

The Easel

(A Collection of Telugu Short Stories Rendered into English)

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EMESCO

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Ananda Sankaram

Dr. V. Chandrasekhara Rao

Into a dream-like atmosphere stepped in Ananda Sankaram timidly. That was a farewell party organized for the final year students of Social Work by their juniors. That evening, the University Campus wore a romantic look about it. Merging with the steady silence of the evening was Ustad Bismillah Khan's serene *Shehanai* music.

Colorful bulbs were hanging on to the long tresses of the damsel-trees. Chairs were arranged in an arc and a small dais was put up in front. Dividing themselves into little groups, students were chitchatting on the lawns. That was a festival of life! Ananda Sankaram was not at all interested in attending that function. But, how could he help it? His Professor Gangadhar had threatened that he would put zero against internal assessment for all absentees. So he had to attend the function disinterestedly, out of compulsion, and great unease.

And it was Ananda Sankaram's nature!

He was scared of the changes that come up in life. He was afraid of walking into morrow. He was so fond of mother's lap, father's pampering, and relatives' entreaties, that he still coveted that wonderful childhood of yesterday. He came into the world of youth as though he was suddenly pushed into it. God! How many responsibilities! And the most unbearable amongst them all ... was the necessity to live in a group. He had to face people; shake hands with them; had to create an amiable atmosphere by exchanging views and opening up his heart. They were all beyond

Ananda Sankaram. He felt very insecure and tense to trespass the safe enclosure of “I”.

But now Ananda Sankaram, more popular in the campus as, ‘A Timid Creature’, ‘Despicable’ ‘Ananda Sankaram? Who?’ etc., etc., was preparing to face one of the most turbulent events of his life.

‘Ahoy! That’s Ananda Sankaram!’ Niranjanrao inadvertently blurted his name loudly to his friends. Niranjanrao, who was absorbed in gossiping about the secret love affairs of lady students till then, suddenly saw Ananda Sankaram coming. And only minutes before he wagered ten rupees on Ananda Sankaram that he would not turn up for the party saying that ‘he was a timid creature; a hare scared of people and would run away miles if he saw them.’ But he cursed him within himself ‘*dirty fellow, turned up!*’ Patting Ananda Sankaram on the shoulder, he said, “Anand! It is thrilling to see you attending this party. That’s the way you should behave. If you try to come into public and socialize like this, you will certainly come up in life! Come on. Go! Go, and greet the Professor!”

Niranjanrao was the only friend Ananda Sankaram had at the university. Niranjanrao got closer to him by identifying their social proximity of belonging to the same caste. Strictly speaking, one shouldn’t call it a friendship; it’s an exploitation of necessities. They go to the movies together, but Ananda Sankaram buys the tickets; they take *chicken biryani* at Hotel Alakapuri, but Ananda Sankaram pays for it; books would be issued in the name of Ananda Sankaram, but they remain with Niranjanrao for months together and Ananda Sankaram pays the dues. Though he was well aware that he was the loser in the bargain, Ananda Sankaram could not help it otherwise.

After greeting the Professor, Ananda Sankaram looked around. There were about twenty-five of his classmates and twenty-