

THE INWARD FIRE SERIES

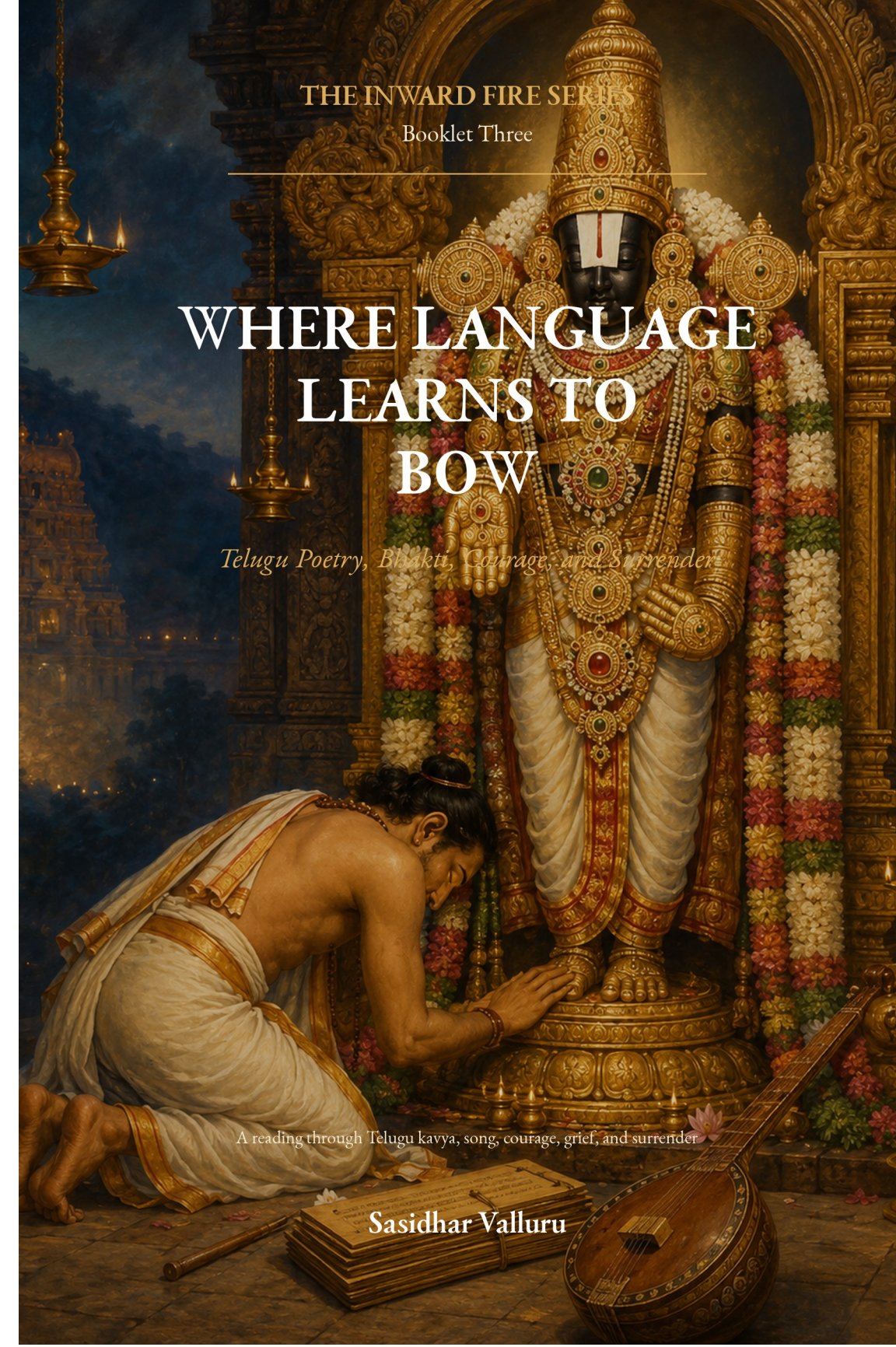
Booklet Three

WHERE LANGUAGE LEARNS TO BOW

Telugu Poetry, Bhakti, Courage, and Surrender

A reading through Telugu kavya, song, courage, grief, and surrender

Sasidhar Valluru



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Cover artwork: Annamayya at the feet of Lord Venkateswara, original generated devotional artwork.

Author's Note

This booklet is the third in **The Inward Fire Series**.

The first booklet asked what remains when dharma is tested, when māyā is named, when knowledge is humbled, when power is exposed, when surrender becomes the last shelter, and when even familiar gods seem silent.

The second booklet asked what comes after that silence. It turned toward nāda: Om, rhythm, Nataraja, poetry, art, grief, and offering. It asked whether art can become upāsana.

This booklet begins after sound, because after sound comes language. Not because language is higher than sound. It is not. Language is sound shaped into meaning. **Svaram** disciplines sound. **Nādam** is the deeper vibration beneath sound. Nataraja is the source, movement, and dissolution of that vibration.

Language is not sovereign. Language bows to **svaram**. **Svaram** bows to **nādam**. **Nādam** bows to Nataraja.

