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An Empirical Study on Folk Culture, Socio-Cultural and Lifestyle of Kadugolla Community in Karnataka

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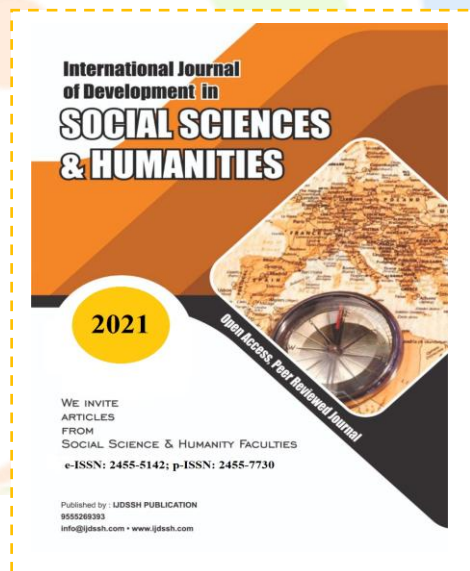
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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the socio-cultural identity of the Kadugolla community in the Tumakuru district of Karnataka state. The Kadugolla community is a distinct pastoral and semi-nomadic group found primarily in the central and southern districts of Karnataka, including Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Hassan, and Davanagere. They are a subgroup of the larger Golla (Yadava) caste but maintain a unique cultural identity marked by their “Hatti” culture and strict traditional taboos. The Kadugolla community of Karnataka is a traditionally pastoral group whose socio-cultural identity and lifestyle have evolved over centuries around sheep and cattle rearing, small-scale agriculture, and distinct religious and cultural practices. This study is an empirical investigation into the socio-cultural norms, lifestyle patterns, and contemporary lifestyle. This study observed that the traditional practices, family structures, gender roles, festivals, folk beliefs, and oral traditions.

The findings reveal a strong adherence to cultural rituals, particularly those associated with livestock, seasonal cycles, and community cohesion, alongside persistent gendered customs that affect women’s health and social participation. Modernization, education, and migration are influencing lifestyle changes, yet the community maintains a resilient cultural identity. This research provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural and lifestyle system of the Kadugolla community, offering insights for policymakers, social scientists, and cultural preservationists seeking to support sustainable development and social inclusion.

Keywords: *Kadugolla; Traditional; Social Structure; Socio-Cultural Practices; Identity; Lifestyle; Folk Culture.*

INTRODUCTION

The Kadugolla community also known as Kadu Golla, primarily a nomadic shepherding group in Karnataka, is considered one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups, often residing in remote, isolated settlements known as Gollarahatti. They are primarily

living in southern and central districts like Chitradurga, Tumkur, and Hassan, known for their distinct culture, traditional ‘hatti’ (hamlets), and ancestor worship, and unique social practices, especially concerning menstrual seclusion, while facing challenges and seeking recognition as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) for development benefits, with ongoing

efforts and government initiatives like development corporations. Historically, the community's livelihood has revolved around sheep and cattle rearing, with many families practicing a semi-nomadic lifestyle in search of grazing lands. Over time, they have settled into small hamlets known as Gollarahatti or Gollaradoddi, often located on the outskirts of villages and lacking basic infrastructure. The socio-cultural life of the Kadugolla community is characterized by rich folk traditions, oral narratives, rituals, and festivals closely linked to pastoral activities, seasonal cycles, and spiritual beliefs. Religious practices combine Hindu traditions with local folk and animistic beliefs, creating a unique syncretic cultural system. Social organization is structured around extended families and community elders, who play a significant role in decision-making, dispute resolution, and maintaining social norms.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive empirical analysis of the folk culture, socio-cultural practices, and lifestyle systems of the Kadugolla community, documenting their traditions, gender roles, livelihood patterns, and responses to modernization and social change. By understanding these dimensions, the research contributes to preserving cultural heritage while highlighting pathways for social inclusion.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the origin and socio-cultural practices of the Kadugolla community in Karnataka.
2. To examine the lifestyle and folk culture system of the Kadugolla community in the state.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study primarily concentrates on secondary sources to analyze the socio-cultural and lifestyle systems of the Kadugolla community. The secondary sources have been collected from Government reports and census information, books and monographs, academic journals and research papers, newspaper articles and media reports, and online research portals and repositories. The collected secondary sources were systematically reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized to understand traditional practices, lifestyle patterns, cultural norms, and contemporary lifestyle, forming the basis for this study.

