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RESEARCH ARTICLE

JOKUMARASWAMI: FOLK DEITY OF RAIN, PROSPERITY, AND FERTILITY

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Abstract

India is an ancient nation with diverse cultures, which are articulated and depicted through different tribes, communities, castes, and ethnic groups. Kabbaliga (Koli) and its associated communities are one of the ancient tribal groups found across the subcontinent of India under different names. Culturally and religiously, they are Hindus with diverse traditional beliefs systems and practices. They worship different deities, saints, philosophers, and personalities from different generations together. Jokumaraswami (commonly called Jokumara) is a popular folk deity of these associated communities in both the central and northern regions of Karnataka state. He is believed to be a deity of rain, agricultural prosperity, and well-being. There are numerous folk tales and songs on the origin of Jokumaraswami and his antecedents on earth. The study aims to know about the socio-cultural aspects of the Kabbaliga and its associated communities and the worship of folk deities in Karnataka. Anthropological techniques such as observation, participant observation, and informal interviews were used to gain a better understanding of these associated groups' social and cultural lives.

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Introduction:-

Culture is an entire form of tradition that originated in the society through civilizations and spread from generation by participating its members through folkways (janapada). Every culture is composed of distinct ways of life and practices. In 1871, Edward Bennett Taylor defined culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. India is a cradle of vast, diversified cultures with diverse origins, worship systems, traditions, beliefs, customs, norms, folklore, arts, laws, dialects, etc., and these diversified cultures were depicted in various ethnic groups, tribes, castes, and communities. In nature, every cultural formation has a rich origin, history, and heritage. Geographically, they vary due to the variances in their way of life and practices. From birth to death, they have a unified, structured existence phase. In the traditional belief systems of India, the beginning practises of appeasing deities and supernatural beings are initially comprised of various non-semantic sounds, then numerous body movements are added to them, and later, the abundant semantic songs are incorporated into those practises for the adoration of deities (Venkat Rao, 2014).

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These are ancient belief-based practises that include the worship of several deities by diverse cultural groups across the Indian subcontinent in distinct religious forms such as folk, tribal, polytheist, and animistic based on the locality, community, and form of worship with countless local texts in the local languages in their traditions; these include Kula devata (clan deities), Grama devata (village deities), and Local deities (regional deities) and People have been performing deity worship rituals since ancient times for a variety of reasons (McDaniel, 2007). Later, these evolved into rituals in various cultures, composed of songs, dances, and non-semantic sounds, and evolved into effect-oriented performances in various cultures. India is a land of mnemonic culture, where cultures are uttered and articulated through memories, and later these memories are passed by word of mouth from generation to generation through folklore (Venkat Rao, 2014).

Cultural groups evolved or appeared in India because of the evolution of various civilizations or the occurrences of great migrations from various parts of the world at various times. Each community practises its age-old traditions through folkways and the knowledge of folkways always helps in understanding the people in multi-dimensional ways. Community studies have always aided philosophers, academics, and historians in multidimensionally understanding and exploring the cultures of diverse people and their social and cultural way of life around the world since the era of cultural evolution.

This paper is structured in the following ways: The first part deals with detailed information about Kabbaliga (Koli) and its associated communities. The second part elaborates the socio-cultural aspects, and the third part describes the origin and significance of the folk deity Jokumaraswami and his worship. The final section of the paper discusses the significance of belief systems in Kabbaliga associated groups.

Mythological Evidence:-

In India, the occupations were primarily based on the kind of work performed by the social groups from generation to generation, and later, these occupations became hereditary structures and were recognized by their occupations in every society. In this regard, Kabbaliga and its associated communities are also one of them, and they are ancient tribal groups found across India with different names. Culturally and religiously, they are Hindus with diverse traditional beliefs and practices. Initially, these ethnic groups resided on the banks of seas, rivers, and lakes as a fishing community.

