

Arebhashe: a language with a rich cultural history

As Arebhashe Samskruthi Matthu Sahitya Academy celebrates its decennial year, we trace the rich origin, history, and culture of the Arebhashe language as well its speakers.

By: Preeti V. Kamat



Kannada is the official language of the State of Karnataka, and surprisingly it accommodates 30 different dialects of Kannada. This contributes to the linguistic diversity of modern-day Karnataka.

Kannada is divided into four geographical regions by traditional linguists: Mysuru, Mangaluru, Dharwad, and Kalburgi. Various communities in these regions speak a specific dialect as their mother tongue, whether it's Halakki Kannada, Havyaka Kannada, Kota Kannada, Rama Kshatriya Kannada, Badaga Kannada (spoken by the Badaga community in Tamil Nadu's Nilgiris region), or even Arebhashe.

Arebhashe or Aregannada or Gowda Kannada is a dialect of Kannada spoken mainly by Gowda and other communities in the regions of Madikeri, Somwarpet, and Virajpet taluks of Kodagu district,

Sullia, Kadaba, Puttur, Belthangady, Bantwal, and Mangaluru taluks of Dakshina Kannada district, and Bengaluru and Mysuru districts in the South Indian State of Karnataka.

It is also spoken in Bandadka, Kasaragod District in the Indian state of Kerala. An estimated five lakh native speakers and more than two lakh people from all other

communities put together speak the language and it is now, the language of communication in these areas. Arebhashe is also known as "Gowda Kannada," a name coined by Prof. Mariappa Bhat, a well-known Kannada scholar.

The Gowdas from Hassan's 'Aiguru Seeme' moved and settled in various parts of Dakshina

In Arebhashe cultures, there is no clear line separating myth from folk or fairytales; all these together form the literature of preliterate societies. Theatre in the form of the traditional Yakshagana, Yakshagana Talamaddale, and Drama prevalent in Arebhashe speaking region has greatly preserved the finer aspects of the Arebhashe language. Yakshagana which is conducted in Arebhashe is very popular among the Arebhashe people, and they often perform in summer. Academy has always supported and encouraged theatres and plays. We are conducting an Arebhashe theatre workshop soon. We are also collaborating with KSS College Subramanya theatre unit 'Kusumasaha Ranga' College in this regard.

LAKSHMINARAYAN KAJEGADDE

President, Arebhashe Samskruthi Matthu Sahitya Academy

Kannada and Kodagu around the 15th century CE. Those who settled among Tulu-speaking populations in Puttur, Belthangady, Karkala, and Vittal of Dakshina Kannada on the other hand, absorbed the culture of Tulu Nadu, learning the local language and worshipping deities in the Coastal Karnataka tradition of 'Daivaradhane', while they picked up features of Kodava culture in Kodagu.

The community also created its own distinct identity, which was retained through its language. In Arebhashe, for example, the community worships the daivas (demi-gods/spirits). When compared to conventional Kannada, Arebhashe has changed in phonetics, syntax, and morphology. Some of the vowels absent from the Kannada alphabet are considered phonetic in Arebhashe.

A change in the pronunciation affects the meaning of a word, which is a characteristic of Arebhashe that is difficult to express using normal Kannada font. Subrahmanya, Peraje or Sampaje, and Madikeri/Bhagamandala Arebhashe are the three major variations within Arebhashe.

Arebhashe was recognised by the Karnataka State Government and formed an academy in 2011 to preserve the culture and literature of the Arebhashe Region which is named

The Academy organises workshops, seminars, cultural events, and gatherings for the Arebhashe public. It also provides research grants for research in Arebhashe language and culture; publishes books and presents the annual awards in the fields of Arebhashe literature, folk arts, Yakshagana, research, and novel writing. Academy also offers leather instruments to the music artistes.

VISHWANATH BADIKANA

Assistant Professor, St. Aloysius College & Arebhashe Academy Member

as Karnataka Arebhashe Samskruthi Matthu Sahitya Academy supported by the then Chief Minister D. V. Sadananda Gowda. The academy celebrates December 15 of every year as Arebhashe Dinacharane. The Academy has a library that houses a good collection of books and magazines in Arebhashe. It also publishes a quarterly magazine by name Hingara.

