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(ಸಂಸ್ಕರಣ ಸಂಪುಟ)

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✍ Nagendra Rao

Situating P. Gururaja Bhat in South Kanara Historiography

Dr. P. Gururaja Bhat, the doyen of South Kanara history and culture, has inspired several teachers and researchers of the region, including the present author, to study the history and culture of the region. The attempt of the present article will be to analyze the contribution of this great scholar to the Historiography of South Kanara.

The researchers of the history of South Kanara, when they are initiated to the history of the region, it is indispensable that they study the work of Gururaja Bhat. This spirit of labour and hard work, undoubtedly, is found in the writings of Prof. Bhat. This is proved by the fact that Bhat visited each and every part of then undivided South Kanara or Dakshina Kannada district with the intention of finding sources for his study.

The personal experience of this author is that no historical place or monument was ignored by prof. Bhat, which shows this enthusiasm to study the history of the region. Naturally, his contemporaries appreciated his zeal and spirit to work for the preservation of historical heritage of the region. Ultimately, he ended up in writing his magnum opus Studies in Tuluva History and Culture. This work is the result of life-time effort of the scholar. True that Bhat incurred considerable financial losses and must have experienced significant mental strain due to this venture but one cannot question the sincerity and dedication of this person.

In actuality, there is no need to specifically mention the contributions of Prof. Bhat since a glance at large number of books and articles written by the scholar reveal the extent of his contribution to the history and culture of South Kanara.

This historiography of any region of India can be generally divided into pre-independence and post-independence period. In the pre-independence period, the nationalist ideology dominated historiography of any region of India and South Kanara was not an exception. Consciously or subconsciously attempt was made to collect and collect data concerning the history of South Kanara. The scholars such as Ganapati Rao Aigal and Sheenappa Heggade belong to this category. Though their methodology may not impress the modern historians, these traditional scholars laid the foundation of South Kanara historiography. It is true that they included history, tradition and mythology in their works, and they could not differentiate between history and myth. But in the context of the period when they were writing, they had no other option but to present a crude form of history. They did not write history to impress demands of the intelligentsia but to refute the argument of British scholars that Indians lacked a sense of history, consciousness of past event. The works of these scholars showed that people of South Kanara realized the need for preservation of the past events, by the use of traditional and conservative historical methodology.

The next phase in the historiography of South Kanara can be noticed in the form of B.A. Saletore, who being a member of the Archaeological Survey of India, was in a better position to analyze the ancient and medieval history of the region. For the first time. South Kanara people could enjoy the product of scientific research. Since B.A. Saletore was writing in 1930s and

1940's, he could not discuss various sources that were not available or deciphered during his life time. But, B.A. Saletore and the previous scholars could not synthesise the works of different scholars. Consequently, these historians could not provide a comprehensive history of the region.

Prof. Gururaja Bhat belongs to the post-independence period, when the scholars were not compelled to either support or refute imperial ideology. Nor were they compelled to uphold nationalist ideology. Gururaja Bhat, undoubtedly, heralded a new era in the historiography of South Kanara, though he did not use theories and models that were introduced in the later period of history. His contribution lies in the fact that he presented the facts and provided an opportunity to the later generation of historians to interpret these facts. For the first time, Bhat synthesised the works of the previous scholars and added to their studies his own research. Perhaps, for Prof. Bhat, historical research implies gradual transition from known to unknown, the methodology used by several explorative researchers.

Unlike the previous scholars, Prof. Bhat depended on the study of primary sources. In historical research, the study of primary sources is important in order to write an objective presentation of facts. In this respect, his works can be considered as objective, though absolute objectivity is a mirage for many of the historians. He along with other contemporaries such as K.V. Ramesh, set the chronology of the South Kanara history. He studied several inscriptions belonging to the ruling families such as Alupas, Hoysalas and the Vijayanagara. The study of these inscriptions formed basis for other historians to add to the knowledge of S.K. history. He could study political, social and economic history of South Kanara. Prof. Bhat also studied the archeology of the region, as revealed by the study of mega-

lithic monuments. He attempted to establish chronology of these monuments to study early historic phase of South Kanara.

An important contribution of P. Gururaja Bhat to the historiography of South Kanara is in the form of the study of iconography of the region. It appears he personally visited the temples, took the permission of the temple management, and took photographs of the temple deities. His magnum opus, 'Studies in Tuluva History and Culture' comprises large numbers of such photographs, which have considerably enhanced the value of the book. It is significant to note that no other scholars of the period attempted to study icons or temple deities found in the temple and date them. Through iconographic research, Prof. Bhat was able to find the date of the temples and the deities and connect them to the information available in the inscriptions. This can be considered as an important contribution to the study of South Kanara history and culture.

The study of temples and temple deities contributed to the creation of a historical and cultural database, which could be used by scholars to analyze history and culture of the region. 'Antiquities of South Kanara' showed the importance of historical monuments. The work could be used by the local and foreign scholars to obtain basic information concerning the historical monuments of South Kanara.

An important contribution of Prof. Bhat is that he created the quantitative base, which acted as the foundation for qualitative approaches. Though the South Kanara historiography lacks the application of historical, sociological and anthropological theories found particularly in Kerala. Prof. Bhat has laid the foundation for the future generation of historians to generalize and theorize history of the region.

Apart from writing in English, Bhat also wrote a few Kannada

works. For example, the work Tulunadina Nagamandala analyzed the history and culture of South Kanara as exhibited by the Tulu folk form called Nagamandala. Thereby, this scholar could popularize history of South Kanara among the masses, creating a sense of history among the people of the region. This shows that Prof. Bhat catered to the needs of both scholarly audience and the common people. His work, 'Tulunadina Itihasadalli Sthanikaru' is significant since it dispelled the pre-conceived notions as found in the Brahmanical literature including Gramapaddhati, concerning the Brahmanical community called Sthanikas. Through a study of inscriptions and their objective analysis, the scholar was able to show the important position that Sthanikas had obtained during a particular historical period.

A review of the books written by Prof. Bhat shows that he did not concentrate only on political history, as he has studied economic and social history of South Kanara. Though he did not study the modern period, Prof. Bhat was well-versed in the study of pre-historic, early medieval and medieval periods of South Kanara history. In this sense, his studies conform to the pan-Indian pattern of the study of society and economy and placing them in the context of the polity.

The details show that Prof. Gururaja Bhat was an archaeologist, epigraphist, an expert in iconography and clarified the chronology of South Kanara. His contributions have allowed the present-day historians to use theories and models to conceptualize the political, social and economic history of the region. Despite a few limitations, the works of P. Gururaja Bhat become indispensable to the student of history of South Kanara.

