

# Srikrishna Alanahally: A Literary Self-Portrait

LOTHAR LUTZE

## I. Daybreak

Off shook the sun the embrace of the naked night  
rose rubbed off his eyes the sleep dirt yawned  
flesh of goats sheep hens ripped open  
brown blue white red muscles stretched  
a butcher's shop opened in the blazing east  
day broke into my village.

Lost in her prison of darkness our vaidika's daughter  
groaned with the pain of her joints  
mourning the waste of her seven years' puberty  
outside the wind waited for her release  
knocked at the backyard door whispered stole away  
day broke into my village.

A hyena: his tongue of eighteen aflame  
stood the gowda boy  
heaving with passion his heart  
sailed for the sky beyond the clouds  
in a fire-flower boat  
day broke into my village.

As I went to the river  
to scrub and to polish  
some tarnished old poetic clichés  
the silver rabbit quivered  
in the lantana bush  
reluctant to leave its just-born  
then my giant dog pounced  
gnashing tearing blood spouted  
day broke into my village.

Dipping in midriver muttering mantras  
the village shanbhogue lewd and past sixty  
leered at the housewives  
raising their sarees in knee-deep water  
filling the pots  
laughed his lecher's laugh as their thighs flared in fullness  
day broke into my village.

(Trsl. K. P. Vasudevan/L. Lutze)

## II. Text-initiated Interview

LUTZE: Krishna, do you remember the day when you wrote this poem, and how it all started?

SRIKRISHNA: Yea, I remember that day when I was just eighteen. I was wandering near around my village. I was full of poetic dreams in my mind. I read Bendre and Kuvempu<sup>1</sup> and I was very much impressed by the poets and I was so mad about the nature and I was dreaming the old romantic ideas in my mind. But unexpectedly I read the modern poems at that time and I was disappointed by the romantic conceptions and I washed the romantic conceptions from my mind. I was searching for new images in my mind at that time.

LUTZE: So, Krishna, when you speak of kavisamayas in your poem – that is 'poetic clichés', as you've told me – you refer to romantic conceptions.

SRIKRISHNA: Not only to the romantic; even the traditional poets in my Kannada tradition, Kannada poetic tradition, you see, from Pampa<sup>2</sup> to Kuvempu – the great tradition of our Kannada poets uses the old kavisamayas or poetic clichés. For them, for all of the romantic poets and the old poets also, the morning is always glorious. The morning means when the lotus blossoms and then only the rays come up. And the evening means for the old romantic poets the lotus is going to close and the *naidile* is going to blossom. These clichés – I was very much disappointed from these clichés and I was searching for the new images to narrate the morning. But in my mind at that time I was full of old poetic clichés and the old kavisamayas. When I went to the river near my village at that time I imagined these pictures. All these five pictures in this poem *Daybreak* (are) from the soil of my village. The first picture – I was very much moved by that picture. I saw that butcher's shop, that colourful flesh (that) was hanged in front of that shop. In the east the sun rises. The clouds are so colourful. In that same time these butcher's-shop fleashes first attracted me, and my mind linked with those clouds and the flesh hanging in the front of this butcher's shop. Then that image was turning in my mind and the poem growing on with some other images. In the fourth stanza of the poem I express, not in suggestive sense, the morning, the real morning or the poetry on the morning, the real poetry on the morning, not depend(ent) upon the old kavisamayas or the poetic clichés. The morning means not only glorious and peaceful thing. The morning may (mean) violence, the morning may pervert, the morning may (mean) tragic thing. That tragic incident happened in front of my eyes when the dog, my dog killed a beautiful and delicate rabbit – my old clichés, old kavisamayas – rooted out all the old kavisamayas and the clichés from my mind.

LUTZE: This killing of the rabbit by a dog was a real incident which you observed?

SRIKRISHNA: Yea, some of the incidents especially in this poem really happened in my life. All the five incidents happened in different days. But one day all the

<sup>1</sup> D. R. Bendre (b. 1896) and K. V. G. Puttappa ('Kuvempu', b. 1904), leading Kannada poets of the older generation.

