



Historiography of Dakshina Kannada; Post-Independence Scenario

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Abstract: This paper deals with the changing perceptions of historians and writers about the historical developments in modern Dakshina Kannada. Historiography is a historian's way of constructing the past. One of the famous anti-colonial movements called the Amara-Sullia Rebellion in 1837 in Dakshina Kannada has been engaging the interests of historians and writers since colonial times. It is interesting to see how a rebellion branded as a mere 'Gowda affair' by the colonial writers has become a symbol of the identity and pride of some castes and communities. Historiography discussed here highlights the process through which history is appropriated to meet the present communal and political ends.

Keywords: Historiography, Post-Independence, Dakshina Kannada, Canara

INTRODUCTION

Historiography in simpler terms is nothing but a historian's own way of constructing the past. It deals with the historian's way of perceiving the past and making sense of the past. In fact, what we read today as history is the historiography or different perceptions of the past. In addition, these perceptions are subject to change; hence the historian is not able to grasp the past as perfectly and completely as it had happened. For that matter, it can also be said that historiography also represents how imperfectly or incompletely a historian has perceived the past. However, some scholars consider historiography "not just as a preface or appendage to history, but as history itself because it tells us how the knowledge of the past is gained, how history is constructed, how we are, where we are in relation to historical knowledge..."

OBJECTIVE

To know the history of Dakshina Kannada district

To understanding the post Independent scenario of Canara region

DISCUSSION

This paper intends to make a survey of the historical writings on South Canara after independence; here the attempt is not to catalogue the works that have been brought out on the history and culture of the land and people, but to find out the various trends in the perception of the past. Of course, perceptions are subjective though they are based on the traces of the past, the pieces of evidence and documents that history leaves behind. But at the same time, the existing contemporary ideological currents also leave an impact on the perceptions of the writer or historian and these aspects are also focused in this discussion.

A comprehensive collection of information began with the imposition of colonial rule on South Canara in the last decade of the 18th century. The earliest source for the colonial South Canara is Francis Buchanan's survey report. However, several administrators afterwards contributed in their own way to present a picture of the Canara region—past and present, from time to time; however, serious academic efforts did not come forth for a long time. The colonial gazetteers brought out in the 1890s were the first major attempt to present a systematic chronologically narrated history. "It contained an outline of the history of the region, following the methodology that had been accepted by the Western tradition of historiography after Ranke". Its authors projected the pre-British rule as a period or an era of anarchy and troubles "crying out for deliverance". The Manuals then dwell on the benefits that the British rule had conferred to the people of the Canara region; thus the colonial rule was presented to us as a 'saga of progress'. And the same trend continued in the future colonial manuals and writings also. These impressions had their bearing on the historiography in the post-independence period also; e.g. the impression that Thomas Munro made in 1800 that "Canara will probably never be a manufacturing country..."¹ and that it would continue as an agricultural region continued to influence the thinking of the writers for a long time. But Tulu cultural traditions attracted several scholars such as A. C. Burnell, A. Manner, Fr. Moegling and others. The inscriptions of the region were also studied by a few scholars.

The Early Indian writers of Dakshina Kannada were Shinappa Hegde,² Ganapathi Rao Aigal, Govinda Pai, B. A. Salortore (in fact, his *History of Tuluva*, 1932, was the first work in English on the history of the Tulu-speaking people), Kesava Kudva, P. Gururaja Bhat and others. They did not focus on the nature and impact of the colonial rule. Tulu nationalism based on the glorification of the ancient Tuluva dynasties finds a place in Saletore's writings. He also contributed chapters on history to the revised version of the Manual of South Canara in 1938.

After independence, the history and culture of the region attracted the attention of several indigenous and outside scholars. Around this time, owing to the reorganization of states a major portion of Tulunad became part of the state of Mysore (now Karnataka) and another portion went to the state of Kerala. "The kind of literature that was produced around the time of independence and the reorganization of states can be seen as part of the attempt to 'take over' this region by the state of Karnataka at an ideological plane. Research of an academic nature was going on in the Universities of the state, particularly Mysore and Dharwad on folklore and history. They extended their areas of interest to Dakshina Kannada as well"³. The post-independence writings sought to reinforce the Tulu identity by highlighting the distinctive features of the Tulu language, culture, social traditions, political experience, etc. The model of history that was followed was the narrations of the political history of empires and imperial administrations.

