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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF THE HISTORY OF SHIVAMOGGA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT :

The historiography of Shivamogga district in Karnataka reflects the development of regional historical studies in South India. The reconstruction of the district's past has evolved from mythological traditions and colonial gazetteers to modern academic and interdisciplinary research. Early knowledge about the region was preserved in inscriptions, temple architecture, local legends, and literary traditions. Later, colonial administrators and scholars produced systematic documentation through surveys and gazetteers. Post-independence scholarship has expanded the historiography through archaeological studies, epigraphy, environmental history, and regional cultural research. This article examines the stages in the historiographical development of Shivamogga district, highlighting key sources, scholars, methodologies, and emerging research trends.



KEYWORDS : *Shivamogga, Karnataka, temple architecture, Hoysala, Chalukya, Vijayanagara, Western Ghats, Nayaka temples, vernacular architecture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Historiography refers to the study of how history has been written, interpreted, and reconstructed by historians over time. In the case of Shivamogga district in Karnataka, historical writing has evolved through several phases—from early epigraphic discoveries and colonial documentation to modern academic research focusing on regional culture, temple architecture, and socio-economic history. The historiography of Shivamogga reflects the district's rich past shaped by multiple dynasties, religious traditions, and cultural developments.

Shivamogga, situated in the Malnad region of the Western Ghats, has historically served as a cultural and political centre of Karnataka. The region has been associated with early dynasties such as the Kadambas, Gangas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagara rulers, and the Keladi Nayakas. These historical layers have attracted historians, archaeologists, and epigraphists who attempted to reconstruct the region's past through inscriptions, monuments, literature, and archival records.

1.1. Aims and Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study- To examine the historiographical development of the history of Shivamogga District by analysing the works of historians, scholars, and historical sources that have contributed to the reconstruction of the region's past. The study also seeks to understand how interpretations of the district's history have evolved from early traditional narratives and colonial writings to modern academic research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the historical sources such as inscriptions, monuments, literary records, and archival documents that provide information about the history of Shivamogga District.
- To analyse the contributions of colonial historians and epigraphists, particularly the documentation of inscriptions in works such as *Epigraphia Carnatica* by Benjamin Lewis Rice.
- To study the role of regional gazetteers and administrative records, including the Mysore Gazetteer, in documenting the historical background of the district.
- To evaluate the interpretations of modern historians who have contributed to the broader understanding of South Indian history,
- To identify major themes in the historiography of the district, including political history, temple architecture, cultural traditions, and regional identity.
- To identify research gaps in the existing historical studies and suggest areas for future research related to the history and historiography of the district.

1.2. Review of Literature

One of the earliest systematic attempts to document the history of Karnataka, including Shivamogga, was undertaken by B L Rice. His monumental work, *Epigraphia Carnatica*, published in multiple volumes during the late nineteenth century, recorded thousands of inscriptions from the Mysore region. These inscriptions provide primary historical evidence regarding political authority, temple endowments, land grants, and social institutions in the region. Rice's work remains an indispensable source for reconstructing the early and medieval history of Shivamogga district.

Another important contribution comes from the colonial administrative compilations such as the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* and the *Mysore Gazetteer*. These works were prepared under the supervision of William Wilson Hunter and later Mysore state officials. The gazetteers provide detailed information on the geography, economy, demography, and historical background of the district. Although these works often reflect colonial perspectives, they remain valuable because they recorded early archaeological observations, inscriptions, and local traditions.

In the 12th century, scholarly research on Karnataka history expanded significantly. Historians such as K. A. Nilakanta Sastri produced foundational works on South Indian history that contextualize the political developments of dynasties like the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, and Vijayanagara rulers who influenced the Malnad region. His studies provide a broader historical framework for understanding the political evolution of Shivamogga district.

