

***Telugu Short Story from Telangana: A Critical Evaluation of Pre-Independence Writers* by P. V. Laxmiprasad, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2022, ISBN: 978-93-5529-178-3, Pp. 82, Price 295/-.**

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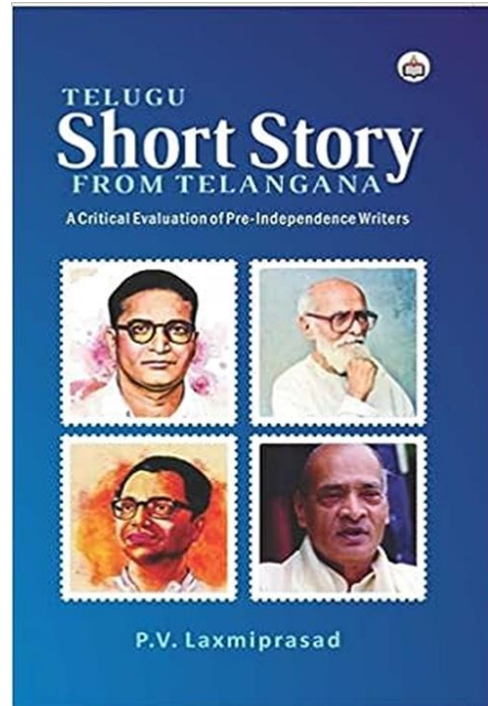
Telugu Short Story from Telangana: A Critical Evaluation of Pre-Independence Writers brings together old greats and assesses the works of finest Telugu Pre-Independence short story writers. The author being a Telugu speaker is elated to see the translated works of the selected four writers – Vattikota Alvaru Swamy, Kaloji Narayana Rao, P. V. Narasimha Rao and Darsarathi Krishnamacharya who made a big impact on Telugu literature with their literary contributions.

The book is divided into four chapters, distributing the pages fairly to discuss the works of one writer in the chapters each. It is followed by conclusion, works cited,

words about the translators, about the critic and saving a few pages for the biography of the writers chosen.

Chapter one entitled “Vattikota Alvaru Swamy’s Inside the Prison” presents the critical examination of six stories – “Parige”, “Food for Thought”, “A Fallen Man’s Heart”, “If Given a Chance”, “Having No Other Options” and “You are No Less than Us”.

Chapter two titled “Short Stories of Kaloji Narayana Rao” discusses eleven stories translated by Elanaaga – “Compassion”, “In fact, we are Better”, “Vibbhoothi or Face Powder”, “Resurrection of Lanka”, “Fifteenth August”, “Affection when Unknown, Aborrence when Acquainted”, “Selection”, “Two Grains”, “Anxiety due to Inexperience”, “Jasmine Vine” and “The Chest of Kaloji’s Stories”.



Chapter 3 entitled “Fight and Fortune – Short Fiction of P. V. Narasimha Rao” critically analyses two stories - “Ramavva Shepherd’ and “Mangayya’s Fortune” which were translated by Prof K. Purushotham and Dr. Palakurthy respectively.

Chapter 4 titled “Fire Flowers and Other Stories by Dasarathi Krishnamacharya” discusses eleven stories translated by Elanaaga – “Fire Flowers”, “Telangana Martyr’s Homage of Blood”, “Darkness to Moonlight”, “Badari”, “Disguise”, “Blossomed Flames of the Forest”, “Veena’s Smile”, “Sankranthi Celebration”, “Half Dream”, “Oranges” and “I am in Love with You”.

All the stories taken up for critical evaluation by Dr. Lakshmi Prasad are truthful representation of the history and the happenings of the society. The stories depict the real living conditions and distress and sufferings of the people of their time. Almost all the stories are populated by the characters who are sufferers in one way or other – characters who became prisoners and thieves and robbers because of their socio-economic conditions; rebellious characters who fought against the Nizam government and the police; characters who martyred their lives fighting for the freedom; characters who are marginalized by caste, religion and status and women sufferers. Exploitation and violence meted out to the sidelined section of the society by the upper class – the feudalistic prejudices and hypocrisy of the society are the common theme in some stories. Most of the stories have the backdrop of history in particular the Nizam rule. The story “Parige” by Vattikota Alvaru Swamy deals with the poverty-stricken life of Dalits in feudal Telangana during the Nizam rule in 1940s. It talks about Mallaiah, the protagonist who suffers prison sentence for no mistake of his besides he belongs to the lower section of the society. He was branded as a thief by an upper-class landlord. After he was jailed, his whole family was devastated, he lost his father and didn’t know whereabouts of his sister. The story poignantly pictures how feudalism dominated the society during the pre-independence era; how poor people were exploited by the rich treating them as payless and bonded labourers making them live in abject poverty ever.

