

## FRAGMENTATION, IRONY AND METAFICTION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY KANNADA TEXTS- A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Postmodernism in contemporary Kannada literature refers to literary trends that challenge traditional narratives, question authority and experiment with new forms of storytelling. Emerging mainly from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these trends reflect changing social realities such as globalization, urbanization, identity politics and cultural fragmentation. Unlike earlier movements like Navodaya (romantic-nationalist) and Navya (modernist and existentialist), postmodern Kannada literature emphasizes plurality, irony and the breakdown of grand narratives.

**Keywords:** navya, navodaya, social, diverse cultural and political identities

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism in Kannada literature, often referred to as the **Navyottara** (Post-Navya) phase, emerged in the early 1970s as a powerful reaction against the perceived limitations of the modernist **Navya** movement. While Navya writing was marked by existentialism, individual disillusionment, and a high-brow intellectualism heavily influenced by Western thinkers, it was often criticized for being detached from the ground realities of rural and marginalized communities in Karnataka. The background of postmodernism in Kannada is thus rooted in a shift from the "inward-looking" individual to "outward-looking" social and political engagement.

### 2. THE SHIFT FROM NAVYA TO NAVYOTTARA

The transition was catalyzed by a growing dissatisfaction among writers who felt that the complex metaphors of the Navya period failed to address the systemic inequalities of the Indian nation-state. Key figures like **Poornachandra Tejaswi** and **Devanur Mahadeva** led this departure by introducing a more socially responsible and accessible form of narrative. Tejaswi's works, such as *Karvalo* and *Chidambara Rahasya*, broke away from modernist angst to explore the intricate relationship between man and nature using a blend of realism and philosophical inquiry. This era saw the rise of the prose form as the dominant literary vehicle, superseding the poetry-centric focus of earlier decades.

### 3. THE DALIT AND BANDAYA MOVEMENTS

The most defining pillar of postmodern Kannada literature is the **Dalit** and **Bandaya** (Protest) movements that gained momentum in the 1970s. Triggered by socio-political events like the "Boosa" incident—where a minister's description of Kannada literature as "cattle feed" sparked a massive rethink of literary values—marginalized voices began to demand an autonomous space.

**3.1 Dalit Literature:** Guided by the ideologies of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Basavanna-led Vachana tradition, writers like Siddalingaiah and Devanur Mahadeva introduced the "first-person" experience of caste-based oppression. Their writing abandoned standardized

"Brahminic" Kannada in favor of regional dialects and raw, colloquial language, effectively "democratizing" the literary landscape.

**3.2 Bandaya Movement:** Established in 1979, the **Bandaya Sahitya Sanghatane** sought to use literature as a tool for radical social change. It drew inspiration from Marxist ideas and focused on the struggles of the landless, the laboring classes, and the socially deprived.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND EVOLUTION

Postmodernism in Kannada is characterized by a "multi-centered" approach rather than a single unified framework. Contemporary narratives often grapple with:

- **Fragmentation and Metafiction:** Questioning the possibility of a "single truth" and using self-reflexive storytelling techniques.
- **Magical Realism:** Infusing local myths and folklore into modern narratives, a trend seen in the works of **Shivaram Karanth** and **Chandrashekhara Kambar**.
- **Globalization and Identity:** Post-1990 narratives have increasingly focused on the impacts of globalization, displacement, and the tension between vernacular modernity and global culture.
- **Feminist Voices:** The **Streevaadi** genre emerged as an integral part of this period, bringing gender-specific experiences to the forefront of literary discourse.

Ultimately, postmodernism transformed Kannada literature from a pursuit of elite aesthetic values into a vibrant, inclusive forum for diverse cultural and political identities

### 4. MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERN KANNADA LITERATURE

Postmodernism in Kannada literature (often called **Navyottara**) isn't a single style but a "multi-centered" explosion of voices. It moved away from the intellectual angst of the previous *Navya* (Modernist) period to embrace social reality, local dialects, and political protest. Here are the major characteristics of this movement:

#### 4.1 Shift from the Individual to the Collective

While Modernism focused on the "alienated individual" and their internal psychological struggles, Postmodernism shifted the lens toward social movements. It gave birth to the Dalit (oppressed castes) and Bandaya (protest) movements, prioritizing the struggles of the community over the dilemmas of the elite intellectual.

#### 4.2 Linguistic Democratization

One of the most striking features is the rejection of "Standard" or "Brahminic" Kannada. Postmodern writers introduced regional dialects (like Kundapura, Dharwad, or Chamarajanagar Kannada) into mainstream literature. This made the language "earthy" and inclusive, proving that literary merit isn't tied to formal grammar.