The study of temple architecture and art history in the region was further developed by scholars such as George Michell. In his book *Architecture and Art of Southern India*, Michell examined the stylistic evolution of South Indian temple architecture, including monuments from Karnataka. His work highlights the architectural influences of the Hoysala and Vijayanagara traditions that are visible in temples located in the Malnad region. Research on the history of the Keladi kingdom, which played a major role in the history of Shivamogga after the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire, has been explored by historians studying the Keladi and Ikkeri capitals of the Keladi Nayaka Dynasty. These studies examine the political administration, temple patronage, and architectural developments under the Keladi rulers.

1.3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a historical and historiographical research methodology to analyse the development of historical writing related to Shivamogga District. The study examines how different historians, scholars, and institutions have interpreted and documented the history of the region over time. The methodology combines qualitative analysis of historical sources with a critical review of existing scholarly literature.

1. Research Design: This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to investigate how the writing of history of Shivamogga region. The approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse.

2. Data Collection Methods: Literature Review: Comprehensive analysis of existing scholarly articles, books, and reports on temple architecture and traditional construction techniques in Malnad region.

3. Participants for Interviews: Semi structured interviews with local historians, architects, temple authorities.

4. Data Analysis: Qualitative Analyse Thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

1.4. Nature of the Study

This research is primarily analytical and descriptive in nature. It seeks to examine the evolution of historical interpretations about the region by analysing the works of historians from the colonial period to contemporary scholarship. The study also identifies shifts in historical perspectives, research approaches, and themes in the historiography of the district.

1.5. Statement of the Problem.

The study of regional history plays a vital role in understanding the historical development of a country. Although the region of Shivamogga District has a long and rich historical background connected with several major dynasties such as the Kadamba Dynasty, Chalukya, Hoysala Dynasty, Vijayanagara Empire, and the Keladi Nayaka Dynasty, the historiographical study of the district has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Most historical works related to the district focus mainly on political history, Socio-Economic History and examining how the history of the region has been written and interpreted over time. Early historical information about the district is largely preserved in inscriptions recorded in works such as *Epigraphia Carnatica* compiled by Benjamin Lewis Rice, as well as in colonial administrative records like the Mysore Gazetteer. While these works provide valuable data, they often present the region's history through colonial administrative perspectives.

In the post-independence period, historians such as K. A. Nilakanta Sastri and architectural historians like George Michell have contributed to the broader understanding of South Indian political and cultural history. However, their works generally discuss the Malnad region within larger historical frameworks rather than focusing specifically on the historiography of Shivamogga district.

Another problem is that many local historical resources such as village inscriptions, temple records, oral traditions, and archaeological remains remain insufficiently studied or systematically documented. As a result, the historical narrative of the district remains fragmented and dispersed across different types of sources.

Therefore, there is a clear need for a comprehensive historiographical study that critically examines the various historical writings, sources, and interpretations related to Shivamogga district. Such a study is necessary to identify the evolution of historical scholarship, evaluate the contributions of different historians, and highlight existing research gaps. Understanding the historiography of the district will not only contribute to the study of regional history but will also help in reconstructing a more balanced and inclusive historical narrative of the Malnad region of Karnataka.

1.5. Need of the Study

The present study focuses on the historiographical development of historical writing related to Shivamogga District. It examines the contributions of different historians, epigraphists, and scholars who have documented the history of the region.

The study covers major sources such as inscriptions, archaeological remains, literary texts, and colonial administrative records. It also analyses how interpretations of the district's history have evolved from traditional narratives and colonial documentation to modern academic research. The study highlights important themes such as political history, temple architecture, cultural traditions, and regional identity in the Malnad region.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the availability of published historical sources and inscriptions. Many historical records related to village temples and local traditions remain undocumented or unpublished. Therefore, further archaeological exploration and fieldwork are necessary to enrich the historiography of the district.

Despite the availability of various sources, the study faces certain limitations. Many inscriptions and historical remains in the district are yet to be systematically documented or fully studied. Several village temples and local historical sites have not received adequate scholarly attention.

In addition, some historical narratives rely heavily on colonial sources, which may reflect administrative perspectives rather than local historical experiences. The study is also limited by the availability of published materials and accessible archival records. Therefore, further archaeological exploration and interdisciplinary research are required to develop a more comprehensive historical understanding of the district.

