APPENDIX - VII

BELGAUM BELONGS TO KARNATAKA

Memorandum submitted by Anant Rao Chikkodi to the Commission on Mysore, Maharashtra-Kerala disputes

From:
Anant Rao Chikkodi, Journalist Belgaum.

To
The Hon'ble Commission on Maharashtra-Mysore-Kerala Boundary dispute, Camp Belgaum.

Hon'ble Sir,

I am very thankful to you for offering this opportunity to place my views along with some information before you regarding the dispute. While I fully support the stand taken by the Mysore Government on this question, I propose to confine myself in this statement, to some particular aspects of the problem about which I have personal knowledge.

Belgaum belongs to Karnataka

Most of our national leaders, who had an occasion to express themselves on this topic, have all along declared
that Belgaum is an integral part of Karnataka. The Maharashtrian leaders in particular, have consistently and unequivocally averred that Belgaum undoubtedly belongs to Karnataka. That there has been a volte face in Maharashtra’s attitude recently, is a different matter. But this change of attitude on the part of Maharashtrian leaders of today, cannot wipe out or cancel the statements of their fathers and grand-fathers.

As a working journalist and as Secretary of the Karnataka Unification League, it has been my good fortune to have discussed this matter with most of the Maharashtrian leaders of the last generation. I am giving here the relevant gist of my talks with some of them. But before doing so, I mention the views expressed by our two most national leaders.

TILAK

I began with Lokamanya Bal Gungadhar Tilak. Tilak was the father of Indian nationalism. He had great admiration for the national fervour, witnessed in Belgaum in those days. He used to describe Belgaum as a "strong fortress of nationalism in Karnataka". In a public meeting held in Belgaum in 1916 under the Presidentship of the late Shri D.V. Belvi, Tilak eulogised
Belvi by calling him "the Governor of this Karnatak Province". Tilak designated Belgaum as the headquarters of his "Home-rule movement in Karnatak". Even a casual perusal of the old files of "Kesari" (Tilak's Marathi Weekly) will convince anyone that Belgaum was identified with Karnatak and Karnatak alone. Though a staunch Maharashtrian himself, Tilak had no narrow provincialism or parochialism in him. No wonder he was held in great esteem by the whole nation. In our younger days we were not mere admirers but worshippers of Tilak.

**GANDHI**

It was Mahatma Gandhi who inspired the Congress to organise linguistic provinces for its work. Belgaum, along with its neighbourhood was included in Karnatak, without any opposition whatsoever. Not a single Maharashtrian raised his voice against this inclusion. At the Kakinada Session of the Indian National Congress in 1923, the Karnatak Provincial Congress Committee gave an invitation to hold its next session in Karnatak. This having been accepted the Karnatak Provincial Congress Committee decided to convene the same in Belgaum. Mahatmaji presided over this Congress Session in Belgaum in 1924. This Session was known as the "Karnataka Session"
as it was the first to be held in Karnataka. In the year 1927, when Gandhiji had undertaken his Khadi Propaganda Tour, he had camped for a while in Belgaum on 25th February 1927 on his way to Ratnagiri. I attended his prayer-meeting on that occasion. But to the surprise of us all, he did not deliver any speech after the prayer. Later, we were told that he did not make a speech here as he was on tour of Maharashtra at that time. He did not wish to mix up Belgaum with Maharashtra. He told his immediate followers that he would be visiting Belgaum again within a month when he would begin his Karnataka tour and on that occasion he would surely make a speech at Belgaum.

There was a reason too for Gandhiji’s extra strict attitude on this occasion. Some Maharashtrian workers had made some collections for the Khadi Fund in Gulbarga under the false pretext that that was a Marathi-speaking territory. Gandhiji knew that Kannadigas had resented this. Hence, he was taking extra precautions against creating an impression that Belgaum was a part of Maharashtra.

When Gandhiji visited Belgaum again in 1934, during his Harijan tour, he saw to it that his speech was rendered into Kannada.
Whenever Gandhiji wrote letters to his friends in Belgaum, he invariably wrote "Karnataka just below the name of Belgaum in the space reserved for writing addresses. I have seen two such post-cards written by him.

RAJAJI

Revered Rajaji visited Belgaum on the 6th of February 1924, on the very day that Gandhiji was released from the Yarevada Central Prison after undergoing a surgical operation for appendicitis. When Rajaji addressed a students' gathering in the Haruti temple, Gangecher Rao began to translate his English speech into Marathi. Immediately there were shouts from the audience demanding that the translation should be in Kannada. Thereupon Rajaji took a voice-vote of the audience and declared: "Kannada Wins". There were thunderous cheers.

In February 1944, i.e., exactly after 20 years history repeated itself. This time, a vast public meeting was held in Basheban Darga compound. The audience shouted for a Kannada translation and Rajaji again took a voice-vote and declared that his speech must be rendered into Kannada and accordingly it was translated into Kannada only.
In December 1960, Rajaji's speech here was translated into Kannada as well as Marathi. Though the organiser and the translator at this meeting were Kannadigas, they made this fine gesture to the Marathi section of the audience.

