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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FORMATION OF A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY IN KASARAGOD: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Kasaragod in the northern part of Kerala State has its own cultural background from ancient period onwards. The people of this area is still living there without considering social, religious and caste differences; that may be started since the Pre-historic period. Like any other civilized society, the people of Kasaragod also very much imbibed by their traditional beliefs and ritual practices handed down from generation to generation. Politically, this region has been witnessed plenty of military conquests. The geographical features, early political conquests, religious migration and the commercial contacts paved the way for the development of a composite culture in Kasaragod. Because of the external contacts, new type of beliefs and ritual practices came into the life of the native people at Kasaragod. In the course of time, it became a meeting ground of different communities with mutual co-existence and thereby a multi-cultural society developed in the northern part of Malabar. The present study is an attempt to know the general features of Kasaragod and to discuss how a pluralistic society developed in the northernmost part of Kerala.

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Introduction:-

Kerala exhibits a multitude of beliefs, arts, history, traditions, customs and manners. If India as a whole has been a great melting pot of diverse cultural traditions, the vicissitudes of history have made Kerala a perfect replica in the miniature of a large area. The geographical isolation of Kerala from the main body of India brought many changes in the life style of the people in Kerala. The distinctness of indigenous and extraneous cultures are clearly apparent in the cultural lives, myriad art forms, religion, rituals, festivals etc., of this narrow strip land in South India. The Dravidian and Aryan elements has its own reflections in various art forms and festivals in different parts of Kerala. The confluence of different communities and their customs has led to the development of a diverse culture in certain areas of Kerala. Because of the contact with the people of outside Kerala, a peculiar trait of culture has developed in the border areas of the State. Such type of cultural entity now exists in the northernmost part of the State, i.e. Kasaragod, which is lying adjacent to modern Karanataka State. There are several questions regarding the presence of a composite culture in Kasaragod. Among them, the most relevant one was that how a pluralistic culture developed there and what are the factors responsible for this cultural synthesis. The geographical position, early political conquests, religious migration and brisk trade activities had vital role in making a pluralistic culture in Kasaragod. It is not easy, but depth analysis is essential to know the influence of such factors for the origin of a multicultural society in the northernmost region of Kerala.

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Kasaragod, the northern most area of Kerala, is bounded by South Canara district of Karnataka at North-East, the Kudagu district of Karnataka at South-East, Kannur district of Kerala in the South and the Arabian Sea at the West. The Sahyadri Mountains lies as a natural barrier on the East. Historically, the present Kasaragod was an integral part of the ancient Tulu Kingdom. According to Keralolpathi, Tulunadu was the creation of Parasurama; the legendary hero. Later, it was conquered by different dynasties from Kerala and Karnataka. Among them, the most important one was the Alupas; who ruled a vast territory from Barkur in Karnataka to Kasaragod. The Alupa hegemony started to decline with the coming of the Chalukyas to this region. The inscription of Chalukya King Kirti Varman II found at Adur in Kasaragod gives proper evidence regarding the Chalukya hegemony in northern Kerala. According to tradition, the Tuluva area of Kasaragod was the southernmost boundary of the Kadamba dynasty under Mayura Varma. Tuluva area of the Kadambas were divided into sixty four parts under different Brahmin Governors. After the decline of Kadambas, Tulunadu was conquered by Alupa and then by the Vijayanagara rulers. But, with the fall of Vijayanagara kingdom in the battle of Talkikotta in 1565, the Ikkeri rulers established their suzerainty over this area. The Ikkeri rulers like Sivappa Nayak and Somasekhara Nayak constructed number of forts in different parts of present Kasaragod. With the decline of the Ikkeri Nayaks, the political administration of this area was occupied by the Mysore rulers. After the death of Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan in 1789, it passed over to the British. In short, the regions of modern Kasaragod District witnessed number of political conquests and struggles until the freedom of India in 1947. Under the British rule, Malabar including Kasaragod was a part of Madras Presidency. Kasaragod was an integral part of the South Canara district of Madras State; before the re-organization of State in India in 1956. Kasaragod taluk became a part of the re-organized Malabar district of Kerala State in November 1956. In January 1957, the region covered by present Kasaragod district was merged with newly formed Cannanore district and the old Kasaragod taluk was bifurcated into Kasaragod and Hosdurg taluks. On 24 May 1984, Kasaragod became a new district in Kerala with Kasaragod town as its headquarter. There is no change in the jurisdiction of the district or taluk boundary since then, though some changes has been made in the case of some villages either by forming new villages or by renaming the existing villages.

