



Research Paper

The post/colonial archive and the idea of Andhra

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Abstract: The paper examines two English translations of the Telugu oral epic *Palnativirula Katha* to understand the dynamics of the regional identity of Andhra. It studies Robert Sewell's *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency* and Gene Roghair's *Epic of Palnādu* to understand the representation of Andhra within these texts and broadly how it has been viewed in history.

Key Terms: Translation, Andhra, Telugu, Consciousness, region and oral epic.

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I. Introduction

This paper seeks to examine two translations of the popular Telugu epic *Palnativirula Katha* to understand the idea of Andhra. The first English translations of the epic appeared as Appendix A to *Antiquarian Remains of the Madras Presidency*. The second English translation of the performatory oral song, *Palnativirula Katha* appeared in 1982 by Gene Roghair. Therefore, firstly this paper examines Robert Sewell's *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency* to map the trajectory of a region Andhra which was embedded in the Madras Presidency though culturally and linguistically had its own distinct identity. Both are attempts to understand India, through an English translation of the epic *Palnativirula Katha* though they appeared in completely different time periods and contexts.

The paper has the twin interests of untying the colonial and postcolonial (by now predictable) interest of the Indologists, both Sewell and Roghair in translating the epic, as also the idea of Andhra as a region that is retrieved through an epic which is definitely confined to even a smaller region like Palnādu. Sewell's *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency*, foregrounds an interest that is diverse from that of a purely academic translation of Roghair's. Sewell, a civil servant travelling across Madras Presidency in 1879 in order to keep a record of the statistics, cultural history of a particular place, namely the Kistna district as he calls it, translates this song from Mudigonda Virabhadrakavi's Telugu *kāvya Palnativirula Bhāgavatamu* (1862). While Roghair's study is academic. In these texts the idea of Palnādu is superimposed as the idea of Andhra and South India. What is Palnādu, what is Andhra in the Madras Presidency and after becoming an independent state would also be studied through the paper. And finally the role of translation, why *Palnativirula Katha* was selected as a representative of the notion of Andhra, would also be reflected upon. It may be added that the paper intends to discuss the idea of Andhra limited to the questions that these two translations project and answer in their own way.

The paper has two parts. The first part attempts to engage with the idea of Andhra beginning with 12 C and the second deals with the translations and their differences in their approach to the subject.

II. THE IDEA OF ANDHRA

The *Palnativirula Katha* is called the epic of Palnādu. Epic by definition is the song of the national hero as David Quint observes in his *Epic and Empire*. By describing the *katha* as an epic, the region of Palnādu is elevated to the level of an empire. In fact, the *Palnativirula Katha* is considered an equivalent to the *Mahabharata* in Telugu tradition as it is treated as the first original work that portrays the consciousness of the Telugus. The *Mahabharata* is undoubtedly a narrative of *rājya* with its dramatized vision for power and polity. The narrative of *Palnativirula Katha* is about *nādu*.¹ A brief account of the theme of the epic is drawn here for the sake of cross reference. The story has all the trappings of the *Mahabharata*. There is the dispute for kingdom among the brothers Nalagamaraaju, Narasingaraju and Malidevaraju and his brothers and there is a cockfight which decides that the loser in the game must leave the kingdom for seven years. Malidevarāju and his

brothers leave the kingdom after losing the game and return after seven years to reclaim the kingdom. But it is denied to them and therefore there is the final battle at Karyamapūdi. Each side of the brothers Nalagamaraaju, Narasingaraju and their half-brothers Malidevaraju and his brothers are helped by their ministers Nagamma and Bramhanaidu. Nagamma is identified with Saivism and Brahmanaidu is identified with Vaishnavism. This is the main theme of the epic as gathered from various printed and oral narrative of the epic.

