



## CREATIVE CONFLICTS: A STUDY OF THE KANNADA POETS- M. GOPALAKRISHNA ADIGA AND K.S.NARASIMHASWAMY

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### ABSTRACT



As Kannada literary aficionados are gearing up to celebrate the centenary year of its pioneering modern poet M.Gopalakrishna Adiga (18<sup>th</sup> February, 1918) having recently remembered another acclaimed poet K.S.Narasimhaswamy (26<sup>th</sup> January 1915), it is essential to assess their creative conflicts not just in the best interest of *Bhasha Sahitya* (regional literature) but as a study of contemporary poets.

Much hype has been created by admirers of both poets as they looked at *Adiga* versus *K.S.Na* (as the poets were fondly addressed) attack and counter attack through their poetry. It is but natural that students of literature look at their favourite writers as celebrities and if such writers oppose each other's views which again is natural in any field, the difference of opinion should be viewed in favour of growth of literature (as in this case) and not detrimental to it. A shrewd scholar awaits such conflicts between literary stalwarts as their creative angst invariably benefits their writing.

**Keywords:** *Creative conflicts, Kannada poets M. Gopalakrishna Adiga & K.S. Narasimhaswamy, Movements in Kannada Literature-Navodaya(New Romantic), Navya(Modern) and Navyottara(Post- Modern).*

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## INTRODUCTION

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of *Swadeshi* movement leading to many socio-cultural changes all over India. Karnataka witnessed the birth and growth of New Romantic Literary Movement (*Navodaya*). It was enriched by innovative writers like T.N.Srikantaiah, B.M.Srikantaiah, Hattiyangadi Narayan Rao, K.V.Puttappa, D.R.Bendre, P.T.Narasimhachar, Gopalkrishna Adiga and K.S.Narasimhaswamy to name just a few who in their unique ways set out to portray a literature which was rooted in Indian tradition and inspired by modern Western literature. The new found freedom of Navodaya writers who creatively used linguistic, stylistic and phonetic variants helped local literature and language to evolve through *Navya* (Modern) and *Navyottara* (Post- Modern) movements.

South Karnataka boasts of literary stalwarts like Govinda Pai, Kaiyyara Kiiyanna Rai, Jnanapita awardees like Shivaram Karanth and U.R. Ananthmurthy. Mogerri Gopal Krishna Adiga was born in the village *Mogerri* of the coastal region of Karnataka while K.S.Na was born in *Kikkeri*, a village in the Mandya district of middle Karnataka. Having lost their father while still studying, Adiga and K.S.Na shouldered family responsibilities and did a part of their education in the royal city of Mysore which is renowned for its rich socio-cultural history.

K.S.Na's early education was in Mysore though he joined intermediate course in Central College, Bangalore which he was compelled to abruptly leave and take up his father's job as an accountant in a shop in Mysore. Adiga too would have trodden the same path had not a supportive aunt encouraged him to study B.A. (Hons) in English from Maharaja's College, Mysore. After doing odd jobs, Adiga taught English in local colleges, became Principal of Lal Bahadur Shashtri College co-founded by him in Sagara, and later at Poorna Prajna College in Udupi. Although Adiga taught English literature, he wrote almost exclusively in Kannada, except for a single poem in English on Rabindranath Tagore for the Radical Humanist magazine.

K.S.Na's first poem was in English and the remaining five hundred and odd in Kannada. His debut poetic collection *Mysura Mallige* (The Jasmine of Mysore-1942) celebrates its platinum year in 2017.

This collection with its nearing forty reprints, stirred a cultural revolution as it erased orthodox taboos associated with love and spoke about common man's expression of emotions in a lucid, yet profound manner. The first phase of K.S.Na's poetry comprising primarily of love or marital poems as he preferred to call them were *Mysura Mallige* (The Jasmine of Mysore-1942), *Iravata* (The White Elephant- 1945), *Deepada Malli* (The Lady With the Lamp-1947), *Iruvanthige* (A Kind of Jasmine- 1949), *Ungura* (The Ring-1952). The Maharaja of Mysore conferred Devraj Bahadur award on *Mysura Mallige* and a movie with the same name based on his poems fetched the poet National Award for Best Lyrics in 1991 and since 2004, a play woven around his poems has been successfully running to packed audience. Despite his multi-faceted poetry, the tag of a 'love poet' limited a broader understanding of K.S.Na's more than five hundred poems which woven around love, life and death, qualify for an extensive and holistic study.

