



THE INTERSECTION OF DIVINENESS AND CASTE IN FAMILY WORSHIP: A STUDY FROM MODERN SOUTHERN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intricate relationship between caste and divineness in Southern Karnataka's family worship customs. Understanding the region's religious, social, and cultural fabric requires an understanding of the family deities (kuladevatas), which are revered by different caste groups. In addition to serving as spiritual protectors, these gods are also seen as representations of social standing and caste identity. Because family deities are frequently associated with the historical accounts, customs, and social mores unique to each caste, their worship is essential to preserving and enforcing caste-based divisions. In order to understand how caste groups utilize divine associations to justify their social positions and strengthen their group identities, this study looks at how family deity worship functions as a tool for caste recognition. The study also explores how these devotional practices influence social boundaries, promoting caste community cohesion and excluding individuals from outside caste-based circles. Despite growing efforts towards caste equality and secularism, these customs remain an important part of both rural and urban religious life in contemporary Southern Karnataka.



KEY WORDS: Family Deities , Identity of the Paste , Recognition of Paste , Worship of God, Southern Karnataka.

INTRODUCTION

The rich cultural and religious traditions of southern Karnataka provide a distinctive perspective for analyzing how caste and divinity interact in family worship rituals. The worship of family deities (kuladevatas), whose importance goes beyond spirituality to become potent symbols of caste identity, is at the core of these customs. In addition to protecting and guiding specific families, family deities also represent social distinction and caste solidarity. By regulating social life and upholding caste boundaries, the worship of these deities is a crucial part of caste-based recognition. The worship of family deities is ingrained in caste hierarchies within Southern Karnataka's traditional socioreligious framework. Generally speaking, each caste or sub-caste group worships a unique set of gods that are connected to its social standing, geographic location, and historical background. These family gods' divinity is frequently linked to caste pride, as the customs surrounding their worship serve to reinforce caste status and foster a sense of belonging. In addition to creating a strong sense of continuity and cultural identity within caste groups, this divine connection serves as a crucial instrument for maintaining social distinctions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:-

Aims:

To Investigate the Role of Family Deities in Caste Identity Formation. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role that family deities, or kuladevatas, play in the establishment and maintenance of caste identities in Southern Karnataka. It will examine how these gods serve as social status markers, upholding caste-based affiliations and distinctions. Examine the Interrelationship Between Divinity and Social Stratification. The study aims to investigate how caste-based social structures and divine worship are intertwined in Southern Karnataka, specifically how family deity worship both promotes communal cohesion within caste groups and strengthens social hierarchies and boundaries.

Objectives:

To Identify the Specific Family Deities Worshipped by Different Caste Groups in Southern Karnataka

- ❖ To Analyze the Rituals and Practices Associated with Family Deity Worship. The study will examine the particular rites, festivals, and ceremonies connected to family deity worship, examining how these customs serve as both religious manifestations and social cohesiveness tools based on caste.
- ❖ To Explore the Role of Family Deity Worship in Reaffirming Caste Boundaries. Through an analysis of family deity worship customs and social interactions, the study will look into how these practices maintain social stratification and exclusionary practices by reinforcing caste boundaries.
- ❖ To Investigate Gendered Dynamics in Family Deity Worship. This goal focuses on comprehending how women participate in and mediate rituals, as well as how gender affects their agency and access to these religious practices, in the worship of family deities.
- ❖ To Assess the Influence of Modern Social Movements on Family Deity Worship. The study will examine how the traditional role of family deities in caste recognition is impacted or challenged by secularism and caste equality movements, especially in urban and semi-urban areas where these movements are more prevalent.

LITERATURE REVIEW:-

A lot of research has been done on the connection between caste, religion, and social identity, especially in South India, where caste is still a major organizing principle in both social and religious life. One of the main themes in comprehending how religion creates and upholds social structures is the function of family deities (kuladevatas) in bolstering caste identity. Because family deity worship is closely linked to the caste identity of families and communities, it presents a special intersection of divinity and social stratification. The purpose of this literature review is to compile important works that examine the functions of caste, religion, and family worship, particularly in the context of Southern Karnataka..

Caste and Religion in South India

In the study of caste and religion in India, researchers such as G.S. Ghurye (1969) have offered fundamental insights into the function of caste in social structures, emphasizing how caste functions through religious practices in addition to economic and political ones. By examining the connection between caste and religion in rural South India and emphasizing the part that temple worship and other religious rituals play in establishing caste-based social structures, Srinivas (1952) expanded on these concepts. In South India, caste is closely linked to religious customs, especially in rural areas like Southern Karnataka, where family deity worship serves as a fundamental component of caste identity..

The Role of Family Deities in Caste Identity

Scholars such as M. N. Srinivas (1987) have studied family deity worship in great detail, pointing out that caste identity is often marked by the deities associated with a particular family. In caste communities, family deities are revered and regarded as sacred beings whose rites and worship are

deeply ingrained. These gods stand in for the social, cultural, and historical bonds that unite members of the same caste, particularly in Southern Karnataka.

Family Deity Worship as a Means of Social Stratification

Despite being essential to religious life, family deities also contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchy. Worshiping family deities frequently serves to reinforce caste hierarchies because caste affiliation determines rituals and access to specific sacred spaces (R. Kapur, 2015). Each caste group asserts exclusive rights to its family deity and associated rituals as a result of these practices, which support a system of social stratification. According to A. Beteille (1965), such religious activities serve as a means of delineating caste boundaries, guaranteeing that the distinctions between the upper and lower castes are consistently reinforced through ritualized devotion..

