



## GURAJADA APPA RAO AS A SCHOLAR AND LINGUIST: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF HIS *MINUTE OF DISSENT*

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of the present paper is to unravel the scholar and linguist present in Gurajada Apparao, a name that needs no introduction in the Telugu literary world, with specific reference to his work *Minute of Dissent* written 110 years ago. This text is relatively less known, yet it is a remarkably significant English prose text by Gurajada Apparao whose fame in the Telugu literary world is unquestionable. Through a brief analysis of *Minute of Dissent*, the present paper uncovers the bilingual scholar and the linguist that Gurajada was.

**Keywords:** Gurajada Appa Rao, Minute of Dissent, Telugu, Literature

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A prolific writer, Gurajada Apparao is most remembered today for his Telugu play *Kanyasulkam*, poetic work, *Muthyala Saralu* and the patriotic song '*Desamunu Preminchumannamanchiannadipenchumanna*'. Much has been written about this great writer's contributions to Modern Telugu literature. In fact, the body of writings that has emerged on Gurajada's writings far exceeds the size of his own writings. However, hardly anything is written about his prose work in English, *Minute of Dissent*, a truly noteworthy contribution to the linguistic history of modern Telugu.

One possible reason why the work is less spoken about could be that it is a work written in English about the Telugu language in a highly formal register that befits the style of a minute.

The *Minute* addresses specific issues related to Telugu usage in the resolutions taken by a committee constituted for identifying current versions for archaic Telugu expressions. The current expressions thus suggested by the committee were to be used in the writing of text books in Telugu. The highly contextual nature of the text which seems to have little relevance to the present-day linguistic scenario, could be yet another reason why barely any scholarly or critical work is available on this.

Besides, the text is highly demanding in that readers cannot comprehend it unless they are well-equipped with its historical background.

***The text begins thus:***

1. I dissent from the views of the majority of the Sub-Committee consisting of Messrs. Vedam Venkataraya Sastry and K.V. Lakshmana Rao. They stuck to the position which they had all along occupied and showed no disposition to come to any common understanding with the Modern School.

2. An examination of the lists, which they prepared, and the covering report clearly show that far from entering into the spirit of the second resolution, they tried to get behind it. The report reopens discussion on the principle of the resolution, lays down conclusions at variance with it, and winds up with an appeal in favor of a school of prose with which Mr.K.V.Lakshmana Row may be particularly identified as the editor of the *Vijnanachandrika* series.

We can see how the very first two paragraphs of the text raise many questions for the present-day readers who wish to understand it. The readers have to navigate through hundreds of such questions to be able to just comprehend the text:

1. What is the subcommittee here?
2. If this were a subcommittee, what was the main committee?
3. Who constituted it and for what purpose?
4. Who are VedamVenkataraya Sastry and K.V.Lakshmana Rao?
5. What was their position and what was the issue at all?
6. What is the Modern School and what does it stand for?
7. What are the lists spoken about here?
8. What is the principle of resolution spoken about here?
9. What school of prose is being spoken about here?
10. Were there other schools on the lines of the school of prose?
11. What is *Vijnanachandrika* series?

As can be clearly seen from these questions, they are all information- seeking questions, answers to which are necessary to form a basic understanding of the text.

However, despite all the hurdles and challenges the text poses *Minute of Dissent* is relevant today for the linguistic insights it offers into the nature of language in general and also into the nature of the Telugu language as it prevailed during the nineteenth and early twentieth

century colonial India.

It is a significant text for the brilliant English prose used by a writer who, curiously, left his mark in the Telugu literary world with his prolific Telugu works. The weighty prose style, marked by a felicity of expression and the argumentative power of the author remind an English reader of the eighteenth century literary colossal figure Dr. Samuel Johnson.

It is a remarkable text for the insights it offers into the history of the Telugu language, especially modern Telugu language. The text gives us an inkling of what the Telugu language was going through at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the official front. It fills the reader of the present day with utter bemusement and also makes us wonder at the kind of linguistic issues that bothered the scholars of the times. The text also provides an opportunity for the readers of today to understand matters over which fierce linguistic battles were fought over a century ago.

One only needs to go through the first few pages of the text to be struck by the brilliance of Gurajada's scholarly arguments. For instance:

The report of the majority of the Sub-Committee is vague. It does not formulate or discuss a body of principles to govern the classification of forms. I asked them to define the terms *current* and *archaic*. Mr. Lakshmana Row showed a disinclination to commit himself to definitions. I then handed in a slip of paper with the following question engrossed upon it.

“What is the meaning of the words *current* and *archaic* when applied to the literary dialect?”

Mr. Lakshmana Row told me that his report answered my question.

In the report there is no attempt at definition; nor can we gather from it in what sense the writers used the terms *current* and *archaic*. ...(p.1259)

At a time when hardly any studies were done on dialects even in the western world *Minute of Dissent* serves as a testimony to the deep and broad understanding the author possessed of important sociolinguistic concepts such as a dialect and standard dialect. Notice how Gurajada offers valid suggestions on how one could study dialects:

In the absence of a linguistic survey we are not altogether helpless in determining questions of general currency. Modern conditions of life have set on foot migrations on an unprecedented scale. Courts, schools, colleges and offices are places where local peculiarities of speech of different districts and different sections of society are represented. The Railway

is a School of dialects. The serious student does not lack opportunities of investigating dialectal variations. (p.1262)

...the imposition of the dialect of one part of a country on the other parts as the standard language, is exactly the process which occurred in the formation of standard speech at every turn in linguistic history. Everywhere the speech of courts and of centres of learning displaced its neighbors less favorably situated and developed into a standard language. (p.1287)

Gurajada also raises several questions of linguistic significance with which linguists continue to grapple even today:

What does the notion of *standard* entail when we speak about a standard language?