Dr. RAJENDRA PRASAD

In May 1935, Dr. Rajendra Prasad visited Belgaum as President of the Indian National Congress. It was the Golden Jubilee Year of the Congress. I was deputed by the District Congress Committee to escort the distinguished guest from Haveri to Belgaum. Rajen Babu had evidently heard about the occasional linguistic controversy in Belgaum and he put many questions to me regarding it. He told me that the Biharees faced a similar problem in their own province vis-a-vis the Bengalis. He said that he too was accused by some people of being anti-Bengali. When I mentioned that the whole trouble was due to the apprehensions of the Kannadigas that Maharashtrians might some day claim Belgaum for Maharashtra, Rajen Babu instantly said: "That would be an impossible claim". There were many such tracts in Bihar where Bengalis predominated. But Bihar would never agree to part with those territories. Language was not the only consideration in such matters, he added.
Whenever Jawaharlal Nehru visited Belgaum, he invariably prefaced his addresses by saying that he felt very happy for having arrived in Karnataka once again. Even during his last visit to Belgaum in 1957, his first sentence in his Hindi speech was "Brothers and Sisters, it gives me great pleasure to be in Belgaum, i.e., in Karnataka once again". It must be remembered that the present controversy was at its height in those days. Still, Nehru asserted in his very first sentence that Belgaum was part of Karnataka.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

I now come to the views expressed from time to time by some of the well known Maharashtrian leaders. First of all, let me quote Dr. Ambedkar who later became the author of the Constitution of India. He was kind enough to grant me a rather prolonged interview in September 1937 in Poona. He was the leader of the Independent Labour Party in the Bombay Assembly at that time. In this discussion which was carried on in two sittings on consecutive days, Dr. Ambedkar had opposed the idea of linguistic provinces altogether. But he was very sympathetic to the idea of bringing all the Kannada areas
in "British India" under one administration. He said that he supported the unification of Karnataka but not the separation of it. He was prepared to go as far as constituting a Karnataka Division either in Bombay or in Madras. But he was not at all prepared to support the formation of a separate Karnataka Province. When I broached the topic of demarcating the boundary between Maharashtra and Karnataka, he advanced a theory which appeared very novel in those days. His theory was that the language of any village, town or city should be determined by the language spoken by the Holeyars or Mahars of that particular place. He said: I am not saying this as the leader of the Mahars or Holeyars, but as a thinking Indian. His argument was that these Holeyars are the original residents of the place. They do not migrate to other places in search of employment. Their population is not a floating population like that of the intelligentsia of the modern cities. Mentioning the case of Belgaum in particular, he said that he fully knew the language of the Belgaum Holeyars to be Kannada and therefore Belgaum undoubtedly belonged to the Kannada Province. He had also promised me that he would issue a statement to this effect at the appropriate time.
Shri Kelkar was the lieutenant of Tilak. He is called the "King of Marathi Letters". I had occasions and opportunities to discuss this problem with him at least half a dozen times. He was aware of the fact that there were Marathi belts or tracts in Belgaum District, but he never thought in terms of claiming Belgaum City for Maharashtra. Whenever this question was opened before him, he used to ask me "Have you not read my Award regarding Bellary? Therein I have clearly said that the city of Bellary must belong to Karnataka as six Taluks out of nine in that District are Kannada and Bellary city is the headquarters of this predominantly Kannada District. How can we claim Belgaum for Maharashtra when it is the headquarters of a predominantly Kannada District?"

The statement issued by Kelkar and others at the time of the Marathi Literary Conference in Belgaum in 1929 is too well known to need any mention here. That statement clearly conceded Belgaum to be an integral part of Karnataka. But a fact which is not so widely known is that Kelkar was supported in his view by the late Shri C.V. Vaidya also. Vaidya was a great scholar-politician of Maharashtra. Kelkar and Vaidya differed on
many issues but on this particular issue of Belgaum, Vaidya wrote a letter to Kelkar wherein he said: "Belgaum undoubtedly belongs to Karnataka. A resolution to this effect may be passed". This English letter of Vaidya to Kelkar is published in the "Karmaveer" of Dharwar in its issue dated 15th March 1929.

M.R. JAYAKAR

The Rt.Hon. M.R. Jayakar was a very distinguished Maharashtrian. I secured an interview with him in November 1941, when he visited Belgaum. When I told him that the younger generation of Kannadigas was suspicious about the intentions of Maharashtra regarding Belgaum, he demurred. His actual words on that occasion were: "No responsible Maharashtrian has ever thought of claiming Belgaum City for Maharashtra. It is all a figment of your imagination. We Maharashtrians wish, well of you".

MARIMAN

The late Shri K.P. Nariman was the uncrowned King of Bombay in his days. In April 1928, he came to Dharwar to preside over the Karnataka Political Conference. I travelled from Belgaum to Dharwar with him in the same railway compartment. In a free chat with me during this trip,
Nariman expressed his views very frankly about Karnataka and its various problems. He surprised me by saying that he was a Karnataki himself. Upon my asking him how he claimed to be a Karnataki, his reply was: "My father was an Officer in the Excise Department serving in Belgaum and I was born in Belgaum. That is why I claim to be a Karnataki".

