

Formation Of Telangana State And Revival Of Telangana Culture

Declaration of Bonalu and Bathukamma as State Festivals

Mala Ravikumar

Research Scholar, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad.

Abstract: The separation of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh in the year 2014 represents a significant socio-political development in India's history. The long-standing grievances of Telanganites against the dominance of Andhra elites who failed to address historical disparities, political marginalization, leading to continued socio-economic, and the cultural and linguistic identity disparities fuelled demands for statehood. The cultural distinctiveness of Telangana finds profound expression in its festivals, such as Bonalu and Bathukamma. Despite their historical significance and rich cultural heritage, these festivals were overshadowed and received inadequate attention in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state. The declaration of Bonalu and Bathukamma as Telangana State festivals by the government stands as a testament to the recognition of the cultural and religious significance, and it signifies the restoration of cultural identity of the Telangana people. The paper delves emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness of Telangana, the statehood movement, and the government's recognition of Bonalu and Bathukamma as state festivals.

Index Terms: Telangana, Bonalu, Bathukamma, Movement, Festivals.

I. Introduction

Hyderabad expanded from south to north of the river Musi, during the period of Nizam from 1724 to 1948. Secunderabad became twin city which was British cantonment. During the Nizam's dynasty there were immigrants from East Africa, Maharashtra, and North India to work for the Nizams, in the army, as body guards and also to carry out business and trade. Forts, monuments, residential complexes of kings, people, religious structures, educational institutions, industries etc., exhibit the traditional landscapes of Hyderabad. The British Resident intended to effect cultural and social patterns of Hyderabad society (Sheshan, 1993). Hence, the city experienced the impact of western culture and ideas during the colonial period. It resembles European social life even today.

The history of Telangana reveals certain troublesome events. The period 1940s it witnessed the religious rivalry of supremacy and contestation between Hindus and Muslims. During the rule of seventh Nizam, people (armed) revolted against the oppression of feudal lords such as Deshmukhs and Jagirdars, locally referred them as Dora. Further, when the British were losing their authority the supporters of Nizam that formed an untrained army called Razakars created tyranny killing Hindus and committed atrocities on a woman. This was to bring back the autonomy of Nizam and Hindus under the Nizam's rule. People of Telangana endured the cruelty of Razakars. In the year 1947 India had independence from the British reign, but not from the Hyderabad state, which stood as an independent princely state under the reign of Nizam. With police action in the year 1948 by the Indian union, it was liberated in September 1948 and became a part of the Indian union.

Nizam dynasty never restrained the religious activities of the native Hindus, but in fact, encouraged the local traditions and gave grants of endowment to Hindu temple besides Masjids and Dargas (V.K. Bawa, 1991; Sheshan, 1993; Luther, 2006). Neither was there any report of forceful conversions to Islam. According to some intellectual sources, it is during Nizam's dynasty the Hindu religious gods Rama and Krishna temples were constructed and endowed lands for their maintenance, until then there were few Sanskritic temples but they did not receive much attention. Hyderabad witnessed the presence of a high number of local deities rather than Hindu Sanskritic gods (Whitehead, 1921; Srinivas, 1965; Elmore, 1984). Of these deities, only a few local deities of old city and Golconda and Hyderabad (current old city) were given importance. The local deities are believed to be causative supernatural forces of epidemic diseases, thus, the worship being continued for the prospect of the community and retained its prominence in the social life of people even today. The literature and oral traditions refer to the abundance and the vitality of the goddess during the pre-Nizam, during the Nizam, and post-independence also.

II. Formation of Telangana State

The post-independence period witnessed the oppression and exploitation of Andhra elites over the Telanganites, which led to struggle against their dominance, with a demand to form separate Telangana State. In the year 1968-69, a massive revolt occurred demanding its separation from Andhra Pradesh state, over a long period people of Telangana withstood the dominance of Andhra people. The amalgamation of Telangana and Andhra regions in 1956, forming the state of Andhra Pradesh, laid the groundwork for the later demands for separate statehood. This merger, however, did not alleviate the historical disparities that continued to persist. Differences in resource allocation, infrastructure development, and employment opportunities between Telangana and the coastal Andhra region became emblematic of the wider socio-economic disparities. Telangana felt marginalized in state politics. Leaders from the coastal Andhra region, leading to a perceived bias in resource allocation and policy decisions. The distinct cultural and linguistic identity of Telangana, with its unique dialect of Telugu, contributed to a sense of separate regional identity, which was degraded by the Andhraites. Issues related to land reforms, tenant rights, and disputes over water resources further exacerbated tensions in the region. The culture and festivals such as Bonalu, and Bathukamma received no attention. Because of these problems, again from the year 2001 onwards it had a new movement for separation of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh, and continued till 2014. Students, employees, unemployed, general public, literates and illiterates, various political parties, including the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), played a crucial role in mobilizing public support for the cause. The central government of India has announced, Telangana State as the 29th state of the Indian nation on 2nd June 2014 comprising 10 districts, and Hyderabad as its capital city. Later the state has reorganized the districts into 33 in 2016, with no change in 119 Assembly electoral constituencies. With the above discussion and context it has been imperative to look at the revival of the cultural aspects of the Telangana State after 2014 on which the literature (Thakur, 2016; Subrahmanyam, 2016) did not shed the light.

