

“ANDHRA KESARI PRAKASAM PANTULU –A STUDY”

D.Sahadevudu*

Abstract

“Andhra Kesari” means the Lion of Andhra, and ‘Prakasam’ denotes the shining or the bright one. He was the lion incarnate, and the sun dazzling. He was the man great and the man ideal. He was the born-warrior, destined for triumph and glory in the battle of life. It is pride to commemorate the great hero’s name and his sacrifice for the country in the most representative and the best meaning of that word!

Key Words: Andhra Kesari, courage, freedom fighter.

* **Lecturer in History, Govt. Degree College Uravakonda, Ananthapuramu, A.P.(state),India.**

Sri Prakasam has confessed that there is no record or any other possible means for ascertaining the exact date of his birth. There is, however, certainty regarding the year in which he was born – 1872, the year when Andhra Desa was in the grips of the great famine of the year, Dhatu. His Parents were Sri Gopalakrishnayya and Srimati Subbamma. Prakasham was the third child, with two elder sisters and a sister and a brother younger than himself. Tangaturu was his surname and we are not to take it as his native village. His village was Valluru, situated between Ongole and Tangaturu.

As soon as he entered a street-school, Prakasam earned the reputation of being first among the noisy boys! He was an expert in playing marbles, tops, and such other Indian games. He used to box with his school-mates and do *dandas* in their company to keep himself physically fit.

In 1884, when Prakasam was twelve years old, his father died. His mother had to shoulder the entire burden of maintaining the family and she did her best, by running an inn. The same year Prakasam was admitted in a school at Ongole. Even there he played marbles and was true to his early reputation. From now on there were “a series of accidents” that changed his course. He was fond of the stage and used to play women’s roles in popular plays. He was admirably suited for the roles and soon earned the reputation of a good actress! About this time, something happened, may be an insignificant thing, nevertheless something that was a turning point in his life. He happened to notice the Pleader with his long coat, who lived in the house opposite his own, daily setting forth to the court. The long coat attracted Prakasam so much, that he decided to become a Pleader himself, and have money and social status similar to that of the man who lived in the opposite house.

Prakasam left Ongole for Rajahmundry to study for the Matriculation Examination. He failed in the examination (1887); but later passed the examination appearing as a private candidate. In 1890, he married Hanumayamma, his own sister’s daughter, and again resumed his studies, joining the Arts College, Rajahmundry. He passed F.A. in 1891, and joined the Law College at Madras in 1892. He passed in second class and started his career as second-grade Pleader in Rajahmundry. Thus he achieved his first ambition. Clients rallied to him in large

numbers and he was very successful in the profession. As a Lawyer-citizen, he found it almost impossible not to get involved in the politics of the Municipality of Rajahmundry. Soon he proved himself “a troublesome man, whom none can avoid”. Though he was elected Chairman of the Municipality he was prevented from taking charge of the Office, and Prakasam after an arduous struggle with authorities and his rivals, succeeded in getting his name gazetted and claiming the Office for which he was elected. He worked as Chairman of the Municipality for some time.

Prakasam soon found himself dissatisfied with his second-grade Advocacy. There had been always an ever-growing desire in his heart during his professional visits to Madras to become a barrister. He made his mother agree to his wish, though he knew quite well that it would involve her in a lot of trouble with her orthodox relatives. So, he took an oath that he would not touch in England meat and woman, and sailed for England. While he was there studying for the bar, he kept up his promise to his mother. He led the life of a pure teetotaler, vegetarian, and a non-smoker. His fellow-students used to ridicule him as “an animal grazing grass”! All this he endured, and in 1906 he returned to India after successfully completing his studies. For one year, he had gone round a tour all round Europe. He visited Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Germany.

In 1907 Prakasam began his career as a barrister in Madras. He started in his profession with a debt of twenty thousand rupees, spent in the purchase of law books! Within a very short period, he relieved himself of the burden of debt and turned his attention to the happiness of his mother. But as ill-luck would have it, God took her away in the same year.

Prakasam competed with English and other eminent lawyers and roared like a lion and they heard his voice even in their dreams. In other words, Prakasam was a lion’s dream to them. He was, during this period an editor of a journal called “Law Times”. With the help of this journal he fought for the rights and privileges of barristers under the autocracy of the English Judges. He established the freedom and dignity of barristers in their profession on a firm footing. All this he could do because of his self-confidence rooted in his heart the heart of a lion. He declared to the world that success in any profession depended on self-confidence combined with

fearlessness and industry. This was the secret of Prakasam's tremendous success as a barrister. For fourteen years i.e. up to 1921 he was a practising lawyer.

Then his life's course took another and quite a new road. In 1921 he sacrificed the income of seven thousand rupees a month and entered the field of politics under the influence of Gandhiji. In other words, he ended as a barrister, and began as a politician. This aspect of his life gave him true glory and earned for him the praise of his countrymen.

