

A STUDY ON NAVODAYA MOVEMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF KANNADA NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

Navodaya (New Birth) period, generally dated from 1900 to 1940s, refers to the beginning of modern Kannada literature, owing largely to the influence of Western education, literature, and modernity. Many Kannada scholars called it a period of renaissance in Kannada literature. These decades saw several writers taking on the responsibility of nurturing modern Kannada literature through translations from European languages. Poetry, the short story, the novel, drama, folklore, and criticism found new scope, shape, and meaning at this time, with poetry dominating the literary scene.

Keywords: literary, nationalism, social reform, humanism, new dawn,

1. INTRODUCTION

The Navodaya form, also known as Navodaya literary movement or style, emerged in the early 20th century in Kannada literature, marking a new era of cultural and literary awakening. The term 'Navodaya' means 'new dawn,' symbolizing a fresh beginning and modern approach to literature. This form blends traditional Indian literary elements with contemporary themes and Western literary techniques.

The Navodaya writers focused on nationalism, social reform, and humanism in their works. They introduced new styles of poetry, drama, and prose that emphasized emotional expression, individual experience, and nature's beauty. This period witnessed the rise of prominent Kannada poets and writers who contributed significantly to the enrichment of Kannada literature.

In essence, the Navodaya form represents a shift towards modernity, bridging the gap between old classical traditions and emerging modern literary sensibilities. It played a crucial role in shaping the literary landscape and inspired subsequent generations of writers to experiment with new ideas and forms.

Thus, the Navodaya form can be regarded as a significant milestone in Kannada literature, nurturing creativity and innovation while preserving cultural heritage.

2. ROLE OF KEY WRITERS IN KANNADA NATIONALISM

The Navodaya period saw the rise of acclaimed lyricists who combined mystic poetry of the Vachanas and Kirthanas of medieval times and the native folk songs of oral traditions with influences from modern English romantics. Best known among them are D. R. Bendre, Gopalakrishna Adiga, K. V. Puttappa (Kuvempu), Shivarama Karanth, V. K. Gokak, Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, D. V. Gundappa ('DVG'), P. T. Narasimhachar, M. V. Seetharamiah, G. P. Rajaratnam, K. S. Narasimhaswamy and Adya Rangacharya ('Sri Ranga') and Gorur Ramaswamy Iyengar.

2.1 Bendre is perhaps the most outstanding of modern Kannada lyricists, authoring a collection of 27 poems, including such masterpieces as *Gari* ("Wing",

1932), *Nadaleela* (1938) and *Sakhigeetha* (1940). His poems had a transcendental quality about them which were neither narrative or dramatic. They cover a wide range of themes including patriotism, love of nature, conjugal love, transcendental experiences and sympathy for the poor. The *Sakhigeetha* is an autobiographical poem about his married life and personal experiences. Bendre had sworn that, in his poetry, he would "rather sow stars in Kannada soil than brilliant jewels".

2.2 The beauty and grandeur of the Malnad hills strongly influenced **Kuvempu**, one of Kannada's doyen poets, in his *Kalki* (1933) in which the poet describes the life of the agrarian community. He further showed his brilliance in using the blank verse in his masterpiece and *magnum opus* that took him nine years to write, the *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* (1949) which contains 22,284 lines, divided into 50 cantos. This work marks the beginning of modern Kannada epic poetry. While the poem follows the Valmiki tradition, Kuvempu puts a stamp of originality on it, bringing together the Indian and western epic traditions.

In a departure from the original epic, Lanka (Ceylon) does not burn in the war nor does Sita enter the fire alone (called *Agni Pravasha*), but rather is followed by Rama. Both however reappear from the fire unscathed giving the mortals a glimpse of their divinity. Not only is Sita's chastity proven, so is Rama's fidelity towards her. Like medieval poet Nagachandra, Kuvempu portrays Ravana as an "evolving soul". He pays homage to all the great poets of the world, including the sage Valmiki, thus placing himself in the tradition of world epic poetry. The work abounds in metaphors and similes and brings home the thought that all living beings will eventually evolve into perfect beings. In the words of a historian, "No one could have imagined that the Kannada language is capable of this complex musical quality, for the first time in this century was Kannada made a language worthy of the gods".

2.3 Govinda Pai succeeded in depicting an authentic Christian ambience in the *Golgotha* (1931). Considered a unique Christian work in Indian literature, Pai narrates in detail, starting from the Christ being taken to Pontius Pilate by a hostile group of Jews demanding his death and the events leading to his crucifixion at Golgotha. The success of this work encouraged Pai to follow with three panegyrics in 1947; *Vaishakhi*, *Prabhasa* and *Dehali*, narrating the last days of the Buddha, God Krishna and Gandhi respectively. *Gilivindu* is his first collection of poems. Forty-six in all, they bring out his love for nature, his country and Kannada language while the *Nandadeepa*, a collection of 37 poems are about devotion to god.

