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**Entanglement of the World and the Text: Literary Cartographies of Kasaragod**

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**Abstract:** Kasaragod offers a variety of patterns of arts embodying myths, folk tales and local histories which all together reflects the rich cultural heritage of region; Kasaragod is a living example for the complexity of spatial politics that operate in a regional level. This is evident both in the historical transformation, cultural shaping and the lived practices of this place. The geographical peculiarities complimented with unique mix of human population, historical occurrences, cultural hybridity and linguistic diversity contribute to this region's distinct spatial existence. The spatial realities of Kasaragod can be made evident in a comparative study of the select literary narratives on Kasaragod. This paper intends to explore the region of Kasaragod with a geocritical method by analyzing two edited volumes by G.B. Valsan, namely Jeevanarekha: Chandragirippuzhayude Charittravarthamanangal [Lifeline: Historical Dialogues of the River Chandragiri] and Bahuvachanam, [Pluralities: Kasaragod Documents]. The method adopted here is the bringing together and juxtaposition of different time-spaces and space-times in Kasaragod's evolution with reference to the select narratives. The resulting spatial configuration of Kasaragod has its territories fixed in past and present; in geographical terrains and in political terrains; in individual memories and in the collective history. This study acknowledges the possibility of recording this region in many other possible ways and admits the significance of similar studies.

**Keywords:** Kasaragod, geocriticism, cultural geography, polysensorial place, space-times, lived space.

**Introduction:** Kasaragod district, which is located at the northern end of Kerala, was formed on 24th May, 1984. Kasaragod, the northernmost area of Kerala, is bordered by the South Canara district of Karnataka to the northeast, the Kudagu district of Karnataka to the southeast, the Kannur district of Kerala in the south, and the Arabian Sea to the west. Its political boundaries got shifted all across history. The present-day Kasaragod was claimed

by various dynasties and political powers across different periods of history: historically an integral part of the ancient.

Tulu Kingdom; was later conquered by different dynasties from Kerala and Karnataka; part of the Madras Presidency under British Rule; part of the South Canara district of Madras State before the reorganisation of states in India in 1956; became a part of the reorganised Malabar district of Kerala State in November 1956; was merged with the newly formed Cannanore district in January 1957. It became a new district in Kerala, with Kasaragod town as its headquarters, since 24 May 1984.

Kasaragod's landscape is significant on cultural and archeological lines, as the landscape bears the traces of history of the invasion and resistance, testimonies of historical forts, remainings of innovative culture of the modern stone age, inscriptions of historical rulers and their practice, etc. (Meethale Purayil 231). Kasargod offers a variety of patterns of arts embodying myths, folk tales and local histories which all together reflects the rich cultural heritage of region, Kasaragod is a living example for the complexity of spatial politics that operate in a regional level. This is evident both in the historical transformation, cultural shaping and the lived practices of this place. The geographical peculiarities complimented with unique mix of human population, historical occurrences, cultural hybridity and linguistic diversity contribute to this region's distinct spatial existence.

The spatial realities of Kasaragod can be made evident in a comparative study of the select literary narratives on Kasaragod. This paper intends to explore the region of Kasaragod with a geocritical method by analyzing two edited volumes by G.B. Valsan, namely *Jeevanarekha: Chandragirippuzhayude Charitravarthamanangal* [Lifeline: Historical Dialogues of the River Chandragiri] and *Bahuvachanam*, [Pluralities: Kasaragod Documents]. The books are originally written in Malayalam. This paper attempts to show literature's engagement with the complexity of spatial imagination in reconfiguring Kasaragod by contrasting the select narratives on Kasaragod. This study endeavours to make a critical reading of the select narratives from *Bahuvachanam* and *Jeevanarekha* in the process of examining the 'referent'- 'representation' relationship in connection with the real place under consideration. The multiplicity and the variety of the spatial representations of Kasaragod in the select books justifies their selection since, a geocritical perspective necessitates "a plural point of view, which is located at the crossroads of distinct representations" (Westphal 114).