Geographically, the ancient Kasaragod is mainly divided into three regions. The regions between rivers Chandragiri and Uppala is known as Alavathunadu. The regions between river Chandragiri and river Chithari is known as Kavayanadu. The regions between river Chithari and river Karimkode is known as Paduvandu. But most reliably all the villages in the present Kasaragod district are situated in three distinct regions viz, Kasaragod coast, Kasaragod plateau and Hosdurg uplands. The Kasaragod coast covers the entire coastal belt of Kasaragod district, which extends from Manjeswaram at north to Thayyil near Trikaripur at South. To the east of this coastal region of Kasaragod taluk lies in the Kasaragod plateau which is the continuation of Karnataka (Deccan) Plateau. The third physio-geographical region of Hosdurg undulating uplands extends over south-east portion of the District. This sub-region slopes from east to west forms catchment areas of Nileswaram and Kariamkode river and its tributaries. When we consider the ancient history of Kasaragod, it is believed that the Brahminical influence called "Aryanisation" had its first footing in Kerala at the northernmost region, which influenced the socio-cultural aspects of the State. As per Keralolpathi, the ancient Tulu Kingdom extended from Gokarna in the north to river Perumpuzha (river Chandragiri) in the south. The jurisdiction of this territory is questioned by later scholars on the basis of historical and epigraphical records, though they still need further probe based on archaeological excavations.

During the Sangam age, the regions of Kasaragod district were under the sway of Ezhimala kingdom. The Cheras also came into the picture of Kasaragod by the conquests of Baskara Ravi Manukulatitya (962-1021CE). The Pullar-Kodavalam temple inscription of the ruler clearly reveals the political domination of the Perumals of Mahodayapuram in the regions of present Kasaragod. The feudatory principalities, which had sway over Kasaragod, were the Kumbala in the north and Kolathiri and Nileswaram in the south. Nileswaram Rajas, who belonging to Allada Swaroopam, had their kingdom extending over the present Hosdurg Taluk. They had to face frequent invasions from Nayakas of Bednore popularly known as Ikkeri Kings. Ultimately, the principality of Nileswaram came under the control of Bednore Nayaks and rulers had to pay an annual tribute to Ikkeris. During this period, Somasekhara Nayak (1714-1739 CE) built the Hosdurg fort and erected a Vijaya-Sthambha (Victory Column) at Nileswaram to commemorate his victory. The history of the origin of Kumbala dynasty, which covered the bulk of the present Kasaragod taluk, is still obscure. According to one view, Kumbala king had descended either from a kshathriya family that migrated from northern India or from the descended of Cheraman Perumal, as this family followed the Marumakkathayam (matrilineal) system of succession. Sometimes they imitated the Vijayanagara rulers for accepting certain honorary titles like 'Raya'. The Portuguese identified Kumbala as an important trade centre during the 16th century CE. The ruler of Kumbala dynasty is also known as Mayippadi Thampuram; after the

shifting of the capital to Mayipadi. After the fall of Tippu Sultan in the third Anglo- Mysore War in 1792, Malabar became the part of British Empire by the treaty of Sreeranga Patanam. The ruling dynasties in the Tuluva regions like Nileswaram and Kumbala also surrendered before the British and accepted pensions from English East India Company. Thus, the southern areas of South Canara District, comprising of present Kasaragod and Hosdurg taluks, completely came under the sway of the British power.

Religions and Composite Culture

Religions had a very significant role in shaping a peculiar cultural background of Kasaragod. It is a real fact that Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Jainism are the major religions flourished in this area. All the religious groups made valuable contributions in creating a composite culture in Kasaragod.