The idea of Palnādu becomes contingent upon the idea of Andhra. This context provides an opportunity to explore the idea of Andhra as a region and the implication it can have- in the light of its formation and dissolution over the centuries including the recent separation of the state into two as Telangana and Andhra-over the cultural moorings of an identity explicated through these translations of the epic. The markers of a regional (both in the pre-modern and modern) world would be deliberated upon through a consideration of history, religion of the time in which the epic is set.

In this context, the category that needs to be explained here are the reference terms of Telugu and Andhra. Historically, the word Telugu is used from 5 C, Andhra from 9 C and Tenugu from 11 C onwards (G.N. Reddy 3). Literary historians have tried to explain the term Telugu as a reference to a tribe and Tenugu as something that refers to South. It is evident from early literature that Asokan inscriptions refer to it as the name of a tribe.ⁱⁱ In Sanskrit *āndhra* also means a hunter. G.N. Reddy in his essay on “Telugu, Tenugu and Andhra” in *Telugu Bāsa Caritra*, notes that the Tamil Sangam Literature has references to Andhras as people of a hunting community. These are men of non-Aryan origin and might have travelled south of the country and settled down. Therefore, the land that they inhabited came to be known as Andhra and gradually the language and people also came to be known by the same name. Now it came to be known as not just a tribe but it also came to be referred to the country as well.

Given this understanding, we may examine some available inscriptional and literary evidence to grapple with the notion of Andhra. This gives an occasion to reflect upon the world of *nādu* or region. A region in pre-modern Andhra was linguistically and culturally bound but not necessarily politically and geographically unified. As we understand the history of Andhra in chronological sequence, it seems as though one ruler followed after another in terms of their invasions and rule of Andhra, but what needs to be seen is that some of these rulers were ruling different portions of Telugu speaking people at the same point of time in history. And the region was probably known by the names of dynasties that ruled it.

The eastern Calukyas, the Durjayas, the Haihayas ruled certain areas in coastal Andhra. For instance, the Eastern Cālukyas were ruling the coastal Andhra regions while the southern part of Andhra was under the control of the Pallavas and the Western Cālukyas. The areas in Rayalaseema have not been under any known ruler’s control around the 10th and 11th C. It was inhabited by barbarans, nisādas and tribals and these warring tribal chiefs played the role of mercenary soldiers in both the western Calukyan and Pallava army.ⁱⁱⁱ It is the Kakatiyas who brought these disparate polities into the over-lordship of their rule. Similarly, in later times even the Kakatiyas in 13 and 14 centuries could not bring all the Telugu speaking peoples under their rule. They had about fifteen districts of the present Andhra under their control. Kākatīya rulers consolidated their power and sovereignty in Andhra in 1198, which was until then largely ruled by small time polities and therefore the public imagination as Andhra was till then largely linguistic and not territorial. Otherwise a linguistic and political region certainly existed as it comes through the expression of inscriptions in Telugu from 6 C onwards. After the fall of Warangal, around the 14 C, Telugu speaking people were ruled by four different rulers at Warrangal, Racakonda, Kondavidu and Korukonda.^{iv} Later on one third of the land inhabited by Telugu speaking people around the 15 C came to be known as Karnata (which is not related to the present Karnataka) under the Kannada rule of Bukka I and Harihara II. The official language was Kannada while people spoke Telugu in their daily lives. And above all Telugu literature and arts were patronized by the Vijayanagara rulers of Hampi and at a later date by the Nayaka rulers of Tanjore. In subsequent times, some of the areas of Telangana and Andhra were with the Bahmani sultans in the north. During the British era in the year 1800 the Nizam Asaf Jha II seceded the districts of Bellary, Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool and Chittor to the British for their help in his wars with the Marathas and Tipu Sultan. And these districts were then added to the territory of the Madras Presidency, while the rest of Andhra was already in the province of Madras Presidency. The point here is that the linguistic map of pre-modern Andhra is not characterized by territorial boundaries, as it were.

