

## Living Years with TFAS!

- Murty Bhavaraju

“Ask not what your country can do for you; Ask what you can do for your country” – JFK

I tried replacing ‘country’ with TFAS and realized that there is no need to choose one or the other as implied in JFK’s statement. If you can do something for an organization like TFAS you automatically get, without asking, a benefit that would be multiple times the effort you put in. In a nutshell that is my story.

### The Beginning

Like many professionals who came to US from India in the 1960s I had limited exposure to cultural and literary activities in India. We were too busy as students trying to get top grades. Graduate schools here at that time did not have many cultural activities let alone Indian activities. In the New York metropolitan area, the Telugu Literary & Cultural Association (TLCA) was formed in 1971 and this was the first organization that attracted us to Indian cultural activities. We attended a variety of events and met many local Telugu families.

Then TFAS was established in 1984 in New Jersey. TFAS became ‘our local association’. Jonnada Ramakrishna, President for the first four years and a close friend, got us involved in TFAS. He encouraged organization of local mini programs and recognized the artists by providing a check and a plaque to the artist from TFAS. For example, in Morris County we joined local friends and honored movie actress Bhanumathi and writers Arudra and K.Ramalakshmi. We conducted an Ashtavadhanam (a first time experience to some of us), a Burrakatha, and some music and dance performances. Our mini programs illustrated Ramakrishna’s vision and how he built support to TFAS from local communities.

Telugu Jyothi magazine also started in 1984 which became a literary voice for TFAS. Jonnada Ramakrishna found the right candidate in Kidambi Raghunath as its editor. And you know the rest of the story of Telugu Jyothi. (see the articles by Vemuri Ramanadham and Bharati Bhavaraju).

Since the beginning, music, dance, and drama became the foundations for TFAS events. The typical Ugadi and Deepavali events had music and dance mostly by children in the first half and a great Telugu drama in the second half – followed by a sumptuous Telugu meal. See the articles by Vaidehi Sasidhar, Polepalli Sankara Rao, Prabha Raghunathan, and Sudha Devulapalli. Please read also the articles we received on the role of TFAS in their life since

childhood by Siva Jonnada, Usha Kidambi, Rajita Chennapragada, and Vasudha Bhatnagar.

Dr. K.V.Rao used to take the responsibility to organize national tours for TFAS sponsored artists from India. He got their visas and arranged travel and host families. He used to meet the artists first and instruct them on how to ‘behave’ while staying with host families (like eat pulihora and beans kooru without complaining even if it was 17<sup>th</sup> time). Last but not the least, Dr. Rao used to negotiate with the artists for two programs for TFAS to help TFAS bank account. Some of the successful tours: Mandolin Srinivas, Gollapudi Maruthi Rao - Sankarabharanam movie artists, Vamsee Handicapped Children, and Dwaram party.

### My Story

Now my real story begins. Towards the end of 1989, a few well wishers of TFAS requested me to become a trustee and take charge as the President for the term 1990-1991. But I did not get an approval from ‘the boss’ at home. That was the time my children and some other matters at home needed my attention. I disagreed with the boss as I felt obligated to get involved with TFAS and became a trustee and the President. My real cultural exposure began.

I had a great team of trustees and we did well in all aspects. I ended up being the President for 4 years. We organized the usual music, dance, and drama at each TFAS event, and we took our best drama to TANA conference in Atlanta in 1991.

We were able to put together a Telugu cultural exhibit with 40 colorful panels which were displayed first at 1990 Deepavali program, two TANA conferences (Atlanta 1991, New York 1993) and at several other TFAS events. This exhibit was the result of significant help I received from the ‘friends’ of TFAS in India: Sri.Ramanaiah Raja, C.Narayana Reddy, and others. These gentlemen purchased valuable pictures and shipped them immediately for the TFAS exhibit in response to a phone call from Dr. K.V. Rao and Dr. Kidambi Raghunath. Of course, a number of TFAS members helped locally to prepare the exhibit as most of the writing had to be done by hand.

Similarly we created a Carnatic music exhibit which was presented at the TFAS and CMANA music events. The exhibit depicted the lives of Thyagaraja, Dikshitar, and Syama Sastry. All this was hands-on cultural experience for me and those who joined in with me.

