

The central postulation of this paper is “Why does the state of postcolonialism not replicate in postcolonial Telugu poetry (TP hereafter) the way it has been replicated in other colonized nations?” This absence of postcolonialism as a theme in TP makes it stand apart from English poetry (EP hereafter) produced in once colonized nations, such as Africa. In fact, the kind of TP which was produced during the British colonial period is also quite different from the poetry written in other colonial nations. The major difference is that TP mostly focused on national problems, such as child marriage, widow remarriage, women’s education, illiteracy, caste system, superstitions, and more, along with problematizing the colonialism. The emphasis was more on social reform and internal cleansing than on colonial oppression or independence. Or, in other words, a substantial section of TP was composed on social problems and reforms than colonialism or, later, freedom from it. After independence, the theme of colonialism or the need to address the aftermaths of postcolonialism completely disappeared from TP. The problems that emerged with postcolonialism, such as poverty, illiteracy, among others, were not very regularly connected to colonial exploitation. More interestingly, TP in postcolonial times began to appear in the form of a clear outcome of the ideological currents of the modernity that colonialism inculcated in India. In other words, TP was and has been purely influenced by the kind of modernity that British colonialism sowed and nurtured in India. We can see the impact of modernity on different streams of poetry, such as classical, neo-classical, Marxist, socialist, feminist poetry and so on. In this course, therefore, we will discuss at least three major differences that makes TP unique and naïve when compared to the postcolonial poetry produced in African and Caribbean nations:

1. What was the nature of TP during the colonial period?
2. What was the nature of the nationalism that was exhibited in TP?
3. The subjective involvement of the African poets in their writings

The final and main emphasis will be on the differences between TP and EP produced in once-colonized nations.

### **Telugu poetry during colonial times:**

There were two kinds of anti-colonial TP. One stream of poetry resisted colonialism and was quite scarce and inferior to the other similar kinds of poetry, which emphasized on patriotism but not on anti-colonialism. For example, *“Maakoddu ee thella dorathanamu”* by Garimella Satyanarayana directly contested colonialism and even equated it with white racism. However, poets like Rayaprolu Subbarao focused more on praising the motherland in his famous songs, such as *“Maa telugu thalliki malle poo danda.”* In the following paragraph, I will explain why such differences existed and which factors were involved in it.

The first factor is the language. Although almost all Telugu poets wrote in their mother tongue, most of them preferred to write in Sanskritized Telugu than the colloquial, day-to-day one. By the 1940s, literary figures, such as Gudipati Venkatachalam or Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, had already introduced the importance and relevance of writing in colloquial Telugu than classical Telugu. They argued that the colloquial version had more benefits in terms of reaching the masses. However, most of those who wrote anti-colonial or patriotic poetry preferred to write in classical Telugu, which made them incomprehensible for a majority of Telugu people, even though these poets had imitated English poetry by adopting the literary styles of romanticism, imagery, ballads and even the core ideology of nationalism. The poets perhaps

got name and fame for it, but it surely did not reach majority of the masses including almost every Telugu women in those times as they were not allowed to learn Sanskrit or classical Telugu which has strong Sanskrit influence.

Gurajada Apparao wrote songs with more emphasis on patriotism than anti-colonialism, because his main aim was social reform or cleansing the society from social evils, such as child marriage, dowry, widow immolation, illiteracy, superstitions and so on. His poem *Desamunu preminchumanna* goes like this: “Love your country; strive for goodness; stop unnecessary blabber; aim for a greater welfare; nation means people not just mud (land).” His other well-received songs, such as “*Puthadibomma Purnamma*,” were on the evil practice of marrying girl children off with old men. His major literary contribution was towards social reform than anti-colonialism. Kandukuri Veeresalingam Panthulu, another great reformer, focused most of his life on erasing illiteracy, the devadasi system, child marriage, and so on.

