

MEMOIRS OF A FOLK PERFORMER

(Chukka Sattiah: Oggu Katha Performer)

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(Chukka Sattiah is a living legend who has transformed this genre with many innovations. The following are excerpts from his memoir).

I have experience of more than 56 years in oggukatha. I was born in the Manikyapuram village, Miryala Ghanpur Mandal, Warangal district, Andhra Pradesh on June 15th 1936. My mother's name is Sayamma. My father Agaiaha died a year and a half after my birth. Some people say that my father performed oggukatha on rare occasions in the village. My mother took care of us with the help of my uncles. We used to have 30 to 35 acres land at that time. My mother and grandmother conducted the money lending business in the village.

I started going to the fields from the age of twelve. My elder brother supervised the cattle and sheep along with the land with my assistance, besides four other servants. There were some breaks in my school education and I had not been keen on continuing. Suddenly I desired to study again, and I joined a private convent school. There, for the first time I learnt the poems from Narasimha Sathakam (praises of lord Narasimha) which are 100 in number. Even today, I remember more than 50 poems of them. I also read some poems of Sumathi Sathakam (moral poems) after which I stopped my studies.

At that point, some people were searching for an actor for the Hanuman character for Chiruthala Ramayana. They liked me and selected me for the role. I practiced it so much that I actually became a Guru (master) and started teaching them the drama. After that, I started work on Krishna Rayabharam with them but I clashed with some people and called it off. When I was thirteen years old, I watched Beerappa Katha (Beerappa is the ancestor of shepherd community) at my house. I found it so attractive that I started practising the songs and dialogue near the well though people yelled at me. I never performed it, though. I was attracted by N.T. Rama Rao in 'Sarangadhara' and I practiced the Sarangadhara story at night to chase away sleep while drawing water in the fields.

Once, a performer was unable to tell the Sarangadhara story with proper diction and rhythm. So, one golla (shepherds' caste) person asked me if I could do it. That was a big beginning - they paid me 3 rupees that day. I used to get 75 paise for my Chiruthala Ramayana performance.



The living legend Sri Chukka Sattiah

My brother being an elder involved in solving the problems of the people in panchayats of the village objected to my narrative performances. It would damage his image if I wear gongali (rugged woolen blankets woven by the shepherds) and perform in the village like bards, he said. He was very angry with me. So I did all kinds of agricultural chores and worked hard for my brother's sake. Simultaneously, I performed shows also.

One day I was writing and practicing a song named after Kaali Mankali Mayamma, (my mother goddess Kaali). The goddess appeared in front of me around 1 a.m. I fell from the bed in fear. She reassured me and fed me with her milk saying that I would be honoured like a king. It was then that I realized that my mouth had become paralyzed. People came running and thought that I had gone mad. From that moment till today, I find the goddess in front of me whenever I close my eyes. After that, my story telling performances improved a lot. I just remembered everything that I saw in my childhood. I never learned any story - I performed on stage with the story coming from my memory.

Till now, I have performed 13,000 shows. Some days I perform from morning 7 am to till night 12 pm especially while I am engaged in promoting the government schemes and election campaigns.

A workshop is going to be held this summer vacation where in 120 artists are going to get trained in Oggukatha. No one ever taught me all this. I just learnt it and practiced it on my own in my back yard.

Sometimes I am forced to present Ramayana within the duration of half an hour. In Vijayawada, I got first prize for this half an hour presentation of Ramayana. Nowadays, nobody is learning stories properly. They are just performing short versions. But Oggukatha will exist as long as god exists.

For 18 years, I have been employed as tutor in Telugu University and getting a good monthly salary. I started with Rs. 2000/- and now I am getting Rs.11, 000/- as I became old. For Oggukatha shows, we charge Rs. 4000/- to 8000/- depending on the situation and capacity of the organizer.

I spent much money which I got in my life for the bore wells in my land. Up to 35 bores we tried but all

of them failed. Not much money is left with me now. I have two sons and one daughter. Unfortunately my daughter passed away recently.

I got honours like Savyasaachi, Kalabrahmma, Makutamleni Maharaju, Kala Samrat and Janapada Kala Murthy. A good Oggukatha narrator can support himself and give bread and butter to others also. That is what I learnt in my life. ✨

EMBOSSED SHEET METAL CRAFT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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Rangasaipet in Warangal district has long been known for the superb workmanship of its metal workers, the Viswakarmas dating back to the great Kakatiya rulers (11th-13th centuries). These craftsmen were known for their proficiency in stone and metal sculpture. They made vigrahas and vahanas and other accessories like crowns of the gods and goddesses of temple and temple ornamentation.

During the Nizam's rule, metal craftsmen acquired strikingly secular overtones and incorporated Mughal floral motifs and designs. With a decrease in the demand for traditional and temple articles of adornment, they switched to the manufacture of articles for use in homes. They make flower pots, vases, lanterns, shields, small stools, Mayur lamps, hanging lampshades, dasavatara shields, panels illustrating the Mahabharata and Ramayana and Hindu gods and goddesses.

The sheet metal products available currently mostly have religious themes. Mementoes are the highest selling products.

The Process of Metal Craft

Metal sheet work involves various processes. Flat ornamentation is the earliest form of sheeting, where the sheet of brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) is placed on a warm bed of lac over a wooden plank. Lac is a mixture of bee's wax, resins castor, mustard oil and brick dust. The edges of the brass sheet are also covered with lac. The sheet is cleaned with tamarind and dried. The design draft drawn with pencil on a tracing sheet is transferred on the sheet by engraving. The negative side of the design is cut away in order to give the see-through effect and the designs are filed to make it smooth. The sheet is taken out from the lac by breaking it. After embossing, the final definition is given. The sheet is treated with nitric acid for shine and then heated and washed. The plates made by this method are often mounted on wooden frames.

Flower pots, lampshades and drum containers are made by hollow sheeting. The sheet has to be given the shape of a hollow container without any converging or diverging molding. The pattern of the form needs to be cut into pieces and welded together to bring out the form. ✨