III. Historical cultural landscape of Hyderabad

The erstwhile Hyderabad was a princely state ruled by the Nizams from 1720 to 1948 whose dynasty is referred to as Asaf Jahi Dynasty that remained as the last Islamic rulers in Indian Union. Before the arrival of Asaf Jahi's reign, the area came under the control of the Bahmani Sultans. Sultuan Quli Qutb-Mulk (1481-1543) occupied which was built originally by Kakatiya as their wester defense fort and he established government around 1501 as a governor (Sheshan 1993; Luther, 2006). The commoners lived separately in a locality in the east which was named 'Bhagnagar'¹, but later it was renamed as 'Hyderabad'. The capital of the state shifted to the new city after some years and built 'Charminar' (four towers) on the eastern bank of river Musi with four arches opening four sides or four streets (north, south, east and west directions) in 1591. It was the centerpiece of the old city of Hyderabad, and it intersected the historical trade routes connecting the markets of Golkonda. The city attracted travellers, traders, Persians, Armenians and people of all sorts. Luther (2006) refers to the notes of French traveller on Hyderabad "the capital city of this kingdom was called Baghnagar, the Persians call it Aidera-bad" (p. 49). The city has given scope to the growth of multiple religions and traditions in the above historical context. Though the Mulsim rulers considered it to be an Islamic princely state, the population was of Hindu by and large. The British and Christian missionaries added the Christian population as well. All the religions and cultures thrived without much hindrance and these gave rise to composite culture. The composite culture characterized the Hyderabad is the product of assimilation and interaction of North India, Persian and the local Telugu cultures, and it is commonly referred to as Dhakhani culture (Sheshan, 1993). Today it is known as 'Hyderabad Culture'.

Hyderabad city had a beginning as a small town in 1591 as said before which covered an area of three and a quarter kilometer and now it is spread to 650 km². Hyderabad had a municipal administration since 1869 which covered 55 km² with a population of about 3,50,000 and by 1960 the area grew to 172 km². In 2017 the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) was formed with an area of 652 km² with the population of 7.7 million, male population is 3.98 million and the female population is 3.76 million (GHMC website). From this it is clear that the villages around the old Hyderabad city during the Bahmani Sultans rule and later under its expansion during the Nizams became part of Hyderabad. After independence the city continues to grow covering more number of villages along with urbanization and development initiatives of the government and private bodies. Hyderabad has developed a blend of tradition and modernity. The city has facilitated the growth of multiple religions Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and other religions without any prejudice though there were occasional communal riots a few years ago mainly for political gains (Naidu, 1996). Though the city experienced communal tensions, people of all religions have

¹ The city was named after Quli Qutub Shah (founder) lover and wife, and she was a Hindu girl with the name Bhagmati (Luther, 2006). This was also called as Golkonda (Gollakonda).

been enjoying the freedom of celebrating festivals with pomp and with show and processions in the streets. Today, the city is on the main line of modernization and globalization. It has gained the name of Cyberabad typifying its growth in Information Technology (IT). The city has grown in terms of population, geographical expansion, economy etc., and accommodating the life of modernity efficiently. It is the city, still an asset and it deserves to be second capital of India as said by Dr B.R. Ambedkar². The Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi referred Hyderabad as Cyberabad and a sister city to Brisbane in its technological advancement³.

IV. Revival of Telangana Culture

The last three decades witnessed emergence of new Sanskritic deity temples that became popular. They include Birla Mandir, Shankarmat, Tadband Hanuman Temple, Karmanghat Hanuman Temple, Puri Jagannath at Jubilee hills, Ganesh temple Secunderabad, Asta Lakshmi temple, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) - Krishna temple in Abids, etc. Apart from these, many more small and medium temples of Sanskritic gods emerged, however, these have not enticed much Hindu crowd, though good numbers worshipped these deities every day. On the other hand, the local deities had and have been crafting their vital space and lured large crowds of devotees. Now, approximately for every 2-4 kilometres, there is a shrine of the local deity, and of them, some were named after Sanskritic goddesses such as Kali or Mahankali or any other. The local communities celebrate the festivals attached to these goddesses irrespective of caste with pomp and grandeur collectively in the months of July and August.

