


JALAGANDAM AND OTHER NARRATIVES

CHAVALI KAMESWARA RAO





Jalagandam
and
Other Narratives

Chavali Kameswara Rao



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*Dedicated To
My Students,
Teachers
and
Family*

Preface

I had ambitions of literary writing right from my school days, originated, driven and developed by my involvement with the *Panchayathi* Board Library at my native place (detailed in one of the narratives here). However much I tried I could not put a few lines together. During my SSLC time, I was reading the humorous plays by *Shree Bhamidipaati Kaameswara Rao*, a very popular *Thelugu* writer. I read almost all his works in the library. One day I picked up one of his plays, copied it and modified to the best of my ability. I worked on this for some days more, adding bits and pieces, some from his other plays. After a few days I picked up some courage and took it to the class and read it to my classmates. Everyone was quite impressed and praised me. But there was one ‘idiot’ who said, ‘*This is not yours. Most of it is from the plays of Bhamidipaati Kaameswara Rao*’. The balloon was pricked and I was crestfallen. Then it was a case of ‘*once bitten, twice shy*.’

The next serious attempt at literary writing was when I was doing research in the University. This was triggered by the then suddenly popular so-called ‘revolutionary poetry’ put out by a bunch of nascent left wingers. The repulsiveness of the narrative in this poetry enraged me and led me into writing some 17 or 18 page poetic commentary, nearly in the left winger style. My roommate (also my name sake), KS Kameswara Rao, who was doing research in history, advised me to hold it for some time. Slowly, with pressures of work, it was out of my mind, and now it is somewhere in my old papers, almost totally irrelevant to the present times. About the same time I penned a long story, half autobiographical, but did not have the courage to send it out for publication, as some people about whom I was critical in it, were still alive and could easily be identified. This too slipped into the oblivion.

One morning in early September 2001, I saw in the newspaper an advertisement from ‘*Kathalok*’, a literary organization in Bangalore, calling for entries of short stories for an ‘All India’ competition. The last date was some two weeks away. Though I did

not have a line written, I wanted to try. In the time between my last attempt decades ago and this time, there were some stories mulling in my mind, on and off. I sat down and wrote '*Jalagandam*' for the competition. I stopped every other work and gave shape to the story a couple of days before the deadline. And there was another announcement from *Kathalok* extending the last date by some ten days. I used this time to fine tune *Jalagandam* and on impulse compiled another story, '*The Friend, I never spoke to...*' and sent both for the competition in time.

A couple of months passed, and out of the blue came a letter from *Kathalok* congratulating me on *Jalagandam* winning the 4th place in the competition and on the other story selected for an 'A' certificate. The letter invited me to participate in the award function (date, time and place indicated) to receive the certificates. The 4th place carried a cheque for Rs, 500 as an award and both were given certificates. This was a thrilling experience for a first attempt in which two of my first stories were selected and the Chairman of *Kathalok* emphasized this point and there were more congratulations. I was happier when the winner of the second prize told me, that his was an eighth try in story competitions.

In the following months I participated in some 'story reading' meetings of *Kathalok* and read from these two first stories. I also read parts of two or three other incomplete stories at these meetings. I received some more encouragement from the members.

I was immensely motivated by these events, which raised my confidence in literary writing.

In a significant effort in fiction writing, I (self) published a 60-page booklet, '*Glimpses into Bharatheeya Samskruthi*', in July 2022. This contains an introduction to Indian cultural heritage, the *Samskrutha* language and explanation to over 50 *shlokas* from various religious texts. This booklet which took a year in writing, is a small contribution to provide the kids (or their parents or grandparents) with glimpses of our cultural heritage.

During the past couple of decades or so, I frequently thought of story ideas and repeatedly thought them over and over, and that is how the material in this narrative was easier to transfer later into writing from the memory. My long and good memory has helped immensely. By relating to the rented houses we lived in before our own house was built, the death of an infant sister who was borne about two years after me but died when she was five months or so, the birth of two other sisters subsequently, and some other significant events, all were reference points to recall events repeatedly.

I slowly sketched several story ideas and developed them over time. A number of issues date back to some 70 years of time from now, in my life. As I had been thinking of them quite often, the memory of them was fresh in my mind. I had a lot of professional work pressure at that time and so could not complete any of them. Even when they were almost complete I did not know where to send, as *Kathalok* closed down. In about two decades of time, I had been continuously looking at the stories, refined them and wrote new ones.

Initially I wanted to name this collection of narratives as ‘*Ammamma and Other Stories*’, but later decided on the title now used, as all are not stories. I thought that I had adequately acknowledged *Ammamma*’s (maternal grandmother) contribution to my well being by making ‘*Jalagandam*’, developed on the basis of the basic idea she gave me, as the principal story of this collection. On mulling further over this issue, I was dissatisfied with the earlier decision and so decided to give her, her own space and wrote the narrative ‘*Ammamma*’.