1.7. Research Gaps and Future Directions

The historiography of Shivamogga District demonstrates the gradual development of regional historical studies in Karnataka. Early historical knowledge of the region was preserved in inscriptions, temple architecture, and literary traditions. Colonial scholars later introduced systematic documentation through gazetteers, surveys, and epigraphical studies. In the post-independence period, historians began to examine the region's past within broader frameworks of South Indian political, cultural, and architectural history. These studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of the historical development of the Malnad region.

The historiography of the district still remains incomplete and fragmented. Many aspects of the region's history, including local social structures, village-level historical developments, and the interaction between human communities and the environment, remain insufficiently explored.

Future research should focus on interdisciplinary approaches combining archaeology, epigraphy, environmental history, and cultural studies. Detailed field surveys, documentation of local temples and inscriptions, and the study of oral traditions can significantly enrich the historical understanding of the district. Thus, a comprehensive historiographical study not only helps evaluate earlier historical interpretations but also opens new avenues for research into the rich historical heritage of Shivamogga district.

Despite significant progress, several areas remain under-researched: Archaeological exploration of early settlements, Detailed study of village temple architecture, social history of local communities, Trade networks of the Malnad region, Cultural landscapes of sacred forests, Future historiography should integrate archaeology, anthropology, epigraphy, and environmental studies to create a more comprehensive understanding of the district's past.

2. THE MAIN SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF SHIVAMOGGA DISTRICT-

The reconstruction of the history of Shivamogga District depends on a wide variety of historical sources. These sources provide information about the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural developments of the region across different historical periods.

2.1. Primary Sources

Primary sources provide direct historical evidence and play an important role in reconstructing the early history of the region. The primary sources used in this study include: Epigraphic records documented in *Epigraphia Carnatica* compiled by B L Rice. Temple inscriptions and architectural remains found in historical sites such as Keladi and Ikkeri. Archaeological and material remains preserved in monuments and temple complexes across the Malnad region. These sources provide information on political authority, land grants, religious patronage, and social institutions.

2.2. Archaeological Sources

Archaeological remains and temple architecture provide valuable evidence about the cultural and religious history of the district. Temples, sculptures, fortifications, and other structural remains reveal information about artistic traditions, technological skills, and patronage patterns of different dynasties.

Monuments associated with the Keladi Nayaka Dynasty and the Vijayanagara Empire illustrate the architectural development of the Malnad region and its regional stylistic variations.

2.3. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources consist of scholarly interpretations and analyses of the historical development of the region. These include: District gazetteers such as the Mysore Gazetteer and the Karnataka State Gazetteer: Shivamogga District. Historical studies on South Indian history by scholars like K. A. Nilakanta Sastri. Architectural and art historical studies such as *Architecture and Art of Southern India* by George Michell. Articles published in academic journals, research theses, and conference proceedings related to regional history and temple architecture.

Historical information about the district is also preserved in literary works written in Sanskrit, Kannada, and other regional languages. These works include religious texts, chronicles, and poetic compositions that describe political events, religious traditions, and social life.

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1. Early Epigraphic and Archaeological Studies

The earliest scholarly attempts to reconstruct the history of Shivamogga district were based on inscriptions and archaeological remains. One of the most significant sources is the **Talagunda Pillar Inscription**, dated to the 5th century CE, which provides valuable information about the Kadamba dynasty and early political developments in the region. The inscription was discovered in 1894 by the archaeologist **Benjamin Lewis Rice**, who played a pioneering role in documenting Karnataka's epigraphy. Rice's monumental work, *Epigraphia Carnatica*, compiled hundreds of inscriptions from the Mysore region, including several from Shivamogga district. These inscriptions reveal details about land grants, temple endowments, and administrative systems under various dynasties. Epigraphic evidence from places such as Talagunda, Balligavi, and Kubetur provides insights into early political authority, religion, and social structures.

