

A Reflection on the Cultural Synthesis of Karnataka – Maharashtra Border Region

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Abstract: Both Kannada and Marathi are very old languages. Both have their own scripts, words with a rich vocabulary, meaning and usages. Synthesis and exchange between Kannada and Marathi in the field of Music, Drama, Painting, Folklore and various other forms of art and literature can be noticed. This paper deals on the cultural heritage or legacy of the Karnataka. Karnataka-Maharashtra border region is primarily concerning Kannada-Marathi languages and the relation between the people speaking these two languages. It is mainly focused on how both Kannada and Marathi languages have influenced each other and have blended together.

Keywords: Karnataka, Marathi, Cultural, Maharashtra and Kannada

1. Introduction

The discussion on the cultural heritage or legacy of the Karnataka- Maharashtra border region is primarily a discussion concerning Kannada-Marathi languages and the relation between the people speaking these two languages. Having a rich and a long history how both Kannada and Marathi languages have influenced each other? How they have blended together, is the focus of the present discussion.

Kannada language belongs to the Dravidian group of languages. Kannada being in existence prior to the formation, evolution and growth of Marathi language; its influence over Marathi is quite natural. However a detailed study of modern Kannada literature reveals a deep and substantial influence of Marathi over Kannada as well.

If Marathi language evolved at the hands of saints, Kannada language was developed chiefly by kings and emperors (poets, thinkers, scholars in the royal patronage). Keeping in mind this distinction in the evolutionary process of the languages would be prudent on our while studying Kannada and Marathi cultures.

2. Literary Relationships and Interlinks

There are written evidences with respect to interlink and intermingling of the two languages. We can see such a synthesis and exchange between Kannada and Marathi in the field of music, drama, painting, folklore and various other forms of art and literature.

2.1 Literature

The Marathi sentence engraved “Chavundaraye Karaviyale” at the foot base of the world famous Bahubali statue at Shravana Belgagola is considered to be the first sentence in Marathi. Though Marathi language is in use since 10th century A.D., Marathi literature pertaining to the period prior to 12th century A.D. is not available. The period since beginnings till 1850 A.D. can be considered as classical, early or old Marathi age. Post 1850 A.D. period can be considered as the age of modern Marathi literature [2]. The Dasa-Sahitya in Kannada and Santh-Panth Sahitya in Marathi which are considered to be more or less

contemporary, occupy a unique place of importance in respective literatures. Regardless of the difference of age between Purandara Dasa in Kannada and Eknatha in Marathi, one can observe substantive similarity in their thinking, expressions and opinions. Both Purandara and Eknatha being ‘Vitthala’ devotees, through their ‘Geya pada’ and ‘Keeratanas’ exalted the virtues like self conduct, self control and they themselves became the paragons of it. “Sarve Bhooti Bhagvat bhava thevane” (seeing God in all) is the very soul of Bhagvat dharma, was their stand point.

Whereas Saint poets/poetess like Janabai, Bahinabai, Muktayee, Changdev, Jnaaneshwar etc. have enriched the Marathi literature to the brim; Shaivaites (Worshipers and devotees of Shiva) such as Akkamahadevi, Gangambika, Basaveshwar, Allamprabhu, Neelambika did it for Kannada Literature [3]. ‘Dnyaneshwari’ (a commentary on Bhagwat Geeta) by Santh Dnyaneshwara and ‘Manache Shlok’ by Swami Ramdas are the two outstanding pieces of work in early Marathi literature which have been translated into Kannada. Whereas Nijaguna Shivayogi’s classic work “Viveka Chintamani” was translated into Marathi during the times of Swami Ramdas and earned much appreciation. The epic work of Kumara Vyasa “Karnata Bharata Katha Manjiri” inspired the Marathi poet Chandratmaja Rudra to write ‘Marathi Bharata’. Scholars have already brought to light the fact that as Kannada words have been prolifically used in ‘Dnyaneshwari’ so have been Marathi words in ‘Kumaravyasa’s Bharata’.

Late. Aloor Venkataraya has translated into Kannada and has published, Lokmanya Tilak’s work ‘Geeta Rahasya’. On the one hand if Sri. S.B. Joshi’s ‘Maharashtrada Moola’ helps the Kannadiga’s (Kannada speaking people) to have an insight into Maharashtra; on the other Mahohar Deshpande introduces the path of mysticism of the saints of Maharashtra through his works to the Kannadigas. If Bhaskar Gokhale has brought Sane Guruji’s stories and Ranjit Desai’s Novels to Kannada, various Kannada works like, M.V. Iyengar’s ‘Subbanna’, K.V. Iyer’s ‘Shantala’, T.P. Kailasam’s ‘Purpose’, Shivram Karant’s ‘Marali Mannige’, U.R. Anantmurthy’s ‘Sanskara’ and a host of Novels by S.L Bhairappa have been translated and are made available for the taste of Marathi speakers. In this fashion Kannada writer’s belonging to the earlier generations, like D.R. Bendre, K.G. Kundangar, P.B. Desai, S.B. Joshi, A. N.

