

## THE NEW WAVE IN KANNADA CINEMA; FROM 2006 TO PRESENT DAY

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**ABSTRACT:** Kannada cinema, also known as Chandanavana or Sandalwood, is the Indian film industry based in the state of Karnataka where motion pictures are produced in the Kannada language. As of 2019, the Kannada film industry based in the city of Bengaluru produces more than 200 films each year. Kannada films are released in more than 1250 single screen and multiplex theaters in Karnataka and most of them are also released across the country and foreign countries also.

A new wave in Kannada cinema is happening on screen which contrasts conventional film style of Karnataka. A visible layer of difference between urban and rural identity and new perspectives of nationhood is being seen in Kannada cinema. The formulas of films are shifting and it can see from the presentation of the character in the marketing of the film. This paper tries to understand the characteristics and outline the Kannada new generation (new wave) cinema.

**Keywords:** Kannada cinema, new wave, culture, sandalwood

### Introduction

Karnataka and kannada cinema are unified in many ways and its relation is omnipresent. The gap between the culture of karnataka and that of kannada film going audience are blurred for the ages. Audience, more appropriately fans of kannada cinema actors and actress perceive actor and actress as god and goddess; create fan associations as their token of love. "They not only love, but worship" (Raman, 2012). The kannada audience influenced cinema majorly by the actors and their glory. Films which highlight actors as "superheroes" are mainly commercial and laid the conventional basis for kannada cinema for long decades. The image of the hero is not restricted within the screen, but also off screen. They become part of their culture and identity. This is a trend that has been happening for a very long time in kannada Cinema (Changing Trends - Is kannada cinema coming of age, 2008).

With strong conventional genres get flourishes, there are also many experimental filmmakers in each times who put their lens towards new light a part of customary way. Madhu Daithota of The Times of

India noted that “young Kannada directors are defying tried-and tested formulas of filmmaking to tell stories the way they need to be told” (2009) and these “films are successful in the box office too” as reported by The Times of India (2010). The new wave films are not totally avoiding the conventional style, but accumulating up social reality in the characters and the situation of the film. Neither on the other hand the new experimental films cannot call as art films nor is it difficult to compare new wave bought by Satyajit Ray and carried over by his successors. This (Kannada) new genre of films, which began with Mungaru Male in 2006, is not what can be classified as ‘art house’ productions. “They have every masala (commercial) ingredient of a formulaic film, but what they also have is a solid storyline, a large dose of realism and actors who are almost unknown” (Ramnath, 2011). The visual language of these films seems to be real, the cultural and social subtexts are more hinted, which take the audience closer to the character, the violence, romance, rituals takes place high in thematically and presented in raw. “The resultant mix has not only struck a chord with directors and actors, but worked wonders at the box office and, hence, with producers as well” (Ramnath, 2011). The older kannada films presented cultural and social context of Karnataka and played a major role in bringing out the feeling oneness among Kannadigas. There is no irony when we witness political leaders today at Karnataka was or are part of active Kannada cinema. If the main ideas of conventional kannada cinema are to promote a message to society for purpose to impress them, what is the threat of emerging new wave Kannada cinema scenario? The aim of this paper is to identify the features of kannada new wave (generation) films and to detail the process of change happening in Kannada cinema.

## **A NEW WAVE?**

A new wave in kannada cinema is happening on screen which contrasts conventional film style of Karnataka. A visible layer of difference between urban and rural identity and new perspectives of nationhood is being seen in kannada cinema. “The formulas of films are changing” (Arun, 2010) and it can see from the presentation of the character in the marketing of the film. karnataka films – Sandalwood which itself based on a town Gandhinagar in Bengaluru city produced various films which aimed on angry young man, love and action genres which focused on “filmic” features which are stereotyped. The audience liked to see out of life actions from their actors and production house bagged good collection. Definitely, by the influence of international realistic films waves of realism punched into sandalwood – here the camera travels away from the city. It finds its frames and angles from villages where real life is pictured. For instance we had the film ‘Thithi’ Directed by Raam Reddy (2016) which was a box office success. The film depicted three generations and all actors in

