

CHARLIE CHAPLIN HAPPENS ONLY ONCE

-Ampashayya Naveen

April 16th is the 123rd birth anniversary of the greatest comedian of 20th century, Mr Charlie Chaplin. Warangal Film Society had organised a function to commemorate the birth anniversary of this world renowned humorist. Some of his great films like 'Mr Verdo' and 'Circus' were shown to the members of Warangal Film Society. Mr Ampasayya Naveen, President of WFS and prof Bhaskar, who wrote a biography on Charlie Chaplin in Telugu had given a brief introduction to the films which were screened on the occasion.

Recently, I read the autobiography of Chaplin in Telugu. Mr.Vallabhaneni Ashwin kumar, the editor of Misimi (a monthly magazine) translated the autobiography of Chaplin in Telugu. This Telugu version of Chaplin's autobiography was published in October 1992. And within no time, that is, on January 1993, a reprint of it was published. This shows the unparalleled popularity of Chaplin even after 36 years after he left this world. The story of Chaplin's life reads like rags to a riches story.

Chaplin was born in London on 16th April, 1889 in a poor family. His mother was a stage artist and a singer. His father divorced her when Chaplin was a four year old boy. As long as Chaplin's mother was earning money, economically Chaplin's life was not so bad. But Chaplin's mother's health started deteriorating and her voice failed while she was singing on the stage. The audience in theatre started heckling her. Then the manager of the theatre got an idea. He brought four year Chaplin on to the stage and wanted him to sing in his mother's voice. The moment Chaplin started singing; the fully packed theatre was hearing him with rapt attention. Chaplin's voice simply mesmerised the entire audience in the theatre. Suddenly people in the theatre started throwing coins at Chaplin with uncontrollable joy. After seeing so many coins at his feet Chaplin stopped singing. The audience did not want him to stop and they enthusiastically encouraged him to go on singing. Then Chaplin said "I will sing only after I pick up all these coins". That word from Chaplin sent the audience into a flood of laughter. Chaplin says that was his first success as a comedian. Then the manager came to the help of Chaplin in picking up the coins. Chaplin said "I am afraid of this manager, he may steal all these coins" this again made the audience to laugh their hearts out. This was Chaplin's very second joke. After collecting all the coins from the manager Chaplin started singing again to the fullest satisfaction of the audience.

Chaplin narrates this particular incident in his biography and says that this incident was the fore runner for all the future events that were to take place in his life. This particular incident has given him lot of confidence it made him realize the innate talent in him. After this incident Chaplin's life faced many ups and downs. He experienced terrible poverty, his mother was seriously ill and she had mental break down. For sometime Chaplin and his elder brother were sent to an orphanage but slowly Chaplin's talent was recognized and he was allowed to join a Drama troupe in London. Afterwards, he was sent to America to participate in a Drama festival. He was dazzled by the wonderful atmosphere in America and he felt this country could put him on the top of the world as artist- comedian.

Those were the days of Mookies(silent movies). Soon, Chaplin started acting in silent films. He established himself as a comedian of unprecedented acting. He had given himself a separate identity as a tramp with baggy trousers, Hitler like moustache, a cane in his hand and funny walking style. This tramp image stood him in good stead. He started to write his own stories, his own screen play and his own direction. The spectators had taken an extreme liking for him. First, he acted in short one or two reel films. Later he started

producing full length movies like 'A Woman in Paris', 'The Gold Rush', 'The Circus', 'City Lights', 'Modern Times', 'Monsieur Verdoux', 'Limelight', 'The King in New York', 'A Countess from Hong Kong'. From one of his greatest movies 'The Great Dictator', Chaplin shifted to talkies. He was bold enough to make a caricature on Hitler ('The Great Dictator'). This film was made in 1940 when the great dictator of Germany was in power. He produced this film knowing well that he would incur the wrath of Hitler. Thus, a poor man from London conquered Hollywood and through it, the whole world.

The greatness of Chaplin's art is : he could make the audience to weep and laugh at the same time. No other comedian could perfect this particular art as Chaplin perfected it. Chaplin had faced very rough and unfriendly atmosphere in America during 1940s. He was accused of many charges like he was a communist, giving birth to an illegitimate son etc., He was made to leave America and settle in Switzerland. The British Government honoured him with knighthood during his last days.

We may see many movie comedians in future but we can never see another comedian like Charlie Chaplin. The Telugu translation of Chaplin's autobiography is a very good book. I never felt that I am reading a translation. Mr Ashwini Kumar had done a wonderful job in translating the original. One should compliment him for making Chaplin even more dearer to Telugu readers by this excellent translation of Chaplin's autobiography.

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