That is the metaphysical spine of this booklet. But this is not a textbook on Telugu **chandas**. I do not write as a formal scholar of meter, grammar, or prosody. I am not trying to display expertise. I am trying to listen.

I am trying to see how great Telugu poets made language bow before Bhagavān.

Sometimes language becomes courage. Sometimes it becomes cry. Sometimes it becomes complaint. Sometimes it becomes praise. Sometimes it becomes certainty. Sometimes it becomes surrender. Sometimes, at the end, it becomes tired and asks to return.

That is enough for this booklet: not **chandas** as grammar alone, not poetry as ornament alone, not language as cleverness alone. Language as offering. Language as śaraṇāgati. Language as the tongue learning where it belongs.

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Opening: When Sound Becomes Language

The first booklet ended with silence. Not decorative silence. Not the soft silence of a meditation poster. The hard silence that comes after dharma has been tested, after grief has entered, after cleverness has failed, after even the gods seem to have stepped back.

The second booklet asked what that silence does. It does not merely remain empty. It vibrates. It becomes Om. It becomes nāda. It becomes rhythm, breath, song, poetry, damaru, dance, and offering.

Now comes the next question: what happens when sound becomes language?

Language is dangerous. It can decorate ego. It can defend falsehood. It can flatter, wound, sell, seduce, argue, manipulate, justify, hide, accuse, and perform. It can also pray, confess, praise, console, teach, remember, surrender, and bow. The tongue is not a small instrument.

A person can live an entire life inside language and still never ask whether language has been offered. We narrate ourselves to ourselves. We narrate ourselves to family, society, work, memory, grief, and God. We keep speaking. Even when we are silent outside, inner speech continues its procession.

So the question is severe: toward what is language turned?

If language remains clever, defensive, self-owned, and worldly, it becomes another costume of the false “I.” If language turns toward Bhagavān, it begins to change. It stops trying to be sovereign. It becomes vāṇi at the feet of the One from whom all sound arises.

That is why Telugu matters here. Not because one language owns God. That would be childish. But a mother tongue is not merely a tool of communication. It enters before theory. It touches memory before scholarship. It carries household rhythm, lullaby, scolding, love, story, prayer, shame, courage, and grief.

When such a language bows, something deep in the person bows with it.

This booklet therefore turns to Telugu poetry and song — Nannaya, Tikkana, Errana, Pothana, Ramadasu, Annamayya, and other devotional voices — not to build a grammar manual, but to ask one question: how did language bow?

How did **kanda** become courage? How did **āṭaveladi** become divine stride? How did **Mahāsrāgharā** become compassion rushing? How did **rāga** and **tāla** carry complaint, exhaustion, and return?

The answer is not mechanical. Meter alone does not make surrender. Music alone does not make bhakti. Poetry alone does not purify speech. The ego can use all of them.

But in the hands of the great poets, language does something extraordinary. It stops showing off. It starts serving bhāvam. It carries the reader into courage, terror, grief, helplessness, certainty, praise, complaint, and final return.

That is where language learns to bow.

1. The House Where Telugu Entered as Sound

Before I ever studied Telugu formally, I heard it.

My father wanted my mother to graduate after marriage. She had come from a village and had not completed a degree beyond school. When she prepared for entrance examinations, Telugu literature stood at the doorway. So my father taught her: **chandās**, meter, grammar, poetry, prose, Andhra Mahābhāratam.

I was a child sitting somewhere nearby. What else does a child do when the father is teaching the mother? He listens. He pretends not to listen. He absorbs.

Telugu was never first given to me as school pressure. It did not enter as marks, exams, correction, and punishment. It came as sound in the house. It came through my father's voice teaching my mother. It came through Nannaya, Tikkana, Errapragada, through meter and meaning, through dignity before I knew how to name dignity.

That matters. A language enters the ear before it enters the notebook. The tongue is trained before the student knows he is being trained. The household carries rhythm before anyone calls it prosody.

Later, when I began returning to Telugu poetry more consciously, I was not entering a museum. I was returning to a sound-field that had already entered me.

That is why this booklet cannot become a dry textbook. For me, Telugu **chandas** is not merely technical architecture. It is the sound of a house. It is the father teaching the mother. It is the child hearing great poets before he can analyze them. It is language entering as *nāda* before language becomes subject.

And now, the task is different: not to show that I know **chandas**, not to pretend I am a Telugu professor, not to turn the booklet into grammar furniture. The task is to watch language bow.

The poets knew something we modern people often forget. Form is not the enemy of feeling. Form can carry feeling. Meter can discipline force. Repetition can intensify devotion. Sound can make meaning enter the body before explanation finishes tying its shoes.

A river without banks becomes flood. A river with banks reaches the sea. So too with language. Without discipline, words become leakage. With discipline, words can become offering.

2. A Child in the Dark: Presence Without Visible Form

I was about nine years old when I first learned that presence does not always require visible form.

