

A.N. KRISHNARAO (1908-71), Kannada novelist, short story writer, playwright, biographer, essayist and critic, wrote nearly two hundred and fifty books. But it is as novelist that he is best remembered. A prolific author who produced a new novel practically every month, his experiments with form and style influenced a whole generation of writers and helped in establishing novel as the most important medium of expression of the modern writer in Kannada.

His novels deal with a variety of interrelated themes—the organic community based on traditional values and its disintegration under the pressures of modern life; the family and its breakdown; sex and marriage; the artist and his world; evils of society like prostitution and commercialization of values—unrolling a vast panorama of a changing society caught in the conflict of tradition and modernity in the first half of the twentieth century Karnataka.

Krishnarao wrote for the people, dreamt their dreams and shaped their myths. He is a writer's writer and his language has, in the words of Ta Ra Su, 'variety, intensity, speed and sensuousness'. H.M. Nayak has aptly observed that the fourth decade of this century in Kannada would go down in history as the Krishnarao decade.

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Preface

As an undergraduate student of the Karnatak College, Dharwad, I did a review of A.N. Krishnarao's *Papapunya* for *Jayanti* in 1943, and I was in the audience when Adya Rangacharya (then R.V. Jagirdar) and A.N. Krishnarao addressed a meeting of Progressive writers in Dharwad in 1944. My review of *Papapunya* had not been very favourable, but I was most impressed by the dignified manner in which Krishnarao met the arguments of his critics. He spoke for barely fifteen minutes though he was famous for his marathon speeches, but left on me a lasting impression. Krishnarao was a very handsome man with an aristocratic bearing, but he dressed simply in pyjamas and *jubba*-jacket combination. He was then at the height of his popularity, with a large following among the youth.

Over the years however he has suffered from critical neglect, and I was happy when the Sahitya Akademi invited me to write a monograph on him for their Makers of Indian Literature series. I have tried in this book to assess Krishnarao's total contribution to the promotion of Kannada literary culture and the all round development of Karnataka. In doing so I have drawn on many sources, but chiefly on two books edited by S.M. Krishnaraya—*Chirachetana* and *Rasachetana*. The Bibliography given at the end of this book is based mostly on S.M. Krishnaraya's compilation published in *Chirachetana*.

Krishnarao was a prolific writer and produced nearly two hundred and fifty books during a writing career of over four

decades. Quite a few of these are out of print and it would have been extremely difficult for me to read them but for the extraordinary kindness of Sri N.R. Inamdar, Librarian of the Osmania University, Hyderabad, who permitted me to use the University's collection. I am grateful to him and his staff for their courteous help. I am also indebted to the Librarians of Bangalore and Marathwada Universities and my friend Dr. Anand Rao Thota for similar assistance.

All the translations from the Kannada sources—primary as well as secondary—were done by me and I have taken pains to make them faithful to the originals. I have tried to assist the reader with translations of the titles of books except in cases where the meaning is the same as in Sanskrit. I hope the transliteration of the Kannada titles, included in the Bibliography, with the help of diacritical marks will facilitate right pronunciation of the names.

G.S. Amur

1.

Life and Background

Arakalagudu Narasingaraya Krishnaraya, A Na Kri as he was popularly known, was a natural writer and, during an active literary career spread over four decades and more, produced a prodigious amount of writing of various types—fiction, drama, biography and criticism and a large quantity of polemical literature—in all nearly 250 books. In most of these areas he was a pioneer, though perhaps his lasting contribution was in the field of the novel. With the possible exception of Shivaram Karanth, it is difficult to think of a writer who was so totally involved in the Kannada culture—its literature, its art and music, and its institutions. With his tremendous energy and zest for life, he found himself always in the midst of a controversy, but it is these very qualities which made him a popular writer. Though he was a self-educated man, he had immense, though not disciplined, learning and was one of the most effective speakers of his time, both in Kannada and English. Like his mentor Alur Venkatarao, Krishnarao was a Kannadiga first and then an Indian. The one unifying force of his life and personality was his faith in *Karnatakatva*, an ideology which Alur summed up in these words: 'By *Karnatakatva* I mean the sum-total of all our feelings and obligations towards Karnataka.' The highest tribute to Krishnarao that Ta Ra Su (T.R. Subbarao), a

1. Alur Vankatarao, *Nanna Jeevanasmritigalu*, Manohara Grantha Mala, (Dharwad, 1974), p. 225.

close associate of his and a distinguished novelist, pays is to his Kannada identity: 'His race was the Kannada race; his religion Kannada religion; his work work for Kannada. He was among the few writers who found a total identity with Kannada.'¹

Krishnarao's life and work are closely interrelated. We have fortunately reliable sources which can provide material for a brief biographical sketch. The most important of these are Krishnarao's autobiographical writings: *Nannannu Nane Kande*² and *Barahagarana Baduku*.³ *Nannannu Nane Kande* (As I See Myself) is sketchy compared with the more detailed *Barahagarana Baduku* (A Writer's Life) which gives a vivid account of the first half of Krishnarao's life. There is not much of introspection or self criticism in these books but they do introduce us to the background and environment of the writer and record his association with persons and institutions. The latter book which was first serialised in *Kannadaprabha* in 1968 before it was published in book form in 1972, carries an afterword by Krishnarao's wife, Vasanthadevi, who gives a moving account of her husband's last days. Among the full length biographies, Ta Ra Su's *A Na Kri* (1947) is the most intimate and sympathetic; it is an extremely well-written book. M.G. Shetty's *A Na Kri, Jeevana Karya* (1977) is a good introduction to Krishnarao's life and work and is also a readable account. *A. Na Krishnarayaru* (1960) by Seva Nemiraja Malla is another book which provides valuable information about Krishnarao and his work. *Rasachetana*, a festschrift edited by S.M. Krishnaraya and published in 1970, is a voluminous book which includes reminiscences by Krishnarao's contemporaries and associates and studies of the various aspects of his work by specialists. Useful as these books are, however, a definitive biography is yet to be written, though this is hardly the place where it can be attempted. What follows is only a brief outline of a life-sketch.

Arakalagudu, a small town in the Hasan district of Karnataka was the home of Krishnarao's ancestors, and his family

1. Ta Ra Su, *A Na Kri*, Sahityalaya (Chitradurga, 1947), p. 181.
2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Nannannu Nane Kande*, D.V.K. Murthy (Mysore, 1944).
3. A.N. Krishnarao, *Barahagarana Baduku*, Vishvabharati Prakashana, (Goa, 1972).

was known for its love of learning and culture. Krishnappa (1826-1906), his grandfather, was legal adviser to Paleyagars (petty rulers) and was well-versed in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada. He translated the Gita in Kannada verse and wrote more than three hundred songs and set them to music. In his appreciative essay on his grandfather's book on the Gita, Krishnarao writes: 'There is no doubt that Krishnayogi's *Bhagavadgitarthasara* is a distinct contribution to religious literature in Kannada. It is written in a style intelligible to all and it is meant to be sung. The poet's contribution to Karnataka music is no less significant.'¹ Krishnappa wrote two books on Vedanta in Telugu and composed songs on the *Upanishads*, *Shankarabhashya* and *Panchadashi*. Krishnarao's father, Narasingaraya, was a contemporary of C. Rajagopalachari, Navaratna Ramarao, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and A.V. Varadachar in the Central College at Bangalore where the legendary Tate was the Principal. He served in the Revenue Department and played an important role in the cultural life of Bangalore. Like A.V. Varadachar, the famous actor, he was tremendously interested in the theatre and was one of the founder members of the Bangalore Union, an amateur drama association. He was very actively associated with the Masonic Lodge and rose to the position of President of its Bangalore branch and, as Worshipful Master, head of all the branches in South India. He was pro British and anti Congress in his political opinions. Krishnarao's mother Annapurnamma was deeply religious and led a pious life.

Krishnaraya, third among five children, was born on 9th May, 1908 (Vaishakha Shuddha Navami, 1830) in Kolar. After his schooling in a Kulimath and Kote A.V. School, he joined the National High School, Bangalore, an institution established by Mrs. Annie Besant in 1917 and run by the Theosophical Society, Madras. He stayed for five years in this school and he was fortunate to have among his teachers K. Sampadgiri Rao, Editor of *Triveni*, and Kandade Krishnaingar, a noted historian. The National High School in those days was a strong centre of political and intellectual activity and Krishnarao at a young age

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Samadarshana*, Standard Book Depot, (Bangalore, 1956) p. 77.

came under the influence of national leaders like Gandhiji and champions of the Kannada movement like Alur Venkatarao and Muduvidu Krishnarao. He was also attracted to the speeches and writings of Pandit Taranath, a rationalist thinker of the time and a versatile genius, whose *Dharmasambhava* had exercised a great appeal to the young by its revolutionary thought. Among the authors Krishnarao read during his school days was Bankimchandra whose novels had been translated into Kannada by B. Venkatacharya. His long friendship with T.P. Kailasam, the famous Kannada playwright, began during this period. Krishnarao was a voracious reader but the academic career did not suit his temperament and he failed to qualify for the University. His elder brother Ramarao was a student of the Maharaja's College in Mysore and Krishnarao occasionally sat through some of his classes, particularly when B.M. Srikantaiyya was lecturing. Krishnarao was a regular contributor to the school journal, but his real career as a writer began at the age of sixteen with *Maduveyo Manehalo* (Marriage or Disaster) (1924), a play he wrote for A.V. Varadachar, a highly talented actor and a close friend of his father. Varadachar did not produce the play, probably because it was not long enough for the professional stage, but it was staged by the Amateur Nataka Mandali and has since been acted several times. It was first published in *Rangabhumi*, an influential journal edited by Dr. D.K. Bhavadvaj. Krishnarao's early introduction to Bankimchandra through B. Venkatacharya attracted him to Bengal and to Rabindranath Tagore, and in 1928 he spent a few months in Santiniketan and came in close contact with the well known artist Nandalal Bose who inspired *Udayaraga* (1934), one of the best known of Krishnarao's early novels. After his return from Santiniketan, he started *Kathanjali*, a monthly journal devoted to the short story, a novel venture in those days. He published the work of such gifted writers as Ananda, Ra Shi, K. Gopalakrishnarao and G.P. Rajaratnam, and brought to light nearly fifty new writers. He also wrote regularly for *Vishvakarnataka*. One of his main interests then was drama and for a time he was quite influential as a drama critic. It was therefore natural for him to be invited to the first Drama Conference held in Dharwad in 1930. With this began his long association with North Karnataka. His play *Maduveyo Manehalo* was performed during the

Conference and, being one of the earliest modern social plays to be staged in Dharwad, attracted a great deal of attention. At about this time he also visited Bombay and was introduced to the Marathi theatre through a performance of Gadkari's *Ekach Pyala*, performed by Balagandharva's troupe.

On 26th October 1931, at the age of 24, Krishnarao married Vishalakshi (Vasanthadevi after marriage) daughter of Shri H.V. Krishnaswamy, Professor of English and Kannada in Nizam's College, Hyderabad, and step-sister to Raja Rao, the famous Indian novelist in English. Vasanthadevi, an accomplished musician, took to writing under the influence of her husband. In Hyderabad, thanks to his father's position in the Masonic Lodge, Krishnarao had access to the best society. Some of his most memorable experiences in Hyderabad were his visit to Raja Dhanraj Gir's collection, where he had his first introduction to Japanese art, and his exposure to Salar Jung's Museum which consisted of a large number of Mughal, Rajput and Dakhani paintings. Krishnarao's knowledge of painting, to which artists like Minajigi have testified, was profound. *Bharatiya Kaleyalli Raja Ravivarmana Sthana* (The Place of Raja Ravivarma in Indian Art, 1932) reveals his originality as an art critic. Krishnarao's interest in music, Hindustani as well as Karnatak, was equally strong. He grew up in an environment in which Karnatak music was a familiar experience, but he was fortunate to have been introduced to Hindustani music by Pandit Taranath who conducted a music school in Bangalore for a brief period. Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur was a life long friend of Krishnarao and he has high praise for Krishnarao as a connoisseur of Hindustani music. He was a member of the Gayan Samaj in Bangalore and was closely associated with the best musicians of his time—Khan Abdul Karim Khan, Sawai Gandharva, Halim Jafar in Hindustani music and Bidarada Krishnappa, T. Chaudayya, Devendrappa, and Chikka Ramaraya in Karnatak music, to mention only the more prominent. The two volumes of *Karnatakada Kalavidaru* (The Artists of Karnataka) include intimate portraits of musicians, painters, sculptors and artists. A large part of his autobiography, *Barahagarana Baduku* tells the story of his friendship with artists of all types from all over Karnataka. Among the painters and sculptors Krishnarao knew intimately were Venkatappa, Minajigi, Kama-

dolli, Siddhanti and Shankar.

In 1935 Krishnarao went to Bombay to seek his fortunes and worked for *The Bombay Chronicle*. E.J. Jepson of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* published quite a few of Krishnarao's articles and encouraged him in his journalistic career. But Krishnarao found it difficult to stay away from Karnataka and soon returned to Bangalore to plunge himself in hectic activity. During 1936-37 he edited *Vishvavani*, a monthly, and in 1939 became the first editor of *Kannada Nudi*, the organ of the Karnataka Sahitya Parishat. During these years he travelled widely throughout Karnataka and wrote numerous articles on the political, social and economic problems of Karnataka for *Vishvavani* and *Kannada Nudi*. Some of these have been collected in his book: *Akhanda Karnataka* (1946). He was also involved in the Karnataka Unification movement. On 21 October 1945 he presided over the Karnataka Ekikarana Parishat held in Mudhol, then part of a princely state. He had, however, to give up the editorship of *Kannada Nudi* owing to differences on the Hindi-Kannada controversy. He returned to the Parishat in 1945 to edit the *Sahitya Parishatpairika* for a time. By then he had published *Sandhyaraga* (1935), his best known novel, and had been firmly launched on a successful career as a novelist. In a series of four novels beginning with *Sahityaratna*, Krishnarao presented a barely disguised autobiography dealing with this phase of his career.

