

Sree

MANDAYAM AJI RAMANUJA IYENGAR

(1862 – 1937)



Sri M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar (MAR) was born in Mysore in Dundubhi Nama Samvatsara, Shravana Shuddha Ashtami, Rohini Nakshatra on Krishna Jayanti day (19-08-1862). He was the third child of Sri Mandayam Aji Venkatacharya and Srimathi Shringaramma.

He was initiated to learning Sanskrit and Kannada languages by Vidwan Periyaswamy Thirumalacharya in Mysore. He completed F.A. from Madras University with scholarship.

He was married to Srimathi Yadugiriyamma, of Annadorai family.

M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar joined Wesleyan Mission School as a Mathematics teacher. But his knowledge in English, Sanskrit and Tamil were exemplary, though Kannada was his passion and prime language.

In those days, Kannada literature had gone to the background as Sanskrit was the leading language. But many overseas Christian missionaries, for their propagation of Christianity, had come to Karnataka like Rev. Kittel, Rev. Rice and so on, studied Kannada and became proficient in the local language. They did a very great job for revival of Kannada as a language. These aspects were benchmarks for three personalities namely R. Narasimachar , S.G. Narasimachar and M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar.

From the year 1880, they worked together for about half a century and they are considered as 'Praathah Smaraniyaru' (ಪ್ರಾತಃ ಸ್ಮರಣೀಯರು) in Kannada beneficiary. R.Narasimachar has done an outstanding work on 'Shasanagalu' (ಶಾಸನಗಳು), 'Kannada Language History for several centuries', because it is a Pancha Draavida (ಪಂಚ ದ್ರಾವಿಡ) vocabulary, which is more than two thousand years old. S.G. Narasimachar and R Narasimhachar covered 'Kavicharithre' (ಕವಿಚರಿತ್ರೆ) about poets, their achievements in poetry and prose. Sri M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar was a pioneer on publishing number of valuable books in old (ಹಳಗನ್ನಡ) and contemporary Kannada (ನಡುಗನ್ನಡ), which were not in a position to see the world.

Students were living in his house and Smt Yadugiriyamma used to feed them with food and clothing, which is remembered by that generation even now. The house was a congregation of Sanskrit, Tamil and Kannada litterateurs.

Publications of Sri M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar:

Arya Matha Sanjivini (ಆರ್ಯ ಮಠ ಸಂಜೀವಿನಿ):

M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar had friends like Komaraswamy Thirumalachar, who was running Sadvidyamandira Press in Mysore. M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar studied the then printing technology (not Word or Pdf!), and became a professional. He started a monthly magazine and named it as 'Arya Matha Sanjivini'. The purpose of the magazine was to start Sanskrit slokas in Kannada like Mukundamaalai, Neethi Subhashitha, Bhagavadgeetha etc. In this magazine, valuable kriti 'Chikkadevaraja Binnapa' (ಚಿಕ್ಕದೇವರಾಜ ಬಿನ್ನಪ) a Vishishtadwaita Siddantha (ವಿಶಿಷ್ಟಾದ್ವೈತ ಸಿದ್ಧಾಂತ) by King of Mysore, Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar, was published, with editing by M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar. Also, in this magazine, with S.G. Narasimachar, he published Mahabharata's 'Aid Parvo' and 'Sabha Parvo' written in the prose order. The magazine was stopped in the year 1890.

Karnataka Kavya Manjari (ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಕಾವ್ಯ ಮಂಜರಿ):

From 1890 to 1893 MAR, along with S.G. Narasimachar, had to go to remote places in Karnataka including the then Madras province like Mangalore, and searched, got several works in palm leaves and old and worn out books. The passion of publishing palm leaf poems in paper brought a monthly magazine called Karnataka Kavya Manjari. In Kannada literature, this was not thought of in those days. Around twenty five works of old Kannada (ಹಳಗನ್ನಡ) came to light. The Government of Mysore instructed all the schools to subscribe to Karnataka Kavya Manjari. Also, some of these as poems and proses became text books for not only Mysore but also in Madras and Bombay Universities.

B. L. Rice in Mysore Gazetteer (Vol I, Page 502) said "A few young men have combined to publish a monthly periodical called 'Kavya Manjari', in which ancient works recently discovered are published with careful editing".