2.4 The influence of the west inspired a new genre in writing, the essay. Here, **A. N. Murthy Rao's** *Hagaluganasugalu* ("Day Dreams", 1937) is best known.

2.5 M. V. Seetharamiah came to limelight during the peak of the Navodaya period and was inspired by such well-known writers as B. M. Srikantaiah and Masti Venkatesh Iyengar. A man of many talents, he was a renowned poet (*Hakki Hadu* or "Bird Song"), novelist ("Robinson Crusoe"), short story writer (*Maargadharshaka*), painter, musician, literary critic, researcher, dramatist (*Swayamvara* or "Choice of a Husband"), essayist (*Hidi Hoovu* or "Handful of flowers") and biographer (*Kavi Ranna* or "Poet Ranna"). To his credit are twelve collections of poems, ten collections of short stories, nine novels, four collections of essays, and nine plays.

All of Seetharamiah's contributions carry a liberal message of love for his surroundings, nature and mankind. An authority on Kannada grammar and literary history, it is to his credit for researching and establishing that the true author of the 9th century Kannada classic *Kavirajamarga* may have been poet Sri Vijaya in the court of King Amoghavarsha I.

He established a research foundation in the name of his mentor, B. M. Srikantaiah ("B. M. Srikantaiah Prathishtana").

2.6 Perhaps the closest in comparison to the wisdom poems of the late medieval poet Sarvajna is the Mankuthimmana Kagga ("Dull Thimma's Rigmale", 1943) by **D. V. Gundappa**. A successful journalist, he was known for his command over the Kannada language and its classics, with a knowledge of Sanskrit as well, despite his limited education which was limited to matriculation only. These qualities and experiences were to serve him well as a writer. Attributed to him are 60 writings in just about every genre of modern Kannada with the exception of the novel. His adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into Kannada is well acclaimed.

The celebrated writer of conjugal love poems, who is known to have been inspired by Robert Burns, K. S. Narasimhaswamy won critical acclaim for Mysore Mallige ("Mysore Jasmine", 1942), a description of the bliss of everyday marital life. In later years, his poems were more metaphysical and included contemporary events in *Dominion Janana* and the *Samsara Rajyanga*.

2.7 Eminent poets produced inspiring poetic dramas, **B. M. Srikantiah** being the trailblazer with his *Gadayuddha Natakam* ("The War of Clubs", 1925), a modern version of Ranna's 982 classic and *Aswaththaman*, a native version of the Greek play *Ajax* by Sophocles. This was the beginning of tragic drama in Kannada, and a new way portraying ancient local heroes.

2.8 Govinda Pai's Hebberalu ("Thumb", 1946) dramatizes the story of Drona and Ekalavya, characters from the epic Mahabharata. Kailasam and his worthy contemporary, A. N. Swamy Venkatadri Iyer ('Samsa') continued to produce fine dramas. Samsa is credited with writing twenty-three plays, of which only six have survived. Of these, a trilogy on the Mysore King Ranadhira Kanteerava are well known; *Vigada Vikramarya* ("The Wicked Vikramarya", 1928), *Vijayanarasimha* (1936) and *Mantrashakti* in (1938).

2.9 Sri Ranga was a dominating and complete authority as a playwright, though he has penned poems and novels as well. In a period of forty years, he authored more than 40 full-length plays and more than 100 one-act plays. His plays, filled with wit and satire, are divided over two periods, the first between 1930 and 1952 where they mostly concerned with social issues. He wrote on Gandhian values and the decadence caused by the caste system in his *Harijanwara* ("The Harijan week", 1934), the *Sandhyakala* (1939) and the *Sokachakra* (1952).

2.10 The wit and satire in **Kailasam's** language, Kannada laced with English, and the social reformer in him are best exemplified in his plays *Bahishkara* (1929) which focusses on religious practices, and *Soole* ("Prostitute", 1945), which dwells on social problems.

2.11 The 1930s saw the rise of another major figure in Kannada literature, **Shivarama Karanth**, who debuted in play *Garbhagudi* ("Sanctum", 1932), which decries the exploitation of society in the name of religion. A series of successful novels were written by him in this period, best known among which are *Chomana Dudi* ("Choma's Toil", 1933) which describes the plight of a harijan in Indian society and *Marali Mannige* ("Back to the Soil", 1942), a story about rural life on the west coast centred on a family's evolution over three generations, during a time of change brought about by westernization. Kuvempu's well accepted *Kanur Subbamma Heggadithi* ("Subbamma Heggadithi of Kanur", 1936) is about an educated protagonist in a conservative society.

