CHAPTER V

CUSTODIAN OF CULTURAL HERITAGE.
The awakening of Andhra in the latter half of the 19th century manifested itself not only in a social renaissance, but also in literary revival, journalism, educational advancement and a rebirth of interests in history, art, architecture and cultural pursuits. People of Andhra began to evince unprecedented interest in not only knowing about their past, but also in preserving their rich cultural heritage. Of all the regions of Andhra, Rayalaserra abounds in historical relics and memories. Among the Rayalaserra districts, Anantapur itself can be considered an archaeological museum in terms of the richness of its temples, art pieces, forts and other historical monuments. 1.

Subba Rao was essentially a lover of arts and passionately involved in all aspects of aesthetics. Even as a school boy once he joined his class mates and set out to Penukonda in order to recover some historical relics. This ancient town was the Summer capital of Vijayanagar kings in their declining years. He had something of a poet in him. He could lecture on the creative process of art with as much ease as he could on a political subject. Inspite of his political

ruggedness he was an aestheteian. He defined poetry as a rhythmic flow of words with their root in joy, agony or passion. His exposition revealed not only wisdom but clarity.

The most triumphant episode in his life is the revival of public interest in the Lepakshi Sculpture and frescoes. In song, lecture, broadcast, pamphlet and exhibition he has made the Andhras pay homage to Lepakshi. His faith and urbaneity and the way he has given his mind and resources to this cause have won him many unshakable admirers. It is a sentimental journey that takes the dreamy boy to Lepakshi. It becomes a rich theme for his romantic exertion. The ravages of the Muslim rulers and the lack of interest in preservation of the later generations threw this temple into neglect. Subba Rao and his indomitable schoolmate Venkteshwarayyanappa cleared the temple of its bushy outgrowths. Subba Rao was the first to draw the attention of the public to this forgotten heritage. He would even relight the battle of Thallikota to save Lepakshi. He always needed a cause for which he would be a martyr. The idea of conservation of Lepakshi has worked into his dream.

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The Virabhadra Swami Temple is situated in the Lepakshi village of Andhra Pradesh. There is a huge stone bull measuring 20 feet by 15 feet in Lepakshi. The Nandi carved out of one single stone, gigantic and very beautiful to look at, is considered to be one of the biggest in the world. The village of Lepakshi is only four miles from Kalluru which is the native place of Subba Rao. Virabhadra Swami is considered to be the Kula Devatha of Achyuta Rayas who once ruled over Rayalaseema in the 16th century. Once during the year 1937, Sri Adi Kavi Bapiraya, who was a poet and painter, visited Lepakshi. When he looked at the Nandi he became so emotional that he cried out to the bull-god of Lepakshi to stand up and move like the great mountain of Kailash.

The Lepakshi temple may appear to be a mere lump of rocks to a casual observer. But the temple is built in a classic idea. In mood and expression the Saivite and Vaishnavaite religious currents converge there. There we see matter struggling towards form and sensations growing into a pattern. The art is massive and its impulse and unity of form is attractive. The basic motive of the sculptors is to portray Siva-Leela or variations of the Siva theme.

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One of its main attractions is the diversity of types in imagery and speculations. It fills the gap in our sculptural knowledge between the early modern and the high medieval period. There are traces of mingled influences, the Rajput and Chinese styles. However in the linear expression, colour values and energy of thought the Lepakshi statuary and frescoes have a definite aesthetic.

Lepakshi is a living art. The whole complex with its huge sculptures, mural paintings and metal figurines flourished during the reign of the Vijaynagara kings. Its art reveals a mastery of laws, a concept of style and details of ornament show a brilliantly developed technique. In the poetic image of Ganesh we feel the full and direct impact of the Vijaynagara art. In the inner shrine, the images of Siva, Virabhadra and Rama have an undeniable grace. This pantheon where deities of three different traditions are worshipped holds the vision of a brighter day.

The Ganga and Yamuna archways at the entrance are elaborately executed with miniature dance symbolism. The central hall or Ranga Mantap, set in proper space and light, is an example of ideal harmony. Its sculptures depict the

symbols of Hindu faith, the miracles of sages and an exotic blood of life. The figures and moral maxims haunt the mind after each visit. Sage Vasiṣṭha solemnizing the marriage of Śiva and Parvati is a master piece of Vijayanagar art. A subtlety of technique is illustrated in the study of Annapurna. The anecdotal sculpture, the story of Śriyali, is a brilliant matching of image and word. A galloping horse supports the Lepakshi arch. The disciplined body of the rider and the dashing energy of the horse arrest the eye. Its grand design brings the conviction of growth and unity.

