

TELANGANA - THE CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES**Capt. Lingala Pandu Ranga Reddy**

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Telangana is a link between the South and the North, a draw bridge between the Dravidians and the Aryans, a meeting point of melting races and a confluence of living languages. It is a gateway to South India. It holds the key for peace and prosperity of integrated India.

It has very often characterized that Telangana as a Panchaveni Sangam, and, therefore, in its secular aspects more important than the Triveni which is the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswathi. For centuries, five different strains of linguistic cultures have mingled together here to develop, in what used to be the old Hyderabad State (Telangana) generally and in the city of Hyderabad particularly, a common cosmopolitan outlook of life which is the peculiar characteristic of the people and which has evoked the admiration of many outsiders not actuated by any sentiments of local patriotism.

The political history of the area itself presents a colourful picture of various dynasties of Hindu and Muslim kings vying with one another for power and peaceful governance of the country (Yazdani 1954, 213). Speaking linguistically, while Telugu is the predominant language of the people, contact with Marathi and Kannada and later with Urdu and Hindi has developed into a wholesome combination and led to be called as Panchaveni Sangam.

It is necessary to keep in mind the ancient history of Deccan in order to trace the growth of this cultural assimilation. The Southern portion of the Indian peninsula lying south of the Narmada river is known, from time immemorial, as the plateau of the Deccan. This land does not comprise merely the modern four Southern States of India-Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, but it covers a vaster area comprising of Maharashtra part of Gujarat, Orissa and other States to the South of the Narmada, Deccan or Dakshinapatha, as it used to be called in ancient days, is characterized by historians as the land of “*Evasive Mysteries*” (Yazdani 1954, 311). It is in this vast area that the Aryan civilization first came into contact with its more ancient counterpart viz., the Dravidian civilization. Sage Agastya is said to be the most important legendary leader of this process of cultural assimilation.

The origin of the four languages spoken in the South namely, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, as now established by scholars, is a positive proof as to how the Aryan and Dravidian languages underwent a process of assimilation leading to their development in modern days as we see them. The influence of Sanskrit and the Vedic culture of which it was the vehicle, has been tremendous and overwhelming on these languages of Dravidian origin. The percentage of words of Sanskrit origin may vary from language to language, but the swamp of its

influence is undeniable even on Tamil which has the least percentage of Sanskrit vocabulary. Scholars of comparative philology have conclusively proved how even Sanskrit with its perfect grammar was influenced by the Dravidian languages with which it came into contact. All the processes must have taken hundreds of years or even thousands of years. While Tamil literature has a history of about 3,000 years, Kannada goes back to 1350 years, Telugu to 1150 years and Malayalam to about 950 years. In fact Malayalam was split up unto a separate language out of Tamil about 950 years ago. Prakrits also travelled to Deccan along with Aryan migrations and one of them developed into what is now known as Marathi. This general feature of the history of Deccan continued up to recent times, and there was further amalgamation of cultures of Urdu and its variant Deccan Urdu. All these historical and cultural developments have led to the Deccan being the confluence of cultures.

The early inhabitants of the Deccan had developed a distinct form of civilization before they came into contact with Aryans. Quest for peace and solitude seems to have led the Vedic Rishis to Dandakaranya, where a section of the Aryan (Yazdani 1954, 344) community consisting of Andhra, Pundras, Sabaras, Pulindas and Mutibas, etc., had separated from the main stock and had fused with the ‘Dasyas’ and settled down to well-established tribes.

The Aryan conquest seems to have extended by the time of Panini, the great Grammarian, up to Berar (Vidarbha). Katyayana later mentions Pandya, Chola and Kerala. Two forces hastened the pace of the Aryanisation of the lands south of the Vindhyas - the Imperialism of the Nandas and the Mauryas, and the missionary activities of the followers of the protestant creeds of Jainism and Buddhism.

