

REVISITING R S MUGALI'S HISTORY OF KANNADA LITERATURE



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ABSTRACT

The *History of Kannada Literature* by R S Mugali shows the origin and growth of Kannada language and literature. The beginning of Kannada literature is seen as a two way process, that is, standardizing of the oral and folk literature and adapting the Sanskrit literature according to the local needs. This history of Kannada literature gives us an organic idea of how a language of acquired its own idiom in literature and how its tradition and socio-historical conditions gave birth to a powerful literature of its own as well as how this movement continued for upcoming centuries till its forms and voices found expression in a new reality of different civilization.



KEYWORDS :Kannada Literature, History, Sanskrit Literature, Oral Literature, Folk and Indigenous Literature.

INTRODUCTION :

The *History of Kannada Literature* by R S Mugali shows, like the other histories of other Indian languages, the origin and growth of Kannada language and literature. The beginning of Kannada literature is seen as a two way process, that is, standardizing of the oral and folk literature and adapting the Sanskrit literature according to the local needs. Kannada language and its land had certain socio-historical conditions which gave birth to an entirely indigenous literature which drew certain elements from other traditions and languages yet held its own uniqueness and identity. This was the literature of Vacanakaras. Vacanakaras' literature was taken over by other Bhagavata poets. In the eighteenth century, it saw the revival of the *Campu* form of Kannada literature. Classical poetry once again gained currency and devotional literature inspired by Srivaisnava faith came into being once again. There came a time when the literary heritage of Kannada literature stood face to face with the rise of a new civilization and a different heritage of English literature. A new literature was born with new literary forms like the lyric, the short story and the novel. New themes like the early marriages, plight of women and social equality came to be dealt with in the evolving Kannada literature resulting in the development of liberal outlook towards these fundamental issued of the society. Old forms of *Campu*, *Sangatya* and *Yaksagana* carried new themes while the lyrical elements of old literature devoted to the mystical or religious school of thought, were used to appreciate nature. In this way the modern

lyric was born. Similarly, social novels and plays came into being while essays and other forms of prose like short story and reviews also developed on the newly constructed paths.

This history of Kannada literature gives us an organic idea of how a language of acquired its own idiom in literature and how its tradition and socio-historical conditions gave birth to a powerful literature of its own as well as how this movement continued for upcoming centuries till its forms and voices found expression in a new reality of different civilization.

In this way, the book appears to us not just a history of Kannada literature or a work where relations between one author and the other, and one period and the other are superimposed by the author, in fact the author has treated the literary history of Kannada in all its complexity and diversity. The author has freely acknowledged the indebtedness of Kannada literature to the Sanskrit as well as Jaina literary tradition. This gave rise to a typical Kannada literature where one religious, mainly from the Jain tradition, and one secular drawing from the Sanskrit literature, was developed by the same author. Pampa wrote *Adipurana* and *Pampabharata*. This was taken over by Ranna and Ponna. This period saw great a flourishing of the *Campu* form along with *Gadyakatha*.

Then R S Mugali shows how the political uncertainty and religious superstitions gave birth to a new literature of *Vacankaras* which carried the message of equality, one godhead and personal relationship with the God, discarding the superficial and tormenting features of the existing religion. This literature was a socio-religious “revolution” vitalizing the spiritual and cultural life of Karnataka. These poets used simple language of common day usage. They formed riddles, proverbs and idiom from the popular speech to carry home their message.

Then the author shows how during fifteenth to seventeenth century the *Vacana* literature faded into the background, and during the zenith of the Vijay Nagar empire, diverse literature came into being—literature with popular appeal pertaining to all the faiths, that is, of *Virasaiva* mystics, Jaina compositions in simple metrical forms and Brahmin literature of devotion. The use of popular metrical forms like *Satpadi* and *Sangatya* was free, while *kirtanas* became the order of the day. After the fall of the Vijay Nagar empire and in the days of darkness of political and cultural life of Karnataka, classical poetry manifested itself through *Virasaiva* poets, heralding the revival of the *Campu* form and, at the same time, the Vedic tradition of Ramanujan of twelfth century inspired devotional literature of Sri Vaisnava faith.

During the time of the Indo-British cultural encounter, all this complex literary heritage of Kannada with its synthesis of Sanskrit, Dravidian, Vedic, Jaina and Virsaiva traditions merged with a new civilization to give again a point of assimilation and synthesis leading to its continuity and richness. In this way the author has presented the history of Kannada literature in an organic form where the synthesis in the past leads to the fructification of literature in future while the present and future are seen carrying the voices of the past. The book gives us the history of Kannada literature like the history of a son, who sets up his separate family with its own idiom and uniqueness yet the blood in the veins of his family is not different from that of the parent stock except that the family has adapted itself to the new social, geographical and cultural idioms.

Literary criticism has been used as the foundation stone on which the structure of the book has been constructed. The book, no doubt, starts with the linguistic confluence responsible for the birth of Kannada literature yet it makes a close critical scrutiny of each poet as the basis of its literary history. The criticism and features of individual poets form a literary tradition or a literary movement under the same religious, social, political and cultural atmosphere. The author, no doubt, takes pains to bring out various religious traditions and socio-cultural and political ethos at various phases being responsible for the development of Kannada literature. So the literary history becomes a stream synthesizing the

many outlooks, traditions, yet each movement or author retaining its individuality which is possible only due to the author's choice of sound literary criticism being the basic unit of literary history.

The author has a flexible approach in the periodisation. For him the old period is one when the language came into its being and started acquiring richness. The medieval period is one when the language had its own creation and idiom and the modern period starts with the Indo-British encounter when the past was being transformed by a new light. The author further divides the old period into four parts--the first part showing the origin and growth of Kannada language the second part showing the translation of Sanskrit works, the third part displaying the use of Sanskrit heritage along with the Jaina tradition by the great poet Pampa, the fourth and the last showing how the poets like Ponna and Ranna carried on the traditions and how other poets contributed to it.

The medieval period is also divided into four parts— part one showing the growth of *Vacana* poetry, part two showing the revival of *Versaiva* literature and growth of devotional, Brahminic and popular literature. Part three describes other *Bhagvata* poets who contributed to this tradition while part four shows a revival of classical poetry and devotional literature of Sri Vaisnava faith. In the modern period the author shows how the new lyric, the new prose, forms of essays, the reviews, the short story, the novel and the drama came into being. R S Mugali has made efforts to bring out the newness of Kannada literature and at the same time presenting the voices of the past in it.

In the last chapter, he sums up the literary history of Kannada literature emphasizing its individuality as well as its indebtedness to the ancient heritage of our country. He rightly says that antiquity or individual authors help us to understand how ancient is the literary tradition and how deep and abiding is its impact on the life of the people speaking a particular language. In fact our study of this book shows that the literary history of a language is like the study of a family line where new generations come yet the same blood goes on changing forms and sometimes gets vitalized from outside influences or diversity of cultures. The book also shows how sound literary criticism and understanding of social and cultural milieu can combine to give us the past in the present where the present leads to the future.

However, the folk literature is not given its critical due in the literary history of Kannada literature. If the interaction of the oral literature and Sanskrit gave birth to Kannada language and literature then it is the dialectics of the folk and the composed literature in a language which is responsible for various literary movements, imagery and cultural fertility.

Once the dialects of the folk and written literature of a language is established and a literary criticism is used as a basic tool, then the literary history becomes the living history of a particular language which people speak, making even the highly intellectual and cold histories sensitive and more comprehensive.

REFERENCES

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