During the forties Krishnarao was drawn into the vortex of the Progressive movement along with writers like Ta Ra Su, Kumara Venkanna, Nadiger Krishnaraya, Niranjana, Basavaraj Kattimani and Chaduranga, and became its spearhead in Karnataka. The All India Progressive Writers' Association which had been launched by Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer and Bhabani Bhattacharya in London, met in Lucknow in 1936 for the first time under the Presidentship of Munshi Premchand and soon had its branches all over India. The manifesto issued at the second conference of the Association held in Calcutta in 1937 said: 'The objective of the Association is to free literature and the other arts which have fallen into the hands of the traditionalists and have lost vitality, and to make them capable of com-

municating reality and creating a new world.¹ The Progressive movement gathered force after the outbreak of the Second World War and with its philosophy of humanistic realism brought about important changes in the field of literature and criticism. The Progressive writers rebelled against the Establishment and its cultural and literary values which in their opinion were romantic and transcendental. In Kannada the movement marked the first important shift in sensibility after Navodaya, the flowering of the modern renaissance in Kannada in the early decades of twentieth century, and though it was strong mostly in the field of fiction affected poets and dramatists as well. Krishnarao who became the President of the Bangalore branch of the Association started in 1944, launched a powerful attack on the Navodaya literature. In the introduction to *Pragatishila Sahitya* (1944), a collection of representative essays on the Progressive movement which he edited, he wrote: 'Modern Kannada literature is mostly literature of the middle class. The people's point of view is totally absent. We have neglected the masses who live in the villages.'² Krishnarao's involvement with the Progressive movement brought him closer to the people but alienated him from the Establishment, and critical recognition and literary honours were denied to him for a long time. Perhaps the fact that he did not occupy a high official position and lacked academic credentials in terms of University degrees was also a setback. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was right when he said, 'Unfortunately in our country official position or a place in the University seems to be necessary for literary recognition.'³ But honours did come to him in the end. In 1960 he was elected President of the 42nd Kannada Sammelana held in Manipal. In 1969 he received an award from the State Sahitya Akademi and in 1970 the University of Mysore conferred on him an honorary doctorate. In the same year he was made Honorary President of the State Sahitya Akademi. But to the end he remained a fighter. The Kannada Chaluvali which he led along with M. Ramamur-

1. Shivakumar Mishra, *Pragativad*, Rajkamal Prakashan (Delhi, 1966), p. 18.
2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Pragatishila Sahitya*, Karnataka Sahitya Mandir, (Dharwad, 1944), p. 25.
3. A.N. Krishnarao, *Kannadada Dari*, Pragatishila Lekhakara Sangha, (Bangalore, 1946), p. 106.

thy and Nadiger Krishnaraya in order to secure Kannada its lawful place in all walks of life could be quoted as an example of his indomitable spirit. He died on 8th July 1971 (Gurupaur-nima 1893) at the age of 63 after a prolonged illness.

At the time of his death Krishnarao was busy planning a comprehensive history of Indian art and a whole series of volumes on the Mahabharata. In spite of his prodigious output, obviously he had not exhausted himself as a writer. Nor had he lost his zest for social and cultural activity. Both as man and writer Krishnarao was known for his ability to fight for causes and for his spirit of independence. Those who knew him intimately, persons like M.N. Chaudappa and H.M. Nayak for example, have testified to his generosity, particularly for young artists and writers whom he protected and encouraged. He was a man of great personal charm and loved meeting people. He had a large circle of friends among all sections of society and his death was felt by many not only as a great loss to Kannada literature but as personal bereavement.

The source of Krishnarao's strength as a writer lay in his commitment to the cause of culture. 'Only those,' he said, 'can know the meaning of freedom who know the meaning of culture.'¹ The goal of culture, as he saw it, was to reduce the gap between straight living and the way of the world, in other words, between the ideal and the actual. He believed that Indian culture was a living and growing force and tried to present it as a whole in *Bharatiya Kaladarshana* (1962) and *Bharatiya Sanskritidarshana* (1964), two extremely useful books which he edited. He had a radical conception of culture and shared Denis de Rougemont's view that 'Culture does not consist only of transmission; when necessary it can take the form of criticism and disruption; it does not only initiate, it invents.'² Krishnarao's intense love of culture expressed itself in an active concern for the condition of the Fine Arts—music, painting, sculpture and theatre—and of the artists. Arts were for him not mere instruments of *vihara* (entertainment) but of *vikasa* (development). Through the two volumes of *Kannada Kalavidaru* he sought to

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sarthaka Sahitya*, Sudarshana Prakashana (Tiptur, 1966), p. 61.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 61

win recognition for artists working in various fields. He was the first to suggest the creation of an Academy of Kannada Arts, which has now become a reality in the form of the various State Akademies. He was particularly concerned over the decline of the theatre in Karnataka and pleaded for the establishment of theatres in all big cities. 'The theatre,' he said, 'is a symbol of the culture of the land.'¹

Krishnarao was a staunch humanist and firmly believed that humanism alone could prevent the world from falling apart. 'The writer,' he said, 'is a prophet of humanism.'² For him the aim of literature was the search for human values and the expression of human life. 'That literature should subserve ethics,' he wrote, 'is a Christian concept and not an Indian one. Literature should be the expression of a full life.'³ He was a strong champion of the freedom of the writer and did not accept any restrictions on his choice of material. 'The writer has a right,' he said, 'to use creatively all subjects on earth, from A to Z of the encyclopaedia.'⁴ He was opposed to eliticism in literature and declared: 'Literature which remains outside the life of the people is meaningless literature.'⁵

The search for an Indian identity was one of the most important urges of the Gandhian age and Krishnarao felt it strongly. He was emphatic on the value of national unity but for him, as for Alur, this could be achieved only through a strong regional identity: 'Unless our lives are permeated from all sides with Kannada we will not be able to know ourselves.' The Kannada agitation he led in the Sixties demanded the acceptance of Kannada as medium of instruction at all levels and as the language of the courts and of administration.

Krishnarao came under the influence of leftist ideology, particularly during the heyday of the Progressive movement, but his attitude to tradition was not one of total rejection. 'To surrender

1. S.M. Krishnaraya, *Chirachetana*, Vishvabharati Prakashana (Goa, 1972), p. 257.
2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sarthaka Sahitya*, Sudarshana Prakashana, (Tiptur, 1966), p. 61.
3. *Chirachetana*, p. 183.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
5. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sahityaratna*, Lalitasahityamala (Dharwad, 1943), Preface.

to tradition can be harmful,' he said, 'but a total rejection of it is the sign of an undeveloped mind. How to bring about a harmony between tradition and modernity and use them for national progress is the problem we are facing today.'¹ Thus, while he recognised the value of the past for the progress of society, he was aware of its limitations, as for example in its attitude to woman. Krishnarao pleaded for openness even in sexual matters and wrote several novels on the theme of prostitution. His strong social awareness enabled him to see that prostitution was not only a question of individual morality but an important index to our total vision of society. In political matters he trod the middle way and was critical of communism as well as of American capitalism.

Krishnarao's sensibility was shaped by a variety of forces. His association with the National High School exposed him to the topmost national leaders of his time. Mahatma Gandhi and his social philosophy made a strong impact on his growing mind. He also came under the influence of the nativistic thought of Alur and Mudavidu who were staunch nationalists but were deeply conscious of the uniqueness of Kannada culture and were emphatic on the need to develop a regional and linguistic identity. Of Alur's *Karnatakada Gatavaibhava* (1917) he says: 'In *Gatavaibhava* we see the centre of inspiration for the awakening and activity in Karnataka and the development of its literature.'² Krishnarao's intense awareness of his immediate environment, aroused by the influence of nativistic thought, preserved him from the dangers of intellectual chauvinism and wooliness. At the same time he was completely open to outside influences. Most of his early reading consisted of Western literature which introduced him to the wider world. 'English literature,' he said, 'opened the floodgates of variety and aroused in us creative discontent. *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavata* were the breath, but we realised that along with breath man also needed for his development, blood, flesh and bone.'³ He was fortunate to be guided in his reading by men of catholic taste like K. Sampadgiri Rao and Kandade Krishnaingar. Pandit

1. *Chirachetana*, p. 259.

2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Kannada Kularasikaru*, Ananda Brothers, (Bangalore, 1951), p. 3.

3. *Chirachetana*, p. 78.

Taranath's influence was in many ways a liberating influence. His lectures on religion, science and sex removed many misconceptions in Krishnarao and modernised his thinking. Alur and Taranath were pioneers in prose writing and Krishnarao learnt a great deal from both of them. His early association with the artists, Varadachar the actor, Nandalal Bose the painter and Mallikarjun Mansur the musician for example, enriched his aesthetic sensibility and inculcated in him a passionate love of the arts. Krishnarao's journalistic work in Bangalore and Bombay brought him close to the people and, as he himself said, helped him to make a departure from his earlier Sanskrit dominated style to a more realistic manner of writing. His commitment to realism became stronger with his involvement with the Progressive movement in the forties. He was exposed to the influence of socialistic thinkers and artists who deepened his social awareness and brought about a radical change in his thought and outlook. His novels on sex and prostitution created a furore and he had to defend himself against charges of immorality and obscenity. *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane* (1952) still remains the only book of its kind in Kannada. Krishnarao's commitment to realism was, however, far from being fanatical. He was aware of other possibilities. Commenting on the place of realism he said: 'The writer cannot produce literature, idealistic or realistic, through an imitation of actuality. Literature is a product of the writer's total sensibility.'¹ He was essentially a humanist and sought to reconcile Marxism with the primitive socialism of the Upanishads, though in the process he alienated himself from the hard core Marxists in the Progressive camp who became his bitterest critics. Krishnarao's was not perhaps a fully integrated personality, but it certainly possessed variety and richness.

Krishnarao's nativistic preoccupation with *Karnatakata* is symptomatic of the times he lived in. The Karnataka of the Nripatunga era, a vast unified country which spread from Kaveri to Godavari, was a fragmented land ever since the fall of the Vijayanagara empire. The Peshwa rule over North Karnataka and the British conquest of Mysore in the eighteenth century had caused a deep erosion in the Kannada identity and the

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sanskritiya Visvarupa*, Standard Book Depot, (Bangalore, 1955), p. 19.

Kannadiga was hardly conscious of his rich cultural and literary heritage. The healing process began with the Rendition of Mysore in 1881 which restored the Wodeyar dynasty to the throne and revived confidence in the Kannada people. With the resurgence of national feeling in the early years of this century began a search for cultural and linguistic identity within the national framework. The recognition of Karnataka as a separate territory at the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 marked the beginning of the Karnataka Unification Movement. The Karnataka Ekikarana Parishat met for the first time in Kasargod on the 4th December 1929 and the struggle led by Alur and others continued till the formation of the Mysore State in 1956. The new State consisted of the old Mysore State, the district of Bellary, the four districts of North Karnataka, South Kanara, Coorg, the Kollegal Taluka and the three districts of Gulbarga, Bidar and Raichur from the former territory of the Nizam. Another seventeen years had to pass before the State was renamed as Karnataka on the 1st November 1973, a happy event which Krishnarao did not live to see.

The literary and cultural renaissance in Kannada preceded the political awakening. The starting of the Karnataka Vidya-vardhaka Sangha in 1890 and the Karnataka Sahitya Parishat in 1915 gave a positive direction to the revival of the Kannada literary tradition. The situation in North Karnataka particularly was deplorable at that time. The influence of Marathi, an inevitable consequence of the Peshwa rule, was so strong that even as late as 1866 Marathi was taught compulsorily in schools and Kannada occupied a secondary place. Mr. W.A. Russel, who took over as Education Inspector of the Southern Division in 1865, was shocked at this situation and wrote: '... The Canarese language has never been taught or cultivated in this Division as the Gujarati or Marathi in theirs. ... The indifference of the Canarese people in general to schools in which the books and teachers are mostly Marathi can hardly be wondered at.'¹ It was Mr. Russel who gave a definite turn to educational policies by effecting a shift in favour of Kannada, and Western scholars like Dr. F. Kittel, Rev. F. Zeigler and J.F. Fleet laid the foundations

1. R.Y. Dharwadkar, *Hosagannada Sahityada Udayakala*, Karnataka University (Dharwad, 1975), p. 8.

of Kannada scholarship. Rev. Kittel, who compiled the monumental *Kannada-English Nighantu* (1894), was among the first to discover the true greatness of Kannada literature. 'My own impression,' he wrote, 'is that the more Canarese vernacular literature becomes known, the more evident it becomes that it will fully bear comparison with any other vernacular literature of the South.'¹ John F. Fleet's *Dynasties of Canarese Districts of Bombay Presidency* (1895) played an important role in restoring the lost pride of the Kannada people. Venkata Rango Katti, a bilingual writer, brought out the first Kannada text books in 1889, and translations from Sanskrit, Marathi, Bengali and English followed to pave the way for the growth of modern Kannada literature. Periodicals like *Vagbhushana* played a very important role in promoting literary culture and training literary taste.

The first great Kannada poet, Pampa, lived in the tenth century and Kannada poetry has had a glorious past, though its modern phase began only with B.M. Srikantiah's *English Gitegalu* (1921). For prose, however, there has been no such tradition, though *Vaddaradhane*, a collection of Jaina religious stories and a great work of prose was written before *Pampabharata* and prose figured in the poetry of the *champu* and *Ragale* styles. The beginnings of modern Kannada prose can be traced back to Kempunarayana's *Mudra Manjusha* (1823), a narrative of mixed forms but written for a modern audience and Muddana's *Ramashvamedha* (1894), where the story of Rama is framed in dialogued commentary between the writer, Muddana, and his beloved, Manorama. Muddana was the first among the moderns and his work reveals a contemporary awareness. The journals—*Vagbhushana*, which has already been mentioned, *Shubhodaya* and *Sachitrabharata*, to mention the more prominent—contributed richly to the development of Kannada prose as a medium of literary expression and communication of thought, but as late as 1905 the Kannada writer who sought to express himself in prose faced serious problems. Alur Venkatarao was one such writer. He analysed the situation and said, that for writers like him, the study of old Kannada, mostly poetry, was not helpful and they had to find their models in English'. But by the twenties of this

1. *Hosagannada Sahityada Udayakala*, p. v.

2. Alur Venkatarao, *Nanna Jivanasmrutigalu*, Manohara Granthamala, (Dharwad, 1974), p. 183.

century, prose had replaced poetry as the chief literary medium. E.P. Rice, the author of *Kanarese Literature* (1921), recognised this fact when he wrote: 'It is evident that the bulk of literature will henceforth be in prose instead of in verse, and that a vocabulary and style intelligible to all readers of ordinary education will more and more take the place of archaic words and forms.'¹ By the time Krishnarao started his literary career, B.M. Srikantaiah, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and D.V. Gundappa had already fashioned prose as a medium of creative expression, but these were nearly his contemporaries and he had no well defined tradition to fall back upon and had to solve most of the problems for himself.