<sup>2</sup> There are two Pampas in early Kannada literature, both of them Jains; one, Adipampa (10th century), wrote a free version of the Mahabharata, the other, Abhinava Pampa (12th century), of the Ramayana.

images stick on to my mind. And all those images have a link in the past. The morning means not the glorious. It is painful. Anything born means painful – and that violence, that painful thing, that painful sensibility I hope I expressed in that first stanza of the poem. In the second stanza and the first stanza I bring two important things in my society: that is, one, the uncomfortableness of expressing even the youth by a Brahmin girl, because she (is) always suffering in the old traditional and moral values. She is unable to express her desires, express her real love because of the fear of the society.

LUTZE: Talking to you very often recently, I've learnt a lot from you, and I know how obsessed you are with this idea, with this contrast between the Brahmin and the Shudra, and again it comes out of this poem. It is this Brahmin girl and the Shudra boy. So, would you like to say a little more on this?

SRIKRISHNA: You see, this Brahmin and Shudra conception – it's very important thing in our life as well as in our literature, you see. The Brahmins from the beginning of our history – they are the intellectuals. The Shudras are very near to the soil and they live with the nature. I think the Brahmins are guiders of the Shudras and the whole country from the beginning through their mind. After the Independence by the great effect of Gandhiji most of the Shudras awake and they (are) going to compete with the Brahmins even in intellectual level. This is a great struggle in every Shudra leader, you see, in my country, their complete aims and their values (are) to become a Brahmin. For example, my great poet Kuvempu – in almost all his literature you will find that struggle for acquir(ing) the Brahminism, means Brahminic values. You see, this Shudra conception enter(ed) into my mind through the writings of Ananthamurthy<sup>3</sup>, and even in Mahabharata, you see, the encounter between the Shudra and a Brahmin started through Parasara and Matsyagandhi – Parasara, a Brahmin rishi, and Matsyagandhi, a Shudra girl. The Vyasa was born by these Brahmin and Shudra parents. It means the encounter between Brahmin and Shudra produces the great thing.

LUTZE: Krishna, you have taught me that this encounter between Brahmin and Shudra is something that can keep a literature alive. On the other hand, are you aware that in the long run it might result in a kind of black-and-white drawing –

SRIKRISHNA: No.

LUTZE: – that in the long run, perhaps, your art may suffer from oversimplification?

SRIKRISHNA: No, impossible. Because, you see, the Brahmin, the conception of Brahmins means the intellectual, intellectualism. The conception of Shudra means the vital sensibility and the vital experiences of the creation. There is not any problem (that) arises when we (are) going to encounter the great sensibility and the great experiences with the intellectual element. It will produce, definitely it will produce the great thing. It will never become simply simple form, you see, because any great art is born out of this encounter of great experience and the vital experience with an intellectual, a great intellectual mind. I think so.

LUTZE: But, Krishna, the moment you try to portray a character from real life, don't you think these contrasts which you are describing, say, intellect on one

<sup>3</sup> U. R. Ananthamurthy (b. 1932), important Kannada poet and novelist of the middle generation. His novel *Samskara* became well-known through a film version.

side, vitality on the other — I think that is the key contrast, you see — don't you think these two things may very easily be mixed in a certain individual?

SRIKRISHNA: No, it is impossible. We must struggle to mix these two things, because the atmosphere for a Shudra writer is entirely different from (that of) a Brahmin writer. A Shudra writer — the atmosphere for the Shudra writer is far away from the intellectual knowledge. He must conquer all the knowledge through his study and through his discussions with the intellectuals. But the sensibility and the real-life experiences are very natural to him. He would like to make his experience and his sensibility meaningful through that intellectual workmanship. For a Brahmin boy there is no problem of acquiring intellectualism because his atmosphere is like that. From the beginning his atmosphere gives everything, every knowledge to him. Not for Shudra boy. Shudra boy learns only the details around his life. He reacts to the sunrise and sunset, he reacts to the nature, he reacts to what is happening in the front of his eyes. But the Brahmin boy immediately reacts to his mantras and his rituals. He is bothered about rituals and his values. The values are most important to a Brahmin boy, and instincts are very important to the Shudra boy, you see. Therefore these two things must unite for a great work. Therefore even in almost all my work I struggle to encounter these two things. I am not satisfied. I am not successful in that respect.

