

VIRTUOSO OF DR. MARRI CHANNA REDDY: CHILDHOOD, PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Abstract

The biographical studies and methods promise to offer unique and unexpected insights into the study of Indian history. Ideally, it should tell us something about the wider historical context, how individuals or groups of individuals have influenced the flow of historical events, but also how these people, their ideas, and their understanding of the world, in which they lived, have been shaped by this historical context. Historically contextualized biography can offer a unique insight into the complexity of the individual, and provide us with valuable opportunities to give analytical nuances to our understanding of history.

Telangana, as a land of resistance, produced many prominent personalities who were in forefront of various social, reformative, and political movements. This study has identified Dr. M. Channa Reddy as a case to describe his contribution, vision, and activism by following a biographical method of writing. Since, Dr. Reddy has decorated many positions and served extensively throughout his life, therefore, exploring and documenting the life story of Dr. Reddy will certainly boost the spirit of coming generations.

Key Words: Marri Channa Reddy, Childhood, Spiritual Life, Personal Life

INTRODUCTION:

The present article describes the childhood and personal life of Dr. Marri Channa Reddy. It further discusses his schooling and education, marriage and family, devotion and spirituality, and the special occasions of his 60th Birthday (Shashtipoothi Ceremony) and 75th Birthday (Diamond Jubilee Celebrations). It also describes his death and final rites and presents his versatile personality as a summary and conclusion at the end.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Dr. Channa Reddy was born on January 13, 1919, in Pedda Mangalaram Village, Moinabad Mandal, Ranga Reddy District (of the then Hyderabad District), now in Vikarabad District. His parents were Lakshma Reddy and Sankaramr¹. Initially, he was named “Acchutha Reddy” but he was renamed “Channa Reddy” in remembrance of his mother’s father’s name – Konda Channa Reddy. The only son of his parents did not receive any extra attention from his parents as it was a fairly big joint family². But the parents had one burning desire the desire to give their son the best education available in the State then. They, therefore, sent their son to his maternal uncle, Shri K. V. Ranga Reddy who was then a practicing Vakil in Hyderabad city, at a very tender age. Channa Reddy began his schooling under the watchful eyes of his two maternal uncles, Shri K. V. Ranga Reddy and Shri K. V. Narayana Reddy.

Even as a child of 9 years old, Channa Reddy nursed a secret ambition to study medicine so that it would make him economically independent to pursue his political work. He began to throw sparks of his inborn organizing abilities when, along with, some of his friends not only in the same age group but also those older than him, organized a Debating Association in his locality. To the astonishment of everyone, the maiden speech of Channa Reddy was on “Truth,” a quality which has, in later years, become a passion with him both in his public and private conduct. The activities of this Debating Association were not confined only to organizing “debates.” They were extended to organizing a library and Channa Reddy was the natural choice for the Secretary-ship of the library. He saw to it that books dealing with Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other mythological stories were collected and given to the members for reading and assimilating the benefits of virtuous living. This early grounding in

what our great epics have taught made Channa Reddy a great adherent of the noble ideals set by them. In the later years of his life, these have found expression more than eloquently whether it was at home or in his service to the people.

The extra-curricular activities in which Channa Reddy involved himself right from his elementary school days and he did not divert his attention from his studies, the purpose for which his parents had sent him all the way to Hyderabad braving all the parental agony of living away from their pet son. He began to win laurels in all the examinations he took including the M.B.B.S. his sole ambition to sustain him in public life.

Having taken the M.B.B.S. degree from the Osmania Medical College with a praise-worthy rank, Channa Reddy now Dr. Channa Reddy straightaway joined the State Medical Service as, at that time, the house surgeon was not instituted. After completing his medicine, he joined as a Doctor in the Government Hospital located in Mahabubabad of Warangal district. Later he resigned to it in the year of 1946. Within a couple of months, he left the service to set up two nursing homes in the city of Hyderabad. His nursing homes were known more as free nursing homes than as ones where the services had to be paid for. He gave up this "service" to the people after a couple of years in order to honor the higher call of the freedom struggle³.

Dr. Sayeed Ali, a popular cancer doctor applauded Dr. Reddy as "*his scholastic career as a medical student was superb. At the age of 17, he had the characteristics of a great leader of great land and people..... In addition to his extra-curricular activities, he stood first and graduated himself at the age of twenty-two and displayed supernatural intelligence and brilliance*".

Alongside his studies in the school and college, Channa Reddy was also busy either organizing or captaining Seva Dal Corps or taking part in political conferences as a delegate. His intense political awareness soon compelled him to join the ranks of those leaders who were fighting for the cause of the people against the Nizam. He braved many a critical situation in such "fights" and came out with flying colors to the great satisfaction of many of the then stalwarts, quite a few of whom had seen in him the future hope of Hyderabad State's dumb toiling millions. He became a rallying point whether it was in Andhra Mahasabha, the earlier version of the State Congress, or in the State Congress and the various struggles it had launched⁴. In 1946, when the Hyderabad State Congress organized its state-wide conference, Dr. Channa Reddy was the obvious choice for the general secretaryship of the Reception Committee⁵. This conference laid the foundation for the "final" onslaught of the Hyderabad people against Nizam and his autocratic rule.