Now the question that confronts us is, was there ever anything called a unified Andhra in which all Telugu speaking people lived as one geographical unit. While it seems obvious that there was never anything like that, however there was an all-pervasive consciousness which gave a sensibility to the Telugus living under different rulers to identify with one another. It is only in the twentieth century that the linguistic and territorial boundaries came to correspond and be known as Andhra Pradesh in 1956.^v The song *ma telugu talliki mallepudanda ma kanna talliki mangalaratulu* □□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ was composed in 1942 by Sankarambadi Sundaracarya and was used extensively to evoke a passion among the Telugu speaking people of Madras Presidency, to demand for a separate state based on this consciousness. The movement for a separate state began and was strengthened by

1952 and the state of Andhra was carved out in 1953 with its capital at Kurnool and then in 1956 after the addition of the Telugu speaking districts from the Hyderabad state, it was renamed as Andhra Pradesh with Hyderabad as its capital. The song was then called the anthem of the State, but now The Hindu of March 19, 2014 observes that it's no longer going to be the theme song of the state. Someone bread on theories of linguistic reorganization of states, learns to look upon region as a unit bound by a shared culture of language, literature and territory. Hence, it would be difficult to imagine a neighbouring region which shared a commonality of language and culture but was under a different ruler and a different tax-paying system. This fissiparous nature of region poses a challenge to a modern observer of the pre-modern world. Therefore, region as a culturally, linguistically and historically contained unit with these shared features doesn't lend itself to understand a pre-modern region. The idea of Andhra as is evident from its history is a seamless entity that encompasses a consciousness of the Telugu speaking people. So it is a modern consciousness that seeks to merge the linguistic and cultural identity with its geographical limitations.

Therefore, even though the epic of Palnādu is about a tiny portion of a land, it projects a vision for all Telugu speaking people who could imagine and identify with it as their own in spite of its limitations. In a sense it is the *sthalapurāna* of only Palnādu. The tradition of Palnādu prevails in eleven districts of the coastal and Telangana regions. It's no surprise that all Telugu speaking people in different polities or small kingdoms would also sing and adapt the song as their own. The song was sung in Kāktiya Ōrugallu as evidenced in *Krīdābhirāmamu*.^{vi} People of all kingdoms would identify with the song or the tradition. Tradition and culture above all a consciousness belongs to all those who spoke and identified with the language more than the geography.

III. THE TRANSLATIONS

Most of the available Telugu literary texts in the nineteenth century were brought together by C.P. Brown, an East India Company civil servant posted at Kadapa. He built what could be easily called the Telugu literary canon. He collected most manuscripts of Telugu texts lying with individual collectors and libraries and made copies of these, edited and published them. However, the epic of Palnādu failed to appeal to his sensibilities and therefore was not published by him. Subsequently, due to the interest of the Brahmin scholars, the epic was revived in an effort to retrieve Telugu literary legacy and identity. For the Telugus it was an attempt to retain a distinct Telugu identity in the largely Tamil-speaking Madras Presidency. There are two issues that need to be addressed here. The first one is related to the idea of Andhra brought together by these two variegated translations of the epic of Palnādu and second and more important is that of the reception of these two translations. This section examines, the purpose the two English translations of the epic serve in their own different contexts. Can we identify the same intentions and interests in the translations mainly done by colonial civil servants like Sewell and the postcolonial academic interests of Indologists like Roghair?

