



COMMENTARY ON BULUSU VENKATA SUBBARAO'S *THE VOICE OF DHURJATI*

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ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt to understand the anguish of Dhurjati in his desire to reach the abode of God as depicted in The Voice of Dhurjati (1977) a translated version of Sri Kalahastiswara Satakam. In his Satakam, Dhurjati showed a complete abandonment to the worldly pleasures, which he enjoyed under the patronage of the great Vijayanagar emperor, Sri Krishnadevaraya. The Voice of Dhurjati by Bulusu Venkata Subbarao (1938-1990) is a commendable attempt by the translator to bring out the beauty of Satakam in a simple and expressive metrical English version to Telugu and other readers. One can see the complete devotion of the translator to Lord Siva besides his admiration to Dhurjati. Some other published works of Sri Bulusu Venkata Subbarao include On The Seventh Hill, The Song of Belgaum, Muktheadhara, Khatwanga besides a collection of unpublished poems. He won many national awards and an honorary doctorate for his contribution to literature. It is to be noted that all the verses quoted in the paper are the translated verses of Dr Bulusu Venkata Subbarao in The Voice of Dhurjati.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well known fact that Dhurjati was one of the gems among the eight great poets in the court of Sri Krishnadevaraya Raya, the great emperor of Vijayanagaram (1509-29AD) who were known as *Ashtadiggajamulu*. He hailed from Srikalahasti, a place in the present day Chittoor district. He wrote two important works, viz., *Srikalahasti Mahatyamu*, a *Bhaktiprabandham* and *Sreekalahasteswara Satakam*, a *Saiva Satakam* besides many other literary works. These two are perhaps the best within their genres. In a famous praise of Dhurjati, emperor Krishna Devaraya wondered "*Stutamatiyaina adhra kavi dhurjati palkula kela galgeno atulita madhuree mahima?*" (How did the praiseworthy Andhra poet Dhurjati get incomparable sweetness to his words?) True to the praise, Dhurjati is unique in bringing

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out incomparable (*atulita*) sweetness (*madhuryam*) in both his poetic works. In this context it is to be mentioned that a Satakam is a composition of a hundred or more often a hundred and sixteen verses addressed to the author himself or to the God. A Satakam may be philosophical, ethical, religious, political, amorous in its main theme. Dhurjati addressed his Satakam's to Lord Siva, who came to be known as *Srikalahastiswara*. In the words of Bulusu Venkata Subbarao, "Sri means spider, Kala means serpent and Hasti means elephant. *Srikalahastiswara* is thus the lord of the spider, the serpent and the elephant". The Shiva's image (in the shape of *linga*) was worshipped by a spider, a cobra and an elephant in a place called Kalahasti. *Srikalahastiswara Satakam* is a book of about one hundred and eight poems (some critical editions were reportedly 129 poems long) each with a closing refrain "*Sreekalahasteeswara!*" and are addressed to the presiding deity Lord Siva of the holy town of Srikalahasti. All the poems are written in classical meters of *Sardulam* or *Mattebham*.

Discussing the sweetness of *Sri Kalahastiswara Sataka* K.R Srinivas Iyengar wrote in his foreword to *The Voice of Dhurjati*, "*Sri Kalahastiswara Sataka* is among the most inspired, most mellifluous and most popular of the Telugu Satakas...By tradition, the Lord of *Kalahasti*, *Siva*, had been worshipped in long past times by a spider, a cobra and an elephant. Through their very devotion to Lord, there erupted rivalry and misunderstanding between them, and this resulted in the death of all three wrought mutually. But since there was no question regarding their unflinching devotion to Siva, they duly attained salvation and were united with Lord." To paraphrase Iyengar's words, in the Satakas, one can find that Dhurjati had highlighted the fact that Lord God is Lord as much in insect, reptile, animal and an illiterate hunter. Unnecessary jealousy and recrimination are utterly meaningless and may lead to destruction of his devotees. Since the Lord could be worshipped in any form, He accepts the offering whatever is given to Him if done in all devotion and sincerity.

Dhurjati enjoyed the patronage of Krishnadevaraya, and had his fill of sensual and worldly pleasures. Realising that he was bonded by worldly lust, he seeks the feet of Shiva to free himself from the bondage of love, lust for power and women. Sri Iyengar believes that the *Satakas* also clearly bring out the poet's perception that surrender of one's soul and real love and devotion to God are enough to get the Grace of God rather than concentrating on learning Vedas, *Mantras* and *Tantras*. It is utter self – surrender and complete devotion that can bring salvation to a devotee.