Balasore. Odisha. A large defense quarters house. My grandfather had died. My parents had gone to Hyderabad. I returned from school and found the house locked. A Telugu-speaking neighbor upstairs gave me milk and told me I would stay there. I nodded. Then I asked for the keys.

I went home, bathed, changed, did my homework, ate dinner upstairs, and insisted on sleeping alone in my own house. This was not heroic courage. It was a child trying to act bigger than fear. Outside the window there were no comforting city lights, no crowd, no traffic, no floating reassurance. Just darkness, space, and imagination doing its usual mischief.

The first night, I slept in the *pūjā* area holding a small Siva *liṅgam*. I did not know proper prayers. I knew a couple of small couplets. That was all. But even then, I felt that this should not matter. My mother had told me *Bhagavān* is like a father. Parents do not demand formal petitions from a child before sitting beside him.

So my prayer was simple: be with me.

The second night, I carried the Siva *liṅgam* to my bedroom. Then a thought arrived: if He is everywhere, why should He remain only in the *pūjā* room? If He is truly *Bhagavān*, then He

is in the bedroom too. He is in the dark too. He is in the empty corridor too. He is outside the window too.

That childhood thought matters for this booklet because it gives the key to Arjuna. A child may first hold the *līṅga* for courage. Then he realizes *Bhagavān* is not trapped in the *līṅga*. The form gives courage, but the presence is not confined by the form.

So too with Arjuna. Everyone remembers Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer. The image is everywhere: Krishna holding the reins, Arjuna holding the bow, the Gita flowing in the space between collapse and action.

But there is another Arjuna we must remember: the Arjuna who goes alone, descends into darkness, faces enemies even the gods could not defeat, does not see Krishna physically beside him, and yet fights as one who has never been abandoned.

That is the bridge. Presence does not always mean visible form. Presence can become courage.

The nine-year-old child did not need to hold the *Siva līṅga* forever. Arjuna did not need Krishna visibly on every chariot in every battle. If *Bhagavān* has given the work, if the inner relationship is real, then the devotee stands. Not because fear has disappeared, but because fear no longer owns the field.

3. Siva Recognizes Arjuna: When *Bhagavān* Gives the Work

Before Arjuna fights the *Nivātakavacas*, before he enters those impossible regions, before he becomes the lone warrior against forces even the *devas* could not vanquish, he is first sent into *tapas*.

Krishna gives him the work. The coming war will not be ordinary. It will demand divine weapons. It will demand preparation beyond normal warrior skill. So Arjuna must go. He must do *tapas*. He must seek the *Pāśupata*. He must become an instrument sharpened for *dharma*.

This is not self-chosen spiritual tourism. It is assigned work. Much of modern spirituality becomes self-curated experience: visions, techniques, titles, shortcuts, feelings, and private importance. Arjuna is not doing *tapas* to decorate himself. He is preparing because *Bhagavān*'s work requires it.

He obeys. Then *Siva* comes in *kirāta* form. Tests him. Battles him. Breaks the last pride of the warrior. Then, pleased, recognizes him.

The verse we have chosen is *Siva*'s recognition of Arjuna:

నరుడవు నీవు మున్నఖిలనాధుడవైన ముకుందుతోడ
 దుస్థర తప మాచరించి జగతీభర రక్షణకారణంబుగా
 ధరణి నవతరించిన పురాతనముషి వని యెల్లనున్
 విచారితమ యెఱుంగుదున్ నరుని నిన్ను జయింపఁగ నెవ్వఁడేర్చునే!

Errana gives this in ***Mattēbha-vikrīḍitam***. The meter matters, but not as textbook display. ***Mattēbha-vikrīḍitam*** has elephantine gravitas. It does not hurry. It does not chatter. It carries proclamation. The gait itself feels weight-bearing.

That is right for this moment. *Siva* is not merely praising a successful archer. He is revealing Arjuna's deeper identity: *Nara*, ancient ṛṣi, companion of *Mukunda*, descended for the protection of the earth.

The movement is vast. Arjuna thought he was fighting a hunter. Siva reveals he was being recognized by the Lord. Arjuna thought he was earning a weapon. Siva reveals he is an ancient instrument of dharma. Arjuna thought he was doing tapas. Siva reveals that tapas itself was part of Bhagavān's assignment.

This scene must come early in the booklet because it shows what happens when Bhagavān gives work and the devotee does it without bargaining. Divine presence arrives in record time. Not because the devotee chases spectacle, but because he obeys the work.

Language bows here by becoming proclamation. The verse does not sparkle for cleverness. It stands heavy, royal, and revealed. The meter carries the weight of recognition. The words expand from "you are Nara" into cosmic memory: Mukunda, ancient tapas, descent, world-protection.

When Bhagavān gives work, the right response is not self-importance. It is focus. Do the work. Let recognition come from where it must.

4. Arjuna Against the Nivātakavacas: Courage Without Spectacle

Now Arjuna goes further.

Indra sends him against the Nivātakavacas in **Pātāla-loka**. These are not ordinary enemies. They are vast, terrifying, and beyond the reach of the gods themselves. The scene is not comforting. There is subterranean darkness. There are countless enemies. There are māyā-weapons. There is no army at Arjuna's back.

