

# Historiography Of Kasaragod: An Overview

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## Abstract

*Kasaragod, the northernmost region of Malabar and the last-formed district in Kerala has a unique cultural background that dates back to the ancient period. This culturally pluralistic small region was an integral part of ancient Tulunadu and was also famous for the use of seven local languages, many art forms, migration of different ethnic groups, foreign invasions, freedom movement, etc. The primitive tribal societies in this region and various religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam made much contribution to the development of a unique culture to Kasaragod. The descriptive and theoretical studies on the formation and development of Kerala are available in many forms. However, most scholars, including historians and linguists, provided little information on the unique cultural background of the extreme north of Kerala State. Many indigenous and foreign scholars tried to discuss the regional kingdoms and the general history of Kasaragod through their works. Locally specific works on the historical background of Kasaragod are tiny, and most of them provide only a general overview and scattered reference on the region's social, political and cultural development. No severe studies have been conducted regarding the historical background of the present Kasaragod. Both the scholars of Kerala and Karnataka had neglected this backward region in their writings. Research works on Megalithic culture, Christian migration, Art forms, and Languages were conducted, but most of the studies were confined to certain areas only. This paper is an attempt to analyse critically the major historical studies made by scholars and the general historiography of Kasaragod.*

**Key Words:** *Cultural Pluralism, Descriptive and Theoretical Studies, Research Works, Historiography.*

## Introduction

Kasaragod, the northernmost and the last formed district of Kerala, has a unique cultural background that dates back to the ancient period. Kasaragod is generally known as the “Land of Seven Languages”. There are various views regarding the derivation of the name of Kasaragod. In his masterpiece work, “Tuhfat-ul-Mujahiddin”, Sheikh Sainuddin mentioned a place named ‘Kanjirakooth’, which is identified with modern Kasaragod. Some scholars argue that the name Kasaragod is derived from ‘Kasara-Kode,’ which is the harm of wild buffalo. Another view related to the place name is that it combines two Sanskrit words: “Kassara”, which means lake or pond and “Kroda”, the place where treasure is kept. Most of the local peoples believe that it is the place where Kasaraka trees (strychnos nux vomica) or kaanhiram in Malayalam are in abundance. There are several questions regarding the presence of a composite culture in Kasaragod. The early political conquests, migration, and brisk trade activities played a vital role in forming a pluralistic culture in Kasaragod. The cultural life of

modern Kasaragod came into being through a long historical process of synthesis of various cultures. The primitive tribal societies in this region and various religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam contributed to the development of a unique culture in Kasaragod. The languages, lifestyle, art and architecture, literature, faiths and social consciousness provided a peculiar cultural identity to Kasaragod. The descriptive and theoretical studies on the formation and development of Kerala are available in many forms. However, most scholars, including historians and linguists, provided little information on the unique cultural background of the extreme north of Kerala State. This paper is an attempt to analyse critically the major studies available regarding the history of Kasaragod.

Many indigenous and foreign scholars tried to discuss the general history of Kasaragod through their works. Among them, the earliest name is A. Sreedhara Menon, who gave little information regarding the northernmost part of the State through his edited work "Kerala District Gazetteers: Cannanore". As a part of the Cannanore up to 1984, the present Kasaragod was the northernmost Taluk of the District. The Gazetteer described that the first batch of Aryan immigrants into Kerala reached the old Cannanore District from the Tuluva region, where the Aryans had already settled and set up colonies of their own. It may be noted that the Kasaragod - Hosdurg areas of the district formed a part of the Tuluva kingdom, and river Chandragiri (river Payaswini or river Perumpuza.) marked the traditional boundary between Kerala and Tuluva countries. Sreedhara Menon illustrated the accounts of Arab travellers and thereby identified places like Bekal, Kumbala and Kasaragod as important towns and market centres during the Middle Ages. Even if the Gazetteer was marked as narration, it stood as the earliest literary source material and gave valuable information about the geography, religions, community groups, social customs, and political administration that existed in northern parts of Kerala. In his other work, 'The Legacy of Kerala', Sreedhara Menon just mentioned the two popular items of recreation that existed in Kasaragod, viz., the cock fighting and the buffalo race.

