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Colonial Rule and Its Impact on the Development of Udupi District: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

The colonial period marked a significant phase in the history of Udupi District, bringing profound changes in its socio-economic, political, and cultural structures. Following the fall of the Kingdom of Mysore in 1799, the region became part of the British-administered South Canara District under the Madras Presidency. British policies introduced new systems of land revenue, administration, education, transportation, and trade, which transformed the traditional society and economy of the region. During the colonial period, the establishment of modern educational institutions, the development of road and communication networks, and the encouragement extended to agriculture and maritime trade contributed to the progress of the district. At the same time, colonial rule created economic inequalities and altered indigenous institutions. This article examines the impact of colonial rule on the development of Udupi, focusing on economic growth, social change, educational advancement, cultural transformation, and political awakening. The study highlights how colonial interventions contributed to modernization while also generating challenges that shaped the district's historical trajectory.

Keywords: Colonial Rule, Udupi District, British Administration, Socio-Economic Development, Cultural Change, South Canara.

1.Introduction

Udupi District came into existence on **24 August 1997** following its bifurcation from Dakshina Kannada District, situated at the southern extremity of the western coastal region of Karnataka. Endowed with a distinct cultural heritage and the distinction of being known as *Devanagari*, Udupi District is one of the prestigious districts of the State of Karnataka and is renowned for its rich historical, cultural, and religious heritage.

Udupi District is renowned for its rich historical, cultural, and religious heritage. According to the inscriptions discovered within the district, the region was ruled by the kings of the **Alupa dynasty** during the **7th century CE**. Around the **10th and 11th centuries**, **Barkur** was recognised as the centre of the political activities of **Shantara of Hombuchcha**, a subordinate ruler under the Alupas. Subsequently, the region came under the rule of the **Badami Chalukyas** and the **Hoysalas**. After the Hoysalas, the region was ruled by the kings of the **Vijayanagara Empire**, who divided the erstwhile Dakshina Kannada District into **Mangalore** and **Barkur** and appointed separate governors for

these administrative divisions. From **1054 CE**, the **Keladi rulers** governed the region for nearly two centuries. From **1863 CE**, the region came under the rule of **Hyder Ali** and **Tipu Sultan**. Following the defeat of Tipu Sultan in the **Fourth Anglo – Mysore War** in **1799**, the British took possession of the territory of the East India Company and merged it with the **Madras Presidency** together with Dakshina Kannada District.

This article analyses, from a historical perspective, the multifaceted impact of colonial administration on the economy, society, education, culture, infrastructure, and political consciousness of Udupi District. In addition, the study seeks to evaluate, from a balanced perspective, the contributions made by British administration to the district's long-term development, as well as its limitations.

2. Historical Background

Udupi District is one of the three coastal districts of Karnataka. It was constituted as a separate district on **25 August 1997** following its bifurcation from Dakshina Kannada District. Udupi District is bounded by **Uttara Kannada District** to the north; **Shivamogga** and **Chikkamagaluru Districts** to the east; **Dakshina Kannada District** to the south; and the **Arabian Sea** and the coastal shoreline to the west. During the **Vijayanagara period**, the region was known as the **Kingdom of Barkur**, whose territorial jurisdiction largely corresponds to the present-day Udupi District.

Prior to the separation of Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada Districts in **1860**, the entire coastal region was collectively known as **Canara (Kanara)**. Thereafter, the districts came to be known as **South Canara** and **North Canara**, respectively. The term **Canara (Kanara)** is the Portuguese form of the word **Kannada**. When the Portuguese first established contact with the inhabitants of this region, Kannada was the common language spoken by the local people. Consequently, they referred to the inhabitants as **Kannaris** and the region as **Canara**. Since the letter corresponding to the Kannada consonant '**DA**' was not commonly used in Portuguese, the word **Kannada** gradually assumed the form **Canara**, which subsequently came into common usage. When the Canara District was geographically divided in **1860**, **South Canara** and **North Canara** emerged as separate districts. Subsequently, with the formation of the unified State of Karnataka in **1956**, Dakshina Kannada District, together with Kasaragod, and Uttara Kannada District were integrated into the State of Karnataka.

Prior to the advent of British administration, Udupi was an important religious and commercial centre on the western coast. The region was renowned for its agriculture, maritime trade, and temple-centred social life. Following the British occupation, the region was brought under direct colonial administration through administrative reorganisation.