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:-

The intersection of caste and divineness in family worship practices in contemporary Southern Karnataka is examined in this study using a multi-method approach. The study attempts to document the complex connections between caste identities, religious practices, and social dynamics in both rural and urban contexts by using qualitative research methods..

1. Research Design

To obtain a thorough grasp of family deity worship and its function in caste recognition, the study employs a qualitative, ethnographic design. Two main research questions will be the study's main focus. In Southern Karnataka, how do family deities serve as markers of caste identity? How do caste-based social stratification and family worship practices interact, and how are they impacted by modernizing forces?

2. Sampling and Participant Selection

Purposive sampling is used in the study to choose important participants from various caste communities that actively worship family deities. The following will be the main focus of the study Caste Groups To reflect a variety of social classes and caste identities in Southern Karnataka, families from various caste groups—such as Brahmins, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, Dalits, etc.—will be represented. Rural and Urban Communities The study will compare family deity worship customs in rural villages and urban areas like Bengaluru in order to comprehend the effects of urbanization and modernization.

3. Data Collection Methods

Ethnographic Fieldwork The researcher will actively participate in family deity worship rituals in various caste communities as part of ethnographic observation, which will serve as the foundation for data collection. Observing festivals, rituals, temple visits, and daily activities related to family deity worship will all be part of the fieldwork. In order to comprehend the importance of these customs in social life, the researcher will participate in important ceremonies like yearly worship, special festivals, and family get-togethers.

Priests, religious practitioners, community leaders, and family members will participate in semi-structured interviews to learn more about the social and personal significance of family deity worship. To promote group discussions on caste-based religious practices and the function of family deities in caste recognition, focus group discussions (FGDs) will be conducted with small groups of participants from various caste groups. These conversations will assist in determining common beliefs within the caste community as well as differences in customs among various castes.

4. Data Analysis

The following major themes will be the focus of the thematic analysis of the data The part family gods play in the establishment and maintenance of caste identity. The connection between caste-based

social hierarchies and religious practices (worship rituals). will be utilized to help organize and analyze qualitative data, and thematic coding will be utilized to classify recurrent patterns in the data.

5. Ethical Considerations

All participants' respect, confidentiality, and informed consent will be guaranteed by the study's adherence to ethical standards. Important ethical factors include After being fully informed about the nature, scope, and goal of the study, participants will voluntarily consent to take part. Participants' identities and personal information will be kept private, and the final report will use pseudonyms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:-

In many regions of India, especially in South India, where caste systems are intricately woven into religious rituals, the interaction of caste, religion, and identity continues to be a defining aspect of social life. Family deity worship, or kuladevata, is a fundamental aspect of religious life in Southern Karnataka and frequently serves as a means of both individual and group expression of faith. However, not enough research has been done on the connection between caste identities and family deities, particularly in light of how these religious practices affect caste-based recognition and social hierarchies in modern environments. This study intends to provide a nuanced perspective on how practices of divine worship not only uphold caste-based identities but also impact social structures within modern South Indian society, given that caste still plays a significant role in forming both social and religious life in the region. The results of this study will add to more general conversations about caste, religion, and social change by illuminating how caste customs continue to exist in private, familial contexts even in the face of public protests against discrimination based on caste.

DISCUSSION:-

A complex and multidimensional picture of religious and social identity is presented by the way caste and divineness intersect in Southern Karnataka family worship. This study shows that family deity worship, or kuladevata, is a tool for caste recognition, social cohesiveness, and identity formation in addition to being a very personal religious practice.

1. Family Deities as Symbols of Caste Identity

In Southern Karnataka, where caste communities frequently use deities as symbols of collective identity, family deity worship is closely linked to caste identities. Worshiping a family deity, which is usually handed down through the generations, strengthens a caste group's sense of identity. This devotion is a social as well as spiritual act that aims to uphold continuity in the family lineage and caste ties.

2. Rituals and Social Stratification

Another important factor in preserving social stratification is the rituals connected to family deity worship. Access to certain religious sites, like temples or shrines devoted to their family deities, is frequently restricted to particular caste groups. Rituals like praying, conducting ceremonies, or acting as priests are only permitted for members of the designated caste.

3. The Influence of Modernization and Urbanization

The impact of urbanization, modernization, and social reform movements on the practice of family deity worship in Southern Karnataka is among the study's most important conclusions. Caste-based religious customs are changing in cities like Bengaluru as a result of wider social changes like increased educational opportunities, economic mobility, and exposure to secular values.

4. The Persistence of Caste-Based Segregation in Worship Practices

Caste-based segregation in religious practices continues despite attempts to dismantle caste hierarchies. Although family deity worship promotes spiritual ties and cultural continuity, it also

upholds caste distinctions. Only members of the caste group are able to participate in the exclusive rites and ceremonies connected to these deities. Because caste membership determines access to religious places and rituals, this exclusivity serves to further social stratification.

CONCLUSION:-

Insights into how religious practices, particularly family deity worship (kuladevata), interact with social hierarchies and caste identities are provided by this study, which emphasizes the intricate relationship between divinity, caste, and family worship in Southern Karnataka. According to the research, family deity worship is still a powerful tool for maintaining caste-based divisions while also encouraging a feeling of unity and spiritual ties among caste members. Understanding the gendered roles in family deity worship is essential to comprehending the formation and maintenance of caste identities. Although women are usually responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of family deity worship in the home, men continue to dominate the public facets of these rituals, especially when it comes to positions like priesthood or officiating at larger ceremonies. Despite playing a crucial role in religious rituals, women are frequently restricted to the home, while men hold positions of authority in both public and religious contexts.

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