The beginnings of the Kannada novel were made in the nineteenth century with translations from Bankimchandra and Hari Narayan Apte. B.Venkatacharya's translations of *Durgeshanandini* and *Anandmath* appeared in 1885 and 1899 respectively. Galaganath (V.T. Kulkarni), inspired by Apte's novels on Maratha history which he translated, wrote independent historical novels like *Kumudini* (1912) and his *magnum opus Madhava-karunavilas* (1923), an epic novel on the founding of the Vijayanagara empire. These historical romances, aimed at the recreation of India's past glory and the promotion of love for one's own land and language, created a taste for reading in the public and prepared the ground for the novelists to come. The main tradition of the Kannada novel, however, has been the social novel and here too the beginnings were made in the last century. Venkatarao Gulwadi's *Indirabai* (1899), Baburao Bolar's *Vagdevi* (1905), Vasudevacharya Kerur's *Indire* (1908) and M.S. Puttanna's *Madiddunno Maharaya* (1915) were important early experiments in this field. Of special significance for the future of the Kannada novel was Puttanna's *Madiddunno Maharaya* (As You Sow So Shall You Reap) which attempted subtle comment on contemporary culture and developed a prose style independent of Sanskrit. Commenting on the historical significance of this novel M.G. Krishnamurti says: 'The density of detail in this novel prevents it from becoming a moral treatise. Though this novel appears at places like a social document, a romance or even a farce, since the novelist is totally committed to the values

1. R.Y. Dharwadkar, *Hosagannada Sahityada Udayakala*, p. 46.

of his society without the least self-consciousness, all these factors get integrated and events achieve a symbolic significance.¹ Krishnarao was a great admirer of Puttanna's novels; yet in his *Sahitya Mattu Kamaprachodane* he spoke of the difficulties of the novelist in Kannada who lacked the advantage of a tradition. He was, of course, thinking of the Western novelist and the advantages he enjoyed.

The short story was yet another form where Krishnarao did pioneering work. Even before his first novel appeared in 1934 he had published two collections of short stories and edited the first representative collection of Kannada short stories, *Kamana Billu*, Vol. I (1933). His *Kathanjali* was the first magazine in Kannada to be exclusively devoted to the short story. Vasudeva-charya Kerur, M.N. Kamat, Panje Mangeshrao and Kerodi Subbaraya were among the earliest practitioners of this exciting new form, but the most distinguished was Masti Venkatesha Iyengar for whom the short story was the principal medium of expression. Masti's stories reflected contemporary life and revealed a sensibility which was completely a product of the organic community. Krishnarao's early stories were deeply influenced by Masti's work, though he broke away from this influence when he entered the Progressive phase of his literary career.

Unlike T.P. Kailasam, with whom he was closely associated, Krishnarao did not achieve greatness as a dramatist but he began his literary career as a playwright and wrote some successful plays. Modern Kannada drama also had its beginnings in the last decades of the nineteenth century, though dramatic forms like the *Yakshagana*, *Krishnaparijata* and *Bailata* had been popular in Karnataka for a long time. Here again the early experiments were translations, mostly from Sanskrit and English. Churmari, an engineer by profession, translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* in 1870. A more literary translation of this Sanskrit classic by Basavappa Shastri appeared in 1882. Shantakavi, a spirited Kannadiga who resented the dominating influence of the Marathi theatre in North Karnataka, started a theatre group known as Karnataka Nataka Company in 1877 which staged plays written by himself. Rajadhani Nataka Mandali and Ratna-

1. M.G. Krishnamurthi, *Adhunik Bharatiya Sahitya*, Akshara Prakashana (Sagar, 1970), p. 25.

vali Nataka Mandali were established in 1880 and 1902 respectively. Amateur theatre activity began with the establishment of Prachya Krida Samvardhaka Mandali in Dharwad in 1896 and the Amateur Nataka Mandali in Bangalore in 1909. The period between 1910 and 1937 has been known as the golden age of the Kannada theatre. It saw the rise of such gifted actors as A.V. Varadachar, Mohammad Peer and Gubbi Veeranna. But this was the age of the actor rather than the dramatist. Most of the plays produced had either mythological or historical themes. The social play was as yet limited to Kailasam's *Tollu Gatti* and a few other plays. But with Kailasam the dramatist had already come into his own and Krishnarao generally followed his lead, though he too wrote a few historical and mythological dramas.

In the preface he wrote to *Diparādhane* (1955) Krishnarao made a quick review of the achievements of his predecessors and indicated the direction of his own development. He wrote: 'M.S. Puttanna proved that Kannada literature could grow independently of Sanskrit. T.P. Kailasam and B.M. Srikantaiah showed how Kannada could retain its genius even after absorbing English influences. Masti and A.R. Krishnashastri continued the tradition of Puttanna. . . Kannada literature grew in many directions between 1915 and 1943, but it remained an elite literature. The Progressive movement in 1943 gave a social direction to literature and created the common reader. The Pocket books. . . made literature an integral part of social life. The instrument of this revolution was the Kannada novel.' It is possible to argue that Krishnarao's assessment of Navodaya literature as elite literature is not wholly true. Writers like Masti had a strong social awareness and wrote from deep within the community. Neither in their choice of subject-matter nor in their style were they guilty of elitist preoccupations. It cannot be denied, however, that as a professional writer Krishnarao created a vast reading public for himself and for other writers and was more programmatic than his predecessors in his pronouncements. The Progressive movement opened up new areas of experience and expression but perhaps it was not wholly an unmixed blessing.

With writers like Krishnarao the critic has a dual responsibility; he has to be aware of the historical dimension of their work while evaluating them in terms of contemporary literary criteria: literary history and literary criticism are both relevant and necessary disciplines.

2

Novels and Short Stories

As a writer Krishnarao explored practically all the forms available to him but his *metier* was undoubtedly that of a novelist. He wrote more than a hundred novels and created a vast reading public for the novel. As a professional writer who produced a new novel practically every month he was not able to maintain uniform quality, but his experiments with form and style influenced a whole generation of writers and helped to establish the novel as the most important medium of expression of the modern writer in Kannada.

In the various prefaces he wrote for his novels and elsewhere Krishnarao has commented on the nature of the novel form and his own approach to it. The following from the preface to *Shrimati* (1952) may be quoted as a representative statement of this kind: 'The novel is a means of refined entertainment. Its essence is in the story and presentation. It is both history and psychology and its chief characteristic is its commitment to life. The artist is national as well as international and his art should devote itself to arouse the spirit of the nation. Art and philosophy are inseparable, like the flower and its fragrance.' Speaking of his own novels in particular, he said: 'I wish to draw the attention of readers to two important aspects of my novels. First, my way of looking at problems; second, their pure Indianness.'¹

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sanjeggattalu*, p. 15.

Krishnarao's humanistic commitment, his most distinguishing quality, is part of his credo as a writer. In the preface to *Minchu* (1930), his first work in fiction, he wrote: 'I have written these stories in order to articulate the voice of the sufferers.' This commitment became stronger and more deliberate with his participation in the Progressive movement and he came to see the artist's duty as one of protest against exploitation. In the preface to *Adrishita Nakshatra* (1962) he emphasizes the value of *karuna* (compassion) and says: 'The goal of my novels is to create respect and sympathy for my fellow men.'

Krishnarao was equally conscious of the moral function of the novelist. 'My writings are novels,' he said, 'and they do intend to please the reader, but they also aim at the same time at the purification of emotion and try to stimulate thinking.'¹ 'The common aim of religion, philosophy and literature,' as he saw it, 'is to purify life and make it auspicious.'² As a novelist he sought with varying results to balance his naturalistic and idealistic impulses, to present human nature in all its reality but also at the same time to refine consciousness, as he realised that the preservation and promotion of culture was an important function of the novelist. The novel for him was an attempt to fill the gap between what he called straight living and the way of the world.

One of the most important services Krishnarao rendered to the novel form was to widen its scope. His novels deal with a variety of interrelated themes—the organic community based on traditional values and its disintegration under the pressures of modern life; the family and its breakdown; sex and marriage; the artist and his world; evils of society like prostitution and commercialisation of values; and Karnatak history. Krishnarao's novels provide excellent material for a social history of the first half of the twentieth century Karnataka. They unroll a vast panorama of a changing society caught in the conflict of tradition and modernity.

Krishnarao was the first novelist in Kannada to deal extensively with the artist and his world, though the artist had already appeared as hero in Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Gauri*, G.K. and Brothers (Bangalore 1958) p. vii.

2. *Ibid.*

Subbanna (1928), the story of a musician's quest for freedom. In a series of novels beginning with *Udayaraga* (1934) Krishnarao paints the many faces of the artist, his complex relations with society and the story of his success and failure. *Udayaraga*, the story of an artist's fall and redemption, is the first in the series, but the most memorable is *Sandhyaraga* (1935). Introducing the novel to his readers, Krishnarao wrote: 'The artist may be a painter, a musician. or a writer but in the end he moves towards unity of vision. What appears to him as a fragment at the beginning is seen in the end as a whole. Only then his life becomes complete and finds its fulfilment. *Sandhyaraga* is the story of an artist who follows such an ideal.' The novel is structured round the contrasted lives of two brothers, Ramachandra and Lakshmana. Ramachandra, studious and ambitious, qualifies for the Bar, becomes a judge and occupies important positions in society, but he is mean, selfish, cruel and corrupt and breaks a harmonious family which his parents had carefully nurtured. Lakshmana, his step brother, is a born artist. The loss of his parents and the inhuman behaviour of his brother which results in his wife's death accentuate his loneliness and he becomes a homeless wanderer. Fortunately, he finds a guru who gives a direction to his life. Lakshmana achieves greatness as a musician but is totally uncorrupted by fame and money which do not touch him. The two forces which sustain his life are music and his love for his dead wife Jaya, and the novel ends appropriately with Lakshmana bursting out into the final glory of the Purvi raga and the incantation of Jaya's name in the dying moments of his life:

Anandabhairavi was over and he took up the *Purvi raga*. . . . The raga went through the first phase and reached the second. Tears streamed out of Lakshmana's eyes. . . . The raga reached the third phase. The flow of tears had stopped. His song kept up the speed demanded by the raga but his soul was at peace. As the raga came to an end, the *taraka* string broke and the sound woke up the listeners. The *tanpura* slipped from Lakshmana's hands and rolled on to the ground, and along with it he too fell down.

Jaya. . .

The two-syllabled word reached the entire audience, and that was the *mangala*. The concert was over. The singer had set afloat the lamp of his soul on the evening raga. . . .

Sandhyaraga may have been influenced by Saratchandra's *Devadas* and other novels but it clearly bears the stamp of Krishnarao's individual genius, and is a fully realised work. The contrast between the two brothers is perhaps too schematic to be natural, and we may find a touch of sentimental idealisation in the character of Lakshmana, but the novel broke new ground in plot structuring and characterisation. Few novels before *Sandhyaraga* were so skilfully constructed and were so eminently readable. The magic of Krishnarao's style had already begun to work.

Sandhyaraga is not merely the story of an artist and his alienation in the modern world. It is also, like Shivaram Karanth's *Marali Mannige* (The Whispering Earth), a novel about the family and the organic community, which were subjected to tremendous pressure by the forces of modernity. Hosahalli, the seat of Shrinivasarao's family with its total stability achieved through a commitment to traditional values, is a symbol of the society which had survived through generations. Shrinivasarao and Minakshamma are an ideal couple, but Minakshamma's childlessness, a curse in the context of the society she lived in, makes her unhappy and she persuades her husband to marry again. The perfect adjustment of the two wives, ununderstandable outside the specific cultural context, is not disturbed by the arrival of children. Savithramma, the younger wife gives birth to Ramachandra and Gopal, Minakshamma to Lakshmana and Shanta. What breaks the family is the extreme individualism of Ramachandra who receives various benefits from the family but proves ungrateful. His self-centredness destroys the family and causes suffering to everyone. The individualism of Lakshmana, the artist, is of another kind. It too leads him away from the family and causes him suffering, but it also brings him fulfilment and salvation.

Sandhyaraga was the first novel in Kannada to receive critical attention in the form of a whole volume of essays in appreciation. *Sandhyaragaprashasti* set up a tradition from which

later novels like Raobahadur's *Gramayana* and U.R. Anantamurthy's *Samskara* have benefited. What appealed to contemporary critics of *Sandhyaraga* was its superb art of story-telling and the beauty of its literary style. V.M. Inamdar, a noted novelist and critic and a contributor to *Sandhyaragaprashasti* wrote: 'When I finished reading *Sandhyaraga* for the first time, one thing impressed me above everything else and that was the almost incredible length of time through which the story moves, without ever the reader feeling it. It is only retrospection which reveals that one has witnessed the passing out of the older generation and the rise and decline of the next. . . (*Sandhyaraga*) affords ample evidence of Rao's masterly manipulation of movement of the story. The tempo is marvellously adjusted to the judicious choice of significant situation, so that the whole conceals from us the lapse of time and gives us the impression of a unique simplicity.'¹

Sandhyaraga has been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and Tamil and deserves to be translated into English. It has also been filmed, though not very successfully. Krishnarao attributed the failure to the fact that while the novel was the story of a musician in the Karnatak style of music, the film version used throughout the Hindustani ragas sung by Bhimsen Joshi.

The artist is the hero again in a series of four novels *Sahityaratna* (1943), *Gajina Mane* (A House of Glass, 1953), *Kannadammanna Gudiyalli* (In the Temple of the Kannada Goddess, 1954) and *Diparadhane* (A Worship Of Light, 1955), which together constitute one long autobiographical novel. 'How a writer faces problems and obstacles in his attempts to lead a purposeful life is the theme of this novel,' Krishnarao wrote in his preface to *Sahityaratna* and this could be said about all the four novels. *Sahityaratna* is the story mainly of three persons: Keshavamurthy, the young writer, his wife Girijamma, and Lalithamma the woman he loves. Murthy marries Girija, the daughter of an influential official, under the pressure of his father, but finds that she does not care for his writing and does not suit him. He discovers a hero-worshipper in Lalita, a widow and a teacher, and they have a satisfying relationship. Murthy's

1. *Sandhyaragaprashasti*, p. 86.

rejection of Girija angers his father and Murthy leaves home and goes to Bombay, where he is joined by Lalita. In Bombay Murthy joins a newspaper run by a leftist group and becomes a successful writer. The other three novels continue the story of the writer's progress. *Gajinamane* narrates his experience in the vicious world of journalism in Bangalore. *Kannadammana Gudiyalli* is a biased account of the contemporary literary scene in Karnataka, with Murthy in the centre. *Diparadhane*, which concludes the series, takes us right through the Progressive movement to the death of the hero.

These novels are remarkable for the narrative ease which they command but they suffer from lack of objectivity and lapses in artistic integrity. In *Sahityaratna*, for example, the real conflict ought to have been between the conventional attitude to marriage and the new acceptance of love as a value. But this does not happen. There is, moreover, too much simplification of character. The novels are also marred by the presence of a great deal of unabsorbed material—discussion of ideologies, the hero's views on men and matters, etc. Many of the situations and relationships are artificial and unreal. If *Sandhyaraga* reveals Krishnarao's strength as a novelist, these novels illustrate mostly his weaknesses.

