

# Linguistic Movements and Political Heterogeneity: Rethinking Unification Movement across British and 'Princely' Karnataka

Society and Culture in South Asia  
8(1) 118–141, 2022

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DOI: 10.1177/23938617211054167

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## Abstract

Subsequent to the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the consolidation of linguistic identities and movements emerged as an important assertion of core democratic values, positing that governance must be in a language intelligible to the majority. Like other linguistic movements in late-colonial India, the *Karnataka Ekikarana* (Karnataka unification) movement did not proceed with a spatially uniform logic nor followed a uniform temporality in realising its objectives of uniting Kannada speakers from disparate sub-regions. Attempting to reconcile elite literary ambitions, popular aspirations and political differences, the movement shifted gears through several phases as it worked across multiple territorial jurisdictions and political systems, including the demarcations of British India and princely India.

Focussing on the period between 1860 and 1938, the present article examines the heterogeneous nature of the unification movement across British-Karnataka and two Kannada-speaking princely states, namely, Mysore in the south and Jamakhandi in the north. It explores the ways in which the ruling family of 'model' Mysore sought legitimacy in embracing

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their Kannada heritage; in contrast, the Jamakhandi rulers resisted any concession to Kannada linguistic sentiments. The article shows how, in arriving at monolingually indexed territorial entities, the bridging of 'internal' frontiers across these divergent political and linguistic contours proved just as crucial as the claiming of dominance over other language groups within an intensely polyglot world.

### **Keywords**

Unification, partition, Kannada, princely states, British presidencies

At the outset, we note that the linguistic unification movements emerged from the impulses of administrative and territorial re-organisation of the Presidencies in colonial India. Generally speaking, the historiography of the various regional linguistic movements that asserted greater visibility in the early years of the twentieth century, regards mobilisation as influenced by the aftermath of the Bengal Partition in 1905.<sup>1</sup> It has been a structural framework for fashioning academic perspectives on linguistic unification movements in British India. However, the history of linguistic unification movements or the re-organisation of states in colonial India does not offer a homogeneous or uniform trajectory. Premised on modern linguistic identities, and influenced by social, historical and political dimensions, linguistic movements assumed distinct dynamics as they each sought to claim dominance over a fluid, for now imaginary, spatial matrix, cutting existing territorial demarcations.

Furthermore, existing studies of nationalism and of linguistic mobilisation have focussed largely on mobilisation in British India, of which the three Presidencies were the three major administrative demarcations. However, the target audiences of linguistic mobilisation, and any imagination of territorial re-organisation along linguistic lines, would, by definition, cut across the boundaries between British India and territories under princely rule. Taking a cue from studies which have focussed on the complexity of the unification movement through an exploration of its varying trajectories in spatial terms (Wood 1984: 65–99), the present article advances efforts to show the political dimensions of linguistic mobilisation and the unification movement, which were tempered by regional diversity. These dimensions merit nuanced study, as little is known about the differentiated trajectories of the movement exhibited across 'Princely' India. Also known often

<sup>1</sup> Windmiller (1954: 291–318) attributes the origin of linguistic movements in colonial India to the post-Bengal partition agitation and its subsequent success in 1911.

as 'Indian India', not much is known about how linguistic movements played out in princely territories, or how linguistic movements straddled the governmental divide to enable native speakers to imagine a sense of belonging that transcended territorial contours of the political unit where they resided.

Necessarily reflecting the subcontinent's linguistic, economic, cultural, historical and social diversities, the history of the unification movement in Karnataka indicates heterogeneous political frames, influences and aspirations. The existence of two different political/administrative terrains, namely British-Karnataka and 'Princely' Karnataka, is a case in point. Exhibiting contrasting historical-political legacies, the trajectories of the history of the Karnataka unification movement as it negotiated developments across these two varied politico-administrative terrains demonstrated important differences. While British-Karnataka emerged as a hub of colonialist and nationalist activities which also nurtured linguistic sentiments, in comparison, state authorities in princely Karnataka were reluctant to encourage nationalist or political activities. Focussing on the period between 1860 and 1938, the present article examines this history in British and princely Karnataka.

## **Moments between Divided and Unified Karnataka (1860–1956)**

The territory under present-day Karnataka was distributed across several administrative units stretching across Bombay Presidency, Madras presidency (both part of British India), Nizam's Hyderabad, Mysore and Coorg. The defeat of the Peshwa in 1818 saw the northern Kannada-speaking tracts of what was to become Bombay Presidency pass under British control. Kannadigas formed a numerical majority in the four 'Kannada' districts, namely, Belgaum, Dharwad, Bijapur and North Kanara in Bombay Presidency. However, the erstwhile political elites under Peshwa rule were Marathi-speaking. For this reason, Marathi enjoyed far greater prestige than Kannada in these areas. The southern parts of the Bombay Presidency included more than 20 princely states.<sup>2</sup> Among all of princely ruled Karnataka, Mysore was the largest state. It had come under colonial rule when the British subdued Tippu Sultan in 1799. Mysore was also the only princely domain where Kannada enjoyed

<sup>2</sup> The Princely states were Sangli, Meeraj (Senior and Junior), Kurandavada (Senior and Junior), Jamakhandi, Mudhol, Jat, Akkalkot, Aundh, Ramadurga, Kolhapur and its feudatories and Savanur.

official patronage. Even as parts of Nizam's Hyderabad had significant segments of Kannada-speaking population, the official language of Hyderabad state was Urdu. The South Kanara district came under the Madras Presidency, where Tamil was made the official language. Last, the province of Coorg (Kodagu), with its distinct linguistic identity, was administered as a Commissionerate. Ranged across these scattered regional geo-political divisions, the advocates of unification envisaged consolidation of tracts across a varied geo-political landscape, which inevitably proceeded through complicated stages until state unification was eventually announced in 1956.