“You are No Less Than Us” by Vattikota Alvaru Swamy is the story of two thieves, Rangaiah and Venkadu, undergoing imprisonment. The story reveals the hypocrisy of the privileged classes in a feudal society and clearly brings the contrast between the thieves and a landlord.

“In Fact, We are Better” by Kaloji Narayana Rao brings before the eyes of the reader the blatant realities of life. The theme of man’s injustice to man is conveyed through the allegorical

representation of two bulls – white bull and black bull. The author highlights injustice and oppression suffered by the poorer sections of the society. Through the conversation between the two bulls, the readers come to know the wretched life of human beings. Even the bulls sympathise with the human beings whereas the fellow human beings fail to do so. The latter are unsympathetic and devoid of human sensibility.

Kaloji Narayana Rao’s “Affection when Unknown, Abhorrence when Acquainted” deals with an age-old burning issue of caste issues. The religious and communal madness turned the human beings into beast killing each other which is still prevalent.

“Ramavva Shepherd” by P. V. Narasimha Rao depicts the horrors of Razakar movement during Nizam rule in Pre-Independent India. The level of destruction and intense violence is captured in the story. During the dictatorial rule, people were killed; women were sexually assaulted, raped and killed. It echoes the situation prevalent in many places even now. The story captures the bold attempt of an old lady saving a good-hearted youth from police amidst the chaos and apprehension.

P. V. Narasimha Rao’s “Mangayya’s Fortune” is a piercing satire on politics and politicians. The author captures the realities of the day and mocks the contemporary politics. The author showcases the reality by depicting Gods and Goddesses who were divided into groups which lead to misunderstanding and dominancy over the other. In a ridiculous way, the author pictures the contemporary political situation. The story also highlights other issues such as fighting within the party, rampant corruption, involvement of black money in elections, battle during elections, humiliations and counter-humiliations in the parliament sessions, revenge politics, lack of ethics in election, the role of media in capturing only sensational news and so on. This story through the representation of Gods and Goddesses, discusses at length the typical Indian politics and political scenario prevailing.

“Telangana Martyr’s Homage of Blood” by Dasarathi Krishnamacharya tells the story of a youth who inspired by leftist ideology, rose in rebellion and end up becoming the victim of savagery. It is the story of anti-Nizam rule and pictures the hellish life and inhumane treatment in prison. The story captures the struggle during the freedom struggle and represents the unknown voices who sacrificed their lives to the country.

Dasarathi's "Disguise" is a story of a woman who fell in love with a rebel who roams around in disguise to escape the police and the Nizam's government. Finally after undergoing sufferings, with the spirit for independence, they achieve victory in life.

The stories of the writers taken up for discussion are deep rooted in the pre-independence spirit. Interestingly, one can find allegorical and humorous take in many stories to reveal the hypocrisy of the human nature. The critic Dr. Lakshmiprasad in his critical evaluation has succinctly summarized all the stories. The language is simple, plain and easy to comprehend. The critic in his preface states how the works of these four writers were critical and important in the phases of freedom struggle. He also stresses on the importance of translation and how the translation and translators play a vital role in popularizing regional literatures.

The critical evaluation did not disturb the feel and spirit of the stories in translation. Every writer taken up for examination by the critic deserves appreciation for their honest representation of the society. In short, it's one of the notable critical works on the chosen stories. Even the non-Telugu speakers are able to understand the backdrop and history of the chosen Telugu short stories. Every story has its own way to reach the readers through translation. This critical work by the critic is a wonderful way of paying homage to the literary legends from Telangana. With both simple and strong plots, the stories make one to retrospect and empathize with the characters. Some characters make us relive their experience with them. The critic has to be highly appreciated for taking up this job of evaluating short stories of the choicest legendary writers from Telangana as the writers were voice to many voiceless people. In this way, he has brought them to limelight especially to the non-Telugu speakers and to the whole world in general. On the whole, the critic has attempted to analyse the first-generation story writers who have immortalized people and their struggles in their writings.