The novels discussed above are largely success stories, where the artist triumphs over hostile circumstances and achieves fulfilment, but Krishnarao also wrote novels on the theme of the artist's corruption and fall. *Natasarvabhuma* (1940) and *Abhimana* (1960), complementary in theme, deal with the world of the theatre; *Chitravichitra* (1952) exposes corruption in the film world which Krishnarao had seen from close quarters when he wrote the screenplays of *Jivananataka* and *Striratna* for Gubbi Viranna; *Sangrama* (1953) is the story of Shrikantha, a sculptor brought up in the true Indian tradition, and his fall through greed and lust; *Bannada Baduku* (1953) is a study in contrast, between two artists, Kirti, the *yogabhrashita*, and Kalpana, the *yogini*; *Bhuvanamohini* (1960) traces the rise and fall of Mohini, a dancer. And *Honne Modalu* (Money Above Every thing) depicts the moral decay of an ambitious dancer who ruthlessly exploits men on her way to professional success. In these novels Krishnarao drew upon his vast knowledge of the world of the artists—musicians, painters, sculptors, actors and dancers—and

they have tremendous significance as source material for a social and cultural history of the times, but he rarely succeeded in transforming this material into the fabric of art. In spite of their acknowledged weaknesses, however, these novels have an important bearing on the development of the Kannada novel. They widened the scope of the novel form by bringing in new themes and showed how the novelist's responses to contemporary life could be transformed into fiction. Their weaknesses, which were serious, became object lessons for the writers who followed.

Though Krishnarao lived into the seventies and continuously responded to the changing life around him, his roots lay in a pre-industrial society which was rural in character and believed in traditional values. In novel after novel he returns to this society and chronicles it with loving detail. This impulse, which finds strong expression in early novels like *Sandhyaraga*, appears to have grown in intensity in the fifties and sixties which must have made him nostalgic about the fast disintegrating rural based traditional society. The trilogy consisting of *Grihalakshmi* (1953), *Rukmini* (1954) and *Tayimakkalu* (Mother and Children, 1955) is a fine example of this kind of novel, though the last two volumes of the trilogy do not come up to the standard of the first. *Grihalakshmi* gives a well documented picture of an integrated life-style, characterised by faith, compassion, trust and honesty. The two main characters, Madhavarao and Rukmini, represent two basic attitudes to life, *Manava-vada* and *Daivavada*, which together symbolise the essence of the culture of the land. The success of Madhavarao, the lawyer, is shown to be the product of a combination of many forces. The human weaknesses, jealousy, meannesses etc. are not lost sight of but these are shown to be yielding to goodness. Rukmini, the central figure in the middle novel of the trilogy, demonstrates the strength of the traditional values which survive all challenges. The intention behind the last novel of the trilogy *Tayimakkalu* which portrays the lives of Rukmini's three children—Narayanaswami who earns a great name as a sociologist, Kamala, the young widow who resists evil and sticks to the path of virtue against all odds and Padma who finds happiness in her marriage with Sarvottama a pilot—is to show how the inherited culture acts as a strong resource for the younger generation, who have to follow careers very different from those of their

parents in a changing society. *Ashirvada* (1955) and *Anugraha* (1955), two parts of a single novel, also belong to this category. 'I have written *Ashirvada* and *Anugraha*,' Krishnarao said, 'to show that Bharatiya culture is still a living and growing force.' Perhaps it is this declared purpose which is responsible for the presence of a good deal of extraneous matter including extensive quotations from the *Isha* and *Katha* Upanishads. But in the central character of this novel Gundabhatta—who must have provided the prototype for S. L. Bhairappa's better known novel *Vamshavriksha*—we have a concrete and credible representation of some of the finest values associated with Indian culture. Gundabhatta is a learned man who has derived his spiritual power from the saint of Shringeri, but the most common symbol of Indian culture in Krishnarao's novels is the woman who trusts her heart and her intuition to guide her way. I have a special liking for *Hengarulu* (A Woman's Heart, 1958) which to me appears an entirely sincere work. Commenting on the main characters of the novel, Krishnarao says: 'Devamma, Achhi and Shrikanthaiyya are persons who have grown under the white umbrella of a magnificent culture. They know what is essential life and the value of pure love.' Their lives are confined to a small place but they influence persons outside it, like Parvatamma the ambitious wife of a lawyer and her daughter Manorama, who have been brought up in a different setting, with different attitudes. The family of Gourinarasimhayya is offered in this novel as a symbol of the finest culture that the Indian rural society has produced. The values in which they believe and their way of life enable them to overcome the problems and tensions of life successfully. The childlessness of Achhi, the rivalry of Rudrappa, the ill health of Gourinarasimhayya, the challenge of Manu who has known a different way of life, that of the city, Vishwanath's early rebelliousness—all these are finally overcome and harmony prevails. The novel is compact and free from extraneous matter. It is told in the simplest of styles and makes a direct appeal to the reader. Krishnarao attempted several variations on this theme—*Aparajite* (1959), *Hennujanma* (1961), *Amritamanthana* (1961) and *Dadiya Maga* (1966) for example—but none of these is as successful as *Hengarulu*, which reminds us of the work of Masti Venkatesha Iyengar who still remains the finest chronicler of the

society and culture of his age and generation. Masti's work is entirely free from the kind of sentimentality that often creeps into Krishnarao's work which is essentially nostalgic in character.

Jivanayatre, the first full length novel Krishnarao wrote, contains many of the themes he was to explore later in his fiction. It also carries a long introduction by the author on love, sex, woman and religion. Krishnarao has said that the theme of this novel was suggested to him by Pandit Taranath during his visit to Taranath's ashram, Premayatan, in 1934.¹ Another important influence was that of Dr. D.K. Bharadwaj, a close friend of Krishnarao who was keenly interested in matters relating to sex and sexual education. In *Jivanayatre* Krishnarao attempts the related themes of sex and marriage. Ramakka, an old woman, has brought up two orphans, Sundar and Puttu. Gundabhatta, a lecherous brahmin and his mistress Chandra take charge of them. Sundar is trained as a musician to follow Chandra's profession. Puttu also grows up in the same atmosphere. The other strand of the story relates to Swami, a lawyer, and his relationship with Lalita, who has an unhappy marriage with Ramakrishnayya, an old man who works as a clerk to Swami. The novel has a melodramatic ending. Swami recognises Sundar as his lost sister and he marries Lalita. The novel takes up a bold theme but it suffers from failure of tone and moral uncertainty. It is obviously a beginner's work, but it clearly reveals Krishnarao's preoccupation with man-woman relationships—marriage, extra marital sex and prostitution. Among Krishnarao's early novels on marriage, *Mangalusutra* (1940), a novel which traces the married lives of Lakshamma's three daughters, enjoyed wide popularity. The theme of love and marriage is also prominent in *Suhityaratna*. In Murthy's relationship with the two women, Girija and Lalita, we have the archetypal conflict between passion and society, formulated in Denis de Rougemont's classic study.²

Krishnarao wrote a large number of novels on sex, love and marriage but most of these lack inspiration and tend to be thesis novels. This is true to some extent of even the better efforts like

1. *Barahagarana Baduku*, p. 215.

2. Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, Faber and Faber Ltd., (London, 1940).

Shrimati (1952) and *Gauri* (1958). In the preface to *S'rimati* Krishnarao says: 'My novels attempt a sweet harmony of art and philosophy. In *Shrimati* this assumes a special form.' Unfortunately, this remained an ideal rather than an actuality. In *Shrimati* we have four types of married relationships. The marriage of Pattabhiramayya, a police official, and Indiramma is a wholly successful marriage in the traditional framework. His two daughters, however, are less fortunate. Janaki marries Ranganna, a zamindar, but his strong sexual needs and perversities destroy the marriage and Janaki returns to her parents with her two children. Suman's marriage with Sundar, a teacher, is also a failure, as Sundar has no other interest except his research, and Suman, horrified by her sister's experience, dreads sex. The other sex relationship in the novel involves Sanjiva, Ranganna's innocent brother, and Mary Pushpa, a Christian girl, with a past to hide. This relationship develops tragic dimensions since it challenges caste taboos and necessitates the emergence of new values, but Krishnarao's handling of the theme is inept and lacks true seriousness. His penchant for melodrama gets the better of his artistic instinct and he concludes the story in a cinematic ending—the reunion of Sanjiva with the dying Mary and the flashing of the message, 'Love is God; Compassion is worship; Service is penance.'

Gauri is a much better novel, though not wholly successful. Krishnarao concentrates on the plot and fails to develop characters adequately, and what could have been a powerful novel is reduced to ordinariness. It is, however, an ambitious novel and a favourite of the author's and deserves attention. *Gauri* is a novel about marriage and it uses a wide canvas. The background which covers several families occupies a large space. The story moves between Madapura and Eletota, set in rural surroundings, and Bangalore, representing urban life. Gauri, the only daughter of Subbashastry and Nanjamma, is presented in the novel as a symbol of innocence and purity. Chidananda, Nanjamma's brother, is in love with Gauri but powerless to defy his mother who is enamoured of wealth and social position, marries Shakuntala, a contrasting symbol. Her family background—her father is Revenue Secretary and her mother, a modernised society woman—is urban and sophisticated, and she is allowed to do whatever she wants. Even after her marriage with Chidananda,

she continues her affair with Shivaram, a playboy, and the marriage turns out to be a disaster. The inevitable anonymous letter turns up and Chidananda is undeceived. He receives another shock when he finds that Gauri whom he continues to love is also in danger, as her in-laws' minds have been poisoned by a scheming rival of her father. Gauri is saved in the end—the villain repents and so on—but Chidananda commits suicide. Obviously, the novel succumbs throughout to plot necessities and melodramatic effects. The contrast between the village and the city is too simplistic to be true. The novel has, however, some virtue. The characters, Gauri and Chidananda for example, are beautifully conceived, though they are not allowed to lead their own lives by the author. The images of rural life, Madapura and Eletota, similarly, are authentic and fully realised images.

There are more unhappy marriages than happy marriages in Krishnarao's novels, though the reasons vary from novel to novel. In *Kanniru* (Tears, 1947) it is the ill treatment of the wife by her mother-in-law; in *Mudimallige* (Flowers in the Hair, 1959) and *Dharmapatni* (1960) it is the faithlessness of the husband; in *Kanchanganga* (1955) it is the domination of the husband by his wife and his in-laws; and in *Kagadada Hu* (A Paper Flower, 1961), it is the family background of unhappy marriages. In some novels, *Devapriya* (1961) for example, the possibilities of overcoming this unhappiness are also explored. In the preface to *Devapriya* Krishnarao says: 'We live in a transitional period when the family is slowly making way for the individual. The circumstances responsible for this transition are the material of *Devapriya*.' *Devapriya* is the story of Muttanna who journeys from innocence to experience through his association with the three women he marries—Parimala who fits into the family but dies in childbirth; Tunga who challenges and destroys the family; and Gracie who belongs to a different culture. The novel ends with Muttanna's break from the past and the beginning of a new life for him with Gracie and Christianity. The problem of culture in the context of marriage provides material for *Kan-kanabala* (1958) as well. The novel, which explores different attitudes to divorce, is built round the careers of three friends: Shanta who believes in a synthesis of Indian and Western cultures and accepts a conventional marriage; Chandra who blindly

accepts Western ways and leads a life of pleasure; and Mitra who becomes problematic by her inability to make a choice. The theoretical frame of the novel requires Shanta to play the role of the saviour in the lives of the other two women, and she does this in spite of the fact that she herself suffers from an incurable disease and does not know marital happiness. There is not much life in this novel, and characters are throughout manipulated by the novelist. There is besides no attempt at arriving at an integrated vision, and the ideas are doomed to abstraction. Yet, since the novel gives us an insight into the nature of social problems with which the novelists of the time were preoccupied, it has some historical significance. Unfortunately, however, because it was easy to imitate such novels, they were readily accepted as models by the younger generation who found shortcuts to commercial success in novel writing.

Prostitution which appears as a theme in *Jivanayatre*, the very first novel Krishnarao wrote, is the overwhelming subject of several novels he wrote during the heyday of the Progressive movement in the fifties. The three novels *Nagnasatya* (1950), *Shanisantana* (1951) and *Sanjegattalu* (The Evening Twilight, 1952) form a trilogy. *Nagnasatya* is the story of Shrinath, a young novelist, and his encounter with the forces of corruption in society. Shrinath's own individual world consists of love and affection in the form of his friends, Nilakantha a doctor and Sharma a lawyer, but the outside world is dominated by images of corruption: Muttamma who makes her living as a procuress, Nagraj her hanger-on, and numerous other women who turn to prostitution out of poverty and greed. Even this world is not wholly commercial and dehumanised. Muttamma's concern for Achamma and her child is genuine and Kamala whom Shrinath loves is not without good impulses, though she lacks the strength and integrity to be loyal to her lover. Shrinath's loss of innocence and his disillusionment with the world form the main theme of the novel. Krishnarao spoils this novel by treating his characters like puppets and by his irrepressible urge to idealise. Shrinath's doing good to everyone goes beyond the limits of reason. Kamala's illness and death are unreal and manoeuvred. Krishnarao's fictional world has a semblance of fact but it is not authenticated. *Sanjegattalu*, the concluding novel of the trilogy, shocked the readers by portraying the life of a nymphomaniac.

Apart from this trilogy which explicitly deals with the theme of prostitution, there are several like *Huliyuguru* (1957), *Kasturi* (1960) and *Pankaja* (1961) where the protagonists are fallen women.