A basic premise for the following discussion is the belief that the unification movement in colonial Karnataka did not simply emerge by 'invoking' linguistic and cultural identity. There were clear political logics guiding the vectors and forms within which linguistic identities were constructed and foregrounded in the second-half of the nineteenth century. Hence, an effort is made here is to locate and link linguistic consolidation and its territorialisation to 'sites where language and politics interact' (Sarangi 2018: 14).<sup>3</sup> As the next section elaborates, these linkages were advanced in three phases. Each of the sub-regions with significant Kannada-speaking populations bore out the existence of heterogeneous institutional dynamics, political legacies, literary traditions and historical experiences among the areas sought to be unified. The fluidity of this matrix defined the extent, scope and nature of possible mobilisation along linguistic lines in advancing the relative claims of the dominant/majority language within each sub-region, as well as within the wider Kannada region that was envisaged as uniting these spatial clusters.

In unravelling this history, it is critical to keep in mind that any understanding of linguistic mobilisation along majority lines would necessarily be subject to the enduring implications of the asymmetrical relationship between English and vernacular languages established in the colonial period. Additionally, however, efforts to consolidate such linguistic majorities seeking now to imprint their linguistic identity as the marker of a monolingually indexed province would need to factor in the asymmetries of the relationships between different 'rival' vernacular languages across different territorial pockets within the region. Thus, while a Marathi–Kannada 'rivalry' emerged in the northern districts, contestation between Tamil and Kannada speakers characterised politics in the southern districts, and similarly between Telugu and Kannada

<sup>3</sup> Sarangi quoted in Jha (2018).

speakers in the north-eastern belt. Given the recent and strong links with the erstwhile Peshwa state, Marathi enjoyed special privileges as darbar/official language in several princely states created by the British after 1818 in the region south of Pune–Satara. Although Kannada was the language of the majority in these states, it remained marginalised in all areas of public life. Within the demographics of such multi-lingual tracts, the politics of numerical strength and assertions around linguistic identity created elaborate intricacies. Such linguistic mobilisations were variously amplified or suppressed in relation to the internal political dynamics and the systems of governance prevailing in each of these areas. Equally, the political contrast between a modern public sphere, as it emerged variably around structures of colonial representation, or in the context of institutions committed to monarchical rule in the princely states, introduced an additional layer of complexity. This aspect has been hitherto almost entirely neglected in available analyses of linguistic mobilisation and consolidation across different regional spheres in the decades following the Bengal Partition. The divergent negotiation of limited avenues of representative government available in British-Karnataka under Presidency rule on the one hand, and, princely States administered by native rulers through an allegiance to dynastic rule and monarchic values on the other hand, impelled a focus on how the unification movement responded to and evolved to span across these divergent linguistic and political logics.<sup>4</sup>

This article explores how the possibilities of linguistic mobilisation played out in terms of the cultural and political structures of two contrasting geographical, economic and demographic regions, namely, the princely states of Mysore and Jamakhandi. The secondary aim here is to contrast these processes of linguistic mobilisation with the dynamics of linguistic mobilisation in British-Karnataka. Both princely states were ruled by Hindu sovereigns, yet were distinguishable by a major contrast: While Mysore state prided itself on having a Kannada-speaking king who promoted Kannada in various fields, about which the discussion follows, the Jamakhandi ruler remained stubbornly reluctant to make any concessions in offering Kannada any cultural or political legitimacy in the public life of Jamakhandi state. Given these disparate linguistic-political circumstances, the history of linguistic mobilisation in both these states offers fertile scope for a study of how the unification movement worked across diverse spatial trajectories. The article is divided into two parts. The first offers a brief account

<sup>4</sup> Nag (1993: 1521–32) gives a comprehensive account of rivalry between languages during colonial period in the context of blooming of unification movements across India.

of how the mobilisation of a modern linguistic identity for Kannada assumed the form of a political movement after efforts of cultural/literary consolidation; the second part dwells on the heterogeneous nature of the unification movement in British-Karnataka and in the above-mentioned two princely states.

## I

### *Linguistic Consolidation: The Three Stages*

The linguistic unification movement in colonial Karnataka gained visible political overtones after the first decade of the twentieth century. A brief account of linguistic/literary activities and historical awareness in the second-half of the nineteenth century in Bombay-Karnataka, including princely Karnataka, will illuminate the key moments in the transition of Kannada identity before its culmination as a political unification movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. Three stages of this linguistic/literary transition can be identified. Approximately spanning the decades between 1860 and 1890, the first stage saw both British and Kannada intellectuals creating an enhanced public and cultural consciousness of modern Kannada made available through contact with colonial education. Following this, between 1890 and 1905, the second phase saw Kannada intellectual elites take initiatives to promote Kannada linguistic identity, literary tradition and culture through formal and organisational means. Spanning the years between 1905 and 1920, and thereafter, the third stage saw the politicisation of Kannada identity, when Kannada linguistic and literary identity were foregrounded as the basis for political action, for better governance and for acquiring political advantages that would supposedly be available equally for the benefit of all Kannadigas. In actual terms, all three stages were inter-linked, as the cultural and linguistic challenges encountered in the first two stages were sought to be addressed in the third.

