

REVIEW ARTICLE



THE ROAR AT TWILIGHT - SONNETS ON LORD NARASIMHA
BY MAHATHI

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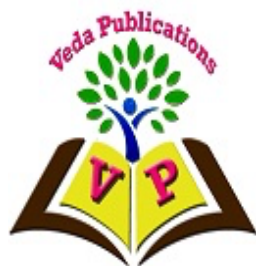
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.133001>

ABSTRACT



Article history:

Received on: 23-08-2026

Accepted on: 15-09-2026

Available online: 26-09-2026

The book contains 108 sonnets — an auspicious number deliberately chosen for japa — plus prose supplements on Sri Sudarshana Alwar, temple traditions, and an exposition on True Devotion through the episode of Narada and Sri Krishna. The poetic architecture of the book wonderfully sustains the theological weight. The discipline of iambic pentameter is maintained with commendable consistency. This is a significant achievement for a non-native English poet attempting what even native English devotional poets rarely attempt after Milton. The sonnets with the sublime language discuss the origin of the two demons- Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu and darkness they unleashed on earth. The devotion of Prahlada brought Lord Narasimha and thus twilight into the world. A unique feature of this work is its extended prose meditation on spirituality and devotion. The book serves as a true bridge between East and West, between classical discipline and contemporary devotion.

Keywords: *Sonnets, Devotion, Darkness, Poetic Architecture, Contemporaneity, Ecological Allegory.*

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A FORMIDABLE UNDERTAKING

To compose a kavya in 108 sonnets in English, in iambic metre, faithful to Srimad Bhagavatam, is an act of literary courage that borders on audacity.

Sri Sai Chandra Mauli in his Foreword rightly points out thus:

“these days when ‘Tradition’ has become a taboo word, poetry in metrical format is shunned and crazy portrayal of mundane themes by less talented poets is patronised, desire to compose a devotional text with commendable poetic and structuration competences is the most heartening feature.” (p.16)

Mydavolu Venkata Sesha Sathyanarayana, writing under the pseudonym Mahati, has taken up the Herculean task. His work of poetry, edited by Sri Konduru Venkata Ramana, is not merely a retelling, but an attempt to reclaim the English sonnet for Bharatiya bhakti.

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STRUCTURE AND POETIC DICTION

The author, reflecting the words of the great poet Pothana, states in his prologue that “I always had the feeling while composing these poems that some unknown Holy Spirit was dictating me each word and each line.” (p.8) He also confesses that he based his

narrative strictly on Gita Press Bhagavatam, with ‘few changes here and there to meet the demands of meter, rhyme and form’. These lines reflect the integrity of the poet and his intention to take it as a mission.

The Shakespearean sonnet form (14 lines, abab cdcd efef gg) is designed for a single argument or emotion, not for epic narrative. Using 108 such units to tell a continuous Puranic story is like building a temple with only chiselled pebbles. The risk is fragmentation. Mahati overcomes this by treating each sonnet as a canto, with a narrative couplet at the end. Swami Tejomayananda Saraswathi notes in his ‘Blessings’ that “The concluding couplets of each sonnet are very informative and exploding motivational ideas.” (p.5)

The discipline of iambic pentameter is maintained with commendable consistency. This is a significant achievement for a non-native English poet attempting what even native English devotional poets rarely attempt after Milton.

THEMATIC ARC 1: THE DEMON AS EGO — HIRANYAKSHA

The opening sonnets, as Dr. Perugu Ramakrishna observes in his foreword, achieve an ‘epic scale reminiscent of classical kavya’. Mahati’s Hiranyaksha is not a stereotyped evil demon.

He stretched his body tall and tallest, till His
crown

had brushed the planets in the sky. (p.29)

It is a hyperbole that is Puranic, not ornamental.

This reminds the readers of the description of Satan by Milton. The most powerful poetic invention in this



section is the depiction of Mother Earth. Hiranyaksha does not simply steal the Earth;
He lifted high the Mother Earth with hands And
spun Her vigorously. Laughed again and yelled
“Now on, you obey my commands And act as I
demand!” She wailed with pain.(pp.35-36)

As Perugu Ramakrishna analyses, Earth becomes, in Mahati's vision, “a sentient mother, crying out in pain, appealing not with power but with vulnerability. This cry marks the moral axis of the book.” (pp.17-18)

Critically, this transforms the Puranic episode into an ecological allegory for contemporary times. Perugu Ramakrishna aptly comments, “In an age marked by ecological exploitation, wars of dominance, and inflated egos—individual and collective—Hiranyaksha’s actions feel disturbingly familiar. Mother Earth’s cry is no longer confined to myth; it resonates in our lived reality.” (p.20) Thus Mahathi implies that the story has eternal relevance and appeal across ages. The poet makes the ancient text urgently contemporary without being anachronistic. The slaying of Hiranyaksha by Varaha is rendered not as triumphalism but as restoration of balance with dharma re-established.