The history of these communities' dates to the mythological times of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. According to the Mahabharat scripture, these communities included the great king Bheeshma (son of Shantanu and Ganga), Satyawati, Maharishi Veda Vyas, and Agasthya. King Rajaram Koli was the founder of the community (Shinde, 2015). Ikshwaku king Satyasena, Gautama Buddha's mother Mahamaya (daughter of Suprabhuta), and his wife Yashodhara were the daughter of Koli king RajaDhandapani (Melakar, 2012). The 12th century great ShivasharanaNijasharanaAmbigaraChowdayya (Siddhashram 2007). Sri Mata Manikeshwari, Sri Mallannappa Appa, Sri Hanamanthappa Mutya, Sri Honnalinga Maharaja, and Sri Sharana Mutya have belonged to these community groups (Jamadar, 2003).

Ethnographic profile of the community:-

There are mainly two divisions within these community groups, such as Gourimakkalu (children of Parvati) and Gangemakkalu (children of Ganga) (Edgar and Rangachari, 1909). They are primarily found in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Rajasthan, Dadar, and Nagar Haveli, with different names. Such as Besta, Koli, Ambiga, Ambigaru, Kabbaliga, Kabbera, Kabbila, Kabberavadlu, Meenugara, Bunde Besta, Macchi Gabbit, Gangemakkalu, Gangakula, Gangaputra, Mahadev Koli, Surya Vamshi Koli, Ganagamatashta, Parivar, Nayak, Gourimakkalu, Kharvi, Bhoiy Torey, Mogaveera, Barki, Barikera, Harikantha, Tokrekoli, Kohli, Barki, etc (Melakar, 2012). In the Madras census report of 1901, these communities in the South Canara region were described as the Bombay Caste of Fishermen and Boatmen and in the Deccan regions as the Bestas and Habberas. In the northern part of Karnataka, these community groups are known for their occupations, such as Walikar, Talwar, Jamadar, Natikar, Kolakar, Barikera, and Sunagar. Now, these communities are familiar with their occupational names as their surname.

The people in the community are strong, healthy, and hard workers. During their rule in India, many kings and Britishers used them as Kotwals (Talawar) in their regiments. These brave and warrior Kotwals guarded the villages against rivals and thieves. Several inscriptions shed light on the prominence of these communities in Karnataka state

dating back to the 7th century AD during the reign of King Mangalesh of Badami Chalukya Dynasty and are known in coastal areas as Ambiga (Ambikar) and derived from the Sanskrit word Ambu (Einthoven, 1922) and as Ambiga (Kabbera) (Edgar, 1909). King's Army included the associated community of Ambigas (Besta) in their military, and with the help of Ambiga, they conquered Revathi Island. They protected several kingdoms in Karnataka. These community groups were residing in the central and northern parts of Karnataka and scattered across the regions of Raichur, Vijayapura, Bellary, Gulbarga, Dharwad, Shimoga, Haveri, Davanagere, etc. These communities were largely engaged in occupations like hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, and agriculture. Hunting and poaching are banned by the government of India, and now they are engaged in fishing, agriculture, and animal husbandry (Mariamma and Shinde, 2014).

Mythological tales and folk songs on Jokumaraswami:-

Mythological and folk tales play a significant role in understanding the origin and history of diverse cultures and the ways of life of their inhabitants. These are primarily comprised of traditional stories, performative art forms, and folk songs. Jokumaraswami is a popular folk deity of these communities in Karnataka; he is associated with rain, fertility, and the prosperity of agricultural wealth. There are numerous folk tales about the Jokumaraswami folk deity's birth and life. Jokumaraswami was a servant of the seven legendary sages of Indian mythology called Saptarishis. Jokumaraswami was born to a couple of sages, Joka and Yalagouri. In another oral folk tale, the narrator says he was born to Joka and Ditna (Ditnadevi) and was named Joka. In other mythological folktales, Jokumaraswami is considered the son of Shiva and Gange (Shivakumar, 2018; Melakar, 2012). He is a son of Maareyedeity (Maaridevate) and came as a representative of a yogi with the blessings of the three gods Shiva, Gouri, and Kumaraswamy. According to the folk belief of the Ganagamatashta community, in the regions of Vijayapura, Gulbarga, Bellary, and Dharwad, the folk deity Jokumaraswami is a son of God Narayana and Goddess Laxmi (Melakar, 2012).

Music and songs are integral parts of cultures and shed light on the various cultural processes that take place around the world. These communities have rich folk literature, which is expressed through folk songs and stories.