This year Arebhashe Samskruthi Matthu Sahitya Academy is celebrating its decennial. Speaking to Karnataka Today, president Laxminarayan Kajegadde said, "We have taken various initiatives to unite the people who speak Arebhashe

across the world. As a part of the decennial celebration so far, the academy has published 42 books to protect and popularise the language and digitalised them for posterity. We have also requested writers who had published books on their own, to get their books digitalised through the academy."

Meanwhile, the academy is working on an Arebhashe dictionary, and is also planning a full-fledged cultural encyclopaedia. "We are producing documentaries to introduce our great achievers to future generations. We have already released a documentary on artiste Mohan Sona. We are further producing documentaries on linguistic scientists Kodi Kushalappa Gowda and Deviprasad. Many short films projects have already been started in this regard. But in order to give it a professional touch, we are conducting a separate workshop on the preparation of documentaries in October. We are putting in best efforts to the language ISO Certified, which will facilitate global recognition for the language," he informed.

"Apart from this, the Academy is organising a four-day Arebhashe Samskruthi Shibira (Cultural camp), where local resource persons enlighten participants particularly youth on traditional practices and songs. Arebhashe has rich written and oral literature like epics, novels, dramas, dictionaries, poems, riddles, and adverbs. The oral traditions of Arebhashe highlight the finer aspects of the language. Shobhane is commonly recited at marriages. It is the way of life of Hindu Gods Rama and Sita. Paddanas are recited in a ritualistic context by particular communities of the Arebhashe region at the Hindu rituals of Bhoota Kola and Siddavesa kind of religious and traditional folk dance," said Lakshminarayan.

"Tulu Gowda people of Sullia, Belthangady, and Puttur perform the full moon summer dance in the





Photos: Bharatesh Alasandemajalu

month of Tulu calendar Suggi. In this same month, Suggi Nalike is also performed. Sadly, the new generation is unaware of such traditional forms. So, we have organised a cultural camp. A minimum of 30 people are expected to participate in the camp. Already we have conducted three workshops, and we have planned to hold seven more in different localities,” he informed.

“This year we are celebrating Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav, to commemorate the 75 years of independence of India. On this occasion, our focus is to highlight the “Amara Sullia Swatantra Sangrama of 1837”. It is a historic incident where farmers of Sullia under the leadership of Kadambadi Ramagowda rebelled against the British and defeated them. For more than 13 days they hoisted their own flag as a symbol of independence at Bavutagudde. Such an important

The Academy is working best of its ability for the development of language by the translating the works, by collecting and publishing of folk literature, by holding training programmes for young writers, etc. It should be continued in the future. The cultural encyclopedia should be published by the Academy, which not only preserves the unique culture but also helps in better understanding.

PROF. K. CHINNAPPA GOWDA

Karnataka Folklore University Former Vice-Chancellor

milestone in the history of Indian Independence is not even known to many. So, it is our responsibility to make our future generation aware of such great achievements of the Arebhashigas,” he explained.

Similarly, Vishwanath Badikana said, “To educate the young generation the academy has planned to work on textbooks, glossary, translation, and archival work, which will also help preserve and develop the language and culture of Arebhashe and its speakers. The Academy is also working on a

documentary collection for veteran personalities of this region, including a seminar on youth literature, a drama camp, and poetry. We will launch our own website and release our documentaries and other works on YouTube at the decennial event.”

Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda said that Gowda Bhashe or Arebhashe has been spoken by several communities. The language resembles Kannada but it is different. It has a unique cultural history that should be highlighted. He opined that the literature in Arebhashe possesses the quality of being taught in schools.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises learning of mother tongue along with other languages with introduction of four-language policy. Thus, Arebhashe fits the bill as the canonical word order of Arebhashe being subject-object-verb which is similar to that of Kannada language. This automatically renders it a language quality appropriate for teaching in schools, which needs to be given the right thrust in the backdrop of NEP implementation. ■

Arebhashe has a history of approximately 500 years. According to linguistic scientists, it is very close to the Badaga language in the Dravidian language. There was a time when Vokkaliga Gowda came from Iguru and started living in Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu district, also Kasaragod District of Kerala State. Many of these families settled in Kodagu from the time of Talakadu Gangas (200–1004 CE). Then they migrated to Coorg (Kodagu) from the Mangalore - Udupi region, to settle among the Canarese Tulu-speaking people. And different communities in this region speak Arebhashe as a communication language.

BHARATESH ALASANDEMAJALU

Arebhashe Samskruthi Matthu Sahitya Academy Member