the film were natives of Mandya district in Karnataka. When the realistic approach out broke conventional formulas of Kannada commercial cinema, its concept of identity and nationhood also seems too changed or tend to change. The cinema played a vital role in shaping up political sphere and cultural identity which marked from the state of Karnataka to the world. (Humble Politician Nograj – 2017, Jagruthi - 2016). The new wave attempts from directors of Kannada films are unique in style and technology. But it is interesting to find out whether they transfer identity to screen or transform.

### **Kannada Cinema and Karnataka**

Bengaluru, the capital city of Karnataka has been a center for the film production in Kannada and other south Indian languages, in the recent times of Indian cinema. The Kannada industry has a deep heritage of filmic culture. Sandalwood has witnessed raise and falls of stars on screen and technicians off screen. The first film in Kannada was Sati Sulochana (Based on the character Sulocana from Ramayana) 1934, came just after 20 years of Indian first film Rajah Harischandra (1913). Both films were based on Hindu mythology. Drama and film were related to each other closely during that period. In keeping with the tradition of company drama, the talkies carried a large number of songs and placed less emphasis on dialogue. K. Moti Gokulsing; Wimal Dissanayake (2013) observed history of talking cinema to three phases. “(I) The puranic, mythological and folklore period (1931-1950), (ii) the melodramatic story period (1951-1975) and (iii) the partly realistic anti – sentimental stories period (1976-1990). The themes of conventional cinema are connected with politics” (Hardgrave 1973; Pandian 1992), its “escapist Utopian content” (Dickey 1993). Later on, “after entry of television the focus slightly shifted towards the middle classes of the nation” (Prasad 1998). This shift helped to carve realism and thus gesticulated ways for a new wave. As said above, “Kannada cinema has its roots in Kannada drama. Gubbi Veeranna was one of the prominent persons in this category. He played a crucial role in promoting the Kannada theatre. All his dramas are based on the well-known stories from the puranas. Gubbi Veeranna also started Karnataka Gubbi Productions which was a company to produce films. He first produced Sadarame in 1935, in which he acted in the lead role. He is also known for introducing many doyens and new talents to Kannada film industry.

### **Kannada Cinema: A cultural outlook**

As Kannada cinema developed it looked mostly the social orientated themes that were deeply rooted in the Kannada language and culture. “When the trend turned towards entertainment and commercial

kannada cinema offers a visual commentary in the form of popular culture entangled directly with the lives of the people so as to enable them to consume various information, belief systems, and cultural commodities and thus fulfil social and cultural needs” (Jesudoss, 2009). Kannada cinema enabled a wider dissemination of Karnataka’s culture and ideology. The cultural practices are still merged with cinema, for instance, the exuberant use of Kannada language. Kannada cinema helped to articulate the political and cultural ideology through various signs and symbols, such as Thali (the most valued and auspicious ornament worn by married women symbolizing the marital bond). As cultural narratives Kannada films reflect the sentiments and aspirations of the people of Karnataka. “The cinema industry takes special care to construct the social, cultural, and political values of society” (Jesudoss, 2009). However, Kannada cinema definitely helped in carving the changes in Karnataka’s culture and challenged traditions and religion sentiments. Films like Kiccha (2011), Election (2013), Matte Satyagraha (2014), Jagruthi (2016) altered kannada cinema industry itself and it also confide themes of social political. The other most notable films are Ulidavaru kandante depicting the culture of coastal Karnataka region, Raajahuli and kirataka shows mandya district nativity in their films.