Both K.S.Na and Adiga tried their hand in other genres like short stories and criticism but are best remembered for their poems. Adiga's critically acclaimed magazine *Sakshi* provided new socio-cultural insights, apart from poetry, politics was his other preoccupation, and he even contested in general elections. During the emergency, he read a poem on the AIR which was a direct attack of censorship and his satire "Nehru shall not retire" brims with dynasty, imperialistic ideology and a nation at stake.

The disillusionment in the post-Independence period as the nation stood at cross-roads between modern Western and traditional Indian literature sprouted the Neo-modern literary movement *Navya in Karnataka*, spearheaded by Adiga and his contemporaries-U.R. Ananthmurthy, P. Lankesh, Sumathindra Nadig, Chandrashekar Patil, Ramachandra Sharma, Vinayaka Krishna Gokak to name a few. They evolved a 'stylized' form of literature influenced heavily by the Western writers such as Eliot, Kafka, Camus, Auden and other modernists. The *Navya* writers who chose to write poetry devoid of meter and rhyme about man's innermost feelings, often echoed despair about life and the helplessness of a human being which



garnered much rebuke for their unconventional style by the traditionalists. Adiga like K.S.Na began writing in the Navodaya phase with inclination of romanticism influenced by native poets like Kadengodlu and D.R.Bendre when he wrote *Bhavataranga* (Ripple of Emotions-1946) but very soon the rebellious poet veered towards progressive movements as he worried about building new nation in *Kattuvevu Navu* (We Shall Build -1948).

Adiga's *Nadedu Banda Dari* (The Trodden Path- 1952) marks a conscious effort to break with the past, and also his past as a poet both morally and aesthetically. As the name itself suggests, *The Trodden Path* rejects extravagant romantic idealism; the introduction itself reads like a manifesto to new poetry as Adiga calls for new realism and new poetic idiom. The poet accepts the need to learn from the modern and post-modern western literature as he juxtaposes contrasting images, colloquial rhythms and native wisdom to conjure poems which disturb and stay in the reader's consciousness for a long time.

If Adiga wrote—*Do not turn your eyes towards the trodden path*, K.S.Na much later contested in his poem *Ninna Hidiya Ilithu Nanna Beralu* (In Your Fist Lay My Finger): *Why shouldn't the road trodden be looked back again?/ If looked at, the flower itself may wither*.<sup>(Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale:397)</sup> As the poem continues the optimistic poet while accepting hurdles in love proclaims: *Love doesn't brim, it isn't love if it does* and the poem concludes: *There are a hundred shadows on the wall if seen/pushing aside the floral screen of the mind's door ajar*.<sup>(Ibid)</sup>

Adiga's *Chande Maddale* (The Drums -1954) reverberates with T.S. Eliot's mythical contexts to reveal a contemporary anxiety; modern alienation also echoed in his fiction *Anathe* (Orphan-1954), poetic collection *Bhumigitha* (The Song of Earth – 1959), book of essays *Mannina Vasane* (The Fragrance of Soil -1966). And again like K.S.Na, Adiga returned to his earlier pre occupations in his third phase beginning with *Vardhamana* (The Evolving One /Another name for Spiritual Leader of Jain Mahaveer-1972), *Idannu Bayasiralilla* (Hadn't Desired This-1975), *Mulaka Mahaashayagalu* (The Middle Men-1980), *Battalaarada Gange* (The Ganga That Doesn't

Dry-1983) and *Chintamaniyal Kanda Mukha* (The Face Seen At Chintamani-1987). These poems brim with allusive urban imagery, intermingling with images of childhood, juxtaposition of satire, discursive themes and flexible formats.