This message which Dhurjati writes is beautifully translated By Bulusu V Subbarao in his *The Voice of Dhurjati*. Commenting on it Srinivas Iyengar opined, "... Shri Bulusu Venkata Subbarao's present attempt is a rhymed metrical version-each stanza of the original being turned into a quatrain of 14 syllables with valuable notes elucidating the several allusions in the poem..." The translator followed the example of original writer using *Sardulam* and



Mattebham (classical meters) and included fourteen syllables in each line of the translated version also.

To quote the first stanza-

*As/ the/ great /lighte/ning cloud/ of /lust/ and/ pa/ssion/ burst /down/ in
To/rren/ti/al/ sin/ I /lost/ the/ ba/lance /of /my /lotus/-mind
Lord!/ Let/ for/ a/ while /your /kind/ly au/tum/nal/ time/ set/ in
That/ in/ peace/ I /may/ serve/ You,/ leav/ing/ all /my /cares/ be/hind
Oh! Lord of Srikalahasti! (1)*

The stanzas reflect Dhurjati's views on many secular, political and philosophical issues of his day. Dhurjati not only brought out the sweetness of Telugu language, but also breathed fire through the poems. They contain a scathing criticism of the society, the ruling class, his own preoccupation with the opposite sex, his many other weaknesses, the ways of his fellow men, and some times, the ways of the divine itself. In all these poems, lurking just below the surface and superbly conveyed, is a deep yearning to be at peace with himself and a longing for the realization of divine presence. The poems also reveal a probing, questioning, lamenting and wondering mind trying to make sense of itself and the society around it (Subbarao.1977).

To quote a verse-

*What a great relief You derive as these ignorant men
Leave you and serve their wives, children, kinsmen and friends always
Knowing not that they cannot fulfill their desires; but then
Dear Lord! For whom do You preserve all this wealth of Your grace... (55)*

He wonders why the mortal souls crave for worldly pleasures rather than seeking the abode of the God. While commenting on the system of his times, he assures in his verse,

*I remain at your feet as Your loyal servant. As the
Mean wicked kings troubled me, I serve You and You alone (56)*

It was a well known fact that Dhurjati had his share of worldly pleasures, which touches upon in the following stanza-

*At the gateways of Cupid joys I had had enough, at
The great: ways of kings joys I had had to my heart's*



*Contempt to my heart's content grant me now the great joys at
The gateways of Your grand Kingdom where joy never departs (62)*

It continues to be a mystery what drove Dhurjati to the feet of Lord Shiva leaving the patronage of the royal court. It was said by some that after the end of the rule of Krishna Devaraya, Dhurjati did not receive the same patronage in the court. But this opinion was also contradicted as his grandson praises the Vijayanagar rulers in his literary works. "However, it must also be contrasted with the fact that Dhurjati's grandson Venkataraya (alias Kumara Dhurjati) wrote *Krishnadevaraya Vijayam*. In addition to being a beautiful *Kavyam*, this book gives valuable historical information about the reign of emperor Krishnadevaraya. If Dhurjati were in serious trouble with the authority, it would not have been possible for his grandson to compose a book on the life of his grandfather's patron."(On line).

The foot notes given by Rao clearly explain the readers the references Dhurjati makes in his Satakam. For example the following verse has several references to the other devotees of Lord Shiva.

*How can I pray You without knowing your identity?
Goat's dung? Lady's breast? Knee measure? What is your shape truly?... (15)*

Bulusu Venkata Subbarao provides crispy notes in a simple and lucid language to the forms of Lord Dhurjati wrote about. Goats dung, lady's breast, knee, measure all these represent the symbol of God in various forms. A shepherd boy prays to the excreta of a goat visualising it as His symbol. A man visiting a woman prays to Shiva by visualizing Shiva's symbol in her breast. This form of Shiva is worshipped in Aachanteswara in Aachanta in Andhra Pradesh. Two more devotees attained salvation by praying to Siva in the Knee and a vessel used to measure grains.