2.12 V. K. Gokak, who was educated in Oxford, established himself as an important contributor to poetics, criticism, drama and the novel in Kannada, with no less than 55 books

to his credit. In addition, he was a distinguished critic of Indo-English literature. His other interests included culture, religion, philosophy and education. His first novel, *Ijjodu* ("Misalliance", 1935) dwells on marital problems caused by sexual incompatibility. His short stay in England helped confirm his love for his native country and language, resulting in the generation of *Samudragitegalu* ("Sea songs", 1940) and *Samudradacheyinda* ("From Beyond the Seas", 1940), the latter being a travelogue on his experiences there. His real epic, *Bharata Sindhu Rashmi* runs into 35,000 lines with the introduction in English.

2.13 Masti Venkatesh Iyengar continued to dominate in short stories with such classics as *Kakana Kote* ("Kaka's Fort", 1938), a novel that remained obscure for some time. Set in a tribal atmosphere, the story brings out the life of a tiny hamlet which eventually merges with a feudal chiefdom. Masti's description of their life, love and society is authentic and natural.

2.14 Whether **P. T. Narasimhachar** wrote an essay, a play or a poem, the poet in him was always evident. He has three collection of essays to his credit; *Rathasaprami* (1935), *Ecchalumarada Kelage* (1949) and *Dhenukapurana* (1969).

2.15 Other notable writers of this period were **Gorur Ramaswamy Iyengar and Ajjampur Sitaram ('Ananda')**. Gorur gave up studies to join the freedom struggle at the age of 17 and came under the enduring influence of Mahatma Gandhi whom he knew personally. He was active in the promotion of the "Cottage Industry" at the village level in the erstwhile Mysore state. A marvelous story teller, his first book *Halliya Chitrgalu* ("Village Vignettes", 1930) won him many laurels for his keen observation and narration of the beauty of rustic life. He followed this with several stories, describing on one hand the casteism and superstitions of rural communities and on the other the simplicity and charm in these communities. In addition to stories, he has to his credit essays, skits, travelogues and novels. In fact among the first novels ever to be written on the independence struggle was penned by him and is titled *Merevanige* ("Procession", 1948). Ananda's outstanding book, *Nanu Konda Hudugi* ("The Girl I Killed") is a tragedy centred on a girl who commits suicide after social disgrace.

2.16 Gopalakrishna Adiga describes the joy of political independence in *Kattuvevu Navu* ("We Shall Built", 1948), a longing for spiritual values in *Mohana Murali* (1944) and the importance of individual freedom in *Samaja Bhairava*.

3. LITERARY STRATEGIES USED TO CONSTRUCT KANNADA NATIONALISM

In the early 20th century, Kannada writers during the Navodaya movement and the unification movement (Ekikarana) employed several distinct literary strategies to construct a modern Kannada nationalist identity.

3.1. Historical Romanticism and Myth-Making

Writers used historical narratives to instill pride in a shared past, effectively "rediscovering" a glorious Karnataka.

- **Documenting "Gatha Vaibhava"**: Aluru Venkata Rao's seminal work, *Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava* (1917), is credited with "rekindling the pride of Kannadigas" by documenting the achievements of ancient dynasties like the Kadambas and Vijayanagara Empire.
- **Poetic Personification**: Poets personified Karnataka as a "Mother" figure (Kannadambe) to evoke emotional and patriotic loyalty, a technique seen in Kuvempu's State Anthem, *Jaya Bharata Jananiya Tanujate*.

3.2. Linguistic and Metric Innovation

The transition from archaic to modern Kannada was a strategic move to make literature a tool for mass mobilization.

- **Simplification of Language:** Moving away from complex classical Sanskritized styles, writers like B.M. Srikantaiah used colloquial idioms and "language of the ordinary people" to make nationalist themes accessible.
- **New Poetic Forms:** They introduced Western-inspired stanzaic patterns (such as the sonnet) and combined them with native folk rhythms (Tripadi, Lavani) to create a "new dawn" (Navodaya) of expression.

3.3. Sacred and Secular Synthesis

Literary figures merged traditional religious symbols with secular nationalist goals.

- **The "Poetic Cabinet":** Kuvempu envisioned a "United Karnataka" where historical and religious icons like Basavanna, Pampa, and Sarvajna served as a metaphorical "permanent cabinet," uniting different eras and sects under a single regional identity.
- **Bhavadite (Lyric Poetry):** The rise of *Bhavadite* (emotional/lyrical poetry) allowed for personal expression that often doubled as patriotic sentiment, blending mystic traditions with modern social concerns.

3.4. Cultural Institutionalization

Writers established platforms to standardize and promote the "imagined community" of Kannadigas.

