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Exploring Truth and Reality: Postmodern Trends in Poornachandra Tejaswi's Narratives**T. Avinash***Associate Professor, Department of English (PG&UG) Sahyadri Arts College, Shimoga (Karnataka) India***Abstract**

The advent of postmodernism is characterized by doubt, uncertainty and negation of absolute reality. Though, it is a contested area, it is marked by the rejection of the grand narratives of modernity and modernism. Modern communicative tools of internet and television have given the concept of hyper reality. Multiple representations and liquid meanings define postmodernism. An important writer in Kannada, Poornachandra Tejaswi's narratives exhibit above stated features. Though, he never called himself a post modern, his representations show the seeds of post modern trends in Kannada prose.

Key Words: postmodernism, doubt, uncertainty, grand narratives, multiple representations.

Poornachandra Tejaswi

The onslaught of modern critical theories has opened up the scope of dismantling a literary text. It is quite possible that literary criticism has taken a new turn and different power relationships are analyzed meticulously. The question of representation and silence in narration is also interrogated upon by critical thinkers. As twentieth century was dubbed as the age of different - isms, post colonialism and postmodernism are viewed with a lot of enthusiasm in academic circles. The west oriented theories have enlarged the scope of analyzing a text on the one hand, and on the other hand, they have lead to deep introspection in the parameters of native criticism. Many native theorists have argued that the so called western theories are imposed upon from outside and in fact they are a hindrance to understand the language of the native people. They view such theories with doubt and reject them as superficial impositions.

However, the critical theories have added new dimensions to the comprehension of cultural negotiations. In spite of being accused as neo imperial theories, they have shown new path of unfamiliar areas of negotiation. Without being parochial or dismissive about such theories, this paper attempts to look into the crucial areas of interpretation. One such area is the contested field of Postmodernism. Let me deliberate upon the arguments of postmodernism and see how this is relevant to analyze a premier Kannada writer Poornachandra Tejaswi. The field of Postmodernism is highly a contested and a problematic area of study. It is very difficult to find agreement among critics on its range of meaning and implication. Some thinkers like Jurgan Habermas argue that the project of modernity has not yet ended and therefore it is too pre-mature to talk about post modernity. According to him, the Enlightenment values of reason, technology and liberal humanism continue to engage

our debate even today. However other thinkers like Jean Lyotard argue that postmodernism is *a condition* which definitely is marked by skepticism about language, truth, reason, causality, history and subjectivity.

For other thinkers like Jean Baudrillard postmodernism is essentially a legitimate product of modern technology and mass media. For him, television by continually projecting floating images creates a kind of hyper reality where absolute reality is not possible. He argues that reality in television and internet is only a *Simulation* and therefore the distinction between signifier and the signified has collapsed finally. Postmodern communication technologies generate free floating images and no one experiences anything other than in a derived form. He went to the extent of calling 1991 Gulf War as “not real but a media event. It is a war without the symptoms of war”. Ziauddin Sardar in a stimulating essay on Post modernism argues that it gives a TRIMMED view of life. I.e. post modernism is characterized by no Truth, no Reality, only Images, no Meaning, Multiplicities, equal Representation, and total Doubt. All absolutes are denied by postmodernists and it is a nihilistic theory of doubt and skepticism. The principle that governs post modernism is that all that is valid in modernity is totally invalid in post modern times. Modernity was framed by what is known as grand narratives: i.e. Big ideas that give sense and direction to life. Such notions as Truth, Reason, Morality, God, Tradition and History do not live up to analytical scrutiny and therefore they are meaningless.

Now, let me analyze Poornachandra Tejaswi's narratives with the backdrop of post modern trends of doubt and negation of absolute truth. Tejaswi from the beginning of his literary career was fascinated by philosophy and pure science. (As opposed to applied science) He was the person who had multiple interests in his life and integrated his interests in his stories and novels. He had interest in pure science, philosophy, photography, fine arts, music, computer technology, nature, environment, hunting, fishing, bird watching and wandering. Most of the times, his narratives exhibit multiple strains of his varied interests. However it is impossible to separate one from the other and as he famously stated his writings must be viewed as all inclusive (*samsleshane*) and not as separate, analytical writings. Here, one can record that he was influenced by Kuvempu's *Poorndristi* (complete vision), Ram Manohar Lohia's *Socialism* and Shivarama Karantha's adventurous experimentations. As he was a prolific wanderer, his narratives have a unique *picaresque* quality. He refused the artificial construction of center-margin bifurcation and wrote from the periphery. Therefore, the elite and the low characters appear simultaneously in his stories. For e.g. in his story *Aristotle and Chinkra Mestri*, the celebrated Greek philosopher Aristotle is equated with a non-descript character Chinkra! Again, in the novel *Carvalo*, a privileged scientist Carvalo was treated on par with a simple country bumpkin Mandanna. Thus, in Tejaswi's narratives, privileged and the marginalized exist and co-exist simultaneously. In other words, he refuses stereotypical bifurcations of center-

margin, good-bad, privileged- marginalized, important- unimportant etc. This at once looks like post modern belief indeed!

