

A Sociological Study of the Heritage, Culture, and Social Life of the Marathi Naik Community: A Special Reference to Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka

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Abstract:

India's multicultural society comprises numerous communities that have preserved their distinct cultural identities despite rapid social transformation. The Marathi Naiks community, residing in parts of Karnataka, particularly in Dakshina Kannada district, represents one such group with a rich historical and cultural heritage. This study examines the heritage, cultural practices, social organization, and contemporary social life of the Marathi Naiks community in Puttur Taluk. The research employs a sociological perspective to understand the community's traditions, family structure, religious beliefs, occupation patterns, educational status, and adaptation to modernization. The findings reveal that while the community maintains strong cultural roots and traditional values, increasing education, urbanization, and economic mobility have significantly influenced their social structure and lifestyle. The study contributes to understanding the dynamic relationship between cultural preservation and social change among minority communities in Karnataka.

Keywords: Marathi Naiks, Heritage, Culture, Social Life, Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada, Sociology, Community Studies.

Introduction

India is renowned for its rich cultural diversity, encompassing numerous communities that have preserved their unique traditions, customs, languages, and social institutions across generations. The

study of such communities is essential for understanding the country's pluralistic social fabric and cultural heritage. Among these communities, the Marathi Naik community occupies a distinct position

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owing to its unique cultural identity, historical background, and social organization, particularly in the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The Marathi Naik community residing in Puttur Taluk of Dakshina Kannada District represents a culturally significant group that has successfully preserved many of its traditional customs and practices while adapting to changing socio-economic conditions. Although their origins are closely associated with Marathi-speaking regions, the community has become an integral part of the multicultural society of coastal Karnataka. Their language, religious beliefs, festivals, family traditions, occupations, and social values reflect a harmonious blend of Marathi cultural heritage and the local traditions of the region.

Heritage and culture constitute the foundation of a community's identity. They foster a sense of belonging by transmitting values, customs, beliefs, and indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. The Marathi Naik community possesses a rich cultural heritage expressed through its language, religious rituals, folk traditions, festivals, traditional occupations, and social customs. These cultural elements continue to shape the community's social relationships, collective identity, and everyday life despite the influence of modernization.

In recent decades, rapid processes such as modernization, urbanization,

industrialization, education, migration, and globalization have significantly transformed the socio-cultural landscape of traditional communities across India. The Marathi Naik community has also undergone substantial changes in its family structure, occupational patterns, educational attainment, lifestyle, and social values. While these developments have contributed to improved socio-economic conditions, they have simultaneously posed challenges to the preservation of traditional cultural practices, indigenous knowledge, and community identity.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the heritage, culture, and social life of the Marathi Naik community in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka, from a sociological perspective. The study explores the community's historical background, cultural traditions, social organization, and contemporary socio-economic conditions, while also assessing the impact of social change on its traditional way of life. By documenting and analyzing these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the socio-cultural characteristics of the Marathi Naik community and to the broader discourse on cultural continuity, identity, and social transformation in contemporary Indian society.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the heritage, culture, and social life of the

Marathi Naiks community in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To study the historical background and heritage of the Marathi Naiks community.
2. To examine the cultural traditions, customs, festivals, and religious practices followed by the community.
3. To analyze the social organization, family structure, and kinship patterns among the Marathi Naiks.
4. To assess the educational and occupational status of the community members.
5. To understand the impact of modernization, urbanization, and social change on the community's traditional way of life.
6. To identify the challenges faced by the Marathi Naiks in preserving their cultural identity and heritage.
7. To suggest measures for the preservation and promotion of the community's cultural heritage and social values.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design. It seeks to understand the heritage, culture, and social life of the Marathi Naiks community in Puttur Taluk of Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in selected villages and localities of Puttur Taluk where the Marathi Naiks community has a

significant presence. The area was chosen due to its cultural importance and the concentration of community members.