B.A. Salvatore mentioned certain place names and stated that Caravatturu was the southern border of the Tulu Kingdom. K.K.N. Kurup identified this place with modern Cheruvatturon the south side of the present Kasaragod district. However, in another place, Salvatore described that river Payaswini or Chandragiri in the northern side of the district marks the boundary between Tuluva and Kerala Countries. Hence, the question of how Caravatturu relates to modern Cheruvattur is relevant. The answer may be mysterious until the exact place is identified. Salvatore was successful in broadening the geographical and political expansion of Tulunadu. He glorified the dynasties that ruled over Tulunadu and often propagated a feeling of Tulu nationalism. However, the merit of writing is that the first critical history of the region by making use of the sources available to date belongs to Salvatore.

In his multi-volume travelogues, Francis Buchanan discussed the features of the territories of Canara, Mysore and Malabar. His work ascribes the various ethnic groups, religions, customs and beliefs, the economic and monetary systems, revenue administration, flora and fauna, arts and commerce, native rulers like Nileswhar Raja, Tamuri (Zamorin), Colastri (Kolathiri), the Mysorian invasion to Malabar and lifestyle of the people in Northern Kerala. Amid the journey, Buchanan reached Hosso-Durga or Pungal-Cotay, both of which signify the new fort, the former in the dialect of Kannada and the latter in local Malayalam languages. To him, the only inhabitants around the fort were a few Puttar Brahmins. They serve a temple whose ancestors were placed there by Ikkeri Raja, who built the fort. Buchanan's work is relevant to scholars interested in studying Malabar's regional kingdoms and various community groups.

By quoting the accounts of the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa, the Kannada Scholar K.G. Vasantha Madhava they were stated that the ports in Karnataka and Kumbala welcomed the crafts of Malabar merchants. Both the seacoasts of Malabar and Karnataka provided new resources for Vijayanagar's commercial interests. The District Gazetteer of

Cannanore supplemented Barbosa's records regarding the brown rice export from Kumbala to Maldives in exchange for coir. By this description, we can analyze that Kumbala in the ancient Tulu Kingdom was a brisk trade centre, and both indigenous and foreign trade relations later sometimes created a mixed culture in this area.

In his multivolume work "Castes and Tribes in Southern India," Edgar Thurston depicts the lifestyle of various community groups living in Kasaragod. His work also discusses various languages and religious-based labour groups in South India. However, he failed to draw a detailed picture of the socio-cultural background of the extreme north of present Kerala.

"A History of South Canara" and "History of Tulu Nadu" are the two excellent works of K.V. Ramesh, who provided the geographical extension and political changes that happened in South Canara regions during the time of the Alupas, Vijayanagara rulers, Bednore Nayaks and Mysore rulers. He applied modern research techniques and criticism in his masterpiece, A History of South Canara. Ramesh is mainly concerned with the region's political history in the ancient and medieval periods, covering the age of Vijayanagar dominations. He used contemporary literary works in Tamil, Sanskrit, and Kannada, as well as foreign accounts and inscriptions, which extensively spread throughout South Canara. In his History of Tulu Nadu, Ramesh tried to draw the territorial expansion of Tulunadu, the political conquests of the Alupa and Vijayanagara rulers, lifestyle of the people and the social and cultural development of Tulunadu; by using both literary and epigraphical evidence. As a part of the study about Tulunadu he noted the domination of Alupa and Vijayanagara rulers over some areas of modern Kasaragod.

"Studies in Tuluva History and Culture", written by P. Gururaja Bhat, is a significant work which mentions the origin of Tulunadu, Tulu Swaroopams and the dynastic history of Alupas in detail. He strongly rejected the Parasurama legend regarding the creation of Tulunadu. He stated that the term Satya Puthra, mentioned in the inscription of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, is closely associated with the inhabitants of Tulunadu. Notably, he tried to find the historical background of the Tulu Kingdom and made huge narrations on the topic. However, Bhat's perspective may be old-fashioned and less theoretical. It is an indispensable reference book for any student of Tulu history and culture, and it is useful to scholars who are interested in studying the general history of the northern part of Kerala.

When Elamkulam Kunhan Pillai was silent about the extreme north of Kerala, K.P. Padmanabha Menon just mentioned the name of Kasaragod by describing the boundary of Kolathunadu in the second volume of his masterpiece work "A History of Kerala".