Folk song on the birth and mystery of the Jokumaraswami:-

Baala Huttayananta Balaka Tottilukatti
 Sakala Maneyavaru Neredu Haadidare
 Baalana Tottiliga Jai Yendu Jokumara
 Halla Halla Gonta Haredu Chendaadyane
 Balera Kanda Padamayya
 Chendaadidare Godi Raja Yella Beladaave Jokumara
 Alata Balata Bandanavva Siri Bagiligi
 Tandara Benne Kodarevva Kandana Tayi
 Horaga Honta Jokumara
 Addadda Male Bandu Dodda Dodda Teneyaagi
 Goddagalella Hainagi Jokumara
 Yaake Komara Ninna Bayige Benne Illa
 Mele Manikyada Haralilla
 E Uoora Onyag Ninna Sulivilla
 Jokumara Andiddu Sirigede; Huttida Elu Dinakke Tirugyana Ninna Maga,
 Jestadevi Ninna Maga Kumaraage Kottare Elu Dinagala (Melakar, 2012; Bulla, 1989; Abhishekh, 2015).

The above folk song in Kannada language describes the birth and mystery of the folk deity. It elaborated the joyful and exciting movements of Jokumara's childhood. Beginning with the birth of the baby:

A baby boy was born, he allowed a cradle to be tied, and every neighbor came to sing a song and then shout slogans like "Jai Jokumara." Jokumara has played in the ponds and then sprinkled the water everywhere, so the wheat and raja have grown everywhere, and to give him butter, but then there goes our Jokumara, and in the last line he narrates and affirms his fertility and prosperity, where it's been raining in all directions, all the rivers are full, and the mountains are filled with greenery, and his deeds, where he calls for rain. Why is there no butter smeared on your mouth, Komara? There are no gems on you, and there is no trace of you in this village's streets. Jokumara

brings wealth and prosperity to society, and Jokumaraswami roams all the places and rules within seven days, and your son, Jeshtadevi, is blessed with seven days of life.

In folk songs, singers describe the mischievous activities of the Jokumaraswami, and they glorify him and his existence in nature as a folk deity. They call him "Honnagedi" as a derogatory remark, "Channagedi" for good-looking, and "Sirigede" for wealthy. The most intriguing aspect of Kannada folk songs about Jokumaraswami is "NammagaDandiyaga Bittu Nadadana," which means "Jokumaraswami has left us on the shores," and the songs continue to tell us how Jokumaraswami exploited the women of the dominant class in society (Chandrashekhara, 1989).

JokumaraHunnime: A festival of Jokumaraswami:-

Humans acquire culture through the process of learning, culture flows from their ancestors to their offspring from generation to generation through folkways. Civilizations are always acting as a source for the evolution of diverse cultures. Orally, civilizations have left cultural ruins through folklore, pieces of knowledge, and heritages throughout the world. All ethnic groups around the world worship deities for several reasons in their cultures, and the worshipping traditions, rituals, and ceremonial practises of deities were started in ancient times. The history of the worshipping practises of deities in India dates to 1500 BCE before pre-Aryan (pre-Vedic) times at the Mohenjodaro and Harappa sites of the Indus Valley civilization (Mookerjee, 1989).

In India, every cultural group worships a deity for several reasons in their society, and they have a strong belief that these deities always help fulfil all their needs and deeds. In people's beliefs, deities preside over marriage, conception, childbirth, health, healing, well-being, and so on, and some deities aid in agricultural wealth and fertility, protect herds, fields, wells, granaries, and some guard village boundaries. Some deities have powers to eliminate ghosts and demons, guard against or heal snakebite, etc. in the beliefs of folk societies (Richard, 1983).

In every culture, rituals act as a mechanism through which beliefs are fulfilled (Jai Prabhakar and Gangadhar, 2011). Kabbaliga-associated groups worship Hindu mythological gods and goddesses such as Shiva, Krishna, Venkateswara, Ganga, and Parvati, along with local and regional principal deities Maramma, Durgavva, Huligemma, Karella, Yallamma, Dyamavva, Gangamma, Iranna, and Mallayya as their Kuldevta, and the folk deity Jokumaraswami (Melakar, 2012). Mostly Kabbaliga-affiliated groups and neighbouring farming communities worship Jokumara for rain, progeny, prosperity, and good agricultural yield (Shivakumar 2018 and Edgar 1909). Jokumara's worshipping tradition is folkloristic, with characteristics like the mythological Vedic god Parjanya, a deity of rain, thunder, and fertilisation of the mother earth (Arthur, 1995).