These novels came in for sharp criticism from traditionalists as well as Progressives. A conference of novelists and short story writers which met on February 2 and 3 of 1952, expressed its disapproval of literature which excited vulgar passion, with an obvious but indirect reference to the novels of Krishnarao and his school.¹ Niranjana, a leading Progressive writer, took Krishnarao to task for the crude naturalism and unrestrained eroticism of his novels. Unlike the traditionalists, he had no objection to the treatment of sex and decadence of society in literature, but he rightly argued that in doing so, the artist's eye must be focussed on the health of the society.² V. Seetharamaiah, a critic of radical sympathies, used uncharacteristically strong language to condemn erotic literature in the Presidential speech he delivered at the Kannada Literary Conference held in Kumta in 1954. He conceded the writer's freedom to choose any subject he liked to write about but warned: 'Literature which sets out to portray the life of the hospitals, the dung hills and sexual perversities can neither be serious nor attain greatness.' 'The natural,' he argued, 'cannot by itself be literature. It is merely an attempt to show something in a different state. Art should transform the actual into the true. The real function of art is the communication of a new vision, the creation of new forms.'³ Krishnarao defended himself through the prefaces he wrote to the novels and through *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane* (Literature and the Erotic, 1956), a book he specially wrote for the purpose. His main argument was that the writer did not accept any restraint on the choice of his material and, since prostitution was a real problem in society, it was his duty to write about it. In *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane*, a hastily compiled book, he quoted passages from ancient and modern Kannada literature to show that explicit treatment of sex was nothing new. Krishna-

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane*, Vahini Prakashana, (Bangalore, 1956), p. 10.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
3. V. Seetharamaiah, *Sahityalokana*, Gita Book House (Bangalore, 1979), pp. 473-4.

rao's defence missed some of the real points his critics had made. He ought to have seen, as K.D. Kurtakoti has argued, that the treatment of *Shringara* in older poetry was mostly a matter of literary convention and that the descriptions of sex activity were parts of larger structures as in Ratnakaravarni's *Bharateshavaibhava*.¹ In *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane* Krishnarao refers to D.H. Lawrence's defence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* but he does not realise the difference in terms of seriousness of purpose and artistic excellence between his own work and that of Lawrence. In a fair assessment of the Progressive writers, M.G. Krishnamurthi brings out their strength as well as limitation. He writes: 'No one can deny that the intentions of these writers were excellent and that some of them played useful roles as social reformers, but their simplistic ideals about literature prevented them from becoming literary artists. Some of them achieved popularity through emotionalistic writing, but their writing on social problems was rarely transformed into art. Because of this, the distance between the artistic theme and the social problem disappeared. For example, some of these writers wrote stories and novels on prostitution. By rejecting prostitution they could declare themselves on the side of justice and civilization, but even when they were doing it they catered to the curiosity of their readers by vivid descriptions of parts of the body and sexual encounters. They defended themselves by repeatedly saying that the artist was free to do what he liked and by pointing out that the earlier writers were not puritans, but their acceptance of the moral function of art was truly ironic. Their ideas of morality, besides, were deeply orthodox and conventional. Since their intentions and literary structures remained apart, it was possible to charge them with immorality.'²

Krishnarao attempted novels on other social themes like politics and the problem of untouchability, but not with much success. In *Hegadaru Baduku* (Live Somehow, 1964) and *Maneyalli Mahayuddha* (War on the Homefront, 1966), for example, we have his reaction to the post-Independence scene. The plot.

1. K.D. Kurtakoti, *Yugadharma hagu Sahityadarshana*, Manohara Granthamala, (Dharwad, 1962), p. 195.

2. M.G. Krishnamurthi, *Adhunik Bharatiya Sahitya*, pp. 27-8,

of *Hegadaru Baduku* is built round two contrasted characters—Sanjivayya who tries to live a Gandhian life by devoting himself to the service of the Harijans and is defeated, and Parameshvarappa who rises to a Ministership through a career of selfishness and corruption. The contrast is too commonplace to engage our serious attention. *Maneyalli Mahayuddha* is a more ambitious novel. It tells the story of the rise and fall of Mahadeva Bhatta, a rich landowner of Shivagram who enters politics and reaches the depths of corruption before he is overthrown. Mahadeva Bhatta is opposed by Nagbhushana Rao a principled politician, Lingegowda a devoted Congress worker and his own sons Girish and Chandramauli. Here again Krishnarao simplifies the issues and manipulates characters and events to suit his purpose. He is only interested in working out the plot and the novel does not add materially to our understanding of the political problems. The same is true of *Paschattapa* (1955) and *Punaravatara* (1956) where he takes up the problem of untouchability. The fantastic career of Channa, the Harijan youth, who becomes a hero in America and, on his return, awakens the tradition-bound people of Doddakere, against tremendous odds, is not an impossible story but it is hardly convincing in the novel. Krishnarao's approach in these novels is wholly cerebral. He lacked the inspiration and the inside knowledge necessary to deal with such themes.

Some of the earliest experiments in the Kannada novel were historical novels. B. Venkatacharya, Galagnath and Kerur Vasudevacharya were the pioneers in this field. Krishnarao, in his search for variety, was attracted to this genre and wrote a series of ten novels—*Vijaya Vidyaranya* (1958), *Tapobala* (1958), *Punyaprabhava* (1959), *Proudhapratapi* (1960), *Mohanamurari* (1960), *Yashodundhubhi* (1960), *Abhayapradana* (1960), *Aliya Ramaraya* (1961) and *Pralayantaka* (1961)—on the history of the great Vijayanagara empire, from the beginning to the end. The life of Kittur Channamma, one of the earliest to rebel against the British, and the achievement of Kempegouda, the founder of Bangalore, also provided him material for a couple of historical novels—*Virarani Kittura Channamma* (1954) and *Yalahankabhupala* (1960). In his historical novels Krishnarao attempted to provide glimpses into the culture of the times along with political events, but his role was mainly that of the popu-

lariser of history. As B. Puttaswamayya, the well known Kannada novelist and dramatist has said, 'The author has been successful in his attempt to give the people the entire history of the Vijayanagara empire through the medium of the novel and in a style that can please even the average reader.'¹

Krishnarao thought highly of the short story as a literary form and said that it had been the life-blood of modern Kannada literature. In fact, the Kannada writers' achievement in the short story has been next only to that in the novel. Krishnarao's own contribution to the development of the short story is not as impressive as his contribution to the novel, but it is by no means insignificant. He published nine collections of short stories—*Minchu* (Flash, 1930), *Kidi* (Embers, 1931), *Papapunya* (1943), *Kannumuchhale* (Hide and Seek, 1945), *Kamana Solu* (The Defeat of Kama, 1947), *Agni Kanya* (The Daughter of Fire, 1947), *Shilpi* (1949), *Samarasundari* (1960), and *Ayda Kategalu* (Selected Stories, 1967). He also edited two volumes of Kannada short stories—*Kamana Billu* 1 and 2 (Rainbow, 1933, 1945) and wrote extensively on the form of the short story. As has already been mentioned, he brought out a periodical devoted exclusively to the short story—*Kathanjali*—which encouraged younger writers.

The Kannada short story had its early beginnings with Panje Mangeshrao and Kerur Vasudevacharya, but it was Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (Shrinivasa) who turned it into a powerful medium of creative expression and endowed it with high literary status. Krishnarao's early stories bore the impress of Masti's own and carried his blessings. In his perceptive introduction to *Kidi*, Masti identified the idealistic strain in Krishnarao's literary personality and said: 'In his writings we experience a compassion for the sufferer, a nobility which rejects meanness in life, a courage in facing evil, a looking forward with hope, and an urge for progress.'²

Krishnarao's discussion of the short story in his introduction to *Kamana Billu* and elsewhere shows that he was fully aware of its unique possibilities. 'The short story writer,' he says, 'does

1. *Rasachetana*, pp. 610-11.

2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Kidi*, V.G.T. General Agency, (Bangalore, 1932), p. ix.

not describe the growth of an individual or of life. He shows a fragment in all its fullness.¹ He identifies the subject-matter of the short story as 'the inner consciousness of the individual.'² His comparison of the short story with the novel is illuminating. 'The novel,' he says, 'faces the objective side of life, the short story the subjective. The novel sees life as a whole, the short story only the significant moments. The short story resembles miniature painting.'³ Krishnarao's analyses of individual short stories in his essay 'Kannadalli Sanna Kathegalu' (The Short Story in Kannada) are intelligent and discriminating. Of Masti's well known story 'Venkatashamiya Pranaya' (Venkatashamiya's Love), for example, he writes, 'Shrinivasa's skilled brush brought out the pure and natural love of Venkatashami for the acrobat girl as clearly as the society which opposed it.' His comments on Devudu's 'Daruvayya Hajamanadaddu' (How Daruvayya Became a Barber) are equally perceptive.⁴

Thematically the stories cover much the same ground as the novels—man-woman relationships, the suffering and exploitation of woman, human potential of the individual, the artist and his world, etc. The canvas, however, is necessarily smaller. In the author's preface to *Minchu* Krishnarao says: 'I have written these stories in order to articulate the voice of the sufferers.' This humanistic impulse works behind most of the stories he wrote. As in the novels here too the sufferers are generally women. 'Avala Balu' (Her Life), 'Mundenu Gati' (What Next), 'Haladiya Bagilu' (The Yellow Door), 'Savitriya Saubhagya' (The Fortunes of Savitri), 'Jvala', 'Gangavvana Ase' (Gangavva's Desire)—all these depict the plight of women— young widows and deserted women—reduced to helpless victims by an exploiting society. Many of these stories have simple structures and adopt straightforward narrative procedures. There are, however, other stories more experimental in nature. Among the stories about the artists—'Karulina Kugu' (The Call of the Heart) 'Ramotsava', 'Hara', 'Vanabhajana'—'Ramotsava' is the most ambitious in design. The story which successfully uses the

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sahitya mattu Jiyana*, Sharada Prakasanalya, (Bangalore, 1944), p. 87.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-96.

flashback techniques centres round Anandaraya, a musician, and his relations with Sundara, his disciple mistress who is no more, and Ramu the young artist born of this union. Almost the entire action of the story is internal, making it an early experiment in psychological fiction. 'Vanabhojana' is lighter in touch but perhaps it has greater truth. Lachhi, the protagonist of this story, rejects a life of comfort with his family in order to be among his pals in the theatre world in spite of its poverty and squalor.

The daring and openness that Krishnarao shows in his unconventional treatment of sex, love and marriage in many of his novels, operate in the stories as well. 'Geddavaru Yaru' (Who Is The Winner), an early story, about a man's sense of guilt towards his wife because of an act of infidelity, is a good example. 'Dodda Manushya' (A Great Man), which seeks to disturb and reorder our sense of values regarding man-woman relationships, is another good story. This story offers Atri, the protagonist who is prepared to take back his adulterous wife, not as an act of magnanimous forgiveness, but out of a natural impulse of goodness, as an example of greatness. These are simple stories but they are more successful than the more ambitious 'Kamana Solu' or 'Annada Kugu' which succumb to melodrama. Krishnarao's unconventionality can also be seen in stories like 'Kareyuva Kannu' (The Inviting Eye), which has an over-sexed woman as a protagonist, 'Madhura Svapna', a story about homosexuality or 'Aa Nanna Tangi' (That Sister of Mine), where the author shocks the reader into a new awareness of man-woman relationship through a frank acceptance of extra-marital relationships.

Krishnarao's penchant for variety tempted him to attempt contemporary political and social themes as well, but here he found himself somewhat out of depths. 'Agnikanye' and 'Mriyushanti', where the author tries to portray the impact of communal disharmony on human relationships, are ambitious but not wholly successful. They suffer from excessive simplification, lack of political insight and journalistic language. The same could be said about stories like 'Purva Paschima' where the complex theme of East-West encounter gets a purely cerebral treatment. It is rarely that Krishnarao attempts to present the mystery of life in his stories, but there are a couple of exceptions like '9-30' where the narrator witnesses Prahladarao's strange

encounter with death at the end of his long journey homewards, in the presence of his wife and child; or, 'Nanna Muddu Saroja' (My Beloved Saroja), where the narrator's pursuit of his vision of the beautiful Saroja finds a truly lyrical expression.

When one thinks of the Kannada short story, one automatically remembers Masti's 'Masumatti', Ananda's 'Nanu Konda Hudugi' (The Girl I Killed), Anandakanda's 'Kanada Kai' (The Unseen Hand) or the stories of more recent writers like Ananthamurthy's 'Prakriti', Chittal's 'Sere' (The Captive), Desai's 'Kshitija' or Lankesh's 'Rotti' (Bread) but in Krishnarao's eighty and odd stories there is hardly a story that can stand along with these modern classics. Krishnarao's greatness is that of the pioneer and his value for other writers lies in the readership he earned for the short story by his own sustained work and in the many doors he opened for them by his continuous experimentation with the form of the short story.

Krishnarao was an egotistical writer and his autobiography, *Nannannu Nane Kande*, is a veritable 'Advertisement for Myself', but the claims he made for his novels were extremely modest. He said: 'My novels may not have achieved much, but there can be no denying that they developed a taste for reading in the Kannada public and a pride in the Kannada language.'¹ This is a characteristic attitude of the Navodaya writers. Galaganath, Krishnarao's distinguished predecessor and a pioneer in the field of novel-writing, had made a similar claim when he said that the purpose of his novels was 'to encourage the habit of reading in the Kannada people and sow the seeds of noble feelings in their minds.'² These writers were aware that they were participating in a momentous literary and cultural renaissance, and it was this awareness that sustained them in their arduous literary endeavours. Krishnarao's devotion to the cause of literary culture was exemplary and his prolific output, particularly in the field of the novel, remains unsurpassed.

Readability is the most striking achievement of Krishnarao as a novelist. He eschewed the stylised narrative methods and the Sanskrit dominated style of his predecessors and concentrat-

1. *Barahagarana Baduku*, p. 230.

2. Srinivas Havanur, *Galaganath Mastararu*, Kannada Sahitya Parishat, (Bangalore, 1972), p. 87.

ed on the essentials of the story, which he unfolded with the minimum of description and maximum of dialogue. One of the aims of the Progressive writers was to take literature to the people and Krishnarao eminently succeeded in achieving this object. It was his conviction that 'the artist should not live in an ivory tower. He must be one with the people.' This was as true of his style of living as of his approach to writing.

Another equally important achievement of Krishnarao the novelist was the extension of the boundaries of fiction, at least as far as the subject-matter was concerned. Nothing human was alien to his fiction and from the philosophy of the Upanishads to prostitution he covered all areas of human experience, almost in a programmatic manner. His explicit treatment of sex in his novels was an act of courage for which he had to pay a heavy price. Krishnarao has recorded in his autobiography how the fiercely hostile criticism of novels like *Nagnasatya* disturbed even domestic harmony.¹ Thus, by the time writers like Ananthamurthy and Desai started writing their novels they found that some of their battles had already been fought by Krishnarao.

Krishnarao was fully responsive to the phenomena of social change in the life around him and he recorded them in his novels, but his deeply humanistic values were derived from the rural organic community which was fast disintegrating under the pressures of industrialisation and modernisation. Though his commitment to this society was not as profound as Masti's, he was able to capture its rhythms and enter into its spirit. Some of his most memorable characters, mostly women, were created out of his lovingly remembered past. But Krishnarao was a transitional figure. He was swept away by the winds of Progressive thought and entered areas from which his predecessors had kept aloof. Thus his fiction provides a strange scene of contradictory images.

