



Literacy Work Of Rajaraja-Narendra With Reference To Andhra Mahabharatamu

Bodda Haribabu

Research Scholar

Andhra University

Abstract

Rajaraja Narendra (1019–1061) ruled the Vengi kingdom as the Eastern Chalukya king in South India. He is the initial Chalukya Cholas monarch. During his reign, members of the Shudra caste who served as generals and royal officials received multiple land grants, indicating that he was a tolerant ruler. He had great regard for priests, the Telugu and Sanskrit languages, and religions. The Telugu translation of the Mahabharata was commissioned by Rajaraja Narendra from Nannayya Bhattaraka, his teacher, advisor, and court poet. Andhra Mahabharatham is the Telugu version of the Mahabharatha, written by the Kavitrayment (Trinity of Poets) of Nannayya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada (also known as Errana). The three poets who, between the 11th and 14th centuries, translated the Mahabharata from Sanskrit to Telugu served as models for all subsequent poets. Lord Ganesha, under the direction of Veda Vyasa, independently translated the Sanskrit Mahabharata into Andhra Mahabharatham. At the request of East Chalukya king Rajaraja Narendra, Nannayya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada composed Andhra Mahabharatham in the Telugu literary style. This signifies the beginning of previously undiscovered Telugu literature. This work has been interpreted in the style of Champu and conveys such clarity, polish, and literary distinction.

Keywords: Rajaraja Narendra, literacy work, Andhra Mahabharatam, Telugu language.

Introduction

It describes the conflict between two groups of cousins during the Kurukshetra War and the destinies of the Kaurava and Pava princes and their followers. It also contains philosophical and devotional material, such as a discussion of the four pururtha or "life goals" (12.161). The Bhagavad Gita, the story of Damayanti, the story of Shakuntala, the story of Pururava and Urvashi, the story of Savitri and Satyavan, the story of Kacha and Devayani, the story of Rishyasringa, and

a condensed version of the Ramayana are often considered to be independent works. Tradition holds that Vyasa is the author of the Mahabharata. There have been numerous attempts to decipher its historical evolution and compositional layers. The majority of the Mahabharata was probably written between the third century BCE and the third century CE, with the earliest surviving passages dating to no earlier than 400 BCE (Austin Christopher, 2019)¹. Probably, the epic's original events occurred between the ninth and eighth centuries BCE (Brockington, 1998)². During the early Gupta period, the text likely reached its final form (c. 4th century CE). (Pattanaik, Devdutt)³.

Background of Andhra Mahabharatam

Andhra Mahabharatam is the Telugu version of the Sanskrit Mahabharata. It was composed by the three greatest Telugu poets: Nannayya, Thikkanna, and Yerrapragada (Errana). In Telugu, these are typically referred to as "Kavitrayam" (Sobha Kalyani, 2011)⁴. Ganesha is credited with transcribing Vyasa's dictation in the first section of the Mahabharata, but scholars regard this as a later addition to the epic, and the "Critical Edition" does not include Ganesha at all. (Mahābhārata, Vol. 1, Part 2.)⁵ Andhra Mahabharatham is the Telugu version of Mahabharatha, composed by Nannayya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada of the Kavitrayam (Trinity of Poets) (also known as Errana). Between the 11th and 14th centuries, the three poets who translated the Mahabharata from Sanskrit to Telugu served as models for all subsequent poets (Kavi Trayam)⁶. This Andhra Mahabharatham was an independent translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharatha composed by Lord Ganesha under the supervision of Veda Vyasa. This translation is therefore not stanza-by-stanza. These three poets composed Andhra Mahabharatham in the literary style of Telugu while retaining the exact same meaning as the Sanskrit Mahabharatham.

Rajaraja Narendra, king of the East Chalukyas, requested that Nannayabhatta (1022–1063, also known as Nannaya) translate the Mahabharata from Sanskrit to Telugu. Rajaraja Narendra, a renowned visionary and member of the Eastern Chalukya dynasty, ruled the Vengi kingdom. Narendra, the revered national hero of Andhra Pradesh, succeeded his father Vishnuvardana (also known as Vimaladitya) as Vengi in 1019 and ruled until 1062. His rule was characterised by persistent political turmoil. He founded Rajamahendravaram, a city on the banks of the Godavari, and transformed it into a thriving cultural and economic centre. He is credited with sowing the first literary seeds in Telugu. As part of his political strategy to promote Telugu literature and strengthen the unity of the regions under his rule, Nannayya Bhattaraka was commissioned to translate the Mahabharata into Telugu. This signifies the start of previously undiscovered Telugu literature. This work has been interpreted in the Champu style and exudes such simplicity, polish, and literary excellence that some scholars do not rule out the existence of Telugu literary works before the Nannaya dynasty. Without his efforts, the Telugu language would not be thriving at present. Few documents exist regarding Rajaraja Narendra, the forgotten servant of the Telugu language. It is

regrettable that his efforts and service to the people were not more thoroughly recorded for future generations.