#### 4.3 Plurality of Truths (Decentralization)

Postmodernism rejects the idea of one "Grand Narrative" or a single historical truth. Instead, it celebrates fragmentation. In the works of writers like Devanur Mahadeva or Poornachandra Tejaswi, stories often have multiple perspectives, leaving the conclusion open-ended rather than offering a moral or a final "truth."

#### 4.4 Use of Folk and Myth (Magical Realism)

Instead of looking toward Western existentialism (Sartre or Camus), postmodern Kannada writers looked back at their own roots, folklore, and local myths. Writers like Chandrashekhar Kambar used folk motifs and oral traditions to critique modern corruption and globalization, creating a unique "Desi" (native) brand of magical realism.

#### 4.5 Metafiction and Intertextuality

Many contemporary Kannada novels are self-reflexive—meaning the story often comments on the act of writing itself. There is also heavy intertextuality, where modern stories reference ancient *Vachanas* or *Puranas* but give them a radical, contemporary twist to challenge traditional authority.

#### 4.6 Subaltern and Feminist Perspectives

The rise of Streevaadi (Feminist) literature brought gender-specific experiences to the forefront. Writers began dismantling the patriarchal structures inherent in earlier literature, focusing on the domestic, the body, and the specific socio-economic struggles of women in Karnataka.

#### 4.7 Critique of Globalization

Post-1990s Kannada literature frequently grapples with the "New Economic Policy." It explores the loss of land, the displacement of farmers, and the tension between the "Global City" (like Bengaluru) and the "Vanishing Village."

### 5. MAJOR WRITERS ASSOCIATE WITH POSTMODERN TRENDS

The postmodern period in Kannada literature, known as the **Navyottara** (Post-Modern) era, is defined by writers who moved away from the intellectual isolation of modernism (*Navya*) toward a more socially responsible and grounded narrative style.

#### 5.1 THE PIONEERS

These two authors are widely considered the architects of the postmodern turn in Kannada:

(i). **K.P. Poornachandra Tejaswi:** Known for breaking from modernist angst to focus on nature, ecology, and the lives of common people. His works like "**Karvalo**" and "**Chidambara Rahasya**" blend science, realism, and a critique of bureaucracy.

(ii). **Devanur Mahadeva:** A foundational figure who integrated Dalit consciousness with high literary art. His novel "**Kusumabale**" is celebrated for its unique use of rural dialects and its exploration of the complex, mystical, and harsh realities of Dalit life.

#### 5.2 MAJOR CONTEMPORARY & TRANSITIONAL WRITERS

Many writers who began in the modernist *Navya* tradition transitioned into postmodern themes, focusing on social rebellion, identity, and the "subaltern" voice.

- a. **P. Lankesh:** A multi-faceted writer and journalist who critiqued social systems through sharp prose. His works, such as the novel "**Mussanjeya Katha Prasanga**", reflect the transition into more grounded, socially aware storytelling.
- b. **Chandrashekhar Kambar:** Known for using folk myths and oral traditions to critique modernity and globalization. His works like "**Shikara Soorya**" are prime examples of the postmodern use of "nativism".

- c. **U.R. Ananthamurthy:** Though primarily a modernist, his later works and critical essays deeply influenced the postmodern discourse on identity and cultural conflict.
- d. **Vaidehi:** One of the most prominent women writers who explores the internal worlds of women and small-town life with a quietly subversive postmodern lens.
- e. **Siddalingaiah:** A revolutionary poet and a key figure in the Dalit movement whose autobiography, "Ooru Keri", and poetry brought the lived experience of the marginalized into mainstream literary space.

### 5.3 OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTORS

- ❖ **Baraguru Ramachandrappa:** A leading voice in the Bandaya (Protest) movement who uses literature as a tool for political and social awakening.
- ❖ **H.S. Shivaprakash:** A poet and playwright known for recontextualizing religious and mystical traditions for contemporary society.
- ❖ **Kum. Veerabhadrappe:** Notable for his realistic and often raw portrayal of rural life and class struggles in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.
- ❖ **Sara Aboobacker:** Focused on the specific socio-cultural struggles of Muslim women in coastal Karnataka.

## 6. THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY POSTMODERN KANNADA LITERATURE

Contemporary postmodern Kannada literature (the **Navyottara** phase) is defined by its shift from the "universal" existentialism of the previous era to "particular" social and cultural realities. These themes often overlap, reflecting a fragmented and complex society.