Mudigonda Virabhrakavi's *Palnātivīra Bhāgavatamu* was published in 1862. Robert Sewell was introduced to the work when he travelled in the region of Palnādu in 1879. He translated the *Palnātivīra Bhāgavatamu* and published it as Appendix A to his *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency in 1882*. He used various titles to refer to the epic within the *Appendix* like *the Ballad of the Heroes of Palnad* and *Chronicle of the Heroes*. Sewell's translation is a summary of the epic- it is appended front and back by various details of the temples, historical information and the inscriptional evidence of grants given to temples, mainly the antiquities. He explicitly admits that he had been looking for legends of places and the people of Krishna district brought this epic to his notice "As a preliminary therefore, a slight sketch of some objects of archaeological interest in Palnad I give a summary of the poem relating to the Heroes. Everything in Palnad is so bound up with these stories that it is impossible fully to appreciate the antiquarian lore of the place without first comprehending the traditions which lie nearest the heart of the people. The summary, moreover, though very slight, will convey an idea of the form of many local poems in Southern India which it would perhaps be well by and by to introduce to European residents in some palatable shape." (Sewell i-xxvii) Sewell's translation begins ambitiously with the translation of the complete episode of the birth of Bramhanaidu, but very quickly dissolves into prose narrative and at times the translation is interrupted by Sewell's delightful commentary on the narrative and his understanding of the religion, ritual including his own illness and inconvenience. There is a certain amount of indifference on the part of Sewell towards the translation.

Roghair's translation of the Telugu oral epic was published in the 1980s, almost a century after the publication of the *Antiquarian Remains*. His translation of the epic to a considerable extent is influenced by Sewell's historical approach to the epic. Unlike Sewell, Roghair worked with two performatory oral singers Alisetti Galeyya and Medukonduru Cennayya. But finally Galeyya's song was translated because of several practical problems in recording with Cennayya. He is said to have about thirty hours of the recordings taped and he translated all of it into English through terse and concise prose. The translation begins with *Ankamma* and *Poturaju puttuka* and then ends with *Bālacandra Yuddhamu*.

Roghair translates the song into chronological and logically developed passages which he calls *kathalu*. He uses western musical notation to understand the emotion and melody of the song. “First, the transcriptions are only examples of melodic ideas presented in the epic. Second, the transcriptions sound an octave below what is written and third the pitches are approximate. It must be remembered that there are limitations in using the western notation system, but these are the closest approximation.” (Roghair 54) The repetitiousness, the mix of myth and reality and the non-sequential pattern of the song which Partha Chatterjee in a different context, calls ‘uncolonized speech’ (Chatterjee 55) are given up for a rational and chronological thematization of the song, whereas while analyzing the epic he constantly skips into analyzing the mythical and the real in the same breath.

Roghair finds problems with the Brahminical high handed understanding of the Palnādu scholarship therefore he chooses to work with the performatory singers. He is impatient and uncharitable towards the published stories of *Palnātivīrula Katha* but his essentialism in understanding the story as something true and only one of its kind is questionable. “As I listened to Cennayya and Galeyya, I began to realize something; the five-hundred-page text of Palnativīracaritra which I had read was not authoritative.” Roghair falls into trouble by comparing one published story of Palnāti Katha with another and giving some amount of priority and privilege to one over another and taking stock of the omissions and commissions within the narratives of all editions of Palnāti Katha. He calls these omissions and commissions “elitist or scholarly tampering with the local tradition” (Roghair 15) Instead of treating these texts as different stories altogether he considers them as different versions of the same story. While accusing the Brahmin scholars of distancing the tradition from its people, Roghair doesn’t hesitate to use western musical notation to understand the oral song; though the attempt seems novel and may have been an exciting exercise. He doesn’t find the usage of a western category insufficient to understand something fundamentally Telugu and local. Thus his translation of the epic can be termed as an exploration in contradictions.

