
- Unlike 'kavyas'(classics), they address social, political, or personal issues
- Over 300 Satakas in Telugu

Telugu literature : Sataka Sahitya

Of the 300 satakas, a couple of examples:-

- From 'Sumati' ('good mind'): by Baddena
(12th century A.D.)

“one's ire is one's enemy
one's patience is an armor, one's compassion
a friend,
one's happiness is a heaven
one's sorrow is a hell for certain! (O ! one
with good mind!)

Telugu Literature : Sataka Sahitya

‘Kalahastiswara Sataka’ (Dhurjati) :16th century A.D.) :
The poems contain a scathing criticism of the society,
the ruling class, his own failings or even God himself,
with a deep yearning for peace and divine help.

“Why do some people think of killing others
and taking over their thrones?

Don't they die themselves, doesn't their
wealth leave them?

Do they live for ever with their wives, sons and friends?

Doesn't Death come some day, O God of Kalahasti?”

(from the translation by Heifetz, H and Narayana Rao,V)

Telugu literature : main references

- : Samagra Andhra Sahityamu by Arudra
- 14 vols
- Modern Telugu poetry:
A review in English by V.Mandeswararao
- Kavya Mala: Anthology of Telugu poetry
editor: Katuri Venkateswara Rao

Telugu poetry : from the diaspora 'An immigrant's angst'

'What a trip on the U.S. highway
Like an aimless castaway!
Amidst 'plenty' are problems galore
Endless is this head-banging chore!

What are our roots, where are we headed
In all directions scattered;
Never in our dreams did we imagine
This forlorn exile foreign!

'An immigrant's angst'

- We plunged headlong into life western
Tasted luxury stem to stern;
But moral strife between East and West
Hardly gives us an iota of rest

Our heart is in India, let's admit
Though we lack the courage to quit –
Thoughts of our young ones always haunt us
And advancing years frighten us

'An immigrant's angst'

The passing away we periodically hear
Of the few that are near and dear,
From stroke, heart attack, by-pass surgery
Or a cancer case in every family

Alas! who is there to care for us?
-Children? Their priorities aren't ours;
Left with social (in)security are we
Nursing home residents-to-be

'An immigrant's angst'

The brighter half of our life is over
The darker phase has begun, moreover
What is the point in brooding now
Knowing we reap what we sow?

Life may be cozy in the U.S. mansion
But uncertain the long-term prognostication
Amidst 'plenty' are problems galore!
Useless is this head-banging chore!!

Telugu Language & Literature



End of Presentation