**6.1 The Subaltern and Caste Consciousness:** The most dominant theme is the emergence of the Dalit voice. Unlike earlier literature that viewed caste from the outside, postmodern writers like Devanur Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah write from within the experience.

- The struggle against "Manuvada" (traditional caste hierarchy), the reclamation of dignity, and the documentation of oral histories that were previously ignored by mainstream literature.

**6.2 Nativism (Desivada) vs. Globalization:** A major postmodern theme is the conflict between local roots and global influences. Writers like P. Lankesh and K.P. Poornachandra Tejaswi explored how globalization erodes local cultures, languages, and ecosystems.

- The "vanishing village," the loss of agricultural traditions, and the tension between "English-medium" global aspirations and "Kannada-medium" local identities.

**6.3 Ecological Consciousness:** Led by Tejaswi, this theme moves away from human-centric storytelling. It treats nature, animals, and the environment as active characters rather than just backgrounds.

- The relationship between humans and the forest, the impact of modernization on biodiversity, and the philosophical mysteries of the natural world (as seen in *Karvalo*).

**6.4 Feminist Subjectivity (Streevaadi):** Postmodern Kannada literature saw a surge in women's writing that moved beyond the "sufferer" trope. Writers like **Vaidehi**, **Sara Aboobacker**, and **B.T. Lalitha Naik** deconstruct patriarchal structures in domestic and public spaces.

- Female desire, the politics of the kitchen, reproductive rights, and the specific struggles of women within minority or rural communities.

**6.5 Hybridity and Magical Realism:** Postmodernists often blur the lines between reality, myth, and folklore. **Chandrashekhara Kambar** is a pioneer here, using folk motifs to critique modern political corruption.

- Using "irrational" folk logic to explain "rational" modern problems, creating a hybrid narrative that feels both ancient and contemporary.

**6.6 Linguistic Pluralism:** Language itself is a theme. Postmodern writers intentionally use **dialects** (Havyaka, Kundapura, North Karnataka) to challenge the dominance of "Standard Kannada."

- Reclaiming the "mother tongue" in its rawest form and using language as a tool of cultural resistance.

**6.7 Metafiction and Historical Revisionism:** Many contemporary works question how history is written. They often feature narrators who are unsure of their own stories or authors who "interrupt" the narrative to discuss the act of writing.

- Retelling myths (like the Ramayana or Mahabharata) from the perspective of the "villains" or the marginalized to provide a "counter-history."

## 7. INFLUENCE OF GLOBAL POSTMODERNISM

Global postmodernism influenced contemporary Kannada literature by introducing a "rare blending" of Western postmodern tenets with local modernist traditions, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. This global shift toward **pluralism and multiplicity** encouraged Kannada writers to move away from "Grand Narratives" and embrace multiple narrative patterns that deconstruct fixed truths. Techniques such as **metafiction, intertextuality, and magical realism** became prominent as authors like Poornachandra Tejaswi and Devanur Mahadeva explored the effects of modernism and globalization on the rural fabric of India. Furthermore, the global postmodern focus on **marginalized and subaltern identities** directly resonated with the emergence of the Dalit and Bandaya movements in Karnataka, empowering writers to use "unfamiliar" idioms and regional dialects to articulate social rage and protest. This interaction ultimately allowed Kannada literature to transcend colonial standards and develop its own "vernacular modernity".

## 8. CONCLUSION

Modern Kannada literature begins with the arrival of English language through colonial administration. This literature is called Navodaya Sahitya. Navodaya literally means a new birth. This indeed was the reincarnation of Kannada literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, after a period of dormancy in the face of the British occupation of India. This period saw greats like B.M. Srikanthiah, K.V. Puttappa, popularly known as Kuvempu, D.R. Bendre, Masti Venkatesh Ayyangar, P.T. Narasimhachar, K.S. Narasimha Swamy, Shivaram Karanth, A.N. Krishna Rao, Basavaraja Kattimani, Niranjana, Betgeri Krishnasharma and many others. These writers were highly influenced by western literature, but recreated the west in the Kannada context. It was Srikanthiah who started this movement of sorts with his translation of a few critically acclaimed English poems of the Romantic period. Many educated Kannadigas, especially those who were in the teaching profession, realized that they needed to express themselves in their mother tongue and started writing in Kannada. Kuvempu is a case in point, who was convinced by his professor (of British origin) that he should write in his mother tongue. Kuvempu went on to become a Rashtrakavi (national

poet). His love of nature, realization of the greatness of man's spirit and the vision to see the blend of nature and God made him more than Kannada's Wordsworth.

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