The mudra of the dancers is lively. It is so natural that one can even feel the manicured nails of the female figures. Full size statuary of a perfect female shape tells, with sensitive curves, tilt in step, graceful draperies and the superb finish of brocades and jewellery are simply alluring. The female figures reflect a spirit of elegance and luxury. Each major image, in its look and posture, represents a burst of creative energy. The figures of elephants moving in a procession have a telling effect.

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The inside ceiling of the Ranga Mantap is covered with full scale frescoes. Their ornamental motive makes them striking. The frescoes do not dim the sculptures but rather heighten their effect. The bevy of charming ladies and over a hundred textile designs border on modern trends. The frescoes are life like. The royal ladies wore no veil and a thick layer of cosmetics protects their face. The painter endows their figure with depth and sweetness. The fresco Krsanarjuniya is a crowning masterpiece. The artist has mastered the trick of unifying the myriad strands of the story. Siva and Parvathi are appealing in the hunters dress.

The painter brings out the symbolism and moral overtones of King Mahendra Varma's legends. The Prince is driving the chariot at terrific speed. It crashes to death a stray calf. The mother cow barricades the chariot and pours out the grief. Then it follows him up to the palace and rings the bell of justice with its tongue. The King appears in the balcony and listens to the tale of woe. The cow pleads for justice. The King orders that the dead calf should be placed in the same chariot which should be drawn over the prostrate body of the Prince. The royal justice moves the Heavens and Gods sprinkle flowers on the

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chariot's path. The cow stands near the chariot licking its dead calf. The massive wheels crush the body of the Prince. Lord Mandesvara appears on the scene and restores to life both the Prince and the calf\(^{10}\). It is a touching story which these frescoes tell so movingly.

In the outer hall, the Kalyan mantap, each inch of the columns is covered with splanas, yoga and animal studies. The variety and range of the geometrical drawings are impressive. The patterned groupings of the Asthabhikpalakes and legendary sages dominate our perception. The symmetrical lay-out and neatness of execution of the deities and their emblems are superb. A magnificent headed cobra enwrangling the image of Siva unites sculpture in depth with sculpture in expense. It is a happy mingling of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures. Human studies like the snake-charmer, clown, magic square Hamsakanya, Nagabhanda, riddles and acrobatics are finely sculptured to bring out the intended messages.

In the outskirts of the Lepakshi complex rests the biggest rock bull which reveals the mighty grasp of structure. Carved out of one giant rock this totem bull has the shapeliness and strength of nature itself. A pendant bearing the image of a double-headed eagle adorns its neck. There is a story that a dispute arose between the contractor

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of Lepakshi temple and the craftsmen. They go on a strike. Instead of laying down the tools they creatively use the strike hours in carving the bull. The most naturalistic aspect is the vitality of the bull.

Conserving Labours of Subba Rao

The temple complex and its priceless art treasures were in a state of neglect without proper maintenance.

Subba Rao took special interest and brought out a new life to the village, its temple, to the Nandi and to the various valuable artistic monuments. He took up this noble cause of conservation with a crusading zeal. He got a number of articles written about all these monuments and got them published in various papers. Lot of publicity was given to these treasures and public began to take interest. He also brought a number of good painters and photographers and took copies of the figures painted and carved on the stone pillers, walls and roofs of the temple. Subba Rao himself wrote a lengthy article on the Lepakshi temple in the Andhra Vignanasarvam (Andhra Encyclopaedia). It is due to his efforts that a book containing the photos of most of the pictures also has come out. Kalluru Subba Rao's Sastipurthy celebrations were conducted at Lepakshi.

His own publication was fittingly named Lepakshi. Many scholars like Lenka Krishnamurthy and Basta Rammiah have published articles about Lepakshi which has now become an important tourist centre. State and Central Governments are interested in the development of this unique temple of art.

