

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

U. R. ANANTHAMURTHY

Born 1932 Melige, Mysore
Died 2014 Bangalore, Karnataka

Life

U R Ananthamurthy was born into a conservative Brahmin family in a small village in what was then the Princely State of Mysore. Although his grandfather was a priest, he lived with a woman of another caste, which was then (and remains today) controversial and may have inspired his novel *Samskara*. His father was a well-educated man, who supported Gandhi's campaign, and Ananthamurthy himself participated in some Gandhian campaign events as a young boy. These are the early indications of social protest and political awareness that would later dominate Ananthamurthy's life. He was educated, however, in a very traditional manner, first at a special Sanskrit school in his village. He went on to earn a BA and an MA at Mysore University, where he also taught English for a few years. He met his future wife, Esther, in 1954 and they were married two years later, and then had two children. Marrying a non-Brahmin and a non-Hindu (Esther was a Christian) was a daring act, though it followed in the footsteps of his grandfather. His life underwent a major change when he went to England on a Commonwealth scholarship and received his doctorate from the University of Birmingham in 1966, having written his dissertation on 'Politics and Fiction in the 1930s.' A year earlier, in 1965, he published his first novel (*Samskara*, 1965), which brought him immediate fame in the world of Kannada literature. It was then translated into many Indian languages, and into English in 1978. He published other novels (though none reached the audience that his first one did), several collections of short stories and pieces of literary criticism, all of which made a major contribution to the 'navya' or new literary movement in the early decades after Independence.

When Ananthamurthy returned to India after studying in Birmingham, he renewed his association with Mysore University, where he became professor of English in 1970. He also served as Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam, Kerala from 1987 to 1991 and became chairman of the National Book Trust India in 1992. In 1993 he was elected as the president of Sahitya Academy, India's literary academy. In 2012, he was appointed the first Chancellor of Central University of Karnataka. He also ran for a seat in the Karnataka state assembly in 2004 but failed to win. Throughout his life, he courted controversy through his writing and his personal life. He was an outspoken critic of the right-wing BJP party and often brought up uncomfortable truths about Hinduism and Indian history. His comments produced a virulent public campaign by some groups against him, and at times he was given police protection.

Achievements

U R Ananthamurthy, who is widely recognised as the greatest Kannada writer of the twentieth century, received many awards, mainly in the state of Karnataka and India. In 1984, he received the Rajyotsava Award in Bangalore; in 1994, the Jnanpith Award for literature in New Delhi; in 1998, the Padma Bhushan from the Indian government; in 2004, he was awarded a fellowship by the Sahitya Akademi; in 2012, he received a special award for literary achievement by the University of Calcutta; and in 2013, he was nominated for the Man Booker International Prize.

List of works

Novels

Samskara/ Rite for a Dead Man (1965)
Bharathipura/ India (1973)
Avasthe/ Estate (1978)
Bhava / Becoming (1994)

Divya / Divine (1998)

Short story collection

Stallion of the Sun and Other Stories (1999)