LUTZE: But, Krishna, you do not believe that these two different attitudes towards life could meet in one single character in your novel?

SRIKRISHNA: Not yet. Because the protagonist of my first novel Kadu is eight-years' innocent boy. Through his innocent eyes I depict the life of the whole village.

LUTZE: Krishna, I have to apologize. We are going to talk again about your fiction. Let us not forget about your poem today. I wanted to ask you a few more things about your poem. I was wondering, Krishna — in the introduction to your collection Adiga<sup>4</sup> has said something very interesting, you know: He calls you a member of a generation devoted to workmanship in poetry, and he opposes you or your generation to another generation which wrote poetry like "sleep-talk", as he says. Would you agree with this view?

SRIKRISHNA: Yes, definitely. I think Gopalakrishna Adiga assessed my poetry without any prejudice. I think so. It is the real valuation of my book. After Adiga wrote that introduction, the way of my poetry took a very serious turn. Now, even now I fear to publish anything unless that poem contains something new, unless that poem is really a good contribution to my literature. Then only I am going to publish it. That idea, that conception came to my mind through the introduction of Adiga.

LUTZE: Do you think this is what he means by workmanship, a kind of — what should I say — artistic perfection which you try to achieve, as opposed to "sleep-talk"? I forgot the Kannada word for it which he uses.

SRIKRISHNA: Kanasugarikeya.

LUTZE: So, do you not at all believe in inspiration?

SRIKRISHNA: No. Once — once I believed in inspiration. I wrote that thing in

<sup>4</sup> M. G. Adiga (b. 1918), leading poet and critic, initiator of the Navya Kavya (New Poetry) movement in Kannada literature.

Lankesha's Akshara hosa kavya<sup>5</sup> when he asked me some questions about my poetry-making. He asked one question: 'Do you believe in inspiration?' I answered: 'No. Once I believed in inspiration. Now I do not so much depend upon the inspiration.'

LUTZE: Then, Krishna, what is it that suddenly makes you see the morning in such a different way?

SRIKRISHNA: I think at the time, you see, that is the flashes in my mind, some flashes going on every day. If you call those flashes inspiration, I don't mind. But those flashes or those inspirations must take the real shape by that workmanship. That is most important.

LUTZE: Krishna, would you like your poems to be listened to or read, and who would you like to be your readers or listeners? Or are you writing them just for your own enjoyment?

SRIKRISHNA: No. I never think so. I am writing the poems for my people also. I believe in my people, in society, in the social consciousness. I have great social consciousness.

LUTZE: Who are your people?

SRIKRISHNA: My people? They may be educated or uneducated. I think some of my poems — you see, there is a complaint against the modern poetry in Kannada. This modern poetry is very difficult to be understood by a common man. But I think some of my poems really reach the mind of ordinary people also. For example, I read this Belagu<sup>6</sup> in number of conferences. All kind of audience gathered there. Everyone enjoyed that poem, including the old traditional writers and the modern writers and the laymen also. I think there is something (that) will communicate to them through my images and the fresh images and the effect of sound also.

LUTZE: Krishna, what do you want to give them through your poems? Is it just enjoyment?

SRIKRISHNA: No, not the enjoyment. With enjoyment I would like to communicate some more things to my audience. If you ask, 'What is that thing?', I am unable to answer it in a few words, because I think poetry is not only the instrument for the enjoyment, it is the instrument to communicate some more things. For example, through poetry we will extend the experiences of a person. Through poetry, I think, we are going to develop the sensibility of a person. I am not ready to accept I can change the society through my poems. I never think so. But I think I will add some more things to anybody's experience through my poems.

LUTZE: Well, Krishna, one last question. You see, Adiga's preface to your collection is full of praise. He said some very important things about you, but it is not all the way praise. There is one point where he complains of a certain monotony in your collection, and I think that refers to your obsession with sex.