Subba Rao Literary Activities

A modern scholar has observed that Sri Krishnadevaraya of Vijayavada Empire was not only one of the greatest rulers but also a literary, grande both in Telugu and Kannada Languages. He thus bridged the gulf between the Andra and the Kannadikas. He could do it easily and effectively because as a king he had all the powers needed to achieve it. But Belluru Subha Rao, who was an ordinary man was also able to accomplish these to a considerable extent without any royal sanction or imperial power to back him up. As one born in the land ruled by Sri Krishnadevaraya, his interest in the development of literature came spontaneously to him. Subha Rao was of the opinion that if there was no patronage or support from the rulers to the poets and literary luminaries, the people themselves should come forward to be a source of strength and support to them. He himself proved to be exemplary to this matter.

Subba Rao is serves in the field of literature are praiseworthy and deserve to be emulated. Sri Appajodu Venkataseshiah has testified to the literary patronage of Subba Rao. Whenever Subba Rao came across a poet or a scholar he used to honour such people and help them financially according to the means available. Till then he would not be satisfied. He used to sit in the literary conferences along with poets, pandits and scholars till late in the night without minding the inconveniences caused to him personally. Among the poets of Rayalaseema Sri Rajasekhara Sethavadhami and Sri Godiyaram Venkata Seshasastri were the most prominent. They used to perform astavadhanam and wrote a number of historical works which aroused sentiments of patriotism in the general public. Sri Rajasekhara Sethavadhanam wrote a book on Rana Pratap Simha. Sri Godiyaram Venkata Seshasastri choose Chhatrapathi Shivaji as his hero. Both these great Andhra poets were honoured by Subba Rao at a special functions organised at Seva Mandir, Hindupur and at Penukonda in 1944 and 1945 respectively. On this occasion the poets called Subba Rao as 'Subhavandhugo' that is, 'the friend and relative of the poets'.

In 1927, when the 60th birth anniversary of Subba Rao was celebrated, his friends and admirers had collected and presented to him a purse of a few thousand rupees. Subba Rao distributed the amount on that occasion to various poets and scholars that they might publish their own works with the help of that money. As a result more than a dozen books have been dedicated to him by a number of Telugu and Sanskrit authors. Among these illustrious works, Sri Jannalasadugu Madhava Sarma's 'Alankara Sudra', Sri Vivasvantha Satya Narayana's Sanskrit work, 'Ashtami-aharana', Boya Balimane's 'Kavya Kavyalayu', and Sri Rama Appa Rao's 'Natyasastra' are important. On the occasion of Subba Rao's 70th birthday Madugula Venkata Rama Sastry dedicated his book, 'Swarnabhishekam' to Subba Rao.

Sri Kalluru Venkatarayana Rao was given financial assistance by Subba Rao to publish his book, 'Anaka Sarvat Charitra'. Subba Rao also helped Cherukopalli Jambhagini Sarma to get his book 'Nabaswarupa' see the light of day. Acharya Bhivakara Venkataradhani once said 'The various books published due to the financial help of Subba Rao as well as his fame and name will last as long as the Telugu language lives'.

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19. Interview with


Subha Rao's Literary Taste

Subba Rao was well versed not only in ancient lore but also in modern and contemporary literature. He was a polyglot who could speak well in English, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. He was an unchallenged master of Telugu rhetoric. His talent for recitation, mimicry, storytelling and humour are many. In 1921 he blew his trumpet to rouse the people's faith in freedom. In Bellary he is addressing a mass audience of ten thousand. Warned by an intense fire he recites a Telugu lyric recalling the Ashokasar tragedy. The listeners' cheeks are wet with tears, when he tells them that he would soon be an outcaste with a number branded on his wrist. Even his speeches in the Legislative Assembly are couched in poetic language. In the constituent Assembly Subba Rao, believing in the classical mellowness, suggested that Hindi should be renamed Bharati. Once at Hardwar without money he collected a pocketful of coppers by reciting the Bhagavatam to a group of Telugu pilgrims. During days of his prison life Subba Rao kept his literary flair alive. He used to read the Mahabharata melodiously and Thikkanas's poems in Bhagavatam with facility and ease.22

Other Cultural Activities

Education

Subba Rao was deeply interested in enhancing the literacy level of Rayalaseema. Once at the end of his speech some one in the audience asked him 'What do you mean by literacy'. Subba Rao retorted, 'it means you should be able to read Rayalaseema on the map'. He found the Harijan outcasts and untouchables were beyond the pale of education. With the blessings of Gandhiji, he founded the Kesava Vidyalaya with later bloomed into a political nursery which has given to Andhra some of the most eminent public servants. Similarly with the help of philanthropist Sri A.M. Linganna he started the Seva Mandal which combined the best of Wardha and Vravaharath traditions. There was no end to his dreams. In the floor of the Legislative Assembly he fought vigorously for education for all. He thundered that the twin aims of education should be the pursuit of truth for its own sake and the shrinking of the mind from partial and hasty judgements. He gave the flaming motto, 'Andam, Arthan and Anandam'. Education must be an exercise in contemporary understanding. He leads the way by starting a network of adult summer classes and basic institutes in Rayalaseema. His reforms are meant to correct the sad and ugly mental and social maladjustments.  

