

CLASSICAL CULTURE ITS DECLINE AND DETERIORATION IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Oswald Spengler, one of the greatest philosopher - historians of modern times, who made an in-depth analysis of the behaviour of the classical cultures of the world, propounded the cyclical theory about the evolution of cultures. According to him all cultures of the world reveal the biological order while passing through the various phases like births, youthfulness, maturity, decline and disintegration. One of the classical cultures subjected by Spengler to his rigorous scrutiny and analysis was the Indian culture. According to him Indian culture in historical times had passed through the distinct phases of birth, youthfulness maturity, decay and disintegration. The Karnataka Renaissance while resembling the one at the national level in its broad outlines and while being one of its tributaries, at once presents several distinguishing features of its own in its vigour and vitality, in its spirit and contents, in its depth and dimensions and in its extent and intensity. It is therefore, proposed to bring out the distinguishing features of Karnataka Renaissance in contrast to those of Indian renaissance. Renaissance usually pre-supposes the existence of a classical, culture and the age of darkness followed by it.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Karnataka, the land inhabited by Kannada speaking people can boast to have great antiquity, which is a matter of great pride and privilege for people of any country. The antiquity of Karnataka is also illumined by the legendary illuminaries like Hanuman (Anjaneya), the great devotee of Sri Rama, Parasurama and his mother Renuka (Ellamma), sage Agastya and others. According to local tradition Hanuman lived in Kishikinda identified with the Hampi region of the present day. Huilgol Narayanarao in his famous poem on the Rise of Karnataka singing the glory of the land has described Karnataka as the birth place of Hanuman. Similarly, he has claimed Karnataka as the land of Parasurama and his mother Goddess Renuka. This poem was sung by every individual of

Karnataka with great pride for one's own motherland. It is also believed that Sri. Rama passed through parts of Karnataka on his way to Sri Lanka. References, viz., Dandakaranya, Godavari, Krisnaveni (Mahanandi), Kaveri and Tamraparni, figuring in Ramayana throw light on the antiquity of the region. Kiskinda has been identified as Anegondi near Hampi.

Konkan comprising South Canara and North Canara districts is famous as Parasurama Kshetra or the land sanctified by Parasurama. Local traditions describe that Hangal in Dharwar district was the capital city of king Virata where Pandavas an year incognito; that Kuntalapura, the capital of the legendary king Chandrhasa is none other than the village Kubatur in Soraba taluka of the Shimoga district, and that Manipura where Arjuna fought a single combat with his son Babruvahana is a town in the Heggadadevanakote taluk of the Mysore district³.

In same way the legend of Agastya has brought importance to the city of Aihole and Badami. The legendary traditions as they were they had little historical truth but they played very important role in arousing the spirit of pride among the people of Karnataka during the 19th and 20th centuries. The poets, orators and the presidents of annual conferences of Kannada Sahitya parishat invariably quoted the legendary stories to infuse the spirit of patriotism among the people of Karnataka. Naturally, the people of the area started taking pride in the antiquity, sanctity, glory and the tradition of the motherland.

This is further evidenced by the discovery of Asokan inscriptions in several places of Karnataka⁹. The discovery of several Kannada sentences in a Greek drama of 2nd century A.D., not only established the antiquity of Kannada language but also the flare of the Greek people for the beautiful princess of Karnataka who was kidnapped by formers. This drama placing the Kannada language as the oldest Dravidian language enhanced the spirit of the people of the land for their language as well as early contacts of Karnataka with Greece. Similarly, the discovery of several Roman, Chinese coins, in the excavations at Brahmagiri established the commercial contacts of Karnataka with ancient Rome and made people of the region proud of their trans-oceanic contacts¹¹. Satavahan rule had no significant contribution in arousing the spirit of patriotism among the natives of Karnataka.