Hinduism in Kasaragod

Hindu religion in Kasaragod was mainly organized on the basis of caste system. Sivalli, Havika, Keradi and Saraswathas are the most important sub caste of the Brahmins in Kasaragod. Mayura Varma, ruler of Kadamba dynasty, introduced the former two in South Canara. Among them the Sivalli or Tulu Brahmins have their head quarters at Udipi where they set up a temple under the guidance of Madhavacharya (1238-1310 CE). They speak tulu language and famous in the Malabar area as Embran, Embranthiri and Potti Brahmins. They have a Madom (Spiritual Centre) of their own called Ednir Madom at Kasaragod. The Havika or Haiga Brahmins follows the teachings of Sankaracharya and they have found a colony at Vittal. It is believed that the Keradi Brahmins were migrated to the regions of Tulunad mainly from Karhad Desa of Maharashtra. Some Brahmins hail from Konkan (Goa) and among them, the Saraswatha group is important. There are two denominations in this group, the Saraswathas and Gouda Saraswathas. Of them, the Gowda-Saraswathas or the Konakani Brahmins are a flourishing community. It is believed that the Saraswatha Brahmins came to the regions of South Canara after the attack of Goa by the Portugues in 16th century CE. The Gawda Saraswatha Brahmins have supervisory power over the temples like Sree Anantheswara temple at Kumbala and Sree Venkataramana temple at Kasaragod. It is well known that all the Brahmin groups occupied high position in the Society and owned agricultural lands through different ways. Along with priestly occupations, they also engaged in agriculture, which is still seen in the north-eastern side of Kasaragod.

The Bunts or the Tulu Nairs and the Billavas are the major non - Brahmin Hindu communities in the northernmost side of present Kasaragod. The Tulu speaking Bunts were originally a military class and they followed matrilineal system known as Aliya Santana. Shetti, Heggade, Nayaka, Bandari, Rai, Ballala etc. are the most common title used by the Bunts. The Billava community has close resemblance with the Tiyyas of Malabar. Like the Bunts, they also follow the Aliya Santana system of inheritance. The Billavas speaks Tulu language and most of them are day-labourers and agriculturists. The Tulu Brahmins, the Bunts and the Billavas still exist as the major sections of Hindu population in present Kasaragod Taluk. The Kshatriyas who take 'Raja' as surname and title are few except for those of the families that ruled the principalities like Kumbala and Nileschwaram. There are other different Hindu communities and sub-castes still living in the rest of the area, especially in the Hosdurg Taluk. Among them the Nair caste form a predominant community in the southern and central parts of the district and take the titles like Nair, Nambiar, Kurup, Atiyoti etc. They have invariably very important role in the temple affairs. The forward castes like Poduvals, Varriars, Marars etc., performs the duties associated with the temples. Traditionally they perform the duties like lightning the oil lamps, making flower garlands, drumming at the time of worship.

The backward communities like Saliyas or Devangas (weavers), Mogers (fishermen), Kaniyans (astrologers), Vaniyas (oil-pressers), Thiyaas or Ezhavas (toddy tappers), Maniyanis or Yadavas (agriculturist), Kulalas (potters), the Kammalars; including Aasaris (carpenters) Thattans (gold smith) etc. had significant place in the development of Hindu religion in Kasaragod. Each community group has their own deities and mode of worship that reflects in the various festivals prevailing throughout the District. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Kasaragod like the Koragas, Malakkudiyas, Malayarayas, Malavedas, Pulayas, Mavilas, Vettuvass, Velans, Koppalas or Nalkadeyars, Malayas, Vannans etc. have significant role in the social formation of Kasaragod. Most of them engaged in agriculture and other traditional handicraft industries like bamboo baskets making, mat making etc. The traditional system of treatment, devil dances and black magic are still practiced in most of the scheduled communities in Kasaragod. Apart from the early inhabitants, the Maratis also became the part of the society of Kasaragod. It is identified that they were migrated from the Konkan area. The custom to avoid the devils from their territory called 'BalSatak' performed by the eldest and the youngest people is prevailing among the Maratis; even today.

It is clear from the above descriptions that the Hindu religion in Kasaragod is organized because of number of castes and sub-castes, most of among them came there from other regions of Kerala or other South Indian states. The available data proves that most of the Hindu people engaged in agriculture, even if each caste has their own traditional occupations. Basically an agrarian based economy developed among the Hindu people throughout the District. Temples and other ritual places have significant role in the social formation and day-to-day life of the Hindus. Apart from other regions of Kerala, the Hindu ritual places acted as a role of religious harmony through the performance of the theyyams connected with the story of the persons belonging to other religion. In short, the majority Hindu people played crucial role in the social and cultural development of the District.