How do we demarcate dialects in a language?

How do we define terms like ‘archaic’ and ‘current’ with respect to word forms?

What is a *spoken language*?

What is grammar?

What are its functions?

Do we study grammar to get mastery over our own language?

Can we apply the principles of the standard of usage in one language to another?

The number of Western grammarians and scholars Gurajada quotes and the scholarly precision with which he quotes them, by way of substantiating his arguments is astounding.

The scholars and the works he cites are revealing of the kind of linguistic work predominant then and also of Gurajada’s familiarity and thorough understanding of this extensive scholarship. For instance, note the history encapsulated in the very title of the work he cites which was published in 1868. We come to understand that this documentation exercise of the Telugu urjees and other official papers by the British government was undertaken keeping the linguistic needs of the civil servants of that time.

Major T.G.M.Lane, Telugu Translator to the Government of Madras and his work “A collection of official documents in the Telugu language consisting of Urjees and other papers filed in Courts of Justice for the use of candidates for the Indian Civil Service”; from every

district of the Presidency except Ganjam and Kurnool.(1262)

Gurajada argues for the inclusion of Telugu verbal forms with the combination of the consonants *sth* (which Gurajada spells *asst*) in the list of current forms prepared by the sub-committee. He proves that verbal forms with 'sth' such as *vasthadu*, *isthimi*, *pilusthamu* and *chellisthamu* have almost universal currency throughout the Telugu using parts of the country by providing an astonishing range of examples of use. To prove that such forms are current, he gives hundreds of examples with documentary evidence from such multiple fields as the following:

1. From the work of Lane mentioned above, Gurajada cites 86 examples.
2. From official documents and legal documents, he cites 10 examples
3. From Christian literature, he cites 109 examples
4. From three versions of the Bible he owned, two of which were published in 1881 and 1890, he presents 32+22+9 examples.
5. From the leading periodicals of his time (media) he presents 30 examples
6. From literary stories he presents 28 examples
7. From ballads and songs of ladies, 20 examples
8. From the ballads of wandering minstrels, 75 examples
9. From the field of drama by quoting eleven individual plays, he cites 51 examples
10. From popular poetry, 95 examples
11. From old manuscripts, seven examples
12. From proverbs, 29. And he says most of the proverbs are taken from the book "A Collection of Telugu Proverbs" by Captain M.W.Carr (1868)
13. From Linguistic Survey of India IV, six examples
14. Eight examples from letters written to a pleader in Gooti
15. 14 examples from letters written to a pleader in Kurnool
16. 12 examples from letters written by persons from ceded districts to Anantapur (to prove that verb forms with the consonants *sth* like *vastharu*, *vasthamu* are common even in inter-district communication)
17. Quotes nine grammar books all of which present verb forms with *stu*. It is interesting to note that among these nine books on grammar and language, seven are written by western authors including C.P.Brown.
18. He quotes numerous examples from a wide range of inscriptions starting with the first

instance of a verbal form with *st* in an inscription of 1208 A.D, which was mentioned by Butterworth in his book *Nellore Inscriptions*

He goes on to show how inscriptions from different Telugu speaking regions show evidence of the verb forms in question:

He further points out that in the inscriptions studied from different periods of history from different parts of the Telugu speaking region, the literary form *ichithimi/ ichithi* occurs only once for every three instances of *isthimi*

Gurajadashows his extensive knowledge of the ancient Indian texts as well and quotes them to substantiate his points. For example,

In ancient India, local variations, however great, did not prove a bar to the literary cultivation of important dialects. Like any modern scientific student of language, Vamana and Jayaditya discourse in *Kasika* of variations of speech from man to man, house to house, and district to district, and according to the mood of the moment.

అపశబ్దా హి ప్రతి దేశం ప్రతి గృహం ప్రతి పురుషం

ప్రతి వ్యవస్థం భిన్నా శ్చానవస్థితాః

(Vide page15 *Kasika*, Benaras Edition)

Note how Gurajadaminces no words in laying bare certain facts:

There is little relevancy in going to Sanskrit grammarians to settle the usages of aTelugu literary dialect

Much of the inconsistency which characterises the pronouncements of the Old school is due to a vain attempt to treat a highly archaic and artificial literary dialect as a living tongue

(p. 1297)

The education of the masses was no part of the orthodox tradition. Learning and literature were the monopoly of the Brahman to whom Sanskrit precedent was sacred and inviolable.

(p.1310)

Telugu poetry appealed to a narrow cult. Scholars wrote for scholars, and as time went on, unintelligibility was felt to be high literary merit. The Kavya dialect abounded in learned Sanskrit and in archaisms. (p.1311)

To prose works in the kavya and pseudo-kavya dialect patronage came from the University and the Department of Education, that is, particularly from Boards of Studies and Text-book

Committees. But for the patronage most of them would not have commanded any circulation. Their existence has been artificial. (p.1347)

The scholarly meticulousness with which Gurajada has written this book is exemplary. It is rare to find scholarship of such depth, width and meticulousness in today's academic world. Thus, the text *Minute of Dissent* is not a text that showcases the creative side of this great imaginative writer but it shows the intellectual sharpness and criticality of a quintessential scholar, a bilingual scholar at that, and an unparalleled linguist who could articulate with utmost linguistic explicitness his views about the Telugu language in English. One can not think of another bilingual scholar of such brilliance in Telugu.

### References

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