And the charioteer is not some minor figure. It is **Mātali**, Indra's own charioteer — the same divine charioteer associated with Lord Rama's final battle against Rāvaṇa, when Indra sends his celestial chariot to aid Rama. That Mātali is shaken here. Even he falters.

And Arjuna fights.

The Telugu verse captures the astonishing image:

సవ్యేన రశ్మీన్ జగ్రాహ ధనుః సవ్యేన చామితః ।
తథా తు యుధ్యమానం తం దద్యశుస్తాం శ్చ దానవాన్ ॥

With his left hand, he gathered the reins; with that same left hand, he held the bow. The dānavas saw him fighting like that — charioteer and warrior at once.

This is not the familiar Savyasachi image — not Arjuna using alternate arms when tired, not a display of shooting in two directions for poetic spectacle. This is Arjuna in an impossible situation: one hand holding the chariot together while the other continues the war.

In the Telugu tradition, we have the **kanda** movement around this scene — quick, compressed, and kinetic. **Kanda** does not walk like an elephant. It strikes. It turns. It carries urgency.

This is not the grand public image of Krishna as charioteer. This is not the battlefield sermon where the whole world knows the theology. This is **Pātāla-loka**. A darker test. A hidden test. A test where even Indra's charioteer loses steadiness.

Where is Krishna? Everywhere. Where is Krishna on that chariot? In the command already given, in the surrender already lived, in the courage that no longer asks for visible reassurance.

Arjuna had not yet heard the Gita in the Kurukṣetra sense. He had not yet seen the Viśvarūpa. He had not yet collapsed before the great sermon. Yet he was already surrendered. He was already moving under Krishna’s instruction.

The Gita did not create devotion out of nothing. It revealed, clarified, and completed a relationship already alive.

Here, Arjuna is not fighting because victory is guaranteed to his eyes. He is fighting because Bhagavān’s work has brought him there. Consequences can go to hell. That is not arrogance. That is karma yoga sharpened into battle.

The contrast is severe. Mātali has divine assignment but loses steadiness. Arjuna has impossible odds but keeps moving. He becomes warrior and charioteer together. He holds reins and bow. He is not waiting for perfect support.

Language bows by becoming action. The **kanda** movement does not over-decorate him. It does not pause to flatter heroism. It makes courage immediate. It makes the verse itself move like a warrior handling too many things at once.

That is surrendered courage: not fearlessness as personality, not heroism as reputation, not adventure as ego. The courage that comes when the devotee knows: He sent me. He is with me. I stand.

5. Krishna Rushes at Bhishma: When Protection Breaks Stipulation

Now we come to the battlefield everybody remembers: Kurukṣetra, Bhishma, Arjuna under pressure, Krishna as charioteer, and the Lord who has vowed not to wield weapons.

But vows made by Bhagavān are not cages for compassion.

On the third and ninth days, when Bhishma’s force threatens Arjuna, Krishna’s protective fury erupts. The charioteer becomes the Supreme. The one who promised restraint throws aside the neatness of that restraint.

Tikkana gives us the great battlefield language:

ధరణీచక్రము గ్రక్కునం గదల దిగ్ధంతావళశ్రేణికం
 ధరముల్ మొగ్గం బడన్ దిశావలయ ముత్కంపంబుగా నీ బలం
 బురులన్ బాజంగ భీష్ముపై గవసె రౌద్రోద్దేకముం జూచి ఖే
 చరలోకంబును సంచలింప హరి చంచద్బాహు ఫేరారాకృతిన్.
 అంహోమర్దనుఁ డాజనార్దనుఁడు మాద్యద్భిష్మకుంభీంధ్రుపై
 సింహోల్లాసవిభాసి యై కవియు నుత్సేకంబు నాటోపమున్
 రంహస్సాస్ఫుర్తియు దీప్తమూర్తియును సందంభంబుఁ జూడన్ జగ
 త్సంహారోన్ముఖుఁ డైనరుద్రుగతి రౌద్రప్రక్రియం బొల్పినన్.

The verse “ధరణీచక్రము...” is in **Mattēbha-vikrīḍitam**. The verse “అంహోమర్దనుఁడు...” is in **Śārdūlam**.

That distinction matters. **Mattēbha-vikrīḍitam** gives the elephantine, earth-shaking weight of Krishna’s rush at Bhishma. **Śārdūlam** gives leonine force, royal ferocity, and the Rudra-like blaze of divine anger. The movement has weight, roar, rupture, and cosmic dread.

This is not sentimental protection. Earth shakes. Directions tremble. Bhishma becomes the elephant before the lion-force. Krishna is compared to Rudra ready for world-dissolution.

And Bhishma? He does not argue with the Supreme. That is the beautiful terror of this scene. The adversary melts.

Bhishma is not merely an enemy. He is a great being, a grandsire, a vow-bound warrior, one who knows who is rushing toward him. He welcomes that vision. He is ready to be slain by the Lord if that is the Lord's will.

No one argues with the Supreme.