The festivals of Sanskritic gods such as Ganesh and goddess Durga which entered into the public domain of Hyderabad in recent times are celebrated with pomp and show largely with the participation of upper caste youth. However, they differ in their motives compared with worship of the local goddesses. In the old city of Hyderabad, the temples and their associated festivals with processions have a significant role to play and the functionaries of these temples make them more significant and utilize them for contestation over space (Rao & Ravikumar, 2017). These are also used to express the strength of Hindu who were suppressed during the Nizams' period in the local Muslim dominated areas despite the fact that the Nizams did not resent Hindu religion as such. But post-independence has affected on the cultural identities of Telangana due to merging of Telangana with Andhra forming Andhra Pradesh state.

The distinct cultural identity has been one of the important components in the Telangana movement for the demand of separate state. It included the linguistic variation, observation of festivals and worship of deities, food habits, dress patterns, music and songs etc. Thus, the leaders in the movement organized several programmes such as Bathukamma worship and dances in the streets, the cultural events of *dhum dham*, Telangana *ruchulu* which included organizing of food festivals unique to Telangana region. Importantly construction of Telangana Thalli which is mother of Telangana and installation of statues and honouring them. 1948 but also after merging with Indian State and the struggle for separate State of Telangana, that is to say till 2nd June, 2014. Perhaps, no other city represents this kind of cultural practices where people express due respect to each other's religion and culture. Later the government of Telangana has declared Bonalu and Bathukamma as state festivals by passing G.O. No.5, and 2 on 26 June 2014, and 24 July 2014 respectively. For these two festivals government of Telangana allocate funds and monitor the celebrations across the Telangana.

V. Bonalu Festival

In this connection it is significant to note that after the formation of the state, the government declared Bonalu festival which is an event related to the worship of local deities. This step has several implications for the worship of the local deities in a grand manner that brought enhanced visibility to the Telangana culture in India and outside the country. This tradition was not well recognized during erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. But, after the formation of separate state, it has gained popularity which is celebrated with pomp, and especially in Hyderabad it is a spectacular festival. The Bonalu festival has a deep historical connection with the wellbeing of Hyderabad. In 1908, a devastating flood caused the Musi River to inundate the old city, prompting the Nizam to take urgent action in draining the water from residential areas. At this critical juncture, it is believed that Kishan Parishad, the Nizam's prime minister and a fervent devotee of Lord Venkateswara and Hanuman, experienced a divine vision of the goddess in his dream. The very next day, he shared this revelation with the Nizam, urging him to seek the goddess's intervention. Despite being a Muslim, the Nizam offered a heartfelt prayer, emphasizing his respect for the Hindu faith. The Nizam worshipped the local deity with five earthen lamps and a saree in a silver plate (Luther, 2006, p.48; Rao & Ravikumar, 2017, p. 241). The Prime Minister

² Published in India Today magazine dated 06 August 2013.

³ In the G20 talks held in November, 2014 at Brisbane, Australia.

of Nizam presented the goddess with a symbolic offering of a golden *chata'* (winnowing fan), silk saree and blouse, vermilion, turmeric, coconut, and pearls, placing them on the water's surface. Miraculously, the water began to recede, swiftly transforming the city into a dry, habitable space, bringing immense joy to its inhabitants.

The term 'bonam' (with 'Bonalu' being the plural form) finds its roots in 'bhojanam', signifying food. This is the culinary offering prepared in a pot or a dedicated bronze vessel for the goddess. The mixture comprises cooked rice, jaggery, curd, and onion. The pot is typically adorned in various ways; commonly, the lower half is coated with a layer of white wash, while the upper portion is embellished with turmeric and vermilion dots. In urban settings, the entire pot is often painted with turmeric, adorned with vermilion dots. Additionally, a smaller pot is positioned atop the opening of the larger vessel, illuminated with an oil lamp. Neem tree branchlets straddle the divide between the small and large pots, with half of the branches extending outward and half tucked within the pot. Women transport the Bonalu on their heads from their residences to the sacred shrine or temple, proceeding in a single file procession accompanied by rhythmic drum beats until they reach the temple.

