



Sahitya Akademi

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meet the author

Chennaveera Kanavi



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Chennaveera Kanavi was born on 28 June 1928 in Hombala village in Gadag Taluk now Gadag district of the then Dharwad district. His father Sakkreppa master, as he was popularly known, was a primary school teacher. His mother Parvathamma was a typical Indian housewife who worked hard to look after the welfare of the family. From his father, Kanavi seems to have picked up some of the basic qualities of his personality. First and foremost, his father was a voracious reader, mostly of poetry and works of religious philosophy. Thus he provided for his son a home in which intellectual culture prevailed. Kanavi's sense of self-discipline both as a man and poet must have been inspired by his father's

example. His early boyhood was spent in a small village Sirunja. This early rural background exercised a profound and lasting impact on his personality and poetry. Kanavi has always been a genuine villager at heart, even when operating the most sophisticated structures of urban culture and technology because of his shift to urban centres for higher education and livelihood. The early rural background has persisted with rare strength and durability.

After his primary schooling, he shifted for his middle school education to Gadag. Thereafter he went to Dharwad, an educational and cultural centre, where he first finished his schooling at the R. L. S. High school. As a high school student, he wrote and got published poems in the school miscellany, thanks to the encouragement of its headmaster, Koppal master. He graduated in 1950 with a First Class first from the famous Karnataka College, and then took an M.A., in Kannada from the newly established Karnatak University in 1952. In fact, 1952 was a crucial year for the poet because this was the year of his hat-trick-getting a M.A degree, getting a wife and getting a job. His was an arranged marriage but it was also one that took place with his consent. The bride was Shantadevi, the daughter of Giddanavar, a most unusual bureaucrat who had a passion for books and learning. The job he landed in was that of a Secretary to the Department of



"Pampa Prashasti", a prestigious literary award being presented by S.M. Krishna, the then Chief Minister of Karnataka (1999)



Honorary Doctorate was awarded to Kanavi by the Karnatak University in 2004

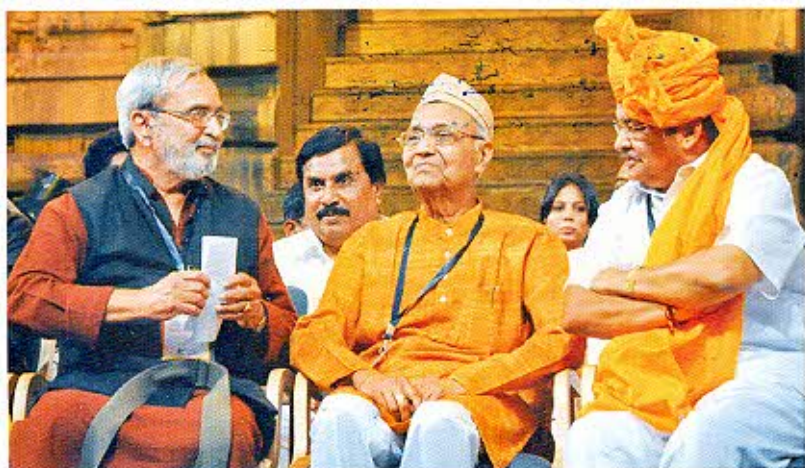
Publications and Extension Service. In 1956, he was promoted to head the department as its Director. While many of his friends have felt he could have made a more significant contribution as a teacher or a researcher. One should not forget that Kanavi's official work involved strong links with literary and scholarly life. Moreover, neither his poetry nor his scholarship may be said to have suffered any real decline. Informally, his scholarly activities never really weakened and his poetry flourished. He was able to bring out fifteen collections of his poems to date, in spite of his onerous official duties, especially under such a task-master as late D.C. Pavate, the Vice-Chancellor. During most of the time, Kanavi himself seems to have no regrets at the way things have gone for him. The Kanavi's have five children - four sons and a daughter. All of them are married and doing extremely well in their lives.

Though past 85, Kanavi as a poet is still a smouldering volcano, and one may not be surprised to see a lot more poetry coming from his pen!

Without any quibbling about semantics, one can say that Kanavi is in some way and in some sense related to the great Vachana literature, Bendre, Lakshmisha, Kuvempu and folk literature. Of course, there was the impact of Madhura Chenna's personality and poetry - simplicity, clarity and directness. In fact, Kanavi had personal acquaintance with the great mystic poet whom he first met in Bijapur way back in 1950. But Kanavi's interest in poetry has its genesis in school days itself. He seems to have felt intuitively that he was cut out by destiny to be a poet. During his college days, he and a few like-minded friends had been meeting at Kanavi's student room in Malamaddi in Dharwad to recite and discuss literature and invited established writers to talk to them. This informal



Kanavi presiding over the Dubai Kannada Sahitya Sammelana (2010)



During Viswa Kannada Sammelana in Belagavi, with late U.R. Ananthamurthy and a local dignitary (2011)

group, calling itself KAVYANUBHAVAMANTAPA, included names that were later to shine as stars in the literary firmament. For instance, it included Shankar Mokashi Punekar, Kirtinath Kurtakoti, Basavaraja Kattimani, Shiveswara Doddamani, Vasanta Kavali and others.