- **Print and Press:** Journals like *Vagbhushana* and newspapers like *Samyukta Karnataka* disseminated nationalist agendas and established a standardized written Kannada across fragmented administrative regions.
- **Literary Organizations:** The founding of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat (1915) provided a central authority to promote the language and organize large-scale cultural conferences that built political momentum for unification.

4. NAVODAYA AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The Navodaya movement in Kannada literature (c. 1900–1950) was inextricably linked to the Indian freedom struggle, serving as the cultural and intellectual backbone for nationalism in Karnataka.

- ❖ **Nationalist Personification:** Writers personified India and Karnataka as mother figures. **Kuvempu** famously urged people to "shove those hundred gods away" and worship only **Bharatambe** (Mother India).
- ❖ **Historical Pride:** Works like **Alur Venkata Rao's Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava** (1917) reconstructed a glorious past to inspire contemporary resistance.
- ❖ **Subversive Metaphor:** Authors used mythological or historical themes to critique colonial rule subtly. For example, **B.M. Sri's Gadayuddha Natakam** and *Aswaththaman* introduced tragic drama to portray local heroism in a modern context.
- ❖ **Bendre:** His intense poems *Tuttina Cheela* and *Narabali* (Human Sacrifice) were direct critiques of the colonial government; the latter led to his **imprisonment**.

- ❖ **Gorur Ramaswamy Iyengar:** He was jailed during the **Quit India movement** and translated Gandhi's autobiography into Kannada, bringing Gandhian ideals to the local audience.
- ❖ **Govinda Pai:** His panegyric *Dehali* (1947) narrated the last days of Gandhi, elevating the leader to a figure of spiritual and national significance.
- ❖ **T.P. Kailasam:** His play *Tollu Gatti* (1918) examined the modern education system through a **Gandhian viewpoint**, while other plays attacked the dowry system and exploitation of women.
- ❖ **Sri Ranga:** His works like *Harijanwara* (The Harijan Week, 1934) advocated for Gandhian values and criticized the caste system.

As the freedom struggle intensified in the 1940s, the aesthetic romanticism of Navodaya gave way to the **Pragatishila movement**, which focused more on the harsh realities of the common man and the underground activities of the **August Revolution**.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO KANNADA IDENTITY

The Navodaya movement was instrumental in constructing a modern **Kannada identity** by transforming the language from an archaic courtly medium into a vibrant tool for **cultural and national awakening**. At a time when Kannada-speaking regions were fragmented across 29 different administrative units and the language lacked official prestige, Navodaya writers like B. M. Srikantaiah and **Aluru Venkata Rao** pioneered a "renaissance" that fostered a sense of "Kannadanness". They achieved this by blending Western Romanticism with native folk traditions, effectively bridging the gap between classical heritage and modern sensibilities. This era saw the rise of a **liberal and inclusive regional consciousness** that used literature to celebrate the landscape, promote social reform, and re-ignite pride in a shared glorious past—exemplified by Kuvempu's universal humanist philosophy and the personification of Karnataka as a mother figure. Ultimately, Navodaya didn't just modernize Kannada literature; it provided the **intellectual and emotional foundation** for the unification of Karnataka.

6. STATUS OF KANNADA LITERATURE

6.1. Digital Era and Kannada Literature

- **Online Platforms:** Websites, blogs, and digital magazines have popularized Kannada literature among younger audiences.
- **Social Media:** Writers and poets use platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook to share their work.
- **E-Books and Audiobooks:** Digital formats are making Kannada literature more accessible to global readers.

6.2. Preservation Efforts

- Institutions like the Kannada Sahitya Parishat and Kuvempu Bhasha Bharathi Pradhikara work to preserve and promote Kannada literature.
- Literary festivals like the Bengaluru Literature Festival and Hampi Utsav celebrate Kannada literary heritage.

6. 3. Challenges

- **Declining Reading Habits:** Digital distractions and the dominance of English are affecting readership.
- **Translation Gap:** Limited availability of Kannada works in other languages hinders global reach.

6. 4. Opportunities

- **Translation Projects:** Efforts to translate Kannada classics into English and other languages are gaining momentum.
- **Support for Emerging Writers:** New platforms and publishing initiatives are encouraging young talent.

7. CONCLUSION

The Navodaya Movement in Kannada literature early 20th century marks a cultural and literary renaissance that played a crucial role in the construction of Kannada nationalism. Emerging alongside the Indian freedom struggle, Navodaya literature sought to revive Kannada language, history, culture and regional pride, while also engaging with modern ideas. Kannada literature has evolved from inscriptions to modern digital expressions, reflecting the changing ethos of Karnataka's society. Its rich legacy, bolstered by iconic figures and movements, continues to inspire readers and writers alike. With efforts to preserve and promote it, Kannada literature remains a vibrant and integral part of India's cultural heritage.

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