The central theme is protection beyond stipulation. When Bhagavān is your protector, His compassion outruns even His own declared limits. He does not break dharma. He reveals that love is deeper than the surface grammar of a vow.

This scene also teaches something dangerous and consoling. Grief, danger, and helplessness do not always need explanation. Sometimes they need presence. And when one has surrendered not merely for results but for presence, the burden begins to transfer.

The grief becomes His. The action becomes His. The battle becomes His. That does not mean the devotee becomes inactive. Arjuna still fights. But the ownership shifts.

Language bows here by becoming cosmic velocity. Tikkana does not simply say, "Krishna became angry." That would be cheap. He makes the battlefield itself tremble. He makes divine fury enter the meter. The language itself runs, roars, and strikes.

This is Bhagavān as protector: not polite, not distant, not bound by our neat theological filing system. He steps in.

6. Rudra Before Arjuna's Arrows: When Grief Transfers to Him

The Gita is only fourteen days old. Arjuna has heard the teaching. He has heard about action, knowledge, yoga, surrender, Self, duty, and the Lord. He has seen what most seekers cannot imagine.

Then Abhimanyu dies.

Grief does not behave like a neat student.

A person can know philosophy. A person can have heard the highest teaching. A person can even have stood beside Bhagavān. But grief does not walk into the room, fold its hands, and ask permission from Vedānta.

Arjuna becomes the father whose son has been slaughtered. He vows to kill Jayadratha before sunset or enter fire. Humanly, that vow is reckless. The battlefield is vast. The enemy will hide Jayadratha. Time itself becomes weapon. Yet the vow has been spoken.

Now what does Bhagavān do? First, He prepares the field quietly.

Krishna takes Arjuna, even in sleep, to worship Siva. Arjuna offers flowers to Siva. Then he finds those flowers at Krishna's feet. The inner unity is revealed — but not as a public sermon, not as an announcement, not as battlefield theatre.

Then the battle happens. Arjuna is in a different zone: grief, vow, fury, concentration, and the pressure of time. Somewhere in that full-day battle, he sees what he sees — someone with matted locks moving ahead of his arrows, facing weapons before Arjuna's shafts can complete their work.

But Arjuna does not stop and connect the dots. How could he? He is not sitting in a calm āśrama analyzing mystical symbolism. He is in the middle of battle, carrying a father's grief and a warrior's vow.

After the battle, Arjuna narrates the matted-lock vision to Vyāsa Maharshi. Vyāsa names what Arjuna had lived but not yet understood: that was Rudra himself — the Bhūteśa, the Lord who had gone before the arrows because Arjuna had prayed.

That is the beauty of it. Krishna prepares the field quietly. Arjuna fights without stopping to decode the vision. Rudra carries the day ahead of the arrows. Vyāsa explains afterward. Bhagavān delivers, and He never advertises it.

People know the famous part: Krishna hiding the sun with the discus, creating the moment for Jayadratha’s death. That is the much-advertised divine strategy. But this quieter thing is even more devastating. The whole day, before Arjuna’s arrows, Rudra himself is moving ahead.

No announcement. No post-fact sermon. No divine “I told you so.” Bhagavān had no reason to advertise it. He owed the grief.

When surrender is real, grief is no longer privately owned. Burden is no longer privately owned. Action is no longer privately owned. The devotee may still cry, vow, fight, and tremble. But the hidden movement has changed.

The grief transfers. Bhagavān steps in.

Tikkana’s verse:

కడగి యే వీరు నేయు నస్తములకైననెదిరి యవ్వల నడచు జే యెండ్రు
గడగినడచు నమ్మేటి జగము లీ నలు గడలనుగలుగు భూతేశు డీశ్వరుండనఘ
వినము.

The meter is **āṭaveladi**. **Āṭaveladi** gives direct stride. Spoken force. Forward movement. It does not carry the royal elephantine weight of **Mattēbha-vikrīḍitam**. It does not carry only the compact snap of **kanda**. It walks. It advances. It has the gait of something moving through the field.

Here the repeated sound — కడగి / గడగి / నడచు — matters. It creates the sense of striding. Rudra is not sitting in abstraction. He is advancing ahead.

The devotee thinks, “I have vowed.” But the deeper truth is: He has already gone before me. And He may not even say so.

Language bows here by making divine precedence audible without divine advertisement. Before the human arrow lands, grace has already advanced.

7. Bhima Before Hanuman: Strength Learning to Bow

Bhima must come after Arjuna. Arjuna shows surrendered focus. Bhima shows strength being corrected.

This correction is not humiliation. Bhima is not made small. He is made rightly aligned.

In the Saugandhika episode, Bhima encounters Hanuman. At first, Hanuman appears as obstacle. Bhima is force. He is used to force. The world has often yielded to his strength.

Then recognition dawns. This is not merely a monkey blocking the path. This is Hanuman. This is Vāyu’s other son. This is Rama’s servant. This is strength that has already bowed.

Ratnakaram Gopalaraju’s **Saugandhika Prasavāpaharaṇamu** gives a beautiful devotional stuti:

జయదయాపాఠోఢి! జయపుణ్యమూర్తి!