#### *The First Stage: Education, Literature and Linguistic Identity (Bombay-Karnataka)*

For a long time, British officials were under the impression that Marathi was the principal language in Bombay-Karnataka. Marathi-speaking rulers in the princely states of the region also added to this impression immensely through the sovereign legitimacy that accorded Marathi the status of an official language within these states. This misconception gradually disappeared and 'in 1851 Kanarese was found to be the principal language' (Roberts 1971: 250) in Bombay-Karnataka. It was in

the 1860s, under W. A. Russel, educational inspector of the Bombay-Karnataka, that Kannada schools were promoted in a substantial number in order to encourage the Kannada-speaking population. Needless to say, the Marathi influence was *also* due to the presence of a large number of Maratha elites, the majority of whom happened to be Brahmins from Maharashtra (Chitpavan Brahmins) and Madras Presidency (Deshasta Brahmins).<sup>5</sup> The regional population, comprising cultivators, traders and labourers, (majority of whom were non-Brahmins), too had accepted Marathi as their language for communication outside their households, despite Kannada being their home language. In such linguistic contexts, encouragement to Kannada schools from British officers (W. A. Russel, J. F. Fleet, etc.) and missionaries (W. A. Wurth, F. Kittel) assumed certain status of importance, as did the work of Kannada elites such as Deputy Channabasappa, Gangadhareshwara Turamari, Dondu Mulabagil, Huyilugola Bhujanga Rao, who produced Kannada text books required for the new vernacular schools, translated English classics into Kannada and wrote independent books on various subjects. These pioneering contributions by local teachers, also the earliest modern scholars in Kannada, assumed some sort of systematic progression as they had precedence before them. This precedence was set by the missionary activities in the publication of Kannada writings. Going back to the 1820s, these publications included not only religious materials, but also non-religious subjects such as Physics, Astronomy, Botany, literature, etc. (Koudur 2020: 12). Printing presses established in Mangalore, Ballary and Bombay in first-half of the nineteenth century gradually heralded a new awakening among the first generation of Kannada literates, of whom Brahmins were a majority. The emergence of new Kannada journals, periodicals and newspapers from several large and small towns all made for great cultural and intellectual ferment in Bombay-Karnataka. The spread of Kannada-medium education also created avenues for the pursuit of modern professions, and enhanced the prospects of government employment. These professional avenues were seen as further opportunities for mitigating the influence of Marathi in public institutions. These circumstances, and burgeoning nationalist feelings from the 1880s onwards, created a cultural space for local elites, especially Brahmins, to take up the cause of Kannada and demand greater access to government jobs and administrative presence. The

<sup>5</sup> Vasudevacharya (1975: 17), a Kannada journalist, harshly writes about the dominance of Marathi Brahmin officers in Vijapura (i.e., Bijapur). He feels sorry that the gullible cultivators, labourers, out of fear of these officers who were predominantly Brahmins, literally served them without self-respect and dignity.

establishment of *Karnataka Vidyavardhak Sangha* (KVS) in 1890 in Dharwad, and the emergence of similar institutional spaces such as libraries, reading rooms and debating platforms, most of them being the initiatives of burgeoning civil society, heralded a great step forward in encouraging Kannada writers, translators, publishers and public speakers (Deshpande 1994: Appendix 3). In other parts of north Karnataka, especially in several princely states, similar linguistic activities were too meagre and uneven. Even though these neighbouring princely states were part of their imagination of greater Karnataka, it was a while before the above-noted Bombay-Karnataka-based teacher-scholars could expand their literary activities to princely states. We did not find any notable writers or publishing agencies or literary institutions in the princely states until the turn of the twentieth century, while Mysore princely state offered an altogether different picture, elaborated in Part II of the article.

### *The Second Stage: Organisational/Institutional Phase*

With Brahmin and a few Lingayath (non-Brahmin-dominant community) writers of Dharwad and surrounding towns at the forefront, KVS provided a much-needed institutional platform for integrating the Kannada-speaking population with their avowed public-political goal of challenging the influence and imposition of Marathi. The support for Kannada did not emerge in simple binary terms, that starkly othered Marathi. The approach of Kannada nationalists was in turn paradoxical and ambivalent, as many Kannada writers of this sub-region were bi/trilingual, both in Marathi and Kannada. Many writings, discursive and non-discursive, were translated into and from both languages.<sup>6</sup> Equally, the articulation of Marathi linguistic identity, cultural and literary pride too had an inspirational impact in triggering similar aspirations around Kannada among the first generation of Kannada nationalists.

Modelled procedurally on the Gujarat Vernacular Society (1848), the activities of the KVS signified the growing confidence of Kannada cultural nationalists in their articulation of *Kannadatva* (Kannadism) as the basis upon which they sought to consolidate a representative public opinion towards the British government. In the course of time, the KVS instituted many awards for budding writers in Kannada, started a Kannada journal, *Vagbhushana*; and passed resolutions to limit the influence of Marathi in Kannada schools, all with the view of promoting creativity in Kannada. Notwithstanding its key role in imagining the contours of

<sup>6</sup> Venkata Rango Katti and Galaganatha are eminently known for translations and multi-lingual traffic of literatures. For details see Dharwad (2013: 252, 413).



a modern Kannada identity and an enlarged territorial entity Karnataka, significantly as an institution, the KVS did not take an official stance on a united Karnataka until 1917.

Around the same time, that is, in the 1890s, a few Kannada elites began weaving nationalist narratives around the emerging Kannada identity. These intellectual elites of the region took upon themselves the responsibility of representing and organising public opinion in Kannada. They were now better-positioned educationally, culturally and politically to take up the dual tasks of using the regional vernacular to address their fellow-natives and to represent their interests to the British government. Successive meetings of the *Karnataka Granthakartara Sammelana* (the conference of Karnataka writers) held at Dharwad in 1907–08 showed attempts to mobilise and unite like-minded Kannada writers across Kannada-speaking areas. Similarly, new arenas of cultural and social action seeking to enlarge the regional scope of influence were launched, including the *Karnataka Prantika Parishat*, the *Karnataka Ekikarana Parishat*, Kannada school for Lambani-speaking population in Bijapur (see Author Unknown 1936: 702) and the *Kannada Amateur Natya Sangha* in Dharwad (see Author Unknown 1933: 374).

