



# THE UNIFICATION OF KARNATAKA – A REVIEW

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**Abstract:** *The struggle for the unification of all kannada speaking areas began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the unification was only an idea of litterateurs and journalists. Later, it succeeded in enlisting the support of political leaders too. With the movement, an awareness about Kannada language and literature grew. A remarkable progress was witnessed both in the prose and style of the language. Aluru Venkata Rao's Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava raised awareness about the history and cultural contributions of different ruling dynasties. Aluru Venkata Rao's Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava raised awareness about the history and cultural contributions of different ruling dynasties. Kannada came to be synchronized with new thinking and beliefs. Its linguistic style, grammar and style of composition began to evolve too. The anti-partition feelings in Bengal influenced many to think about of having a separate statehood for Kannada-speaking people too. His Highness Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, the Ruler of Mysore from 1940 ceded his kingdom to the Dominion of India in 1947 but continued as the Maharaja until India became a Republic in 1950.*

The struggle for the unification of all kannada speaking areas began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historians point out that the origin of the movement for the linguistic provinces can be traced to the same time for example, the demand of the Oriya speaking people and the demand for Sylhet district to be transferred from Bengal to Assam. Even before the independence the consciousness of linguistic unification among the Indians was stimulating. They opposed British policies of divide and rule. The movement began during the second half of the 19th century with the establishment of Karnataka Vidya Vardhaka Sangha in 1890 in Dharwad. The unification movement went hand in hand with the freedom movement and became stronger in the Kannada-speaking areas. Apart from frontline organizations like the Vidya Vardhaka Sangha in Dharwad and the Kannada Sahithya Parishat in Bangalore (formed in 1915), All-Karnataka Writers Conference and Karnataka State Political Conference, which were held in Dharwad in 1908 and 1920 respectively, have also contributed significantly to this movement.

Initially, the unification was only an idea of litterateurs and journalists. Later, it succeeded in enlisting the support of political leaders too. Hence, in 1920, it was decided to push for the unification through a Congress session. A number of delegates were present at Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress held in 1920 to press for this cause. In 1923, Hindustani Seva Dal, led by Dr.N.S.Hardikar, started a signature campaign in regard.

In 1924 at Belgaum, the annual session of the Indian National Congress was held and was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi. Here, Huilgol Narayana Rao sang the song, Udayavagali Namma Cheluva Kannada nadu (Let our charming Kannada Nadu arise), which not only enthralled the audience, but also helped in raising the

spirits for the cause. In the same venue, the Karnataka Unification Conference was held. Here emerged Karnataka Ekikarana Sabha, which later became famous as Karnataka Ekikarana Sangha.

With the movement, an awareness about Kannada language and literature grew. A remarkable progress was witnessed both in the prose and style of the language. Aluru Venkata Rao's Karnataka Gatha Vaibhava raised awareness about the history and cultural contributions of different ruling dynasties. Kannada came to be synchronized with new thinking and beliefs. Its linguistic style, grammar and style of composition began to evolve too. The anti-partition feelings in Bengal influenced many to think about of having a separate statehood for Kannada-speaking people too. Aluru Venkata Rao's interpretations about new spirits of nationalism based on Kannada language and literature boosted the movement. His concept of *Karnatakatwa* included everything related to Kannada. During 1940s, a cry for a separate state for the Kannada-speaking people increased. Karnataka Ekikarana Parishath began to identify itself as an important association in this regard. Other new areas like Bellary, Kasaragod and Mangalore emerged as new centres of the movement. In 1947, Karnataka Ekikarana Maha samithi came to be constituted with people like S Nijalingappa, A J Dodmeti and Srinivas Rao Mangalvedhe as its members.

His Highness Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, the Ruler of Mysore from 1940 ceded his kingdom to the Dominion of India in 1947 but continued as the Maharaja until India became a Republic in 1950. He became the 'Raja Pramukh' — a constitutional position — as the head of Mysore State from 1950-1956, and in a rare gesture, even after the reorganization of the State on a linguistic basis, he was appointed Governor of the integrated Mysore State in 1956 and held the post until 1964, after which he was nominated as the Governor of Madras State (now Tamil Nadu) for two years.

The acceptance of the Wodeyers in the democratic polity of India is best explained by the cardinal principles upheld by their dynasty — political accommodation, enlightened governance and proactive reforms which anticipated and defused any possibility of social unrest. Thus, Mysore had a representative Assembly from 1882. Although the franchise was limited and powers were minimal, it marked out this princely state as the most progressive in India.