Krishnarao's art, moreover, had serious limitations which affected the quality of his work. While he had a variety of ideas and experiences as the raw material of his novels, he lacked an integrated vision which is an essential quality of great art. It is this which separates him from the class of writers like Masti

1. *Barahagarana Baduku*, p. 228.

and Karanth. He did not always succeed in transmuting his thought into art and packed his novels, particularly during the later phase, with extraneous and undigested matter. *Ashirvada* and *Anugraha*, for example, include whole chunks of Upanishads with commentaries and *Chitra Vichitra* reproduces an entire screenplay!

Perhaps a more serious charge against Krishnarao as a novelist would be that he tended to manipulate characters and situations for plot-effects. Even an essentially good novel like *Sandhyaraga* is not free from such melodramatic touches. The whole school of Krishnarao—with the exceptions of a few like Ta Ra Su, Niranjana and Kattimani—made melodrama its chief medium. The work of even such serious writers as S.L. Bhairappa has been a victim of this kind of influence.

3

Drama and Theatre

Krishnarao wrote his first play *Maduveyo Manehalo* in 1924, four years after Kailasam's *Tollugatti*, the first important play in modern Kannada drama and though he did not equal Kailasam's achievement or that of Shriranga (Adya Rangacharya), perhaps the greatest dramatist Kannada has produced so far, he wrote twenty eight plays in all and influenced the course of the development of the Kannada drama in its formative years. Krishnarao's preference for the novel, a result of the frustration caused by the absence of a good theatre and the reluctance of the publishers to publish plays, was a later development. He grew up in an environment charged with intense theatrical activity. His father was a founder member of the Bangalore Union, an association of amateur artists established in 1900 and a close friend of Natakashiromani A.V. Varadachar, the most gifted actor of his time, who founded his own theatrical group Ratnavali Nataka Sabha in 1902. Even as a young man, Krishnarao was a passionate lover of drama and saw plays performed in all languages in Bangalore, often in the company of Kailasam. Among the earliest of these were Varadachar's *Shakuntala*, *Ratnavali* and *Ramavarma Lilavati*. His admiration for Varadachar, whose life provided him with material for *Natasarvabhouta* and several sketches, was unbounded. He never tired of mentioning the debt he owed him for the encouragement he had received for his first play.

Bangalore was a scene of enthusiastic activity in the theatre

in the 1920s and witnessed two Drama Conferences—one presided over by Rabindranath Tagore and the other by Sarojini Naidu. The starting of the theatre journal *Rangabhumi* by D.K. Bharadwaj in 1925 stimulated discussion of performances and encouraged drama critics. Krishnarao was closely associated with this journal and was virtually its editor. For several years he wrote drama criticism for this and other journals. He also acted in plays including his own. We know, for example, that he was one of the actors who put up *Maduveyo Manhalo* in Dharwad in 1929. There are also records of his participation in the performances of A.N. Subbarao's *Coolie*, Shriranga's *Daridranarayana* and Bellary Raghava's *Ramdas* and *Vijayanagara Patana*.¹ He loved to be with the actors and knew practically all the important artistes of his time—Gubbi Viranna, Mohammad Peer, Nagendra Rao, Handiganur Siddharamappa, Basavaraj Mansur, Master Hirannayya, Krishnamurthy and even actors from outside Karnataka like Prithviraj Kapoor. At a time when the actors did not enjoy social reputation he wrote about them and sought to win recognition of their talent. Among his writings there are at least three sketches of Varadachar alone.

In his book *Natakakale* (The Art of Drama, 1957) and articles like 'Kannada Rangabhumiya Aguhogugalu' (The State of the Kannada Theatre) and 'Kaleda Kannadanataka' (A Brief History of Kannada Drama) Krishnarao explored the reasons for the decline of the theatre after Independence and pleaded for the creation of theatres in all the cities of Karnataka to promote drama. He had a high notion of the role of drama in society. 'Drama,' he said, 'is the symbol of a people's culture. No other medium can express contemporary social life as effectively as drama can.'¹ He thought that as art it was superior to the cinema since it established a direct communication between the actor and the audience. He was unhappy over the division of the theatre into amateur and professional segments and argued that this had inhibited the growth of drama in the proper direction. He was fair and objective in his assessment of the work of contemporaries like Kailasam and Sriranga and fully acknowledged their contribution to the development of drama, though he felt that the amateur dramatists with their sophisti-

1. *Chirachetana*, p. 258.

cated styles—with a strong mixture of English in the case of Kailasam and urban wit in the case of Shriranga—had discouraged the professional producers from accepting their plays. Krishnarao was aware of the potentialities of the theatre for the education of the people and quoted the examples of China and Russia where these had been realised to a considerable extent. As a member of the State Sahitya Nataka Akademi for several years he was a source of encouragement for young dramatists and actors.

Pandit Taranath wrote an enthusiastic preface to Krishnarao's first play, *Maduveyo Manehalo* and said; 'The play heralds the birth of a new age.' Most of the plays performed in those days were historical and mythological plays which had little social relevance. As early as 1887 a person who called himself 'Havyaka Hitechhu' published *Iggappahegadeya Viviahaprahasana athava Kanyavikrayada Parinamavu* (Iggappahegade's Marriage or The Effects of Selling Brides), a social play of great significance. The realism which this play achieved in its language and in its treatment of the theme was a remarkable achievement but since it was not produced on the stage it remained outside the Kannada dramatic tradition. It was Kailasam, who had spent long years in the West and had steeped himself in the Western theatrical tradition, who revolutionised the Kannada stage and freed it once for all from the unrealities that possessed it. In plays like *Tollugatti*, *Huttadalli Hutta* and *Sule* Kailasam revealed a remarkable ability to focus the light of tradition on contemporary social problems, a deeply compassionate vision of the human struggle for a meaningful life, an amazing grasp on the living language of men and an unmatched gift for true humour. Against this background, Krishnarao's first play was undoubtedly a pioneering effort which continued the good work which Kailasam had started.

Maduveyo Manehalo is actually more a farce than a full-fledged play. The influence of Ben Jonson's *The Silent Woman* in the plot and that of Kailasam in style are too evident to be missed. Gangadhara, who hatches a plot to teach his uncle, a rich widower, a lesson by marrying him to his friend Maddhu disguised as Lalita, dominates the action. The main contrast in this play is between Sheshagiriraya who represents the decadent older generation and Gangadhara who symbolises the younger

generation with a more healthy attitude to life. This theme was to be exploited with greater skill and artistry by writers like Shriranga who came on the scene a little later. It is significant however that the dramatic conflict which appears in the mature plays of Shriranga—*Harijanvara* and *Sandhyakala* is already present in an embryonic stage in *Maduveyo Manehalo*. The clash between tradition and modernity was the overwhelming theme of the literature of the time, and drama was no exception.

Ahuti (1930) is even more clearly a play with a purpose. In the preface to the published play Krishnarao wrote: 'Hindu society should not fall into the hands of the traditionalists who would put the clock back. Nor should it allow itself to be exploited by the so called reformers who are actually parasites on society. Knowledge and love alone should be its goal. I have written this play to bring out these ideas.'¹ *Ahuti* has a simple structure. Its characters fall into two sharply divided groups. On the one hand, we have the exploiters—Shripatiraya, corrupt and hypocritical in all his dealings and Madhav, an unscrupulous and immoral quack doctor—and on the other, the exploited—Raghu, and Radha, Shripatiraya's son and niece respectively. Shripatiraya's cruelty to his wife and son is matched by Madhav's cunning and lechery. Raghu emerges in the play as a rebel, and his decision to marry Radha, the young widow who has been seduced by Madhav and is with child, is presented as an example of revolutionary morality. *Ahuti* is a fairly well constructed play but the language still bears the impress of Kailasam's style.

Krishnarao's other plays on social themes—*Adaddenu* (What Happened, 1931), *Gubbachhi Gudu* (The Sparrow's Nest, 1938), *Dharmasankata* (The Dilemma, 1938), *Vishvadharmā* (1938) and *Bannada Bisanike* (Coloured Fan, 1938)—are one-act plays. *Gubbachhi Gudu* is a play about the conflict between the old—here represented by Mailaraiah who is too old for his young and attractive wife—and the young, represented by the young lovers, Mailaraiah's wife Saroja and Shankar, Mailaraiah's nephew, but in a lighter, comic vein. In taking the side of the adulterous couple, the play adopts a bold moral stand, but it

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Ahuti*, V.G.T. General Agency (Bangalore, 1930), preface.

has a weak structure. The last scene, for example, is wholly superfluous. The dialogue too is loose and does not observe dramatic relevance. *Dharmasankata* anticipates Krishnarao's novels about prostitution, like *Nagnasatya*. The central character is a prostitute. The play is rather artificial and the ending where the lecherous Jagirdar confronts his own sister who is procured for him by Saraswatamma, is highly melodramatic. *Vishvadharm* dramatises the predicament of a writer who is unable to get on with his work because of too many distractions. None of these achieves even the limited success of *Ahuti*.

Krishnarao wrote a few historical plays as well. His conception of this genre was too broad and accommodating. He said: 'In a way all plays are historical plays. Plays which paint the political, social and domestic life of a particular age should be considered historical plays.'¹ Plays like *Rajaputalakshmi* (1945), *Kittur Rani Channamma* (1951), and *Jagajyoti Basaveshvara* (1949), are, however, historical plays in a much stricter sense. For *Rajaputalakshmi*, a drama of heroism and sacrifice, Krishnarao drew upon Todd's *Annals of Rajasthan*. In the preface to this play he suggests that the play has an ideological framework. He says: 'Hindu-Muslim unity is essential for the country. But I feel that the Hindu should not be a coward. He must realise his own strength and hold out his hand of friendship to the Muslim.' Yoshi, Prithvisingh's wife, who is the Rajputlakshmi of the play, is a symbol of this idea. Khwaja Hasan Attar, a fictitious character, stands for Hindu Muslim unity. The play has a tragic ending. *Jagajyoti Basaveshvara*, an ambitious work which has more than fifty characters, was written for Gubbi Viranna. The play suffers from loose structuring and sentimental portraiture of character but it does succeed in giving a new interpretation of the Bijjala-Basaveshvara relationship. *Rashtradhurina Bangalore Kempegouda* and *Kittur Rani Channamma* are heroic drama in the conventional mould, and provide good entertainment.

An other type of play Krishnarao attempted was the mythological play. *Svarnamurthy* and *Hiranyakashipu* published together under the title *Eradu Natakagalu* (Two Plays, 1938), belong to this category. Krishnarao declared himself to be a

1. *Rasachetana*, p. 215.

puranapriya (lover of myths) but he also said that his was not the *puranadrishti* (orthodox view): 'The theme could be mythological, historical or social. What is important is that it should be controlled by human interest.'¹ Thus he eliminates the element of the supernatural from the myth of Hiranyakashipu and presents, it as a drama of the conflict between a tyrant and the champions of the people. Similarly, in *Svarnamurthy*, the conflict between Rama and Lakshmana assumes the form of a confrontation of opposing values, royal duty and human love.

Krishnarao was introduced to the world of films as early as 1931, when he was in Bombay, through the cine-actor H.R. Hanumantharao, but he did not think highly of cinema as an art. Nevertheless, he wrote scripts for at least two films, *Jivana-nataka* and *Striratna* and came to have an inside knowledge of the film industry. *Jivananataka*, produced by Gubbi Viranna, starred Shanta Hublikar, B. Jayamma, and Kemparaj. Krishnarao had to spend nearly a year at Coimbatore where the film was made. He made good use of his experiences in this area by producing a novel out of it. *Chitra Vichitra* (1952), perhaps the only novel of its kind in Kannada, is the story of how a Kannada film was made. Shivananda who has been dreaming of becoming a movie actor goes to Bengal and gets acquainted with some people working as apprentices to a film director. On his return to his own place, he succeeds in persuading Sahukar Rudrappa to invest money in his venture. Rudrappa agrees because his mistress Saroja wants to become a film actress. Most of the action relates to the filming of *Shri Rama Paduka Pattabhisheka*. Lechery, jealousy, communalism, all these play their parts but ultimately the film is saved by Sudarshana, the writer of the script who has been neglected and illtreated. *Chitra Vichitra* is not one of Krishnarao's better novels but the uniqueness of its theme gives it a special significance. The novel invites comparison with R.K. Narayan's *Mr. Sampath*.

In spite of his bitter experience in the world of films, however, Krishnarao took up the cause of the Kannada films and one of the demands of the Kannada agitation he led in 1962 was that the showing of Kannada films should be made com-

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Eradu Natakagalu*, Karnataka Sahitya Mandir, (Dharwad, 1938), Preface.

pulsory in theatres in Karnataka. This was necessary because of the onslaught of films from other languages which had crowded out the Kannada films. Krishnarao therefore has made a significant contribution to the Kannada film industry which now attracts writers of the calibre of Girish Karnad, P. Lankesh and Chandrasekhara Kambar—to mention only the more prominent.

In spite of his prolonged involvement in the theatre, Krishnarao was only partially committed to drama. His chosen field was the novel and it would be unrealistic to claim for him the status of a major dramatist. None of his plays ranks with Kailasam's *Tollu Gatti*, Shriranga's *Hurijanvara*, Masti's *Kakana Kote*, Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* or Chandrasekhara Kambar's *Jokumaraswamy*, which have come to be recognised as important milestones in the development of Kannada drama. Yet, to ignore his work altogether as some literary historians have done is patently unjust. He was, like Kailasam, a pioneer in the field of drama and though he can be faulted on many counts it cannot be denied that he paved the way for better dramatists. It should be remembered that even in the thirties, there were not many good plays available to the producer and that they depended either on adaptations of plays from other languages or plays which were wholly artificial and lacked the qualities of true art. The full value of Krishnarao's early experiments in drama, its many forms like the social, historical and mythological, can be grasped only in a historical perspective.

Other Prose

Besides novels, short stories and plays, Krishnarao wrote a variety of prose which included literary and art criticism, biographies, biographical sketches and autobiographies, and a good deal of expository prose popularising and propagating ideas. No account of Krishnarao's work would be complete without some discussion of these aspects.

Literary criticism as it is understood today as a separate and distinct discipline devoted to the analysis and judgement of literary works is a modern concept and in Kannada it has been developed only during this century. Earlier writers were interested in poetics and rhetoric, and not in the interpretations of individual works of art. They generally followed the lead given to them by Sanskrit writers on poetics, but the best of them, Nripatunga who wrote *Kavirajamarga* (9th century A.D.) and Nagavarma I, the author of *Chandombudhi* (10th century A.D.) for example, showed a clear understanding of the difference between the geniuses of Sanskrit and Kannada and identified it in terms of diction, metrical forms and other areas. As early as the ninth century, Kannada had a highly developed language and literature, and inquiry into the nature of poetry and art had already begun, but the history of literary criticism begins only in the twentieth century.