It was the anxiety of Dr. Reddy that the whole fight against the Nizam should be conducted on Gandhian lines. He drew inspiration from the Congress stalwarts outside like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Rajendra Prasad. He journeyed all the way to Delhi to meet Mahatma Gandhi and seek his blessings for the manner in which the state's fight against the Nizam was being carried on. Soon the movement against the Nizam entered the "intensive" phase and, as a natural corollary, the top leaders of the movement were imprisoned by the regime among whom Dr. Reddy was one. After a short spell of imprisonment, the Nizam Government released the eight top leaders of the State Congress of whom Dr. Reddy was one and also the youngest to explore the possibility of negotiating a settlement with them. The negotiations had failed, and the "regime" encouraged a para-military organization, the Razakars, to loot and terrorize every anti-Nizam element in the state. This compelled the leaders of the State Congress to think of alternative strategies in order to sustain and reinforce the freedom struggle against the Nizam. As a tactical move, some of them "established" themselves outside the borders of the state and intensified the struggle. Dr. Reddy, on his part, began publishing Hyderabad, a weekly, from Vijayawada and smuggled its copies into the state. This campaign yielded dividends in that the highly explosive writings of Dr. Reddy fired the imagination of many inside the state and the fight against Nizam became more militant.

Happily, when the Government of India launched "Police Action" against the Nizam of Hyderabad, its success marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Hyderabad's integration with the Indian Union. As a consequence, Hyderabad came to be recognized as a state of the Indian Union, and its representatives were invited to join the Provisional Parliament of India. Dr. Channa Reddy was one of the members who thus came to represent Hyderabad State in the Provisional Parliament. Within hardly eight days of his joining the Congress Party in the Provisional Parliament, Dr. Reddy's dynamic qualities and his fiery speeches on the situation in Hyderabad attracted the attention of Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajaji, who were quick enough to press him into service as one of the whips of the party. The speeches of Dr. Reddy in the Provisional Parliament were so eloquent and penetrating that they attracted the front-page attention of leading newspapers like the Hindustan Times, New Delhi. This position of Dr. Reddy in the Provisional Parliament won him many enduring friendships with stalwarts

like Rajaji, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, and others which stood him in good stead in the later years of his political life.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE:

Dr. Reddy's personal life is a happy and harmonious one. In fact, Smt. Savitri Devi whom he married in 1936, is the daughter of his maternal uncle Sri K.V. Narayana Reddy and Smt. Rajamma, is the younger brother of Konda Venkata Ranga Reddy. Unfortunately, Savitri Devi lost her parent at the age of 8 years. As a result, she was brought up under the guardianship of K.V. Ranga Reddy. Smt. Savitri Devi, known as 'Ammma' to everyone, inspires the entire family. With her spiritual bent of mind, she has been a great source of courage and inspiration to Dr. Reddy. Savitri Devi, a synonym for devotion, sees everything that Dr. Reddy needs, and, to her, this is the most important mission in life.

Dr. Reddy was blessed with three sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Krishna Reddy born on 10th April 1940 and passed away at the early age of 21 years in 1961. Even at that tender age, he was elected Sarpanch, Marpalli Village. Now, the elder son Ravindra Reddy born in 1942 is an active member of the Rotary Organization, involving various Community Service Projects, and served as the District Governor of Rotary District, besides managing his own printing business.

The younger son Shashidhar Reddy was born on 24th August 1949 and did a Master's in Agricultural Sciences from Kansas University, U.S.A. He was elected to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1992 in the vacancy caused by Dr. Reddy's resignation on being appointed as Governor of Rajasthan. Later, he was elected as MLA in 1994, 2004, and 2009 from Sanathnagar Assembly Segment. He also served as a Minister in the Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy Cabinet in 1993. He was convener of the AICC Task on Naxalite Violence in 2004. He was appointed as a Member of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Government of India in 2005 and went to become Vice-President of NDMA with the status of Union Cabinet Minister in 2010. He has been responsible for formulating the Government of India guidelines that would ensure a prompt and effective response to cyclones in any part of India. Daughter Vasudha's husband Sudarshan Reddy was also in the printing line. Dr. Reddy has three grandsons and three granddaughters. Channa Reddy's only Sister Vimala Devi is now 93 years old.