Rayaprolu Subbarao wrote a poem *E Desamegina* which goes like this: “Whichever country you may go; wherever you may tread; praise your mother land, Bharati; maintain the pride of your nation.” In another poem “Amaravathi,” he glorifies the cultural heritage of Telugus by pointing out the remnants of the Indian legacy, such as educational institutions, generosity of kings, flourishing of trades, and so on. Another poem by Rayaprolu “*Srilu pongina jeeva gadda*” (This is the land where riches just overflow) praises the Vedic culture and heritage. Nanduri Subbarao and Krishna Sastry who lived during colonial times were romanticist poets who wrote mostly on themes of love, nature, and beauty. Viswanatha Satyanarayana wrote the poems “*Andhra Pourusham*” and “*Andhra Prasasthi*” where he glorified the valor and fame of Telugus (in the history). He also wrote a poem titled “*Jhansi Rani*,” which faintly broached the themes of anti-colonialism and patriotism. But most of his literary works were based on religion.

## Postcolonial Telugu poetry:

There was no significant improvement on the process of composing poetry even after independence. Most of the poems started with an angry note on how evil colonial exploitation was and how bravely the freedom fighters fought for the nation. Interestingly, almost all of TP single-heartedly focus on economic exploitation, not cultural, psychological, or social exploitation. Although the cultural revival was acknowledged, Telugu poets usually never saw colonialism as a powerful replacement of Telugu culture. This explains why Telugu poets were already imbibed with religious tolerance and secularism and were aware of the loopholes in Telugu culture. So instead of focusing on the cultural exploitation, they more often than not highlighted the pre-colonial glory of the land, which existed in the form of architecture, engineering, music, dance and also moral characteristics, such as fraternity, monogamy, female education, gender equality, eradication of class- or caste-based discrimination, etc. They had also acknowledged the contribution of Orientalists, such as Max Muller or Anne Besant, to Indian culture. The other feature is praising Congress leaders, such as Nehru, Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, etc. It is rather rare to come across the names of extreme nationalists, such as Bhagat Singh or Subhas Chandra Bose, except in the leftist literature produced by different schools of Marxism. The notions of *satyagraha* (righteous anger), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *santi* (peace), pacifism (non-violence), fraternity (brotherhood), unity across communities, equality, *abhyudayam* (progress), etc. were core themes of anti-colonial TP, whether it was produced during or after colonialism.

Sri Sri brought forth the Marxist concepts of historical materialism and class exploitation, among others, into TP. Most of the poems of Sri Sri

promised an utopian socialist world, which never materialized. Through his writings, it is certain that he was convinced of the Marxist formula that colonialism was a necessary phase of any feudal country in order to promote itself to a classless society. So, he believed that colonialism will pass away on its own, similar to birth pangs during child birth, an occurrence that is necessary to produce a better socialist world. Hence, he never took either colonialism or nationalism seriously in his writings. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was known for his humanist and rational poetry. He was also a romanticist, and his poetry compilation "*Amrutham Kurisina Raatri*" earned him the Sahitya Academy Award posthumously. He also did not make explicit critique of colonialism.

The other trend which needs acknowledgement is *digambara kavitvam* (naked poetry). Six men who called themselves as Cherabanda Raju, Jwalamukhi, Mahaswapna, Nagnamuni, Nikileshwar, Bharaviah produced this volume. Among the six poets that started this trend, only two, namely "Mahaswapna" and "Nagnamuni," had chosen to stick to this trend for a longer time. They used explicit carnal language and the female body to express their anger toward the society. They claimed that they did this in order to wake up the society and shock it so it could perform its duties better.

### **Cinema poets:**

Cinema songs must also qualify for poetry to a large extent. It is not easy to ignore cinema songs as they have more absolute visibility than print literature. Some of the vibrant nationalist and anti-colonial songs were produced according to the demand of the cinema narrative by cinema song-writers. This was part of the cinema they worked on and not to satisfy their patriotic obligations or tasks. First among all the poets was Srirangam Srinivasa Rao (Sri Sri), who is considered a pioneer of modern TP. He was a self-proclaimed Marxist leader who produced his poetry volumes or cinema songs more on class exploitation than

colonial plunder. The other poets who came after him wrote excellent songs for Telugu films, including anti-colonial or patriotic songs, according to the commercial demands of the particular film they were working on; thus, there was nothing personally patriotic or nationalistic about it. A chronological study of this area presents us with another startling aspect that the anti-colonial or patriotic songs were limited to the immediate decades of 1950s to 70s, which followed the independence gained in 1947. It is almost impossible to come across Telugu cinema songs with anti-colonial emphasis after 1970s. Songs like "*Janani Janma Bhumisha (1982)*," "*Vande Mathara Geetham varasa Maruthunnadi, (1985)*" or "*Pavithra Dhathri Bharathamba*" (2019) were produced according to the narrative of the specific films they were a part of. Usually, such songs are meant to highlight the hero than the theme of nationalism.