Sewell’s attempt is clearly to give a sense of history by bringing together these antiquities which is one of the reasons why the British rule surveyed the whole land holdings of all provinces they had under their control and census were initiated and records kept to give a sense of history to Indians. Through the translation, Roghair is clearly responding to a certain kind of Telugu intelligentsia and doesn’t even allow himself the freedom to independently assess and understand the written tradition in itself in the Andhra culture, history and social life. He is dismissive of the Telugu works of Palnāticaritra and therefore doesn’t use any of it for his translation work into English. In choosing to work with the oral singers Roghair overtly denied the Brahminical view on the subject. What is denied in Roghair’s narrative is the hegemonic idea of Andhra in denying the written texts their credibility, almost as if rectifying the attitude of an earlier generation of Brahmin scholarship. These scholars, according to him, tried to appropriate the epic into the Brahminical fold. ‘What we seek is not an objective picture of how Palnādu society has functioned; our concern is with the inner or mythic conception of things-of locality, history, religion, society, culture, geography and values.’ (Roghair 86) It’s interesting to note that while Robert Sewell claims the epic as part of an Andhra which was embedded in the Madras Presidency and thereby south Indian tradition, Roghair claims the epic to its region and to the non-Brahminical legacy. The historic consciousness that Roghair invokes is not Brahminical but indigenous. Sewell translates the epic directly from the Brahminical sources though Virabhadrakavi’s *Palnāti Bhāgavatamu* itself is based on the oral singing tradition. Sewell’s vision of Palnādu is of South India and perhaps it would showcase to his distant European reader as well as to the immediate East India Company authority, the cosmopolitan nature of Madras Presidency.

When we look into the manifest intentions of these two Indologists, as they clearly state there is the baggage of colonial power missing in case of Roghair, but the readership for whom these translations are done and the understanding of India are not far from each other. Sewell’s chronicle subsumes the larger agenda of the colonizer that of constructing a history for these disparate and warring regions brought together by the British and to give them an identity. It becomes evident that Sewell’s field-notes was written for a colonial officer (who needed to make policies based on the notes). Sewell was clearly chronicling the 19 C Palnādu through a translation of the epic of Palnādu. In his field-notes we don’t find reference to the people of the district but only inscriptional evidence and though the intended objective of enterprise is to understand the people of the place. Through his translation of the epic, Roghair creates credibility and space for himself and for Sewell in the Telugu scholarly world by endorsing Sewell’s translation. Roghair’s approach to the epic interspersed with a great deal of sensitivity resulting in greater understanding of the epic and its significance in the local world view, certainly gives an added value to the translation as opposed to the lackadaisical attitude of Sewell. His translation is intended to put in place an alternative tradition to the existing scholarship of Palnādu epic though, unfortunately it was not followed by any other Telugu scholars who continued to look up to the established, Brahminical tradition of Pingali Lakshmikantham or Akkiraju Umakantham. Most of the fictional works that came up in Telugu after Roghair’s translation, continued to pay tributes to Srinatha as the original author of the epic. Occasionally there is a mention of Roghair’s translation otherwise it hasn’t had any serious

impact on the understanding of the alternative oral traditions available in Telugu. And to say the least, Sewell's translation was hardly treated as a creative work during the time of its publication along with *Antiquarian Remains*, in times when translation was not yet treated as an industry that it has become today.

ⁱ It is the Vijayanagara rulers who divided the *rājya* into *sīma*, *nādu* and *sthala*. Krishnadevaraya alludes to *dēsa* in his *dēsa bhashalandu Telugu lessa* for the first time. Ideas gathered from N. Venkataramanaiah's *Vijayanagara the Empire and the City* P.104.

ⁱⁱ Himanshu Prabha Ray's *Monastery and Guild*. Bombay, Calcutta and Madras: OUP, 1986, P.42.

ⁱⁱⁱ See S. Nagaraju's "Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu." in *Literary History, Region and Nation in South India*," edited by Sheldon Pollock. Special Issue, *Social Scientist* 23. 10-12;8-23.

^{iv} See Venkataramanaiah P.115 for a lengthier discussion and inscriptional evidence.

^v Andhra Pradesh was one of the first states to be formed on linguistic basis along with Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu after the enactment of the States Reorganization Act in 1956

^{vi} A Telugu text of the same period *Krīdābhīrāmamu* which contains the earliest evidence to the oral performatory tradition of the *Palnātivīrula Katha*.

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