SRIKRISHNA: Yes. Adiga's assessment is in some respect correct; except one or two poems, I think, three or four poems, almost all poems (are) concern(ed) with sex. During the time when I wrote those poems I was between eighteen to twenty years' boy. The most powerful instinct at that time for me was sex. You

<sup>5</sup> Anthology of New Kannada Poetry, edited by P. Lankesh (b. 1935).

<sup>6</sup> Kannada title of Daybreak.

see, in my country, in my atmosphere, in my society the sex means it is obscene. There is no liberal attitude towards sex in my elders or in my society. They are going to suppress the sex of everyone. Because of their suppress(ion) the members from my generation became rebel against these old values and the suppress(ion) of that sex, and I think sex is the most powerful instinct in our life. The anger and the hunger and the sleep are also instincts. But the sex is the most powerful instinct, because we are going to satisfy our hungriness by eating something. We are going to satisfy our sleep by sleeping. But we are going to satisfy our sex through some other living being. It means the instinct of sex is more complex than remaining instincts. Some of my elders asked me, 'Why are you going to write on sex only? You must (be) aware about the poverty of this country. That is the greatest thing. It is the most important instinct. The hungriness is the most important thing in this country.' Yes, I accept it. But the instinct of sex is much more powerful than the poverty and the hungriness because we are going to satisfy that instinct through some living beings only. If we are going to use some food, there is no problem when we are eating something. But we are going to use a girl — there some problem will arise between our relationship and our satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore that problem is very complex; and at the time I fell in the love with some of the girls I was betrayed by those girls, and I was an innocent boy (who) came from a village. I think love is eternal, love is beautiful. I had some great ideal values getting through the readings of moral books, and I was very much disappointed by some, and I was cheated by some girls and I became very angry with those girls. I became pervert in sex, and I expressed almost all experiences, and I opened my mind through my poems.

LUTZE: Krishna, you've been using the past tense all the time now in talking about sex. Do you think you have changed since then?

SRIKRISHNA: Yea. After the publication of *Mannina Hadu*<sup>7</sup>, I think, now, at present, I think, sex is not obsession for me now, you see. Now I bother about some other values in my life and society as well as sex also. Even now I am fond of that instinct of sex. I think sex is only the real force of man. I learnt that from my life experience as well as (from) the knowledge through Lawrence also. Even in my recent poems it is entirely different from any obsession. In my forthcoming long poem — I have already illustrated some of the parts from that poem, you see — in that poem I am far away from all these obsessions. I am going to express my experiences from last six years after publishing this *Mannina Hadu*. (For) those six years' experiences I hope (I am), without any obsession, without any prejudice, going to get a form in real poetic sense.

LUTZE: And which way, just to finish it, which way do you think you have moved in those six years? Say, towards society, towards tradition, towards religion, towards spirituality?

SRIKRISHNA: Yea, from last six years I experienced lot. I came from a(n) interior village without any prejudice. I came to the city as an innocent boy. I was full of dreams and I was expecting number of things in this town. When I was in my village, I was alone inside me, I was alone, there is nobody inside me. I was myself

<sup>7</sup> Poetry collection (1966, 21968), contains twenty-five poems by Srikrishna, among them *Belagu*.

there. But after entering to this city I've mixed with the different kinds of people, you see. Day by day, gradually I lose my identity, and there are number of fellows entering my inside, and I am going to use the Marx for the sake of my life. That is a great tragedy – I think it is a great (one) in my life. Now I am sitting in front of you, you see. I think the real struggle in my mind I would like to express as myself only. That struggle is for every minute in my mind. But the society (is) going to protest that real shape of mine. They expect only my masks. But I am unable to become insincere in that way. Therefore once again I am going to struggle for the identity of myself. Once again now I am trying to become what I was in my village. It means not remove the city experiences from my mind, it is not the way. I am going to identify in my real svarupa, in my real shape.

LUTZE: We have a beautiful word in German – Gestalt.