### **Entanglement of the World and the Text in the Literary Cartographies of Kasaragod:**

Geocriticism is a critical model proposed by Bertrand Westphal and it welcomes a "geocentered" approach to literature and cultural studies: "Unlike most literary approaches to space— such as imagology, ecocriticism, or geopoetics . . . — geocriticism tends to favor a geocentered approach, which places place at the center of debate" (112). A geocentered approach showers prime concern on the place concerned. Geocriticism advocates the use of literary and cultural texts as representations in such a way "which would allow a particular

place to serve as the focal point for a variety of critical practices” (Tally Jr. lx). Significance of the geocritical approach is that, “By bringing together multiple authors, including multiple genres and disciplines . . . the geocritic orchestrates a number of different points of view, allowing diverse perspectives to flesh out, to round out, and perhaps to overcome the stereotyping or otherwise limiting images of a given place” (Tally Jr xi). Geocritical reading of places would reveal the varied cultural meanings that necessarily form part of any landscape.

In gathering ‘several optics’ on Kaaragod, this study demonstrates the basic tenet of geocritical methodology: “The representation of space comes from a reciprocal creation, not simply a one- way activity of a gaze looking from one point to another, without considering other reciprocating gazes (as in Eurocentrism, for example). Geocritical analysis involves the confrontation of several optics that correct, nourish, and mutually enrich each other” (Westphal 113). If once we take into account the argument made by Westphal, that “the referent and its representation are interdependent and interactive” there is the creative possibility wherewith the literary representation would enhance the process of re-imagining and re-locating the place under consideration (113).

Any place can be understood as ongoing compositions of traces. In other words, places are made up of ongoing trace chains. Whether durable/ temporary, material or non-material, left by humans/non-humans, traces shape the meaning of a place and, influence the identity of cultural group that inhabits that place. Traces confer cultural meaning to places/geographical sites. As traces change over time, places become dynamic states of transition, ie, places will be in “fluid states of transition as new traces react with existing or older ones to change the meaning and identity of the location” (Anderson 5). Close reading of any spatial text would underline the plurality and multiplicity of places. Juxtaposition of narratives about a place will shed light on the remaking of the physical world through the imposition of cultural values, ideas and meanings. A cultural geographic framework will enhance the reading of landscapes with multiple meaning. Hence, this paper infuses a cultural geographic approach in to the geocritical method of reading the representations of Kasaragod in *Bahuvachanam* and *Jeevanarekha*.

The spatial configuration of this region is ever shifting because of its unique ethnic, geographical, historical, cultural geographical, bioregional and linguistic characteristics. The dynamic spatial configurations of this region obstruct any attempt to offer a final, complete static portrait of Kasaragod. The method adopted here is the bringing together and juxtaposition of different time-spaces and space-times in Kasaragod’s evolution with reference to the select narratives. The resulting spatial configuration of Kasaragod has its territories fixed in past and present; in geographical terrains and in political terrains; in individual memories and in the collective history. This study acknowledges the possibility of recording this region in many other possible ways and admits the significance of similar studies.

*Bahuvachanam* and *Jeevanarekha* comprises numerous narratives and polyphonic literary voices that attempt the literary documentation of Kasaragod. The book *Bahuvachanam* [Pluralities] highlights the heterogeneous existence of Kasaragod and records it as a place of ever-growing multiplicity. *Bahuvachanam* follows the strategy of literary mapping for reimagining the region named Kasaragod. The book highlights the cultural landscape and the literary cartography of Kasaragod by assembling together a bunch of narratives. Each narrative attempts to engage with the heterogenous spatial existence of Kasaragod, in capturing the lived experiences, in bringing imaginary/ memory projections and in exhibiting a literary conciouness about equally relevant other narratives in myth and history. The organisation of these narratives exhibit a flexible grouping whereby different sections gather the memories of the natives, experiences of the visitors, local histories, regionally significant political events and cutlural expressions, linguistic explorations and the memories of the great figures from regional history.

