



KANNADA - A Classical Dravidian Language

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Kannada is a classical Dravidian language spoken predominantly by the people of Karnataka in the southwestern region of India. The language is also spoken by linguistic minorities in the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Goa and also by Kannadigas abroad. The language had roughly 43 million native speakers by 2011. Kannada is also spoken as a second and third language by over 12.9 million non-native speakers in Karnataka, which adds up to 56.9 million speakers. Kannada was the court language of some of the most powerful dynasties of south and central India, namely the Kadambas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Yadava Dynasty or Seunas, Western Ganga dynasty, Wodeyars of Mysore, Nayakas of Keladi Hoysalas and the Vijayanagara empire. It is one of the scheduled languages of India and the official and administrative language of the state of Karnataka.

The Kannada language is written using the Kannada script, which evolved from the 5th-century Kadamba script. Kannada is attested epigraphically for about one and a half millennia and literary Old Kannada flourished in the 6th-century Ganga dynasty and during the 9th-century Rashtrakuta Dynasty. Kannada has an unbroken literary history of over a thousand years. Kannada literature has been presented with 8 Jnanapith awards, the most for any Dravidian language and the second highest for any Indian language.

Based on the recommendations of the Committee of Linguistic Experts, appointed by the ministry of culture, the government of India designated Kannada a classical language of India. In July 2011, a center for the study of classical Kannada was established as part of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore to facilitate research related to the language.

Kannada inscriptions begin to occur about AD 450. The earliest Kannada literary text dates from the ninth century, though references to a number of earlier works exist. Jains were the earliest known cultivators of Kannada literature though works by Lingayats from that period have survived.

Vaddaradhana by Shivakotiacharya is the earliest existing prose work in old Kannada. However, one of the earliest extant works in Kannada is the Kavirajamarga generally ascribed to the Rashtrakuta king Nripatunga Amoghavarsha.

In the tenth century, the champu style of composition was perfected. Pampa was the master-pioneer of this art; he is called the father of Kannada poetry. Continuing the epic tradition were Ponna and Ranna. Pampa, Ponna and Ranna are considered the three gems and the epithet 'golden age' is used for their period.

With Basaveswara introducing the vacham sahitya or sharana sahitya in writing, a revolution came about in the 12th century. Pithy, simple and drawn from daily life, the 'sayings' or vacham spoke up for the equality of men and dignity of labour. The poets expressed their devotion to god Shiva in simple vachana poems.

These poems were spontaneous utterances of rhythmic, epigrammatical, satirical prose emphasising the worthlessness of riches, rituals and book learning. Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Devara Dasimayya, Channabasava and Kondaguli Kesiraja are the poets called Vachanakaras who wrote in this genre.

Akka Mahadevi was prominent among the women poets; she is also said to have written Mantrogopya and Yogangatrividhi. Siddharama is credited with writings in tripadi metre and 1,379 extant poems of his are to be found. Aroimd AD 1260 Karmada's first standard grammar, Sdbdamani Darpana was written by Kesiraja. Under the patronage of the later Hoysalas, several literary works were produced.

Kannada literature flourished under the Vijayaaagara kings and their feudatories during the 14th-16th centuries. The Kannada Bharata by Kumara Vyasa is an outstanding work. Jainas, Virashaivas and brahmins produced poetic works and biographies of saints.

Some of the notable names of the period are Ratnakara Varni (Bharatesvara Charita), Abhinavadai Vidyananda (Kavyasara), Salva (Rasa Ratnakara), Nanjunda Kavi (Kumara Ramane Kathe), Bhimkavi (Basava Purana), Chamarasa (Prabhulinga-lilai in 1430), Narahari (Torave Ramayana). Kumari Valmiki (1500) wrote the first complete brahmanical adaptation of Ramayana, the Torave Ramayana.

With the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire, the Kingdom of Mysore (1565-1947) and the kingdom of the Keladi Nayakas (1565-1763) gave encouragement to production of literary texts covering various themes. A unique and native form of poetic literature with dramatic representation called Yakshagana gained popularity in the 18th century.

Modern Kannada theatre is traced to the rise of Yakshagana (a type of field play) of the 16th century. Yakshagana compositions are associated with the rule of King Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar II (1704-1714) and Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1794-1868), a prolific writer of the era who penned over 40 writings including a poetic romance called Saugandika Parinaya. King Chikka Devaraja Wodeyar (1673-1704) wrote Geetha Gopala, a well-known treatise on music, in saptapadi metre.

