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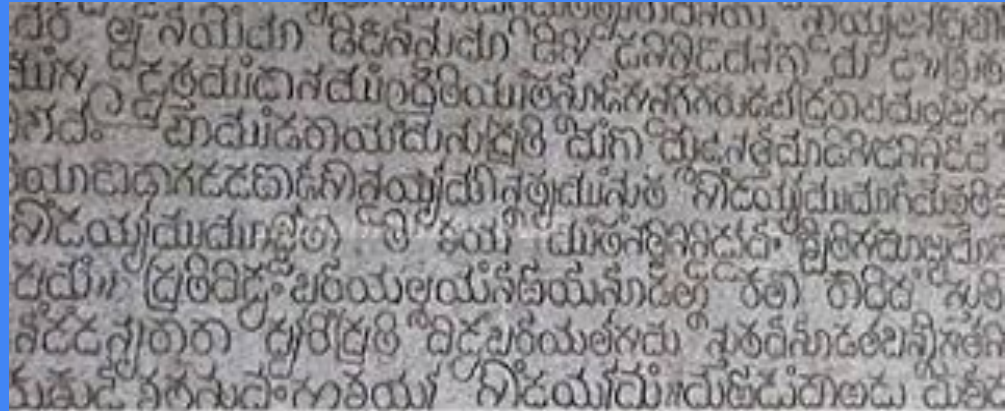
# The Evolution of Kannada

A presentation by Sravani Boinepelli  
in partnership with Meghana Bommadi

- Kannada is a Dravidian language spoken predominantly by Kannadigas mainly in the state of Karnataka.
- The language has roughly 38 million native speakers.
- Kannada script evolved from the 5th-century Kadamba script.
- It is influenced to an appreciable extent by Tamil and Sanskrit.
- The sources of influence on literary Kannada grammar appear to be three-fold: Pāṇini's grammar, non-Paninian schools of Sanskrit grammar, particularly Katantra and Sakatayana schools, and Prakrit grammar.

- The earliest inscriptional records in Kannada are from the 6th century. The Kannada script originated from southern Brahmi lipi of Ashoka period. With time, it underwent many changes during the reign of Sathavahanas, Kadambas, Gangas, Rastrakutas, and Hoysalas.
- A mixture of Telugu-Kannada scripts has been used in Kadambas of Banavasi and the early Chalukya of Badami inscriptions in the west even before the Seventh Century. In the middle of the 7th century, a new variety of the Telugu-Kannada scripts was developed. Only in the 13th century, the modern Kannada and Telugu scripts were developed.
- Other languages like Konkani, Kodava and Tulu use only Kannada script.

- The early development of Kannada was independent of the Sanskrit influence. However, in later centuries, Kannada, like the other Dravidian languages, was greatly influenced by Sanskrit in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and literary style.
- The writing system of Kannada script includes the principles that governs the phonetics and is a system of syllabic and phonemic writing.



Kanada Literature in Old Times



KANNADA STONE INSCRIPTION FROM  
TALEAD, A.D. 326

*Now in the Museum, University, Mysore.*

## Literature through the centuries...

Tracing back the origins of Kannada

He loved soccer, but feared he had no way to talk to a coach or teammates.

- The oldest extant book is Kavi Raja Marga (“The Path of the Poet Kings”) written by King Amoghavarsha Nrupatunga of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty around 840 AD. It is meant to be a guide to literarians and tries to standardise the many dialects found in the Rashtrakuta Empire. By the very nature of the content it is obvious that numerous literary works must have preceded it.
- Around the 10th century a new tradition of mixing prose and poem came into existence. This style now referred to as Kampu Kavya was propelled by “The Three Gems of Kannada” namely Pampa, Ponna and Ranna.

- These pieces typically dealt with epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata although a significant number of them were biographies of kings and due to the popularity of the Jain religion at that time. These biographies were called the tirthankaras.



- In fact, the patron of Ranna, who was a minister in the court of the Ganga King Raachmala IV, Chavunda Raya wrote the history of all the 24 tirthankaras in his book “trishanti-lakshana maha purana” better known as the “Chavundaraya Purana”.

- Dated to 978 AD, the Chavundaraya Purana is of special interest as it is the oldest existing specimen of a book written in continuous prose, and therefore enables us to gain an understanding of the language as spoken in the tenth century.