One can find the predominant *Navya* influence in the second phase of K.S.Na's poetry as he experimented stylistically and thematically interrogating life, god, man, time and death in *Shilalate* (The Stone Creeper-1958), *Maneyinda Manege* (From One House to Another-1960) and *Tereda Baagilu* (The Open Door-1976). This phase despite the poet's sixteen year hiatus from poetry garnered recognition (Central Sahitya Akademi award for *Tereda Baagilu*) and acclamation as a poet. Writers often go through a hiatus which perhaps is the time when they contemplate, rejuvenate and create seminal works; Adiga too went through such a pause; thirteen years after the publication of *Bhumigitha* in 1959, his next poetic collection *Vardhamana* came much later only in 1972 which fetched him the much awaited Central Sahitya Akademi award.

K.S.Na's final and third phase comprised collections like *Nava Pallava* (The New Sprout-1983), *Dundu Mallige* (The Cherubic Jasmine-1993), *Navila Dhvani* (The Voice of the Peacock-1996), *Sanje Haadu* (The Twilight Song-2000), *Kaimarada Nelalalli* (In the Shadow of the Hand Post-2001), *Ede Thumba Nakshatra* (A Heart Full of Stars-2002), *Mounadalli Maatu Hudukutta* (Searching for Speech in Silence-2003) and *Deepa Saalina Naduve* (Among Rows of Lighted Lamps-2003). These poems dictated amidst deteriorating health and eye-sight problems, still brim with life though there lurks an undercurrent of death-its unpredictability, parity and its stoic acceptance.

These stalwarts garnered similar recognitions for enriching Kannada Literature-receiving Kerala's Kumar Ashan Award (Adiga in 1976 and K.S.Na in 1997), elected President of Kannada Sahitya Sammelan (Adiga in 1979 at Dharmasthala and K.S.Na at Mysore in 1991), Honorary Doctorates (Adiga from The World Academy of Art and Culture in 1979 and K.S.Na from Mysore University in 1991).

A closer analysis of the thematic concerns of Adiga and K.S.Na shows them criss crossing with their



preoccupations on love, social concerns, vagaries of life, uncertainty of death, God and spiritual quests. K.S.Na's very popular *Ninna Hesaru* (Your Name) begins with how a name haunts the poet in blushing lotus petals, tolling bells of the temple, the eyes of a jumping calf, in every thing in and around, finally binding the self with the soul. Adiga's *My Lotus Red* begins with the blooming beauty's sensuous impact on the passers-by, wind, bees and water but the emergence of the golden rayed Sun pales worldly attractions as the blushing Lotus turns towards the Supreme Power.

If K.S.Na sang in, *Let poetry wish well for all,/ the blue sky doesn't discriminate,/Every one is born of the same earth,/ every one heads towards the same, / joy or sorrow, / let whatever befall/ let poetry wish well for all.* (Bride Comes Home: 177) Adiga's poem *Desire* echoed- *Let our thoughts come out and,/take wings after maturing in the shell of tradition;/May then a fresh new song come alive and,/gently touch every heart,/in its rendition* (Gopal Krishna Adiga, Samagra Kaavya:04) And then there is a similar poem of K.S.Na titled *Desire* where in the poet says-*For the earth's gifts, for pains, for pleasures/I wish to hold a mirror;/with human heart's compassion and affection/I wish to merge my voice.* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 417)

K.S.Na's satire on critics titled *Ikkala* (Tongs) mildly rebukes by beginning that in winter, they grumble it is cold and in summer cursed the sunlight, their reprimand on rain was that it would never leave and warned that their tribe admire nothing: *If one reads they say:/Write again, chap! /If it's written they probe: / is writing alright? /What are their wishes! /Their own comment. /There's nothing they admire here, beware* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 273)