The hegemony of the Nandas and the Mauryas was short lived. Later, the empire of Ashoka disintegrated soon after his death. After the Mauryas, this area of Deccan was ruled by the Satavahanas, the Vakatakas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas of Kalyani (Sastry 1978. 125), the Eastern Chalukyas, the Yadavas, the Kakatiyas, and last but not the least the Rayala kings of Vijayanagra. Their dominions varied from time to time, but did not coincide with any particular linguistic area. As such, after the invasion of Devagiri by Allauddin Khilji in 1294 the perspective changed and led to more intimate contact gradually with Islamic culture. He was the first Muslim leader who crossed the Vindhyas and came to the South.

The origin of the Bahamani kingdom itself is symbolic of some concept of Hindu-Muslim unity. While it cannot be said that all of the Bahamani Kings were equally free from religious or communal fanaticism, it can be said without fear of contradiction, that all the five dynasties of the Bahamani Kings were equally free from religious or communal fanaticism and possessed more catholicity of outlook than the later Moghuls or other Muslim rulers.

The Qutub Shahi kings of Golconda were particularly famous for their broad-mindedness and for the patronage of local languages and literatures. In fact, Ibrahim Quli Qutub Shah was acclaimed by the Telugu poets and writers of his period as “*Ibharamudu*”. It is said that he not only patronized Telugu poets but he himself composed poetry in not only Deccan Urdu and Telugu but also in Persian. He lived in the Vijayanagar court for 7 years. It was during his reign, the popular *Yayati Charitramu* and *Tapati Samvaranopakhyanam* were composed by Telugu poets as they greatly enjoyed royal patronage. Addanki Gangadhara Kavi was patronized

to great extent by the king himself. Also, to one of his noble Aminkhan, the renowned author of those times, i.e., Ponniganti Telaganarya who hailed from Patancheru dedicated the famous work *Yayati Charitramu*'

Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah



Ibrahim's successor Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah was even a greater devotee of Telangana Desa and a patron of Telugu literature. He himself is said to have composed Telugu poetry, though till date no such work has been discovered. His Urdu collection of poetry is interspersed with an unceremonious use of Telugu words and phrases and his poems centre around the local Hindu festivals and subjects of Hindu culture. In fact according to one school of thought, the birth of Urdu language took place in the Deccan during his time.

The new language Urdu was as such, the product of the contact of the foreign Muslims and the Hindu population in the North speaking the various Prakrits and therefore contained Turkish, Persian and Arabic words with a large admixture of Brij Bhasha which was another name for Sourasari Prakrit and which had become current in a wide territory extending from Sindh to Bihar and from Lahore to Malwa. This language was brought to the Deccan with the invasion of Allauddin Khilji, but it received a stimulus after Mohammed Bin Tughlaq made Deogiri or Daulatabad as his capital. According to the latest researches, the first Urdu poet of Deccan was Khawaja Banda Nawaz, the great saint of Gulbarga (825 A.H.) (Sherwarni 1974, 108) and this language which was called as the 'Hindi' language and patronized by the Bahmani kings soon became their official language.

The Deccan became a great centre of learning soon after Allauddin's conquest i.e., in 1294) (Sherwani 1974, 210) and attracted a large number of celebrated scholars of Arab and Persian origin as well as many Muslim saints who made this language as the vehicle of their propagation of religion and philosophy. During the hegemony of the Maratha kings and Peshwas, Marathi language spread far and wide and the Modi script of the Marathas was used for recording village records even in parts of Telangana and Karnataka areas. While Persian was the court language of the Bahamani kings including the rulers of Golconda, the *Sanads* or documents of grants, etc., were usually inscribed in two languages – i.e., Persian as well as the then local language Marathi or Telugu.

The western Chalukyas also held sway over a large part of Telugu speaking area. Saints like Tukaram, Janardhan Swami who were born in the Marathwada area spread the Bhakti cult in one part of the country while the Vaishnava cult of Bhakti was spread through Acharyas of the Ramanuja and Madhva schools in the other areas. The Kakatiyas were Saivas (Sastry 1978, 136). Their successors Reddys also generally followed the Saiva cult. The Velamas largely

subscribed to the Vaishnava religion, but in the Marathwada area a new sect of Bhakti culture (Mahanubhav Panth) arose with the rise of a great religious leader Basaveswara who became the preceptor of Veerashaivism over the country. He was a Minister in the court of the kings of Kalyani (Bidar district) where the capital of western Chalukyas had shifted. As a consequential impact of all these historical and cultural developments in the Deccan tended to create a spirit of unity in diversity (Venkataramanayya 1937, 410).