Upadhyay, V.K.Gokak, R.S. Mugali, Shiranga have put efforts in upholding the affinity and kinship between the two languages and cultures. Both R.S. Lokapur and Dr. C.S. Deshpande have made a deep study and analysis of Marathi 'Dnyaneshwari'. On the one side if Dr. Deshpande translates Keshav Maharaj Deshmukh's work 'Dnyaneshwari' (transformation of Jnaneshwari into an easy text form) into Kannada, on the other side R.S. Lokapur's inquisitive ability leads him to find the Kannada words in the 'Dnyaneshwari'. His works like 'Halagannada mattu Marathi' (classical Kannada and Marathi) 'Kannada Dnyaneshwari' 'Dnyaneshwarakaleen Marathi Bhashewar Kannadacha Prabhav' (Influence of Kannada over Marathi of the times of Jnaneshwar), The Dnyaneshwari in three parts 1995-1997-1999, speaks volumes of his deep, assiduous and persevered studies in this area.

The credit of bringing Marathi Biographies/Autobiographies to Kannada goes to Chandrakant Pokale. Lakshman Gayakwad through his translation of 'Uchalya', Madhavi Desai's 'Nachga Ghuma', Lakshman Mane's 'Upaar' introduced a different and diverse culture to Kannadigas [5]. In the area of the translation of Dramas, Girish Karnad, D.S.Chougale, Yeshwant Sardeshpande's works are noteworthy, and one can find considerable use of the language of north Karnataka and that of border areas in their work. By translating the works of 'Dalit' poets, Dr. Sarjoo Katkar and others have gained name and fame in the translation genre of literature. In addition to that, through his work 'Kannada Nele Shivajiya Moola' (Land of Kannada being the origin of Shivaji) Dr. Katkar [1] has highlighted the fact that Shivaji, who is an idol and a paragon of Marathi and Maharashtra history and culture today, has his ancestral linkages to Karnataka. It is indeed interesting to note that Shivaji's ancestors had migrated from the place called 'Surtur' (Gadag district) of Karnataka to Shikhar Shignapur of present day Maharashtra. By making aware of this interesting fact to both Kannada and Marathi speaking people he has become the spokesmen of Kannada-Marathi cultural synthesis. It will not be an exaggeration if I state here that many writers through their similar efforts have tried to build a bridge between the two languages and cultures.

2.2. Relations in the Areas of Theatre, Play & Drama

Theater was born in India due to the influence and inspiration of Parsi theater. During the days when North Karnataka and South India were a part of one administrative unit in the history, once the a folk group called 'Karki Mela' from North Canara (today's Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka) were performing 'Dashaavatara' through a form of folk art called 'Yakshagana' at Sangli. The ruler of the Princely state of Sangli Srimantrao Patvardhan with Vishnudas Bhave happened to see the performance, very much impressed by the same Srimantrao is said to have told Vishnudas Bhave to right a play and thus was born the first play in Marathi 'Seeta Swayamvara'. The first stage experiment of the play was made on 5th November 1843. This being the reason 5th November is celebrated as Marathi Theatre Day.

2.3. Relations in the Area of Painting as a Form of Art

The famous J.J. School of Arts and Nutan Kala Mandir of Mumbai, served as the schools of art for the Kannada people too, particularly belonging to the north Karnataka region. Sri. Dandavati of Bailhongal (Belgaum Dist.) being at Nutan Kala mandir use to provide many opportunities to Kannadigas. A Shade of the beauty and elegance of artworks, portraits and painting of these two schools belonging to both realistic and abstracts forms can be seen in the works of many senior artists belonging to north Karnataka. In this way one can see schools of arts in Maharashtra having had a great impression and influence on the artist of Karnataka.