The Navodaya phase of Kannada literature (1900-1930) was an age of creation rather than age of criticism. Nevertheless, there was considerable critical activity directed towards specific

ends: (a) a redefinition of the nature and function of literature in terms of Western concepts, (b) rediscovery of the literature of the past and (c) evaluation of contemporary Kannada writing. The pioneers in this field were: B.M. Srikantaiah (*Kannada Kaipidi*, Vol. II), A.R. Krishnashastry (*Sanskrita Nataka*), D.V. Gundappa (*Saundarya mattu Sahitya*), D.R. Bendre (*Sahitya hagu Vimarsh*) and Masti (*Vimarsh* Vols. 1-4), who established a sound critical tradition and developed a competent language of criticism. Therefore, Krishnarao had a tradition he could use. He was, however, a pioneer in the field of art criticism and there have not been many art critics after him in Kannada.

Krishnarao's theoretical criticism is limited to discussions of the novel and the short story as literary forms, and defense of progressive literature against the charges of obscenity and immorality through a clarification of its aims and objectives. He had, however, a clear idea of the nature and function of criticism as can be seen from the two essays he wrote, 'Vimarshaka' (the Critic)¹ and 'Vimarshaya Hadi' (The Critical Path).² In one of the seminal passages in the former essay, he defines the critic and the artist in relation to each other and says: 'The artist gathers the rays which fall on his intellect and heart and gives them an integrated form. The critic is one who understands the functioning of the heart and the intellect and throws light on the intention and the meaning hidden in art.'³ The universe, he says, is a storehouse of creative energy. The artist fills it and the critic uses the energy for the good of others. The role of the critic, as Krishnarao sees it, is that of a teacher and an interpreter and what distinguishes him from the others is his inclusiveness and the ability to see things in the round. The artist, he argues, could possibly do without the critic, but his services to the reader are indispensable. He pleads for a creative approach to the business of criticism.

In his own critical practice Krishnarao was more interested in appreciation and interpretation than in evaluation, and in this he followed the lead of Masti and Bendre for whom criti-

1. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sahitya mattu Jivana*, Sharada Prakasanalaya, (Bangalore, 1944) pp. 49-57.

2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Sajivasahitya*.

3. *Sahitya mattu Jivana*, p. 52.

cism was *rasavimarshe*. His approach to the literature of the past was selective and his main area of interest was in Virashaiva literature to which he was attracted early in his life. In his autobiography, *Barahagarana Baduku*, he mentions *vachana sahitya* as one of the formative influences that shaped him as a writer. What must have appealed to Krishnarao in *Virashaiva* literature was its protestant nature and the strong sense of Kannada identity which all the Virashaiva writers possessed. Besides, he must have been looking for a prose tradition which he could use, and Virashaiva literature—the *vachanasa* of the Virashaiva saints like Dasimayya, Basaveshvara, Allamaprabhu, Akkamahadevi and others, and the *ragale* form practised by Harihara and others—which had successfully carried out experiments to bring poetry close to prose in rhythm and diction, must have fascinated him. Krishnarao's work in this area includes *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti* (Virashaiva Literature and Culture, 1943), one of the earliest books of criticism he published, *Basavannavara Amritavani* (The Immortal Sayings of Basava, 1943), an anthology of Basaveshvara's *vachanas* with commentary and a brief biography, and several articles on other Virashaiva poets—'Dasimayyana Vyaktitva' (The personality of Dasimayya), where he traces Dasimayya's influence on Basaveshvara, 'Sarvajana Saroktigalu' (The Essence of Sarvajna), an enthusiastic appreciation of the *tripadis* of Sarvajna, a sixteenth century writer. He also brought out critical editions of Devakavi's *Marulasiddhakavya* (1587 A.D.) and Raghavanka's *Harischandra-kavya* (12th Cent. A.D.).

Distinguished scholars like F.G. Halakatti, S.S. Basavanal, Rev. Channappa Uttangi and others had preceded Krishnarao in the field but his authority was widely acknowledged. Reviewing *Basavannavara Amritavani*, Professor Basavanal said: 'A.N. Krishnarao is one of the few who can speak and write authoritatively on Virashaiva literature and culture.'¹ Krishnarao's love for Virashaiva literature was so passionate that at times he tended to identify Kannada culture and literature with Virashaiva culture and literature,² which was unfair to the Jaina

1. *Rasachetana*, p. 410.

2. A.N. Krishnarao, *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti*, S.S.N. Book Depot (Bangalore, 1943), p. iii.

contribution which had preceded Virashaiva literature and the Brahmana literature which had followed it. He was, however, guided by sound critical judgement in his estimate of the achievement of the Virashaiva writers. He wrote: 'It is to the credit of the Virashaiva poets that they preserved the uniqueness of Kannada and gave it strength. They released the Kannada language from the golden chains of Sanskrit and by adopting native Kannada metrics like *Ragale*, *Tripadi*, *Chaupadi*, *Shatpadi* and *Sangatyā* they revealed to the Kannada people their true genius. The cultural wealth of a country is to be found in the life and literature of its people. The Virashaiva poets came from the masses and wrote for the masses. They developed their poetic style from the spoken language of the people, their proverbs, fables and stories.'¹ *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti* is a good introduction to one of the most important phases of Kannada literature and it covers the poets of six centuries, from Basaveshvara of the twelfth century to Shadaksharideva of the seventeenth. It aims at inclusiveness rather than depth in its approach, but makes its critical points effectively. Krishnarao shows, for example, a fine insight into the nature of Basaveshvara's *vachanas* when he says: 'Basaveshvara did not set out to create literature. . . . He talked to the people about his own thoughts and experiences and about his spiritual travail. His *vachanas* are expressions of his soul power, rays of the light of his life. They mark the progress of his spirit. It is because of this that we see them as literature.'² Elsewhere Krishnarao describes the *vachanas* as the spiritual autobiography of a *sadliaka* and claims for them a place in the mystical literature of the world.³

Among the other *Virashaiva* writers Krishnarao liked most were Raghavanka, the twelfth century author of *Harischandra-kavya* and Sarvajna of the seventeenth century. He pays a high tribute to Raghavanka's poem and says: 'Throughout his poem the poet reveals his ability to analyse the workings of the mind, its struggles and stillness, as if he was prophetically aware of the literary taste of future times. It is because of this that

1. *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti*, p. 98.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

3. *Kannada Sahitya mattu Sanskriti*, pp. 80-103.

Harischandrakavya pleases the modern reader in spite of the fact that the subject matter had been borrowed from older poets.¹ Sarvajna, the people's poet, was a writer after Krishnarao's own heart and he gives him full throated praise. In his essay 'Sarvajnana Saroktigalu' Krishnarao mentions the unparalleled influence that this writer had on the lives of the people and the great service he had rendered to folk poetry by elevating it to high literary status. He was drawn most to the writers who lived their lives close to the people and who wrote for the people. He loved the Virashaiva poets like Raghavanka because they wrote not to win literary fame but 'so that people may live' (*jana badukalendu*).

With the exception of Virashaiva writers and a few others like Lakshmisha, Krishnarao did not show much interest in the literature of the past in which he found 'more rotten roots and slimy sea creatures than pearls'. For Lakshmisha, (14th century A.D.) he had a genuine liking, though he was critical of the poet's lapses in handling characters in parts of *Jaiminibharata*.

Krishnarao responded more fully to modern Kannada literature which, as a creative writer, he found of immediate relevance. His essays on the Kannada short story, the Kannada novel and the Kannada drama are informative and insightful. Particular mention ought to be made of the two essays on the novel, 'Sahityadalli Vastavikateya Sthana' (The Place of Realism in Literature) and 'Kadambariyalli Vastavikate' (Realism in the Novel) which appear in *Sanskritiya Vishvarupa* (1955). On realism Krishnarao says: 'A writer's work may be romantic or realistic but it has to be judged from the standpoint of art.' In his criticism of the Navodaya writers, however, he adopted other standards of judgement. 'The Navodaya writers,' he said, 'had the desire of taking literature to the people, but because of the political and social conditions prevailing before Independence they were not able to create literature that met the needs of the country.'² In spite of these shifting standards, however, he always tried to be fair to the writers and his panoramic surveys of modern trends in Kannada literature—'Beleyuttiruva Kannada Sahitya' (The Growth of Kannada Literature), 'Sim-

1. *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti*, p. 157.

2. *Sanskritiya Vishvarupa*, p. 21.

havalokana' (Retrospect) and 'Sarthaka Sahitya' (Significant Writing)—are marked by sympathy and understanding. His book on T.P. Kailasam, *Kailasam* (1947), though not the first book in Kannada to deal with the work of a contemporary writer as Krishnarao claimed—Neranga (Neglur Ranganath) had already published his book on Sriranga—is a loving tribute to a friend, but it is entirely free from hero-worship and sycophancy. In fact, he dwells in this book at some length on the harm that the Kailasam cult has done to drama. He is at his best, however, when he speaks of Kailasam's great contribution to Kannada prose and on the quality of the humour in Kailasam's plays.

Krishnarao's interest in theoretical criticism was of a limited nature. His essays on 'Hasyarasa', 'Rasanubhava' and 'Bhasheyalli Vyakaranada Sthana' (Grammar and Language) reveal a well-informed and alert mind, but his most impressive piece of theoretical criticism is undoubtedly *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane* (1956), a book he was provoked into writing by the hostile criticism of *Nagnasatya*. Even before he wrote this book, Krishnarao had raised the question of morality in literature in his afterword to *Papapunya*, a collection of short stories he published in 1943, and had said: 'The Progressive writers strongly opposed escapism in literature and drew the attention of the people towards the living truths and the burning problems.' *Sahitya mattu Kamaprachodane* is a more elaborate defence of the writer's freedom to choose his own subject-matter. Krishnarao characterises the Indian society as one based upon exploitation and argues that Indian attitudes to woman have always been contradictory. He quotes elaborately from the older Kannada poets to prove that in their eyes woman was an object of pleasure. As a progressive writer, he rejects the traditional attitudes to woman and emphasizes woman's claims for equality with man and the need for sexual education. Krishnarao concludes his long essay with the assertion that terms like 'erotic' and 'obscene' are borrowed from medicine and ethics respectively and are not relevant to the study of literature. Krishnarao's book is a compendium of ideas on a variety of related matters culled from many sources, but the book fails to present a sustained and sustainable argument. It does not face the question of obscenity and immorality in art squarely. Besides, it suffers from

verbosity and looseness which are rarely to be seen in Krishnarao's writings.

Krishnarao is one of the few genuine art critics that Kannada has produced. Besides the early work *Bharatiya Chitrakaleyalli Raja Ravivarmana Sthana* (The Place of Raja Ravivarma in the History of Indian Painting, 1932), he wrote a number of essays on Indian art—'Hoysala Shilpakalavaibhava' (The Glory of Hoysala Sculpture), 'Bharatiya Chitrakaleya Vikasa' (The Development of Indian Painting), 'Ajanta Chitrakale' (Ajanta Paintings), 'Debi Prasad Roy Choudhari' and 'Bharatiya Chitrakale' (Indian Painting). Most of these essays are introductory and there is no attempt in them at radical revaluation. His book on Raja Ravivarma, however, is refreshingly original. Like Ananda Coomaraswamy, Krishnarao insists that Indian art should retain its Indian identity. 'Modern experiments show,' he says, 'that if Indian art is to survive it should remain truly Indian.' It is this quality of Indianness that he misses in Ravivarma, who imitated Western models and was false to his own tradition. 'Whether it was a goddess, an *apsara* or a heroine like Lalla Rookh,' Krishnarao says, 'Ravivarma's imagination was exhausted in portraying the setting and changes in attire.'¹ 'Ravivarma has a place in the history of Indian art,' he argues, 'but he has no place among the artists.'² Krishnarao's discussion of topics like 'The aim of art', 'Indianness in art', 'The effect of the West on Ravivarma' etc., bear the imprint of Coomaraswamy's thought.

Krishnarao tried his hand also at biography, biographical sketch and autobiography and added another dimension to his work in prose. The earliest of these was *Nannammu Nane Kande* first published in 1944. Like *Hosahuttu* (A New Life, 1932), *Nannammu Nane Kande* is a declaration of faith and contains the author's views on a variety of matters such as caste and religion, national unity, regional identity, progress in literature and the use of the regional language as a medium of education. A sizeable part of the book is taken up by a discussion of the reviews of the author's *Sahityaratna* by Shivaram Karanth and others. *Barahagarana Baduku* (1972) is more satisfying as an autobio-

1. *Bharatiya Chitrakaleyalli Raja Ravivarmana Sthana*, p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

graphy, though if the reader looks for the 'design in the carpet' he would be disappointed. Like Adya Rangacharya's *Suhitiya Atmajijnase*, *Barahagarana Badaku* is, as the title itself suggests, an account of Krishnarao's growth as a writer. Rigorous self-criticism was not one of Krishnarao's virtues and the book deals mostly with the story of his emergence as a writer and the persons and forces contributing to this phenomenon. The value of the book, however, transcends this immediate purpose. As Krishnarao himself has put it: 'The sixty years of my life coincide with an important phase of the history of my country. The freedom struggle, the Kannada renaissance, Indian independence, the emergence of the Karnataka State - all these happened during this period. I have known people connected with these events and seen them from close quarters and it is a pleasure for me to write about their life and personality.'

