



Library

Sahitya Akademi

27 March 2006

meet the author

Abburi Chayadevi





Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award 2005 by the President of Sahitya Akademi, Dr. Gopi Chand Narang

"My growth as a woman writer gets reflected in the growth in my understanding of the women's issues taken up for my writings. I myself have grown up from a submissive but protesting girl to an understanding and self-assured woman."

- Abburi Chayadevi.

Abburi Chayadevi was born on 13th October 1933 in Rajahmundry, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, to Sri Maddali Venkatachalam (pseudonym Nachiketudu) and Smt. Maddali Venkataramamma. She graduated from the Government Arts College, Rajahmundry (1951) and did her Masters in political science from the Nizam College, Osmania University (1953). "My family never encouraged me to do the things I was interested in ... though my father had no intention of bringing me up as a writer, he indirectly provoked me to become a writer. The male domination at home and outside induced me to grow up as a woman writer ..." says Chayadevi.

She took initiative to develop her talents and with her writer friends, Ramadevi and Turaga Janaki Rani, presented several plays and talks on the radio. Once she wrote a playlet in Telugu based on the play *The Barrets of Wimpole Street* which appealed to her greatly because of the similarity she found in the temperament and behaviour of the father of Elizabeth Barratt Browning and that of hers. When her

father read the abridged Telugu adaptation, he wrote a touching letter saying that he had nothing but love for his children and that they should never be afraid of him. It was then that she realized the purposefulness and value of creative literature.

Her journey as a fiction writer began with her first story "Anubandham" (The Bondage) which was published in 1952 and has now crossed over a period of fifty years. In her stories, she depicts the mundane life experiences, problems, conflicts, critical moments of women with a keen eye. Her stories look at life from a genuinely feminine perspective.

In one of the radio talks she expressed her views on "how to choose a husband" and the same led to her marriage with Sri Abburi Varada Rajeswara Rau, poet, journalist and the son of the famous Telugu poet Sri Abburi Ramakrishna Rau. "Entering the family of well-known litterateurs was advantageous to me in the budding stage as a writer...I entered the intellectual company of Sri Sri, Arudra, Elchuri, Kundurti, Ajanta and others..." who were her husband's intimate friends, she reminisces.

She jointly edited *Kavita*, a quarterly, with her husband and it was devoted to the free verse. She tried her hand in writing poetry too. One of her poems "Vinnaava" was published in *Andhra Jyoti*, which was later included in the anthology of feminist poetry *Neelimeghalu*.

In her story 'Vimarsakulu' (Critics) published in 1955, Chayadevi brings out the inevitable predicament of the unmarried college girls, their views on the institution of marriage and the compromises they are forced to undergo in their lives.

After a short stint as the editor of *Vanita*, a women's monthly in 1956, which put her closer to the issues concerning women, she did a diploma course in Library Science and started working as a Librarian at New Delhi. She started her career in 1959 at the United Service Institution of India Library. In 1972, she worked as the Deputy Librarian at the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library and voluntarily left the job in 1982. And in the same year she left Delhi and settled in Hyderabad where she again devoted herself to writing. She undefatigably contributed stories and articles to various newspapers & magazines.

In 'Prayanam' (The Journey), a long story published in 1965, Chayadevi quite boldly presents her views on rape; she firmly believes that it was not to be taken as a life and death problem and either renunciation of normal life or suicide should never be taken as a solution to this problem. It should be given no more significance than an accident, she emphasises. Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar have rightly pointed out while writing about her story "Bonsai Bratuku" (1974), "Abburi Chayadevi questions our notions of art, and of a woman as a decorative piece, through her employment of the metaphor of bonsai for the life of a woman. She wants us to perceive the stunted



Prime Minister Nehru glancing through the anthology "Modern Telugu Poetry" on his Birth Day 14-11-1958

growth of the woman in a cramped space".

Her story "Gaddu nela" (The Difficult Month), published in 1975 was the verbal consequence of the turmoil in her mind when she yearned for an offspring. She says, "My expectations rose and fell periodically. The deep disappointment I felt during a particular month remained in my memory. More than two decades later, I wrote the story "Gaddu Nela". When I mentioned the theme to my husband, he uttered the word "chi!" considering it ridiculous. Of the same story, my niece expressed shock on reading a particular sentence referring to blood, considering it as too outspoken. I did not change it... However, it was clear that a woman writer was not supposed to cross the proverbial line of control not only in behaviour, but



Receiving Smt. Susila Narayana Reddy Sahiti Award in 1996 through Rasamayi

also in expression, and even in thought".

She recalls a similar situation and says, "...while translating the story 'Srimati Udyogini', 1975, the translator, Sri Srinivas Rayaprol omitted a particular sentence perhaps, considering it as anti-traditional. The interviewer at the end of the interview, asks the housewife if she would marry the same man given another chance. She replies emphatically, saying "Yes", but says to herself, "It's supposed to be the duty of the Indian woman to say so!" I found the omission of this sentence after the book came out".

Her short autobiographical novel *Mrityunjaya*, based on her correspondence with her father over a period of time, fetched her an award - Rachayitri Uttama Rachana Puraskaram from Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University in 1996.

She edited an anthology of Telugu women's writings of the 20th century for Sahitya Akademi (2002). She has been a columnist in magazines and newspapers like *Udayam* (weekly), *Bhumika*, *Andhra Prabha*, *Navya* and also in some websites like *Info.com*.