Jokumaraswami is a popular folk deity and religious godly character who is revered by the villagers and worshipped by the married women of these community groups as the bringer of rain and prosperity. The adoring tradition is a kind of oral performative art form, and ritual is performed through folk songs. The annual Jokumaraswami festival (JokumaraHunnime) is held in the month of Bhadrapada (september) on Ashtami Tithi of the Sanatan Hindu calendar, and the rituals are performed once a year after the Ganesh Chaturthi festival.

Jokumaraswami, the folk godly personality, is born and lives in the homes of these community groups. Women collect clay from a nearby tank on the first day of the festival, and the clay idol of Jokumaraswami is moulded and sculptured with piercing eyes, a broad forehead, a broad face, thick brows, a largemouth, thick lips, a protruding nose, thick moustaches, and a huge phallus to represent his virility and libidous energy. The idol is covered with vibhuti, kumkum on his forehead, and his head is covered with a turban.

Jokumaraswami's lifespan is limited to seven days (a week) and is dependent on Lord Shiva's blessings; Joka rishi is blessed with the seven-day son Jokumaraswami, and he lives for seven days; within seven days, Jokumaraswami roams all the places, rules, and is well-known for granting prolificacy to those who pray, and the rituals are performed for all seven days. On the first day of the Jokumaraswami festival, they place the idol of Jokumaraswami in the bamboo basket. The basket is decorated with neem leaves around the idol and flowers given by the people of the Hoogar community (garland community). The Jokumaraswami idol holds copra in his hands, as well as the Jokumaraswami Kappa (karka) and prepared gruel (ambali), and his lips are butter-applied. Later, women begin deity worshipping ceremonies in their families. They go from house to house in the villages every day, singing folk songs to the deity (Abhishekh, 2015).

During the festival, on the very first day, women visit the village chieftain and landlord Gouda's house, and Gouda's family performs the pooja rites. In return, Gouda is blessed with rain and grains in the village, and then the women sing a folk song that glorifies the life of the Jokumaraswami deity, and from Gouda, in return, they collect plenty of alms and money. Every day, women visit each house in the villages from the upper to the lower classes and sing a folk song on Jokumara that glorifies the deity's adventures and miracles, to the accompaniment of songs sung by the group of women (lead women will start the songs, and the chorus is followed by other women) from all day until the end of the Jokumaraswami festival. In return, they collect alms in the form of food grains, butter, chili, salt, money, cloth, tamarind, millet, gruel, and roti from households they visit in the villages. Then, villagers are blessed with Jokumaraswami Kappain Neem leaves and prepared gruel (ambali) brought by the women, which is distributed in pumpkin leaves across the houses they visit, and the idol is covered with a full offering of alms given by the villagers (Abhishekh, 2015).

Every household in the village offers Prasadam (naivadya) to the Jokumaraswami deity and performs pooja, kissing his lips with butter. The villagers strongly believe that if they apply the butter on his lips, people get prosperity in terms of good agricultural yield, rain, health, and wealth in the region. Then the villagers beseech Jokumaraswami for their children's health, childbirth, healing from diseases, their animals, agricultural wealth, and the well-being of the villagers. On the seventh day, the final stop will be at the house of the Harijan (Madiga) community in the village, where they will perform the final ceremonial rites, namely, the breaking of an idol of the Jokumaraswami, which results in the spillage of fertility and the arrival of rain, and the ruins of the Jokumaraswami deity are buried under the horizontal stone of the Washermen (Agasas) in the village. Once, Jokumaraswami happened to forcibly derive sexual titillation from a woman belonging to the Washerman community, who later sought vengeance and killed Jokumaraswami (Abhishekh, 2015).