### *The Third Stage: The Process of Politicisation*

Areas around Dharwad in north Karnataka witnessed vociferous protests against *Vanga-bhanga*, or the Bengal Partition of 1905. Then onwards, there were efforts to ensure strong representation from north Karnataka in the annual gatherings of the Indian National Congress. Dharwad became an epicentre for a series of associational activities initiated outside state patronage, which sought to propagate a consciousness of united Karnataka. These efforts at defining territorial dimensions for linguistic consolidation, thus, began to give shape to Alur Venkat Rao's, an eminent Kannada nationalist, efforts to fashion a concrete and philosophical shape for Karnataka unification through his early aspirational vision of Kannadatva, where language, culture and politics would complement each other (Venkatrao 1941: 261–9).

Subsequent political changes in the wake of constitutional reforms under the Acts of 1909, 1919 and through the proposals and debates around the Nehru Report of 1928 resulted in heightened levels of linguistic consciousness and provincial mobilisations in different regions of British India. After a separate provincial Andhra Congress Committee was conceded at the Lucknow Congress of 1916, efforts were made to influence the Congress leadership to accord more legitimacy to the Kannada movement and give it greater visibility within the Congress

structure by accepting the demand of Kannada nationalists for a separate Karnataka Provincial Committee within the Indian National Congress (Letter from the Secretary 2018: 47–49). Alongside, the first resolution in the Bombay Legislative Council (BLC) on the issue of a separate Karnataka province was moved by A.B. Lathe in 1921. Efforts were also made by north Karnataka representatives to table ‘memorials from residents, public institutions and local bodies of the Karnataka districts demanding a separate province for the Karnataka on linguistic basis’.<sup>7</sup> The Annual Conference of the Congress in 1924 held in Belgaum under the presidentship of Gandhi was crucial as it witnessed the first Karnataka Unification Conference under the leadership of Siddappa Kambli and Kadapa Raghavendraraya, the Secretary of Karnataka Sabha. Subsequently, between 1926 and 1929, the issue was raised on several occasions in the BLC by the representatives of Bombay-Karnataka.

To Venkat Rao and his associates, who mainly hailed from British-Karnataka in the Bombay Presidency, the Princely States of Mysore, Nizam Karnataka or even those of Bombay-Karnataka had not figured in their initial imaginations of a politically unified Karnataka. For a long time, a united Karnataka envisaged the redrawing of boundaries around the Kannada districts of the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, combined with Coorg. Even as late as 1928, a monograph on Karnataka Unification prepared jointly by Karnataka Unification Sabha and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (Dharwad) did not consider including princely states in its political vision (Secretaries of Karnataka Unification Sabha and KPCC 1928: XX). Yet, culturally and territorially, the princely states were part of the pride of Karnataka, and this was imagined by invoking a glorious past during which there was a composite Karnataka.<sup>8</sup> It was part of the geo-cultural imagination of the Kannada nationalists, on which Venkat Rao and his associates could claim complete sovereignty. But it was a long wait before these cultural and territorial claims could gain political legitimacy as the Congress adopted the policy of non-interference towards the princely states. For active participants in the Congress such as Venkat Rao and others, this official stance was both demotivating and a political

<sup>7</sup> D. R. Patil on behalf of S. A. Sardesai (Bijapur, MLC) in Proceedings of the Bombay Legislative Council, 25 July 1927, 616. Proceedings of the Bombay Legislative Council, 23 July 1928 (132) give details of the district and taluk local bodies, city municipalities and local associations which passed resolutions for creating a separate Karnataka province in the four districts of southern division of the Bombay Presidency.

<sup>8</sup> From Godavari River in the north to Kaveri in the south; from 500 miles of coastal line in the west to Ajanta in the east was imagined as the glory of the past (Hegde 1939: 3).

dampener. These political circumstances clearly pointed towards the several roadblocks that the imagined linguistic, geographical or cultural unity of the Kannada nationalists had to overcome. Significantly, as the Motilal Nehru Report, adopted in the contentious Annual Session of the Congress at Lucknow in 1928, proposed linguistic provinces as the defining territorial unit of the incipient federal nation, this approach of non-interference with the princely states was withdrawn, allowing the possibility of linguistic unification to emerge fully and supersede distinctions of British India and princely states (Parachuri 2001: 531–40). Yet, resolving the question of princely state was not addressed adequately for a long time until the 1940s.<sup>9</sup>

Under these circumstances, the progress of constitutional reforms and debates had a greater traction in the political atmosphere of British India, as compared to the princely states. Political debates and contestation over colonial policies between the British administration and nationalist elites had made for avenues of public participation that seemed lacking in the more placid political waters of the princely states that remained relatively untouched by the debates over political demarcations of boundaries, representative politics or democratic reforms.

## II

### *Linguistic Unification and Contrastive Poles of Princely States*

All major and minor princely states in India had accepted the paramount power of the British Government. The colonial rule had inaugurated modern institutions and governance, albeit unevenly across India. However, princely states in India developed their own indigenous strength or lacked strength to sustain and perpetuate their own political/governmental systems, literary, linguistic and cultural traditions which were inherited over generations. The long-enduring literary/linguistic heritage depended largely on the distinct provisions for cultural patronage characterising each princely state. Equally, political circumstances, governing policies and the nature and levels of institutional development impacted literary/linguistic activities or identities. As argued earlier, Kannada nationalists in British India imagined princely states as a part of larger Karnataka but were

<sup>9</sup> It was in the post-1940s that a united Karnataka, inclusive of the princely states, was envisaged in the political discourse of Karnataka unification movement (Gopalrao 2011: 72–109).

constrained in making political moves to concretise their vision. They waited for a suitable political juncture to launch such moves to capture the popular imagination of princely states.