Sources of Data

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through extensive fieldwork in the study area using qualitative research methods. Information was gathered through personal interviews with community elders, knowledgeable informants, and members of the Marathi Naik community. In addition, the researcher conducted direct observation of cultural, social, and religious practices, engaged in informal discussions with local leaders and residents, and undertook field visits to obtain first-hand information regarding the community's heritage, culture, and social life. Secondary data were collected from a wide range of published and unpublished sources, including books, research articles, academic journals, census records, government reports and documents, relevant websites, and community records. The integration of both primary and secondary data helped ensure the reliability, authenticity, and comprehensiveness of the study.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was adopted to select respondents who possessed adequate knowledge about the history, culture, and social life of the Marathi Naiks community.

Data Analysis

The collected data were classified, interpreted, and analyzed using sociological perspectives to understand the cultural heritage, social organization, and contemporary changes within the community.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the heritage, cultural practices, social structure, educational status, occupational patterns, and the impact of modernization on the Marathi Naiks community in Puttur Taluk.

Historical Background of the Marathi Naiks Community

The Marathi Naik community is a culturally distinct group with historical links to the Marathi-speaking regions of present-day Maharashtra. Oral traditions and local historical accounts indicate that sections of the community migrated to different parts of Karnataka over several centuries. These movements are believed to have been influenced by factors such as military service under regional kingdoms, administrative appointments, trade, agriculture, and the search for better livelihood opportunities. Over time, many Marathi Naik families settled in the coastal districts of Karnataka, particularly in Dakshina Kannada, where they gradually integrated into the local socio-cultural environment while retaining important aspects of their ancestral heritage.

The title Naik has traditionally been associated with leadership, authority, and

administrative responsibility in several parts of India. Historically, members of the Marathi Naik community were engaged in occupations such as agriculture, trade, village administration, public service, and other allied activities. Their active participation in local economic and social life contributed to their recognition and acceptance within the communities in which they settled.

In Dakshina Kannada District, especially in Puttur Taluk, the Marathi Naik community has established a strong socio-cultural presence. Although Kannada has become the principal language of everyday communication due to prolonged interaction with the local population, many families continue to preserve elements of their Marathi heritage through traditional customs, religious practices, festivals, family rituals, and cultural values. This cultural continuity has enabled the community to maintain a distinct identity while actively participating in the multicultural society of coastal Karnataka.

The historical development of the Marathi Naik community reflects a gradual process of migration, settlement, cultural adaptation, and social integration. Across generations, the community has adapted to changing political, economic, and social conditions without completely abandoning its traditional heritage. Today, the Marathi Naiks of Puttur Taluk represent a community that successfully balances its cultural legacy with the demands of contemporary society. Their

historical journey illustrates the resilience of cultural identity and demonstrates how traditional communities negotiate continuity and change in a rapidly modernizing world.

Cultural Heritage and Traditions

The Marathi Naik community possesses a rich and vibrant cultural heritage that reflects its historical background, social values, religious beliefs, and collective identity. This heritage has been preserved and transmitted across generations through language, customs, rituals, festivals, and other traditional practices. These cultural elements continue to play a vital role in shaping the community's social life and strengthening its sense of identity and belonging.

Language is one of the most significant markers of the community's cultural identity. Although Kannada is the predominant language used in everyday communication due to prolonged interaction with the local population, many Marathi Naik families continue to use Marathi during family gatherings, religious ceremonies, and cultural functions. The preservation of the Marathi language serves as an important link with their ancestral heritage and reinforces their cultural distinctiveness.

Religion occupies a central place in the cultural life of the Marathi Naik community. The community predominantly follows Hinduism and worships various deities, including family

deities (Kuladevatas) and village deities. Religious rituals, temple worship, annual festivals, and community celebrations strengthen social solidarity and reinforce shared cultural values. Major festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Deepavali, Navaratri, Dussehra, and Ugadi are celebrated with great devotion, enthusiasm, and active participation from all sections of the community.

Traditional customs and rituals continue to be observed during important life-cycle events such as birth, naming ceremonies, puberty, marriage, and death. Marriage ceremonies are generally solemnized according to Hindu customs and traditional family practices, emphasizing kinship ties, community participation, and cultural continuity. These occasions provide opportunities for social interaction and the transmission of customs and values to younger generations.