My wife and two daughters were always behind me helping with the events including cooking and serving food or cleaning the venue after the event. This training helped my daughters to become Indian cultural ambassadors at their colleges later and now in their communities. Now, of course, we are hoping that they would prepare their own children to help our culture and traditions continue in the future.

On the literary side, Telugu Jyothi magazine opened an opportunity to brush up my Telugu which I gave up after joining college. I was given a forum to share my thoughts and experiences. In fact, I published my own book of articles, thanks to a number of friends who encouraged me.

While I am happy with my association with TFAS and Telugu Jyothi, I feel modest looking at some of my friends who came before and after me and have achieved so much individual success in their own ways. Vemuri Ramanadham, one of our senior, senior citizens who started 'Telugu Sahithi Samooham' for those interested in writing and discussing Telugu literature, is still active in writing poetry and essays for Telugu Jyothi. Appajosyula Satyanarayana organizes cultural and literary events while being a busy professor. Dama Venkaiah actively promotes philanthropy while being busy with his accounting practice. Guthikonda Ravindranath has been a leader who started new organizations and helped existing organizations in various ways. You can read his article 'Are Telugu Associations Truly Serving the Needs of our Community In North America?' Ramakrishna Chalikonda is a perpetual volunteer in helping cultural organizations well before and after he served as President of TFAS. Shanthi Kumar writes and produces Telugu cultural movies. Obviously, there are many others and I named only a few that came to my mind immediately.

I became the editor of Telugu Jyothi in November 2003 after losing a great friend Kidambi Raghunath who ran the magazine for 20 years. I know I am not of the same caliber as Raghunath. I used my years of management experience by delegating the responsibilities to four Associate Editors: Syamala Dasika responsible for stories, Radha Kasinadhuni for essays, and Vaidehi Sasidhar for poems, and Anantha Sudhaker Uppala for production support. In fact Anantha Sudhaker was behind this souvenir production! The Telugu Jyothi team has ideas to expand Telugu Jyothi to an online magazine and encourage our younger writers to take active role.

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I hope what I wrote is sufficient to impress upon you that the benefit I gained is greater than the effort I put in. The benefit was also spread to my family – my wife, children, and grandchildren. They unanimously confessed that my involvement in TFAS back in 1990 over their objections was a good thing. That means one of the TFAS goals "to preserve and propagate Telugu cultural heritage amongst future generations" was achieved.

Here is my humble advice now that you read up to this point: Someone told me that they don't care for our cultural associations because of politics. I asked if he would stop working because the office has some politics! Realize that the exposure to culture - however you define it - is a reward in itself. Enjoy Carnatic music as well as movie songs; Enjoy Bharatanatyam - Kuchipudi as well as folk dances; Watch serious drama as well as light skits; Read serious literature if you can but enjoy kathalu - kavitalu published in our magazines as well.

Enjoy your involvement in any activity or all activities if you can and see how it affects your outlook on the greater happenings in your life.

*Bhavaraju Parabrahma Murty, Ph.D. has been in the electrical engineering profession for more than 40 years. He is a Life Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Activities: Past President-TFAS; Past Vice President-Carnatic Music Association of North America; Constitution & By Laws Committee - Hindu Temple & Cultural Society; Editor Telugu Jyothi. Published a book of short stories in Telugu "asalu kamTE ekkuvadi" in 1999.*

**Chalam - Cover Page and Pictures Artist**

The pictures on the cover and inside were done by Turaga Seshachalam who was trained at JJ School of Arts and Siddharth College of Communications at Bombay. He initially worked at Polydor of India Ltd. (later, Music India Ltd.) designing covers for gramophone records, cassettes, and CDs. As a freelance artist Chalam worked on souvenir design for Bombay Andhra Mahasabha, publicity material for magazines, pharmaceutical packaging, IT educational ads, etc. Chalam received Government of India awards for designing and printing techniques, and was honored by Bombay Andhra Maha Sabha for contributions to social and cultural activities.

Chalam has provided cover picture for more than 25 issues of Telugu Jyothi. His art was exhibited at TANA Art Exhibits in 1991 and 1993 and many times in Bombay and Hyderabad.