

**Classic Poetry Series**

**D. R. Bendre**  
**- poems -**

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## D. R. Bendre(31 January 1896 - 21 October 1981)

Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre (Kannada:?????????? ?????????? ?????????? ; Marathi: ??????????? ?????????? ??????????) was amongst the most famous of Kannada poets of the Navodaya Period. Praised as varakavi, literally 'gifted poet', he was the second person among eight recipients of Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred in India. He wrote under the pen-name of Ambikatanayadatta ("Datta, Child of Ambika"). He also held the title Karnataka kula Thilaka ("The light of the Kannada Nation") conferred by Udupi Adamaru Math. He was conferred Padma Shri by Government of India.

### <b> Early Life and Education</b>

He was born on into a Madhwa Brahmin family at Dharwad in Karnataka. His Grand father was a Dasagranthi (Master of ten volumes of sacred lore) and scholar in Sanskrit classical literature. Dattatreya's father was also a Sanskrit scholar who died when Dattatreya was only 12 years old. Dattatreya later adopted the pen-name of Ambikatanayadatta which literally means Datta, son of Ambika after his mother who ran a Khanavali or eatery to feed the family. Bendre completed his primary and high school education in Dharwad with his uncle's help and completed his matriculation in 1913. He joined the Fergusson College, Pune for his higher education. After obtaining his degree Bendre returned to Dharwad and started teaching at Victoria high school. He married Laxmibai from Ranebennur in 1919. He obtained his Master of Arts degree in 1935.

### <b>Career </b>

Starting his career as a teacher at Victoria high school in Dharwad, he worked as a professor of Kannada in D.A.V. College Solapur between 1944 and 1956. In 1956 he was appointed an advisor for All India Radio's Dharwad station.

### <b>Later Life</b>

Bendre formed the Geleyara Gumpu (Group of Friends) in 1922. Mainly intended as a peer group for the study of culture and literature, this friends' circle drew poets, writers and intellectuals from different parts of Karnataka including Ananda Kanda, Sham. Ba. Joshi, Siddavanahalli Krishna Sharma, Enke, , Krishnakumar Kallur, V. K. Gokak and R. S. Mugali. In 1926 Bendre started the cultural movement Nada-habba, a celebration of the land and its culture which is still prevalent in Karnataka. This festival is celebrated during the navaratri. In 1932 Bendre was sentenced to imprisonment for writing Nara Bali (Human

Sacrifice), which was then branded seditious. He was under house arrest in Mugad village. Bendre's two sons Panduranga and Vamana and daughter Mangala were the only three surviving children among nine who were born. In 1943 he presided over the 27th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana held at Shimoga. He went on to become a fellow of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat. In 1972 the Government of Karnataka produced a documentary on his life.

### **<b> Works and Message</b>**

Bendre started off with simple and earthly romantic poetry, often using the "spoken" language. His later works dig deeper into social and philosophical matters. G. S. Amur, a leading critic in Kannada, says "Bendre believed in the value of an integrated personality but loved to project himself as a threefold being: Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, the biological self, the dehi; Professor Bendre, the thinking self; and Ambikatanayadatta, the creative self. The three selves were conceived as mutually supporting selves, as the imagery Bendre used to concretise this idea clearly suggests. He spoke of Ambikatanayadatta and Professor Bendre as closely related to each other as the banks of a river or the belly and the back. One could not exist without the other."

Bendre has been hailed as the father figure of modern Kannada poetry. His poems are linked to the Kannada poetic tradition through their use of folklore, the vachanas and the kirthanas. Apart from native prosodic forms, Bendre has also employed native imagery, folk beliefs, references to Indian mythology and the language spoken by common people. Nada Lila (The Play of Sounds) is perhaps the most remarkable of his poetry collections.. All the features of Navodaya poetry like patriotism, the reformatory zeal, critical attitude, Indian culture, consolidation of traditional strength, mystical faith and assertion of a poet's individuality can be found in this collection of poems.

Bendre used diverse techniques for spiritual lyrics, classical style for sonnets and traditional as well as colloquial idiom for pastoral and folk lyrics. Symbolism is characteristic of his poetry. His poem Patargitti (Butterfly) sung as a nursery rhyme speaks of colors of temptation. Another one Mudalmaneya (Morning) becomes symbolic of all pervading peace or, the poet's yearning for it. In the Kuniyonu bara (Dance Eternal) all diverse currents of thought meet in on great confluence. Apparently, all Bendre's poems could be set to music and abound in alliteration; but there was always a hidden layer of meaning which only a trained poetic mind could decipher.

As a person, Bendre was friendly, suave and sociable. He mixed with intellectuals and illiterate villagers on equal terms. He loved and interpreted life in different

colors.

Towards the end of his life Bendre was deeply absorbed in numbers. This was not a new interest for him but now it became a central concern. When Dom Moraes visited him during his exploration of Karnataka in 1976, he found him totally immersed in numbers. In his books Vishvadhharanasutra and A Theory of Immortality Bendre made ambitious attempts to intuit all knowledge into numbers.

**<b> Awards and honors</b>**

Jnanpith Award - 1974 (For the collection of poems Naaku Tanti)

Padma Shri - 1968

Sahitya Academy award - 1958

Kelkar prize - 1965

Fellowship of Sahitya Academy - 1968

And many more.

# Dawan

The Eastern house shone with pearl-water  
Gilded smoothly all over:  
Flooding through the open doors  
Light drenched the entire earth.

The liquid diamond rushed through the fountain  
Rushed of it's own accord;  
The sweet-scented buds opened up,  
Opened of their own accord.

On the leaves, inside the flowers, appeared  
Drops of amrita, amrita drops.  
Who brought them here from above the sky,  
Who put them here, now?

They placed the petal brush  
In the hands of the cool breeze  
And smeared with scented pollen,  
The bees are let loose in the sky.

From the throats of trees and bushes  
Rose the songs of birds,  
And the wild earth was transformed  
In an instant, into the land of Gandharvas.

The eye saw, the tongue tasted,  
This my body experienced touch,  
The ear heard, the nose smelt,  
My mind, temple of God, forgot itself in ecstasy.

Immeasurable is space, beyond the grasp of the mind,  
The colour, unseen, is hidden from the eye,  
Only the rasa of peace bodies forth in love,  
This, my brother, is no mere dawn.

(Translated by G.S. Amur)

D. R. Bendre

# Hakki Harutide Nodidira?

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# Love Is Our Life

Me, a poor girl, and he, a poor fella,  
Love is our life  
Is love that comes in handy  
On the road of joy n' strife

Be he near or be he far,  
The apple of mine eyes is he!  
I melt when I see his darling face,  
He's my precious jewelry!

Winter days or summer,  
His body is warm to touch,  
When I have him near me  
I wear \*him\* like robes n' such

The gifts he has bestowed on me  
Are secrets we two share:  
Crimson roses for my cheeks,  
And my lips, a sweet éclair!

What more could I ask for?  
He's given me all I need.  
His gift of life grows in my womb,  
To ask for more is greed!

(Translated by C.P. Ravikumar)

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