I had sent *Jalagandam* to over a dozen friends and it was received well, prompting me to continue the effort of short story writing. Some other stories were sent to a few friends using them as a sounding board. Those who particularly spent time to read are, Dr M Sanjappa, Dr AK Shyam, Dr CK Majunath , Dr S. Shantharam, Ms Chandrika, Mr Shrikanth and Ms Prakruthi Rao. Dr Mamatha Rao proof read some narratives and made significant suggestions. Shree Jai Ganesh drew my attention to the different postures of *Shiva*

Nataraja. I am grateful to them for their kindness in sparing the time. Dr. Manjunath, with a long experience as a cardiologist and physiatrist in the US, provided interesting diagnostic observations on two stories. These points, appended to the respective stories, give a new dimension to story writing.

There are 30 narratives in this collection. This is wholly a work of fiction but inspired by and rooted in events, experienced or heard first hand. The objective of shaping this compilation is not just to satisfy my ambitions of literary writing, but to convey the message carried by the narratives, reflecting the conditions under which people lived in and their ambitions and struggles. I have narrated experiences of a large number of people. Some narratives are a synthesis of combined experiences of several people, spanning over seven decades, both in semirural India and abroad, another objective is to provide an opportunity to benefit by the experiences narrated. Experience enhances tolerance. The saying that only those who experienced something will understand it is not wholly true. We need not and cannot experience everything. Rational thinking facilitates benefitting from the experiences of others and this is a wiser approach. That is the other purpose of these narratives.

The narratives here generally come under the following categories:

- A number of people believe in astrology and some live by it. Many are often distressed when the predicted good things did not happen. They are flustered when bad things happen unexpectedly. In recent months at least six astrologers predicted on the TV, great times in every aspect of the lives of people of the '*Kumbha raasi*'. I do not know if this came to be true to anyone, but I know of at least two people who are in a worse state than ever. People often say that only bad predictions would turn out to be true. They may be partly right. Of all predictions, good and bad, in the horoscope of my very close cousin, the prediction that '*this person has only very little domestic happiness*' missed the reality by a margin, as his domestic happiness was not just 'very little', but almost absent. An astrologer / palmist in Rajaaji Nagar (Bangalore), looked at the

face and the palms of my friend, and said ‘*your marriage is only for public consumption, and you don’t derive any happiness from it, right?*’ My friend was flabbergasted at that very accurate reading. Then he was told that he had two years more of difficult period ahead and that after that phase his professional life will get into much better times and he would attain very impressive name and fame. This would continue for over a decade. But he cannot expect any domestic improvement. All this prediction proved to be entirely true.

Astrology should be seen only as a guide to choosing an appropriate path in the future. It is meant to prepare us mentally to avoid nasty surprises and shocks. An astrologer may have made an inadvertent error in his calculations, resulting in incorrect predictions. Even if he were correct in his assessment, he would not and cannot tell us anything and everything he reads in our horoscopes. The message from the stories based on horoscopes here is not to tell that astrological predictions would all be correct or incorrect, but that they should be understood in a rational manner. We should not blindly believe in them and build sand castles basing on them or go into dumps of depression. The lives of many of the elders in our family circle were guided by the horoscopes. I have a different experience with my own horoscope, written soon after I was born, by a very reputed astrologer. On the basis of this exposure to astrology, I was compelled to write the horoscope centric stories, *Jalagandam*, *Maarakam*, *Matching horoscopes* and *Death by starvation*, highlighting my observations.

- There are several narratives here that are about people and their struggles. ‘*A pleasant evening*,’ ‘*The embarrassed father*,’ ‘*Helping and loaning are not the same*,’ ‘*I stole once; but did I really steal?*,’ ‘*My brush with Sod’s Law*,’ ‘*Noble, but unknown*,’ ‘*Oh! Bhagavvan, what have you decreed?*,’ ‘*Procrastination is often unwise*,’ ‘*Sometimes teachers go overboard*,’ ‘*Teaching concepts: the ancient and modern ways*,’ ‘*The Friend, I never spoke to..*,’ ‘*We fall in love, but will get well again*,’ and ‘*My experiments with drugs*,’ are under this theme.

