



FAMILY DEITIES AND CASTE RECOGNITION IN SOUTHERN KARNATAKA: A STUDY OF DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates how caste identities and social recognition in Southern Karnataka are shaped by family deities. The worship of family deities (kuladevatas), which act as hubs for devotional rituals and social cohesiveness within caste communities, is intricately woven into the region's religious and cultural fabric. The study intends to investigate how, in both rural and urban contexts, family deities serve as symbols of caste identity, fostering social differentiation, hierarchies, and group cohesion. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork that was done in a number of Southern Karnataka villages and towns, where family deities play a significant role in both ritualistic and daily activities. The study reveals the various ways that family deities uphold caste boundaries, validate caste membership, and impact caste-based social recognition through participant observation, devotee interviews, and examination of regional myths and rituals. Additionally, in light of modernity, urbanization, and political shifts, the study looks at how caste groups interact with and compromise their religious practices, particularly in light of the emergence of secularism and social justice movements.



KEYWORDS : Family Deities , Identity of the Paste , Religious Activities . Rituals of Religion Social Structure.

INTRODUCTION

Family deities, also known as kuladevatas, are important to religious life and social identity in Southern Karnataka, a culturally diverse and rich region. In addition to being objects of worship, these gods are important symbols of caste identity that bind people to their ancestry and uphold the social structures that characterize their communities. In Southern Karnataka, the custom of honoring family deities is very old and has its roots in a complicated network of myths, customs, and beliefs that have been passed down through the ages. These deities' temples are frequently the center of attention for the local populace, where yearly celebrations, pilgrimages, and rituals provide chances for social interaction and reinforce caste-based identities and community ties. Family deities in this context are.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:-**Aims:**

1. To investigate how Southern Karnataka's caste identities and social recognition are shaped by family deities, or kuladevatas.
2. To investigate the relationship between caste solidarity and devotional practices in various communities.

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ To document the rituals, myths, and practices associated with family deity worship across different caste groups in Southern Karnataka.
- ❖ To explore the role of family deities in maintaining caste-based social cohesion.
- ❖ To analyze the impact of family deity worship on caste recognition in rural and urban areas.
- ❖ To evaluate the impact of secularism, urbanization, and social justice movements on family deity worship and caste recognition.
- ❖ To investigate how caste groups negotiate their position and social status within the broader society through family deity worship.

LITERATURE REVIEW:-**1. Family Deities and Caste Identity**

Numerous studies have examined the idea of kuladevatas, with many authors emphasizing how these deities uphold caste-based social structures. Generally speaking, family deities are seen as representations of social standing and ancestry. Family deity worship, according to Nandini Sundar (2007), is an essential component of reaffirming caste identity and strengthening familial bonds, not just a religious practice. In order to strengthen caste solidarity and social recognition, family deities are frequently linked to rituals that commemorate important life events like birth, marriage, and death..

2. Rituals and Devotional Practices

Kuladevata worship involves a variety of devotional practices, many of which are regional in nature. Researchers like M. N. Srinivas (1952) have documented the crucial role rituals play in establishing caste identities in their study of temple worship in Southern Karnataka. Temples honoring family deities frequently serve as hubs for neighborhood events, bringing followers together through yearly celebrations, rites, and pilgrimages. In addition to strengthening religious devotion, these customs serve as social gatherings that let caste groups communicate, share resources, and fortify their shared identity..

3. Caste and Social Cohesion

In both rural and urban settings, family deity worship has been connected to social cohesiveness and the development of caste-specific networks. Caste-based religious practices, such as family deity worship, have been argued by scholars like N. Jayaram (2003) to foster a sense of solidarity and belonging among caste members. In villages, the temple dedicated to the family deity serves as a hub for social interaction, business dealings, and decision-making pertaining to caste..

4. Modernity, Secularism, and Caste Recognition

Modernizing factors like urbanization, secularism, and political movements supporting caste equality have had a greater impact on the relationship between caste and religion in recent decades. While caste distinctions have somewhat eroded as a result of urbanization and political reforms, family deity worship is still firmly ingrained in the fabric of social identity, according to scholars like V. Geetha (2010) who have examined the effects of secular and social justice movements on caste-based religious practices..

5. Gender and Family Deity Worship

Gender is important when it comes to caste and family deity worship. In family deity worship, roles and responsibilities are frequently gendered, even though both men and women take part in rituals. Women are often the primary caretakers of the household temple and are essential to the continuation of family deity worship, especially in rural areas. But as Uma Chakravarti (1993) noted, caste-based religious practices' gender dynamics frequently mirror larger social injustices. Patriarchal systems that restrict women's social mobility and influence within caste hierarchies frequently limit their roles in these religious settings..

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:-

In order to investigate how family deities influence caste identities and recognition in Southern Karnataka, this study uses a qualitative research methodology. In order to give a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and religious factors that affect caste identification and solidarity, this study will concentrate on the devotional practices associated with family deity worship. To gather and examine data, the methodological approach combines textual analysis, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork.

1. Research Design

In order to document the lived experiences of caste communities in Southern Karnataka, the study uses a case study methodology with a focus on ethnographic techniques. The study aims to obtain a thorough grasp of how family deities serve as indicators of caste identity by concentrating on particular communities and their devotional customs. The purpose of the study is to compare how family deity worship manifests itself in rural and urban environments..

