

As per the recommendations of the SRC, a new state of 74,000 square miles, and two crore people was formed out of disparate and reluctant entities : the erstwhile Mysore state, the Kannada speaking areas of Bombay , Madras , Hyderabad and the princely state of Coorg . This was indeed an unprecedented moment, both in Karnataka's history and in the brief history of the independent Indian nation state. Whatever their differences , such was the Congress discipline of these days that the three stalwarts of the Congress , S Nijlingappa, C Hanumanthaiah and Devraj Urs publicly appeared to be on the same page .

Interestingly , Nijlingappa was a Lingayat , Hanumanthaiah a Vokkaliga and Devraj Urs was an Arusu , a member of the extended clan of the Wadiyars . Although both Lingayats and Vokkaligas ( Gowdas) were Kannada speaking , their differences were quite pronounced. So much so, that even the normally staid SRC commented *“ It has been estimated that Lingayats or Veerashaivas constitute about 30% to 40% of the population in the Kannada areas outside Mysore at present. The other important section of the Kannadigas namely the Vokkaligas similarly constitute a little less than 29% of the population of Mysore. In the united Karnataka, it has been estimated that a little more than 20% of the population may be Lingayats between 13% and 14% Vakkaligas and about 17% to 18% Harijans. It is clear therefore that no one community will therefore be dominant and any one section can be reduced to the status of a minority if other groups combine against it....*

The first , and most immediate impact of this demographic change was that Hanumanthaiah moved to the Union Cabinet , making way for Nijlingappa to be elected as the first CM by the new Mysore assembly, which consisted of the erstwhile assembly members from Bombay, Madras, Coorg Hyderabad , and old Mysore.

With respect to the retention of the old name , it is interesting to see the difference in perspectives . Nijlingappa wrote in his memoirs : “The name Karnataka could have been accepted had I pressed for the name change, but I did not want to unnecessarily hurt any feelings. The man who most openly wanted the old name to continue, and did not accept Karnataka, was Devaraj Urs ,who subsequently became chief minister and then had the name changed to Karnataka , for his political gain”.

One must mention here that this memoir was written two decades after the incident , and by then, Nijlingappa was a bitter man, and Urs was the height of his glory . Indeed , one of the first actions of Urs on becoming the CM was to change the name of the state from ‘Mysore’ to ‘Karnataka’. It is true that the change to ‘Karnataka’ in 1956 would have made sense : the majority of the population of the enlarged state lived outside of Mysore , and the INC had described these areas as the ‘Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee’.

However if at the time of merger , the outsider to ‘Mysore’ (S Nijlingappa) retained the name to assuage the feelings of the minority who lived in the former princely state, almost two decades later, the insider ( Devraj Urs ) decided on ‘Karnataka’ to reassure those who were not from Old Mysore that their interests would be uppermost in the polity of the new Karnataka , especially as he pushed the aggressive land reforms policy . The groundwork had been laid in 1961 by the Kadidal Manjappa, who had grown up in old Mysore with its marked inequalities in landholdings. His legislation had limited impact, partly because it contained loopholes but mainly because subsequent governments lacked the will to implement it. However , Urs wanted to create a new support constituency – that of the peasant cultivator. All tenanted land passed to the

government, which, in turn, transferred it to the tenants .The amended Act also barred the leasing of land, abolished sharecropping, prescribed ceilings for various categories of land.

However , with the benefit of hindsight , it must be placed on record that while Nijlingappa became the first CM, and Urs took the credit for renaming the state, the it was Hanumanthaiah 's dogged persistence that laid the foundations of Karnataka. His articulation of the many "cusp cultures" of the state on the one hand , and the development discourse on the other 'a 200-mile coastline to landlocked Mysore, three valuable harbours of Bhatkal, Malpe and Karwar; new cities; crops; rivers and water-falls of north Karnataka as potential hydroelectric dam sites' set the tone and the context for integration. Of the two arguments – the state took over the development discourse , and ignored the former , for soon after the merger , much to the chagrin of old Mysoreans like HR Gaffar Khan, the linguistic claims the eight lakh Urdu speakers was systematically ignored . On this issue ,the silence of the state was juxtaposed with the sound of the cinema . In the aftermath of linguistic reorganization of states, cinematic icons in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh began to supplement the political life of the people in a *parallel state form* .Thus the role of Kannada cinema , especially the post 1956 productions which coincided with the emergence of Rajkumar as the larger than life super hero also contributed in no small way in creating the popular ferment for Karnataka as the mark of the linguistic and cultural identity of all the Kannadigas !

*The columnist would like to acknowledge the following works : Broadening and Deepening Democracy, E Raghavan & James Manor, S Nijlingappa's autobiography and the writings of Janaki Nair in EPW. He also benefited from extended conversations with Preethi Nagraj, a popular columnist from Mysore .*