Chapter VI

CHILAKAMARTHI AND OTHER CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chilakamarthi, assumed an active role in all the contemporary movements that have taken place during his life-time. He strengthened new ideas, reform activities and stood for certain values. He never hesitated to express his opinions, even when he knew that they were not palatable.

6.2 THEATRE MOVEMENT

"Telugu Drama" appeared only in modern period as entertainment. It was different from earlier recreations like puppet shows and yakshaganas. Telugu drama emerged as a result of the Western influence, especially because of the popularity of Shakespearean dramas. The theme was selected from Indian classics, epics, puranas and mythology. To suit the nativity and to continue the old tradition, verses began to be added. Thus the early themes in Telugu dramas were either mythological ones or adaptations from English themes.

Parsees were the first in India to take up both amateur and professional theatres on the lines of English drama. They first staged at Bombay and from there, they began touring all over India since 1870s. They visited Pune, Gadag, Bellary, Guntur and Rajahmundry. Thus the influence of the Parsees was felt on Maharashtrians, Kannadigas, and then on Andhras. As such, Telugu dramas began to be written to be staged. Thus the influence of the English was not direct
but indirect from Parsee to Marathis and from there to Kannada and finally to Telugu.¹

The first Telugu Drama was *Manjari Madhukariyam* written by Korada Ramachandra Sastry in 1860. *Julius Caesar* by Vavilala Vasudeva Sastry in 1875 was the first translation from English to Telugu.

The credit goes to Kandukuri Veeresalingam for popularising theatre in Rajahmundry. He being influenced by the performance of the Parsi players of Dharwar troupe in the Andhra area, began his own troupe of young players, mostly consisting of his own students. He got *Chamatkara Ratnavali*, an adaptation from Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors, staged. Another drama *Ratnavali*, adaptation from Sanskrit, was also staged in the same year. The audience of Rajahmundry were thrilled by witnessing Telugu dramas for the first time on the stage.

Chilakamarthi stands as a stalwart in the early history of Telugu drama. His contribution to Telugu drama was varied: (1) He wrote successive dramas for the sake of Hindu Nataka Samaj. (2) He directed the dramas as the President of the Samaj. (3) He introduced discipline in the drama troupe and fought for certain values.
Chilakamarthi showed his greatness as a playwright in the beginning period itself. All his dramas were pauranic. Within a brief span of two years from 1889, Chilakamarthi wrote as many as eight plays at the request of Immaneni Hanumantha Rao, the founder of Hindu Nataka Samaj.

Chilakamarthi thoroughly studied Sanskrit and English dramas and introduced their unique features into his works. From Sanskrit, he borrowed and introduced into Telugu, Nándi and Prastavana, prologue at the beginning and Bharata Vakyam i.e., epilogue at the end. The story was divided into Acts and scenes as per the English model.² His plays were almost all original, containing classical themes and epic characters.

Chilakamarthi's interest in Dramas began with the arrival of Immaneni Hanumantha Rao, a teacher by profession and a committed actor to the theatre by choice, to Rajahmundry in 1887. Hanumantha Rao along with his family, brought a poor and active boy Tanguturi Prakasam to Rajahmundry. He admitted him in his school and began to train him as an actor. Besides being an actor, Hanumantha Rao founded Hindu Nataka Samaj and associated Chilakamarthi as a member with that.

Chilakamarthi started his literary career with the writing of plays for Hindu Natak Samaj. He wrote Keechakavadha at the age of 22. This was followed by the writing of successive plays Draupadi Parinayamu, Sreerama Jananamu,
Parijatapaharanamu, Nala Natakamu, Sita Kalyanamu, Prasanna Yadavamu, Prahlada Charitramu, Chatura Chandrasida, Gayopakhyanamu, Tilothama etc. His most loved play was Prasanna Yadavam. But, the most popular drama was Gayopakhyanamu written in 1890, and one lakh of copies were sold even in those days. As actors capable of reciting verses began to be available, he introduced verses. These became popular even with the semi-literate and illiterate sections of the society. Harischandropakhyanamu and Bammera Potharaju were his incomplete plays. Chilakamarthi translated fourteen works from Sanskrit. Abhinava Bana's Parvathee Parinayamu and the remaining thirteen plays were from Bhasa Nataka Chakram. The total number of his plays, including the incomplete, are about twenty-seven.

Chilakamarthi was not merely a member of Hindu Natak Samaj who prepared a number of dramas for enactment but later on, acted as its Vice-President and as President. He tried to infuse discipline and morals into the members regarding punctuality, regularity and non-addiction to drinks. He struggled hard to maintain its independence from the officials and maintain its esteem. He was very strict regarding the free passes to be issued to officials. His association with Prakasam began to grow as he developed a liking for Prakasam for his intelligence, dynamism and for his action in dramas.
Pandit Sivanadha Sastry, Brahmo came to Rajahmundry in 1890 to give lectures on Brahmoism. He, being impressed with the work of Chilakamarthi praised him as Local Shakespeare, as he was both a writer-cum-director. He was prepared even to act as Balarama in Gayopakhyanamu at Amalapuram at the time of crisis.