Within seven days, he became a burden to the villagers as he spoiled the women from the higher community in the villages, and so he was killed; but as his head broke into halves, seeds spilled on the earth, and the earth flourished with greenery, and there was thunderous rain (Shivakumar, 2018). Jokumaraswami reaches the abode of Lord Shiva, says that there hasn't been raining, crops have dried, and people are starving (where he dissents from Lord Ganesh's claim that the people of earth are happy and well-fed), and upon hearing this, Shiva calls for rain, and then all lakes and seas were full and flowing, and the people were satisfied and happy, and after Lord Ganesh, Jokumaraswami succeeded in bringing rain to the suffering people along with the blessings of Lord Shiva on earth (Melakar, 2012). After the death, his face is still facing the village with a curving smile on his face, indicating that even during the death he is not free from the Gramyasabhavas (dark qualities of human beings like lust, desire, and anger that leave a heavy toll on an individual and a society), and the final rites signify the arrival of rain and new vegetation in the region. The festival ends with the death of the Jokumaraswami deity on the seventh day of the full moon (poornima), and his death is followed by copious rain on earth (Abhishekh, 2015).

There is a folk belief that even the most drought-affected days would be blessed with rain on the festive juncture of Jokumaraswami Hunnime (Shivakumar, 2018), and every community in the village would take part in the worship ceremony. His birth is celebrated when the rains are anticipated anxiously. When Jokumaraswami begins to molest the women of the lower caste community (Agasas), he accelerates his end, and the people of Kabbaliga and its associated sects adore, enchant, and awaken the folk deity Jokumaraswami for rain on the earth, and the festival is celebrated by the lower community groups in Karnataka. The people in the neighbouring villages believe that when the idol of the Jokumara breaks, it signifies the coming of rain in that area.

When Jokumaraswami arrives in the villages, the villagers pray and seek blessings. They ex-vote (harake) in Jokumaraswami to fulfil their desires. After the fulfillment, they present a deity with an ex-voto as Kulavi (a skull cap), an Ududaara (a hunch thread), and so on. There is a strong belief that the decorated butter in the eyes of Jokumara would cure eye problems if they applied the same to their eyes. People used to collect the decorated butter of Jokumara, signifying that all the complications of evil eyes would be rid of. Childless women usually worship Jokumaraswami because they hope to have children.

During agricultural ceremonies in the region of Bellary district, the Kabbera (Barika) community celebrates the festival on the first full-moon day in the month of Bhadrapada to appease the deity of the rain god. In the celebration, Kabbera women carry Jokumaraswami Kappa on their heads in a bamboo basket containing neem leaves and varieties of flowers. They go around the villages and towns and collect alms, food grains, etc. from the cultivating class of Kapus (the farming community). In return, they give some neem leaves, flowers, and holy ash

(basma) to the devotees. On the seventh day of the festival, the devotees gather at a specific place. Porridge (ambali) will be prepared and distributed among them as a prasadam of Jokumaraswami. Later, some of the porridge is taken by the farmers to sprinkle on their agricultural fields. There is a strong belief that the act of sprinkling led to a rich harvest in their agricultural fields (Edgar, 1909).

The other kind of worship of Jokumaraswami deity is called Muddam. Barika (Barker) sect draws a drawing in charcoal powder outlining the crude representations of Jokumaraswami's human image. On the first day of the festival, they draw the figure of Jokumara in front of their house (early morning), believing that Jokumaraswami brings rain and prosperity. People are offering money, food grains, etc. to the Barika sect. Every folk society believes that by worshipping a deity, they will be rewarded with money or alms (Edgar, 1909).

Conclusion:-

Indian subcontinent witnesses many folk rituals and ceremonies in almost every community across the region. The practice of folk rituals is to fulfil their worldly desires. All rituals may contain worship of nature and depict the devotion towards the mother earth. Socio-cultural study of the Kabbaliga-associated communities found that they still believe in traditional and customary practices by worshipping their ancestors and nature. Women of these associated communities and their neighbouring farming communities worship clan or village deity believing that the appeasement of the deity may bring rain, fertility, progeny, a prosperity of agricultural wealth, and well-being. Jokumaraswami, a folk deity tradition of worshipping is significantly connected to the life of these people and expresses through folk songs. People also have a strong belief that Jokumaraswami helps to succeed in their occupation, accomplishment of all their needs and deeds. Overall, the worshipping ceremony is a harmonious collaboration of the diverse class and communities in the villages.

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