

	ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER		Sociology
SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF KURUBA WOMEN IN KARNATAKA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY		KEY WORDS: Kuruba Women, Pastoral Communities,	
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ABSTRACT	The Kuruba community is one of Karnataka's oldest pastoral groups, has traditionally relied on sheep and goat rearing, agriculture, and indigenous ecological knowledge. Kuruba women take part in a crucial role in managing livestock and sustaining rural livelihoods but face persistent challenges including gender inequality, limited access to education, healthcare, productive resources, and decision-making power. This paper explores the evolving socio-economic status of Kuruba women through a sociological lens by systematically reviewing secondary data from government reports, Census records, and academic studies. It investigates aspects such as education, employment, health, livelihoods, political participation, and social mobility, while considering the influences of patriarchy, occupational insecurity, and climate change. Findings indicate that education, government welfare schemes, and Self-Help Groups have contributed to improving women's socio-economic conditions; however, structural barriers continue to restrict their empowerment. The study recommends enhancing education, diversifying livelihoods, promoting financial inclusion, and implementing gender responsive policies to support the sustainable development of Kuruba women in Karnataka.		
INTRODUCTION	Women having nearly half of India's population and play an important role in supporting families, communities, and economies. In rural India, they make significant contributions to agriculture, livestock management, household production, natural resource conservation, and unpaid care work. Despite these significant contributions, gender disparities persist, limiting women's access to education, employment, health-care, financial resources, property ownership, political participation, and decision-making. Understanding the socio-economic status of women within specific caste and occupational communities is critical for promoting inclusive and sustainable development. The Kuruba community, one of Karnataka's largest pastoral communities, has traditionally relied on sheep and goat rearing, agriculture, dairy farming, and indigenous ecological knowledge, contributing significantly to the state's rural economy.		
	Women of this community perform a variety of productive and reproductive roles, such as livestock care, fodder collection, dairy processing, agricultural labor, household management, childcare, and participation in local markets. However, much of their labour is unpaid, informal, and socially undervalued. Over the last three decades, urbanization, educational expansion, economic liberalization, technological advancement, decentralization, women's reservation in local governance, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), microfinance initiatives, digital banking, and government welfare programs have created new opportunities for Kuruba women to participate in education, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and political life. At the same time, declining grazing lands, climate change, occupational insecurity, migration, wage disparities, unequal ownership of productive assets, and entrenched patriarchal norms continue to stymie their socioeconomic advancement.		
	Although educational expansion and skill development have enabled many Kuruba women to enter a variety of occupations and increase their economic independence, significant disparities persist, particularly among rural and economically disadvantaged households. From a sociological standpoint, Kuruba women's changing socioeconomic status reflects the dynamic interaction of gender, caste, pastoralism, modernization, state intervention, and rural transformation, in which traditional livelihoods coexist with new aspirations and opportunities. Against this backdrop, the current study investigates the changing socioeconomic status of Kuruba women in Karnataka using a systematic sociological review of existing literature, government reports, census publications, and policy documents. It examines changes in education, employment, livelihoods, health, political participation, social mobility, and women's empowerment while identifying structural factors that continue to influence their lives. The study adds to the fields of rural sociology, gender studies, development studies, and public policy by providing a thorough understanding of the changing socioeconomic realities of Kuruba women in Karnataka's pastoral communities.		
	Review of Literature		
	Manjunatha and Gangadhar (2018) examined the socio-economic status of Bettakuruba tribal women in Chamara-janagara district, Karnataka. The study found that although women contributed significantly to agriculture, forest-based activities, and household livelihoods, they continued to experience low educational attainment, limited asset ownership, and poor socio-economic conditions. The authors emphasized the need for educational advancement, livelihood diversification, and women's empowerment to improve their quality of life.		
	Naveen Kumar, Vani, and Inamdar (2022) investigated the livelihood patterns of Kuruba shepherd communities in southern Karnataka. Their study highlighted the importance of sheep pastoralism to the rural economy while identifying challenges such as climate change, shrinking grazing lands, and declining pastoral livelihoods. The authors recommended strengthening institutional support, veterinary services, and sustainable grazing policies for pastoral communities.		
	Jayashree, Ramya, and Nalina (2024) analysed the socio-economic status of tribal women in the B.R. Hills region of Karnataka. The study reported improvements through government welfare programmes but observed persistent problems related to literacy, healthcare, employment, and poverty. It stressed the importance of education, skill development, and greater participation of women in local governance for sustainable development.		
	Lokesh and Geethanjali (2023) reviewed the contribution of SHGs to the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Karnataka. The study concluded that SHGs enhanced women's financial inclusion, savings, entrepreneurship, leadership, and decision-making capacity. The authors suggested strengthening capacity-building programmes and market linkages to improve rural women's economic empowerment.		
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Serrao, Sequeira, and Varambally (2021) examined the role of financial inclusion in improving the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable households in Karnataka. The study found that access to banking services, institutional credit, and digital financial systems enhanced household income, savings, and women's economic participation. The authors highlighted financial inclusion as an important instrument for promoting inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the changing socio-economic status of Kuruba women in Karnataka from a sociological perspective.
2. To examine the influence of gender, pastoralism, modernization, and government interventions on the socio-economic transformation of Kuruba women.