Youngblood (2000) observes that “cinema technology shapes and records the objective and subjective realities of every person” (p. 128) to extend this idea in case Kannada cinema realism takes place within the life of an individual. Kannada often portrays cultural rituals of Karnataka. Cultural leaders enjoy high status in every culture and it is no difference in the case of Karnataka. Here we can see the same status is offered to the film stars. We can see darling names for film actors as a representation of the leader. Dr Rajkumar known as Natasarvabouma (The Emperor of Acting), Vishnuvardhan as Sahasa Simha (Brave lion), Ambareesh is known as Rebel Star all over the country, shivarajkumar as hatrick hero, crazy star, real star, power star, Challenging star etc it is still continuing for younger generation actors also. Young and upcoming superstars of sandalwood Yash, Sudeep and Darshan are adored by huge fan following in the country. But it is interesting question to watch how long they “leadership” will sustain in the circumstances of new wave films.

### **Kannada Films after Independence**

About 24 films were made in Kannada after independence. This period is known as the growth period of Kannada film industry. Mahathma Pictures, R.N.R Pictures, Pampa Pictures and other studios were established in the state. C.V.Raju’s Krishnaleela (1947), Kemparaj Urs and R.M.Veerabhadraiah’s, Geetanjali and Bhakta Ramadasa (1948), D.Irani’s „Bhaktakumbara (1949) and M.A.N.Iyengar’s, Sati Tulasi (1950) were the popular films during this period. Prominent film

personalities include-Kemparaja Urs, Marirao, Lalita, Usha, Rathnamala, Honnappa Bhagavatar, B.Raghavendrarao, Lakshmiibhai, Pandaribhai, Jayanti, Mahabalarao, M.S.Subbanna, B.Jayasri and others. There were limited number of Kannada films made by the leading producers and directors. These films had not achieved commendable success in the box office economics.

In 1950s, Kannada film industry had not gained any identity from the point of view of production of commercial and art films. B.M.S.Film Ltd and Brindavan Film Ltd companies were established in Karnataka during this period. The Kannada film industry was able to produce about 75 Kannada films during this period. „Shani Mahathme“ (1951), „Srinivasa Kalyana“ (1952), „Soubhagya Lakshmi“ (1953), „Gunasagari“ (1953), „Devakannika“ (1954), „Kanyadana“ (1954), „Adarsha Sati“ (1955), „Kalidasa“ (1955), „Bhagyodaya“, „Bhakta Vijaya“ and „Haridasa“ (1956), „School Master“, „Bhoo Kailasa“ and „Premada Putri“ (1958), „Jagajyoti Basaveswara“, „Dharma Vijaya“ and „Mahisasura Mardhini“ (1959), „Ranadhira Kantirava“, „Bhakta Kanakadasa“ and „Makkala Rajya“ (1960) were the prominent Kannada films of this decade. Kalyan Kumar, Udayakumar, Rajkumar, Mynavati, Leelavati, B.S.Ranga and others emerged as the popular film personalities during this time. The decade also witnessed the growth and development of Hunsur Krishnamurthy, R.Nagendrarao, H.L.N.Simha, N.Lakshminarayan, Aroor Pattabhi, K.Shankar Singh and Y.R.Swamy as prominent directors. Rao (1996:06) notes: “About 75 Kannada films were made in 1950s. A new generation of talented directors and film personalities were born during this period. A large number of moviegoers also cropped up over a period of time. This was the crucial stage of consolidation of Kannada film industry”. Another eminent film journalist Modaliyar (2009:04) writes: “Early Kannada films were based on folklore, mythologies and historical themes and subjects. About 125 Kannada films were made during 1954 – 1964 on the basis of technological developments and talented film personalities. The Kannada films had gained national recognition through qualitative contributions. Prominent award winning films such as „Nandi“, „Bedara Kannappa“, „Bhakta Vijaya“, „Bhakta Kanakadasa“, Mahakavi Kalidasa“, „Premada Putri“ and „School Master“ brought reputation to Kannada film industry. Rajkumar had acted in about 55 films as the lead actor and consolidated the cinematic foundations of Kannada film industry”. In 1960s, Kannada film industry was supported by the prominent writers and organizers like A.N.Krishnarao and Vatal Nagaraj. The progressive writers, Kannada activists and cultural personalities prevailed upon the government to develop Kannada film industry through infrastructural development, healthy film subsidy, and other progressive measures.

