

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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MUKUNDA RAMA RAO'S NOBEL LAUREATES IN POETRY

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**ABSTRACT**

Mukunda Rama Rao's book on Nobel Laureates in Poetry is unique and the very first of its kind in Telugu. Thirty-seven Nobel Prize winners from 1901 to 2011, their lives and distinctive writings are all provided with meticulous care in the book, which got a publication grant from Central Institute of Indian Languages. But for the outstanding efforts of the editors A.K.Prabhakar and K.P. Ashok Kumar this work could not have been undertaken at all. The author published this book in 2013 much earlier than his magnum opus 'Veedani mudi' brought out in September of the same year. In fact the Nobel book has been a stepping stone for the remarkable achievement of the poet-translator and literary enthusiast. For one thing, it is an arduous task getting English translations of the poems of world-renowned poets. It is a stupendous effort of translating the poems into Telugu, really a labour of poetic love and admiration.

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The first Nobel Laureate was Sully Prudhomme, a French poet, who got the prize in 1901, in the year of its inception. Here is a reverse translation of the poem. Now a word about reverse translation: It cannot really be the best rendering. It is a necessity for the sort of help to the readers in Telugu. It is not an attempt to excel the first translator but to delve into cultural nuances. But for this the Telugu reader has no way of reading great poems. Only a few samples can be given, first, the Swedish poet Tomas Transtroemer who was awarded the prize in 2011.

Tree, Sky*A tree is always walking somewhere in the rain**In the downpour that has gone gray ,it is going
crossing all of us**It has a purpose. Like the black bird in the fruit
orchard**That gathers and heaps life from the rain**Along with the rain**Stops too the tree**Here and there in the clear night it stays calm**For the snow flowers that blossom in space**Waiting just like us (p.274)*

Sully Prudhomme, the first to won the Nobel in the year of inception 1901 for his poetry in French.

In this World

In this world all flowers would wither away

Even the sweet songs of birds would be short-lived

I'd always dream of the summer that's always remembered.

In the world lips come together delicately

Sweetness would stay just like that

I'd dream of that kiss only which remains in memory.

In this world every man would be grieving

Either for the friendship or the love lost

I'd dream of the stable, mad love.(page.30)

Eugenio Montale was the winner in 1975. The author Mukunda Rama Rao calls this writer a combination of comfort and grief. Born in Genoa, the poet feels that we are not going forward; only seeing but not thinking; we are experiencing time and that is not relevant now.

Seeing Off

May my sending off reach you

Are you those that think Christ would return, friends!

I love, I love the Earth

The one who gave it to me

The one who'd take it back

I love. (p.182)

Latin America's people's poet Pablo Neruda of Chile was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1971 two years before his demise. It was the tradition of Chile to send reputed poets to foreign countries for cultural transmission. Here is one of his poems selected by the editors of this book.

Verb

Twisting this word

I've been thinking of entwining it

Since several years now ... over this

Some big dog, with its tongue

Or a big river, with its water rubbing it again and

again

Yes

This has become soft and shining now

In word I need a salt metal

Earth that wouldn't bite

In the word iron salt

Is blood of those spoken and unspoken?

In the innards of the innards of the letter

I'm thinking of blowing my enthusiasm

I'm thinking of licking the fire in sound

I'm thinking of hearing darkness in wailing

I'm thinking of spitting out

Words like stone virgins. (p170)

Revered and adored as Viswakavi, Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913. Here is a very short poem of that great poet rendered into Telugu by the author, which I reverse translated as I did the earlier one.

The Gift of the Humble One

The Desert deeply regrets: 'Poor you, you bring me a lot of water

What can give you in return, I have nothing.'

Replies the Cloud: 'Desert, I don't ask for anything

You yourself have been granting me joy with the fortune of gifting me.(p.60)

Of the thirty-seven Nobel awardees between 1901 and 2011, only three were women. All can be included here as a mark of acclaim for the imaginative fair sex. Gabriela Mistral was the first woman who was the 1945 winner. She belonged to Chile Vikuna in Latin America. The author tells us

that the fervent emotion generated love was the inspiration for her poetry. Here is a poem:

Dusk

*My heart feels like one becoming a fluid
When becoming soft like a candle
My veins' slow oil
Does not become liquor
My life feels like running away
Like a deer, without noise, in peace(p. 107)*

Nelly Sachs was the first German, a Jewess, who got the award in 1966. The author quotes her in the epigraph of his note: 'I wouldn't have stayed alive if I had not written. Death is my preceptor. Metaphors are my sounds, my dumb cries. I write only to liberate myself from me.'

O, Smoke Chimneys

*Even if the worms of skin destroy my body
I see in my eyes God – Yobu 19:26
Cleverly built smoke chimneys of the quarters of death
While in the air Israel's body is moving like smoke
The blackened street welcomed
Is it not the sun's ray
That wiped it
O, chimneys
Irmia's liberation route, Yobi's dust*
Like the way made for refugees' smoke
Placing stone on stone, who invented you
O, Quarters of Death
Welcomed and employed
When the one a guest offers a feast
Your own fingers
Like a sword between Life and Death*

Placing thresholds

O, Smoke chimneys

Your fingers

Still like the smoke in the air is Israel's body. (. 161)

*Irmia and Yobu are Jeremiah and Job

Wislawa Szymborska is a Polish lady who won the Nobel in 1996. She was the bold and courageous woman who defied the Soviet dictator Stalin as a hateful snowman. Here is her poem.

Vietnam

'Woman! What is your name?' 'I don't know.'
'What is your age?' 'I don't know.'
'Why are you digging this most?' 'I don't know.'
'How long you been hiding?' 'I don't know.'
'Why did you bite my finger?' 'I don't know.'
'Don't you know we have not harmed you?' 'I don't know.'
'On whose side are you?' 'I don't know.'
'This is war, you have to decide something?' 'I don't know.'
'Is your village still there?' 'I don't know.'
'Are they your children?' 'Yes' (pp 261-262)

Mukunda Rama Rao's book stays alive as long as Telugu readers read his poetry. The work is undoubtedly monumental.