Mysore was also the first state to make reservation on the basis of domicile and caste; the first demand came from the Mysore Brahmins, who were finding it difficult to compete with the Madras Brahmins who had a virtual monopoly over the upper tier of the state's civil service until 1920. This soon led to demands from other groups as well. When Wodeyar IV appointed the Justice Miller Committee to look into the issue of reservation for backward classes (which meant everyone except Brahmins, Anglo-Indians and Europeans), Visveshvaraya resigned his Dewanship in protest. However, the Miller Committee recommended 75 per cent reservation in the long run and a time-bound programme to ensure that at least 50 per cent of posts were kept for the backward classes. Thus, seven decades before the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, Maharaja Krishna raja Wodeyar IV opened the public service to less exalted groups in the caste hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the popular upsurge against the Curzon's Partition of Bengal had an all-India impact and linguistic groups everywhere started their movements. It also galvanized the Kannada speaking populations living outside Mysore to come together under the leadership of Aluru Venkata Rao. He called for a movement for uniting Karnataka. He was known as the 'Kannada Kula Purohita' or the 'High Priest of the Kannada family'. He made a case for integrating all Kannada regions of Madras and Bombay presidencies, besides those under the Nizam of Hyderabad into the Kingdom of Mysore. This demand received a fillip when the idea of separate Karnataka State was also ratified by the INC committee led by Motilal Nehru in 1928. According to this, there

was a 'strong prima facie case for unification' of all the Kannada speaking areas, and it was believed that Karnataka could also be a financially strong province.

However, it is interesting to note that unlike language movements elsewhere which looked for an external scapegoat, Aluru Venkata Rao turned the gaze inwards. He wanted the Kannadigas to measure their inadequacies, not against the overarching triumphs of the imperial power, but against the modest successes of other linguistic nationalisms within India itself. Aluru Venkata Rao's anguished cry in 1920: 'We don't have a history! We must have a history!' implied that it was only through a recast of history, that Kannada people could find their identity and their role in Indian history. He deplored the fact that his effort came five decades after Bengali, Marathi and Hindi counterparts had made their heroes and historic triumphs a part of the Indian nationalist narrative.

Yet it must be placed on record that the impetus for shaping the Kannada identity came not from Mysore, but the Bombay Karnataka region where the Marathi national identity was being reinforced. It was RH Deshpande, who strove for the revival of Kannada in a region where Marathi was the language of administration. On the other hand, Mysore was noticed throughout the colonial period for its achievements in state crafts and industrialization.

With the merger of Mysore into India, there was a clear divide in the Kannada movement. While the Mysoreans felt that they were far more advanced in almost all spheres: education and culture, agriculture and industry, health and education. They felt that the merger of the 'backward areas, starting with the six talukas of Bellary, would actually prove to be a drain on the exchequer. They wanted the Kannada speaking areas outside of Mysore to be constituted into another Kannada speaking state. This change of attitude is best characterized by DV Gundappa (DVG). At the Karnataka Sangha Rajyotsava in 1944 at Bangalore's Central College, he called for the consolidation of the Kannada-speaking areas within one, two or more states, however by the time of the SRC in 1955, DVG had become a staunch opponent of a single Karnataka. Others opposed to the ideas of linguistic unification while supporting the idea of two states, namely Karnataka and Mysore, were ex-Diwans Vishweshvarayya and M Mirza Ismail, scholars such as MPL Shastri, Congressmen such as AG Ramachandra Rao and T Channaiah (who had also earlier supported unification), and members of caste associations such as Vokkaliga and Kuruba Sanghas. This assortment of cultural 'royalists', non-dominant castes, and technocrat-administrators wanted to preserve Mysore's formidable reputation as a 'model' state and tried to prevent the linguistic consolidation of the Kannada speaking people.

On November 1, 1956, the different Kannada-speaking regions of southern India were brought under a single state through the linguistic re-organization of states. But, as the state observes the 60th anniversary of that year, it appears rent apart by many conflicts both from within and without. Although the roots of the word 'Karnataka' are very old, the territory of present day Karnataka was split into over 20 different administrative units including different princely states, the Madras and Bombay presidencies, and the Nizam's Hyderabad state. The movement for the unification of Karnataka began in the late 19th century, with the formation of the Karnataka Vidya Vardhaka Sangha in Dharwad in 1890 by RH Deshpande. Records show that the Sangha passed a resolution in 1912, calling for the merger of the Kannada-speaking areas under the British.