While Adiga scorns: *The critic a Satan, a leech, yet a friend, my Guru, /Like a shadow you climbed the heights I climbed/ Crept into the lower depths I jumped/Rubbing your wings to my wings you too flew towards the horizons I flew/Explored, like me, new horizons; still/You stood apart, untouched, spreading yourself/Above, below, around, piercing the sky/Drilling the ground.* (Gopal Krishna Adiga, Samagra Kaavya: 343)

Adiga's protagonist is a common man with limitations as he clearly states in *Sri Ramnavamiya Divasa* (The Day of Sri Ramnavami) having the

potential to create splinters but cannot explode. While K.S.Na's protagonist is an optimistic common man whose acceptance of life's absurdities cosmically connects him to his surroundings.

K.S.Na's poem *Ramanavami* taken from *Kaimarada Nelalalli* (Under the Shade of the Hand Post) written two years before his death in 2001, typically speaks about the poet's innate optimism, by beginning with, *I am not the one who brings a finger before the eyes,intending to look at the world from there. /If seen thus, the sight is incomplete.* (Song of Life: 60) The poet asks us to look at the trickling rivulet, the standing hill, the stubborn boulder, the flying bird and the hearth. He further brings us closer to reality by diverting our attention towards children who are returning home from school and their laughter which continues even as they sit to eat, making the author feel that some fortune lost long ago, has been regained. And then the day is remembered as Rama's birthday, the rituals of a jasmine garland on Rama's portrait, sweet meats, salad, melon-juice, fan, children in gold-laced dhoti bustling around and singing hymns, the festival springing as an oasis amidst the desert of life. While the elders bless that *'Let life be a festival like this every day,* (Ibid) their village beauties refill oil when it is exhausted in the row of lamps. The poem ends with K.S.Na's belief in beauty and acceptance: *That thing called beauty exists, if thought so, it doesn't, if thought no. This is the world. May well be.* (Ibid)

The anxieties of a free nation forging towards its future as it tried to break free from the shackles of its past, are the recurring conflicts in Adiga's poetry. In his poem *The Ganga will Never Go Dry* he ridicules the beaten path of the river: *'Although fresh water flows in, there is still the inebriation of the past'*. His last two anthologies *Ba Ittalta* (Come Hither, Hither) and *Suvarna Puttali* (The Golden Doll) offer no clues about old age, health (towards his end Adiga endured the limitations of a paralytic) and loneliness as adamant ideologies are reassessed as the poet stood at the threshold of death.

K.S.Na cannot be called an atheist; neither was he overtly religious but his belief in an unknown force which nurtures, guides and cares for us reverberates throughout his poetry. For example his



popular sonnet *Sanna Sangathi* (A Small Incident) is outwardly a narration of a simple incident while the inward, subtle meanings are profound. The little one's careless kicking of bed sheet and the mother's protective hand which repeatedly covers denotes the deeper care shown by Supreme Power despite men's callous attitude, yet God continues to shield us.

In K.S.Na's poem *Tungabhadra* he says that he is not referring to the stream but his year old daughter by the same name whose bewitching ways keep him enthralled and we realize that the child's simple tactics governed by its innocent belief are elevated to a philosophy of life. When the father scolds, the child crawls to her mother's lap and reprimanded by her mother, Tungabhadra climbs her father's lap. The belief that when one bank gets angry, there is another where one can rest and gain solace exists; a belief which adults like him too lack, astonishes the poet.

In a dilemma the poet again questions in *Ena Bedali* (What Shall I Ask?)-*You have left the world to me / Why should I trouble!* (Song of Life: 76) Again the poet attempts to answer man's queries to God in *Aho Ratrugalalli Bidadu Ninna Dhani* (All through the Day and Night Your Voice Does Not Leave Me). The poet expresses his disbelief in ritualistic worship to appease God which makes man succumb to faith cure while the creator is more pained than pleased at being isolated and called a stone. Man can attempt to become God by his deeds not by mere worshipping felt K.S.Na which he professed in *Idadiru Nanna Ninna Simhasanada Mele* (Don't Place Me On Your Throne) where the son (man) refuses to sit on the father's (God's) throne but desires to gain kingship by working towards it.