THEMATIC ARC 2: THE GREATER DEMON — HIRANYAKASHIPU AND PRAHLADA

If Hiranyaksha is physical arrogance, his brother Hiranyakashipu is intellectual and spiritual arrogance — the ego that does tapas to conquer death itself.

The episode of Prahlada forms the emotional epicentre of the book. The poet handles Kayadhu's pregnancy, Narada's intervention in telling Indra that

the child to be born is a great devotee of Maha Vishnu, and the birth of the luminous child in a demon's house with quiet restraint.

Prahlada is portrayed as sthitaprajna — firm in devotion despite torture.

He talked with people with graciousness

And moved and played with rich and poor alike.

He walked along the gardens, woods and copse

With stares at sky. None could sense his real psych. (p.69)

The sonnets dealing with his attempts to teach his Asura classmates the name of Hari are among the most lyrical in the book, because they juxtapose childlike simplicity with terrifying power.

THEMATIC ARC 3: THE TWILIGHT — THE THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

The title is the philosophy. Narasimha appears at twilight — neither day nor night, neither inside nor outside, neither man nor beast, neither on earth nor in sky — to kill a demon who cannot be killed by man or beast, by day or night, inside or outside.

Mahathi understands the logic behind the portrayal of the Almighty as half beast-half animal performing the supreme task of killing the demon to save the earth with its inhabitants as few devotional poets do, that twilight is not a loophole in a boon. As the book's own critical section notes, in Vedic tradition God is described as Nirakara, Nirguna, Niranjana — formless, attributeless, beyond appeasement and thus can be worshipped in countless forms, in countless names and through countless ways.



The poet celebrates this as the very genius of the Vedic vision: "The Absolute, indivisible and transcendent, manifests itself out of compassion, distributing cosmic energy" (p.17) Narasimha is thus not an avatar among avatars; he is the paradox made flesh, the roar that shatters logic.

The sonnets describing the manifestation — the destruction of the pillar and the ferocious roar that makes the three worlds tremble — achieve true sublimity. The language becomes elevated, yet maintaining rhythmic discipline while allowing emotional expansiveness.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SUPPLEMENT: SPIRITUAL ESSAYS

A unique feature of this work is its extended prose meditation on spirituality and devotion. The III section of the book, which has two essays, elevates the book from story to shastra. In the first essay, the poet traces the iconography from 8-armed benevolent form to 16-armed destructive form, and maps the pan-Indian presence: Simhachalam, Tirumogur, Srirangam, Kumbakonam Chakrapani, Nagamangala, Puri Jagannath and Turavur. It explains why Vaishnavism worships the weapon as Alwar — as a devotee. The discussion of Baliharana ritual and the concept of Chakra as Time (kala) itself shows the author's erudition. He is not just a poet; he is a student of Agama.

The second essay is a treatise on 'True Devotion'. The Narada and Sri Krishna episode answers the question "Who is the truest devotee?" The ultimate battle, the poet suggests, is not between gods and demons, but between ego and surrender. This one

thought summarises the entire wisdom inherited through centuries of tradition.

STRENGTHS OF THE WORK

To sustain 108 sonnets without collapsing into forced rhymes is remarkable. Words like 'effulgence', 'deafening silence', 'connotations' are woven with bhakti and jnana. The work blends classical metaphor with modern sensibility. The description of Narasimha as a paradox of grace and terror is exceptional. The language and diction chosen by Mahathi rightly matches the gravity of the subject chosen. The work is the epitome of devotional authenticity.

FINAL ASSESSMENT: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

Sri Sai Chandra Mouli rightly comments: "Texts like *The Roar of Twilight* are the need of the hour to inculcate values and motivate youngsters to lead ennobling lives. The elderly audience find ambrosia that quenches their thirst for knowledge and guidance to redeem themselves." (p.15) These words resonate with the age in which people give minimal importance to value—based lives and tend to get success at any cost. The work by Mahathi implores us to stand for a moment and introspect our lives. In an age of free verse and fleeting content, the book demands slow reading that requires the reader to hear the beat and to feel twilight.

The work is highly recommended for students of comparative literature, bhakti studies, and all devotees of Lord Narasimha. It deserves a place in university libraries and temple libraries alike. It stands in the lineage of Pothana's Bhagavatam, but in English sonnet form — a true bridge between East



and West, between classical discipline and contemporary devotion. It roars, reflects, and finally redeems — much like twilight itself. In a nutshell, the work of Mahathi is an excellent masterpiece and a luminous contribution to Indian English devotional literature.