The Muslim saints like Khwaja Banda Nawaz of Gulbarga and many at Aurangabad became the objects of worship not only by the Muslims but even an extraordinarily large number of Hindus on account of their great mystic powers. While strict conformity to one's own religious tenets and to one's own school of philosophy was limited to what were traditionally known as the upper classes of Hindus and Muslims, the multitude of the masses belonging to both communities followed saints or Sufis, Hindu or Muslim, whose universal messages of love of God and man without distinction of caste or creed and whose distaste for religious and traditional distinctions, attracted them tremendously.

Hindus were employed by the Muslim kings and Muslims were employed by the Hindu kings in this area and were entrusted with the highest posts requiring perfect loyalty and confidence. Even during the early rule of Asafjahi dynasty in Hyderabad, the highest posts concerning revenue and civil administration were entrusted to Hindus who were held in highest esteem and they enjoyed the same privileges, jagirs, Mansabs and others that were open to the Muslims. The history of this period shows examples of Muslims being military commanders of Hindu Rajas and Hindus being military commanders of Muslim kings in various parts. This was the result of the general and secular outlook that pervaded the culture of the people of these areas.

Akkanna and Madanna, the Hindus by religion were risen as the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-chief during the reign of the last Qutubshahi king who was forced to surrender Golconda to Aurangazeb. Even during the Asafjahi rule, a Hindu by name Maharak Kishen Prasad held the highest post of Prime Minister twice during his lifetime, for long periods. As such, social life in Hyderabad till a few decades ago was unalloyed by any tinge of communal differences or distinctions (Sherwani 1974, 401).



Akkanna and Madanna

The city of Hyderabad had itself a romantic origin. Mohammed Quli Qutubshah laid the foundation of the city in 1590 A.D. originally as Bhagyanagar or Bhagnagar in the name of his Hindu mistress who was converted to Islam later and became his legal wife. Bhagmati later came to be known as Hydermahal and the name Bhagyanagar was also changed to Hyderabad. Though the veracity of this story is doubted by some historians, it is nevertheless one that has become current and holds the field in history and tradition (Hussain 1936, 220). In this city, which soon became the capital of the Asafjahi kings, streams of people representing different languages and cultures joined together. There were Muslims of Turkish, Arabic and Persian

origin who formed the highest echelon of officialdom though they were of foreign origin. The Asafjahi kings brought with them Kayasthas from Northern India (Satyanarayana 1975, 106) Khatriis from Punjab etc. Brahmakshatriyas joined them mostly from Gujarat and other places. The rulers and the nobles patronized these poets and literary men who developed Persian, Arabic and Urdu literatures under their auspices.

The Peshwas gave a fillip to Marathi language and the saints of Marathwada propagated it through their socio-religious activities. The holders of Samstanams who were the descendents of the ancient Reddy and Velama kings being gradually subjugated, followed the practices of the rulers. They patronized Sanskrit and Telugu poets and literary men and maintained the old traditions of the courts of the Hindu rajas, particularly those of Vijayanagar and Kakatiya rulers, who were noted for their great patronage of learning. Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagar was their ideal in this respect. He called his mother tongue Telugu as Karnatakabhasha because he was the king of the whole of Karnataka and a large part of Andhra (Briggs 1861, 93). Though he patronized Telugu literature and was himself a great poet he was the king of Karnataka. His rule was the golden era in the history of Telugu literature. His court was adorned with the *Astadiggajas* – the 8 poets, whose literary and cultural effulgence became unparalleled in any other period of the Andhra history.



**Krishnadevaraya discoursing with Ashtadiggajas –
The stalwarts of Culture**

All these historical and cultural developments tended to make Telugu a real confluence of cultures (Menon 1961, 315). The only hope that exists today is that these historical and cultural characteristics will continue to be in existence and will not be adversely affected by any spirit of narrow chauvinism, either literary, regional or communal. In fact, it is and should be the proud privilege of the Telangana to maintain these valuable traditions in future too.

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