The prominent films of 1960s include – „Kittur Chennamma“ (1961), „Vijayanagara Veeraputra“ (1961), „Gali Gopura“ (1962), „Swarna Gowri“ (1962), „Kulavadhu“ (1963), „Veerakesari“ (1963), „Veera Sankalpa“ (1964), „Amarashilpi Jakanachari“ (1964), „Bettada Huli“ (1965), „Miss Leelavati“ (1965), „Toogudeepa“ (1966), „Emme Tammanna“ (1966), „Belli Moda“ (1967), „Gange Gowri“ (1967), „Jedara Bale“ (1968), „Mannina Maga“ (1968), „Mallamma Pavada“ (1969), „Uyyale“ (1969), „Gejje Puje“ (1970), „Karulina Kare“ (1970), „Samskara“ (1970) and so on. B.R.Panthulu, Hunsur Krishnamurthy, Geetapriya, Puttanna Kanagal, Pattabhi Ramareddi and N.Lakshmi Narayan enriched the foundations of Kannada films through award winning films. Rajkumar, Udaykumar, Kalyankumar, Rajesh, Toogudeepa Srinivas, Kalpana, Jayanti, Bharati and other stars made the decade of 1960s as the „Golden age of Kannada film industry“. The Government of Karnataka also promoted Kannada film industry through subsidy, awards, construction of studio and other measures.

Thespian actor Rajkumar played a pivotal role in the implementation of Gokak report. But for Raj’s active involvement in ‘Gokak movement’, Dr. Rajkumar led the Gokak movement and the state witnessed large scale arson and violence. Under the leadership of the actor, the movement gained lot of momentum and witnessed a drastic change in response from the general public in Karnataka state.

### **Kannada Film in the Age of Globalization**

There were remarkable economic changes and modifications during 1991 – 2000 in the entire world. The process of globalization had impacted all walks of human life including the film and other media. The policy of economic liberalization also paved the way for Foreign Direct Investment in the various sectors of economy including the media. The new media had also emerged as powerful participatory communication and development media. The prominent films of this decade include – Bhujangayyana Dashavatara (1991), Ramachari (1991), Chaitrada Premanjali (1992), Jeevana Chaitra (1992), Akasmika (1993), Ba Nalle Madhu Chandrake (1993), Prajashakti (1994), Hrudaya Raga (1994), Om (1995), Apareshan Anta (1995), Janumada Jodi (1996), Gulabi (1996), Amrutha Varshini (1997), Nagamandala (1997), Tayi Saheba (1998), Hoo Male (1998), Janumadata (1999), Upendra (1999), Sparsha (2000) and Munnudi (2000). In the age of globalization, about 58 Kannada films were made. A good number of films also received national and regional awards for cinematic excellence. Modaliyar (2009:04) states: “The Kannada film industry had shined during the age of globalization. Many talented and young personalities like Shivarajkumar, Ravichandran, Jaggesh,

Devraj, Ramesh, Kashinath, Kumar Bangarappa, Shashikumar, Ramkumar, Kumar Govind, Raghavendra Rajkumar, Sridhar, Vinodraj, Abhijit, Saikumar, Malasri, Sudharani, Shruti, Tara, Bhavya and others established identity for Kannada film industry through their talent and capacity. The film literature, music, photography, acting and other inputs also provided a creative touch to the film making in Kannada.