Dr. Reddy survived a very serious car accident during the 1978 elections, further; he survived the Indian Airlines Plane crash at Hyderabad on 17th December 1978 when he was Chief Minister. In June 1990, he underwent Kidney Transplant surgery in the U.S.A. To the surprise and delight of many of his friends, countless well-wishers, and followers, his recovery made medical history. All of these can be seen as acts of Divine Grace and makes people believe that he was born for a special purpose.

Dr. Channa Reddy was essentially a family man and looked after his wife and children very affectionately. On most of the tours in the state, he would be accompanied by his wife, and together they would visit places of worship. The Chief Minister was a very religious person and yet he had never shown it publicly. He respected all religions. Whenever he toured the districts, he would make it point to visit all important shrines including some mosques and churches. In practice, he was highly secular and respected Muslim clerics and participated in their religious functions. While organizing the tours in the districts, the Collector and the SP had to include temple visits in their itinerary.

Often, the priests of the important temple would invite him, and he would readily accept the invitation and take their blessings. His favorite temple was Srisailam, and he visited it innumerable times and got "Koti Bilwarchana" puja which is performed with one core of *Bilwa* leaves. The main priest of Srisailam temple was quite close to him and he would perfume the Pujas and *yagnams* on behalf of the CM, particularly for good health. Annavaram, a sacred temple in East Godavari District, and Simhachalam in Visakhapatnam district were his favorite temples apart from Tirupati. He was a great devotee of Lord Anjaneya Swamy and visited the famous Anjaneya Swamy temple in Kurnool, Kadapa whenever he toured those districts without fail. The political leaders often used to visit the temple to get closed to the Chief Minister. There was hardly any tour of the Chief Minister which did not include temple visits.

It is not the only temple, but he had equal belief in Muslim shrines. The Muslim clerics took every opportunity to invite him to their places of worship and he would never turn down their request. It was his secular outlook that brought him close to the Muslims of the state who had immense faith in him. Politically this practice brought him close to the minority community which in turn helped him to maintain communal harmony and also check the spread of the Islamic outfits and political parties. He never allowed any conflicts between Hindus and Muslims and particularly in Hyderabad city which had a considerable population of influential Muslims and their political leaders.

He had immense faith in muslim clerics so much so that a “baton” given by a holy Muslim cleric, was carried by him throughout his life. One cannot imagine Dr. Channa Reddy being seen without his sacred baton in his hand, at any time he appeared in public. It was rumored that when this baton (stick) was presented to him in a mosque he was promised that he would attain power and rule the state and it came true. Dr. Channa Reddy’s personality was such that nobody can take him for granted. He exuded authority and respect. He always dressed immaculately and never appeared in any shabby dress. His demeanor clearly indicated that he was the Centre of power. His total personality was such that even the Central Congress leadership gave him immense respect and the so-called High Command of the Congress party used to give a lot of importance to him.

DEVOTION AND SPIRITUALITY:

Dr. Marri Channa Reddy was a ‘Karma Yogi’ with a strong religious bent of mind. Notwithstanding his multifarious administrative and political responsibilities, Dr. Reddy always found time for religious activities and visits to temples. He was a true believer in ‘Niskama Karma’. He had very often said that “a blade of grass will not move without the will of God”. What is taught in Gita, Dr. Reddy practices? He conducts himself in the true sense of ‘karma Yogi’. He believes in doing his duty and leaving rest to Almighty. Thus, his unclenching faith in God and love for temples and their environment is well-known.

While inaugurating the Yoga Institute at Secunderabad, Dr. Channa Reddy whose efforts led to its establishment, described in detail the tremendous potentialities of yoga, which he averred could change ordinary men into supermen. The function as well as the speech made an interesting revelation of yet another facet of the dynamic personality of Dr. Reddy. He envisaged a great future for the science of yoga and wanted the Yoga Institute to grow from strength to strength and become a center of perfect yogic practice and knowledge to serve not only the people of the state but also those coming from all over India and outside.

His Holiness Swami Chinmay Ananda described Dr. Channa Reddy as the most eloquent of the inaugurators of his Geeta Gnana Yagnas. In his inaugural address to one of the Yagnas, Dr. Reddy spoke about the need for spreading the teachings of Geeta to the far corners of India and making them available to all. Referring to the author of the Geeta, Lord Krishna, Dr. Reddy said that the Lord’s was a life worthy of emulation by everyone and that it had a universal appeal. Lord Krishna’s life appeals to the youth because as a youth he excelled in physical feats of strength and intellectual brilliance; it appeals to the warriors because he was the greatest warrior of his time; it appeals to the worldly men because he was surrounded by wives and children, relations and friends, and wealth and comforts; it also appeals to those who renounced the worldly things because he led a completely detached life amid plenty of everything. Even to the diplomats and politicians, Lord Krishna’s life has a great appeal because of the manner in which he tactfully and successfully tackled all problems, and faced all complicated situations with courage and equanimity. When Dr. Reddy thus spoke about yoga and the teachings of the Geeta, he only gave expression to his firm belief in the great Indian culture.