2. Data Collection Methods

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Ethnography is the primary method for collecting qualitative data in this study. The researcher will conduct participant observation at various temples dedicated to family deities across multiple villages and towns in Southern Karnataka. Field visits will include participation in rituals, festivals, and community gatherings centered around family deities.

3. Sampling

Purposive sampling will be used in this study's sampling strategy to choose communities that worship family deities. These groups will be selected according to their geographical location (rural or urban), unique caste affiliations, and the importance of family deities in their religious and social customs. Members of communities whose caste identity is strongly linked to their active participation in family deity worship. Religious leaders and temple authorities: Those in charge of supervising the worship and ceremonies related to family deities.

4. Data Analysis

The qualitative information gathered from field observations, interviews, and textual analysis will be examined using thematic analysis. With regard to the worship of family deities and its relationship to caste recognition, this method will assist in identifying recurrent themes, patterns, and categories. Important topics to be investigated include The differences in family deity worship between rural and urban environments will be compared and examined. This comparison will concentrate on how devotional practices differ in various geographic contexts and how they affect group identity and caste recognition in these various settings.

5. Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to social research ethics, all participants will remain anonymous, and participation will be entirely voluntary. Informed consent will be requested from each interviewee and survey participant. The researcher will treat every research project with deference and cultural sensitivity, taking into account the religious and cultural practices of the communities being studied..

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:-

In Southern Karnataka, caste identities and social structures are largely shaped by the worship of family deities, or kuladevatas. For many years, scholars have been deeply interested in the relationship between religion, caste, and identity in South India. Many South Indian communities place a high value on family deities, or kuladevatas, and their worship frequently transcends the spiritual realm to include caste recognition and social identity. In order to identify important themes and research gaps, this review of the literature examines the body of knowledge regarding caste, family deities, and devotional practices in Southern Karnataka. A key component of caste identity in Southern Karnataka is the practice of family deity worship, or kuladevata worship, which connects religion and social structure. This study looks at how family deities reinforce caste boundaries, promote social cohesion within caste groups, and shape caste recognition. This conversation tackles the complex interrelationships between caste, religion, and identity in the area by examining the devotional rituals connected to family deities..

DISCUSSION:-

1. The Role of Family Deities in Caste Recognition

In Southern Karnataka, family deities are potent symbols of caste identity. Every caste group has its own family deities, which are frequently connected to their geographical location, social standing, and historical roots. As a result, family deity worship is an important part of caste-based recognition and goes beyond simple spirituality. As representations of their caste heritage and social status, devotees actively participate in festivals and rituals associated with their family deities..

2. Social Cohesion and Solidarity through Family Deity Worship

Within caste groups, the worship of family deities is essential to promoting solidarity and social cohesiveness. Devotional activities foster solidarity and support among one another, particularly when they include temple visits and community rituals. The family deity temple serves as a hub for caste-based meetings in both rural and urban areas, where caste members trade goods, plan social events, and talk about problems impacting the neighborhood. These behaviors aid in the development of caste networks, which offer financial, social, and emotional support.

3. The Intersection of Family Deity Worship and Caste Boundaries

Family deities not only facilitate social cohesion but also play a significant role in delineating caste boundaries. The very act of worshipping a specific family deity marks one's place within the caste system, signaling to others their caste affiliation. This boundary-setting function is crucial in a society where caste continues to shape social relationships, access to resources, and even political power.

4. Modern Influences: Urbanization, Secularism, and Political Change

Caste recognition and the worship of family deities in Southern Karnataka have been significantly impacted by the shifting sociopolitical landscape brought about by urbanization, secularism, and political movements. In many places, the dissolution of traditional social structures brought about by urbanization has increased interaction between various caste groups. Caste-based rituals face new difficulties in this urban setting since family deity worship may need to change to fit the less stratified and more varied urban environment..

5. Gender Dimensions of Family Deity Worship

In Southern Karnataka, family deity worship is heavily influenced by gender. Family deity worship has historically been primarily maintained by women, especially in rural areas. Maintaining the family shrine, carrying out rituals, and making sure that religious practices continue within the family are frequently the responsibilities of women. Their significance in the generational transmission of caste identity is highlighted by their participation in the worship of family deities..

CONCLUSION:-

This study has examined the intricate relationship between family deity worship (kuladevata) and caste recognition in Southern Karnataka. Family deities are not just spiritual guardians but also powerful symbols of caste identity, playing a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing social structures. The devotion to family deities serves as a means of preserving caste affiliations, ensuring the continuity of caste practices, and providing a sense of belonging within caste groups. Through rituals, festivals, and temple worship, individuals and communities reaffirm their caste identity, fostering social cohesion and solidarity. This seminal work explores the social and cultural role of caste in Indian society, offering an early foundational understanding of caste dynamics in India, including in regions like Southern Karnataka. This article discusses the role of religious practices, including deity worship, in reinforcing social hierarchies and caste identities in India, with a focus on South Indian regions. Dube's work provides an in-depth analysis of caste in rural South India and its intersections with religious practices, including family deity worship. This study examines the persistence of caste-based identities and religious practices, offering insights into how family deity worship contributes to caste recognition in India. This work focuses on the role of Hindu rituals in maintaining caste identities, with specific attention to devotional practices tied to family deities in the South Indian context.

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