The Marathi Naik community also preserves its cultural heritage through folk traditions, devotional songs, oral narratives, storytelling, and traditional cultural performances. Community elders play a significant role in safeguarding and transmitting indigenous knowledge, ethical values, and customary practices to the younger generation. These oral traditions contribute to the preservation of the community's historical memory and cultural continuity.

Although modernization, urbanization, education, and globalization have

influenced the lifestyle of the community, the Marathi Naiks continue to preserve many of their traditional customs and cultural practices. Their cultural heritage remains an important source of identity, social cohesion, and community pride, demonstrating the resilience of traditional values in the context of contemporary social change.

Social Organization

Social organization constitutes the foundation of the social structure of the Marathi Naik community and plays a significant role in maintaining social cohesion, cultural continuity, and collective identity. The community's social life is organized around the institutions of family, kinship, marriage, religion, and community participation. These institutions regulate social relationships, define social roles and responsibilities, and facilitate the transmission of cultural values from one generation to another.

The family is the primary unit of social organization among the Marathi Naiks. Traditionally, the joint family system was predominant, with multiple generations living together under one roof and sharing economic responsibilities, property, and domestic duties. Such a family structure promoted mutual cooperation, social security, and the preservation of cultural traditions. However, with the spread of education, urbanization, occupational mobility, and migration, nuclear families have become increasingly common,

although strong emotional and social ties with extended family members continue to be maintained.

Kinship occupies a central place in the community's social structure. Kinship relations extend beyond the immediate family and play an important role in regulating social interactions, mutual assistance, and participation in community affairs. Relatives actively participate in religious ceremonies, marriages, festivals, and other life-cycle events, thereby strengthening interpersonal relationships and reinforcing social solidarity. These kinship networks also provide emotional, economic, and social support during times of need.

Marriage is regarded as one of the most important social institutions within the Marathi Naik community. Marriages are generally solemnized according to traditional Hindu customs and community practices, with the active involvement of parents, elders, and relatives. Marriage not only establishes a union between two individuals but also strengthens kinship ties and promotes social cohesion within the community. Traditional rituals, religious ceremonies, and customary practices continue to be observed during marriage celebrations, reflecting the community's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage.

Community institutions such as temple committees, caste associations, youth organizations, women's groups, and cultural organizations play an important

role in strengthening social organization. These institutions organize religious festivals, cultural programmes, social welfare activities, educational initiatives, and community development programmes. They also serve as platforms for resolving social issues, promoting unity, and preserving the cultural traditions of the community.

In recent decades, factors such as modernization, higher education, migration, technological advancement, and increased interaction with other communities have influenced the social organization of the Marathi Naik community. Although certain traditional practices and family patterns have undergone transformation, the community continues to maintain strong social relationships, cultural values, and a shared sense of identity. Thus, the social organization of the Marathi Naik community reflects a dynamic balance between cultural continuity and adaptation to contemporary social change.

Educational and Occupational Status

Education and occupation are key indicators of the socio-economic development and social mobility of any community. The Marathi Naik community in Puttur Taluk has made significant progress in both educational attainment and occupational diversification over the past few decades. Growing awareness of the importance of education, coupled with improved access to educational institutions and government welfare

programmes, has contributed to higher literacy levels and enhanced socio-economic conditions within the community.

Traditionally, agriculture and allied activities constituted the primary sources of livelihood for the Marathi Naik community. Many families were engaged in farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, and other agricultural occupations, while some members participated in trade, small-scale business, village administration, and other local economic activities. Although agriculture continues to provide employment for several households, particularly in rural areas of Puttur Taluk, the occupational structure of the community has undergone considerable transformation in recent years.

The expansion of educational opportunities has played a crucial role in facilitating this transformation. An increasing number of Marathi Naik families encourage their children to pursue higher education in disciplines such as science, commerce, engineering, medicine, law, management, education, and information technology. As a result, many members of the community have entered professional careers and secured employment in government departments, educational institutions, healthcare services, financial organizations, private industries, and the corporate sector.