Dr. Reddy about yoga and found him as one who not only reposed faith in the efficacy of the science of yoga but also as one who practices it in his daily life. Yoga is defined as “the science of man in depth.” In fact, the outside world identifies the word ‘yoga’ with India. Each of the 18 chapters of the Geeta is called ‘yoga.’ The root word of Yoga is ‘YUJ’ meaning to join i.e., join the lower with the higher, the ‘Aatman’ with ‘Paramaatman’, etc. The 18 chapters in the Geeta are grouped into three divisions: Chapters one to six deal with Karma yoga; chapters 7 to 12 deal with Bhakti yoga; and chapters 13 to 18 deal with Gnana yoga. While all other scriptures talk of surrender to a higher power and thus of Bhakti yoga, the Geeta talks not only of Bhakti yoga but also of Karma yoga and Gnana yoga.

The great sage, Vyasa, saw how people were misled and even got dejected because they felt that one had to retire from the family life and go to the forests to listen to the Upanishads to reach the final goal. This, he found could not be the path for the generality of mankind because most people are deeply engrossed in the affairs of their Samsar and so cannot have the capacity to renounce things and go to the forests. Vyasa also felt that it was a dangerous trend.

Hence, he conceived the idea of giving to the world a gist of the teachings of the Upanishads, in the form of Geeta, as taught by Lord Krishna himself to Arjuna, against the background of a battlefield. Arjuna, a reader of the people and the greatest archer of the times, felt confused and dejected when faced with the challenge of his life, though he had prepared for it all through his life. Arjuna was dejected and confused because of (a) anxiety for the future (as to what would be the result of the war), (b) conflicting thoughts and emotions (due to his attachment to his grandfather, teacher, and others,

whom he faced in the battlefield), and (c) that he was the 'doer'. Most of us in life are confused and dejected due to similar anxieties, conflicting thoughts, and emotions. We are no doubt proficient in our chosen fields of action as Arjuna was, but at the neck of the time, we falter and fumble when faced with the challenges of life. This happens to most of us almost every day in our life.

Geeta is a scripture born out of a crisis in the life of one of the greatest heroes of ancient India. The Geeta, expounded against the background of a battlefield, makes the philosophy it advocates very appealing to the modern man who is always moving from crisis to crisis in his daily life in the fast-changing modern civilization. Arjuna's reaction on the battlefield was a complete psychological breakdown, making him a hysterical and neurotic person trying to run away from his moral responsibility. Fortunately, Arjuna's problem then was a fundamental problem and so has been of interest to all. According to ancient traditions of yoga, as propounded in the Geeta, Moksha is the liberation from these desires, tensions, and conflicts within, by elevating oneself to a higher consciousness beyond all desires.

What is taught by the Geeta is put into practice by Dr. Channa Reddy. He conducts himself in the true fashion of a karma yogi. He believes in doing his duty and leaving the rest to the Almighty. By regular Sadhana he has been able to maintain his physical vigor and dynamism. The clarity in his thinking, writing, and expression is the envy of many. He practices for about half an hour yogic exercise consisting of Asanas, Pranayama, etc. Pranayama blesses men with radiant health and superlative nervous energy. He then meditates for some time in his pooja room which gives him the necessary mental discipline and strength.

With this energy of his body and mind, Dr. Reddy literally jumps into his day's work just as a warrior jumps into the battlefield with vigor, purpose, and determination that seems to baffle many people. By his sustained Sadhana, Dr. Reddy has become an example too much younger people, both in politics and in Government. This Sadhana, combined with his lofty ideal of serving the people of his state, has endeared Dr. Reddy to one and all. As he regards "work as worship" and possesses the required dynamism of body and mind to put it into practice, he neither spares himself nor others who work with him. The fact that his present official charge demands his having to keep very late nights does not appear to wear him out because the yoga exercises, he practices and the meditation he observes every morning relieve him of all tensions and keep him physically fit and mentally alert.

Since he became Minister in 1952, he spared no pains and had been engaging himself in the work of renovation of the temple in some way or the other. Dr. Reddy had all-around knowledge of temple renovation work. He was aware of the Agama and the Shilpa Shastras. He was also quite conversant with the constructional aspects as well. Dr. Reddy's role in the field had been very commendable and appreciated by devotees.

Srisailem

Srisailem is one of the most important and ancient temples not only in Andhra Pradesh, but in the whole of India. Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy, the ruling deity, is one of the Twelve Jothir Lingas of Bharat, and his consort, Sri Bharamamba Devi is one of the Ashtadasas Shaktis of the country⁶. Srisailem is therefore most sacred and an important temple to those who are adherents of the Saiva form of worship. This famous Kshetra has four Maha in the East is located in the Tripurantaka temple which has marvelous architectural beauty. It had no approach road. The temple was in a dilapidated condition. Dr. Channa Reddy, as Minister for Planning, visited the place and immediately arranged for laying the Ghat road to the hill on which the temple stands. He got the Panchayat to construct the road and secured for them the necessary funds.

