

Andhra Lokokti Chandrika :
A Collection of Telugu Proverbs - One of the Earliest Translations into English

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Abstract

This is the 150th year of the publication of ‘Andhra Lokokti Chandrika : A Collection of Telugu Proverbs’ by Captain M.W.Carr in English. It was one of the earliest translations published in 1868 A.D. and it paved way for the succeeding ones. It is significant in more than one sense that besides introducing the Telugu ethos and aesthete to the English-speaking readers, it illustrated the universality of human experience and expression against the canvas of life by giving parallel proverbs, the counterparts of Telugu proverbs, in languages like German, Scottish, Spanish, Latin, Italian and a few other world languages.

This monumental translation work presented a wide range of 2,700 proverbs in Telugu – including a few hundred Sanskrit proverbs. These wise sayings present the panoramic view of sentiments, beliefs, mannerisms, idiosyncrasies, virtues, vices and ratiocinations of people of this land, the Telugu psyche in its myriad hues. This work is a must read for every Telugu man who is a student of English language and literature who wields his hand at translation.

Telugus were among the earliest Indians to attempt translation of their works into English. Besides translation of classic Sanskrit works into English by both Westerners and Indians, the masterly pieces translated from the vernacular languages of India, became instrumental in constructing bridges of understanding and awareness between the Orient and the Occident and also between different regional languages within India.

In Telugu, ‘Andhra Lokokti Chandrika : A Collection of Telugu Proverbs – Translated, Illustrated and Explained’ compiled by Captain M.W. Carr published in 1868 AD was a surprisingly exhaustive work comprising 2,700 Telugu Proverbs and 488 Sanskrit Proverbs. This year happens to be the 150th year of its publication.

The beauty of this path-breaking work is in not just providing literal English translation of the Telugu Proverbs, but in proffering appropriate explanation and in some cases, wherever possible, quoting the counterpart of the Telugu saying in other world languages like German, Scottish, Spanish, Latin, Italian, French etc. This instills in the reader's mind a sense of universality of human experience cutting across languages, cultures and religions.

In addition to this, the author has also given an interpretative explanation and footnotes for certain concepts and words typical of the culture, to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the apothegms. Let us look at a few samples.

అడకత్తులోని పోక

Like a nut in the nippers

Adakattu are nippers used for breaking Areca Nuts.

To be between the hammer and the anvil (French). (35; P.7)

ఉయ్యాలలో పిల్లను వుంచి వూరెల్లా వెతికినట్టు

Putting a child in a cradle and looking for it all over the village.

He who looks for his ass and sits on its back (French).

See how the following popular Telugu Proverb corresponds exactly to the Danish one: (332; P.60)

గుర్రము గుడ్డిదయినా దాణాలో తక్కువ వుండదు

Although the horse be blind, he won't eat less corn.

Supporting a useless person.

A bad horse eats as much as a good one (Danish) (793; P.143)

పెరుగుట విరుగట కొరకే

To grow is but to be broken.

Ruin follows speedy exaltation.

Fortune and glass soon break, alas! (Dutch) (1531; P.268)

The author of *Andhra Lokokti Chandrika* has taken utmost care in explaining the usages, mannerisms, concepts and idiosyncrasies typical of the Telugu stock as reflected in their proverbs. He has given a detailed explanation to facilitate the reader's comprehension.

పోరాని చుట్టము వచ్చినాడు, తమలపాకులు బొడ్డు వంచి కోయమన్నట్టు

"A near relation has come" said he "Stoop and pluck the betel leaves".

The owner of the garden unwillingly complied to his relation's demand to be supplied with betel leaf gratis, and instructed his gardener with the ambiguous phrase "stoop and pluck", which the relation understood to mean that the order was to be obeyed with alacrity, the object really being that the worst leaves, which are always nearest the ground, should be given. The word translated "near" signifies literally "one goes not". Applied to that which is done because politeness requires it, but unwillingly. (1569; P.274)

సంజయ రాయభారము

The embassy of Sanjaya.

Sanjaya was employed by as an ambassador by the Kurus and showed no zeal for his party.

(See the *Mahabharata*)

Applied to a person who takes no real interest in the performance of his duty.

(2078; P.359)

ఇల్లు ఏడే అమావాస్య, యిరుగూ పొరుగూ ఏడే తద్దినం, వూరు ఏడే పెండ్లి లేదు

There is no new moon which the household regrets; nor annual ceremony, the neighbours; nor marriage the whole village.

At the new moon, the Hindus abstain from eating rice in the evening, but take care to make up for it with other good things; at the Taddina (ceremony on the anniversary of a deceased relative's death) the neighbours are feasted; and to a marriage the whole village is invited. (271; P.48)

The precision and brevity exercised in the choice of words, the inherent rhyming wherever possible and also the accuracy in explanation in driving home the import of the saying i.e., the wisdom element, which is the proposed outcome of all proverbs, is omnipresent in this magnificent work. Look how beautifully the following well-known Telugu saying is translated and explained:

మింగ మెతుకు లేదు, మీసాల మీదికి సంపెంగ నూనె

Not a grain to eat, but scented oil for the mustaches.

Love of outward show disproportionate to one's means. (1728; P.299)

మేక మెడ చన్ను

The wattle on a goat's neck.

A useless appendage. (1808; P.313)

మేకవన్నె పులి

A goat-coloured tiger.

A wolf in sheep's clothing. (1809; P.314)

సంతోషం సగం బలము

Happiness is half (a man's) strength. (2081; P.360)

Even most of the Sanskrit proverbs selected by M.W. Carr in this book were all well-known to Telugus and the translation is equally precise and awe-inspiring.

(While the Sanskrit sayings were given in Devanagari script in the book, they are given in Telugu script here for the convenience of readers.)

మౌనమర్థాంగీకారః

Silence is half consent.

Who keeps silence consents (Italian)

He who says nothing, consents (French) (327; P.448)

యథా రాజా తథా ప్రజాః

As the king, so the people.

Like king; like people (Latin) (335; P.449)

అంఘనం పరమౌషధం

Fasting is the best medicine

Feed sparingly and defy the physician (366; P.458)

విభూషణం మౌన మపండితానాం

Silence is the ornament of the ignorant. (389; P.463)

A study of M.W. Carr's book is extremely helpful to everyone from Telugu background who has something to do with English language and its usage. It is mandatory for those who study literature and work on translations.

The readers of this rare and valuable work understand the following things:

- The culture and language are interrelated and they influence a person's imagination which is at the root of all creativity and professional endeavours.
- Surprisingly, much has not changed in Telugu idiom and English usage, though a few structural changes in language usage took place in the last one and a half centuries, a time of great global change.

Last but not the least, a reader of this work will see that his vocabulary expands by leaps and bounds and his aesthetic and intellectual horizons extend a lot leading to a synthesis of linguistic expression and articulating wisdom. Finally, this book is a prescription not to be ignored.

Reference: అంధ్రలోకోక్తి చంద్రిక : A Collection of Telugu Proverbs, Translated, Illustrated and Explained Together with some Sanskrit Proverbs, M.W. Carr, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1989.