ORIGIN AND POPULATION STATUS OF THE KADUGOLLA COMMUNITY

The Kadugollas have maintained a documented presence in the central Karnataka region for at least a millennium. During the periods of the Hoysala dynasty and the Vijayanagara Empire, pastoral communities such as the Gollas played

significant roles as soldiers as well as suppliers of dairy products to the state. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, several Kadugolla lineages rose to prominence as Poligars (local chieftains), exercising considerable political and military influence in regions including Chitradurga and Pavagada, where they often functioned as guardians of strategically important hilly terrain. The distinctive hattis (hamlets) settlement system of the Kadugollas is believed to have emerged during this period as a means of protecting cattle from wild animals while also enforcing a strict internal social order. According to community tradition, this system was established by their ancestor Ettappa and is governed by customary laws collectively referred to as Ettappa's Kattu.

The Kadugolla community in Karnataka is estimated to have a population ranging between 300,000 and one million, with several reports placing the figure more specifically between five and 6.75 lakh. Traditionally a nomadic pastoral group, the Kadugollas are primarily shepherds and are officially classified as an Other Backward Class (OBC) in Karnataka. The community predominantly resides in approximately 1,264 hattis (hamlets) spread across 38 taluks in 11 districts of the state. Their population is particularly found in districts such as Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Bengaluru Rural,

and Hassan, reflecting historical patterns of pastoral migration and settlement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Socio-Culture and Lifestyle System of the Kadugolla Community

This article focuses on the socio-culture and lifestyle system of the Kadugolla community, a traditionally pastoral group primarily in Karnataka. Though many studies focus on their social and economic marginalization, their cultural life reflects distinct traditions, worldview, and practices.

1) Identity, Distribution & Traditional Lifestyle: The Kadugolla community is a traditionally pastoral group found mainly in central and northern Karnataka, especially in districts such as Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Davanagere, Ballari, Koppal, and parts of Raichur. They are often considered a distinct group within the broader Golla/Yadava pastoral communities, with their own cultural traits and social practices. Today, most live in small hamlets called Gollarahatti or Gollaradoddi — separate habitations often detached from larger villages and lacking basic amenities.

2) Traditional Occupation: The primary traditional occupation of the Kadugollas is animal husbandry, especially sheep and cattle rearing. Earlier, many families followed a

semi-nomadic or migratory lifestyle, moving seasonally in search of grazing land. Today, along with livestock rearing, some families engage in agriculture, wage labour, and small informal occupations.

3) Settlement Pattern: Kadugollas usually live in separate hamlets known locally as Gollarahatti or Hatti, often located on the outskirts of main villages. These settlements historically had limited access to basic amenities such as education, healthcare, and transport, contributing to social isolation.

4) Social Organization: The community has a strong kinship system, with importance given to extended family and clan relations. Marriage is generally endogamous within the community, but exogamy is practiced at the clan level. Community elders traditionally play a key role in resolving disputes and maintaining social order.

5) Religion and Belief System: The religious life of the Kadugollas reflects a blend of folk, tribal, and Hindu traditions. They worship local and village deities such as Junjappa, Siddhaiah, Ettappa, Nagappa, and Narasimha Swamy. Nature worship, ancestor worship, and belief in protective spirits are important elements of their faith. Rituals are closely linked to livestock health, rainfall, and agricultural cycles.

6) Customs and Ritual Practices: Important life-cycle rituals include birth, puberty, marriage, and death ceremonies, conducted according to community traditions. In some areas, ritual seclusion of women during menstruation and childbirth has been practiced due to beliefs about purity and pollution. Community festivals and jathres (fairs) strengthen social unity and cultural identity.

7) Dress, Food, and Culture: Traditional dress was simple and suitable for pastoral life, though modern clothing is now common. Food habits are based on millets (like ragi), milk products, and locally available grains. The community has a rich tradition of folk songs, oral narratives, and cultural performances, often related to pastoral life and devotion.

8) Status of Women: Women actively participate in livestock care and household work. However, social customs have traditionally placed women in a subordinate position, with limited access to education and decision-making. In recent years, awareness, education, and government programs have started bringing gradual change.

9) Contemporary Lifestyle & Transitional Dynamics: While many still retain traditional livelihoods and oral cultural practices, increasing interaction with broader society through migration for work,

schooling, and media exposure is reshaping lifestyles. Urban migration for employment and education is introducing new social roles, while also challenging traditional community structures.

Kadugolla Folk Culture System

The folk culture of the Kadugolla community is a vivid tapestry of pastoral legends, rhythmic music, and oral epics that have been preserved for centuries within their isolated 'Hattis'. Unlike mainstream traditions, their folk arts are deeply tied to the survival and spiritual protection of their livestock.