As one scholar puts it "The history of South Canara for them meant the history of the political powers that ruled over the region... In short, the Vincent Smith paradigm of historiography, followed by Salvatore was successful to a great extent to provide sanction and legitimacy for the political domination of Tulunad by powers from up the Ghats with retrospective effect from historical times!... A paradigm of historiography, which was designed to legitimize imperialism of one variety, helped "imperialisms" of other varieties also when adopted to lesser situations. The same tendency of inadvertently following an ideology, which probably points to intellectual inertia, can be seen in the writings of those who followed Saletore". K. V. Ramesh's *A History of South Kanara*, a masterpiece covers ancient and medieval periods. P. Gururaja Bhat was another scholar who devoted his life to the study of the history of Tulunad. His works form an invaluable source of information for research scholars on Tulu history and culture. A. Sundara, Suryanath U. Kamath, K. G. Vasanthamadhava, P. N. Krishnamurthy, B. Vasantha Shetty, P. Ganapayya Bhat, B. Surendra Rao⁴ and others have immensely contributed to enriching our understanding of the South Canara history. Mysore and Karnataka universities were the first ones, which encouraged the study of and research into the Canara region. The 1980s witnessed the emergence of Mangalore University and it greatly affected the ongoing probing of the history and culture; it provided a new fillip to the academic efforts of the budding scholars. It goes to the credit of the various departments of Mangalore University that ever since the inception of the University they have immensely contributed to the creation of a substantial quantum of information on Dakshina Kannada by specifically concentrating on the Canara-centric aspects. Some of the research theses that have been brought out have provided a new orientation to the study and are path breaking in several ways. The Department of History over 40 years of existence has been at the forefront of encouraging research into the region's past.

Eminent scholars, who headed the department such as B. Surendra Rao and Kesavan Veluthat, not only personally reinterpreted the historical developments in the light of the new ideological perspectives but also encouraged their research scholars to deviate from the trodden path and approach the problems with a critical bent of mind. This has resulted in the production of a few scholarly theses, which have brought about a paradigmatic shift in local historiography. These scholars have focused their attention on such themes as the evolution of state and society in various periods, minor powers, nature of trade and commerce, colonialism and resistance to the same, police and judiciary under colonial rule, socio-religious movements, education and social change, urbanization, evolution of forest policy, slavery in the west coast, plantations, missionary activities, western medicine and indigenous society, freedom movement, social change after independence among the various religious as well as caste groups, Dalit movements, historiography, etc. The department can lay claim to the fact that it has facilitated the reconstruction of the history of Dakshina Kannada by moving away from the colonial historiography paradigms. The department has also brought out commemorative volumes on important occasions, which also provide a new orientation to historical thinking.

CONCLUSION

However, the crystallizing sense of caste and communal identities is leaving its impact in recent days on the approaches to the region's history. The resurgence of Tipu's memory as a freedom fighter on the one hand, and his alleged atrocities on the other hand, glorification of Queen Abbakka's⁵ exploits against the Portuguese and her projection as the first freedom fighter for 'confronting colonialism', revival of the concept of Tulunad, proliferation of literature on various castes and communities, such as the Bunts,⁶ Billavas, Bearies, Jains, etc., are indicative of the fact that the current political ideologies, a longing for ancestry and other contemporary pressures and pulls are shaping the character of the recent historiography. The recalcitrance of professional historians to feed into the current needs of the political and communal groups is leaving the field wide open for non-historians to stray into the same and come out with their own versions of the historical issues through their 'research.' This means that one can write anything as history and get away with it. This trend is increasingly vitiating the world of academic research.

Thus, both the serious and popular historical writings are proceeding side by side while the latter has more appeal and potential to influence the common reader and shape his/her opinion.

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