On behalf of Natak Samaj, Chilakamarthi wished to honour Bipin Chandrapal at the time of his visit in 1907. The drama ‘Veni Samharam’ was staged and the money accrued i.e., Rs.150/- was given to Pal as donation.

Chilakamarthi encouraged women to enact female roles. Earlier, men were doing the roles of women too. Tanguturi Prakasam, in his younger days, enacted female roles like Draupadi in Keechaka Vadha, Kausalya in Sreeramajananam, Chitrarekha in Gayopakhyanamu, Ratnamgi in Sarangadhara, Damayanthi in Nala Natakam etc. Yaragarla Satyaraju, another student was also good in enacting female roles.

Chilakamarthi along with his friends Gunneswara Rao, and Krittiventi Nageswara Rao appealed to women to enact female roles. Dasari Narayana Rao (harmonist) from Tenali responded to this call and brought his daughter Kanchana Mala to Rajahmundry. She acted as Chitraangi in Sarangadhara and Chitralekha in Gayopakhyanam and was received well. Later on, she entered into Telugu
movies and earned the fame of the first glamourous heroine of Telugu cinema. So he was one among the early playwright producers to bring women to the theatre.

6.3 MOVEMENT FOR SPOKEN LANGUAGE

In the beginning of the 20th century, there began a debate about the language to be used in the books. A controversy raged over the language issue whether to use Grandhika (language used in books) or Vyavaharika (colloquial language). Gurajada Appa Rao and Gidugu Venkata Ramamurthi became champions of spoken language to be used in books also. Pithapur Maharaja Rao Surya Rao supported Grandhika style. The difference between Grandhika and Vyavaharika is that the former is governed by certain grammatical rules and the latter is spoken language including the regional slang.

In spite of his respect for Gidugu and Gurajada, Chilakamarthi differed from them over Vyavaharika usage. He preferred simple Grandhika, as was used by Vemana and Kandukuri Veeresalingam. Though their language did not come under Vyavaharika, it still could reach the common man. The reason was that the language was not too dogmatic like that of Prabandha poets. Hence, Chilakamarthi also used the simplest and most lucid form so as to reach everybody. He preferred simple Grandhika on two grounds.

(1) Children should learn good and profound language, as the texts are prescribed for them.
(2) The style and books should appeal to all regions of Andhra. It Vyavaharika style i.e., allowed, there is scope for regional slang which has limited appeal.

Chilakamarthi believed that Vyavaharika style, if used in books, would damage the language and harm the traditions, as some of their supposed followers began using vulgar and unpalatable things. Chilakamarthi visited Visakhapatnam along with Puranapanda Mallaiah Sastry, Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao and Kuchi Narasimham in 1914. The Raja of Pithapuram sent these people to support the Grandhika movement at a place known to be a centre of Vyvaharika style. Chilakamarthi never hesitated to express his feelings and hence spoke for more than an hour to his satisfaction in support of Grandhika style. Andhra Rashtra Abhyudaya Rachayitala Samgham (Arasam), while publishing his autobiography in 1944, stated that they differed with Chilakamarthi in this aspect and requested him to take one more progressive step.

6.4 CHILAKAMARTHI AND LIBRARY MOVEMENT

Chilakamarthi strengthened and assumed an active role in spreading the library movement. This was because he believed that knowledge should be within the reach of every one, irrespective of class, caste and gender. He believed that society would be better when everybody has the right to study and has the ability of solving one's own problems. As libraries cater to these objectives and spread social and political awareness among the people, he tried to spread the movement.
Chilakamarthi toured many places including remote villages and mobilised people through lectures on the advantages of the libraries. He addressed a large gathering at Berhampur on 12th August 1911 and spoke about the importance of libraries.

Chilakamarthi received invitation on behalf of Sakala Andhra Mandala Library Celebration Committee in 1914 to address them at Rammohan Library, Vijayawada. This was the beginning of the rare honour of presidential addresses to be given at various places. His lecture at the very first Sakala Andhra Mandala Grandhalaya Maha Sabha was received very well and it was published in Grandhalaya Sarvasvamu. He not only stressed on the need for the establishment of more libraries but also gave the “Grandhalaya Veda” as follows:

The Sun’s light brightens everything, so shall knowledge dispel darkness and brighten every life.

As the life giver, Air is freely shared by all.

So knowledge to be freely shared by all.