Discussing further the position and prospects of Belgaum, he said that the consensus among the official and non-official members of the Bombay Council was to make Belgaum the headquarters of a separate Karnataka Division and to join Bellary and Mangalore Districts from Madras to this Division. The European members, "along with most of us", were very enthusiastic about this idea. Maharashtrian members have also welcomed this idea. None of them has ever said that Belgaum does not belong to Karnataka. I think the public of Karnataka is unnecessarily agitated over some irresponsible writings in the Marathi press.

N.V. GADGIL

The late Shri N.V. Gadgil, when he was Governor of Punjab, had addressed the Dassara Gathering of the Maharashtrians at Chandigarh on 19th October 1961. In
this address, he had given very healthy advice to his compatriots exhorting them "not to create unnecessary noise nor to remain pining for regaining the five or six Marathi villages that have been included in "Karnataka". He had given similar advice with regard to the so called Marathi villages that were included in Madhya Pradesh also. This address delivered by him was very prominently published in "Lokmitra", a Marathi Daily, edited and published by Shri S.M. Joshi, an equally prominent leader and friend of Gadgil. I was one of those who were very happy at such a sane attitude adopted by Shri Gadgil. He had confined Maharashtra's claim to a few villages which the Kannadigas would have most willingly conceded. He did not include any town or city from Karnataka in Maharashtra's claim.

This happiness of mine was not destined to last long. I was shocked and surprised when Gadgil came to Belgaum on 1st August 1963 to assume the Presidentship of a Conference which had been convened to support the present Maharashtra agitation. This was directly contrary to what he had said in Chandigad. I published a very courteous and respectful open letter to him in Marathi, pointing out his inconsistency. I personally handed over a printed copy of this letter to him. He could not make any reply.
After a few weeks when I went to Poona, I called on him to pay my respects as usual. I said: "Kakasaheb, you ate up your own words on the occasion of the Marathi Literary Conference at Satara, where, in your Presidential Address you wanted to propose a formula for the solution of our boundary dispute, accepting the basis of 60 per cent Marathi majority for the transfer of villages. Your extremist friends prevailed upon you to delete that portion from your address. Now, you have almost assumed the leadership of the extremist agitation by going to Belgaum to guide the agitators. Is not all this inconsistent with your Chandigarh attitude?" Shri Gadgil smiled profusely and said: "Don't worry. All these questions will surely be settled amicably in a Round Table Conference which, I am sure, will have to be convened for this purpose".

I am only sorry that this Round Table Conference of Gadgil's conception did not materialise during his lifetime.

D.R. THAKUR

My senior friend Shri. D.R. Thakur, is the most conspicuous leader of the Maharashtra agitation in Belgaum. I respect him as my elder brother. But Thakur's
present posture is quite inconsistent with his previous attitude towards this question. Till recently he was not opposed to the inclusion of Belgaum in Karnataka. On so many occasions he has spoken and written in support of the identification of Belgaum with Karnataka. I have read many of his writings and heard more of his speeches. On 22nd February 1926 the Karnatak Unification Day was observed in Belgaum. In the public meeting held under the presidentship of Shri Gejji, Shri Shakur made a speech supporting the formation of a Karnataka Province and inclusion of Belgaum District into it. Again in another public meeting held on 1st September 1929 under the presidentship of Rao Bahadur Angadi, Thakur congratulated the sponsors and supporters of the Karnataka Unification resolution in the Bombay Council and condemned those who had opposed it. I have culled those two items from the issue of "Karmaveer" Weekly dated 1st March 1926 and 6th September 1929 respectively. The old files of Shri Thakur's own paper "Tarun Bharat" bristle with many more records of events and incidents which would clearly show his complete and unreserved identification with the cause of Karnataka in those days.

He has completely changed his stand now. Of course, he has every right to do so.
SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS

The leaders of the non-Congress parties also admitted explicitly and implicitly Belgaum's rightful inclusion in Karnataka. The Karnataka Provincial Non-Brahmin Conference was held in Hubli in 1921. Messrs. B.K. Dalvi and D.A. Birje, the most prominent Maratha leaders of Belgaum, attended it as delegates. When Shri Dalvi of Belgaum was elected as President of the Non-Brahmin Conference in Bombay in 1927, the Marathi Non-Brahmin Press hailed his election as a demonstration of Maharashtra's good wishes and brotherly feelings towards Karnataka. In many an educational and literary conference held in Belgaum by the Marathi people, the fact was repeatedly emphasised that they were catering to the cultural needs of the "Marathi residents of Karnataka".

The foregoing narration of events, incidents and interviews will conclusively prove that all the concerned parties have consistently conceded Belgaum to be an integral part of Karnataka.

I once again thank this Hon'ble Commission for affording this opportunity to express myself on this problem.

Belgaum:

Date: 26-3-1967

Yours respectfully,

(Basant Rao Chikkodi)