Karnataka Kavya Kalanidhi (ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಕಾವ್ಯ ಕಲಾನಿಧಿ):

In 1899 he published rare books and a monthly magazine titled as 'Karnataka Kavya Kalanidhi' for fifteen years. This was viewed by Dr. D.V. Gundappa (DVG) as "from his very busy schedule, he searches palm leaf articles and publishes it too, without any monetary benefits. It takes half a day for each leaf, to understand and to find out whether it is worth publishing or not. This shows the amount of patience and passion of M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar for the language". He published around seventy five books under the name of Karnataka Kavya Kalanidhi.

Karnataka Kavya Kalanidhi did not have any particulars like caste, religion or relatives, known friends, man or woman and so on. It has in its publications from Jain, Veerashaiva, Gowda, Brahmin, as well as Sanskrit and Tamil works and others. He published 'Hadibadeya Dharma' (ಹದಿಬದೆಯ ಧರ್ಮ) from Sanchi Honnamma, who was supplying betel leaves to the Palace. The purpose was only and only to promote Kannada literature for common man. This shows clearly, the 'Nirmoha' and 'Balance of Mind' of the publisher, which should be followed even today.

After the demise of S.G. Narasimachar in the year 1907, and the closure of Wesleyan Mission School due to insufficient funds, M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar struggled hard to continue publishing. He was helped by Smt. Yadugiriyamma's uncle, Sri M.A. Srinivasacharya, [who had translated, Alexander Duma's 'Count of Monte Cristo' to Kannada as 'Raja Malaya Simha' (ರಾಜ ಮಲಯ ಸಿಂಹ)], and became a Kannada lecturer in Maharani's College, Mysore.

The then King of Mysore, Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar was impressed by M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar's works, and 'Ordered' [Order No.956/17.04.1903] publishing of Sougandhika Parinaya (ಸೌಗಂಧಿಕಾ ಪರಿಣಯ), Vatsarajana Kathe (ವತ್ಸರಾಜನ ಕತೆ), Shakuntala Naveena Teeke (ಶಾಕುಂತಲ ನವೀನ ರೀಕೆ) and thirteen other books of late Mumtaz Ali Khan. Some of them were published in Karnataka Kavya Kalanidhi.

His Highness Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar used to go to different places and was giving lectures in English. Because of his proficiency in British English and also Kannada, M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar was given the 'Translator' post in the Palace to translate official documents from English to Kannada and vice versa. This was for the benefit of people under the Kingdom of Mysore.

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar was his student in Wesleyan Mission School. Masti has narrated about incidents discussing with M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar in his bibliography 'Bhava'. Sri B.M.Srikantaiah was considering M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar as his 'Guru'. Dr. D.V.Gundappa in his 'Gyapaka Chitra Shaale' has written a paragraph on M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar, which shows the respect and honour to M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar.

Works of M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar:

For children he wrote Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels, Halasina Hannina Maya (ಹಲಸಿನ ಹಣ್ಣಿನ ಮಾಯ), and so on.

His Kannada Reader-4 was a text book for primary school children.

'Kavi Kavya Prashamse' (ಕವಿ ಕಾವ್ಯ ಪ್ರಶಂಸೆ) was a lecture he gave to Vidyavardhaka Sangha, Dharwad, and is published as a booklet.

'Pramaana Prameya Viveka' (ಪ್ರಮಾಣ ಪ್ರಮೇಯ ವಿವೇಕ) was a lecture for Sanskrit poets in Maharaja's Sanskrit College and is also published as a booklet.

'Kavisamaya' (ಕವಿಸಮಯ) has lot of poets and their poems which is one of the research works of M.A.Ramanuja Iyengar and is a reference book for research students.

'Bhagilu Bhadra' (ಭಾಗಿಲು ಭದ್ರ) is an exposition of 'Deha' and 'Atma' (ದೇಹ ಮತ್ತು ಆತ್ಮ). This gives peace of mind when it is disturbed.

'Suvratha' (ಸುವ್ರತ) is a prose form of Janna's Yashodara Charite (ಜನ್ನನ ಯಶೋಧರ ಚರಿತೆ).

Others include Prabandhaavali (ಪ್ರಬಂಧಾವಳಿ), Kavi Rannana Jivana Charitre Matthu Kavya Mimamse (ಕವಿ ರನ್ನನ ಜೀವನ ಚರಿತ್ರೆ ಮತ್ತು ಕಾವ್ಯ ಮೀಮಾಂಸೆ) to name a few.

He passed away on 27.06.1937 at the age of 75 years. Condolence meetings were held in several places and several poets spoke about him and even now a photo of M.A. Ramanuja Iyengar is displayed in Krishnaraja Wodeyar Auditorium and Kannada Sahitya Parishat, Chamarajapet, Bangalore.