When Prakasam was in his F.A. Class, Congress had not grown up. Its name was not heard very far. When he became barrister, it had struck deep roots in the hearts of the people, following the division of Bengal. The "Surat Congress" attracted Prakasam and he began to attend every meeting of the Congress. And he renounced his profession of Advocate, inspired by Congress and Gandhiji. With the help and support given to him by Sri Rajagopalachari and Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao, he established the journal called "Swarajya". This was on the 29th of October, 1921. In that journal he began publishing the aims of Congress and also its scheme of work. The paper was later on published in Telugu and Tamil, though at first it was in English; and it came to inspire the entire country with the ideas of National Movement.

Then came the days of Civil Disobedience and Simon Commission. Simon Commission was bid to go back. These days brought with them the title of *Andhra Kesari* for Prakasam. While lecturing in a street in Madras asking Simon to go back, a young man called 'Parthasarathi' was shot dead by the police. As soon as he heard the news, Prakasam descended on the spot where the corpse lay with utmost speed, like a thunderbolt, and cried aloud. "Who is the tyrant? Where is that human-demon? This corpse is mine. Fire on me if you can"? With these words he showed breast to the gun. The Police guns dropped themselves involuntarily. The people's voice was heard "Andhra Kesari-ki-jai, Prakasam Jindabad". Prakasam had become Andhra Kesari amidst loud acclamations.

In 1933, Prakasam lost his wife. She had borne him three sons, of whom two survived. In 1937, Prakasam became the Revenue Minister in the Madras Government formed by Sri C. Rajagopalachari. He was in that post for two years and a half, when the Ministry resigned. After

serving his term in prison, for his part in the Quit-India Movement, Prakasam became Chief Minister of Madras in the year 1946. His Ministry was sworn in on the Telugu New Year's Day. He was in office for eleven months when party squabbles made him relinquish his post.

In 1947 August, came National Independence, for which Prakasam had sacrificed and suffered as a soldier under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. But the fighting was not yet over for Prakasam. He became a relentless fighter against the selfishness and power-manoeuvrings, which to him had become intolerably apparent in his own party. He severed connections with Congress, and along with Prof. Ranga formed the Kisan Mazdoor Party. But soon Prof. Ranga parted company from him and Prakasam's PrajaParty became a part of Prof. Kripalani's All-India Party of the same name. Later this party merged with the Socialists to become the Praja Socialist Party. Prakasam's objective, which was in the first instance India's freedom had been realized, but his other objective, that the Andhras should have their own state in independent India was yet to be realized and Prakasam became the first Chief Minister of the New Andhra State. With his objective realized, he had also ended his quarrel with the Congress Party and became its member once again. At the age of eighty, Prakasam did not rest, and he declared his next objective to be Visalandhra. The period when he was Chief Minister of the State saw many bold actions, which brought development and prosperity to the Andhra State Sri Venkateswara University, the road-cum-regulator bridge over the Krishna river were the outstanding achievements of this period. In the elections of 1955, which were held after the fall of Prakasam's ministry, Prakasam was reelected from the constituency of Ongole. On the first of November, 1956, his last objective was fulfilled, when the Viasala Andhra Pradesh came into existence. Prakasam was a fulfilled man, and his weary eyes brooded fondly over the Inauguration Celebrations.

Prakasam had achieved whatever he had worked for; it was a life which knew no rest and no disappointment. He was a man who would not allow anything to stand in his way, a man of tireless energy and magnificent courage. His life came to an end on Monday the 29th May, 1957, in the capital city of the Andhras, Hyderabad. "With him had passed an era".

That is the life-story of the man, he was the Lion and Sun. He never stopped roaring, he never ceased to shine. He knew no weariness in a long life of struggle and sacrifice. His was a dedicated life; as Dr. Rahdakrishnan said: “his was the reckless courage”. Rajaji called him the real lion; while Prakasam himself considered his life an endless striving in the cause of service to people.

Conclusion

Prakasam was a dominant figure for four decades in the political scene in Andhra, and in India. He saw the causes near to his heart succeed, and the dream of Visalandhra come true.

Prakasam had something great about him. The barks of puppies did not deter him, no, not even the thunder-bolts of heaven. He stood up as a man. Andhra Desa had need of heroes and he was one. What it wanted was a new electric fire to stir up fresh vigour in its veins and he was it. He hated cowardice and showed that man dies but once. He was a great spirit, a mighty energy and a boundless enthusiasm. He was a man of action always. He wanted to make his people such as he was, and was a true leader in the best sense of the word. “Be and make” was his motto. He knew great sacrifices were necessary to achieve great things. “Go to Hell yourself to get salvation for others”. He laid down his comforts, his pleasures, his entire life and made a bridge of human claims over which crores could cross the sea of life. As long as sacrifice is regarded sacred, Prakasam is immortal.

A harmonious and magnificent combination of fearlessness, energy, self-confidence, self-control, strength, service and sacrifice, Andhra Kesari Prakasam was a rare man. His is an inspiring example.

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