M G S Narayanan's research work "Perumals of Kerala" gives some relevant information about the Chera suzerainty in the regions of Kasaragod with the help of the Pullur-Kotavalam temple inscription of Bhaskara Ravi Perumal. He stated that the first Muslim Mosque at Kanjirakkuttulay outside the Chera kingdom. His statement clearly shows that the Perumal rule extended up to the southern part of the Tulu Kingdom. It is also a leading light to ensure Salatore's argument regarding the southern boundary of the Tulu Kingdom at Caravatturu, perhaps a place near the river Chandragiri. Apart from the few references, MGS does not provide anything regarding Kasaragod's cultural background. Like the prominent scholars of Kerala history, he also neglected the history of this land of diversity.

A book on local history, "Reflections on Malabar: Society, Institution and Culture," edited by C. Balan, provides specific valuable essays on the northernmost part of Kerala. In this work, Kesavan Veluthat made an overview of Tulu studies and examined the historical validity of the works on the Tulu Kingdom produced by different scholars and institutions. The historiography of the Tulu studies analyzed by Kesavan is relevant, authentic, and valuable for discovering new areas for research in the history of Tulunadu. His critical outlook and approaches towards the Tulu studies are notable and attractive. In addition to the Tulu studies, the book discusses the Mushika Vamsa Kavya, the Christian migration to Malabar, the birth of the Communist

Party in Malabar, and the pepper trade and transport infrastructure in Malabar. However, the book mainly analyzed the history of modern Kerala, except for a few references to the medieval history of north Malabar.

The travelogue titled “Ente Keralam”, published by Raveendran, mainly discussed the family and agricultural relations of Tulu Brahmins, the trade significance of Kumbala and Kanhangad, the kinship between the Kumbala dynasty and Cochin Royal family, the feudal character of the ruling family of Kumbala, the first Christian migration to Rajapuram, the spiritual centres like Anandasramam and Nithyanandasramam and the establishment of Malik Dinar Mosque in A.D.642 at Kasargod. However, the book does not provide a complete survey of the district. Raveendran only wrote about the significance of some places he visited and failed to describe how the peculiar cultural development occurred there. Kattakkada Divakaran also provided some travel accounts regarding the historical development of Kasargod.

Among the local sources related to the northernmost part of Kerala, “Kasaragodan Gramangaliloode”, written by K Balakrishnan, provides relevant historical data regarding the pluralistic culture of the region. As discussed, the book provided general information about the origin of the name, society, and geographical features, as well as some data about the legendary heroes, art forms, small industries, and the social affairs of the region. Balakrishnan believes that military conquests and religious migration are the factors that influenced the origin of a composite culture in Kasaragod. As a pure localized text, the book provided an overview of the social, religious and cultural background of Kasaragod without considering all parts of the district.

In his book *Kerala Samskaram*, Ajith Kumar pointed out the divergent social formation of the northern part of Kerala. According to him, the Hindus helped Malik Dinar construct a mosque at Kasaragod, which indicates the willingness of the traditional Hindu people to accept the new religion.

“The History of Muslims in Kasaragod”, written by Moyin Malayamma Hudvi, reveals that the Muslim community was influential in forming a separate cultural entity in the District. The Muslim Theyyams like Kalanthan Mukri, Mukripocker, Ali Bhutham, and Ummachi Theyyam are performed in Hindu ritual places, and the Muslim interference in the Hindu rituals and vice-versa helps to maintain religious harmony. The Muslim presence in the Hindu art forms is reflected in the customs of Malayali Chamundi at Kottagar, the place between Manjeswar and Ullal. Moyin Hudvi tried to present various mappila art forms and their significance, communities like Byari and Hanifa, and the narration of foreigners about Tulunadu. However, the work is only a narration about Muslims in the northernmost part, without any theoretical framework.