Islam in Kasaragod

The commercial contact between Kerala and Arabia led to the advent of Islam into Kerala in the 8th century CE itself. It is believed that Malik Ibn Dinar and family were the pioneers of the Islam religion in Kerala. They established first mosque in Kerala at Kodungallur and then with the help of the local rulers the religion of the Prophet made gradual progress. It was Zamorin, the ruler of Calicut, who helped the Muslims to become a major force in the public life of north Kerala. The Muslim religion have deep root in Kasaragod which proved from the old Mosque at Thalankara founded by Malik Ibn Dinar. In the Course of time, many local people were converted to Islam and it became an influential religion in Kasaragod. They are also known as Mapplias and majority among them are the Sunnis. There are other groups called the Byaris who settled in the northern part of Kasaragod. The Muslims are basically the merchants, but the day-labourers and fishermen also came from the Muslim community. Today, most of the business in the urban areas of Kasaragod is controlling by the Muslims. Almost all Muslims go to the Mosque for the jumma or Friday prayer but women are not usually allowed to attend the prayers in the main areas of the mosque. The mosque is the centre of learning and all spiritual and social activities of the Muslim community. They have their own rituals and practices in every moment of the spiritual life. The contribution of the Muslim people in the field of literature and art took as a remarkable asset in the cultural formation of Kasaragod.

Christianity in Kasaragod

The Christians form the third important religion in Kasaragod District. The story of the rise and spread of Christianity in Kerala is a part of the legend of St. Thomas. According to tradition, Christianity was introduced in Kerala in the 1st century CE by St. Thomas. He is said to have landed at Mavelikara, a place near to Muziris in 52 CE. He took initiative to convert several Hindus and founded seven churches on the Kerala coast. Christian religion started to spread in Malabar area with the establishment of Portuguese power in 16th century CE. But Christian migration from Travancore to Kasaragod strengthened only in 1940's. Most of among them were the Syrian Christians. During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, there are Latin Christians, who belonged to the Mangalore Diocese and speak Konkani language, settled in the northern regions of present Kasaragod taluk. The churches in Hosdurg taluk also functioned under the Mangalore Dioceses up to June 1960. Then they became the part of the Calicut and Kannur Dioceses. There are many churches in Hosdurg taluk came under the Kottayam Dioceses. They converted many people from other communities; most of among them were the Billavas or Ezhavas in Hindu Religion.

Christianity made steady progress in Kasaragod and the church became one of the well-established institutions in the course of time. The liturgy and organisations of the church were also subjected to diverse cultural influences during different stages of its history. Most of the Christian people in Kasaragod engaged in agriculture. They introduced number of new agricultural products in Kasaragod like tapioca, pineapple, guava etc., which were unknown to the local people until that time. They widely cultivated the commercial product like rubber that gives substantial income to all sections of the people lived in the hilly areas of Kasaragod. The Christian people in the district also managed educational institutions and hospitals in different parts of the District. It is a significant fact that the modern developments took place in the hilly regions of Kasaragod mainly with the migration of the Christians.

Jainism in Kasaragod

The Jain religion entered to Kerala before the Christian era. It is quite probable that following the great immigration of the Jains from Magatha under the leadership of Bhadrabahu during the period of Chandragupta Maurya, and their settlement in Sravana Belgola in Mysore, Jain influence crossed over to the neighbouring areas of Kerala. The northern regions of the present Kasaragod taluk were the important settlement areas of the Jainist, who came there mainly from Karnataka. The Alupa rulers in Tulunadu and the Bangara rulers at Manjeswaram promoted the Jain Religion and provided assistance to them to construct Basadis (place of worship). The two important Basadis in the district, which are maintained or lingering in existence, are located at Manjeswaram. They are the Parsvanatha

Basadi and the Chathurmukha Basadi. The former dedicated to Parsvanatha, the 23rd Theerthankara of Jainism and the latter dedicated to Aadhinatha, Chandranatha, Santhinatha and Vardhamana. The Hindus freely offered their willingness and support for building Jain temples and in return, they had no reservations in their response to Hindu religious and spiritual sensibilities. As they were the strong critics of caste system, their presence in the regions of Kasaragod helped in the formation of a secular culture there.

Conclusion:-

Cultural life of the people of Kasaragod has evolved through a long historical process of the synthesis of both indigenous and foreign cultures. The different cultural forms that had been at work in the formation of the culture unique to Kasaragod were that of the primitive tribal societies in this region, other South Indian societies and various religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. Each religious group has their own peculiar customs and manners. Even though certain religious differences are prevailing, a kind of tolerance and amity existing among the people that leads to maintain unity in diversity and thereby to make a composite culture at Kasaragod. The Pluralistic culture of Kasaragod region has its own peculiar traits, which mark it off from other regional cultures. The languages, life style, art and architecture, literature, religions, faiths and social consciousness bestowed upon Kasaragod a different cultural identity.

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