- Around the 11th century, Kannada literature experienced a setback due to invasion from Tamil kings. The Badamis and the Chalukyas who patronised the Kannada literature were defeated and thus the patronage stopped.
- But many inscription dating to this time have been found. Although they are of a non-literary nature they have given us tremendous insight to the state of the language during the 11th century.

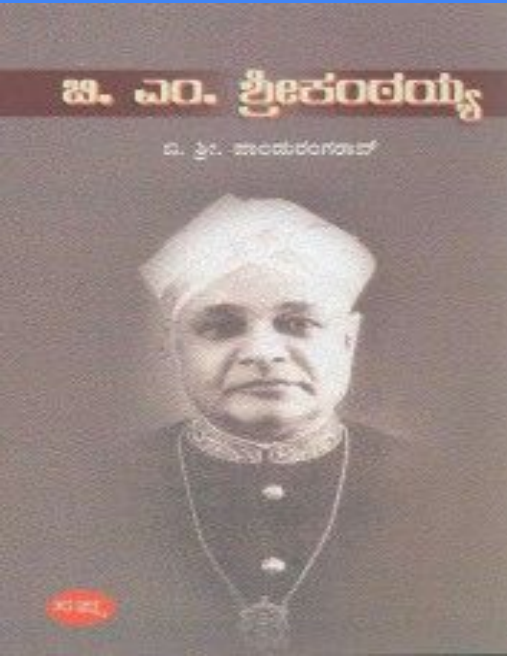
- Grammarians like Nagavarma-II who under the court of the Chalukya King Jagadhekamalla II wrote the 'Kavyalokana' and the 'Karnataka Bhasha Bhushana' which deals with the grammar and the rhetoric of the Kannada language.
- At around the same time, a hill tribe from the Malenadu Region rose into prominence. They were the Hoysalas King Vishnuvardhana defeated the Cholas and conquered Gangavadi. With the patronage from the Hoysalas Kannada literature began to flourish again.



- King Vishnuvardhana under the teachings of the philosophers Madhvacharya King VI and Ramanujacharya converted from Jainism to Vaishnavism. Thus Jain writers faced tremendous competition with the new Vaishnava friendly works that were coming out. The dialogue and rebuttals that followed left a lasting impression and changed the literary landscape of Kannada.
- The 12th century witnessed the rise of a style of writing called 'Vachana Sahitya' when the Kalchuris rebelled against their Chalukyan overlords. Vachana literally means that which is said. Written in free verse the works are brief paragraphs typically ending with salutations to Lord Shiva. These salutations varied locally and different poets used different salutations.

- The 14th century is aptly called the golden age of Kannada literature. Kannada literature flourished under patronage of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- This period also shows a lot of interaction between Telugu speakers and Kannada speakers, The noted writer Srinath even called his 'Telugu' Kannada.
- The 15th century witnessed the rise of the Vaishnava Bhakthi movement. Devaranamas and Keerthanas were the terms that are given to the devotional poems written in simple Kannada and were sung by the wandering bards of this time.

- The 16th century witnessed the rise of the Mysuru Empire and one of the poets of significance in this time was Sarvajna. His works consist of instructions on how to live life and morality.



- Drama also flourished and many plays were subsequently written and enacted. With the dawn of the twentieth century BM Srikantiah established a new era of modern literature. These works were written in the present day form of Kannada rather than hale Kannada or Halegannada (old Kannada). The works mainly dealt with issues like social evils and the Independence Struggle.

- In the 1950s new styles were being experimented with and this led to works like DV Gundappa Mankutimmana Kagga, Kuvempu Sri Ramagana Darshanam, Bendre's Naaku Tanti etc. This period also saw the rise of the leftist movement and works like Gokak's Indilla Nale came into being.
- Chikkaveerendra by Masti deals with the fall of Coorg was another major work of this time.
- Gopalakrishna Adiga along with Gokak brought new life into Kannada literature with a style of writing called navya(new). Bhyrappa came into public view with his work "Dharmasiri" written in this format. Other post modern trends include writers writing anti navya. There has also been a shift from poetry to prose and rise in dramatic literature.

- Nanjanaguda Tirumalamba is the first major woman writer in modern Kannada.
- Short story writers such as Panje Mangesha Rao and Masti Venkatesha Ayyangar made entry in this period.
- Kannada poetry soared to a new height with innovative poets like BM Shrikanthayya.
- Institutions like University of Mysore, Kannada Sahitya Parishad etc are doing a commendable job in pushing the Kannada literature forward.