From the available sources regarding the Tulu Kingdom, the most reliable and detailed work is “Tulu: Nadum Bhashayum Nattarivum”, written by C. Raghavan. The work discusses the Thalankara Inscription of the Alupa ruler Jayasimhan I (980-1010 A.D). It concludes that it may be better to consider the origin of the Kumbala dynasty from the Alupas. C. Raghavan referred to Tulunadu under the Vijayanagar rulers and quoted the words of Kesavakrishna Kuduva regarding the Portuguese trade in Tulunadu, the significance of Kumbala and Manjeswar port towns and the brisk trade contacts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The domination of Kumbala dynasty in the southern part of Tulu Kingdom and the reign of Bengara rulers in the regions of Manjeswar, the victory of Ikkari Nayaks in Tulu Kingdom and Malabar, the construction of forts at Bekal, Chandragiri, Hosdurg, Kumbala, Bandaduka, Kundamkuzhi and Kasaragod by the Ikkeri rulers, the invasion of Mysore rulers like Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and the accession of the British in Malabar are the important topics discussed by Raghavan. He questioned Sreedhara Menon's argument regarding the invasion and domination of Ikkeri rulers over the Kumbala dynasty. If it were a place under Ikkeri rulers, it would be merged with the Kingdom of Hyder Ali. However, the Mysore rulers made deals with Kumbala

as an independent territory. Raghavan provided valuable information through descriptive and analytical methods by considering the description of languages, religions, festivals, art forms, customs and traditions of the ancient Tulu Kingdom, including the present Kasaragod. His effort to mark the boundary of Tulu Kingdom is remarkable. The picture of the Ananthapuram inscription is also appended to his work.

Folklore studies about Kasaragod are plenty; most of them were already compiled by scholars like M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri, Raghavan Payyanad, B. Muhammad Ahammed, VenkatarajaPuninjithaya and others. The folk arts like Theyyam, Thira, Bhootham Folk songs like Thottampattukal(Theyyam Songs),Vithukilapattukal or Koythupattukalor Krishi Pattukal(Agricultural Songs), Samudayikapattukal (Community Songs), Anushtnapattukal (Customary Songs), Vinoda Pattukal (Leisure Songs), PaniPattukal (Labour Songs) Katha Pattukal (Story Songs) etc. are powerful to reveal the socio-cultural life of the people. The thottampattukal of the Theyyamssometimes gives a vivid picture of the administration of different regional kingdoms in North Malabar. For example, even though it was oral, the thottampattukalof the theyyams like Kshethrapalaka, Vettaykoru Makan and Vairajathan describes the origin of AlladaSwaroopam. The folk songs clearly describe the people's customs and traditions, beliefs, mode of worship, festival, craft, labour, caste system, production process, myth and legends, stories, tools and implements, dress, etc.. Even though most of the incidents mentioned in the folk songs are exaggerated, they sometimes provide historical information, especially in the case of specific place names still existing in different parts of Malabar. Kasaragod offers a veritable array of the performing arts, most springing from folk tradition. Though often related to religious rituals and mythological stories, they highly connected with the language of the ordinary people. Many folk songs about the northern Malabar is already compiled by M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri, S.K. Nayar, Gopala Pillai P.A, Yahia Pulikkal, B.Mohammed Ahammed, R.C.Karipath,Raghavan Payyanad and some other linguists. They tried to find out the historical value of the songs through deep discussions and analysis.

M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri published over fifty works on folk arts and folk songs in Kerala. His narration on Tulunadu is mainly on the basis of oral and literary sources. He mostly tried to check the document's authenticity through a comparative and critical outlook. His essential works like TheyyamThirakaludeThottampattukal, NammudePandathePattukal, PazhayaPattukal, PulayarudePattukal, Pulluva Pattum Nagaradhanayum, Thottampattukal, Poorakkali, ManthrikaVidyayumManthravadaPattukalum, Nadan Pattukal, KurathiThottam, Nadan Kalakal-Nadan Pattukal etc. are the compilation of folk songs in different parts of Kerala. Supplementary notes and sufficient examples are also appended in his works. Most of these works provided valuable knowledge regarding the socio-cultural tradition of north Malabar, including Kasaragod. Namboodiri is of the view that we cannot neglect the worth of folk art and folk songs because all these provide sufficient information regarding the customs and traditions of the depressed community in Kerala.

Mohammed Ahammed studied many of the Muslim folk traditions in Malabar and concluded that Mappila folklore tried to expand a localized composite culture in Malabar. In his work, "MappilaFolklore", Mohammed Ahammed introduced the language, songs, art forms, festivals and lifestyle of the Muslim community in Kerala. He stated that the cultural integrity of Kerala is remarkable due to the mutual interaction of the customs and beliefs of different religious groups in the state. According to A.K. Nambiar, the Muslims came here and transplanted the traditional culture of Kerala into their life; early inhabitants here accepted the customs of Muslims, and thereby, a composite culture developed in Kerala.Mohammed Ahammed examined the secular aspects of Hindu-Muslim communities by analysing Muslim theyyams like Ali Chamundi, Mukri Pocker, Kalanthan Mukri, and UmmachiTheyyam performed in various Hindu ritual places at Kasaragod. Though the effort of Mohammed

Ahammed is an excellent asset to folklore studies, most of his findings lack theoretical and methodological insight.