About 700 films were produced during this period. Kannada film industry gained national and international recognition during this period". Most of the Kannada films were commercial films based on the technique of re-make. The Government of Karnataka constituted an expert committee under the Chairmanship of V.N.Subbarao to look into the problems of Kannada film industry. The committee submitted the report in 1994 and suggested series of progressive measures for the development of Kannada film industry. The Karnataka Chamber of Film Commerce also fought against the culture of remake and dubbing. The Government of Karnataka also imposed 100% entertainment tax. The period witnessed the remarkable development of Kannada film industry. Ravichandran, Sridhar, Lokesh, Devraj, Vishnuvardhan, Prabhakar, Ambarish, Sunil, Ananthnag, Jaggesh, Ramesh, Saikumar, Kumar Bangarappa, Raghavendra Rajkumar, Shivarajkumar, Upendra, Shashikumar, Malasri, Khushbu, Vinayaprasad, Bhavya, Sudharani, Tara, Shruti, Supriya, Jayamala, Umasri and others contributed significantly toward the development of Kannada film industry.

### **Kannada Film Industry in the New Millennium**

In the new millennium, Kannada film industry has grown remarkably. About 80 to 100 films were made every year in Kannada. A new generation of talented film personalities has entered the Kannada film industry and provided a new dimension to Kannada film making. Prominent films of the new millennium include –Care of Footpath (2007), Mungaru Male (2006), Duniya (2007), Cheluvina Chittara (2007), Gaja (2008), Avva (2008), Yodha (2009), Ambari (2009), Rasarusi Kuvempu (2010), Magiya Kala (2011), Koormavatara (2011), Bharath Stores (2012), Tallana (2012), December-1 (2013), Harivu (2014), Shivam (2015) and Siddhartha (2015).

The contemporary Kannada film industry has grown quantitatively and qualitatively because of the entry of young, talented and energetic film personalities. They include – Ganesh, Vijay, Prem, Puneeth Rajkumar, Vijaya Raghavendra, Sudeep, Darshan, Ramya, Poojagandhi, Haripriya, Indrita Rai, Shubha Punja, Sharmila, Amulya, Radhika Pandith, Nidhisubbaiah, Daisy Bopaiah, Nikhita and others. A new generation of talented directors like Prakash, Nagendra Prasad, Rathnaja, Dinakar, M.D.Sridhar, Yograj Bhat, Soori, Charitanya, Madesh, Mahesh, Kiran Govi, Devadatta, Amar,



R.Chandru and others has contributed innovative ideas and efforts for the development of Kannada cinema in the new millennium. In the year 2009, Kannada film industry celebrated platinum jubilee in a grand scale. About 75 books were brought out by Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce on the cinematic contributions of eminent personalities under the editorship of Barguru Ramachandrappa. The Kannada language also received the classical language status on the eve of platinum jubilee celebrations indicates the prestige of Kannada people, remarked Yeddyurappa (2009:09). The status of Kannada film industry was analyzed by Kannada Prabha (2009:01) a leading Kannada daily. It reads: “Kannada film industry has crossed 75 years confidently despite certain drawbacks and constraints. It has limited film marketing opportunities. All the healthy and progressive experiments that have taken place in the Indian film industry have also occurred in Kannada film industry. Kannada film industry has carved a niche for itself in the national and international film avenues. The future of Kannada film industry is bright”.

