**Modernism, Kannada Literature**

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Modernism, known in Kannada as ‘Navya,’ emerged as a literary movement in the 1950s. This period saw writers deliberately moving away from the Romanticism of the Navodaya period, which is considered an age of literary renaissance shaped by complex interaction with colonialism and the West. In contrast to Navodaya, which reflected nationalist sentiments, the Navya period emerged in the context of the formation of the Indian nation-state. The newly-formed Indian nation-state aroused large expectations, and their betrayal led to anti-Congress (the ruling party), anti-Jawaharlal Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India) sentiments among the intellectuals and the literati. It was a post-Gandhi era of disappointment and disillusionment in literature. Navya was also partly in response to the leftist progressive movement, called Pragatisheela in Kannada, which arose in 1940s and continued in the 1950s. Pragatisheela literature, prominent in short stories and novels, focused on social issues such as poverty, the importance of context in shaping one’s personality and the plight of the common man, and employed realistic narration. Modernist poetry was shaped by its opposition to Navodaya writing, while Modernist short stories and novels emerged as a reaction to Pragatisheela literature.

Navya writing also displayed a sense of existential despair, under the influence of European writers such as Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Writers who did not share these sentiments—and were optimistic or hopeful of changes—described the despair of Navya writing as a simple translation of the post-World War situation in Europe into Kannada, regardless of the striking differences in context. In poetry, the influence of T. S. Eliot was predominant, and Baudelaire’s work also found entry into Kannada in this period. In the field of literary criticism, the influence of F.R. Leavis, and T.S. Eliot can be seen.

V.K. Gokak is generally credited with coining of the term ‘Navyate’ in a talk delivered in a Kannada Conference held in Mumbai in 1950. This talk called for changing the way poetry was written in Kannada. Gokak had just returned from London and was well acquainted with the changes happening in European literary scene. The collection of poems he published in 1950 was titled *Navya kavitegalu*. However, in terms of content, it was Gopalkrishna Adiga who seems to have inaugurated the Navya movement and fostered it by grooming a group of writers. His first two poetry collections were largely in Navodaya style, while his third collection *Nadedubanda Daari* (1952) marked a major shift in sensibility. Shantinath Desai’s novel *Mukti* (1961), which depicts the protagonist's quest for an independent identity, may be regarded as the first Modernist novel in Kannada.

In poetry, Adiga was followed by a host of writers including Ramachandra Sharma, Gangadhara Chittala, Chandrashekar Kambar, A.K. Ramanujan, K.V. Tirumalesh, Sumateendra Nadig, and H. M. Chennaih. Kambar came under the influence of folk literature and moved out of Navya to carve his distinctive niche. Some of the poets in the group, including A.K. Ramanujan, tread distinctive paths within the broad Modernist framework.

Apart from Shanthinatha Desai (Novels: *Mukti, Beeja, Vikshepa, and Om Namo*), major names associated with Modernist prose narratives in Kannada include U. R. Ananthamurthy (Novels: *Samskara, Bharatipura, Avasthe, Bhava, Divya*), Yashavanta Chittala (Novels: *Shikari, Mooru Daarigalu, Chedha, Purushottama*), Lankesh P. (Novels: *Biruku, Mussangeya Katha Prasanga, Akka*), Poorna Chandra Tejaswi (Novels: *Nigooda Manushyaru, Chidambara Rahasya, Carvalho*), Alanahalli SriKrishna (Novels: Kaadu*, Parasangada Gendetimma, Bujangayyana Dashavatara*), K. Sadashiva (mainly short stories), T.G. Raghava (mainly short stories). U.R. Ananthamurthy’s novel *Samskara* acquired the status of a modernist classic after its English translation by A.K. Ramanujan travelled worldwide. Modernist writing showed a strong preoccupation with probing individual personality, the split persona, and solipsistic protagonists, caught in the hands of unknown forces, to whom the world appears mysterious and forbidding.

Not all writers who began as Modernists continued within the framework of Modernism. For instance, Poorna Chandra Tejaswi—through his short story collection *Abachoorina Post-office* (1971)—tried to break away from the Navya mold and, in his Preface, openly criticized the Modernist preoccupation with form and technique at the expense of lived experience. Similarly, P. Lankesh’s novel, *Mussanjeya Katha Prasanga* (1978), and U.R. Ananthamurthy’s short story, “Suryana Kudure” (1979), mark their transition from Modernism to other literary trajectories.

A feature that marks the difference between Western and Kannada Modernism is the influence of Rammanohar Lohia on some Kannada writers. Lohia’s ideology, which was a mixture of Karl Marx and Gandhi, had a deep impact on writers such as Gopalakrishna Adiga, Ananthamurthy, Lankesh, and Poorna Chandra Tejaswi. Though their writings depict the plight of the individual at odds with the ways of the world, their predicament is often socially contextualized. Sometimes we also find that they take up a politically potent theme and encase it in the language of Modernist writing, which undermines the political dimension of the work.

In the field of theatre, too, Modernism played a pivotal role through the influence of existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. Playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Lankesh, Chandrashekar Kambar, Ratna, and Sumateendra Nadig began their careers as Modernist writers. Some of these writers moved beyond the Modernist framework after the 1970s and became important playwrights not only in Kannada, but at a national level as well.

The Modernist movement in Kannada literature played an important role in cultivating a group of specialized critics in Kannada. Modernist literature was often criticized for not being easily accessible to the readers, which necessitated the mediation of critics to provide explication of complex literary works.

**Timeline**

1950 Call for a new kind of poetry by V.K. Gokak at a Kannada conference in Mumbai

1952 Call by Gopalakrishna Adiga to move away from the trodden path through his third collection of poems, *Nadedubanda Daari*

1961 Publication of the novel, *Mukthi,* by Shantinath Desai

1962 Beginning of the journal, *Sakshi,* under the editorship of Gopalakrishna Adiga

1965 Publication of the novel, *Samskara,* by U. R. Ananthamurthy

1970 P. Lankesh edits Modernist anthology, *Akshara Hosa Kavya*, which showcases the achievements of the movement in poetry

1971 Dissenting voice about Navya movement by Poorna Chandra Tejaswi in his preface to *Abachoorina Postoffice*

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