

CENTENARIAN LEXICOGRAPHER G VENKATASUBBAIAH NO MORE



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RENOWNED lexicographer Professor Ganjam Venkatasubbaiah, fondly known as Prof GV, died at a private hospital in Bengaluru early on Monday. He was 107. Prof GV had been a strong opponent of Hindi imposition, which, according to him, would affect every south Indian language.

A full sixty years of his life went into compiling eight volumes of the Kannada dictionary, running into 10,000 pages, which is the biggest for any Indian language dictionary. While the first volume was finally printed in 1970, the eighth and final volume appeared in 1995.

During his college days, when he was pursuing MA in Kannada, Venkatasubbaiah was inspired by noted poet and writer B M Srikantaiah who had visited as an examiner for Prof GV's viva-voce examination. "After asking questions for more than one-and-a-half hours, BM Sri had said Kannada should be taken to a different level by young people like me. This was in the late 1930s. This stayed with me and I always wanted to do something for the language I loved," Prof GV had told The New Indian Express in an earlier interview.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, condoled the death in a tweet, stating, "The demise of Professor G Venkatasubbaiah has left a huge void in Kannada literature. He was a prolific writer and thinker who made many efforts to popularise Kannada. He was passionate about his work and inspired many youngsters. Condolences to his family and admirers."

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and other ministers too express their grief. Venkatasubbaiah's last rites were conducted with full state honours.

Born on August 23, 1913, Prof GV hailed from Mudagandur village in Mandya district. His grandfather Narasimha Jois was a Sanskrit scholar and his father Ganjam Thimmannaiah was a Kannada and Sanskrit scholar. Venkatasubbaiah, who had a Master's degree in Kannada was a writer, grammarian, editor, lexicographer, and critic. He also taught at Mysuru, Bengaluru and Davanagere.

In 1943, when a committee was formed under the chairmanship of A R Krishnamurthy to compile a Kannada dictionary, Prof GV was among the scholars who would pick words from various Kannada literary works, right from Pampa to K V Puttappa. After the first volume of the dictionary was published, GV was assigned to take it forward.

From traditional to the new-era Kannada, Prof GV successfully documented the richness of the language. He was awarded the prestigious Padma Shri, the Pampa award and also the Kendra Sahitya Akademi's literary honour, 'Basha Sanman', for south zone.

He had presided over the 77th Akhila Bharata Kannada Sahitya Sammelana held in Bengaluru in 2011. He had earlier pointed out that many new words have emerged in Kannada and this is going to be a constant change. If the government decides, then there is a scope for another volume of the Kannada dictionary, he had said.

WHEN GV MET THE MAHATMA

Tumakuru: Lexicographer G Venkatasubbaiah, who passed away on Monday, had fond memories of Madhugiri, where he studied high school and also got an opportunity to meet Mahatma Gandhi in 1927. "Gandhi was in Madhugiri for a fund-raiser organised by Congressman Ranga Iyengar. The Mahatma was astonished by the town's generosity, as people, especially women, donated their personal ornaments," GV, as he was popularly known, had shared this anecdote with reporters some years ago. "After a public event, I met Gandhiji at the Travellers' Bungalow as I was assigned the task of taking care of his necessities. Babu handed over a khadi garland to me and asked me to keep it on the table. Gandhiji's touch at that moment remained in my memory forever," he had added. GV's father Ganjam Thimmannaiah was the Kannada pundit at the school, where Infosys founder N R Narayan Murthy too studied.