Dharmapuri

The temple at Dharmapuri in Karimnagar district is one of the few famous temples in the Telangana Region. The ruling deity is Lakshminarasimha Swamy. Every Telugu man knows Narasimha Satakam. This book was written in this village as could be seen from the Mukuta "Sri Dharmapuri Nivasa Dushta Narasimha Durita Dura"⁷. Dr. Reddy undertook the renovation of this temple and he was the chairman of the Renovation Committee. Several renovation works were executed. He laid the foundation stone for the Raja gopuram and got the Venkateshwara Swamy Mandapam constructed. He also got the blueprint prepared for the construction of choultries. The T.T.D. also constructed a choultry at his express desire.

Venkateshwara temple in Hyderabad

The temple which catches the eye of anyone passing through the metropolis of Hyderabad is Sri Venkateshwara Swamy Temple of Kalapahad. It was constructed by the Hindustan Charitable Trust. It was Dr. Channa Reddy who conceived this idea as long back as in 1962 when he was the finance minister. He has initiated it in collaboration with the late Sri Alapati Venkatramayya, the then Minister for Endowments, pioneered the venture on the highest point in the twin cities.

Dr. Reddy was shrewd in finding ways and means of execution of such stupendous works. He made necessary efforts for the assignment of land and then for the preparation of the blueprints. The Hindustan Charitable Trust put up a beautiful temple on this hill which is now one of the centers of all the visiting public, apart from being a source of inspiration to the citizens. Dr. Reddy supervised its execution at all stages. These are only a few examples to quote.

Common Good Fund

It is on account of his drive; a good number of temples were renovated. One might ask what the source of funding for these renovation works is. Dr. Channa Reddy had introduced a novel scheme known as the "Common Good Fund" with contributions from the temples whose annual income exceeds Rs. 50, 000 per annum at the rate of 3% of the assessable income. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam is presently contributing Rs. 2.2 crore per annum towards the common God Fund.

The fund was mainly intended for renovation, preservation, maintenance of Charitable and Hindu Religious institutions, establishment and maintenance of Vedapatashalas and Schools for training in Archakatwam, Adyapatwam, Vedaparayanikatwam, Silpan, etc. The Chief Minister himself was the Chairman of this fund committee for allotment to various deserving temples.

Stapathi

In order to carry out renovation works an Engineering Cell with a Superintendent Engineer was created within the Endowment Department. The post of 'Stapathi' was created to design the renovation plans and get the works executed. The renovation programs required the services of good and efficient sculptors. There was a dearth of such workmen in the state. They have to be brought from outside. In order to meet this deficiency, a Silpa Kalasala (College) was established some time ago; but somehow it remained inactive⁸. Dr. Channa Reddy gave a fillip to reactivating the Kalasala. He also directed that stipend to students must be adequate in order to attract, a sizeable number of candidates.

During 1970-80, 25 temples were renovated with a cost of Rs.1 crores later Rs. 2 crores were also sanctioned for the renovation of over 1500 temples. From 1990, 1992-93, about Rs.1.25 crores were sanctioned for the works. The total number of temples for which sanctions were given from 1978 to 1993 is 2,802, out of these 1322 have been completed.

Another significant feature of his devotion was the sanction of grants of temples outside the state, in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, and also Sri Lanka. Besides renovation programs, Dr. Reddy was responsible for establishing Veda Pathasalas, Adhyapaka Scheme, Silpa Kalasala, and Archaka Training School- all funded from the Common Good Fund.

Dr. Channa Reddy has endeared himself to the devout public by his remarkable service to the cause of temples. More importantly, he has received in abundance the blessings of the presiding deities in sacred shrines. May God bless him on his 75th birthday to serve the cause of shrines!

GREAT CONNOISSEUR OF ARTS:

Dr. M. Channa Reddy was a multi-faceted personality. He was described aptly as a fine product of Hyderabad culture, a man of drive and dynamism, a leader with a golden heart, a yogic visionary. He is a person of the charisma trust of the weak, an able administrator, and a man of the masses. He is all things to all people. Art and culture are very dear to Dr. Channa Reddy. He has always had the highest respect for the art and theatre and its artists. He loves the theatre not with the patronizing attitude of a politician, but with the firm conviction that theatre⁹ was the essential for the health of the nation⁹. He believed that cultural activity was not only an educative and social value but also has a significant curative effect on the human psyche. He knew this instinctively, through his close contact with the theatre for well over six decades.