The two volumes of *Karnatakada Kalavidaru* (1946, 1952) and *Kannada Kularasikaru* (1951), which contain lively sketches of a large number of Kannada artists and writers, provide strong evidence of Krishnarao's commitment to the culture of his land and his constant endeavour to promote it. 'Knowledge about the poets and artists of a country,' Krishnarao writes in the preface to *Karnatakada Kalavidaru* Vol. 1, 'is an essential part of its total history.' These volumes create a rich portrait gallery. Krishnarao toured all over Karnataka to collect facts, and these sketches are remarkable for their precision and reliability. The inspiration for these volumes must have come to him from Alur Venkatarao's *Karnatakada Viraratnagalu* which appeared in 1930. There is an amazing variety in the choice of the subjects. We have here musicians, both of the Hindustani and Karnataka schools, like Mallikarjun Mansur, Sawai Gandharva, Ramakrishnabuvu Vaze, B. Devendrappa, K. Vasudevacharya, Veena Raja Rao; painters like Kamadolli; and actors like Varadachar, Gubbi Viranna, Mohammad Peer and Basavaraj Mansur. Krishnarao's extensive knowledge of the fine arts, and his concern over the neglect of the arts and the artists in contemporary Karnataka, are evident throughout these volumes. In *Karnatakada Kalavidaru* the author's intention is not merely to popularise the successful artist, but also to win recognition for young artists like Vasudeva and Shankara Joshi. These pen-portraits are rich with personal anecdotes and reflections and are drawn

with bold and economical strokes of the brush. *Kannada Kularasikaru* is more like a gallery of fame. Krishnarao borrowed the term 'kularasika' from Sarvajna and applied it to the writers. The publisher's claim that *Kannada Kularasikaru* is 'of immense help in understanding the attitudes, creative ability, experimentation and progressive outlook of the modern writers' is largely justified, though one feels that Krishnarao has not written about his contemporaries with perfect candour. Among the writers who figure here are Masti, Krishnashastry, Bendre, V. Sitaramaiah, Devudu, Puttappa, Shivaram Karanth and others. Criticism is generally restrained and respectful and the intention is to give the reader a feel of the author's way of living and his work. Judicious use of quotations from the writer's work is one of the lively devices Krishnarao employs in his art of portraiture. Very often he achieves his effects with the introduction of the subject itself. As an example, I quote here the opening paragraph of 'Ti Nam Shri' (T.N. Shrikanthayya): 'Once some of us writers met at a dinner party. Ti Nam Shri was one of the invitees. The discussion which flowed in many directions finally came to the question of the ancientness of the Kannada language. Father Herras had just started a controversy on the coins found at Mohenjodaro by saying that the words on the coins were in Kannada. We were all overjoyed at the thought that the history of Kannada would go back to 4000 to 5000 B.C. Ti Nam Shri wanted to know whether Herras's view had been accepted. Many had disagreed with Herras but that had been secondary for us. Ti Nam Shri said, "Pride should not blind us to truth." This small anecdote illustrates Ti Nam Shri's seriousness as a scholar and his love of truth before everything.' Not one opening, however, is like another. The piece on Devudu, for example, begins with a description of a strike scene at Balepet Square and the one on G.P. Rajaratnam opens with a fairly long quotation from his poem 'Yendkuduka Ratna' (Ratna the Drunkard).

Krishnarao's full length biographies include those of the Virashaiva saints Basaveshvara, Allamaprabhu and Akkamahadevi; Kabir, Vivekananda and Gandhi; and his own contemporary T.P. Kailasam. *Lord Basaveshvara*, *Allama Prabhu* and *Akkamahadevi* are in English. Besides these, scattered over the many volumes of criticism, there are a large number of biogra-

phical sketches of contemporary writers and artists written for broadcast and other purposes. These are excellent aids for building up a history of modern Kannada literature.

It is impossible in the brief space available to me in this monograph to give a full account of the large quantity of expository prose Krishnarao produced for various occasions, and I content myself by merely indicating its nature. Krishnarao's prefaces to his own books and the books he edited contain his thoughts on many important areas and Sri S.M. Krishnarao has done a commendable job by bringing them together in a single volume. *Chirachetana* (1972) is essential reading for any one interested in the study of modern Kannada literature. I should also mention in this context *Kannadada Dari* and *Akhanda Karnataka*, both published in 1946. These are collections of articles Krishnarao wrote for various magazines on the political, social and cultural problems of Karnataka and controversies related to them. These are of immense use to the political and social historian of Karnataka. Krishnarao's output in speeches, which was of stupendous proportions, is either lost or lies buried in newspaper reports, except for a few speeches like 'Sarthaka Sahitya', the address he delivered as President of the Kannada Literary Conference at Manipal, which exist in their entirety. The Navodaya age produced great orators like B.M. Shrikantaiah, Muduvu Krishnarao and Pandit Taranath. Krishnarao too was a powerful speaker and had the ability to hold his audiences spell-bound for hours together. His speeches usually lasted for two to three hours. Professor D. Javaregowda has high praise for the prose of Krishnarao's speeches. He says: 'I have not seen any one who could speak as fluently, as clearly and as interestingly as Krishnarao. . . Even his writings do not fully illustrate the beauties and the variety of rhythm which the prose of his speeches possessed.'¹ These speeches and articles reveal the activist in Krishnarao's personality who was quick to respond to his own immediate environment and who had the boldness and courage to express his opinions fully and without fear.

1. *Rasachetana*, p. 224.

5

Conclusion

Like the three great men that influenced him—Alur, Galaganath and B.M. Shrikantaiah—Krishnarao had a strong awareness of the writer's responsibility. 'The writer,' he said, 'is an architect of the nation. He should love freedom and free thought and his life should be an example for others. . . . The writer who does not oppose cruelty, tyranny and exploitation is an impotent creature.'¹ In his own life he strove to live up to this ideal—he called himself a hero of many battles—and often succeeded. He was born at a time when the winds of change were blowing all over the country and the Kannada people were slowly emerging from the dark ages and were coming into their own. Krishnarao was a child of this Renaissance and he carried forward the work of his masters. His greatest achievement, as Niranjana and others have said, was the creation of an awareness in the Kannada people. Like Alur he too could have said about himself: '*Karnatakada Sarvangina Unnati* (the all round development of Karnataka)—these three words hold my entire universe.'² Krishnarao was actively associated with all the important movements of his time to unify and protect Karnataka and to give Kannada its rightful place in Karnataka and outside. His involvement with the Kannada culture was the main source of his creative and critical activity.

1. *Rasachetana*, p. 176.

2. *Nanna Jivana Smritigalu*, p. 88.

Another of his striking achievements was to take literature to the people, a movement which Galaganath had started before him on a smaller scale. What we see in their cases is the phenomenon of the author moving towards his audience. One of Krishnarao's deepest convictions was that 'the artist should not live in an ivory tower. He must be one with the people.'¹ Like Galaganath, whose novels were enjoyed even by the illiterate who had them read out to them, he too had the ordinary reader in mind and took pride in the fact that his novels were read even by hotel boys. In his autobiography he talks about the conversion his novel *Sandhyaraga* had brought about in a hotel manager who was filled with remorse for ill treating his mother by reading the novel and sought her forgiveness.² Krishnarao was bitter about the hostile criticism of novels like *Sahityaratna* and *Nagnasatya* but the concept of the alienation of the artist from his community was foreign to him. He wrote from within his community and for the community. Leslie Fiedler has rightly said: 'The writer and his audience, that is society as a whole, are mutually responsible for the act of myth making. But it is up to the writer to find and manipulate these subconscious images that cut across age and social distinction. He is a catalyst. He performs for the community of which he is a part. He hands back to them their dreams in tact.'³ This perhaps explains the tremendous popularity that Krishnarao enjoyed with his readers. He dreamt the people's dreams—including the sexual ones—and shaped their myths.

Perhaps Krishnarao's lasting contribution as a writer was to the development of prose in Kannada. He was among the first to realise that the development of prose was an urgent need of the country.⁴ Krishnarao found his models in early Virashaiva literature. In one of the most seminal passages in *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti* he says: 'The beginnings of a prose style congenial to the genius of the Kannada culture are to be found in Basaveshvara. Harihara brought this style to maturity. The *Champu kavya* writers had used prose merely as a link (between

1. Preface to *Agnikanye*.

2. *Barahagarana Baduku*, p. 217.

3. Priya Karunakar, 'Is American Literature Removed from Reality?' MS.

4. *Sahitya mattu Jivana*, p. 14.

passages of poetry). It was Harihara who in his *ragales* gave it its distinctive status, and shaped it into an effective medium of expression.¹ He was equally sensitive to contemporary experiments with prose, as his classification of the prose of D.V. Gundappa and Alur as *viragadya*, that of Masti and Panje as *lalitagadya* and the prose written by Taranath as *vicharapurnagadya* illustrates. He was quick to recognise the significance of the quiet revolution that Kailasam had brought about in Kannada prose by the use of colloquial diction and speech rhythms. The process of standardisation of Kannada prose which had begun in the nineteenth century as a result of the contact with English reached its culmination in the prose of Krishnarao whose style provides the norms for description, dialogue and exposition. The wavering between the colloquial and the refined, the crudeness and the lack of subtlety, the admixture of Kannada and English vocabulary and expressions—all these defects of the early experiments had been over-come and standard prose had been finally established. Ta Ra Su's comment on Krishnarao's style brings out this fact very well. 'Krishnarao's prose style,' Ta Ra Su writes, 'is like the cream of milk. It is free from linguistic acrobatics and show of ornamentation. What others would say in ten words he says in one. . . . But his brevity does not result in obscurity. The emotion is never forced. . . . His language is simple, but not dull. It has variety, intensity, speed and sensuousness. It assumes the power of the art of painting.'² Krishnarao in this sense is the writer's writer.

In an analysis like this, one should also recognise the role Krishnarao played in modernising the Kannada sensibility. Like Adya Rangacharya and Shivaram Karanth, Krishnarao too grew up under the stimulating influence of Pandit Taranath. Taranath was deeply involved in the Indian tradition in philosophy, music and literature, but he was iconoclastic and revolutionary and rejected a great deal that was meaningless in the past. Krishnarao was not an original thinker and a book like *Dharmasambhava* was beyond him, but he carried forward the rationalistic tradition of the Master and fought against social evils and exploitation. As Dr. H.M. Nayak has said, the fourth decade of

1. *Virashaiva Sahitya mattu Sanskriti*, p. 14.

2. Ta Ra Su, *A Na Kri*, p. 108.

this century in Kannada would go down in history as the Krishnarao decade.¹ The Progressive movement he led had a vast liberating influence, particularly in matters relating to sex. With the Progressive movement Krishnarao entered the mainstream of Indian literature and found kindred spirits in writers like Gudipatu Venkatachalam of Telugu, Anant Kanekar of Marathi, Buddhadeva Bose of Bengali, and Ugra of Hindi.

To thousands of his readers Krishnarao was known mainly as a novelist, the author of *Sandhyaraga*, *Mangalasutra*, *Kanniru* and *Nagnasatya*. Several good novelists, Betageri Krishnasharma, Shivaram Karanth, Devudu Narasimhashastri and Sriranga for example, were his contemporaries, but he was the most popular of them. Galaganath gave up novel writing in 1928 and turned to the *Mahabharata*. In the thirties there was a sudden flowering of genius in the Kannada novel and several new writers appeared on the scene with highly promising experiments. Shivaram Karanth's *Chomana Dudi* (1933), Sriranga's *Vishvamitrana Srishui* (1934), V.K. Gokak's *Ijjodu* (1935) are a few examples. Krishnarao and Karanth have emerged as the most influential of this group of writers. These two writers had many things in common. Both of them were professional writers and were deeply involved in the arts. They also shared strong humanist concerns. Their influence and achievement however show a marked difference. With his strong experiential base, capacity for self-criticism as an artist and a total commitment to his art, Karanth took a more difficult path and continually accepted new challenges as a writer. Almost every good novelist writing today—U.R. Anantamurthy and Yashvant Chittal for example—has been in some way or the other influenced by him, though it is difficult to identify any writer as belonging to his school. Krishnarao, on the other hand has tended, like Somerset Maugham, to repeat the successful formula once found and to exploit an accommodating style. More easy to imitate than Karanth, he proved an effective model for several writers, mostly mediocre. But the Krishnarao tradition has also produced writers of the calibre of Ta Ra Su, Niranjana, Basavaraj Kattimani and Chaduranga who learnt what they could from him but proceeded to develop their own individual style and

2. *Rasachetana*, p. 139.

vision. It is not fair to lay all the sins of his followers at the doors of Krishnarao. As I have argued elsewhere in this monograph, he had many good qualities as a novelist. He had serious concerns—the loss of the rural organic community, for example, affected him deeply. He was a highly competent craftsman with an inborn gift for story telling, and possessed a fine sense of the true genius of the Kannada language. His wide canvas covered almost all aspects of the life of the lower middle classes. If, in spite of these gifts, he failed to achieve real greatness as a novelist—here one has in mind international standards of such valuations – it was because of lapses in artistic integrity and lack of adequate self-criticism, weaknesses induced by professional necessities and flaws in his own personality. Krishnarao's achievement, however, should not be judged by the intrinsic worth of the novels alone—after all, there are no permanent standards of judging such worth. It should be assessed in the context of the totality of his work which without doubt had the dimensions of greatness.

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<i>Mahakavi Ulloor</i>	Sukumar Azhicode
<i>Maharshi Devendranath Tagore</i>	Narayan Chaudhuri

<i>Manik Bandyopadhyay</i>	Saroj Mohan Mitra
<i>Manikkavachakar</i>	G. Vanmikanathan
<i>Manilal Divedi</i>	Dhirubhai Thaker
<i>Manmohan Ghose</i>	Lotika Ghose
<i>Meghani</i>	V.J. Trivedi
<i>Michael Madhusudan Dutt</i>	Amalendu Bose
<i>Mir Taqi Mir</i>	Ish Kumar
<i>Mira Bai</i>	Usha S. Nilsson
<i>Nammalvar</i>	A. Srinivasa Raghavan
<i>Nanalal</i>	U.M. Maniar
<i>Narmadashankar</i>	Gulabdas Broker
<i>Nazir Akbarabadi</i>	Mohammad Hasan
<i>N.C. Kelkar</i>	R.M. Gole
<i>Panje Mangesh Rau</i>	V. Sitaramiah
<i>Pothana</i>	D. Venkatavadhani
<i>Pramatha Chaudhuri</i>	Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay
<i>Prem Chand</i>	Prakash Chandra Gupta
<i>Radhanath Ray</i>	Gopinath Mohanty
<i>Rahul Sankrityayan</i>	Prabhakar Machwe
<i>Raja Rammohun Roy</i>	Saumyendranath Tagore
<i>Ramalingar</i>	G. Vanmikanathan
<i>Sachal Sarmast</i>	K.B. Advani
<i>Sarala Dasa</i>	Krishna Chandra Panigrahi
<i>Sarojini Naidu</i>	Padmini Sengupta
<i>Shah Latif</i>	K.B. Advani
<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	Manoj Das
<i>Sudhindranath Datta</i>	Amiya Dev
<i>Surdas</i>	Usha S. Nilsson
<i>Surya Mall Mishran</i>	Vishnu Dutt Sharma
<i>Swami Brahmanand Tirth</i>	J.C. Sathe
<i>Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay</i>	Mahasveta Devi
<i>Tiruvalluvar</i>	S. Maharajan
<i>Toru Dutt</i>	Padmini Sengupta
<i>Tukaram</i>	Bhalchandra Nemade
<i>Tyagaraja</i>	V. Raghavan
<i>Vallathol Narayana Menon</i>	B. Hradayakumari
<i>Vedam Venkataraya Sastry</i>	Vedam Venkataraya Sastry (Junior)
<i>Veeresalingam</i>	V.R. Narla
<i>Vemana</i>	V.R. Narla
<i>Vidyapati</i>	Ramanath Jha
<i>Vrindavanlal Verma</i>	Rajeev Saxena
<i>Zinda Kaul</i>	A.N. Raina