A Kannada Sabha was set up in 1916 to work towards the unification, and it was renamed the Kannada Ekikarana Sangha in 1936. The Ekikarana movement got a boost with the organization of the Kannada Sahithya Parishat in Bangalore in 1915. Dharwad continued to be the epicenter of the movement for a united Karnataka. When the Congress passed a resolution in 1928 to formulate a constitution for India, NS Hardikar and Ranganath Diwakar collected over 36,000 signatures of people who demanded that all the Kannada-

speaking regions be merged into a single state. Elsewhere in the state, the Mysore kingdom functioned from 1881 when the erstwhile Maharaja Sri Chamarajendra Wodeyar assumed powers of the state and the order for the first representative assembly was issued on August 25, 1881. The assembly met for the first time on October 7 that year. Even then, anyone who had attained the age of 18 could vote.

The Legislative Council of non-official members with “practical experience and knowledge of local conditions and requirements to assist Government in making Laws and Regulations” was established by the erstwhile Mysore kingdom. The Council also included the Dewan and the President of the Council. By 1923 the council had 50 members. When the British granted independence to the Indian sub-continent the Mysore king acceded to the Indian union. The then Maharaja issued a proclamation on November 25, 1949, the Representative Assembly and the Legislative Council were dissolved on December 16, 1949. The first Assembly under the Indian Constitution was formed in 1952 and had 99 elected members and one nominated member. With the formation of Andhra State in 1953, parts or adjoining Bellary District from Madras State were added to Mysore State and the Strength of the Assembly increased by five members. That year, the unification movement took a violent turn.

The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee decided to hold its special executive committee meeting at town hall in Hubli on April 19, 1953. Around 25,000 people gathered at the town hall, and the Congress members had a hard time getting inside. They were geared and heckled, their resignations were demanded. Shankar gouda Patil of Adaragunchi village went on an indefinite hunger strike. Someone burned a vehicle, and stoned were pelted at the police, who then resorted to a lathi charge. On November 1, 1956, the state of Mysore was formed following linguistic re-organization. It included four districts from the former Bombay state, three districts of Hyderabad state, a district and a taluk of the Old Madras state, the state of Coorg and the princely state of Mysore.

It was only in 1973, under the chief minister ship of Devaraja Urs that the state was renamed as Karnataka. The term Karnataka has its roots in terms that find mention in literary texts that are several hundred years ago. According to UR Ananthamurthy, the Kavirajamarga refers to the land from Cauvery to Godavari where Kannada is spoken as Kannada desha. “It is probably one of the earliest instances of defining a land in terms of a language spoken by a people,” Ananthamurthy says. Although there was a demand for the unification of all Kannada-speaking areas, there was opposition too, mostly from the Mysore region. The demand for unification in the 1950s and before came from the inequality that Kannada-speaking people faced in other administrative regions. They felt that their social economic development was ignored in these regions because of their lack of numerical strength.

However, it was felt by some in the Mysore region that merging the Kannada-speaking regions would place strain on Mysore’s resources. In his essay titled “Kannada and Mysore” author KN Subrahmanya notes that there was a demand to have two Kannada states, one with areas adjacent to Mysore and the other comprised of areas to the north of Mysore. There was also a fear among Vokkaliga – who are concentrated in the Mysore region – that they would be numerically outnumbered if all Kannada-speaking areas were united. Unfortunately, although territorial integration has been achieved, developmentally, Karnataka could still be divided into three: The Old Mysore region, Mumbai-Karnataka and Hyderabad-Karnataka are unequal in terms of living standards, and are developed in that order.

Some these grouses have manifested in the debates around the demands for water. Many have raised questions about how, the Mahadayi and Cauvery agitations have received much attention from political parties and Sandalwood, while the Nethravathi agitation in coastal Karnataka, has not quite been equated with “Kannada” and “Karnataka”. This turn of events is quite ironic, as the coastal Karnataka region where Tulu is the local language, has some of the highest human development indicators for historical reasons. Culturally though, various parts of Karnataka have their own rich traditions in food, culture, community, festivals, and linguistic diversity.

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