Similarly Dhurjati refers to other devotees of Lord in the following verse:

*I did not order You to be my door keeper, never
Insulted You with impure meal, nor did I throw You
Out of my place blinded by sex-mania: My prayer
You left unheard, tell me why: It's not your custom I knew... (16)*

Here the notes by Bulusu Venkata Subbarao mentions the devotee of Lord Shiva- Bana, who having won the intimacy of Lord Shiva asked Him to be his palace guard, which He willingly obliged. Another devotee Thinna, an illiterate tribal, offers half eaten food to the Lord out of innocence. The Lord even bears the insult caused to him by His devotee, who ordered Him to



leave out of his sight. The Lord puts up with a devotee who stoned Him thinking that he was doing Him good. But Dhurjati did not stop there. He reminds Him the severe tests He had given to his devotees by asking Chirutonda Nambi to cook the flesh of his son and serve Him. Thinna was tested by the Lord to which the devotee removes his eye to replace the Lords' bleeding eyes. To quote the verse-

*These, my hands, lack the nerve to stone You, it is beyond me
To sacrifice my son with joy, I shudder to pluck my
Eyes for you, what I deserve! Whatever you grant me
I take it as the greatest boon with all my spirits high... (17)*

The political views of Dhurjati also can be seen where he mentions that nothing can match the grace of God –

*Majestic elephants, gleaming chariots, most stunning
Palanquins, prize horses, scents, rare dresses priceless gems all
Can they give salvation? Ignorant people go running
After them and at the royal gates they waste their days all... (31)*

Such a scathing attack on the royal patronage, which many poets desired in those days, may make one to think that Dhurjati has some underlying message to the royal court. But he was quick enough to admit that he too was one of those who sought those pleasures but realises that he may be pardoned by Him as He pardoned many a devotee of His for their acts done in innocence...

*Oh! How many years I spent here and what I achieved; to
Whom with what aim I still live; Truth will I ever see;
In the next days still left what I can I do except to serve You
Belittle me not Lord! Come, save me, I am at Your mercy... (33)*

But the devotion of Dhurjati as he wants to be one with Him and he mentions that he took His name – Dhurjati, one of the names of Shiva in verse, may be hoping to be one with him in name at least!

*All according to the rites; I took Your name and the pure water
That washed Your feet, shard Your plate, Your food and betal leaves too
And myself adopted as Your dear child, hereafter
Never leave me, Father, I left them all to be with You... (26)*



Such ardent devotion to God has a message to present day times where a lot of discrimination is shown in our times between people of different castes and religions. Dhurjati's Satakas have a message to us that is the God is for all those who believe in Him. He suffers when his devotees are put to suffering. So to please God one should see God in all. We can also see the freedom of expression people in the times of Krishnadevaraya enjoyed, because Dhurjati is frank in criticizing kings and their ways (verse 113). However, one must realize that the Sataka leaves the message that Lord Siva, who is the True Lord, is what one must seek rather than leaving the principles, character and the culture in blind chase for wealth and power. This message of his is still relevant today. May be the translator Bulusu Venkata Subbarao also wanted to convey the same message. A critic opines that, "Out of the troubled soul of Dhurjati, there emerged a superb addition to world literature. It continues to touch a nerve, educate and entertain lovers of poetry. The poems are full of richly elevated thought, poetic beauty and embellishment, as well as sensitivity for the suffering of human soul that is often lacking in many ancient writers"(on line).

The poet, Dhurjati himself comments on his poetry in verse 113-

*Your majesty! A great poet awaits Your pleasure. He writes
Poetry with ease; grand in style and theme. His art is pure,
His genius is rare and on cheap sex he never writes."*
"Go we saw him already", so the mean kings respond, sure(113)

The personality of the great poet, Dhurjati could be easily guessed from the translation *The Voice of Dhurjati*. Sri Bulusu Venkata Subbarao in his introduction mentions thus: "In my translation in my humble way I tried to place before the reader the great poetic personality of Dhurjati. And it is no easy task. I consider my ambition fulfilled if the reader could guess the greatness of the author's personality after perusing the translation." Here it is apt to mention that the reader easily understands Dhurjati and his personality through the exemplary work of Bulusu Venkata Subbarao. Though the translator says that it was an amateur's work, one has to accept the statement of Sri Srinivas Iyengar, "I think Subbarao faced a difficult task with patience and proficiency, and I hope his commendable work will reach a wide audience." The work is easy to understand and makes it interesting to readers of various ages. The underlying message that God is Omnipresent and is seen in all creatures; He can be sought through utter devotion should be understood by the modern reader. Those Telugu speaking people, unable to read the Telugu version, can definitely understand the poetic beauty of Dhurjati and his personality by reading the translated version of the Satakam, *The Voice of Dhurjati*.



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