జయజయ, దశదిశాసాంద్రసత్కీర్తి
 జయదీనపోషణ! జయసత్కృపాంగ!
 జయజయ శ్రీరామ! చరణాబ్జభృంగ!

We will simply call this a **dandakam**. That is enough for this booklet. We are not writing a grammar book; we are listening to what the form does to the bhāvam.

The poetic force is clear. The repeated **jaya** turns recognition into worship. Bhima does not merely say, “You are strong.” He praises Hanuman as **Śrī Rāma’s caraṇābja-bhṛṅga** — the bee at Rama’s lotus feet.

That phrase is the knife. Hanuman’s greatness is not merely speed, muscle, size, leap, or battlefield service. His greatness is that he lives at Rama’s feet.

This is the mental map for accomplishment. We sometimes feel great. We sometimes feel capable. We sometimes feel dangerous, impressive, successful, efficient, warrior-like, mountain-moving. That is exactly when Bhima must meet Hanuman inside the mind.

Strength without surrender becomes noise. Strength that bows becomes service.

That is the contrast. Bhima arrives as force. Hanuman reveals force purified by devotion. Bhima bows and becomes larger, not smaller.

Dandakam is not tidy narration. It is devotional surge. It is what happens when praise cannot remain in a neat little box. The form permits overflow because the bhāvam has exceeded ordinary speech.

Bhima’s pride does not need to be crushed into shame. It needs to be turned toward the right source. That is what Hanuman does.

8. Draupadi in the Sabha: When Human Protection Fails

Now the booklet must enter helplessness. Not weakness. Helplessness.

Draupadi in the sabha is one of the most terrible scenes in the Mahābhārata because it is not merely an attack by one wicked man. It is the collapse of an entire moral field.

Her husbands fail. The elders sit. The court fails. Law fails. Power fails. Speech fails. Dharma is present in the room only as a wounded word.

She has a father. She has husbands. She has mighty warriors connected to her. She has elders in the hall. She has public dignity. She has every normal shelter that society says should protect a person. All collapse. Then she calls Him.

That is why this scene belongs in the center of the booklet. It shows śaraṇāgati when every human shelter has been exhausted.

In Nannaya’s handling, the passage moves through prose and padya — **vachanam, kanda, śīsam, āṭaveladi**. This is not accidental for the reader’s experience.

Vachanam gives the cold machinery of adharmā: argument, command, public order, the administrative tone of horror. **Kanda** tightens humiliation into urgency. **Śīsam** expands the attempted outrage so the horror unfolds before the sabha. **Āṭaveladi** lands the reversal: the cloth becomes immeasurable, the violator tires, shame returns to the one who tried to shame.

The poet does not beautify the crime. That would be vulgar. The language first allows us to feel the collapse. Then it allows us to witness the impossible protection.

The cloth comes. Not because Draupadi tied a bandage once. Not because of some small transactional merit. Not because Bhagavān maintains a ledger like a village accountant. The cloth comes because she has surrendered and called Him as the last and only refuge.

That distinction matters. Bhakti is not barter. Śaraṅāgati is not an invoice. She does not say, “I did this for You, now You owe me.” She cries out from the place where nothing else remains.

Language bows by refusing to make the scene comfortable. It shows the sabha’s failure, human shame, public helplessness, and then the sudden reversal by grace.

This is not literary decoration. This is language at the edge of dharma.

9. Prahlāda Before the Pillar: The Child Who Did Not Need Proof

After Draupadi, Prahlāda must come. Draupadi shows helpless surrender. Prahlāda shows fearless certainty.

He is a child before a tyrant. Hiraṇyakaśipu has power, kingdom, rage, weapons, command, and the full machinery of fear. Prahlāda has no army, no worldly protection, no political leverage, no escape plan. But he has certainty.

Pothana gives the famous **kanda**:

ఇందు గలఁ డందు లేఁ డని
సందేహము వలదు చక్రి సర్వోపగతుం
డెం దెందు వెదకి చూచిన
నందందే కలఁడు దానవాగ్రణి! వింటే.

Do not doubt by saying He is here and not there. The wielder of the discus is all-pervading. Wherever you search, there He is, O lord of daityas.

This is not theology as performance. This is a child standing before death and saying: He is everywhere.

This scene connects back to the child in the dark. The nine-year-old child first holds the Siva liṅgam. Then he realizes Bhagavān is everywhere. He does not need to keep holding the form as if God is trapped there.

Prahlāda stands at the terrifying end of that same truth. He does not need a temple, a safe room, an approving audience, or the tyrant’s agreement. He does not even need the pillar to prove Him. The child knows.

Then the pillar breaks.

The meter is **kanda padyam**. **Kanda** gives compact certainty. It does not wander. It does not build a long philosophical thesis. The repeated spatial movement — ఇందు / అందు / ఎందెందు / అందందే — makes omnipresence audible.

The verse itself searches everywhere: here, there, wherever, everywhere. Language bows by becoming fearless declaration. Not argument. Not lecture. Not proof-seeking. A child’s certainty before terror.

