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Bendre And Linguistic Movement In Karnataka

Nagaratna.V.Parande

SSCA Govt. First Grade College
K.K.Koppa. Dt Belgaum
Karnataka State

Abstract:

Language has been a binding factor and also the strength of the people of a region. Thus, language provided the base for the growing nationalist movement in Karnataka in late 19th and early 20th century. The people, more particularly the intelligentsia, protested against Kannada being replaced or dominated by other languages, especially the neighbouring regional ones like Marathi, Telugu. The resistance was surprisingly not much against English, the official language of the ruling class. The movement that initially started as a protest against linguistic oppression soon morphed into one that demanded a separate state to be created consolidating all Kannada-speaking regions. Thus, making the unification of Karnataka one of the major historical events in India.

The paper is an attempt to study the linguistic movement in Karnataka during late 19th and early 20th century. D.R. Bendre, the noted Kannada poet represent a significant moment in the history of Karnataka. Here an attempt has been made to analyse his role in the unification movement

KEYWORDS:

Unification, Language Movement, Cultural Dimension .

INTRODUCTION:

During the period of British rule, areas that comprise the present Karnataka State were under as many as 22 different administrative units.¹ (C. R. Govinda Raju, 22) These were further grouped into five main units like Bombay Presidency, Madras Presidency, the Princely state of Mysore, the Nizam's Hyderabad and Kodagu. Thus in spite of their large number, the Kannadigas did not have a common administrative patronage. North Karnataka came under the rule of Bombay Presidency where Marathi was the official language. Those in the Hyderabad Karnataka region came under the Nizam's rule where Urdu ruled. Kannadigas in South Canara came under Madras Presidency where Tamil was the main language.

Kannada had been reduced to a minor status in its own land. In this situation, Kannadigas were experiencing innumerable day to day problems as other languages dominated their life. Economically too, these areas remained underdeveloped, neglected and backward.

Under these conditions, a feeling of discontent had started brewing among people. They felt that their interests and their language were being relegated to the background. These state of affairs created a deep urge in the Kannadigas to be united politically, economically, socially, regionally and culturally

Consequently, The Kannadigas challenged the expansionist claims of neighbouring Indian languages and strove for a regional, linguistic and cultural identity. Similar movements dominated by languages to get an independent identity in the neighbouring regions like Orissa, Andhra inspired the movement. The vehement reaction of the Bengalis against the partition of Bengal was a signal for the Kannadigas to unify for the sake of their regional language. Simultaneously, they also shared the all India

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vision of the larger Indian nationalism. All these aspects have made the study of linguistic movement in Karnataka relevant and interesting today.

Even though the movement had a political urgency, it had a cultural dimension too. Here the writers of modern Kannada literature spearheaded the movement. Thus the success of movement does not belong to the politicians alone. In the preface to 'Nannadu Ee Kannada Nadu (This Kannada land is Mine)' which Bendre edited in 1928, Bendre writes – "Just as Kumarswami united his six bodies into one and became a single deity with six faces, so Vishwa-Karnataka has to rise from its fragments." 2 (qtd in Amur, p.74)

The writers aroused the emotions and ideologies of the people who were politically divided. Their writings helped the people to come out of the amnesia brought about by the colonial rule and made them conscious of their rich past.

"Where the politicians did have some confusion about this regional unity, this confusion did not exist in the writers for they had the vision of a cultural Karnataka" 3 (C.R. Govinda Raju, p.4)

The separated Kannadigas had to be brought together and to form an identity of their own based on their language. The people had to associate themselves with the culture and literature of the region. Already the awareness of being an Indian and at the same time of being Kannadiga had been awakened during the fight to oust the British. Thus the consciousness about one's own regional language had become more acute during this period.

The intensity of the unification movement was seen in Northern Karnataka. The loss of identity was felt more intensely in this region where Marathi was the dominant language. Naturally, the seeds of the unification movement and all its most important protagonists including Alur Venkat Rao were from Northern Karnataka. Therefore, Dharwad became the centre. One of the earliest and the most important organizations that spearheaded the entire movement, the Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha took birth in Dharwad.

In northern Karnataka, Marathi was perceived as a threat to Kannada. The Kannada intelligentsia suspected that their language would be displaced by Marathi as the medium in schools as well as the language in the court and offices. In order to counter the undermining of linguistic and cultural greatness of Karnataka, the intellectuals brought to fore its glorious past to strengthen the regional Kannada identity.

Though the movement's main concern was the regional language and the main resistance was against certain neighbours who were described as 'foreigners'; it was not based on narrow parochialism. To the Kannada intelligentsia taking up the Kannada issue was as natural as identifying with the larger Indian issues. This participation on national level could be seen after the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, when the local intelligentsia attended its annual sessions and propagated the Congress ideas in Karnataka.

BENDRE'S ROLE

Against the background of this political and literary setup, Bendre's role is considered pivotal in the movement for unification of Karnataka or language movement. To him the development of language was an inseparable component of broader nationalist scheme of nation forming. He was convinced that the larger Indian Nationalism did not pose any threat to the sustenance of the local identity. Indian Nationalism and other related issues formed integral parts along with the Kannada issues in his scheme of world development and its process.