1) Oral Traditions and Songs: The foundation of Kadugolla folk literature is rooted in its Kavyas (epic narratives). Folk songs and oral tales particularly those recounting the exploits of heroes such as Veera Tammanna Nayaka and King Ranabhaire Gowda occupy a central place in Kadugolla cultural life and are preserved through sustained oral performance. These narratives function both as instruments of cultural resistance and as repositories of the community's historical memory. Performed during ritual and festive occasions, such songs and stories serve to transmit collective history and legendary traditions across generations. Among these, the most significant folk narrative is the legend of Junjappa, a revered cultural hero believed to

have protected the community's cattle from disease and external threats. The Junjappa Pada stands as a major oral composition, traditionally performed throughout the night during festivals.

2) Traditional Worship and Deities: The Kadugolla community primarily worships deities such as Junjappa and Eshwara, whose presence is venerated in small shrines known as devara gubbas, typically situated at the corners of their hattis (settlements). Ritual practices associated with these deities prominently feature the Gane, a traditional musical instrument that holds deep cultural and religious significance among the Kadugollas. The Gane is the most iconic instrument of the community is a long bamboo flute, usually measuring four to five feet in length, and is used especially in the worship of Junjappa. Historically, the instrument was played by cowherds to calm and manage their cattle. Within ritual contexts, Gane Vaadya (flute music) is believed to possess healing properties, particularly in curing sick livestock, and is also thought to invoke the presence and blessings of the divine.

3) Folk Dance Forms: Dance among the Kadugolla community functions as a collective cultural practice, commonly performed during full-moon nights and annual fairs. One of the most prominent

dance traditions is Kadugollara Kolata, a high-energy stick dance distinguished from other Kolata forms found across Karnataka. This variant incorporates distinctive rhythmic structures and accompanying songs, known as Kolata Padagalu (Songs), which reflect the community's pastoral lifestyle and historical experiences. Another significant dance form is Manevu Kunita, a ritualistic performance traditionally presented during religious processions. This dance is characterized by synchronized movements executed to the rhythmic accompaniment of drums and the Gane (Bamboo flute), reinforcing both spiritual devotion and communal cohesion.

4) Cultural Identity- Moonlight Festivals

(Beladingala Habba): The cultural identity of the Kadugolla community is deeply rooted in ritual practices, particularly those associated with festivals such as Beladingala Habba (the moonlight festival), during which communal dances and, most notably, song performances are central. The tradition of celebrating festivals under the full moon reflects the community's close relationship with natural rhythms. Ritual games, in which young men and women participate, are integral to these celebrations and serve to test strength and agility, symbolizing the resilience and physical endurance required for a pastoral way of life. Women play a significant role in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge by leading

the performance of Janapada (folk) songs that address themes of childbirth, marriage, and seasonal change, thereby expressing the community's deep connection to natural cycles. In contemporary contexts, the Kadugolla community increasingly draws upon its folk arts and oral traditions—particularly songs of resistance—as a means of asserting cultural identity amid the pressures of modernization and social change.

5) Folk Medicine and Beliefs:

Kadugolla folk culture encompasses a largely undocumented tradition of herbal knowledge, particularly in the domain of ethno-veterinary medicine. Given that cattle constitute the primary source of wealth and livelihood for the community, the Kadugollas have developed an extensive folk pharmacopeia based on forest-derived medicinal plants used to prevent and treat bovine diseases. This body of indigenous knowledge, transmitted orally across generations, continues to command respect and practical relevance in rural regions such as Chitradurga and Tumakuru, where it remains actively practiced and valued. The community has a beautiful tradition of celebrating festivals under the full moon. Ritual Games are young men and women participate in traditional folk games that test strength and agility, symbolizing the hardiness required for a pastoral life. Women

often lead the singing of Janapada (folk) songs that cover themes of childbirth, marriage, and the changing seasons, reflecting the community's deep connection to the natural cycle.

6) Settlement Structure (Hatti): Kadugolla settlements, known as hattis, are traditionally located on the peripheries of villages or in close proximity to forested areas. These settlements are typically enclosed by thorny fences, reflecting both practical considerations of livestock protection and the community's pastoral way of life.

CONCLUSION

The empirical study on the folk culture, socio-cultural practices, and lifestyle of the Kadugolla community in Karnataka highlights a community deeply rooted in pastoral traditions, local religious beliefs, and collective social practices. The Kadugollas

maintain a distinct cultural identity through their oral traditions, folk songs, festivals, and rituals that connect daily life with livestock care, seasonal cycles, and spiritual beliefs. The research also suggests that the gendered dimension of their social system, where traditional norms and seclusion practices for women coexist with gradual changes brought by education, awareness, and modernization. In conclusion, the Kadugolla community exemplifies the interplay of tradition and change, showing how folk culture and lifestyle systems persist even under modern influences. Preservation of cultural heritage, coupled with social inclusion and policy support, is essential to ensure sustainable development and empowerment for this historically marginalized pastoral community.

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