Modaliyar (2009:04) remarks: “The celebration of platinum jubilee of Kannada film industry is a matter of great pride. The Kannada films are watched by the audiences across the globe. Kannada film personalities also deserve to receive the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke award for their cinematic excellence and contributions. Kannada film industry is marching towards progress despite competition from other films, challenges of other film personalities, video piracy, dubbing of films, inadequate film theatres and other drawbacks. Kannada film industry is recognized at various levels for the rare accomplishments”. The award winning Kannada films of the new millennium include – B.S.Lingdevaru’s *Kada Beladingalu* (2006), Yograj Bhat’s *Mungaru Male* (2006), Girish Kasaravalli’s *Gulabi Talkies and Vimukti* (2008), Girish Kasaravalli’s *Kanasembo Kudureyanneri* (2009), Rutwik Simha’s *Rasarushi Kuvempu* (2010), K.Shivarudraiah’s *Magiya Kala* (2011), Girish Kasaravalli’s *Koormavathara* (2011), P.Sheshadri’s *Bharat Stores* (2012), N.Sudarshan’s *Tallana* (2012), P.Sheshadri’s *December-1* (2013) and Manjunatha Somashekara Reddy’s *Harivu* (2014) and Santhosh Ananddram’s *Mr. and Mrs. Ramachari* (2015), Jeer Jimbe (2016), *Kirik Party, Thithi, Nathicharami, KGF* etc. Siddaramaiah, the Chief Minister of Karnataka (2014:08) emphasized the need for production of creative Kannada films thus: “Film is a powerful medium of communication in modern society. It has the capacity to reach out to plenty of people with multi-faceted messages. The art films and parallel films are entirely different from commercial film. The film should transform the lives of the people who are at the cross roads in the age of commercialization. The value based new wave films command respect from the people rather than commercial films which are made for making money by the market forces”.



With the popularity of a television cultural transmission happened and arms of globalization lend the kannada people to know about the other cultures. In December 2011 director Pawan Kumar announced on the Web about his next project I e Lucia. For the next two months, he met quite a few producers and top actors and found it difficult to fund his film. That led Pawan Kumar to write a post titled Making Enemies on his blog. Three days after it was published, the response was so overwhelming that he decided to pitch the idea of inviting people to produce the film and Pawan Kumar initiated Project Lucia.

Lucia is notable for its use of crowdfunding. It was funded by 110 investors who contributed to the project through a Facebook page and a blog run by director-actor Pawan Kumar. It was the first Kannada movie to bypass the traditional film financing model. Another film Rangitaranga released in 2015 was well received by the audience of Karnataka. This film focused on the cultural practices of coastal Karnataka region. Films like Ulidavaru kadanthe, Sarkari Shale are addition to this list. These are films that depicted popular cultures of particular regions of Karnataka.

Another notable film in the recent times is yash starer KGF- Chapter one. Set in the 1970s, it's the story of a fierce rebel who rises against the brutal oppression and becomes the symbol of hope to legions of downtrodden people. Written and Directed by Prashanth Neel, KGF is the first Kannada Movie to release in 5 Languages (Kannada,Hindi,Tamil,Telugu,Malayalam). K.G.F: Chapter 1 became the fourth highest grossing Hindi dubbed film after the Baahubali franchise and 2.0. The film became the first Kannada film to cross 100, 200 and 250 crores rupee at the box office. The roaring success of KGF also got the film international recognition and accolades. In the new wave of Kannada cinema, emergence of many young directors like Raj B Shetty, Hemanth Kumar, Rishabh Shetty, Suni, Santosh Anandram and others given sandalwood many box office hits. For instance Suni directorial venture Simpallaag Ondh Love story, was a low budget film with all newcomers and the film gained popularity with its songs and story line and looted the box office.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding the new generation, the current kannada cinema can be roughly classified as a technologically driven period where all cinemas with respect of any theme or outfit largely depend on technology in its all phases of production, promotion and distribution. With the interactions of international media and arguably influence of film festivals, comes a new wave in kannada cinema, but this new wave cannot compare with the new wave attempts which we saw in Bengali, Malayalam and Tamil films.

This new wave (new generation) of kannada films seems to be doing is to fuse the energy and entertainment of a mainstream film (without its formulaic excesses) with the complexity and sensitivity of an art film (minus the excessive artiness) (Pradeep, 2008). In a comparative analysis if it's "lack of vision and imagination in art, economy and market values made Malayalam cinema to distress and in kannada" (Ramachandran, 2009:14) it is distressing in ideology and stardom in kannada cinema.

. "The young directors of new wave cinema look for actors, not superstars, but they believe in star system too" (Stars bring the audience, a director makes them sit there, 2008). The popularity and economic success of recent new generation kannada films show an opening on scholastic concerns over thematic and theoretical debates (Kalorth, 2013).