In Kurtkoti's words, "Bendre loves to talk about the relation of his own individual self with the world around him and proves in various ways, that a poet has certain obligations to the world in which he lives and he ought to fulfill them through his poetry." 4 (p.1)

Bendre appeared on the Kannada poetic scene when the condition of Kannada language was in bad shape. When he started his poetic career, Karnataka had not yet got a political boundary. The aim of the regional linguistic revival was not to defy the national framework, but only to demand certain internal rearrangements within that system. There was no conflict between nationalism and linguistic regionalism. Neither were there any conflicts at the political and the literary levels. Bendre and his work are a paradigm of this process. 5 (K. Raghavendra Rao, p.5)

Bendre was one of the pioneers of modern Kannada literature. There was a feeling of frustration among the poets as the sources from the older tradition had exhausted and there was hardly anything fresh remaining to base one's work on. There were some sporadic and isolated efforts to mark a new path. Bendre "had a dual responsibility of creating a new kind of poetry capable of absorbing new ideologies and new models of sensitivity and also of preserving its identity as the poetry of Kannada people." 6 (Kurtkoti, p.4) Even though Bendre's mother tongue was Marathi, then a dominant language, he chose to write in Kannada. He had for option either English or Marathi as his medium of expression, but his choice of Kannada shows

his affection and loyalty to the language.

Bendre played a crucial role in the unification of Karnataka. His 'Geleyar Gumpu' (Friend's circle) played a vital role in the renaissance movement in Karnataka. The members of this group who were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo, shared a common goal. This association was dedicated to the cultural awakening of Karnataka and the struggle for national freedom. Its membership consisted primarily of V. K. Gokak, R. S. Mugali Madhurachanna, Betgeri Krishna Sharma, etc. Its major task was to make Kannada literature reach the common man. The group was first to organize Nadahabba (regional festival), which became an important cultural activity. It ran journals like 'Swadharna' and 'Jaya Karnataka' and launched the Jaya Karnataka Granthamala, which brought out the first anthology of Kannada folk poetry. Its ideal was to unify Karnataka politically as well as psychologically. It was a Herculean task and was inspired by Aluru Venkata Rao and others.

Bendre's writings vehemently echo the need of unity of regional language, unity of local culture and regional history. He became the representative voice of North Karnataka as his ideas about Kannada language and Karnataka and the need for unification were the unspoken, repressed feelings of the people of Northern Karnataka. Bendre's writings touched the chords of people's heart.

Bendre deals with regional and national themes in many of his poems. Bendre's "Kannada Kandavvan Lali" (Lullaby for Kannada baby) is a song sung by Mother India for her Kannada daughter. Here Karnataka is being lauded as the daughter of Mother India.

For Bendre, Dharwad is the microcosm of India. His intense feelings about this place are concentric; they spread out to encompass Karnataka and then widen to encompass the nation too. In his poem "Dharwad Tayi" he expresses his feelings about how Dharwad forms an important, integral part of his motherland's pride and honour.

Karnataka is mirrored in his image of Dharwad, he saw Karnataka through Dharwad. It was a focal point to invoke the feelings of unification in Kannadigas. Similarly, the glory of Hampi symbolised the prosperous days of the past that were the zenith of an ideal life, as against the gloom that had enveloped the Kannadigas under the colonial rule. The Kannada mirror has been fragmented and strewn about, he writes in "Odanudi"

In order to unify the state he had to make efforts to awaken the people who had gone into a slumber-like condition over a period of a century, having lost their identity, they were completely in disarray and disoriented. He uses his gift of powerful invoking in verse e.g. "Kannadigana Udayavani" to awaken Kannada Mother,

You are the expression of the saint,
the words of the brave,
a source of endless knowledge .
why are you in slumber now,
Awake O Mother Saraswati.'

The regional impulse can be found in 'Kanasinologondu kanasu' (A Dream within a dream). According to Amur, this was inspired by Anandmath 7(p.75).

When Bendre started his poetic career, he had for models only the traditional Kannada and folk poetry. Both resisted experimentation. Bendre incorporated both the modes of expression in his poetry. He assimilated the vigour of the folk poetry and sophistication of the traditional poetry. Thus, carrying forward the tradition of Kannada poetry he infused it with a new spirit.⁸ (Kirtinath, p.7-9)

Bendre's poem 'Belagu' (Dawn) published in 1926 occupies a special place in the evolution of modern poetry in Kannada because of the discovery of a new expressive mode and a new expressive form.⁹ (Amur p. 29)

"In an age dominated by English, the language of the rulers, he had not only the courage to affirm the great capabilities of Kannada but also the ability to demonstrate it." ¹⁰(Amur, p.125)

A look at all his efforts and works shows that Bendre played a crucial role in the revival of Kannada language and also in the unification of Kannadigas. He was the one who brought in a new dawn to modern poetry in northern Karnataka. He established the custom of celebrating 'Nadahabba', which glorified the regional linguistic culture. This turned out to be the cultural base of the political movement for the formation of a Karnataka province comprising the entire Kannada-speaking population.¹¹ (K. Raghavendrarao, p.4)

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