The British established a well-organised bureaucratic administrative system, conducted land surveys, implemented new land revenue policies, and developed transportation and communication networks. These changes laid a firm foundation for the social and economic transformation of Udupi District during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

3. Economic Impact of Colonial Administration

3.1 Agriculture

During the colonial period, agriculture constituted the principal means of livelihood for the people and, from that period to the present day, the district has remained predominantly agrarian. With the objective of maximising government revenue, the British introduced a systematic land revenue system.

The economy of the region was primarily dependent upon agriculture. **Paddy** was the principal crop, while **coconut, arecanut, pepper, cashew, and cardamom** were also extensively cultivated. The commercialisation of agriculture encouraged cultivators to grow commercial crops required for export markets. During this period, **fisheries** also acquired particular prominence. The district possessed several fishing centres, and the export of fish significantly contributed to the improvement of the local economy.

3.2 Trade

The coastal location of Udupi District was favourable for maritime trade, and fishing constituted one of the principal economic activities of its inhabitants. British policies encouraged the export of agricultural produce and forest resources to both domestic and international markets. The district's extensive coastline played a significant role in generating foreign exchange, providing nutritious food, and creating large-scale employment. Udupi District occupies the foremost position in the State in marine fish production. A substantial number of families in the district have traditionally depended upon fishing as their principal occupation and source of livelihood.

Malpe Port developed into an important commercial centre. As a consequence of improved road transport and communication facilities, merchants were able to expand their commercial networks. This development enabled trade to play a significant role in the economic growth of the district.

4. Infrastructure Development

During the period of British administration, greater priority was accorded to the development of infrastructure.

4.1 Electric Power System

Electricity is supplied to Udupi District by **MESCOM (Mangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited)**. The district receives power from the **Sharavathi** and **Varahi Hydroelectric Power Generation Stations**.

4.2 Industrial Profile

Udupi is one of the districts of Karnataka possessing several important industries. Industrial estates have been established in **Udupi**, **Kundapura**, and **Karkala** taluks. The district comprises cashew-processing units, rice mills, coconut powder manufacturing units, fish feed and fish oil processing units, fishing-net manufacturing units, ice-block manufacturing units, plastic manufacturing units, wooden furniture manufacturing units, and engineering industries.

4.3 Railway Network

The **Konkan Railway Broad Gauge Line** passes through the taluks of **Udupi** and **Kundapura**. It connects **Goa** and **Mumbai** in the north with the State of **Kerala** in the south. **New Mangalore Port**, located at Mangalore, is the nearest major port to Udupi. In addition, **Malpe**, **Gangolli**, and **Maravanthe** possess minor ports.

4.4 Transport Connectivity

The district possesses a well-developed road network connecting its rural areas. State highways traverse the urban areas and major centres of the district. The National Highway passing through Udupi provides connectivity to important cities such as **Mangalore**, **Karwar**, **Goa**, and **Mumbai**.

4.5 Postal and Telephone Services

The post offices established in Udupi District provide, in addition to ordinary postal services, **Speed Post**, **Business Post**, **Bill Mail Service**, **Express Parcel Service**, **Answer Detail Post**, **e-Payment**, **e-Post**, **National Bill Mail Service**, **Union Money Transfer**, **Postal Life Insurance (PLI)**, and **Life Insurance Services**.

4.6 All India Radio

The **All India Radio Station, Mangalore**, commenced operations in **1976** and continues to function as the Government's official broadcasting institution. Its transmission covers the districts of **Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, and Kasaragod**. A relay station of All India Radio is located at **Brahmavara** in Udupi District. In addition to **Kannada**, programmes are also broadcast in the **Tulu** and **Konkani** languages. At present, several **FM radio channels** also operate within this broadcasting region.

4.7 Banking System:

Udupi District occupies a leading position in banking services and possesses the highest number of bank branches in the State. As a result, the district has earned recognition as the "**Home of Banking Services**."

5. Social Reforms under Colonial Administration

5.1 Dissemination of Modern Education

One of the most significant contributions of colonial administration was the introduction of modern education. Christian missionary organisations and government educational institutions introduced Western-style education. English education opened avenues for government employment and professional opportunities. The introduction of the English language among Indians became an important factor in bringing about social transformation and ushered in numerous revolutionary changes. For Indians who had long remained bound by the rigid conventions of Sanatana Dharma, English education proved to be a boon. It paved the way for modernisation, broadened intellectual horizons, and subsequently contributed to the emergence of the Indian Renaissance and the growth of nationalism.