Sri Sri C. Narayana Reddy, Arudra, and Atreya are a few important yesteryear songwriters of Telugu cinema. Among all the songs, "*Maa telugu thalliki*," written by Sankarambadi Sundarachari for the movie *Deena Bandhu* in 1942, was adopted as a state song by Andhra Pradesh. Sri Sri wrote "*Padavoyi Bharatheeyuda*," in 1961 which is about celebrating independence from the British and the importance of focusing on the development and progress of the nation. His *Telugu veera levara* (O, Telugu soldier, wake up) written in 1974 is a significant song on anti-colonialism. "*Punya Bhumi Naa Desam*" by Jaladi Rajarao, "*Naa Janma Bhumi entha Andamaina desamu*" by Arudra or "*Silala pai silpalu chekkinaru*" by Atreya are good examples that Telugu films have always used themes of patriotism as literary material.

It may not be necessary to look for writers beyond this category, as anti-colonialism almost became irrelevant to Telugu cinema except when movies were made on historical figures, such as *Leade*, *Rani Rudrama Deci*, *Seyra*, among others. The movie *Leader* has a title song with excerpts from old classics such as *Maa Telugu Thalliki* and *Sirulu*

*Pongina Jeeva Gadda Idi*. However, such films are also made in order to project new heroes with a noble purpose. For instance, *Leader* can also be understood as an attempt to introduce Rana as a hero. He belongs to a family known as Movie Mughals, as they have been involved in the industry since his grandfather's time.

With this understanding about the history and ideological backdrop of TP, let us look at the postcolonial EP produced in other nations.

### **Postcolonial English poetry of other nations:**

Kenya's poet Joseph Kareyaku wrote:

"It is not as you suppose, your lands,  
your cars, your money, or your cities  
I covet...  
It is what gores me most,  
that in my own house and in my very own home  
you should eye me and all that's mine  
with that practiced, long-drawn, insulting sneer."

In a poem entitled "If you want to know me," Noemia De Sousa from Mozambique used the literary device of personification:

"This is what I am  
empty sockets despairing of possessing of life  
a mouth torn open in an anguished wound...  
a body tattooed with wounds seen and unseen  
from the harsh whipstrokes of slavery  
tortured and magnificent  
proud and mysterious  
Africa from head to foot  
This is what I am."

In the poem “The Shapes of Fear,” Richard Ntiru from Uganda wrote,

“Like an arrested breath  
when breathing makes silence imperfect  
and the ear cannot differentiate  
between the conspiratorial whispers and the winds singing.  
... a twig in the courtyard snaps  
and report of a gun is understood.”

Lenrie Peter from Gambia wrote:

“Open the gates  
To East and West  
Bring in all  
That’s good and best.”

Caribbean poet Derek Walcott wrote:

“I was seized by a pity more profound  
than my young body could bear, I climbed  
with the laboring smoke,  
I drowned in laboring breakers of bright cloud,  
then uncontrollably I began to weep,  
inwardly, without tears, with a serene extinction  
of all sense; I felt compelled to kneel,  
I wept for nothing and for everything”.

James Berry from Jamaica wrote in his poem “People Equal,”

“Some people shoot up tall.  
Some hardly leave the ground at all.  
Yet-people equal. Equal.



One voice is a sweet mango.  
Another is a nonsugar tomato.  
Yet-people equal. Equal.

Some people rush to the front.  
Others hang back, feeling they can't.  
Yet-people equal. Equal.”

Ishion Hutchinson from Jamaica, in his poem, “A March,” wrote,

“pay attention to the skirmish — the white  
panther that flitters up the pole —  
its shade grows large on the ground.”

Therefore, it is clear from this analysis that there are fundamental differences between Telugu and English postcolonial poetry. The difference may be traced back to the “response” that the colonized people from different nations had chosen. In other words, the Telugus may have exhibited more self-reflexivity and transparency in the colonial critique than the Africans or Caribbeans. Telugu writers must be more open to learning and benefitting from the modernity that accompanied colonialism than their African counterparts, who have chosen to linger in their pain from colonial times to the current times.