Subba Rao appreciated the role of libraries and reading rooms in promoting literacy among the masses. He was twice elected as the President of the District Library Association and continued to hold that post from 1955 to 1961. During his term of office a number of new branch libraries were opened at various places in the district. He did his best to collect the entire library cess due from the public in order to give the necessary impetus to the library movement. A veteran of the Library Movement once described Subba Rao, ‘as a touring library’.

Addressing a Library Committee meeting once Subba Rao observed that ‘Libraries provide both education as well as recreation to the people. This contributed a lot to enlighten the public during the freedom movement. Similarly their role in consolidating the newly won freedom also is very useful’. From his childhood days, Subba Rao used to like libraries most. While at Bangalore as a student he made the maximum use of the Seshadri Memorial Library. He himself started Village Libraries at Kalluru, Lepakshi and Kadnapalli.

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Journalism

Since the beginning of the present century there was a spurt in Telugu journalism. By 1905 as many as 20 journals were published in Telugu. These papers played a vital role in educating the people during the freedom movement. Each national leader in those days had his own papers, either in English or in the regional languages. When Subba Rao entered politics he too wanted to start a news paper to propagate ideals of patriotism and nationalism. At that time Balà Gangadhara Tilak was his great hero and inspirer. Tilak's mantra of 'Swaraj' was in everybody's lips. Subba Rao became a devotee of Tilak and his Home Rule Movement. His admiration for Tilak was so much that he named his newspaper as 'Lokamanya'. It was a Telugu Monthly. The aim of the paper was to give a new aspect to the problems of Nationalism and Culture. In its columns he clarified the basic issues and it had the merit of open mind. He preached liberty, discipline, self-reliance and self-respect through 'Lokamanya'. His lucid flashes of thought fascinated the youth. But in his desire to make the ideology of Gandhi a practical creed he closed his journal and went on a lecture tour. But he never gave up writing thought-provoking articles in other journals of the day.

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Subba Rao conducted a number of cultural festivals and literary conferences. He used to invite a good number of Telugu and Kannada poets under the auspices of the Rayala Kala Parishad of which he was the Chairman. He honoured those poets in various ways during the cultural meets. One such conference was held in 1934 at Anantapur. Another festival was conducted at Kalyandurg in 1937 under the esteemed Chairmanship of Sri P.V. Narasimha Rao. A third conference was held at Penawonda under the Presidentship of Sri Bannawada Cepala Reddy at which the renowned Telugu scholar Saraswathiputri Putaparthi Sri Narayanaswamy was honoured. A poets' meet was a part of the 70th birthday celebrations of Subba Rao in 1957. The Madaakasira literary festival held in 1969 was perhaps the last meeting in which Subba Rao made his public appearance.

There was never a cultural mela or literary conference held in Anantapur since 1919 without Subba Rao taking part in it. He is one of the founder members of the Anantapur "Lalitha Kala Parishad". This institution is now the Centre of true arts such as dance, music, drama, and cultural festivals. He was so much interested in this project that

he gifted his own valuable piece of land in the centre of the town for constructing the Lalitha Kala Parishad. The building there is rightly named, 'Padmashri Kalluru Subba Rao's Nataka Vidyalaya'. Subba Rao used to organise fine arts exhibitions now and then at Anantapur. Inaugurating one such exhibition in 1937, he declared that whether it was art or education, it should be useful for the development of mankind. He started the Rayala Kala Parishad in 1928.²⁷

There are a few standing monuments at Anantapur which immortalise the memory of Subba Rao. The local Engineering College and the Research Institute of Oil Technology owe their existence to his vision and foresight. The Tower Clock in the city erected to mark the first anniversary of Indian Independence is an unmistakable landmark, a tribute to a great patriot, 'the Grand Old Man of Anantapur', Several other monuments perpetuate his memory in Hindupur and Anantapur.²⁸

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