Archaeological remains and temples in the region also provide important historical evidence. For example, the **Rameshvara Temple, Koodli**, built during the Hoysala period in the 12th century, illustrates the architectural and religious developments of medieval Karnataka.

Epigraphical records constitute one of the most important sources for the study of the district's history. Numerous inscriptions found in temples and historical sites provide information about royal

grants, administrative systems, religious patronage, and socio-economic conditions. The inscriptions recorded in *Epigraphia Carnatica* compiled by Benjamin Lewis Rice remain a fundamental source for understanding the early and medieval history of the region. These inscriptions refer to the rule of dynasties such as the Kadamba Dynasty, Chalukya, and Hoysala.

3.2. Early Traditional Narratives and Mythological Works

The earliest historical memory of Shivamogga district survives in mythological traditions, folklore, and religious literature. According to local traditions, the name Shivamogga is derived from *Sihi-Moge* meaning "sweet pot," associated with a legend about the sage Durvasa. Similarly, regional traditions link the district with episodes from the Ramayana, particularly the legend of Rama killing the demon Maricha near Thirthahalli. Although these accounts cannot be treated as historical facts, historians consider them important because they reflect collective memory and cultural identity of the region. These narratives form the earliest layer in the historiography of the district.

3.3. Colonial and Early Modern Historical Writing

The systematic historical study of Shivamogga district began during the British colonial period.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British administrators and scholars produced some of the earliest written histories of Karnataka, including Shivamogga. Their works were primarily descriptive and relied heavily on inscriptions, monuments, and administrative records.

Historians such as Benjamin Lewis Rice and John Faithfull Fleet contributed significantly to the documentation of inscriptions and early dynastic history. Their studies provided foundational knowledge about the Kadambas, Chalukyas, and other early rulers of the region. However, colonial historiography often focused mainly on political chronology and dynastic narratives, giving less attention to social and cultural history.

3.4. Colonial Records, Gazetteers Works and Administrative Reports

During the British colonial period, detailed records were prepared regarding the geography, economy, and administration of the region. Publications such as the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* and the *Mysore Gazetteer* provide systematic descriptions of the district.

These works also document early archaeological discoveries, local traditions, and historical narratives, which are useful for reconstructing the historical background of the district. Gazetteers and administrative reports also played an important role in documenting local traditions, geography, and economic activities of the Shivamogga region.

British administrators prepared detailed gazetteers that documented the geography, economy, and history of regions under their control. Works such as the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* and the *Mysore Gazetteer* contain some of the earliest modern historical descriptions of the district. These colonial works often focused on: Administrative history, Revenue systems, Population statistics and Political events.

3.5. Colonial Interpretation

Colonial historians frequently interpreted Indian history through a Eurocentric perspective, emphasizing political events and administrative structures while overlooking local cultural and social dynamics. However, their work remains valuable because they recorded: Local traditions, Early archaeological findings, administrative documents For example, colonial investigations into events such as the Nagar Revolt provide insights into rural society and political unrest in the region.

3.6. Nationalist and Regional Historiography

After Indian independence, historians began to reinterpret the history of Karnataka from a regional and cultural perspective. Scholars focused on Kannada literature, religious movements, and local traditions.

The medieval cultural history of Shivamogga gained attention through studies of the Allama Prabhu, a 12th-century saint and poet associated with the Lingayat movement and born in Balligavi in the district. His vachanas and philosophical teachings contributed significantly to the religious and literary heritage of Karnataka. Researchers also examined the role of Shivamogga as a centre of religious activity, highlighting important pilgrimage centres such as Humcha, Chandragutti and Kudli. These studies expanded historical understanding beyond political history to include social reform movements, literature, and religious traditions.

3.7. Modern Academic Research

Recent historiography of Shivamogga district has become more interdisciplinary. Historians, archaeologists, and cultural scholars now study themes such as temple architecture, regional art traditions, and environmental history.