Secondly, allied to this passionate rooting in rural life, is his lyrical invocation of nature and its endless sights and sounds. Trees, flowers and birds provide a constant rhythm to his poems on urban life. Kanavi's attitude to nature differs from that of other important poets who have shown a warm love for nature. It is not possible in a brief introduction to give detailed examples and one must be forgiven for indulging in unavoidable generalisations. While Bendre and Kanavi share the ability to depict nature with minutely observed details, the two differ in many other respects. In Bendre, nature is certainly loved for its own sake but yet it also serves, as a metaphor for the transcendental and the spiritual of its own, when he does try to bring it under figurative mode. Kanavi usually makes nature a rural resource. Thus often his presentation of nature is mediated by rural life to such an extent that the rural becomes a symbol for nature in contrast to urban civilization.

Kanavi has been described as a descriptive poet, meditative poet and a confessional poet. All these characteristics apply but yet they also miss out on one dimension - the dimension of

experiencing life before meditation and description. The question then is not merely whether he describes or meditates but about what he describes and what he meditates on. It is his earthy, rural hardness, the kind of hardness the poet finds in *Zinnia*, that is the hall-mark of his experience of nature and people. It is that which ultimately dictates the nature of his language, metre and music. There is no doubt that his distinctive poetic voice will be heard for a long time to come.

Hailing from a poor rural family steeped in the religious culture of North Karnataka, Kanavi has risen to the status of a major figure in modern Kannada literature, especially as a poet. His poetic career spans seven decades or so beginning from his first collection of poems, *KAVYAKASHI*, in 1949. His poetry explores and captures the rhythms and cadences of our rural life through lyrics of haunting beauty. His language and imagery reflect his deep and loving understanding of the life of ordinary people living their daily lives in the villages and small towns of North Karnataka. His poems sing the joys and sorrows, loves and hates, good and evil, which are the stuff of normal human fate. The poems indicate Kanavi's great craftsmanship, linguistic mastery and imaginative insight. Kanavi's poetry is a unique blend of romantic imagination and classical discipline. He is a poet who has lived intensely and passionately recording with rare poetic skill of his life, including mundane events. His sonnets



Writer Chennaveera Kanavi inaugurating Mysuru Dasara atop Chamundi hill in Mysuru on 01-10-2016 as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others look on.

articulate a philosophy of life that accepts life but also questions it critically. His poems have become part of our life, and his poetry has won him many important awards, both national and regional.

Apart from his poetry, which runs to several volumes, he has written considerable prose work on the literary and cultural themes. But Kanavi's contribution does not end with literature. He has established himself as an icon of cultural life in North Karnataka. There is no significant cultural event in this part of Karnataka, in which he has not participated with distinction. As a recognition of his contribution to Karnataka's literary and cultural life, he was invited to preside over one of the Kannada Sahitya Sammelanas, which are annual cultural events in which the literary and cultural life of Karnataka is celebrated with great gusto.

Kanavi has also distinguished himself as an administrator in his capacity as the Director of Publications and Extension Service in Karnatak University, virtually from its inception. He made effective use of this opportunity to locate and nurture talented scholars in various disciplines. He also made innovations in the field of extension service by providing a link between the rural hinterland and the University.

As a person he embodies the best qualities of Kannada culture in his gentle and unassuming presence. However, his modesty and moderation have not prevented him from making profound and uncompromising commitment to the values of universal humanism.

Cultural Ambassador : Status as a symbol of Kannada culture he has been participating for the last four decades, in important cultural and literary events both in Karnataka and at National level.



Reciting Poetry during the "Dharwad Sahitya Sambhrama" on the line of Jaipur Literary Festival (2016)

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Madhuchandra, Sharada Prakatanalaya, Bengaluru, 1954
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- Sahitya Chintana, Minchinaballi Granthamale, Dharwad, 1966
Kavyanusandhana, Pa. Vem. Smaraka Granthamale, Mysuru, 1971
Samahita, Bhandage Prakashana, Gadag, 1977
Madhurachenna, Karnataka Sahitya Academy, Bengaluru, 1984
Samatolana, Minchinaballi Granthamale, Hubballi, 1989
Vachanantaranga, Murugarajendra Brihanmatha, Chitradurga, 1999
Shubha Nudiye Hakki, Sahitya Prakashana, Hubballi, 2000
Sahitya Samahita, Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, Hampi, 2006
Sadbhava, Samvahana Prakashana, Mysuru, 2008
Kanavi Samagra Gadya (2 Vols.), Kannada Culture Department, Bengaluru, 2009

Felicitation Volumes

1. Chembelaku 1980
2. Mugiyada Hadu 1998
3. Belliterina Dari 2003
4. Kanaviyavara Ayda Kavitegala Anusandhana 2009
(Practical criticism of selected poems)

Awards Received

- Sahitya Akademi Award (1981)
Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award (1985)
Karnataka State Rajyotsava Award (1988)
Pampa Prashasti, the highest Karnataka State award for distinguished achievements in Kannada literature (1999)
Nadoja (Honorary Doctorate) of Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, Hampi, 2002
Honorary Doctorate of Karnatak University, Dharwad, 2004

Other Assignments

- Member, General Council, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi (10 years)
Member, Karnataka State Sahitya Academy (6 years)
Member, Kannada Advisory Committee, NBT (3 years)
Member, Syndicate of Kannada University, Hampi (1992-95)
Member, Syndicate of Karnatak University, Dharwad (2001 - 04)
President All India Kannada Literary Conference 1996, Hassan.