M.A. Rahman's "Palamayude Koodal," [Meeting of the Varied], in *Bahuvachanam* relocates the cultural geography of Kasaragod (11- 28). It traces the historical and cultural evolution of Kasaragod and points at varied historical occurences and cultural happenings that contributed to its unique making. A critical reading of the narrative using a cultural geographic perspective would reveal the place as formed out of endless trace-chains. On a historical plane, the spatial and cultural identity of the place is reulted from the coding and recoding of various forces that once occupied or invaded Kasaragod at different periods in hisotry (15- 18). They include the linguistic community of Tulu and the native communities like Maavilar, Koregar, Vettuvar, and Pulayar, who inhabited Kasargod since the known hisotrical period. Those who incribed meaning on this spatial plane also include the group who migrated to Kasaragod including Maratha community, Konkani community, Maadigar community and Urudu community. Rahman's narrative inpires to locate Kaargod as a 'permanent state of transgression, of boundary crossing'- a "transgressivity that would make space fundamentally fluid" (Westphal 6). The narrative also hints at the violent geographical inscription on the land by the force of modernity and governmental agricultural policies whereby the natural bioregions were destroyed and new agricultural practices like Cashew farming were imported to the region as part of cash-crop policies (Rahman 12). Reading of these trace chains reveal overwritten layers of Kasrgod's natural and cultural history. Kasaragod's cultural geography is marked by its location on the border of Kerala and Karnataka, leading to a unique blend of influences and a rich tapestry of traditions. The region's geographic position has contributed to its linguistic diversity, with Malayalam, Tulu, Kannada, Urudu, Marathi, Hindi and Konkani spoken, along with other dialects and languages like Beary. This linguistic diversity is reflected in the region's art forms, festivals, and cuisine . The reference to various linguistic traditions with officially accepted number of seven and many other local language practices open way to explore the linguistic trace formation which set this place's identity against any other region in the world (17). Refernce to the various writers who wrote about Kasaragod invoke an image of the the multi-lingual spatial reality of Kaaragod as embedded in varied literray representaions (15-17).

“Marichavalude Kalyanam” [The Marriage of the Dead Woman] by is a fictional attempt to juxtapose a mythical place against modern place (52-57). A critical reading of Meera’s writing also brings to light the multi-dimensional mythical consciousness that lie deep in its geography. “The Marriage of the Dead Woman” has its roots in the folk beliefs of Kasaragod. The writer happened to hear about a strange custom that once prevailed among Kasaragod’s local people. It is writer’s knowledge about this custom of arranging marriage for the unmarried dead people that lead her to write this story. The story in-turn presents a fictional landscape that lays a bridge between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the real world and the fictional world. The story is a fictional account of the cultural geography of Kasaragod and it brings together its myth, ritual and the practice into a modern plateau. The elusive mythical place in literary imagination is used by the author to examine the present day spatial politics by contrasting the binaries like writer/ reader, man/woman, privileged/ marginalized, living and the dead, reality/imagination, preferred/ othered, etc. The unmeasured distances between the world of the living and the world of the dead in the myth is a metaphorical announcement of the real life distances laid by institutions of caste, language and everyday mythologies of beauty and merit. The myth and ritual turn to be the mirrors which expose spatial/social distances that still prevail among different social groups even when the times change and the planes alter. The story in short, is an account of the hidden cultural places on the one hand and the documentation of the deterritorialised people in myth and culture, on the other hand (52-57).

The most significant feature of Kasaragod is its reluctance to stick to any fixed linguistic, spatial, cultural or political boundaries in a rigid manner. The subjective spatial experiences of the individual/social group based on gender positions, social grouping, caste relations and personal experiences add to the multiplicity of the place. Any sociological, cultural, religious, linguistic or literary analysis will reveal the spatial meaning of Kasaragod as relational and ever- changing.

