PREFACE

Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar needs no introduction. A doyen among the teachers of English in India, well-known professor both at home and abroad, reviewer, critic, literary historian, biographer, poet, great academician, educationist, humanist and above all a true sadhaka and a sahridaya – such were the feathers in his cap, he wore easily with equal distinction. In a way he is to the Indian English Literature what Rabindranath Tagore is to Bengali literature.

I belong to the large family of disciples (Sishya Parampara) of Prof.Iyengar. He was my teachers’ teacher i.e., I was taught by those whom he taught. His name used to be taken by my teachers almost with an inner awe, be it Prof. T.R.Dutta, Prof. T. Padma, Prof. A.V.V. Narasimha Swamy or Prof.K.Lakshmi Devi, the same holds good. They always used to look upto him. They always chanted their teacher’s name. Naturally I was attracted and charmed by Prof.Iyengar’s name.

My first encounter with Iyengar’s ‘Indian Writing in English’ made me breathless. There is a galaxy of hundreds of writers and
thousands of titles. But here is Prof. Iyengar guiding and helping the students to understand and appreciate all these writers. He does it single handedly with sheer simplicity and equal felicity. Thus my interest grew not in the Indian English Writers but in the man who introduced them, made them popular with his encouraging, sympathetic and understanding reviews and articles. When I turned to the other titles of Iyengar I felt stunned at the astounding variety of his scholarship and instantly became his admirer. My admiration strengthened further when I began reading his poetry. It took almost six months for a slow reader like me to complete reading all his poetry, which includes the epic-trilogy. I decided to work on the poetry of Prof.Iyengar to earn my doctoral degree.

As my journey through the pages of the epics continued things became more vivid. Of course, fluctuations of doubt, slackness, spurts of frustration, desolation were there arising simply because of my sheer ignorance. At those times it was Prof.Iyengar’s blessings, as Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar wrote to me once, guarded me. The women characters in Iyengar’s epics are not merely present as women in their physical aspect but as sparks of the divine, the manifestation of Magna Mater in her
varied nuances. Woman is established as the driving force. She drives, rather than being driven. The protagonists of Iyengar are exemplars of glorified feminine, paragons and incarnations of the supreme Shakti. The illustrations he chooses are described by him as the lamps of noble Indian womanhood representing an ascent and evolution in terms of glowing complexity. The following is the succinct summary of what I have done in the thesis, chapter wise.

In the First Chapter, Life and Works, I have tried to the best of my ability to sketch the life of Prof.Iyengar. It is very difficult to write about a man who was so simple and self-effacing in his life-time. He was a multi-faceted personality, who endeared himself to one and all. He used to speak little about himself and more about the good work done by others. An epitome of our culture and ethos, he always yearned for excellence in the fields of literature, culture and human relations. He was a cultural ambassador, an exemplary orator, an illustrious personality and a philosopher par excellence. I have deliberately omitted many of his critical writings except a few. I did not comment upon the books edited by him for the reason, his own books are more in number and they vary largely in their themes.
Hence the chapter **Life and Works** is a humble attempt to cover the life and the literary output of this giant literary figure.

In the Second Chapter, **The Saga Sublime: The Poetry of Prof. Iyengar**, I have tried to interpret his poetry briefly in my own way, as I understand it. As a writer of verse Prof. Iyengar’s work is truly phenomenal. He was a poet who wrote from the higher intuitive planes and his words have a winged power and beauty. His poetry is marked for its grandeur of design, poetic imagery, its richness of spiritual significance and Vedic reminiscence. As an illustrious disciple and a great admirer of Sri Aurobindo, Prof. Iyengar imbibed the qualities of his master of head and heart. Starting with the first volume, **Tryst with the Divine** to the final **Krishna Geetam**, the influence of Sri Aurobindo is clearly evident.

In the Third Chapter, **Sitayana: Epic of the Earth-born**, I have tried my level best to understand and appreciate the character of Sita, the archetype of Indian womanhood. I have tried to interpret Iyengar’s innovative sketching of Sita’s image not as the gentle chaste wife of the hero Rama, but as central and pivotal to the story-line of **The Ramayana**. Prof. Iyengar deals
with the symbolic significance of Sita's character rather than her mere physical presence.

**Satisaptakam: Saga of Seven Mothers** is the Fourth Chapter in the thesis in which an attempt is made to present the seven protagonists of this epic as woman in several roles such as Victor, Achiever, Mother, Mentor, Beacon, Philosopher and the Furies. All these women share in common the moral virtues of chastity, fidelity and self-less sacrifice. Each one of them blazes forth a unique individuality. The prime theme of this saga is woman as *Adya Shakti* – the embodiment of energy in the universe.

Chapter -V, **Krishna Geetam: The Delight of Existence**, describes in detail, Radha, the central figure to **Krishna Geetam**. Iyengar sings of Radha but with a difference from the traditional handling of the theme. She is indeed *Adya Shakti*'s willed descent to work in collaboration with Krishna in his *avatar* mission. She is verily the heart and soul of the flute call.
In the Final Chapter, **Summing Up**, I have made an attempt to compare these three epics of Prof.Iyengar with the other great epics. These are the stories of heroines enshrined in immemorial Indian Legends. Looking beneath the surface, it becomes clear that these protagonists are more than women, and the struggle is not for a single life alone as in their respective cases. Redemption of the entire humanity is the issue.