The triangular conflict between God, man and earth is echoed in many of his poems even as he humbly accepts in *Prathama Raajanige* (To the First Lord): *The lamp is yours, the wind is yours, / Let not light be extinguished* (Song of Life: 72) K.S.Na's poetry accepts man's inability to ascertain the existence of God even as he acknowledges a guiding force which makes men lead a better life. The poet finds it easier to trust the benevolent earth than the unknown, omnipresent God and sing in contentment: *What's there be it heaven or hell? Does a fortune not*

*available here grow there?* (Narasimhaswamy, Iravata, Malligeya Maale: 61)

Though both wrote on festivals like Deepavali and Ugadi the depiction was different. As a quintessential modern poet Adiga questioned: *Is light distortion of darkness? /Is the festival of light a feast for twelve month's of darkness?* (Selected Poems of Gopalakrishna Adiga, trs Nadig Sumatheendra: 17) And in Ugadi which is a festival ushering the Hindu New Year, Adigas corns: *Eat neem and jaggery (you have it?)/ (doesn't matter even if you drink tea)/ sit down for a while and listen to your calendar.* (Ibid: 12)

While K.S.Na ushers Deepavali with: *Let a befitting reply be heard/by the darkness that mocks at the very entity of light! /May the light of festival of lights/raise its hand in benediction/wish well to everyone in every thing!* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 396)

Welcoming the New Year with its baggage of delights and distresses K.S.Na claims: *We are neem/we are jaggery/ joys and sorrows are ours. And in another poem on Ugadi he concludes: The song never gets over, it is not a song if it does. /Ugadi has arrived, fetch neem-jaggery!* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 524)

In Adiga's *Bhumigita* man felt alienated from God, burdened by religion, yet unwilling to cut the umbilical chord despairs: *The priest who sanctifies children's names knows better the funeral rites* (Selected Poems of Gopalakrishna Adiga, trs Nadig Sumatheendra :17)

K.S.Na's trust in earth is based on his innate belief that we have been blessed by her bounty and this can sustain us, as he expresses in *Bhumigeetha*: *The mother leads and we follow/and the procession is on./Whatever the odds on the way/we know no defeat* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale) Adiga's dilemma is not a pessimistic exasperation but a modernist's existential crisis, as he concludes in *Bhumigita*:

*Some say-"We don't know where the switch is."*

*Some say-"We have forgotten the address of the main office."*

*The rest say-"It is somewhere here."*

*In darkness, on the narrow blind alley one has to crawl fumbling for the wall.*

*The blind man rides astraddle on the lame.*

*We have to wait and see how the path passes by* (Selected Poems of Gopalakrishna Adiga, trs Nadig Sumatheendra: 21)



K.S.Na's *Kaimarada Nelalalli* (Under the Shade of the Hand Post) written in his eighties reflects the poet's innate optimism, graceful acceptance of man's limitations and community bonding which is fast dissipating in the wake of modernism:

*You've enquired after the pace of this river,  
how shall I, an ignorant, answer?  
The raft floats at it's own pace; even the  
flowing water has its own pace.  
The fish that sinks and rises has its own pace.  
The sand and the stones that move noiselessly  
on the river bed have a different pace.  
All those collectively are a river.* (Song of Life: 76)

The erudite scholar U.R.Ananthmurthy in his collection of critical essays *Maatu Sota Bharata* (The India that Lost its Speech) while appreciating Adiga's light humour, analyses his revelation of life's gory and wonders whether such recurrent images distort the joys of life. Taking a line from K.S.Na's poem he describes Adiga's poetry as: *From the depths of earth, the vision of truth blooms and doesn't sing* (as against K.S.Na's poetry which does sing). Ananthmurthy also felt that the dominant platform for K.S.Na's poems is the wedding altar, while Adiga's poems gains strength from bamboo sticks. If Adiga wrote, *'In the cradle shop the bamboo is cheap'* (Selected Poems of Gopalkrishna Adiga, trs. Nadig Sumatheendra: 17) K.S.Na asserted, *The first line of my song is the cradle, friend, / its end indeed is the crematorium outside the city.* (Narasimhaswamy, Baala Haadi, Malligeya Maale: 599)