Varasulkam

Dr. Reddy's association with the theatre movement had begun in 1937 when he, as a college student, played the female lead in a Telugu play, 'Varasulkam'. With his thespian appetite, whetted by the praise he received for his histrionic ability, he directed and produced another play 'DAYYALA PANNUGUDA' on the evils of drinking. This play was staged with inspiration received from the Temperance Movement launched by the late Raja Bhadur Venkata Rama Reddy, the Commissioner of Police and a rest social reformer. This play testifies to Dr. Reddy's firm conviction that has to be abhorred at all times.

It was after the Nizam's Hyderabad State became part of the Indian Union in 1948 as a result of the police action, and Dr. Channa Reddy was chosen a Minister in the Government of Hyderabad State in 1952 at a very young age, that his interest in theater was renewed with vigor. Since then, Dr. Channa Reddy has been playing a key role in the theatre arts of Andhra Pradesh. As a minister, he attended the

Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad at Machilipatnam in 1953. He was invited the Parishad to Hyderabad for their next drama festival. The 1954 Kala Parishad held its festival at the Exhibition Grounds, Hyderabad, and it turned out to be a historic event, because it brought together great talents in the Telugu Theater. As a host, Dr. Channa Reddy took a personal interest and saw that the festival was a great success from every angle.

In those days, the Indian National Theatre Association (INTA), Hyderabad Branch, was the only prominent theatre organization. Dr. Channa Reddy was closely associated with it. In 1954, Bharatiya Natya Sangh, the Theatre Centre of India, established its branch in Hyderabad. Dr. Channa Reddy became its President and guided its destinies for more than a decade. In course of time, other institutions like the Sangeetha Nataka Akademi came into being and amateur theatre groups also developed.

Ravindra Bharati

Another standing monument to the zeal of Dr. Channa Reddy for arts is the Ravindra Bharati, perhaps the only, people's theatre in the twin cities at that time. In its planning, construction, and organization, he played a key role and became the first President of Ravindra Bharati. He encouraged theatre activity at Bal Bhavan in Hyderabad. His interest in the Folk Theatre led to the conduct of the All-India Folk Festival when he was the governor of Uttar Pradesh.

The day he assumed office as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 1978, he announced what he envisioned for the betterment of the theater. Theater and Film had engaged his attention and he had been taking a keen interest in the problems of the artists and the technicians. Cinema, though an art, is still essentially an industry. It had an enormous capacity for organization and creating public opinion. It also contributed crores of rupees to the exchequer; Dr. Channa Reddy had come to grips with the problems of the film industry.

Dr. Marri Channa Reddy had brought the government and the industry together to solve the problems and clear the bottlenecks. Of course, a lot need had to be done; but he took steps in the right direction. On the other hand, drama is a highly individualistic art and hence there was smug self-satisfaction on the part of theatre people, most of them not dependent on theatre for their livelihood. It is difficult for them to organize themselves. No professional theatre will grow in such conditions. Unless the imperatives of putting up a show every night are there, and the need to face an audience night after night was present, on appreciable progress can be achieved. That was the prerequisite to the promotion of theatre.

It was his cherished desire to have one play in Ravindra Bharati, the premier theatre of Hyderabad. He was prepared to make Ravindra Bharati available for staging plays every day from 9.30 p.m. Of course, he was aware of the technical and logistic problems; the experiment could be tried, while another theatre could be built specifically for regular drama, regarding the rural theatre, which consists of folk and mythological plays, which unfortunately are languishing due to lack of patronage he felt that a Theatre Institute should be established to bring youth from the villages' train them and provide gainful employment in the art. The main weakness of theatre people when they faced problems was to stop all activity. This was due to the lack of dedication and firm conviction. His advice is, ' ' Don't stop. Solve the difficulties''.

All the theatre artists know that Dr. Reddy is one of them and he has the feel for their problems. Theatre is in his blood. It is almost impossible to see Dr. Channa Reddy leave the theatre in the middle of a performance. Indeed, he considers it a sacrilege not to withstand his hectic public life as a Minister in the State, or at the Centre, Chief Minister or Governor, he always needed the theatre for relaxation and entertainment. He always stayed till the curtain. Call on could even see him disposing of urgent official papers, between the scenes of a play. The performer could not expect greater tribute from their beloved leader. He was keen in his observations about the theatre and was unsparing in his criticism whenever they go. At the same time, he can laugh like a child when his mind was engaged and he was thoroughly entertained.

When he became the Chief Minister in 1989, further fillip was given to the growth of Cultural institutions Andhra Pradesh had various cultural Academies like Sahitya Academy, Sangeetha Academy, Nataka Academy, and Lalithakala Academy for the promotion of respective art forms. These academies were abolished when Telugu Desam Party came into Power. Though there was a persistent demand both from people and cultural institutions the Government paid a deaf ear to the revival of the academies. As a great connoisseur and lover of arts, Dr. Channa Reddy in his second spell of Chief Minister-ship, issued orders reviving all the cultural academies would up by Telugu Desam Government. He also restored the old age pension for poor artists. That was the service of Dr. Channa Reddy to the cause of art and artists.