Rajaraja Narendra

Rajaraja-Narendra was the Chalukya ruler of Vengi, the fertile alluvial lands located between the Krishna and Godavari rivers in present-day Andhra Pradesh. By the eleventh century, the lords of the Deccan had intervened in the affairs of the Chalukyas of Vengi for nearly two centuries, intermarrying with them, inciting civil war, and irrigating the lush coast with the blood of brothers, fathers, and sons.

In the late 10th CE, the rise of the imperial Cholas in Tamilakam added another actor to the politics of Vengi. Narendra himself was the son and grandson of Chola princesses, and had to draw on Chola support to defeat multiple bloody attempts by his ambitious half-brother Vijayaditya VII to unseat him. Vengi became one of two contested riverine regions between the mighty Kalyana Chalukyas of the Deccan and the Cholas of Tamilakam, the other being the Raichur doab.

After the death of the Chola emperor Rajadhiraja at the Battle of Koppam in 1054, Narendra became no more than a titular lord, the vassal of the Kalyana Chalukya emperor Someshvara I. He had little company in his sorrowful retirement: his son Rajendra seems to have preferred to live with his maternal uncles, the Cholas (this remarkable man would eventually take advantage of the chaos of the late 11th century to declare himself Kulottunga I Chola, but that is a story for another day). In this old age, ravaged by the trauma of his family history, Narendra turned to literature as a consolation (Anirudh Kaniseti, 2020)⁷.

Up to the 9th CE, most courtly literature in South India had been composed in Sanskrit. But by Narendra's time, South Indian elites had grown more interested in vernacular language texts that appealed to a deeper and more diverse political economy. Poets and kings began to create new, standardised versions of hitherto-diverse regional dialects conforming to Sanskrit aesthetics and grammar. This had been particularly successful in the Deccan: in the late 9th CE, the Rashtrakuta emperor Amoghavarsha composing the Kavirajamargam, a manual of Kannada poetics based on the Sanskrit Kavyadarsha of the 8th century Pallava court-poet Dandin, inaugurating a flourishing tradition of Kannada court poetry, such as the Vikramarjunavijayam of Pampa. (Pampa was, incidentally, a Jain from the Telugu country). Poets such as Pampa were members of a highly-paid, highly-mobile, highly-skilled literary-political elite, whom kings competed to retain for the prestige they brought and the effective propaganda they could compose (Yazdani, Ghulam, 1961)⁸.

Narendra decided, for the first time, to undertake this process of creating a standardised, aestheticised courtly register of Telugu. He reached out to Nannayya – a Brahmin from Tamilakam, possibly a Chola or Kalyana Chalukya officer - and said “My lineage begins with the moon... The stories of the Pandavas, virtuous and beyond blame... are ever close to my heart. Please compose in Telugu a book that makes clear... the proven meaning bound to the Mahabharata text.” Perhaps this was Narendra's way of making himself feel relevant and powerful: his failures as a king redeemed by his success as a patron of literature (Narayanarao and David, 2002)⁹. Perhaps situating the horrors that he went through in the language of his childhood, telling the story of his ancestors (he may certainly have thought of the Pandavas and Kauravas as such, ridiculous as it may seem) through the Mahabharata, helped him heal from his broken youth. And so mental health, older literary experiments, a cosmopolitan courtly elite, and tragic violence all came together.

Literary Works during the time of Rajaraja Narendra

At the time of Rajaraja Narendra, two Kannada literary works, namely Vikramarjuna Vijayam and Gadayuddam, had already popularised the Mahabharata story in Karnataka. The Mahabharata was translated into Tamil between the seventh and eighth centuries. However, Puranas were not available in Telugu. Brahmins would recite Puranas such as the Mahabharata in Sanskrit in temples and courts.