Adiga's poems are inherently rebellious and always speak about breaking away from the bindings of a system which stifles men but can one exist without these bindings? Such question grapples the poet along with the reader leaving open ended possibilities. *Life is leaving everything we have and craving for things which we do not have....* these lines from Adiga's much acclaimed *Mohana Murali* (The flute of Mohana) describe his tryst with life and God. Like most modern poets, Adiga's preoccupation is to strive harder than his predecessors as he vented out, *"The mind is tired of repeating what others have said and written; /my life is a veritable hell till it attains the originality of describing colourfully in my own words"* (Gopalkrishna Adiga, Samagra Kavya: 3)

Brimming with realistic optimism even in his last collections, K.S.Na appreciated any form of creation- man, god, nature and poetry. *Kavana Huttuva Samaya* (The Time of a Poem's Birth), *Kavite Mattu Baduku* (Poetry and Life) are some of his poems on poetic process. The poet's humble assertion of his innate belief in his poetry is stated in *Nanna Kavithe* (My Poetry) from his debut collection *Mysura Mallige: I am mortal; only my song will remain/ I am not infected by the desire of fame; / far behind I, the shepherd, will stay; / the herd of cows and calves will move, / crossing the valley ahead of the golden dust.* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 58.) If Adiga's *Bhuta* (Past/Ghost) cried- *Secret embryos of the demon past haunt/ in the stale air of the dark in the old buried well.* (Selected Poems of Gopalkrishna Adiga, trs Nadig Sumatheendra: 29) K.S.Na's *Bhuta Kannadi* (Ghost Mirror/Magnifying Glass) questions: *What will not befall you if all that you wish to forget attacks you knocking on the door again?* (Narasimhaswamy, MalligeyaMaale: 365)

## CONCLUSION

As a reminder of those good old days where in writers despite their differences still respected each other we find these warm words expressed by Adiga in a commemorative book on K. S. Na titled *Chandana*, *"Agony, apprehensions, humiliation, financial difficulties, the mind's turmoil and distress- all these appear to be an integral part of an excellent poet. Sri. K.S. Narasimhaswamy seems to have been more than blessed in this matter. Yet, enduring pain he went on to pen beautiful songs on life."* (Chandana: 340) And at the time of Adiga's death on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 1994, the eighty year old K.S.Na was one of the first to console the bereaved family and mourn a contemporary poet who in many ways inspired him to strive better.

Yet, many K.S.Na admirers cannot forgive Adiga's parody, *Pushpakaviya Paraaku* (The Regality of the Floral Poet) which begins with *'There was a Keats, here's a swan poet'*, satirizing that the door of K.S.Na's poetry may be opened by a touch which K.S.Na's response is: *I'm not Keats nor the dream of swans. My poetry is the life of stonecutters.* (Bride Comes Home: 180) Some critics like Prof.C.N.Ramachandran appreciate K.S.Na's heroic stand to stick to his gentle convictions by subjecting it to the trials of life's



hardships. That Adiga haunted K.S. Nais obvious in the sonnet *Adiga's Remark* written years after Adiga's demise:

*Gopala Krishna Adiga said once that my experience itself is tenuous: / I admit. How can my voice be Adiga's / when each one's talent is his own, let it be. / His voice is the style of Yakshagana; / mine is as if two friends sit in the cool evening / without raising their voice. / Each one's choice of experience is his wish. / When one's experience is one's deity it is courtesy to move on carrying it. / Let there not be sarcasm in poetic ebullience; / let's not tread a crooked path. / Life is more complex than poetry. / This world is beyond our comprehension; / here, though clad one is nude, though fed, hungry.* (Narasimhaswamy, Malligeya Maale: 581)

Government's K. S. Narasimhaswamy Trust which promotes the popular people's poet.

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