As the water which quenches our thirst is freely drunk by all

So is knowledge to be freely consumed by all

As the Sunshine and Moonlight which brighten the world is freely enjoyed by all

So is knowledge to be freely enjoyed by all.
It explains that knowledge should be available to all without any discrimination like the air, water and the light. As it contains the spirit of the movement, it is still recognised as an important message and is revered.

Chilakamarthi visited Nidamarru, and presided over the anniversary of Pothana library.

Chilakamarthi was invited to Baruva to attend a library meet in May 1915. He visited Hyderabad in December 1915 to preside over the annual function of Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam. He was accompanied by his scribe Kakarla Kondaiah. It was attended by personalities like Sarojini Naidu and Akbar Hyderi. He was honoured by Sarojini Devi with a shawl sent by Ravichettu Lakshmi Narasamma, wife of late Ravichettu Rangarao. He visited the house of Sarojini Devi later on and conversed with her husband Mutyala Govindaraju Naidu.

Chilakamarthi was invited to preside over the anniversary of Vetapalem Library by Subbaraya Shreshti in 1928. He obliged him, visited the library and signed in the visitor’s Register.

Chilakamarthi was invited to preside over the anniversary of the library at Kanagala village in Guntur district either in September or in October 1934 and he obliged.
Chilakamarthi participated in Library meetings at various times and at various places like Ganjam, Sompeta, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Amalpuram, Penugonda, Bhimavaram, Narasapuram, Potlapudi, Nandyala, Anantapur etc.

Chilakamarthi in his Autobiography explains about the origin of the Gautami library in Rajahmundry. Nalam Krishna Rao founded Veeresalingam library in the Townhall in 1898 and Chilakamarthi was its President. When differences grew between Nalam Krishna Rao and Veeresalingam, the former tried to change the name of the library. He soon realised that it was impossible, as long as Chilakamarthi, continues to be its President. Hence, successful attempt was made to remove Chilakamarthi from Presidentship by increasing its membership with their own supporters. The library was renamed as people's library in 1908. Addanki Satyanarayana, brother-in-law of Vaddadi Subba Rayudu, started another library and named it as Vasuraya Grandhalayam. In 1920, both the libraries merged with each other and received the present day name of Gautami library.¹⁸

Thus the services of Chilakamarthi to the library movement were significant.

6.5 CHILAKAMARTHI AND DIVISIVE MOVEMENTS

The closure of nineteenth century and the first decade of 20th century saw the formation of various caste organisations in Andhra. They began to plead for
higher social rank for their community and for reforms within the community-like opting for English education, jobs, widow marriages, enhancement of marriageable age etc. Though there was the positive effect of infusing self-respect, they also began to spread their own superiority thus giving scope for communal conflicts and mutual hatred. This was also the period when Hindu and Muslim feelings on the one hand and Brahmin and non-Brahmin feelings on the other were moving towards a dangerous break. Chilakamarthi's stand in these divisive movements of dividing people on the basis of religion and caste is clear from the epilogue of his Autobiography.

Chilakamarthi insists on unity among the various religious groups and the social groups. He tries to convince people with an argument that the Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins, non-Brahmins, Harijans and tribals, for thousands of years were all born and brought up in the same land. They breath the same air, drink the same water here, enjoy the crops and prosperity of the land here. Mutual and reciprocal hatred would lead only to the total destruction and certainly not for the welfare of anybody.19

Chilakamarthi then attacks the non-brahmin movement indirectly in the Epilogue. He tells us that Srirama though a non-brahmin is still worshipped as God. Many among the twelve Alwars, though non-brahmins, are commanding respect and are receiving worship. Mahabharata, though a story about non-
brahmins is revered as Fifth Veda and is recited by Brahmins everyday. Viswamitra, the propounder of Gayatri Mantra and Veda Vyasa, the author of Brahma Sutras are revered by Brahmins. Then he tells us that non-brahmins are no other than the cultivators, who work hard to produce rice and thus feed the humanity, without caring for heat or rain. Finally, he concludes that just like the members in a family take up different professions for the welfare of the family, the different communities should take up different works for the sake of the country. As the human beings are wise and distinct from the animals, they should not stoop to the level of angry quarrels and fights, as the animals do. Then he pleads again for unity by giving the following examples: because of the unity only, the little grass can fasten the mighty elephant; because of unity only, the small banyan leaves can give shade and shelter from the mighty Sun; because of unity only, the small atoms transformed into a mountain, can stop the whirlwind.20

Thus, Chilakamarthi’s answer to the divisive movements seems to be the unity, breaking the artificial walls of religion and community. He opines that patriotism should be everybody’s religion to achieve the development of the country. He insists that every man should revere the concept of unity as panchakshari mahamantra.21
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