

## Executive Summary

UGC sponsored Minor Research Project **The Complete Works of Brahmarishi Dr. Sir R. Venkatratnam Naidu**

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Dr. Sir R. Venkatratnam Naidu ( 1862-1939) was the most prominent figure of the Brahmo Samaj movement in South India. A leading educationist , he made a tremendous impact as Principal, Pithapur Rajah's College, Cocanada ( Kakinada) and subsequently, as the first elected Vice-Chancellor of Madras University. He was venerated as a teacher, a thinker, a guide and mentor, a source of motivation and inspiration to thousands of students and teachers. Along with Pandit Veeresalingam Pantulu, he was also the most prominent social reformer of South India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He used the charisma of his personality, his oratorical powers and remarkable writing capacity to lead the movement for social change and amelioration in South India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He initiated and pursued many social reform projects,, turning his attention to diverse areas- widow re-marriage, upliftment of women and Harijan and Backward Classes. One of his major concerns was the anti – Nautch movement for the betterment of the lives of the devdasis or nautch girls. He achieved considerable success in his efforts, working in collaboration with like-minded philanthropists and progressive thinkers like Veeresalingam Pantulu and the Maharajah of Pitampura. Many of the social reforms he tried to bring about were achieved either during his lifetime or shortly afterwards.

Sir Venkatratnam Naidu was a prolific writer and impassioned speaker on areas ranging from education to literature, from religion to social evils, from spirituality to morality. His innumerable articles and speeches were published in 8 volumes during his lifetime; subsequently, a ninth volume was added after his death. Unfortunately, copies of the nine volumes of his collected works as well as of the commemorative volume are almost untraceable. A rare set has been found in the custody of Dr T. Rajyalakshmi. Unfortunately, and understandably because of its date of publication, the quality of publication of these nine volumes is unsatisfactory. There are numerous typological and spelling errors, nor has the material been organized and classified in a systematic manner.

The writings and speeches of Sir Venkatratnam Naidu have tremendous archival value. They represent not only the thinking and life of one of the great personalities of modern India

but also an important phase in Indian social and cultural history. In order to preserve the work of this remarkable personality- teacher and preacher, scholar and orator, leader and reformer, devotee and humanist- for posterity, the project to prepare a revised edition of his collected works, without typographical and spelling errors and with proper organization of the vast matter, was undertaken and sanctioned as a Minor Research Project by the UGC.

The research work required at the outset that the voluminous writing and speeches, spread across 9 volumes, should be typed out to enable re-organization as well as corrections. The outcome of the research work is the writings and speeches of the great visionary, organized into two large volumes, with a total of almost 1400 pages. Vol I contains two major sections- 'Prayers and Meditations' and 'Services and Sermons'. 'Prayers and Meditations' are a record of numerous and varied occasions from namkarans to weddings, from inaugurations to his own birthday celebrations, that Sir Venkatratnam Naidu presided over and on which he conferred his blessings. Each is remarkable for the incomparable fecundity and variety of expression- the command over language keeping pace with the sincerity and depth of feeling and emotion. 'Services and Sermons' are the record of the numerous Brahmotsav services that he conducted through the years. They are extraordinary for the manner in which the intense faith in the Supreme Being is expressed in the most sublime language and with the most remarkable variety. Vol II is a collection of his articles and speeches on various areas - Spirituality and Religion, the Brahma Samaj, Social Reform, Education and Appreciations and Reminiscences. His observations on Spirituality and Religion carry an important message for us in our times- that spirituality, not rituals, is the essence of religion. His comments and analysis of the Brahma movement provide invaluable insights into the genesis and core values of the movement. His addresses and articles on social reform are not only a testimony to his deep humanitarianism, his vision of an equal and just society, his overwhelming concern for the amelioration of the condition of women, they also offer a valuable understanding of prevalent social evils. The section on Education offers us a glimpse of what made Sir Venkatratnam Naidu such a great teacher and educationist - the articles and addresses are filled with deep concern for both students and teachers. Many are addresses to youth, exhorting them to lead a blameless and purposeful life. His "Appreciations and Reminiscences" contain incomparable insights into some of the greatest luminaries of his times – Pandit Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Pandit Shivanath Shastry, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Sri Gopal Krishna Gokhale, as well as understanding of sages of the past like Sri Chaitanya and Sant Tukaram.

The preparation of these volumes required multiple readings and corrections to ensure that the final outcome was as close as possible to what Sir Venkatratnam had said or written. The effort of systematically organizing and correcting errors of spelling, construction and language which had crept in due to poor technical support available more than seven decades

in the past was time-consuming but always a challenge worth taking seriously. The two volumes of the monumental and mammoth life-work of a great teacher, educationist, social reformer and thinker will, hopefully, be an important step in recognizing the achievements and contribution of one of the great leaders of our nation of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.