10. Gajendra's Cry: When Protocol Cannot Outrun Surrender

Now helplessness becomes absolute. Draupadi's honor is under assault. Prahlāda's life is under threat. Gajendra's strength itself has failed.

This is important because Gajendra is not weak at the beginning. He is an elephant. Powerful. Kingly. Massive. He enters the waters with strength. Then the crocodile grips him. The struggle continues. Strength drains. Time passes. Pride collapses. Muscle fails. Only surrender remains.

Then he cries.

Pothana's full verse is one of the great Telugu moments of divine urgency:

సిరికిం జెప్పడడు; శంఖ చక్ర యుగముం జేదోయి సంధింపఁ; డే
 పరివారంబునుఁ జీరఁ డభ్రుగపతిం బన్నింపఁ డాకర్ణికాం
 తర ధమ్మిల్లముం జక్క నొత్తడడు; వివాద ప్రొత్తిత శ్రీ కుచో
 పరిచేలాంచలమైన వీడఁడు గజప్రాణావనోత్సాహియ్యై.

The chosen meter is **Mahāsrāgharā**. **Mahāsrāgharā** can feel like a long garland, a sweeping current, a grand movement. But Pothana uses grandeur to show speed. That is the genius.

The Lord does not pause for royal procedure. He does not tell Lakshmi. He does not prepare the discus in the usual way. He does not put on slippers. He does not move through protocol. He runs.

This is the contrast that must be made sharp. The devas may wait ages for an avatāra when oppressed by asuras. Cosmic problems may unfold through yugas, births, vows, boons, curses, and incarnations. Ravana's tyranny must wait for Rama. Dharma may need history.

But one cry in absolute surrender? There He is. No slippers. No delay. No court announcement. No Vaikuṅṭha procedure.

This is not inconsistency. This is intimacy. The cry of the surrendered being is not processed like a cosmic administrative file. It reaches Him as a child's scream reaches a parent.

Language bows here by making divine majesty run faster than majesty itself. The repeated "He did not..." structure strips away royal protocol one layer at a time. The grandeur of the meter does not slow compassion. It magnifies how vast the compassion is.

When surrender becomes absolute, Bhagavān does not behave like distant sovereignty. He behaves like the One to whom the cry belongs.

11. Ramadasu in Prison: The Devotee's Right to Complain

Now we move from epic and purāṇic crisis into personal bhakti. Ramadasu is not making an abstract theological point. He is suffering.

Imprisonment. Torture. Humiliation. Punishment for adorning Rama. The crushing question: I served You. Why am I being crushed for it?

His kīrtana “ఇక్ష్వాకు కులతీలక” carries that anguish with astonishing intimacy:

మీ తండ్రి దశరథ మహారాజు పెట్టినా రామచంద్రా

లేక మీ మామ జనక మహారాజు పంపినా రామచంద్రా || ఇక్ష్వాకు కులతీలక ||

Did your father Daśaratha pay for these jewels, O Ramachandra? Or did your father-in-law Janaka send them, O Ramachandra?

On the surface, this is audacious. A devotee questioning Rama like that could sound irreverent to a person who does not understand bhakti. But bhakti hears the child.

The complaint is not rebellion. It is family-right. Ramadasu is weary from torture, imprisonment, and injustice. His cry has heat. It is not the calm exhaustion of someone whose life-work is complete. It is the anguish of one who has served and is being punished.

Rama does not mind. Sitamma does not mind. Parents understand the angst of children.

The **rāga** traditionally associated here is **Yadukula Kambhoji**, and the **tāla** is **Mīśra Chāpu**. **Yadukula Kambhoji** gives dignity to sorrow. It keeps the complaint from becoming vulgar. It allows reproach to remain tender. It has the quality of speaking from inside relationship, not outside it.

Mīśra Chāpu gives a slightly uneven human gait. It is not square, militaristic, or stable like a march. It leans. It pleads. It allows the line to ache. And the refrain “**Rāmachandrā**” keeps pulling the complaint back into surrender.

That is the key. He complains, but he keeps calling Him. The devotee's right to complain is not the right to abandon relationship. It is the right born from relationship.

Language bows here by becoming intimate enough to accuse, but surrendered enough to keep addressing Him as Rama. This is not polite prayer. This is prison-bhakti. This is a child calling the Father to account. And the Father knows.



A poet-saint at Rama's feet: original generated devotional artwork.

12. Annamayya's Return: When the Work Is Done

Ramadasu's weariness comes from torture. Annamayya's weariness is different.

In **"Antaryāmi Alasiti Solasiti,"** the bhāvam is not "Why are You doing this to me?" It is closer to this: the work is done, the body is tired, the song has been sung, the journey has run its course. Take me back.

This distinction matters deeply. Ramadasu complains from prison. Annamayya returns from completion.

Annamayya is old, tired, and done with his work. The jīva has served, sung, lived, and now asks to be received. This is not defeat. It is return.

The **rāga** is **Ābhōgi**. The **tāla** is **Ādi**. **Ābhōgi** gives spare inwardness. Its pentatonic field feels uncluttered, exposed, and intimate. There is no need for excess ornament. The soul has no performance left.

