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## **LANGUAGE NEWS THIS MONTH -- REGIONAL DIALECTS AND INDIAN LITERATURE**

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Dr. Giraddi Govindaraj, a renowned writer and critic of Kannada literature, raised an important issue when he called upon the new entrants to the field of Kannada creative literature not to neglect the regional dialects of Kannada as medium of expression. The use of the regional dialects in creative literature such as short story, novel, drama and poetry, he argued, gives an authenticity to the creative work, as he put it. He was speaking in Belgaum to an audience of Kannada writers.

The role of the regional and social dialects of an Indian language in creative literary works is often restricted to the purposes of characterization and the description of the setting. This is a tradition that dates back to a few thousand years in Indian literature. When a novel is written wholly using a regional or social dialect, people, not acquainted with the regional or social dialect, have difficulty in fully comprehending and enjoying the literary piece.

Traditional Indian literature often chose standard-ization not only in content and theme but also in language use. On the other hand, "new" literature often seems to prefer experimentation, novelty, and reality. Can reality be created using the standard, often written, literature? Should a realistic description necessarily be presented in the regional and social dialects only?

With growing literacy, universal education, and standardized monthly and weekly magazines that bring out interesting or popular stories week after week, or month after month, the sharp dialectal differences relating to region and social strata seem to be losing their edge in day to day communication. No doubt the differences in accent and lexical choice will continue to be there. And these differences will mark the identity of the speakers who use them in their communication.

Another important point made by Dr. Govindaraj was that all the dialects of a language are of equal worth. The variety of spoken Kannada in Belgaum or the variety of spoken Kannada in Raichur (I think that he rightly chose these two varieties, because the former is adjacent to Marathi, and the latter to Telugu) was of equal worth and quality compared to the varieties of Kannada spoken in Mysore or Bangalore. He argued that the new entrants to the field of literature from the Belgaum or Raichur region should not think that their dialects are non-standard varieties and, on this account, do not deserve to be used as the medium of expression in their writings.

While the students of linguistics would agree to this position of Dr. Govindaraj, the reality of life is such that the so-called standard written dialect of Kannada, for that

matter, the standard written dialect of any major Indian language, is considered to be "superior" in some sense to the regional and social dialects of any one particular group. Standard dialects evolve on their own based on social and other factors in operation among the people who speak a language. The elevation of a dialect to the positions of the standard is a long process.

Dr. Govindaraj encouraged the users of these dialects not to feel any inferiority complex about their own dialects and exhorted them to use their dialects in their writing. He declared himself to be against those who wish to develop common Kannada that would be understood and accepted by all the regions of Karnataka. Such common Kannada, he said, would be lifeless and appreciated by none.

The forces of standardization are much stronger now than ever in all the Indian languages. Dr. Govindaraj's argument is understandable, but it appears that the forces of standardization will succeed. Communication needs, convenience, and economy of effort along with the spread of education will help the standardization process move forward faster than we can imagine now.