

PURUSHOTTAM CHOWDHARI

Life and Writings 1803 – 1890

by

Rev. Dr. Ravela Joseph, Aug 22nd, 2004

Purushottam chowdhari was a great poet, orator, preacher and committed servant of God. Among all his writings, his lyrics are widely used by all Telugu Christians irrespective of denominations. His style of writings is highly classical, deep in meaning, sweet in hearing and melodious in singing. The tone is more spiritual though poetical and centrality of his life and writings is Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

For some political and social reasons, during the period of the Moguls, some of the people from Bengal had evacuated from Bengal and settled in Utkal, the present Orissa. Among them were the ancestors of Purushottam Choudhari. By caste they were the Bengal Brahmins. The word '*chow*' means four. His forefathers were appointed by the then kings over four places (paraganas) as tax collectors and secondly, they were also the exponents of the four *Vedas*. Hence the title Chowdhari was given to his forefathers

Purushottam Chowdhari was born to Kurmanath Chowdhari and Subhadradevi Chowdhari on the 5th September, 1803 in Madanapuram in Orissa. The family being Brahmin, observed all the ceremonies such as Pumsavana, Jata karma, Namakarnam, Vedamrambham, Saptadina vivaham etc. in the life of Purushottam Chowdhari. He was a vaisnava bhakta by birth. *Bhakti* is a loving devotion and surrender and confident prayer to divine person. Such devotion and surrender should be entirely unreserved and complete. *Bhakti* is not something that can be manifested only at the time of worship, but rather it is an act manifested in every aspect of human life. There are nine steps in the path of *bhakti*. They are *sravana*, *kirtana*, *smarana*, *pada seva*, *arcana*, *vandana*, *dasya*, *sakhya* and *atma nivedana*. By following these steps, the viasnavites believe that the devotee enters the presence of God and grows in union with God and finally gets himself absorbed in God. Purushottam Chowdhari's life goal was also to get himself absorbed in God. Therefore, he followed all these steps and in devotion to God, he wrote, as a *viasnava bhakta* a *satakam*, one hundred poems on Sree Rama, some poems on Siva, on Krishna Leela and on Gurus. He also read *Siva Yoga Sara*, *Vedanta Sara*, *Jeeva Prabodha*, *Bhagavata Kathalu*, *Paratatvam*, *Atmagnana*, *Avaduta caritra* etc. He followed all paths found in Hinduism and not only that he went to the extent of living with the naked saints to achieve his life goal, getting absorbed into God. But, he utterly disappointed and dissatisfied with all these ways.

While he was in this kind of spiritually disturbed situation, he was given a Christian pamphlet which he read after sometime and found in it how Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for the salvation of the humankind. He later found some more pamphlets which created in him a deep desire to know more about Christ. He traveled 400 miles to get the New Testament from Vizak. He read it and found peace in his mind and soul finally accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and was baptized on the 6th October in 1833 later in 1836 he was ordained (on the 24th of April).

From the day he was baptized (1833) Purushottalm Chowdhari started his Christian literary life. His literature can be divided into three parts.

1, Works related to the scriptures

Bible Dictionary
Daivika Santi Margam
A Sermon in Oriyan language
A Sermon on the Judgement

2. Pamphlets on different topics

Kulachara Pariksha
Mukti Marga Pradarsanam
Jagannath Pariksha
Brahma Ganam
Andhakara Nasanam
Masuchi Visuchi Sankata Branthi
Manasse Mulam

3. Poetical works

Yesu Nayaka Satakam	(1845)	Satya Bhajan	(1874)
Yesu Prabhu satakam	(1845)	Vigraha Nirmanam	(1847)
Rakshana Charitra	(1846)	Pancha Rathnamulu	(1847)
Nistara Rathnakaram	(1846)	Devuni Virudrupa Varnanam	(1884)
Panchachamara Pannamulu	(1847)	Telugu Prasangalu	
Kraistava Neethi Prakasham	(1851)	Sankeerthanalu	
Satyavedasara Sangraham	(1871)	Kreestu Parathathvam	

The primary object of his writings is to expound the teachings of Christ, his Lord by using meaningful images, analogies, and illustrations. With his experience once as a *viasnava bhakta*, Purushottam Chowdhari brings the *bhakti* element into his Christian writings. In his work, *Kriastava Niti Prakasam*, *bhakti* element is extensively expressed. The *bhakti* phraseology like devotion, devotee, adoration, anchoring faith in Christ, union with Christ, union with Holy Spirit, Christ the Refuge and faith in the name, feet, cross and blood of Christ are vividly used. The *bhakti* motif is also well expressed in *Yesu Nayaka satakam*, *Yesu Prabhu Satakam* and *Panchachamara Pannamulu*.