60th and 75th Birthdays:

On 13th January, 1979, the happy occasion of his Shashtipoorthi, all prominent personalities across India offered hearty blessings and wished a healthy and bright future. On 22nd January 1994, a huge gathering was witnessed on his 75th Birthday celebrations took place in Lal Bahadur Stadium, Hyderabad city and many of eminent personalities all over India wrote a plethora of messages to wish Dr. Reddy, and all those messages were completed in a book form and the souvenir is titled as “Dr. Marri Channa Reddy 75th Birthday Celebrations”. Former Shri. Giani Zail Singh, President of India, Shri. Krishnakath, Governor of Andhra Pradesh who released the souvenir, Shri. Kasu Brahmanad Reddy, Former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh who presided the programme, and many other prominent personalities were presented on this occasion and praised his laudable efforts and service.

Dr. Reddy’s “Jana Janardhana Seva”

As a newspaper reporter, N. Muralidhar observed Dr. Channa Reddy closely and distantly since around 1960, with however certain long intervals. Looking back, it seems that batting on a sticky wicket has been an inescapable feature in his long hectic public life. Whether in or out of office or he was in his home state or elsewhere. Dr. Channa Reddy occupied the center stage of political developments in Andhra Pradesh. Indeed, no political discussion that concerned Andhra Pradesh could progress without referring to him¹⁰. He has seen him make rousing speeches in public rallies, or offer satyagraha in City streets and court arrest; he saw him transform the sedate proceedings in a government meeting into a brain-storming session by throwing up bold, revolutionary, and creative ideas which stunned the listeners into silence. Though one among a host of politicians, he stood from the rest, with his irrepressible dynamism, sharp responses, extraordinary intelligence, and a strange restlessness that was perhaps born out of an impatient desire for change.

Even when he watched him engrossed in some writing work or discussion with an aide, his concentration was total, conjuring up a political image tilt’ some “force seething in idleness”.

Fifteen years ago, on the occasion of his Shastpoorthy celebrations, Maa Ananda Mai sent a short three-sentence message which provides a wonderful insight into Dr. Reddy’s life and works.

The message read as follow:

‘Illumine the moment of your birth by proceeding on the path of immortality- “Success lies through actions in the Corm of Jana Janardhana Seva “May you lifelong to achieve your cherished goal”¹¹.

Ananda Mai’s message not only spans the past and future of Dr. Reddy but also provides a valuable clue for understanding his personality. Ananda Mai states that Dr. Channa Reddy’s lies in rendering ‘Seva’ to ‘Jana Janardhana’ No wonder, he gravitated towards medical studies and practiced in the city to serve the sick and ailing – real Jana Janardhana Seva – before entering politics. His political activity commenced with the non-violent struggle against the oppressive rule of the erstwhile Nizam Government – again Seva to Jana Janardhana in Telangana. Perhaps his Seva flowered full bloom after he took over the reins of Andhra Pradesh State as Chief Minister in 1978. Besides reducing the age of voters for Panchayat Raj and local bodies from 21 to 18, he introduced reservations in favour of members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Panchayat Samithies, extending up to the post of President of the Samithies and Chairmen of Zilla Parishads.

Dr. Reddy initiated these measures to utilize the instrument of Panchayats for transforming the rural economy and reduce the hold of the rural elite and vested interests in these institutions.

To bring the weaker sections into the mainstream of life, he gave a vigorous thrust to the implementation of the 20 Point Economic Program, and the construction of permanent houses. He allotted more than 50% of the state’s resources for the development of activities catering to the rural people. By exempting land revenue for small farmers with holdings of 2½ acres wet and 5 acres dry, he became a friend of the poor farmer. In providing villages with bus transport, he was constantly trying to expand his Jana Janardhana Seva activities¹². Dr. Channa Reddy’s pro-Kisan, pro-Dalit and pro-Grameen” approach had wholesome praise and support of veteran leaders like Prof. N. G. Ranga.

By reserving 25% to Backward class in Government jobs and educational institutions, even before such a demand was voiced by anyone, Dr. Reddy emerged as a forerunner of the Mandal Commission recommendations. The self-employment schemes he grounded through SETWIN to enable the

unemployed youth to become productive individuals won the praise of the International Labor Organization. The bias Dr. Channa Reddy displayed in bettering a lot of weaker sections has thus distinguished him as a person among the sevaks of Jana Janardhana.

DEATH AND FINAL RITUALS:

The Tamil Nadu Governor, Dr. Marri Channa Reddy, passed away around 7 a.m. on 2nd December 1996, following a massive heart attack. After embalming the body was lying in state at his residence in Tarnaka here for the State funeral.