2.4 Relations in the Field of Music

Language and Manmade political borders have never been a barrier for people to enjoy and appreciate the sweetness and melody of music. Mallikarjun Mansur, Basavaraj Rajguru, Bhimsen Joshi, Kumara Gandharva and Gangubai Hangal who are well known in Maharashtra as the five pillars of Hindustani Music, all belong to Karnataka. There was a belief in those days in the border region that if Kannadigas have a good voice to sing the Maharashtrians have ears to listen and appreciate. Again language and borders were never a barrier when Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar gave a play back to a Kannada song "Bellane Belagayitu" in the Kannada film 'Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna', appreciated till date by Kannadigas. Late Shivanand Patil sung with equal fervor and passion both 'Dasa Pada' of Kannada and Marathi 'Natyageeta' (a form of semi-classical dramatic music in Marathi drama).

2.5 Linguistic Relations

Both Kannada and Marathi are very old languages. Both have their own scripts, words, with a rich vocabulary, meaning and usages. Even then in the border areas both the languages have influenced from each other and there is substantive exchange in terms of use of the words from each other. Let us understand this by citing few popular examples. 'Avanga jara samjhaisi hel' is a typical Kannada sentence in which the words 'jara'(little) and 'samjhaisi'(explain) are Marathi words. Similarly in some Marathi sentences like 'Madchun thev', 'hudkun kad' have inclusion of Kannada words like 'madachun' (fold) 'huduku'(search). In this fashion the language of the border region is interlaced with each other. We find people unconsciously and effortlessly using words from each other's language and yet communicate clearly.

3. Non-Literary Relationships

In the sphere of non-literary relationships we shall touch upon a host of areas such as customs, traditions, beliefs and methods in the regular day to day life where one can find a tremendous level of intermingling and fusion giving rise to a totally different and vibrant culture. Study of a culture through its literature alone would be a one-dimensional and incomplete approach and thus insufficient to gauge the true spirit of a culture. There should always be an effort to find the other dimensions of it in the arena of beliefs, traditions, customs and religion in the routine day to day life of people,

particularly common folks. Only then a deep and thorough knowledge and understanding of culture can be had.

3.1. Religious and Spiritual Interlinks

A Comparative Study of the literature of The 'Dasa' tradition of Karnataka and 'Santh'(particularly the 'Varkari Panth')tradition of Maharashtra throws light beyond any doubts on the fact that both these religious reform movements were born were progressive and were popular at the same time.

Vitthala also known as Vithobha is a Hindu God, considered to be a manifestation of lord Vishnu or his incarnation, Lord Krishna, predominantly worshipped in Maharashtra and Karnataka (where he is known as Panduranga) brings the 'Dasa' and the 'Santh' together.

There is lot of similarity between the literary and spiritual works of the 'Dasa' and the 'Santh'. Both the traditions have given stress on and have a consensus on the possibility of Salvation or liberation through devotion alone and Chanting the name of the lord being the only means for Salvation. Both the traditions had vowed themselves to singing and dancing in the name of their beloved Lord 'Kirtanache nachu rangi/Jnanadeep lavu jagi' (Will dance in the ecstasy of the lord/ will illumine the world with the light of knowledge). Similarly they not only believed but also experienced that everyone being very much involved in household life, through righteousness, simplicity and morality can follow the path of devotion to attain salvation. Though they had opposed and attacked the 'Varnashrama Dharma' through their works, they by stating all are equal on the path to God, had created an egalitarian, open path for all towards attaining salvation. Due to this approach of the like of Kanakadasa in Karnataka and Santh Chokhamela or Chokhoba in Maharashtra were held in high esteem and reverence among the devotee folks. The notion that Women are the biggest impediment on spiritual path was demolished by these saints and this enabled many women to take part in spiritual and religious activities. Janabai of Maharashtra and Helavanakatte Giriamma from Karnataka are to name a few amongst many other. In order to take devotion and spiritualism to the common most man, the poor, the downtrodden these saints tried to write and sing in the language that these people at large understood. This very effort of theirs made both Kannada and Marathi languages rich.

'Kaanada ho Vitthalu Karnataku' in a Marathi 'Abhang' (a form of devotional poetry sung in the praise of Vitthala) signifies the fact the Vitthala in Pandarapur belongs to Karnataka region and has entwined religiously the people of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Every year hundreds of thousands of people (Known as 'Varkari' ,literally meaning a pilgrim) from bordering areas of Karnataka visit Pandarapur which has brought religious harmony in the region. Varkari Pantha (Path) or Sampradaya (tradition) is a Vaishnava religious movement, within the Bhakti spiritual tradition of Hinduism, geographically associated with the Indian states of Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. Varkaris worship Vitthala, of Pandharpur. Teachers and preachers associated with this movement include Dnyaaneshwara, Namdeva, Tukarama, Chokhamela and

Eknatha, all of whom are accorded the title of 'Santh'. The Varkari movement includes the worship of Krishna in the form of Vithoba and a duty-based approach towards life emphasizing, moral behavior, strict avoidance of alcohol and tobacco, strict vegetarian diet and fasting on 'Ekadashi' day (twice a month), self-restraint (brahmacharya) during student life, modesty, equality and humane approach towards all rejecting discrimination based on caste or wealth, the reading of holy books by all castes and regular 'Bhajan' and 'Kirtan'[4].