Though her forte is fiction, she has also written critical essays and travelogues. Her highly estimable potentiality for these genres has been acclaimed by Chekuri Ramarao, well-known Telugu critic and Sahitya Akademi Award winner. He says, "Abhuri Chayadevi is a talented Telugu prose writer. Her prose is delicate, yet elegant. An elegance devoid of taunts, jeers and ridicules is seen all through her works... in her collection of critical essays 'Vyaasa chitraalu' one can see her

ability to discuss unique aspects on a work or on its author as has been never done before by any other critic, this highlights her talent. ...One of her essays, "Parislo naa paryataanubhavaalu", is just not mere narration about Paris, but the prose is employed to give a humorous narration of the experiences of a person who suddenly steps into that culture. In other words, she creates an alternate female character to that of Barister Parvateesam in the context of Telugu literature. Adopting the first person narrative technique, the author turns into the character and caricatures herself.."

Her story "Tana Margam" has been selected by Doordarshan, for telecast. And the collection of stories entitled *Tana Margam* fetched her Sahitya Akademi Award 2005. Most of the stories in this collection are effectively and positively deal with the various problems faced by middle class women. Simply and starkly told, these stories reach deep into the reader's hearts. This book is certainly a valuable addition to Indian short fiction in Telugu.

She has written a book *Bommalu Cheyadam* (a guide for doll-making). She met leading feminist writers Smt Volga, Smt Vasanta Kannabhiran and got associated with their Women's Resource Centre, Asmita. Her story 'Srimathi-Udyogini' caught the attention of Anveshi, Centre for Women's studies, Hyderabad and they included it in the second volume of the Women Writing in India published in 1993. She is a member on the Editorial Board of *Bhoomika*, a feminist magazine.



Being honoured by the Karnataka Women Writers' Association on the occasion of the 5th Karnataka State Women Writers Conference held in July 2003 at Bangalore

A Select Bibliography

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

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Tana Margam, Likhita press, Hyderabad 2002

NOVEL

- Mritunjaya (short autobiographical novel), Udayam Pub., Hyderabad 1993

ESSAYS

- Vyasa Chitraalu, Visalagranthasala, Hyderabad 1996

TRAVELOGUES

- Chinalo Chaya Chitraalu, Visalagranthasala, Hyderabad 2002

TRANSLATIONS/ ADAPTATIONS

- Anaga Anaga (selected world folk stories for children), 1955
Sadhana Prakashanam, Hyderabad
Aparachita Lekha, Itara kathalu (selected stories of
Stefan Zweig,) Sadhana Prakashana, Hyderabad 1956
Reprint by Visalagranthasala, Hyderabad 1998
Mana Jeevitaalu - Jiddu Krishnamurthi Vyakhyanaalu, 1998, 2000
Krishnamurti Foundation of India, Chennai

EDITED

- Kavita 1,2 (the free verse journal in Telugu),
Kavita Pubs, Hyderabad 1954
Vanita (monthly), Andhra Yuvati Mandali, Hyderabad 1956
Modern Telugu Poetry (Anthology of Translations),
Kavita Pubs. Hyderabad 1956
Varadasmriti (memorial volume on Abburi Varada
Rajeswara Rau) , Abburi Trust, Hyderabad 1994
Iravayyava Shatabdamlo Telugu RachayitruLa Rachanalu,
Sahitya Akademi 2002
Co-edited Telugu Katha Kosam,
Telugu Akademi, Hyderabad 2005

COLUMNS:

- Udayini , Udayam weekly 1989-1990
Aalokanam , Bhumika 1996
Andhra Prabha Daily, occasionally 1999-2000
Maata Saayam , Navya weekly 2004-2005



'Rachayitri Uttama Rachana Puraskaram' for 1995 being awarded by the Education Minister Sri Basheeruddin and the VC, Telugu University, Dr. Nayani Krishna Kumari in 1996

AWARDS

Vasireddy Ranganayakamma Sahiti Puraskaram, Telugu University	1993
Smt Susila Narayana Reddy Sahiti Award	1996
Rachayitri Uttama Rachana Puraskaram for Mrityunjaya novel. P.S. Telugu University	1996
Abhinandana-Durgabhai Deshmukh Award	1997
Kalasagar - Pandiri Sahiti Puraskaram	2000
Sahiti Puraskaram from Pulikanti Sahiti Satkriti	2004
Sahitya Akademi Award 2005 for Tanamargam (story collection)	2006

CHRONOLOGY

1933	Born on 13th October in Rajahmundry
1951	Bachelor of Arts
1952	First story published in college magazine
1953	Master of Arts in Political Science Married to Abburi Varada Rajeswara Rau
1954	Edited Kavita, the free verse journal
1956	Edited Vanita, a monthly
1959	Shifted to New Delhi
1982	Returned from New Delhi and settled in Hyderabad
May 1993	Sad demise of Sri Abburi Varada Rajeswara Rau Instituted Abburi Trust in memory of the late husband and father-in-law
1995	Member of the Sakhya Sahiti
1996 -	Member, Jiddu Krishnamurti Centre, Hyderabad
1998-2002	Member of the General Council, Sahitya Akademi
2002	Visit to China along with nine other writers under the Indo-China cultural exchange programme