Though he underwent a kidney transplant five years ago and was known to be keeping indifferent health, news of his sudden death was received with disbelief¹³. He attended a marriage of the daughter of a former MLA. Mr. Konda Lakshma Reddy, last night and participated in ceremonies connected with the forthcoming marriage of his own grandson.

At 2-30 a.m. in the early hours, he complained of chest pain and was taken to Medi-City Hospitals, where he remained conscious, enquiring about the marriage plans. Around 6-45 a.m. he was suffered from a massive heart attack. Doctors present tried to revive him. But the end came shortly thereafter.

The Andhra Pradesh Government declared a holiday for its offices three days, and the day of cremation. Seven days of mourning were announced. The State Cabinet adopted a condolence resolution and the Chief Minister. Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu had accompanied by his entire cabinet went to Tarnaka and placed wreaths on the body. He conferred with members of the family, including Mr. M. Sashidhar Reddy, Congress MLA, and Mr. Ravindra Reddy, both sons of Dr. Channa Reddy, and finalized the arrangements for the cremation.

There was a steady stream of visitors at the Tarnaka residence of Dr. Channa Reddy throughout the day as news of his demise spread. Among the visitors were a large number of former Ministers, leaders of political parties' officials, and his admirers. People lined up before his residence and filed past his body kept in a huge hall on the side of the stately bungalow. Dr. Reddy's body was brought to the residence from the Apollo Hospital where it was embalmed at 1-30 p.m. Almost the entire Cabinet was led by the Chief Minister. Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu escorted by the body. The funeral has been put off to Wednesday to enable Dr. Reddy's grandson, Mr. Aditya, to return from the U.S.

On behalf of the president, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, and the Vice-President Dr. K. R. Narayana, wreaths were placed by the Governor's staff. Among the callers was the High Court Chief Justice Mr. Prabha Shankar Mishra. Former Chief Minister, Mr. N. Janrdhan Reddy, former Union Minister, Mr. G. Venkatswami APCC president, Mr. K. Rosaiah, film artists, Mr. A. Nageswara Rao and Mr. Krishnam Raju, the CLP Leader, Mr. P. Janardhan Reddy, and the former Speaker Mr. D. Sripada Rao.

A large group of CPI leaders led by Mr. Ch Vittal Reddy, Mr. Dasari Nagabhushana Rao, and Mr. Ch Rajeswara Rao also visited the residence and paid homage. Mr. Venkatswamy who served in his Cabinet said Dr. Reddy was always a fighter and played a key role in strengthening the Congress. Mr. Rosaiah and Dr. Reddy were endowed with the skill of converting an adverse situation into a favorable one.

The Prime Minister, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, the former Prime Minister Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, Mr. N. D. Tiwari Congress (T), Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, the Pondichery Chief Minister Mr. Janakiraman, the former Chief Minister, Mr. Vijayabaskhara Reddy, National BJP leaders Sri Atal Bihari Vajpai, Sri Venkaiah Naidu, Sri. Bandaru Dattatreya and lot many MPs from the State paid their last respects to the departed leader on 4th December 1996. The Speaker, Mr. Y. Ramakrishnudu, in a message, said in the death of Dr. Reddy, the country had lost a great freedom fighter and an able administrator. Dr. Reddy had served in various capacities, both in the State at the Center.

SUMMARY:

This paper has discussed the childhood, spiritual and personal life of Dr. M. Channa Reddy who was born in a village near to Hyderabad city in an agricultural family and studied in MBBS in Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad. His views on local politics, Dr. Reddy freely gave vent to his feelings and determination to fight against injustice and repression, even without bothering to know who he was and what he was doing. His candid exposition of the situation in the State impressed the

public that laid a foundation to become a reputed personality. He placed great faith in truth and frankness a rare virtue for a politician.

The most striking feature of Dr. Reddy is that even in adverse circumstances, he never loses his cheerfulness and remains ever willing to serve the people in some capacity or the other. He has unshakable faith in God. There have been many occasions when his indomitable courage and righteous action had converted the most hostile crowds into docile gatherings, the moment he rushed into them singly to the dismay of his supporters.

Dr. Reddy has a craze to meet saintly persons in caves and mansions. He has endeared himself to all the Matadhipathis in the country and enjoys their blessings and good wishes in great measure. Probably, the secret of his great energy for work lies in the love and affection he enjoys not only from the people but also from the saints and sages.

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- ⁴ Report of the States Re-organization commission, Manager of Government of India Press, 1955, p.101.
- ⁵ Hanumantha Rao Madapati, Op.cit., Part II, PP.138-143.
- ⁶ Dr. M. Channa Reddy 75th Birthday Celebrations Souvenir - (1994), p.58
- ⁷ Ibid, p.59.
- ⁸ Ibid., p.60
- ⁹ Ibid., p.36
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p.61
- ¹¹ Ibid., p.61
- ¹² Ibid., p.62
- ¹³ Received message from the Hindu newspaper on Tuesday, December 3, 1996