Devotees and pilgrims from bordering districts of Karnataka visiting Goddess Lakshmi, Tulaja Bhavani temples in Kolhapur and Tulajapur respectively or for that matter visiting Jyotiba and Akkalkot of Swami Samarth, devotees and pilgrims from Maharashtra visiting Savadatti (deity Yallamma) Chinchali (deity Mayakka) , Ganapapura (the Deity Dattatreya) is a symbol of religious and cultural harmony.

3.2. Relations in Matrimony

As far as the matrimonial relations and ties are concerned people of the region marry off their daughters in their respective casts to the towns, villages cities as interior as Belgaum, Gadag, Dharwad in Karnataka and Sangli, Miraj, Sholhapur in Maharashtra.

3.3 Trade Relations

The trade between Karnataka and Maharashtra particularly in the border regions is pretty brisk and substantive. Milk produced in the border areas of Karnataka is routed to Maharashtra, processed there into a variety of milk products and again sold in the markets of Karnataka. The milk products of Maharashtra are very popular and preferred in the border areas of Karnataka. Similarly for the jaggery (made of sugar syrup), cotton and host of other cereals and millets produced in the border regions of Karnataka, cities like Miraj, Sangli, Kolhapur, Sholhapur in Maharashtra are prime markets. Ichalkarangi once known as the 'Manchester' of Maharashtra is even today a preferred destination for the weavers, dyers of Belgaum, Bagalkot and Bijapur. The popular raw tobacco produced near the border town of Nippani is processed into scented chewable tobacco in the Jaisinghpur town of the Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. The sugarcane produced in the farms of Belgaum, Raibag, Chikkodi areas is sent to the sugar factories at Halkarni, Shirol, Ichalkaranji in Maharashtra. Apart from many other reasons the main reason for this is, that majority of the members of these co-operative sugar factories are people from border areas of Karnataka. It will certainly not be out of context here if a very interesting fact regarding a leading trade and business community in southern Maharashtra, the Jain community is mentioned. The Jain community though uses Marathi in the field of trade, commerce and education; have preserved Marathi at home.

3.4. Political Relations

The influence of the political and administrative policies of Shaahu Maharaj, the Prince of Kolhapur can very much be seen in the border areas. He was a progressive thinker committed himself for social cause and justice. One can see

a very deep influence of the same in the regions of southern Maharashtra and northern Karnataka.

4. Conclusion

The analysis is basically an attempt to throw light on one rich and unique 'border culture' which took shape over the past some centuries due to the dwelling of a section of both Kannada and Marathi population on the boundary. Some analysts in the past may certainly have had difficulties in drawing similarities between the culture, tradition, language, literature, food, habits of Marathis and Kannadigas, but what should have perplexed them is the fact that the strangers' inevitable association on a stretch of land for centuries transpired into a unique and rich culture.

The historic turn of events that unfolded on the border during the course of the rule of both Marathi and Kannada rulers has been aptly analyzed. A multi-culture impact on people and its acceptance resulted in building a bond between the two sections stronger. An analysis on how the various facets of the past history, traditions, culture and language paved way for a vibrant and distinct social fabric highlights the reality of changes that took place on the border during the course of history. People may be speaking Kannada, Marathi or any other religion on the border, their speaking-accent resemble. And not merely that, but the rituals, food, dress and the living trends strike similarities as a result of the mix of both of them.

We also see both languages showing courage to make a sincere effort to come out of the morass of religion, sectarianism, cast, regionalism etc. In the same breath I wish to state the birth of 'Dalit literature' in Kannada with a tinge of rebellion and revolt out of the inspiration and influence of the 'Marathi Dalit Panthers'. Of late, common people on the streets are used to and are accustomed to adjusting and adapting themselves to the inconveniences, inadequacies, in a way it is unavoidable in their day to day life. If one has to understand and grasp clearly the culture of a region through a comprehensive study; studying the cultures of both the strongest and secure section of the society as well as the society which is weakest, miserable and lowest in the social strata is essential. Only then a complete understanding of the culture of border regions can be had.

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