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# River Kaveri and Kodagu Region: Flowing Myths and Kodava Sari

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## Abstract

*Significant stories of some Indian myths and legends are based on these rivers. One such significant river in India is River Kaveri. There are various myths and stories which tell different aspects of the river's origin and her course. This paper bids to bring out some of the mythological stories of River Kaveri, which interrelates her to the community of the Kodavas, who are the tribes of the Kodagu region, which is the origin place of River Kaveri. This research paper deals with the story of inter relationship between river Kaveri and the Koduva community, and the myth connecting this river and her course with the specific style of saree draping of the women in the community that is still in practice. It tries to connect the femininity of river Kaveri to that of the Koduva sheilas, and how they abide by culture and tradition proposed by river Kaveri long ago. It also pens down the origin history and her flow over the region and the myths behind those to have a better understanding on the river's course and its connectivity to the heritage of the region. This paper is an attempt to bring out the prosperity of Indian myths down the ages and its prominence found till date with the lives of Indian people.*

**Keywords:** Kaveri, Draping, Females, Curse, Course.

The legacy of Indian Myths is purely based on their connectivity towards the people's way of living helping it to withstand the test of time. Indian myths are part and parcel of the Indian people in almost everything of their everyday life. However, this paper is going to deal with one of the tribal regions found in Karnataka and their myths with traditions. The geographical history of India is mostly connected with its myths, in this prominent portion is filled up with its rivers. Each and every river that flows in India has its own origin myths and legends believed in those regions. These stories are always connected to the way of living of the geographical tribes and their customs. Kaveri is one such promising river that flows through two states Karnataka and Tamilnadu.

River Kaveri's origin myth has various versions in each purana of Hinduism but the most famous one is the story found in Skanda Purana. This myth starts at Kailasa in the Himalayas. The most important event is going to take place: the wedding ceremony of Lord Siva and Parvati. To witness this once in a lifetime event the whole world along with the *devaloka* is marching towards Kailasa, because of which the earth starts to experience a dangerous tilt. This should be balanced if not it might cause a huge chaos in the planetary movement. Thus, Lord Siva asks Sage Agastya to march towards the south to equalize the pressure caused in the north. Sage Agastya is such a tremendously powerful figure, but he too wanted to

witness the wedding. So, Lord Siva promised him to give a vision to see their wedding procession. Agastya is still not pleased and asks to fulfil his long-lasting dream of setting up a holy tirtha. Lord Siva's mind strikes with an idea as Kaveri is in penance to become a holy river. Lord Siva now offers Kaveri in Agastya's *kamandalu* and asks him to march towards south. In south a *rakshasa* named Surapadma has caused a drought, to save it Ganesha's (first son of Siva and Parvati) help was sought. He disguised as a crow and upsets Agastya's *kamandalu* to make Kaveri to flow and become a benefactress as well as a nourisher.

River Kaveri then starts her destiny to purify the sins of humans. Her path towards the ocean king is very vast and prosperous. Kaveri's journey as a holy river starts from the most prominent place named the *Malainadu* known as Kodagu. River Kaveri starts her course from Sahyadri Hills in Coorg and reaches the Bay of Bengal travelling for about 802 kilometres. Each and every turn and tributary has so many stories to narrate. This paper just focuses on the Kodagu region and its tribe. Kodagu is a place of prominence because of the significant river Kaveri. This river is seen more as a goddess than a river based on its prosperity and generosity. The culture and way of living of the kodava tribes are mostly based on the myths of river Kaveri. One such myth includes the way of dressing for the kodava women till this date. This story also includes the curse of sage Agastya and the counter curse by River Kaveri on the Kodava tribes. This article states these rituals and the story behind it so that it promotes the connection of Indian myths to Indian geography.

Kodagu Desa is the top hill region found in Karnataka formerly known as *Malainadu* at present as Coorg. This place includes most of the river Kaveri as a pathway found in Karnataka. It includes Bharmagiri where the river Kaveri sources its flow known as Thalakaveri. According to Agni Purana, Sage Agastya creates a woman named Lopamudra from all the good things he found. Then she was gifted as a daughter to the childless King Kavera from whom she gets her name Kaveri. Later, the ancestors of Sage Agastya urge him to get married and so he asks Kavera for Lopamudra. She accepts the proposal with one condition stating that Agastya needs to be with her always. When the situation came, Kaveri disguised herself as a river and started to flow in the regions. Agastya who went in search of her found her and persuaded her to take the case to the Kodavas.

Kodavas has two sections one is Amma Kodavas and the other is Kodavas. When the case reached them the Amma Kodavas found wrong with river Kaveri, who deserted her husband whereas the Kodavas thought it was wrong to force any woman to stay with a man against her will. This shook Agastya, who cursed the Kodavas four times.

1. They will decrease in huge numbers.
2. Their women will not tie their clothes in front.
3. The rice will not grow if it is sown by then.
4. Their cows will go dry. (Seshadri 29)

To help the Kodavas who supported her River Kaveri counter cursed all the four curses of Sage Agastya by stating, "The Kodavas shall increase but the Amman Kodavas shall decrease. The women shall tie their saris from the back, The rice shall be transplanted and then it will grow. The cow shall be milked after the calves have drunk" (Seshadri 30). These counter curses serve as an example for agricultural and animal husbandry.

Kaveri went further to set an example for the way of draping Kodavas sari herself. After blessing the Kodavas she escapes from Agastya, who catches her hold by holding the end of her cloth. Kaveri tried to escape the hold by a swift turn towards the right side and flowed away. This made the pleats of Kaveri sari to move backwards thus forming the draping style of the Kodava sari is born. After this incident the place was named as Balamuri (turning to the right) and Kaveri also became the goddess of the Kodavas. River Kaveri is beloved to be a significant source of all forms of life for the people of Kodavas. They offer prayers to her as Goddess till days. More than being

a Goddess she fulfils her destiny as a mother for her people by nourishing the land in all possible ways. These myths help to understand that most of the Indian tribes are influenced through such stories for generation after generation and they still follow it. It stands as an example how the religion, culture and tradition of India are living for ages without any chaos making Indian myths one of the living mythologies even in the 21st century. India's each and every nook is filled with belief and legends. Even the geographical names originated based on the so-called folklores of the area. Each temple in India has a Sthala Purana (story of the origin of the temple) and the auspicious places have Thala Puranas (story of the origin of the place). It is inevitable to separate the culture and legends in India.

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