Yahiya Pulikkal edited a work on the cultural and ethnic background of Malabar under the title "Jana Samskara Patanangal". The work is a narration about the traditional community groups in Malabar like Saliyas, Karimbalas, Velans, Asaris, Koppalars, Kurumans, Mukkuvas, Thiyyas, Kammalas, Mavilas, Chakliyas and Munnuttans in Malabar. The micro-study of caste and racial factors is essential to understanding the complete cultural heritage of Kerala. The work of Yahiya Pulikkal is reliable in the case of the description of different castes in Malabar. The structure of the society, division of labour, and present significance of community groups in Malabar have been discussed in his work. A serious approach to the historical problem is reflected throughout the work.

Locally specific works on the historical background of Kasaragod are tiny. Most of them provide only a general overview and scattered reference on the social and cultural development of the region. Even though it is the nearest place to Karnataka State, Kannada Scholars also neglected this land from their writings, as done by the historians and linguists in Kerala. Recently some historical works are appearing on this neglected area in the form of local history. The purely localized works in Malayalam like Nerippu(2004), OruThulunadanPeruma(2006), Kodavalam(2006), Angatimugar: Noottandukaliloode(2009), VatakkannPeruma (2011) give valuable information on the social and cultural background of different villages and also the general history of Kasargod. The village historical work 'Nerippu' discussed the origin of the place name of 'Matikai', the migration of different community groups to the eastern side of the village, the origin of landlordism and popular movements against local enemies and the general history of Matikai village by using the sources collected from the old people. As a historian, V. Kuttian, the general editor of the work, tried to follow the historical methodology and depended on the oral and written source materials for the study. Though the work is mostly narration, it provides general information about the history of Matikai village. The work on Angadimugar village written by H.A. Mohammed Master is only a narration of the development of the region from 1700 AD to 2008 AD. There was no historical continuity or methodological framework in this book. The other village histories, like 'Kodavalam' and 'OruThulunadanPeruma' edited by C. Balan, discussed the historical background of the Kodavalam and Ajanur villages, respectively. Both works help know the general history, including the migration of different castes and their functions, social and political institutions, cultural developments, etc. Even though the lack of a definite theoretical framework discoloured the book, it is an excellent effort to reveal the historical background of the villages in northern Malabar.

Among the localized historical works on Kasaragod, the most reliable one is "Kasaragod: CharithravumSamoothavum", edited by C. Balan and published by Kasaragod District Panchayath. As a detailed work on the geographical, linguistic, social, political and cultural life of Kasaragod, the book throws light on the development of the District from ancient to modern. It is the only available work covering almost all the past incidents of the district using oral, literary and archaeological sources. As the best narration on the historical development of the land of seven languages, it is one of the first great and attractive attempts among the regional historical writings in Kerala. Even though there are theoretical and methodological defects, the work is a leading light for the development of local historical writings in northern Malabar.

## **Conclusion**

Kasaragod, the northernmost part of Kerala, is a cultural hub of the state. The geographical position and the fertility of the land brought different community groups to this region. The military expeditions and commercial contacts were the supporting factors behind the flow of various social groups into Kasaragod. As a border area of Kerala and Karnataka, the people of

this region live with a peculiar cultural background, which is perhaps the mixture of many cultures that exist in both states. This composite cultural trait is reflected in people's whole lifestyles. The confluence of religions, castes, languages, rituals, ceremonies, customs, and traditions made Kasaragod a land of diversity within a common culture. However, no serious theoretical or scientific studies have been conducted regarding the historical background of the present Kasaragod. Both the scholars of Kerala and Karnataka had neglected this backward region in their writings. Academic discussions and research on Megalithic culture, Christian migration, caste groups, languages and art forms were conducted, but most of the studies were only confined to certain areas. A broad scientific study is essential to reveal Kasaragod's historical background and cultural traits.

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