The princely states had to walk a wary path with respect to political developments in British India, as they were expected to steer clear of supporting any political movements not sanctioned by the British government. Being under constant surveillance of the British Residents, especially as the national movement gained momentum, native rulers found themselves cast in the role of ‘bulwarks of reaction’ (Chandra et al. 2016: 356). The consequence of such restrictive political structures is reflected in the failure to develop administrative skills, the failure to promote sustained and systematic linguistic growth, and the failure to offer political leadership or nurture new organisations in princely states, like in the case of British-Karnataka. Constitutional reforms in the princely states could follow only an uneven trajectory. The sovereign king decided whether pro-people political and constitutional reforms were needed in the state or not. With ‘decision making in the *darbar* (princely court) ... the preserve of the prince and a restricted, ascriptively recruited elite’ (Wood 1984: 71), a contrast between the ‘open’ liberalism of British India and the seething intrigue of palace rule in the princely states was a frequent theme discerned in political commentary of the times. The state of affairs in Jamakhandi princely state corroborates the ascriptive nature of rule and autocracy.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, the patronage received by Kannadigas in the royal court of Mysore became a rallying point and a touchstone for the demand of Kannada activists in other Kannada-majority princely states that Kannada be made into a *darbari* (courtly) language in their states. Under these conditions, possibilities for furthering the Kannada unification movement in princely states were impacted both by the specificities of internal politics as also by the relations of nationalists with provincial and national politics. The following section offers a comparative and contrastive perspective on the significantly divergent trajectories and developments with respect to the unification movement in Mysore and Jamakhandi princely states. First, let us see the case of Mysore.

<sup>10</sup> Raya (1937: 302) shows the autocratic regime of the Jamakhandi ruler, neglect of local Kannada-speaking people in administration, ascriptive nature of recruitment in the state administration and judiciary, with undue preference shown to Marathi-speaking relatives and their networks.

### Language Politics in 'Model' Mysore

Ruled by the Odeyar dynasty since the thirteenth century, the kingdom of Mysore, was a part of the Vijaynagar Empire.<sup>11</sup> After the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799, parts of its territory were annexed and added to the Madras Presidency and Nizam's Hyderabad, and a minor scion of the Odeyar family was restored at the helm of a Princely state carved out from the rest of the erstwhile kingdom of Mysore. In 1831, Mysore was put under the direct rule of a British Commissioner. Fifty years later, in 1881, the Mysore throne was 'restored' to Odeyar rule under the surveillance of a British Resident, so that Mysore became yet another vassal state under the patronage of the British.<sup>12</sup> Changes initiated under Tipu's administration, followed by 50 years of British Commissioner's rule, had laid the foundation for the modernisation of the state's educational and political structures. Steps were initiated to make the regime more people-centric, which included the establishment of scores of English- and Kannada-medium schools by both government and private individuals way back in the 1830s. In the same vein were the separate schools for girls, started in the 1880s; the establishment in 1883 of representative institutions like *Mysore Praja Prathinidhi Sabhe*, the first of its kind, in native states and, in addition to the representative assembly, in 1907, the establishment of the Mysore Legislative Council.<sup>13</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, Mysore was frequently referred to as 'one of the best administered native states in India' (Manor 1977: 12).<sup>14</sup> Nalvadi Krishnaraja Odeyar's reign (1894–1940) is identified as the force behind modernising Mysore and initiating several social reforms. It was mainly thanks to him that the kingdom earned the tag of 'model Mysore'. Krishna Raja Odeyar is also praised for patronising Kannada language and culture. A litterateur himself, he had several Kannada and Sanskrit poetic compositions to his credit. Under him, the pre-colonial legacy of patronage towards Kannada and Sanskrit poets found renewed support at the Mysore court. Beyond the Royal court, modern organisations along associational lines for the promotion of Kannada literature and culture such as *Karnataka Sahitya*

<sup>11</sup> Going by the 1921 census records for the state, approximately 85% of the total population of 5, 978,892 was Kannada-speaking. See GOI (1921)

<sup>12</sup> Districts of this state were Bangalore (including cantonment), Chitradurga, Mysore, Shivamogga, Kolar, Tumakuru, Hassan and Kadur.

<sup>13</sup> Naidu (1996) gives an exhaustive picture of educational and literary history of Mysore from 1831 to 1920.

<sup>14</sup> This label was not accepted universally in Mysore and there were many criticisms against excessive bureaucratic hand in administration.

*Parishat* (KSP) were established during his tenure. In appreciation of his welfare measures and active support towards Kannada, many newspaper reports and editorials virtually deified the King as the protector of Kannadigas and their culture, their *Raja Pratyaksha Devata* (see An Editorial 1946). As Gopal Rao, a prominent historian of the Kannada unification movement, remarks, such an approach preempted Mysore-Kannadigas from negative feelings of linguistic insecurity or apprehensions of a besieged identity, felt by their fellow-Kannadigas in the states of Nizam-Hyderabad, Madras Presidency and Bombay Presidency (Gopal Rao 2011: 109).

These political reforms and administrative initiatives earned due admiration. There was a sense of pride in having a Kannada-speaking king after 50 years of British commissioner's rule. Significantly, these first signs of Kannada social and political consciousness coincided with the resentment building up in public sphere on account of the conflict between Kannada Brahmins and Tamil Brahmins in Mysore that had emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and which continued to simmer into the first decade of the twentieth century. Such resentment was accentuated among Mysore Brahmins, who contested the disproportionate presence of Tamil Brahmins from the Madras Presidency in administrative positions at the Mysore court. This gave rise to the slogan, 'Mysore for Mysoreans', to express the displeasure of Mysore Brahmins (Boratti, 2019: 37–58). Obviously, this conflict was parochial, sectarian and did not contribute to the unification movement. However, such competitive sentiments of othering Tamil Brahmins led to an expansion of the representative body in Mysore. In 1907, the Mysore Legislative Council was expanded to accommodate more Kannadigas as representatives. This uneasy relationship between Kannada and Tamil Brahmins was also witnessed in the cultural sphere in subsequent decades, finding pronounced expression in the field of Carnatic music. Nalvadi Krishnaraja Odeyar's personal interest, besides public demand, in encouraging Kannada compositions in Carnatic music is a case in point. It was an attempt to mitigate the domination of Tamil and Telugu musicians in Mysore cultural sphere (Koudur 2004: 53–95).