Occupational diversification has emerged as a prominent characteristic of

the community's socio-economic development. In addition to agriculture, members of the Marathi Naik community are employed as teachers, government officials, engineers, doctors, nurses, bankers, entrepreneurs, business owners, skilled workers, and professionals in various service sectors. Migration to urban centres for higher education and employment has further expanded occupational opportunities and contributed to improved standards of living and economic stability.

Women have also made notable progress in education and employment. Increased access to schools, colleges, and professional education has enabled many women to pursue higher studies and participate actively in teaching, healthcare, banking, business, government service, and other professional fields. Their growing educational attainment and economic participation have strengthened family welfare, enhanced decision-making within households, and contributed to the overall social development of the community.

Despite these positive developments, the community continues to face challenges such as unemployment, underemployment, increasing competition in the labour market, and the need for continuous skill development to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy. Nevertheless, education remains a powerful instrument of social mobility, economic empowerment, and community development. Overall, the improvement in

educational attainment and occupational diversification reflects the Marathi Naik community's commitment to socio-economic progress while preserving its cultural identity, traditional values, and social cohesion.

Women and Social Change

Women occupy an important position in the social, cultural, and economic life of the Marathi Naiks community. Traditionally, women played a significant role in maintaining family values, preserving cultural traditions, and participating in religious and social activities. They were primarily responsible for household management, childcare, and the transmission of cultural practices and customs to younger generations.

With the spread of education and increasing awareness, the status of women in the community has undergone considerable transformation. Greater access to educational opportunities has enabled many women to pursue higher studies and acquire professional qualifications. As a result, women are increasingly participating in various fields such as education, healthcare, government service, business, and other professions.

Social change and modernization have also contributed to greater involvement of women in family decision-making and community activities. Many women actively participate in self-help groups, cultural organizations, and social welfare programs that promote community

development and empowerment. Their contributions have enhanced both family well-being and social progress.

Economic independence has become an important aspect of women's empowerment within the community. Employment opportunities have enabled women to contribute to household income and improve their social status. At the same time, they continue to play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage through their involvement in festivals, rituals, and traditional practices.

Despite these positive developments, certain traditional expectations and gender-based challenges still exist. Balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations remains a common concern for many women. However, increasing educational attainment and social awareness have helped create opportunities for greater equality and participation in various spheres of life.

Overall, the changing role of women reflects the broader process of social transformation within the Marathi Naiks community. Their growing participation in education, employment, and social activities demonstrates the community's progress toward empowerment and development while maintaining its cultural values and traditions.

Impact of Modernization

Modernization has brought significant changes to the social, cultural, and economic life of the Marathi Naiks

community in Puttur Taluk. Factors such as education, urbanization, technological advancement, globalization, and improved communication have influenced various aspects of community life, leading to both opportunities and challenges.

One of the most noticeable impacts of modernization is the increasing importance of education. Greater access to schools, colleges, and professional institutions has improved literacy levels and created new employment opportunities for younger generations. As a result, many community members have moved beyond traditional occupations and entered professional and skilled sectors.

Urbanization and migration have also contributed to social change within the community. Many young people migrate to cities in search of higher education and better employment prospects. This has resulted in changes in family structures, with nuclear families becoming more common than traditional joint families. While such changes have promoted individual independence, they have also reduced regular interaction among extended family members.

Technological advancements have transformed communication, access to information, and daily lifestyles. The use of mobile phones, the internet, and social media has increased awareness about education, employment, and social issues. At the same time, these developments have exposed younger generations to new

cultural influences and changing lifestyles.

Modernization has also affected cultural practices and traditions. Although the community continues to celebrate traditional festivals and religious ceremonies, some customs and rituals have undergone modifications to suit contemporary lifestyles. The use of local and regional languages has increased, leading to a gradual decline in the use of Marathi among some younger members of the community.

Despite these changes, the Marathi Naiks have shown a strong commitment to preserving their cultural identity and heritage. Community organizations, family institutions, and religious practices continue to play an important role in maintaining traditional values and social cohesion.