- No one can achieve anything all alone. There is always a horde of people who did a kind deed to push us forward from time to time. We should be grateful to all those people who have supported us over decades. And it is a pleasure to remember the help we received and be grateful for it. Telling others of the good we received from different people is one of my ways of being grateful. The narratives, ‘*Ammamma*’, ‘*My mentor of English language and outlook*’, ‘*The practical demonstrator*’ and ‘*My apprenticing*’, are in this in this genere. I am fully conscious that I have not acknowledged each and every one, which is rather difficult.
- *Bharath* has a very rich *samskruthi*. Many traditional practices have been disappearing and we have a responsibility to the posterity to revive and promote the still relevant and beneficial practices. The narrative ‘*Tharavaani annam*’ is an example of this.
- There is a large number of agricultural varieties, manufactured products and food items that originated in small geographically and/or linguistically defined population groups. These items are their intellectual property. The ‘Geographical Indication tag’ of the Government of India recognizes the rights of communities to the origin and names of a number of diverse products. A small illustrative sample of dishes from the *Thelugu* cuisine is provided here in ‘*A glimpse into Thelugu cuisine*’, to drive the point of the need for GI tags for more products.
- Some narratives do not properly fall into any of the above categories. Such of those as, ‘*The creepy power of celebrities*’, ‘*Maharishi Vaalmeeeki’s ingenious poetic vision*’, ‘*My most ardent travel abroad*’, and ‘*The Humble VIP*’, are in this miscellaneous group.
- There are issues that make us ponder over them for decades and which weigh us down. They are exactly not personal, but concerned with outlook. Many have implications in tradition, history and politics. The long narrative on ‘*Left and Right: which is*

right?’, deals with one such issue, with extensive ramifications into our lives.

- After reading through some hard stuff, I want you to smile a little going through the ‘*Tidbits*’ (don’t read them all in one go) and exit these narratives enjoying the piece, ‘*Exit chuckling*’.

More out of compulsion of a life time habit, I wrote these narratives the way I wrote a scientific paper, checking and rechecking for factual correctness, clarity of expression and language, repeated spell checks, citing sources and other issues. In spite of my efforts, I am sure that there would be a few lapses that escaped my attention, for which I sincerely apologize.

Dr. S Shantharam, who read some stories, particularly ‘*Teaching Concepts: Ancient and Modern Ways*’ and ‘*Tharavaani Annam*’, observed that our ancestors have projected scientifically valid hypotheses by observation and experience, though not subjected to rigorous experimentation and verification, like in modern science. This is what we should be conscious of, while evaluating ancient scientific achievements.

At the time of publishing the booklet on *Bhaaratheeya Samskruthi*, I had a dilemma on whether to go for a publisher or get it printed and distribute it free of cost. I have had about six decades of extensive experience in scientific writing but science and fiction are worlds apart. From my experience in publishing books, research articles and blogs in a very large number, I have noticed that over the decades the reading habits have severely declined. Now people would read only if they essentially require an article or a book for their immediate professional use, more readily so if it is on the internet. The habit of reading fiction or religious or cultural material has come to a trickle. Under the circumstances the possibilities of someone buying and reading what is non-essential are extremely remote. In the interests of popularizing the contents of this booklet, and to draw people away from the computer even for a short time, I have opted to bear the costs of bringing out the hard copies and

distributing them free of costs. A digital file of the booklet also is made available to those people to whom it is difficult or expensive to send the hard copy.

I had the same dilemma with this collection of narratives, and I have also realized that self-publication has its own problems. Spending on printing is a small issue but the costs and efforts of sending hard copies to people are a burden. An individual author has very limited means of bringing a publication to the notice of potential readers. If I go for a publisher there would probably an Editor fellow over my head, who would want to change things as per his perception. I wanted that my ideas and thoughts, in my language and style of expression, should reach the reader.

In view of some services offered, such as ISBN number, formatting print and ebook versions, publicity, selling, no Editor and absence of some other issues associated with publication that can cause headaches, I finally opted to get this collection of narratives published by Iterative International Publishers. I immensely thank them, particularly Shree Manoj, Shree Sunil Kumar, for all their support to my efforts.

Chavali Kameswara Rao

June 02, 2024

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chavali Kameswara Rao was born in a devout and traditional family and was brought up in Amalapuram, a very small town in Andhra Pradesh. He had long experience of the Hindu religion and its practices. His awareness of the Hindu epics and ancient literature was inculcated by the elders in the family, teachers and regular attendance at the temple performances such as Hari Katha, Burra Katha, Plays on epic themes, Bharathanatyam and classical music, by very knowledgeable, committed and efficient artists. He studied Samskrutham for a couple of years at school and kept in touch with the language in his later years. He attended two 'Geetha Gnana Yagnas' conducted by Swami Chinmayananda and read a considerable amount of literature on the major religions in India. In July 2022, he published a booklet 'Glimpses into Bhaaratheeya Samskruthi' in English (distributed free of cost), introducing Samskrutham as an ancient Indian language, Hindu culture and explaining 50 shlokas from various Hindu religious texts. The present compilation reflects his very broad and long life experience in India and abroad. He aims to coordinate the traditional practices with the modern outlook.



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