Ādi tāla gives steadiness. Not the uneven, pleading ache of **Mīśra Chāpu**. Here the devotee is not arguing. He is laying himself down.

The repeated **alasiti / solasiti** carries bodily tiredness and spiritual readiness. Language bows by becoming simple, old, tired, and true.

The devotee does not ask for victory. He does not ask for wealth. He does not ask for vindication. He does not ask for public recognition. He does not even ask for a new mission. He asks to be received.

This is why Annamayya must close the main movement of the booklet. Gajendra gives rescue. Ramadasu gives complaint. Annamayya gives completion.

The tongue that spent life singing now places itself at the feet of the Lord. This is the final bow of language: not argument, not praise, not literary mastery, not devotional heat. Return.

13. The Gist

If I had to compress this booklet into one flow, I would say this: language is not sovereign. It is shaped sound. Sound is not sovereign. It belongs to nāda. Nāda is not sovereign either. It belongs to Nataraja — the stillness that dances, the silence that sounds, the Lord before whom word, rhythm, poetry, and breath must finally bow.

Telugu entered this journey first as sound in the house — my father teaching my mother **chandas**, the child listening before he knew he was listening. Later, the same question returned in a deeper form: can the mother tongue become an instrument of Bhagavān?

The answer is yes, but only if language stops serving ego alone.

Arjuna shows language becoming assigned work. Siva recognizes him in **Mattēbha-vikrīditam**, with royal gravitas, because the warrior has obeyed the task given by Bhagavān.

Arjuna against the Nivātakavacas shows language becoming solitary courage. Krishna is not visibly beside him, yet Arjuna stands because presence has already become command.

Krishna rushing at Bhishma shows language becoming divine protection. The Lord's compassion outruns even His own stipulation. In **Mattēbha-vikrīditam**, “ధరణీవక్తము...” makes the earth tremble with elephantine force; in **Śārdūlam**, “అహోమర్దనుఁడు...” gives Krishna's rush a leonine, Rudra-like ferocity.

Rudra moving ahead of Arjuna's arrows shows language becoming grief carried by grace. Krishna prepares the field quietly through Siva worship; Arjuna lives the matted-lock vision in battle; Vyāsa explains afterward that Rudra himself had gone before him. The public remembers the discus hiding the sun, but the deeper full-day grace was silent. Krishna does not advertise. Grief transfers; Bhagavān steps in.

Bhima before Hanuman shows language becoming praise. Strength meets strength already surrendered to Rama. Bhima does not become smaller by bowing. He becomes rightly aligned.

Draupadi in the sabha shows language becoming cry. When every human protection fails — husbands, elders, court, law, and public dharma — śaraṅāgati becomes the only refuge.

Prahāda before the pillar shows language becoming certainty. The child does not need proof. He knows Bhagavān is everywhere. The **kanda** verse makes omnipresence audible through its own spatial repetition.

Gajendra shows language becoming absolute surrender. When strength fails and one cry becomes total, Mahāviṣṇu does not wait for protocol. Compassion runs.

Ramadasu shows language becoming intimate complaint. The tortured devotee asks Rama whether Daśaratha or Janaka paid for the jewels. It is audacious, yes. But it is the audacity of a child who still belongs.

Annamayya shows language becoming return. The work is done. The body is tired. The song has been sung. The devotee no longer argues. He asks to be received.

That is the arc: assigned work, solitary courage, divine protection, grief carried by grace, strength bowing, helpless surrender, fearless certainty, absolute cry, intimate complaint, final return.

This is not a grammar textbook. It is not literary bragging. It is not an attempt to sound learned. It is a seeker's reading of Telugu poetry as living śaraṅgati.

The poets teach us that language need not remain merely clever, defensive, social, argumentative, or worldly. Properly turned, language can become courage, praise, cry, complaint, certainty, and surrender.

The tongue too must eventually become an instrument: not for winning arguments alone, not for making money alone, not for social performance alone. For truth. For beauty. For offering. For Bhagavān.

Epilogue: The Tongue at His Feet

The cover image of this booklet should not be merely decorative. Annamayya at the feet of Lord Venkateswara is the whole argument in one picture.

The poet is not standing above the song. The song is not standing above the Lord. The language is not claiming sovereignty. The tongue has found its place: at the feet.

That is also why Ramadasu belongs near Rama's feet. Why Tyagaraja belongs near Rama's feet. Why Hanuman is called the bee at Rama's lotus feet. Why Draupadi's cry rises only when all worldly supports fall. Why Prahāda does not need to clutch proof. Why Gajendra's cry reaches before protocol. Why Arjuna can stand alone. Why Bhima can bow. Why Annamayya can return.

The final destination of language is not silence as emptiness. It is silence after offering.

The tongue speaks until it learns to bow. The poem moves until it reaches the feet. The song rises until it returns to nāda. Nāda vibrates until it is recognized as His.

Then language has done its work. It does not vanish in failure. It rests in surrender.

End of Booklet Three