Native English-speaking elites caused the Mysore administration to be unduly bureaucratic and allowed the reforms to have only a limited impact.<sup>15</sup> However, the translation of the proceedings of the Assembly

<sup>15</sup> The presidential speech of Krishnaraya (1940: 20) in the 24th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana reminisces the dominance of English among the Kannada and official elites in Mysore. For discussion on excessive bureaucratic rule of Mysore government, see Chandrashekar (1983), Veerathappa (1979) and Bhagawan (2003).

and Council into Kannada provided the mechanism through which the government sought to reach out to the people and print media. These efforts echoed the translation practices of the Bombay Legislative Council in the principal languages of the Presidency, namely, Marathi, Kannada and Gujarati. In this regard, the employment of a well-known Kannada writer, M. S. Puttanna, as an official translator by the Mysore government is a noteworthy historical instance of modernising Kannada to meet newer challenges of legal and legislative nature (see Tharakeshwar 2019). He was expected to assist in making available translated accounts of the Assembly debates in Kannada towards securing a wider circulation for the administrative and development measures being undertaken.

Paradoxically, both the KSP and the later *Karnataka Sangha*, only two organisations in Mysore before 1935 to promote Kannada literature and language, remained organisations helmed by Kannada elites who had bilingual command of English and Kannada. The initiatives of these organisations were confined to upper-caste elite circles—often Brahmin—comprising literary writers, government officials, renowned lawyers and traders. Unlike the KVS in Dharwad, the agenda of KSP did not extend to the spread of education among Kannada-speaking communities, because of which demand for primary school education in Kannada or the establishment of Kannada schools did not emerge as a prominent focus therein. Unlike KVS's daunting task of meeting challenges posed by Marathi, KSP's founding principles emphasised the need to modernise Kannada to make it adequate to the tasks of modern industrial and scientific advance. Prominent public intellectuals and iconic figures, such as B. M. Srikantaiah and Sir M. Visvesvaraiah, at the time of inaugurating KSP in 1915, advocated these functions for KSP (Nair, 1996: 2811). In their vision, the growth and development of language were intricately tied to economic development. These were an addition to M. S. Puttanna's translations and the cultural and literary preoccupations of pioneers, such as B. L. Rice, Ferdinand Kittel and Basavappa Shastri. The linking of Kannada with economic development at Mysore were novel arguments at the time.

Though the KSP signified an important intervention in promoting Kannada literature, language and culture, it steered clear of any show of support towards the unification movement. Venkat Rao and his associates tried to involve KSP in the movement, but in vain. The KSP toed the line of the Mysore government, its chief patron, in discouraging any discussion or debate on the unification campaign. As commentators have observed, it 'had almost no importance in preparing the way

for political struggle, either in the development of an organizational base or in raising popular political awareness' (Manor 1977: 52). The Mysore state government strongly perceived the National Congress and influence of the nationalist movement as a threat to the survival of the princely order.<sup>16</sup> This attitude of the Mysore government earned the dissatisfaction of many Kannada writers, for whom Mysore became a prime example of 'narrow-mindedness in princely states' (Hegde 1939: 49), which hampered the larger interests of Kannadigas.

The people or the Congress workers of Mysore state remained largely indifferent to the question of Kannada unification with exceptions like Kuvempu, a literary icon, who spoke in favour of Mysore extending support to the unification movement for a larger Karnataka. There was a perceivable lack of warmth between nationalists of Bombay-Karnataka and Congress workers of Mysore (Chandrashekar 2002: 95). This resulted in the establishment of a separate Provincial Congress Committee of Mysore in 1937, which only distanced itself from the idea of unification movement as proposed by nationalists in Bombay-Karnataka. In the 1940s, these attitudes were further heightened by anxieties about possible dominance of Lingayaths if Mysore were to throw in its lot with a united Karnataka. These fears were especially strong among the prosperous Okkaligas (non-Brahmin peasant community), who did not want to share the economic prosperity of their community and that of Mysore with the rest of Karnataka (Chandrashekar 2002: 95; Nair 2011: 52–62).

### *The 'Other' Within: Politico-Linguistic Aspects of Jamakhandi State*

The rulers of the small native state of Jamakhandi in North Karnataka were the Marathi-speaking, Chitpavan Brahmin Patwardhans, who had acquired their political influence under the Peshwa elite with whom they had allied. Jamakhandi was one of the erstwhile southern Maratha states. Having concluded a treaty with the East India Company in 1820 following the fall of the Peshwas in 1818, the Patwardhans ruled Jamakhandi until 1948, when Jamakhandi merged into the state of the Indian Union.<sup>17</sup> Territorially and demographically, it was a small state and consisted of two talukas, Jamakhandi and Kundgol, and three *thanas*,

<sup>16</sup> Manor (1977: 83). Alur and his associates were actively involved in the Indian National Congress. They must have proved too heavy for the Mysore administration.

<sup>17</sup> The last ruler of this state was Shankar Rao Appasaheb Patwardhan (22 August 1947 to 8 March 1948) under whose reign the state merged into the Indian Union on 8 March 1948.



namely, Wathar, Patkal and Dhavalpuri.<sup>18</sup> The majority of the total population consisted of Kannada-speaking people in the state. Like other princely states, the state owed allegiance to British rule, and this meant it also sought to curb any nationalist activities in the state. For instance, during the Non-Cooperation movement of 1921, Jamakhandi state imposed restrictions on the opening of *khadi bhandars* (cotton wear-house) and political speeches. Unless prior permission was sought and granted, stiff fines upto ₹200 and prison sentences of upto 6 months could be levied upon organisers (see Umapathi 1992).