The Eastern Chalukya Dynasty championed Jainism and Shaivism. Rajaraja Narendra was a Shaivite. He held in high regard Brahmin priests, the Sanskrit language, and religion. The success of Jains and Buddhists taught him that translating religion and the Puranas into Telugu was an effective means of promoting their popularity. Even a millennium ago, Buddhism and Jainism were preached and taught in local languages, gaining wide popularity. Therefore, Rajaraja Narendra requested that his teacher, advisor, and court poet Nannayya Bhattaraka translate the Mahabharata for his subjects from Sanskrit to Telugu.

During Raja Narendra's reign, Nannaya translated two and a half parvas of the Mahabharata into Telugu. Tikkana and Errapragada resumed identical practises after more than two centuries. Raja Raja Narendra's most notable contribution to the Telugu community was assisting Nannaya in developing the first and most comprehensive grapheme script for the Telugu language, including grammar and punctuation. Which is an even greater achievement in the context of the evolution of the Telugu language, which is now the sixteenth most spoken language in the world (93+ Million / 9.3 Billion Speakers). The Telugu community owes a tremendous amount of gratitude to the visionary who decided to create a script for Telugu so that one day it will have a great language with a perfect grapheme that can write better than English. Telugu is able to produce "But" and "Put" with perfect phoneme output without requiring the speaker to remember how to pronounce them. Credit goes to Raja Raja Narendra and Nannaya Bhattaraka.

Rajaraja Narendra and the Andhra Mahabharatamu

The blossoming of one of South India's most prolific literary traditions owes a great deal to the entangled networks of family, politics and poetry in the 11th century. Rajaraja-Narendra was the Chalukya ruler of Vengi, the fertile alluvial lands between the Krishna and Godavari rivers in modern Andhra Pradesh. By the 11th CE, the lords of the Deccan had been intervening in the affairs of the Chalukyas of Vengi for almost 200 years - intermarrying with them, encouraging civil war, and watering the lush coast with the blood of brothers, fathers and sons.

In the late 10th CE, the rise of the imperial Cholas in Tamilakam added another actor to the politics of Vengi. Narendra himself was the son and grandson of Chola princesses, and had to draw on Chola support to defeat multiple bloody attempts by his ambitious half-brother Vijayaditya VII to unseat him. Vengi became one of two contested riverine regions between the mighty Kalyana Chalukyas of the Deccan and the Cholas of Tamilakam, the other being the Raichur doab.

After the death of the Chola emperor Rajadhiraja at the Battle of Koppam in 1054, Narendra became no more than a titular lord, the vassal of the Kalyana Chalukya emperor Someshvara I. He had little company in his sorrowful retirement: his son Rajendra seems to have preferred to live with his maternal uncles, the Cholas (this remarkable man would eventually take advantage of the chaos of the late 11th century to declare himself Kulottunga I Chola, but that is a story for another day). In this old age, ravaged by the trauma of his family history, Narendra turned to literature as a consolation.

Conclusion

Andhra Mahabharatham is the Telugu version of the Mahabharatha, written by the Kavitrayment (Trinity of Poets) of Nannayya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada (also known as Errana). The three poets who, between the 11th and 14th centuries, translated the Mahabharata from Sanskrit to Telugu served as models for all subsequent poets. Lord Ganesha, under the direction of Veda Vyasa, independently translated the Sanskrit Mahabharata into Andhra Mahabharatham. At Rajaraja Narendra's request, Nannayya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada composed Andhra Mahabharatham in the Telugu literary style. This signifies the beginning of previously undiscovered Telugu literature. This work has been interpreted in the style of Champu and conveys such clarity, polish, and literary distinction.

References

1. Austin, Christopher R. (2019). Pradyumna: Lover, Magician, and Son of the Avatara. Oxford University Press. p. 21.
2. Brockington (1998, p. 26)
3. Pattanaik, Devdutt. "How did the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' come to be (and what has 'dharma' got to do with it)?"
4. Sobha Kalyani (2011). Difference between Andhra Mahabharata and Sanskrit Mahabharata. <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-Andhra-Mahabharata-and-Sanskrit-Mahabharata>
5. Mahābhārata, Vol. 1, Part 2. Critical edition, p. 884.
6. <https://telugubasha.net/en/literature-telugu>
7. Anirudh Kanisetti (2020). Rajaraja-Narendra and the Andhra Mahabharatamu. <https://www.anirudhkanisetti.com/post/andhra-mahabharatamu>
8. Yazdani, Ghulam (1961). The Early History of the Deccan. Vol. I. London; New York: Published under the authority of the Government of Andhra Pradesh by the Oxford University Press.
9. Velcheru, Narayana Rao, and Shulman, David. Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology. Berkely and London: University of California Press, 2002.