SRIKRISHNA: For the svarupa? Yea, it is a good thing. Yes, that is the important thing in my poem. That is the major thing.

Mysore, 9–9–1972

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LUTZE: Krishna, say something about your use of language, especially, what do you think about the artistic possibilities of using dialect?

SRIKRISHNA: Yea, the language is the most important part in my writing, because without language we can't express anything. I think language is the most important thing in any art piece according to my view, because that language part must move any audience. The first thing in any artistic piece (is) that language. The moving thing in the artistic piece I think (is) that language. I think it means the intellectual, any intellectual element may lack, but the effect of language will remain in poetry. But in short-story the language and the ideas or the intellectual element I think can't (be) separated. For that purpose I go on rewriting it. When I am going to rewrite, this intellectual (element) and these ideas enter into that language. Spontaneously I am using powerful language. Because I am full of my language, you see. The language is not a borrowed thing for me. These ideas I must borrow from here and there. But not the language. Language is my spontaneous thing. When I am going to make that incident as an art piece or I am going to make an experience as an art piece, I struggle with ideas and my language on that experience...

You see, in Kannada there are number of different dialects. If you go to Uttara Karnataka – means Bendre dialect – (it) is entirely different from my dialect. My village dialect is entirely different from the city dialect. My village dialect is very near to poetry. My villagers used very few words to communicate any great thing. But in city you can't. We are going to use lot of words to communicate silly thing. In my village the language is very very precise. I feel shy now, you see, even now when I am going to my village I feel so uncomfortable, because I can't communicate anything directly to my parents, because my language by this urbanization became – nonsense, I think, you see. But the dialect of my villagers (is) still powerful. They are using very few words to communicate most essential thing, because the experience of villagers is very very limited experience. They had limited words also to express their limited experiences. Here I am – now I became educated man. My experiences also became big, you see. Therefore I am learning

these all kinds of words, other languages, and now I am rich by lot of words. But these words can't communicate my — I got some words for my science knowledge or some intellectual knowledge or something, you see. These words dominated me completely. I can't communicate my emotional and most intimate feelings in these words, you see. I must communicate my sentiments or my emotions or my love only through those words I learnt where I was born and where I am going to be happy with my parents or my relatives, you see. At that time I really suffer, because if I am going to use those words now — it became very unnatural also. By this urbanization we are using all the sophisticated words. The language became very sophisticated, far away from the raw language, you see, the rawness of my village language. But even the sound, the effect, the beauty of my village language — I am full of that village language . . . That language — I'm full of that language itself, you see, because that language of village-folk — it is flowing like my blood, you see, that village folk-language. But not this urban language, because every word I learnt, I exercised with the language here. But in village language there is no problem. Therefore I am very comfortable and I am very happy when I am using that village language . . .

(But) I am going to get some more thing. If I go on using the urban language it is also nonsense. If I go on using the village folk-language it is also useless. If I go on using the folk-language there is no speciality or there is no stamp of Krishna on that language, you see. If I go on using village language as village folk-artists used, what is the use, you see? I must fuse with my cultured language also. Otherwise, I will also (be) one of the folklorists, that is all — folk-singer of a village. That is the deficiency I find in Kambar<sup>8</sup> also — Kambar writing the poems like my village folklorist, you see. The writing of my village folk-singer would be no different from my writing. I could not achieve much more than my village folk-singer. Therefore I am going to fuse my village language with this cultured and this Sanskritized or Westernized (language). From transplanting two different things you will get new very wonderful thing, you see. That is the experiment in my language . . . From the first poem of Mannina Hadu it is the struggle between these two things. One side the cultured language, another side the real village language (which) is flowing in my blood itself. I do not bother about learning my village language because it is flowing like my blood. But I am going to learn every word (of) this cultured language. Every word is new thing to me . . . This is the problem, even now, even after ten, you see, nearly twelve years or thirteen years after when I entered into this city. Even now I am struggling with this cultured language. It is very unnatural to me. When I am using this language I feel uncomfortable, because I do not communicate real Krishna to my friend or my intimate persons. If I am going to use my village language I feel very comfortable, but I am struggling to fuse these two languages, even for my relationship. That is the problem. Even for my relationship, even for my way of writing, even for my way of living also, you see. I must fuse these two things. I can't live there or here itself. I must live with these two things. Therefore the whole (of) my writing and the whole (of) my life depend upon this fusing these two things.