It was the first writing to propagate the Vaishnava faith in the Kannada language. Sarvajna, a mendicant and drifter Virashaiva poet who was seen as the 'people's poet', wrote didactic vachanas, penned in the tripadi metre, which constitute some of Kannada's most celebrated works.

Lakshmisa (or Lakshmisha), a well-known story-teller and a dramatist, is dated to the mid-16th or late 17th century. The Jaimini Bharata, his version of the Mahabharata written in shatpadi metre, is a popular poem. The Vaishnava movement produced the immortal songs of Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa.

Modern Kannada literature began in mid-nineteenth century and incorporated two aspects—absorption of western ideas and a rediscovery of the past. Laskhminaranappa ('Muddana') wrote some good prose works.

In the early 19th century, Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and his court poets moved away from the ancient champu form of prose toward prose renderings of Sanskrit epics and plays. The first modern Kannada novel is Kempu Narayana's Mudramanjusha (1823).

Modern Kannada literature was cross-fertilised by the colonial period in India as well, as translations of Kannada works and dictionaries into European languages as well as other Indian languages, and vice versa, and European style newspapers and periodicals in Kannada came to be. In the 19th century, interaction with European technology, like new printing techniques, gave an impetus to modern Kannada literature.

The first Kannada newspaper called Mangalore Satnachara was published by Hermann Mogling in 1843; and the first Kannada periodical, Mysuru Vrittanta Bodhini, was published by Bhashyam Bhashyacharya in Mysore at around the same time.

B.M. Srikanthayya (Inglis Gitagalu) regarded as the father of modern Kannada literature, gave Kannada poetry a conscious modern direction. S.G. Narasimhachar, Panje Mangesha Rao and Hattiangadi Narayana Rao made immense contributions. The novel found an early champion in Shivaram Karanth while another prominent writer, Masti Venkatesh Iyengar ('Masti'), a Jnanpith Award winner considered the father of Kannada short story, laid the foundation with his Kelavu Sanna Kathegalu (1920) and Sanna Kathegalu (1924). T. P. Kailasam, with his Tollu Gatti (1918) and Tali Kattoke Cooline pioneered modern drama.

His plays mainly focused on problems like the dowry system, religious persecution, woes in the extended family system and exploitation of women.

Novels of the early 20th century promoted a nationalist consciousness. While Venkatachar and Galaganath translated Bankim Chandra and Harinarayana Apte respectively, Gulvadi Venkata Rao, Kerur Vasudevachar and M.S. Puttanna wrote realistic novels. Aluru Venkatarao penned Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava that deeply influenced the movement for Karnataka's unification. D.V. Gundappa and K.V. Puttappa were other poets of note.

Most famous was D.R. Bendre. Puttappa (Ramayana Darsanam) and Bendre (Nakuthandti) have won the Jnanpith Award. The novel in Kannada has made a lasting impact. M.S. Puttanna wrote novels rooted in the Kannada soil. A novelist of note is K. Sivaram Karanth whose Chomana Dudi and Marali Mannige are outstanding works. He has received the Jnanpith Award.

Yet another Jnanpith Award winner is Prof. V.K. Gokak, poet and novelist. Incidentally, the most number of Jnanpith awards has been given to Kannada literary writers. Some dramatists of note are Basavappa Sastri, T.P. Kailasam, and 'Sansa'. Kannada literature has seen the rise of writers like P. Lankesh, Nissar Ahmed, Girish Karnad, and U.R. Ananthamurthy.

From the early 1970s, a segment of writers started to write novels and stories that were anti-‘Navya’. This genre was called Navyottara and had a more socially responsible role. The writers in this form of writing were Poornachandra Tejaswi and Devanur Mahadeva.

Striking developments in recent times have been the rise of the prose form to a position of predominance and growth in dramatic literature. Bandaya (Rebellion) and Dalit literature, with Mahadeva’s Marikondavaru and Mudala Seemeli Kole Gile Ityadi are examples of this trend.

SCRIPT

The Kannada script is a type of writing system called an alphasyllabary. All consonants have a built-in vowel. Other vowels are indicated with diacritics, which appear next to the consonants. When they appear at the beginning of a syllable, vowels are written as separate letters. When consonants appear together without intervening vowels, the second consonant is written as a special joint symbol, usually below the first. The direction of writing: left to right in horizontal lines.

LITERATURE

It has highest number of Janapeeta literary awards compared to any Indian language. Kannada had a huge boost during the Vijayanagar period. Shri Vinoba Bhave called "Kannada" script the "Queen of Kannada Scripts" not for all Language – "Vishwa Lipigala Raani".