He believes in the triune God. He says that there is no happiness apart from God, no salvation and safety except in Christ, and no satisfaction unless one drinks the splendid, kind and pure spirit of God. Therefore, he pleads to fix one's firm desire in the Triune God. He says in his *bhakti* towards God, one should prostrate (*sagiluta*), kneel down (*mokallunuta*), anticipate eagerly (*dosilogguta*) and humiliate (*vinayam cuputa*) himself before God.

In his lyrics 137 and 138 in Andhra Christian Hymnals, the poet expresses his deep faith in the name of Jesus Christ. Just by uttering the name of Jesus Christ, he says, one's deceitfulness and guilt are destroyed and peace and delightfulness are granted. (*das jana hrhdhvikasamai yella dosamulaku vinasakaramina Yesu namam*)

He affirms his faith in the power of the feet of Jesus Christ. The feet of Jesus Christ, he says, are the source for the eternal happiness of a devotee and purge away the sins of the

whole world. Therefore, he wants to worship the Lotus Feet of Christ with pure and blameless devotion. He wants to worship Christ by placing his head under the feet of Christ and to meditate Christ by keeping the feet of Christ in his soul and mind

Purushottam Chowdhari believes that salvation is possible only through the death of Christ. He states with deep conviction that there is no forgiveness for our sins unless we understand the salvific nature of the death and blood of Christ. He writes:

**Ni karacharanara vindamulu garedi
Rakthamulo muningi na neri durithambula
Dolagi nemmadi saukhyamu ...**

“Your blood that flows from your body is the sole principle of my life.”

“Ni dagu tanuraktame parama dharmamu nakadi Yesu nayaka.”

“All my sins will be perished by one, only one drop of your blood.”

‘Harinchu papamella ni maha pavithra raktha bindu rasilo nokka chukkato’

Purushottam Chowdhari was a great evangelist. He toured hundreds and hundreds of miles to preach the Gospel. He was a strong believer in Christ. Once while he was preaching the Word in Madras (Chennai), a group of people got together and beat him severely. He received those beatings as blessings from God. Many a time he was persecuted by his own people and by others. He lived for and served Christ with deep faith and commitment

Yet, once in his life, he was thrown into a gross sin. He writes, ‘my eyes were covered with layers of fat and so instead of turning my eyes towards Jehovah, I turned to an image of soil and I committed sin.’ The fall was so deep and so dark that he could not come out of it by himself. He felt ashamed of his sin and confessed it to God through prayer for one year. ‘**Thrahimam Kristu natha,**’ ‘**Unnapatuna vacchuchunnu ni pada,**’ **Yerigi yerigi chedipothini manassa,** ‘**Vaddu manasa buddhi kuruch**’ are the famous confessional lyrics written by Chowdhari. After he received forgiveness from God, he wrote ‘**Yohova na mora lalinchenu.**’ **Dasula Prardhana dappaka yosagedu Yesu nayakude ma velpu.**” These devotional lyrics have been in the history of Christendom consoling the believers in their weaknesses and helping them to overcome their shortcomings and get revived.

In his last years he wrote two lyrics expressing his vision of heaven. He writes, I am ready to make my journey to the feet of the Lord; and therefore, he tells to all the organs of his body, “It is enough what you had done, it is enough, please do not come on my journey to the presence my Lord.” He died in 1890 at his 87th year and was buried at Cuttack. “His end was eminently peaceful” We can understand the nature of the person and work of the Rev. Purushottam Chowdhari in the words of Rev. J.C. Pike of Cuttack, “My memory of Purushottam Chowdhari is simply of very delightful old man.... He was a man of ability, but it was his sterling character that won my admiration and love. He was so genial and kind that every one loved him” and was loved by his Lord God.