Continuous exploration of truth and reality are the *leti motifs* which appear again and again in his narratives. Quest for truth has its own existence in Tejaswi's world. For Tejaswi, knowing is an important aspect of human existence which is irreversible and irrevocable. It is one way of coming out of dark, ignorant world. But knowing is NOT everything. It is impossible to comprehend the mystery of this universe. Nature has its own nuances and intricacies. No doubt it will open itself for human exploration and adventure. But it will not give up its innate mystery to human understanding completely. Human rationality is fascinating but human hubris is not. The European enlightenment age produced an analytical knowledge system where quest for everything was fore grounded. Technology and modern science were privileged. Man became the centre of this universe and this enlightenment rationality created a tremendous ego in human beings. He thought that there is no limit for human consciousness. Anything which was not in the framework of rationality was rejected as useless, primitive and ignorant. Binary oppositions like rational-irrational, superior-inferior, progressive –regressive, modern-primitive etc were artificially constructed during this period. As many post colonial thinkers have correctly argued, this enlightenment modernity was used by colonialists to establish and consolidate their colonial empire. Tejaswi, influenced by modern science and the rationality advocated by Ram Manohar Lohia, has tried

to explore unexplored territories of this universe. For his journey, the use of rationality was an important tool, no doubt. He wanted to come out of the ignorant idyllic village life. But he never considered rationality to be an end in itself. Many times, it may fail to explain plural Indian native life systems which are beyond so called rational explanation. It does not mean that native life worlds are irrational but it only means that they are *a-rational*. The multiple native life worlds well might escape the rigid binary opposites which are a colonial construct. In this respect I would like to analyze his celebrated text *Carvalo*.

The novel *Carvalo* is set in a semi urban locale Mudigere-characterized by caste and ignorance. There are two diametrically opposite characters in this novel - the scientist *Carvalo* and the village idiot *Mandanna*. *Carvalo* is a privileged scientist who is well recognized by society. He is a product of English education and his renowned scientific analytical temper has brought him universal recognition. Based in a research institute in Mudigere, he was exploring an unresolved mystery of nature-that of the origin of a flying lizard which existed millions of years ago. He was trying to connect the missing link of the origin of this lizard. As opposite to this character, there is *Mandanna* who is uneducated, irrational, and irresponsible. He looks quite out of place in a civilized society. In fact, the so called civil society rejected him as a non entity. In the beginning of the novel even the rational narrator, treated him like a village bumpkin. But the narrative does not reject *Mandanna* as useless, empty and irrational. It re-cognizes the intricate life

world and the knowledge system of Mandanna. He might be uneducated, but he also has inherited a different knowledge system. His knowledge of nature, birds, and eco system is beyond question. He indeed, is a natural scientist- a fact recognized by Carvalho but never considered by the society. The external society blinded by colonial stereotypes thinks that Mandanna is a primitive, regressive fellow. But the narrative interrogates such a life vision and deconstructs binary oppositions. It is Mandanna who dominates in the expedition to thick forest in search of the missing flying lizard. His simplicity and selfless helping nature are striking. His intricate knowledge of eco life system of the forest leaves the narrator in a state of shock.

The quest for truth is also characterized by uncertainty and doubt. Ultimate reality as post modernists argue is impossible. In *Carvalho* as stated earlier, the mystery of the origin of the flying lizard remains mystery till the very end. The narrator exclaims "It is better, it remained a mystery" In the other novel *Inscrutable Mystery*, the murder of another scientist Mr. Jogihal is unresolved. In the same narrative, there is long debate about the nature of the relationship between art and reality. Two characters debate about the primacy of art and reality and they find evidence about their argument every time. In

Jugari Cross, the origin of the river is unresolved. The sudden disappearance of many people in this novel once again remains a mystery. Many possible narratives are forwarded by the local people and every argument has its own validity. In this novel there is a reference to the existence of Big Boss but his real identity is only speculative. There is a classic speculation about the possibility of the Telephone connection at the other end of the telephone receiver. A merchant who receives a mysterious call predicts about who might be there at the other end but he cannot know. As Umberto Eco argued meaning is like different layers of Onion! If one layer is removed, there are other layers and the act of removal leads to nowhere!! In *Krishnegowda's Elephant*, the behavior of the elephant becomes a mystery for mundane local people. They continuously predict the reason for its behavior and every time they find evidences to support their argument. Thus, multiple representations are the hall mark of Tejaswi's narratives.

The negation of binary opposites and liquid reality are the hall mark of postmodernism. Though, Tejaswi never claimed that he was a post modernist, his narratives show the sign of post modern doubt and uncertainty.

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