Although Jamakhandi had adopted the trappings of a modern political system and institutional apparatus, these were not flexible and open enough to accommodate political reforms and constitutional values as had gained expression in Bombay-Karnataka, or to some extent in Mysore. Jamakhandi had not made much progress under its Marathi-speaking rulers. Its transport connections with the rest of India were poor, as were its links with trade or tourist circuits. Also, no independent newspaper or periodical was published in the state. Strict restrictions were placed by palace authorities on nationalist activities, so much so that even nationalist newspapers were barred from libraries in the state which carried nationalist news. Complementary to this, restrictions against the use of proscribed books (mostly with nationalist fervour) were strictly enforced.<sup>19</sup>

The issue of linguistic unification does not seem to have been raised in Jamakhandi for a long time. Even as the Kannada nationalists of British-Karnataka implicitly imagined princely states to be part of the map of larger Karnataka, the official stance of the Indian National Congress of non-interference in matters of the princely states preempted their intervention in the political affairs of the state. Even so, there was a significant nationalist lobby that was discreetly active in Jamakhandi. Marathi-speaking Congressmen with active links to Congress units beyond Jamakhandi, such as Ananta Vasudev Sabaade, Daamu Anna Halyalkar and others, were nationalists at the forefront of the demand for democratisation and constitutional reforms. Their political activism and differences with the Jamakhandi rulers did not extend support for the cause of Kannada. In their scheme of things, the issue of Kannada unification was not more important than the nationalist movement.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> According to 1921 census, Jamakhandi had a population of 101,195, which was much smaller than Mysore and Bombay-Karnataka.

<sup>19</sup> See *Annual Administration Report of the Jamakhandi State for June 1926*.

<sup>20</sup> Krishnasharma (1941: 272), who toured many princely states during this time, noticed how these nationalists and social reformists 'woefully' lacked knowledge of Kannada.

Under Patawardhan rule, as an elite language, Marathi had expanded its cultural influence in the urban areas of Jamakhandi. The ruling family of Jamakhandi had consistently favoured aesthetic and cultural practices echoing the Marathi ethos and traditions. As an ardent patron of Marathi art and culture, Parashuram Bhau, who ruled Jamakhandi between 1897 and 1924, founded a drama troupe, *Abhinava Natya Samaj*, in 1921. Under this tutelage, the palace did much to propagate the cause of *Marathi Sangeet Natak* and supported the performance of a number of Marathi dramas in the Marathi region and northern Karnataka (Nidoni 1996: Chap 10). In the same vein, Marathi-medium schools outnumbered Kannada-medium schools: out of 72 vernacular boys' schools in the state, 46 schools taught through Marathi medium as against 24 schools teaching in Kannada. Administrative reports show Marathi was given prominence at the elementary and higher primary school levels.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, legal and administrative business was conducted in Marathi, and the Jamakhandi Gazette was published periodically in Marathi and English. The pre-eminence of Marathi in public life was sought to be stringently maintained even in the proceedings of the *Jamakhandi Praja Pratinidhi Sabhe* (JPPS), the sole civil society platform to voice the problems of the people in Jamakhandi. It was reported that in the meeting held on 15 April 1935, the ruler categorically ruled out the use of Kannada as a *Daftar* (office) language.<sup>22</sup> There were no arrangements for translating official announcements or the contents of state policies or programmes of governance into Kannada. The Kannada intelligentsia did not find it expedient to raise the issue of *darbar* language until the 1940s, when the cause of linguistic unification had reached a decisive stage in most princely states.

This identification with the ruling family gave Marathi enormous influence over decisions and patronage affecting many spheres of life, establishing it as a cultural 'standard'. The Kannada-speaking population, especially middle-class literates, sought to emulate it.<sup>23</sup> However, within Jamkhandi state, Marathi remained a minority language, leading to measures for the promotion of Marathi being resented and complaints

<sup>21</sup> Prior to this, in 1882–83, the ratio between these two was disproportionately in favour of Marathi: of 24 schools, Marathi schools were 17 in number, while there were only four schools in Kannada. For more details, see Administrative report of Jamakhandi, 1920: 1–26.

<sup>22</sup> See *Jaya Karnataka*, vol. 13, no. 6, 426. Any discussion on this matter in the Assembly was ruled out completely. See Patwardhan (1926).

<sup>23</sup> Kulli (1983: 2) draws our attention to Marathi's influence in commercial field too, especially in trade and business.

about the step-motherly attitude towards Kannada pouring in slowly. Against this backdrop, KVS passed a resolution in 1901 to ask the Jamakhandi government to start Kannada-medium schools and appoint Kannada teachers.<sup>24</sup> Until the 1940s, resentment over the cultural and political subjugation of the Kannada-speaking people under the Marathi rulers took the form of resolutions, appeals and newspaper reports, all mostly initiated from beyond the confines of Jamakhandi state. In 1937, *Jaya Karnataka*, an important Kannada magazine published in Dharwad, pointed out the absence of civil society institutions and organisations to promote the cause of Kannada in Jamakhandi and Mudhol, yet another princely state ruled by Ghorpade family of Marathi descent. These reports lament that the people in these princely states were dependent on nationalists in British India for inspiration and encouragement. Here, the role of a well-known writer, Kannada activist and Lingayath leader in Jamakhandi, Tammannappa Satyappa Chikkodi (1862–1933), in raising the issue of Kannada is worth noting. As a member of a committee formed at the Fourth *Kannada Sahitya Sammelana* (Kannada Literary Conference) held at Dharwad in 1918, he advanced petitions to the Maratha rulers to encourage Kannada-medium schools and implement Kannada in the administration. Later, through successive meetings of the KSP, Chikkodi persistently proposed resolutions towards including Jamakhandi, Mudhol, Savanur and other princely states in the proposed united Karnataka.<sup>25</sup> He worked hard to assert the linguistic rights of Kannadigas and demand justice for them under Marathi rule.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, in an effort to encourage Kannada reading, he established Shri Shankara Linga Vaachanalaya and sponsored the availability of national newspapers in this library (Kulli 1983: 32).