Many writings in *Bahuvachanam* retrace the intertwined spatial linguistic and cultural landscape in their own distinct styles. A close reading of the different spatial sales in the book reveals the polylocative nature of places. **Henri Lefebvre**’s theorisation of place as ‘made up’ through a three-way dialectic between the perceived, the conceived and the lived space, may be enumerated with reference to some narratives in *Bahuvachanam*. For example, N. **Sasidaran**’s “**The Place of Second Birth**” [**Janmamekiya Marudesam**], documents a place named Kaadakam from multiple dimensions (67- 69). Geographically the place is located in the Kasaragod district in Kerala and is situated 25kms east to Kasaragod town. Owing to the natural- geographical features, it is a village; bioregional nature of the place is decided by the surrounding forest.

Distinct language traditions of the place make it a multi-located linguistic arena featured by the co-existence of Kannada, Tulu and Malayalam. The historical occurrence of the Kadakam Forest Riots and the Communist revolution of 1980’s contribute to the political nature of the place.

Local language uses establish the place as a remote linguistic area. N. Sasidaran's memories about his changing emotional attachment with the place along his 30 years career as a government school teacher reflects the reality of relatively fluid subjective spatial experiences suggested by critics like Henri Lefebvre and **Michael de Certeau**. Accordingly the the cultural factors of gender, class, age, profession etc. act as the deciding factors of spatial experiences. The consequence is that the same place may provide different spatial experiences to different individual agents. N. Sasidaran's memories record the different spatial and cultural interactions that changed his spatial perception of Kadakam from the state of being an outsider to an insider. A critical reading of this session may expose place as a polylocative and multi-dimensional entity.

Modern cultural geography emphasise the fluid and relative nature of place. The relative nature of place and the shifting spatial perceptions based on the agent's insider/outsider perception is hinted by **Raveendran** in the session titled "Pallikkara, Kanhangad" (65-66). In stating that while Kanhangad may be simply an in-between station for the **passersby**, it is a vibrant source of deep spiritual, philosophical, political and intellectual inspiration for the inhabitants, the author is signalling the heterogeneity of place and spatial experiences.

Raveendran's reimagining of landscape also bears multiple traces of mythical, architectural and political consciousness.

Place is perceived as a vivid sensorial place in Rahman Thailangadi's "**Bullock Cart and Horse Cart**" [Jedkkayum Saaratum] (41-44). The author here juxtaposes Kasaragod's present spatiality with its past spatiality stored in memory. The session seeks to evoke a 'polysensorial place' suggested by the book *Geocriticism*: "By taking time to focus on senses other than merely the visual, the geocritic can register the sensuous plenum of a place . . ." (Tally Jr xi). The place in memory is drawn in this narrative is marked by its overlapping territories. The ringing bells of the bullock cart and the rhythmic sound pattern of the horse cart design the place in his memory as a soundscape. The vivid picture of the local dishes and food items in memory draws spatial boundaries along distinct culinary practices. The sights and sounds of the people recalled from memory turn the place a human geography. The narrative can also be read as a demonstration of the concept of spatio-temporality suggested by Bertrant Westphal, where a place may be perceived as a series of space-times, a "temporalized space" (11). The narrative locates the transition of Kasaragod from the past to the present times in juxtaposing the town's space-time with bullock carts and horse carts, with the present space-time featured by autorikshas. The spatio-temporality of the place is also underlined in marking the shift of time in connection with the transition from the construction of huts with grass and palm leaves to roofed houses and double-layered concrete houses.

*Jeevanarekha [Lifeline]* edited by G.B. Valsan, is an attempt to retrace the cultural

history of Kasaragod by associating popular recollections gathered around the river Chandragiri. The unwritten history of Kasaragod's lived space evolves through the collective memory, ebbing and flowing around the riverside. *Jeevanarekha* provides a chance to read the 'traces' of collective memories and experiences embedded in Kasaragod's spatial and cultural landscape.

The book offers the river and river bank as cultural texts that bear the traces of cultural inscriptions and everyday histories. These bunch of narratives together seem to form what Bertrand Westphal calls, 'a pluralistic image of the place,' and Kasaragod is perceived as a 'multifaceted zone in the process' (Tally Jr x). The book attempts to reimagine the lived space of Kaaragod against the innumerable types of deterritorializations it had been subjected to. Multiple variety of texts and multiple discourses that refer to Kasaragod is gathered here. Many narratives exhibit a historical consciousness of the geographic and/or the cultural geographic limits that were blurred, erased, or redrawn in the course of time. Kasaragod is perceived as a polyphonic site in this book, a "place under whose aegis are gathered a series of narratives" (Westphal 112).