Mysore, 22—9—1972

<sup>8</sup> Ch. Kambar (b. 1938), Kannada poet and playwright.



### III. Editor's Postscript

Srikrishna was born in the Karnataka village of Alanahally in 1945. He thus belongs to the generation of writers born into India on the eve of Independence, if not into independent India itself, and therefore escaped certain colonial complexes only to find himself caught in the web of problems faced by a postcolonial society. This can well be felt in his interview (which he insisted on giving in English), even if there he relates his problems exclusively to the traditional Brahmin-Shudra and city-village dichotomies. Still, his candour makes this interview a most valid document of the painful process of Sanskritization (at one place identified with Westernization by the interviewee) and urbanization, which so many Indian intellectuals of his age and background are presently passing through.

As one of the most promising young Kannada poets and short-story writers — he has also successfully tried his hand at novel writing (Kadu, 1971) — Srikrishna could not but be included in a research project dealing with the author-reader relations in three contemporary regional literatures of India (Hindi, Bengali, Kannada), which originally was conceived, jointly with Prof. D. Kantowsky of Konstanz University, within the Sonderforschungsbereich (Special Research Unit) 16. An article on *Literatursoziologie auf kommunikationstheoretischer Grundlage als sozialwissenschaftliches Korrektiv*<sup>9</sup> served as a theoretical point of departure. For reasons mainly administrative, the project has so far been restricted to an investigation of author situations conducted by the present editor in the Hindi-, Bengali- and Kannada-speaking regions in 1972–73. The results of this investigation will be presented in the near future in a monograph entitled *Authors of India: A Study of Creativity in Three Contemporary Regional Literatures*.

What above has been termed Text-initiated Interview is an essential feature of the project. The initiating text (poem or narrative prose passage) is meant to set the conversation afloat and at the same time, by providing a fairly hard and fast topic, help to reduce vagueness. In the interview the Western interrogator serves, as so often, as a catalyst or, if you like, a rather queer combination of mirror and mid-wife, but serve he does, and he may even be useful in extracting fragments of truth which otherwise would have remained unpronounced.

The text of the interview, as printed here for the first time, is the result of an attempt at minimal editing. Repetitions (unless they appeared to be ingredients of the speaker's style), obvious slips of the tongue and distortions of meaning had to be eliminated if possible — with additions by the editor marked (. . .) —; but at the same time an effort was made not to interfere unnecessarily with the stylistic variety of English presented by the interviewee. Although — or because? — it linguistically reflects, as usual, the speaker's mother-tongue, it develops a peculiar and almost poetic beauty of its own, with a lack of inhibition, a freshness and vigour reminiscent of Afro-English writing at its best. Features of style contributing to such an overall impression may be the cyclic recurrence of keywords (e.g., *kavisamaya*), the visible growth of ideas in speech (with apologies to Heinrich von Kleist; e.g., the morning — the real morning — the poetry on the morning — the real poetry on the morning), statements which at first sight must seem contradictory, in particular to the Western

<sup>9</sup> In: *Internationales Asienforum* 4 (1971), 515–523.

listener or reader (e.g., No, it is impossible — We must struggle to mix these two things), the anticipatory placing of prominent parts of a sentence (e.g., A Shudra writer — the atmosphere for the Shudra writer is far away from the intellectual knowledge), which is a mark of emphatic speech.

Acknowledgements are due to K. P. Vasudevan, through whom and in whose company I met Srikrishna and other Kannada authors, and Srinivasa Rao, who had more than a hand in giving the interview its printed shape. When the encounter with Srikrishna took place late in 1972, he was teaching Kannada literature at a Mysore college. Recently I was told that he has since returned to his village — which would be a *dénouement* not altogether unexpected.