Overall, modernization has contributed to educational progress, economic development, and social mobility within the Marathi Naiks community. At the same time, it has created challenges related to the preservation of cultural traditions and community identity. The community's ability to balance tradition with modernity reflects its adaptability and resilience in a rapidly changing society.

Challenges Faced by the Community

Despite achieving progress in education, employment, and social development, the Marathi Naiks community faces several challenges in the

contemporary era. Rapid social and economic changes have influenced traditional ways of life and created concerns regarding the preservation of cultural identity and community values.

One of the major challenges is the gradual decline in the use of the Marathi language among younger generations. Increased interaction with Kannada, English, and other languages in educational and professional settings has reduced the use of Marathi in everyday communication. This poses a threat to the preservation of the community's linguistic heritage.

Urbanization and migration have also affected community life. Many young people move to cities for higher education and employment opportunities, resulting in reduced participation in traditional cultural activities and community gatherings. This has weakened some aspects of social cohesion and intergenerational interaction.

Another challenge is the gradual decline of traditional customs, rituals, and folk practices. Modern lifestyles and changing social values have led to reduced interest among younger generations in certain cultural traditions. As a result, some elements of the community's cultural heritage risk being forgotten over time.

Economic challenges such as unemployment, job competition, and rising living costs also affect some sections of the community. Although

educational attainment has improved, securing stable employment remains a concern for many young individuals.

The community also faces the challenge of balancing modernization with cultural preservation. While embracing educational and technological advancements, there is a need to safeguard traditional values, customs, and social institutions that form the foundation of community identity.

To address these challenges, greater efforts are required to promote cultural awareness, preserve traditional practices, encourage the use of the Marathi language, and strengthen community organizations. Active participation from community leaders, educational institutions, and younger generations is essential for preserving the rich heritage and cultural legacy of the Marathi Naiks community.

Overall, the challenges faced by the Marathi Naiks community highlight the need for a balanced approach that supports social and economic progress while ensuring the preservation of their unique cultural identity and traditions.

Findings of the Study

The study on the heritage, culture, and social life of the Marathi Naiks community in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, revealed several important findings:

1. The Marathi Naiks community possesses a rich cultural heritage that reflects its historical migration, settlement, and adaptation to the socio-cultural environment of Karnataka.
2. The community has successfully preserved many of its traditional customs, religious practices, festivals, and social values, which continue to strengthen its cultural identity.
3. Family and kinship relationships remain important components of the community's social organization, although there has been a gradual shift from joint families to nuclear family structures.
4. Educational attainment among community members has improved significantly, leading to greater awareness, social mobility, and economic development.
5. Occupational patterns have diversified over time, with members engaged in agriculture, business, government service, education, healthcare, and other professional sectors.
6. Women play a vital role in preserving cultural traditions and are increasingly participating in education, employment, and community development activities.
7. Modernization, urbanization, and technological advancements have positively influenced educational and occupational opportunities but have also contributed to changes in traditional lifestyles and social relationships.

8. The younger generation is increasingly exposed to modern cultural influences, resulting in a gradual decline in the use of the Marathi language and certain traditional practices.
9. Community organizations, religious institutions, and family networks continue to play an important role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity.
10. The Marathi Naiks community demonstrates a strong commitment to balancing modern development with the preservation of its cultural heritage and traditional values.

Overall, the study highlights that while the Marathi Naiks community has undergone significant social and economic transformation, it continues to maintain a distinct cultural identity rooted in its heritage, traditions, and collective social life.

Conclusion

The Marathi Naiks community of Puttur Taluk represents an important cultural and social group within the diverse landscape of Karnataka. Their heritage reflects a history of migration, adaptation, and cultural resilience. While modernization has brought significant socio-economic advancements, the community continues to preserve many aspects of its traditional identity.

The study highlights the need for systematic documentation of cultural practices, oral histories, and community

traditions. Efforts involving educational institutions, local organizations, and community leaders can contribute to preserving this valuable cultural heritage for future generations. Understanding the experiences of the Marathi Naiks provides broader insights into the processes of cultural continuity, social transformation, and identity preservation in contemporary India.

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