Modern research highlights the architectural heritage of the district, including temples built during the Hoysala, Vijayanagara, and Keladi Nayaka periods. These studies demonstrate how local building materials, regional artistic traditions, and royal patronage influenced temple design and religious practices in the Malnad region. Scholars also analyse the interaction between geography and culture, noting that Shivamogga's location in the Western Ghats influenced settlement patterns, agriculture, and trade networks.

3.8. Post-Independence Regional Historiography

After Indian independence, the historiography of Shivamogga district expanded significantly due to professional academic research.

3.8.1. Karnataka State Gazetteer

The Government of Karnataka produced revised district gazetteers, which included updated historical interpretations based on archaeological and epigraphic evidence.

3.8.2. Regional Historical Studies

Scholars began focusing on regional history, highlighting the role of the Malnad region in Karnataka's cultural development. Studies explored: The Keladi Nayaka kingdom, Trade networks, Temple architecture, Local administrative systems, The Keladi Nayakas, who ruled after the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire, transformed the region into a powerful local kingdom in the 16th–17th centuries.

4. MODERN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Recent historiography has moved beyond political history to include interdisciplinary perspectives.

4.1. Environmental History

Studies on sacred forests in the Western Ghats highlight the ecological traditions of the region and their historical importance.

4.2. Cultural and Architectural Studies

Modern scholars increasingly analyse temple architecture and cultural landscapes to understand historical processes. Research shows that temple architecture in the district evolved through Kadamba, Chalukya, Hoysala, Vijayanagara, and Keladi Nayaka influences.

4.3. Micro-history and Local Studies

Recent scholarship emphasizes: Village histories, Local temples, Folk traditions Regional political institutions. These studies provide a bottom-up perspective that was largely absent in earlier historiography.

4.4. Major Themes in the Historiography of Shivamogga

The historiographical study of the district highlights several recurring themes:

- Political transitions between major South Indian dynasties
- Temple architecture and religious patronage
- Regional identity of the Malnad region
- Agrarian economy and forest resources
- Local resistance movements and colonial administration

These themes demonstrate how the region's history has been interpreted differently across time.

4.5. Sources Used in the Historiography of Shivamogga

The reconstruction of Shivamogga's history relies on several types of sources:

1. **Epigraphic sources** – inscriptions from Talagunda, Balligavi, and other sites.
2. **Archaeological remains** – temples, forts, and monuments.
3. **Literary sources** – Kannada and Sanskrit works including vachana literature.
4. **Colonial records and gazetteers** – administrative documentation.
5. **Modern academic studies** – research on architecture, religion, and regional history.

These diverse sources have allowed historians to develop a comprehensive understanding of the district's historical development.

5.1. Historiographical Approach

The study employs a historiographical approach, which focuses on examining how historical narratives about the district have been constructed and interpreted by different scholars. This includes: Identifying the colonial interpretations presented in early gazetteers and administrative reports. Examining post-independence regional historical studies that emphasize local political and cultural developments. Analysing modern interdisciplinary approaches, including environmental history, archaeology, and cultural studies. Through this approach, the research traces the transformation of historical writing from descriptive colonial narratives to more critical and analytical modern scholarship.

5.2. Analytical Method

The collected sources are analysed using qualitative historical analysis. The method includes: Critical examination of historical texts and inscriptions Comparative analysis of interpretations by different historians. Evaluation of the reliability and limitations of historical sources. This analytical process helps identify major themes, trends, and research gaps in the historiography of the region.

6. CONCLUSION

The historiography of Shivamogga district demonstrates the gradual evolution of historical research in Karnataka. Early colonial scholars focused mainly on inscriptions and dynastic history, while later historians expanded the scope to include social, cultural, and architectural studies. Modern interdisciplinary research continues to uncover new aspects of the region's past.

Through epigraphic evidence, temple architecture, and literary traditions, the history of Shivamogga has emerged as an important component of Karnataka's cultural heritage. Continued archaeological investigations and scholarly research are likely to further enrich the historiography of the district in the future.

Thus, the historiography of Shivamogga reflects not only the history of the region itself but also the changing methods and perspectives of historical research in India.

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