Opinion against the autocratic rule and indifferent attitude of the Marathi rulers and for the ‘pathetic’ condition of Kannada and the Kannadigas in these princely states was mobilised through editorials, reports and articles in several Kannada journals, newspapers and magazines, mostly in British-Karnataka. Highlighting the inadequate representation of Kannadigas in JPPS, a 1937 report in *Jaya Karnataka*

<sup>24</sup> Deshpande (1994: 30). Such resolutions indicate KVS’s wish to express solidarity with Kannadigas in the princely state without any political pressure on it.

<sup>25</sup> Also see, Resolutions passed by Tammannappa in 7th Karnataka Sahitya Sammelana at Chikkamagaluru in 1921 (Kannada Sahitya Parishat Patrike, vol. 6, no. 2, 67; at 15th Karnataka Sahitya Sammelana at Belagavi in 1929, (Kannada Sahitya Parishat Patrike, vol. 14, no. 2, 77).

<sup>26</sup> He was also a member of *Jamakhandi Samsthan Praja Parishad* (People’s Organisation of Jamakhandi Province) held at Pune in 1927. See Kulli (1983: 37).

alleged that the Kannadigas were not consulted in the governance of the state.<sup>27</sup> Against this backdrop, pressure was steadfastly mounted to deploy Kannada as a language of the *raj darbar* (king's court). Thus, significantly, in Jamkhindi, arguments in support of inclusive constitutional reforms came to be shaped around the Kannada cause and need to restore it to its rightful and legitimate place within these princely states.

It was against this slow momentum that the articulation of a political consciousness around Kannada identity gradually emerged in Jamakhendi. The first instance in this direction was evident in the 1920s: notwithstanding the official position of the Congress that precluded it from intervening in the political affairs of princely states, the Bombay-Karnataka Congress succeeded in thwarting the moves to include Jamakhendi in the Satara Congress circle of Maharashtra, even while the imagination of a larger Karnataka inclusive of princely territories did not have the formal sanction of the National Congress (Kamath 1977: 957). After this, slowly and steadily, with increasing coordination, Kannada nationalists in British- and princely Karnataka started spreading the cause of Kannada and Karnataka unification in Jamakhendi. As a consequence of these efforts, the twenty-second Karnataka Sahitya Sammelana was held for the first time in Jamakhendi in 1938. This occasion was used by Kannada nationalists to advance the cause for Karnataka unification inclusive of princely states. As the demand for responsible government by Congress nationalists grew in strength and transfer of power at the national level appeared as an increasingly imminent possibility, by the late 1930s, the Jamakhendi ruler, Shankar Patwardhan, had softened his approach. Thenceforward, state authorities showed greater flexibility with regard to public opinion, seeking more power for the people and an increased role and visibility for Kannada in public life.

## Concluding Remarks

The above discussion has brought out the spatial and temporal heterogeneities within the linguistic unification movement as it played out in British- and princely Karnataka. These varying chronologies and time-scales across sub-regions owed much to the changing dynamics of divergent political possibilities vis-a-vis colonialism and nationalism emerging across multiple territorial jurisdictions that were sought to be unified through the vision of linguistic consolidation. Examining the

<sup>27</sup> See a report by Raya (1937: 302).

growth and development of the Kannada unification movement in British- and princely Karnataka, this article has shown how intersecting linguistic, literary and political developments impacted different trajectories of the movement. The emergence of the movement in princely states was contingent upon the context of both the peculiarities of the internal politics, and the strength of Kannada nationalist sentiments within each princely state, and its place vis-a-vis the dynamics of provincial and national politics. Thus, the Kannada nationalist movement in princely states was not merely the result of what was happening in the British-Karnataka, but was also the result of responses emanating from these territories to a wider field of forces and events.

Like linguistic movements elsewhere in late-colonial India, the Karnataka unification movement did not progress either through a linear logic or follow a uniform yardstick across these partly contiguous-partly discrete territorial entities. Attempting to reconcile elite ambitions, popular aspirations and political differences, in the subsequent decades, the unification movement shifted gears, first, to deal with social differences, between Brahmins and Lingayaths, and then in later phases, with caste calculations among Lingayaths and Okkaligas. A separate study would be needed to understand the socio-political hegemony of the unification movement over caste calculations and their articulations.

Possibilities of linguistic mobilisation in the late-colonial period were bolstered through the enunciation of core democratic values positing that governance must be conducted in a language intelligible to the majority. In a nutshell, this article has shown how the prospect of the realisation of these values was subject to severe pragmatic limitations ranging from the realities of constitutional reform at this juncture, on the one hand, and the rise of dominant tendencies of language, caste and religion within the nationalist movement, on the other. These paradoxical tensions had important implications for the ways in which key categories of language, region and identity were articulated and contested across 'internal' frontiers that proved just as crucial in the process of claiming dominance over monolingually indexed territorial entities within an intensely polyglot world.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article is a part of project of ICSSR 'Framing Inter-regional Comparisons' which was carried out under the supervision of Prof. Veena Naregal (Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi), the Project Director. I am immensely thankful to her for her insights and suggestions. I also thank Ramesh Bairy and Tharakeshwar for their useful comments.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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