Bonalu festival is celebrated by all the castes except upper castes such as Brahmins and Vaisyas, inhabiting the villages and urban centres. The pattern of worship differ from village to village because of the existing social structure. Though the caste structure is same across the state, the worship patterns of the local deities however found to be similar still there exists some variations. There are two aspects observed, firstly, in the urban area such as Hyderabad, all the lower castes together offer Bonalu at their respective localities local goddess, but there is a pattern of hierarchy of caste has been noticed. At some other neighbourhoods no such arrangements have been noticed. This distinction is due to the settlement configurations. For instance, at the Golkonda Maisamma temple a traditional structure is observed, whereas at the Mahankali temple of Secunderabad is not the same. Secondly, in the villages also we can identify such distinctions and commonalities. For instance, in South Telangana, each of the lower caste has their own local goddess to whom they offer Bonalu, other castes do not worship in any form. In both cases, rural and urban areas there found differentiated worship array. In Hyderabad, festivities commence in the month of July (Ashadam month according to the Telugu calendar) at the Maisamma temple within the Golkonda fort, culminating with the Bonalu celebrations at the Mahankali temples in the old city of Hyderabad. Throughout this period, local mother goddess deities receive Bonalu offerings. The Government of Telangana plays an official role in organizing this festival. Hundreds of devotees partake in commemorating the goddess, presenting Bonalu offerings, and in some cases, performing animal sacrifices, notably of roosters. The festival takes place from the morning till late evening hours throughout the month. The same structure is absent in the rural Telangana, because each village has its independent social, administrative and political structure, so there is no question of observance of beginning of the festival at some village and end with any other.

VI. Bathukamma Festival

Since the Telangana struggle, the Bathukamma festival has gained widespread popularity both nationally and internationally. Bathukamma is a vibrant arrangement of various flowers and leaves artfully stacked in a conical shape. This celebration transcends the borders of Telangana and is now observed beyond the state's boundaries. Its global recognition stems from the active participation of the state in organizing the festival worldwide, often in collaboration with Non-Resident Indians. The festival spans nine days, coinciding with the Dussera festivities. Flowers like thangedu (Cassia/Senna Auriculata), banthi (Tagetes Erecta), gunugu (Celosia Argentea), along with numerous others, are integral in the creation of Bathukamma. Within each household, women arrange these vibrant displays in their courtyards, engaging in lively songs, rhythmic clapping, and playful circular movements. Eventually, they ceremoniously transport the Bathukammas in a procession to nearby ponds or lakes, gently releasing them onto the water's surface. Bathukamma, alongside Bonalu, encapsulates the essence of women-centric celebrations, emblematic of women's revered status as 'mothers' within society. An air of sophistication and grandeur marks this festival. Telangana government mandates the participation of all government and private institutions in the celebration of Bathukamma.

VII. Conclusion

The amalgamation of Telangana with Andhra to form Andhra Pradesh was based on linguistic similarities. However, this union brought to light significant disparities in political representation, socio-economic conditions, and educational awareness, leading to the dominance and exploitation of Telanganites by the upper castes of Andhra. This unequal treatment ultimately sparked the movement for separate statehood. It became evident that the Andhra elites sought to suppress Telangana's distinct culture and language in favour of their own. Festivals like Bonalu and Bathukamma were marginalized and on the brink of fading away. The establishment of Telangana as a separate state not only preserved these cultural practices but also served as a powerful platform to showcase the unique identity, language, and traditions of Telanganites to the entire nation and the global community. The formation of the state has been a crucial step in ensuring the recognition and preservation of Telangana's rich heritage.

References

- Bawa, V.K. 1991. *The Last Nizam: The Life and Times of Mir Osman Ali Khan*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Elmore, W.T. 1984. *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Service.
- Luther, Narendra. 2006. *Hyderabad: A Biography*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Naidu, Ratna 1990. *Old Cities, New Predicaments*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Rao, N Sudhakar, and M Ravikumar. 2017. "The Ritual of Power and Power of the Ritual: An Interface between Religion and Politics." In *Religion and Modernity in India*, edited by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Aloka Parasher Sen, 238-264. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sheshan, K.S.S. 1993. *Hyderabad-400: saga of a city*. Hyderabad: Association of British counsel scholars.
- Srinivas, M.N. 1956. "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization." *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (4): 481-496.
- Subrahmanyam, V. (2016). *Telangana Movement: Narrative and Representation*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.
- Thakur, D. (2016). *The Formation of Telangana: Emerging Perspectives on the Genesis and Dynamics of India's 29th State*. New Delhi: Routledge India.
- Whitehead, H. 1921. *Village Gods of South India*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
- <https://www.ghmc.gov.in>
- <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/make-hyderabad-the-second-capital-of-india-demand-andhra-leaders-173156-2013-08-06>