5.2 Social Reform and Change

From a social perspective, British rule proved beneficial to Indians. Through the introduction of English education, Indians gradually abandoned many obsolete customs and adopted a modern way of life. They embraced the Western ideals of equality and liberty and discarded numerous superstitious beliefs. Christian missionaries condemned social evils deeply rooted in Indian society, including the practice of **Sati**, child marriage, polygamy, the caste system, female infanticide, and slavery. English-educated Indian intellectuals also opposed these social evils. As a consequence, the British Government abolished many of these practices through legislative measures. Thus, society underwent a process of social purification. Changes were also witnessed in dress, food habits, and the adoption of certain Western practices. The influence of British rule further promoted women's equality and women's education, leading to the emergence of an English-educated middle class.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indian society was stagnant, characterised by the rigid caste system, the practice of **Sati**, untouchability, human sacrifice, the **Purdah** system, and child marriage. Society was enveloped in ignorance, and people had become victims of numerous superstitions and blind imitation. Owing to the conversion activities of Christian missionaries, Hinduism faced significant challenges during this period. It was under such circumstances that the British introduced English education. Educated scholars who received English education began to question the social evils prevalent in society. Influenced by Western thought, they developed a rational outlook and broadened their intellectual understanding. They examined society from a critical perspective and became actively engaged in social reform. As a result, many social evils gradually declined, harmful customs were reduced, and society advanced towards a more dynamic and progressive path.

5.3 Caste and Community Relations

Before the advent of British rule, Indian society was characterised by numerous superstitions, blind customs, and harmful social practices. Evils such as female infanticide, the practice of **Sati**, and child marriage were prevalent. The British, upon witnessing these conditions, were astonished. Having been influenced by the liberal atmosphere of Western thought, they sought to restrain the cruel practices prevailing in Hindu society and contributed to its modernisation. Christian missionaries also played an

important role in the process of modernising Indian society. Although the caste system occupied a dominant position within society, the expansion of educational and economic opportunities gradually enhanced social mobility. Many communities succeeded in improving their social and economic status through education and trade

6. Cultural Impact of Colonial Administration

6.1 Religious Institutions and Society

Despite the influence of colonial rule, religious institutions retained their prominent position in the social life of the region. The renowned **Sri Krishna Matha** continued to function as an important pilgrimage centre, a centre of religious education, and a major centre of cultural activities. Temple festivals and religious traditions strengthened community unity and reinforced the cultural identity of the people.

6.2 Development of Literature and Print Culture

The introduction of printing technology provided significant impetus to the development of **Kannada** and **Tulu** literature. Newspapers, periodicals, and books became important instruments for the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of public awareness. The growth of print culture also encouraged intellectual discourse and contributed to the formation of a distinct regional identity.

6.3 Preservation of Folk Arts

Even during the colonial period, traditional folk art forms retained their vitality. Among these, **Yakshagana** continued to be one of the richest cultural expressions of coastal Karnataka. These cultural traditions not only preserved indigenous values but also demonstrated their capacity to adapt to changing social conditions.

6.4 Influence of Western Culture

Through colonial education, Western ideas relating to science, administration, and social organisation were introduced. Although traditional customs continued to retain their influence, the introduction of modern ideas encouraged cultural adaptation and social transformation.

7. Political Awareness and Nationalism

The expansion of education and the growth of the print media contributed to the development of political awareness among the people of Udupi District. By the beginning of the twentieth century, nationalist ideas had gained considerable popularity. Local leaders actively participated in various national movements, including the **Non-Cooperation Movement**, the **Civil Disobedience Movement**, and other activities associated with the Indian freedom struggle. This political awakening encouraged the active participation of the people in India's struggle for independence and contributed to the growth of national consciousness.

Conclusion

Colonial rule had a profound impact on the development of Udupi District. British administration introduced modern systems of governance, education, infrastructure, and trade that contributed to economic and social progress. At the same time, colonial policies often prioritized imperial interests, resulting in economic exploitation and social challenges. The interaction between traditional institutions and colonial modernity shaped the unique developmental trajectory of Udupi. The legacy of this period continues to influence the district's educational, cultural, and economic landscape in contemporary times.

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