The overflowing boundaries of Kasaragod is hinted in the session dealing with "**Thalangaraperuma**" (198-200). The references to Thalangara in the writing "Thalangaraperuma" invites our attention to a cultural cum economic centre of Kasaragod at a particular point of time. This was a local place with the uniqueness of a transnational space in history, owing to its role in region's trading history. The region shifts from its local character and to move to a translocal plane as we are informed about its significance in relation with the transport and connectivity.

The mapping of the cultural geography of Kasaragod is attempted in *Jeevanarekha* by a bringing together of varied cultural practices and fragmented local tales. The 'polysensoriality' of the lived space of Kasaragod emerges from the everyday cultural practices of food (239-240), sound (137) and sights (197). An alternative history of the Kasaragod evolves as the book documents the traces of the lived history in the form of linguistic practices like reversed saying (128), local sayings (194), daily practices (213), religious occurrences (117), agricultural activities (130-131), survival attempts (129), local knowledge systems (125), political protests (124), childhood memories (121), natural disasters (141-13) personalized historical accounts (195), individual spatial experiences (219-220) and regional narratives (227). The narratives attributes the heterogeneity of the place to its politically laden boundaries, the ever changing agricultural and cultural practices and to the multiplicity of the subjective experiences it generates.

**Conclusion:** The geocritical method of reading the select narratives and the cultural geographic focus of study highlight the multiplicity of meanings embedded in landscape. This study in this way maps the fluid boundaries of the lived space of Kasaragod and relocates the polyphonic history of this region. The juxtaposition of these different narratives reveal the relative nature of the place under examination. The comparative reading of the select

narratives offers a glimpse of the ever-shifting boundaries of Kasaragod. Each of the narratives included in these texts retell Kasaragod's spatial history in connection with inter-connected blocks of various space- times. Miscellaneous narratives in these books with their own exclusive 'spatiotemporality' show up the spatial reality of Kasaragod as an ever-changing one, echoing Westphal's words about geocritical methodology which "tends to inscribe space in a mobile perspective" (113). In assembling narratives of diverse sorts, the select books exhibit an affinity with the geocritical method, echoing the practice of 'interdisciplinary methods and a diverse range of sources' suggested by Westphal in *Geocriticism* (Tally Jr x).

The multiple writings in these books are geocritical in that the writing of space here "emerges from a spectrum of individual representations as rich and varied as possible" (Westphal 113). The select books exemplify one of the methodological tenets of geocriticism: "multifocalization of views on a given referential space" (Westphal 114). By moving beyond merely a single author's perspective *Bahuvachanamand Jeevanarekha* proclaim the truth of what Westphal calls 'multifocalization' and 'polysensoriality' of places (Westphal). The varied and multi-dimensional narratives in these books reveal the cartography of Kasaragod as a dynamic one. The boundaries stay blurred and fluid in everyday cultural practices. Multiple boundaries intersect and overlap creating dynamic cultural spaces or thirdspaces (Bhabha; Soja). Kasaragod's dynamic cultural spaces keep itself away from fixed geographical models of modern geographic enquiries. Language practices, literary traditions, religious rituals, social customs and economic interactions result in complex spatial configurations. They not only connect seemingly different places in time and space but also chart out nomadic cultural places in everyday life.

Representations here engage in a dialectical process in presenting the polyphonic existence of Kasaragod. They also point at the possibility of complex connections among variously scaled and nested places across time. All selected writings perceive Kasaragod as a site of multiple inscriptions resulting in distinct spatial configurations. What these books attempt to do is that they try to record and map a dynamic place that has roots in history, but performance and practice in contemporary culture. What results is, as Edward Soja remarked, an ever-shifting image of Kasaragod as a "real- and- imagined" place with innumerable creative and political possibilities.

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