II. VIGOUR AND VITALITY OF CLASSICAL CULTURE:

The renaissance in any part of the world is closely associated with the history of the land and its glorious past in its real concept renaissance means the revival of the history modified to suit to changed environment, and circumstance is born receiving inspiration and impetus from historical roots. The European renaissance received its inspiration from the intellectual fervour and aesthetic sense of ancient Greek and Roman literature and art. Indian renaissance derives its inspiration from the spiritual richness of the ancient Indian seers. Karnataka

renaissance was the brain child of the vigour and vitality of the ancestors of Karnataka. It is therefore, intended in this chapter to project the vitality and vigour of the penetrating analysis of the cultural heritage of Karnataka. A major premises of the glorious heritage of Karnataka is the assumption that the land produced some of the greatest heroes who succeeded in establishing new kingdoms by overthrowing the alien yoke and by converting the kingdoms into extensive empires by undertaking military campaigns against the rulers of the distant lands. The native ruler of Karnataka whose name has almost become synonymous with heroism was Mayuravarma, the founder of the Kadamba dynasty in the words of Alur Venkatarao was “mountain peak of pride”. The episode of how Mayurasharma got converted himself into Mayuravarma thrills the heart of the readers. He had gone to Kanchipuram, a renowned Ghatika of the education centre of South India for pursuit of higher learning. According to Sthnagunda inscription he was insulted by an army officer of the Pallava king with an intention to take revenge upon the army officer he gave up the sacred duties of a Brahmana and got himself converted into Kshatriya. This episode not only symbolized the caste conflict between Brahamans and Kshatriyas of those days but ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Kadamba dynasty with Banavasi as its capital. Mayuravarma was the first native ruler of Karnataka who succeeded in establishing a native dynasty which was destined to play a significant role in moulding the history and culture of northern part of Karnataka.

III. VIJAYANAGARA THE LAST PHASE OF GLORY OF KARNATAKA:

The Karnataka culture reached the climax of its glory and grandeur during the period of the Vijayanagara empire. The establishment of Vijayanagara empire in 1336 A.D., marked the triumph of Hindu forces of Karnataka against the onslaughts Islam. Vijayanaqara empire stood as a bull work against the spread of Islam to the south of river Krishna³¹. Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru was fond of describing Hinduism of south India as the true and genuine Hinduism³². This explains the significance of Vijayanagara empire in protecting and preserving Hinduism against the inroads of Islam into southern India.

Madhuravijayarn of Gangadevi depicts the miserable condition of the Hindus in south India during the south Indian campaign of Malik Kaffur. The circumstances forged the unprecedented unity among the Hindus and brought the people together to face unitedly, the onslaught of Islamic army. It is significant that military forces under the leadership of Sangam brothers on the one hand and religious forces under the blessings of sage Vidyaranya on the other joined hands against Islam and defeated the non-iconoclastic forces³⁴. The establishment of Vijayanagara empire is undoubtedly a great turning point in the history of Hinduism in particular and Indian history in general.

IV. LITERARY EXCELLENCE:

Kannada is one of the oldest languages of India, with a continuous literary tradition, that is diverse, dynamic and powerful in form and content. Its literature is definitely more than one thousand years old as the first available work, viz., Kavirajamarga was written in the 9th century A.D. Considering, however, reliable evidence in the inscriptions and literary sources, one can aver that it is earlier still, dating back to the sixth century. We can only make a brief and broad survey of this ancient, vast and varied literature. The oldest known Inscription, found in Halimidi and said to belong to the 5th cen. A.D. does contain traces of old Kannada prose in its developing form, termed as 'earlier old Kannada'.

Three poets viz., Pampa, Ponna and Ranna during the trail of classical poetry in old Kannada during the 10th century, though different in temperament and talent, these three had one common feature in them that they were broad- minded in outlook despite being strong adherents of Jaina religion and therefore, they wrote on secular and another religious work in continuation of the tradition, which Gunavarma I appears to have set up. His Adpurana deals with the life and the spiritual progress of Purudeva, who became the first Teerthankara in Jaina hagiology. Though it is overloaded at times with philosophic discussion and legendary narration, it has risen to great heights of poetry in crucial situations, where character and action blend together and thus fulfils the assurance of the poet to bring together poetic beauty and religious substance. His other work, entitled Vikramarunavijaya or Pampabharata as is popularly known is undoubtedly one of the greatest poems in the language. Ponna, an eminent poet and contemporary of Pampa, wrote Bhuvanaikaramabhyudaya and Santipurana.

V. ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE:

Perhaps, the most distinguishing feature of Karnataka culture which has contributed immensely to the enrichment of the Indian culture was the marvelous monuments, decorated with exquisitely carved sculpture and pillars⁵⁴. The esthetic sense and artistic skill of the people of Karnataka is nowhere better exhibited than in the temples which have spread over length and breadth of Karnataka. The temples, monuments and sculptures have been the source of inspiration for the Kannada speaking people. They have been considered as the living monuments and memorials of the past glory of the land⁵⁵. The spirit of renaissance among the people of modern Karnataka was aroused by the description of technical skill and the artistic excellence of the craftsmen of Karnataka preserved through architectural and sculptural marvels of the land. A brief account of the evolution of architecture with distinct designs, schools on the one hand and the sculptural galaxy on the other is expected to impress upon the readers that the spirit of renaissance was instinctively aroused by the excellence of these pieces of architecture and sculpture.

The tradition of using the stone as the medium of artistic taste and technical skill was inaugurated by the artists of the time of Chalukyas of Badami from 6th century onwards. Anivaritha Gunda and Tribhuvanachar were the prominent artists of the early Chalukyan times who supervised the excavation and construction of the causes and temples of the early Chalukyan times. The early Chalukyan architectural monuments illustrate the fact that Karnataka stood as a gate way between the Nagara style of architecture of the North and Dravidian style of architecture of the South. Consequently, the new style known as Vesara style of architecture blossomed out of the soil of Karnataka. The Vesara style besides its own distinguishing features also presents a rare blend of the Nagara and Dravidian styles. The combination of those two schools of architecture has been excellently executed in temples of Pattadakal especially of Sangameswara, Papanatha and Galaganatha.

VI. TOWARDS DECLINE AND DETERIORATION:

Kannada speaking area in historical times was quite extensive. According to Kavirajamarga the earliest extent work in Kannada of the time of Rastrakuta king Amoghavarsha the Kannada speaking area extended from river Kaveri in the south to river Godavari in the north. A critical study of the contents of the epigraphs reveal beyond doubt that the Kannada speaking area in ancient time was far more extensive than the limits fixed by the Kaviraja Marga. The discovery of the lithic records in Kannada has brought forth the fact that. Kannada speaking area was quite extensive and under single administrative unit during the times of the Chalukyas of Kalyani and Kalachuris. The administrative unity and the extent of the Kannada speaking area was an important factor for heralding the glorious and classical culture in its multi-faceted developments in the sphere of literature, architecture, sculptural art and administration and religion.

The establishment of the Muslim rule in Delhi in 1206 A.D. signaled the shock to the native culture of India. The series of invasions of south India planned by All-Ud-din Khilji and executed by Malik Kaffur extended this shock to Karnataka culture. The establishment of the Vijayanagara empire and Bahamani kingdoms at the wake of Malik Kaffur's invasion gave a first blow to the unity of the Kannada speaking areas. The areas to the north of river Krishna came under the rule of the Bahamanis where-as the areas to the south of river Krishna continued to be under the rule of the Vijayanagara empire. The areas under the Bahamani rule which once witnessed very brisk Kannada culture on such a grand scale as never seen before at once came under the Mohammadan influence. A survey of the development of literature, religious activities, architecture and sculpture during the 14th centuries and 15th centuries brings forth the fact that Kannada cultural activities were at once paralyzed and Kannada cultural atmosphere disappeared to the north of the river Krishna⁶⁸. But however, Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire became the centre of Karnataka culture and literature⁶⁹. These

developments were in no small degree significant in inaugurating the process of disintegration of the Karnataka culture. The richest part of the Kannada speaking area was eclipsed by Mohammadan rule which arrested its natural progress.

VII. CONCLUSION:

The situation in parts of Karnataka under Nizam was not totally different. In this area Urdu was adopted as the official as well as spoken language and it was adopted as the medium of instruction from primary to the highest level. Even technical education, education in medicine was done through the medium of Urdu. No wonder therefore Kannada language, Kannada culture and native traditions of Karnataka totally disappeared from the area known as the Hyderabad Karnataka⁸¹. The situation in Bellary district was peculiar. This area being the alone and isolated part of Madras presidency came under the influence of the neighboring Telugu language and culture. The expansion of Telugu language in Bellary district was so fast that it gave a death blow to Kannada language and culture in Bellary in eastern parts of Chitradurga and Kolar districts. The story of Mangalore district was slightly different but equally pathetic.

Thus we notice that after the fall of the Vijayanagara empire, the Kannada culture, language, literature almost vanished from all its peripheral (bordering areas) and was almost reduced to nothing. Darkness and dismay prevailed in the whole of Karnataka culture and literary activities had come to stand still. The Karnataka culture had almost stopped breathing and there were no hopes of its survival.

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