Statement of the Problem

The socioeconomic transformation of rural Karnataka has had a significant impact on the lives of Kuruba women, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Although Kuruba women have traditionally contributed to pastoralism, agriculture, livestock management, and household livelihoods, their efforts have largely gone unnoticed and undervalued. Improvements in education, government welfare programs, SHGs, and political participation have raised their socioeconomic status; however, ongoing challenges such as gender inequality, unequal access to productive resources, wage disparities, occupational insecurity, declining pastoral livelihoods, and patriarchal norms continue to limit their empowerment. Existing research focuses primarily on pastoralism or rural women's development, with little sociological attention paid to the changing socioeconomic status of Kuruba women. Therefore, this study seeks to examine their changing socio-economic conditions through a sociological perspective to better understand the processes of gender, pastoralism, and rural social transformation in Karnataka.

Research Methodology

The current study makes use of a systematic review research design based on secondary sources of data. It is descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to investigate the changing socioeconomic status of Kuruba women in Karnataka from a sociological standpoint. Relevant literature was compiled from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, and Census of India publications.

Conceptual Framework

The study views Kuruba women's socioeconomic status as a multidimensional construct shaped by interconnected social, economic, cultural, political, and institutional factors. Kuruba women have historically worked in pastoralism, livestock rearing, agriculture, and household management. Modern processes such as modernization, urbanization, education, technological advancement, government welfare programs, and market integration have all altered traditional roles.

The conceptual framework assumes that education, occupational diversification, access to government schemes, participation in SHGs, digital inclusion, healthcare, and political participation all have a positive impact on Kuruba women's socioeconomic status and empowerment. In contrast, patriarchal norms, gender discrimination, limited access to productive assets, climate change, and declining pastoral resources continue to stifle their development.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Female Literacy Rate in Karnataka (2001 & 2011).

S.N	Census Year	Female Literacy Rate (%)
1.	2001	56.9
2.	2011	68.1

Source: Census of India (2001 & 2011).

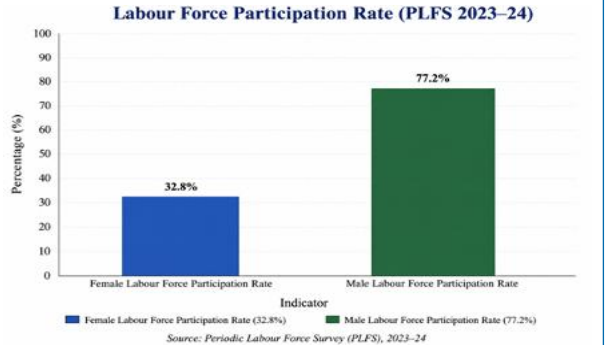
Female literacy in Karnataka increased from 56.9% in 2001 to

68.1% in 2011, indicating considerable educational progress. Improved literacy has enhanced women's access to employment, awareness of government schemes, and participation in decision-making. Similar educational improvements have contributed to the socio-economic mobility of Kuruba women, although disparities remain in rural areas.

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of Women in Karnataka: 2023–24

S.No	Indicator	Percentage %
1.	Female Labour Force Participation Rate	32.8
2.	Male Labour Force Participation Rate	77.2

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2023–24.



Although women's labour force participation has improved, it remains significantly lower than that of men. Kuruba women continue to contribute through pastoralism, agriculture, livestock management, and informal employment, much of which remains unpaid and under-recognized.

Table 3: Women's Empowerment Indicators in Karnataka: 2019–21

S.No	Indicator	Percentage (%)
1	Women having bank accounts operated by themselves	89.7
2	Women participating in household decision-making	88.3

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–21.

The findings indicate considerable progress in financial inclusion and household decision-making among women in Karnataka. Government initiatives, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and digital banking have strengthened women's economic participation. These developments have also benefited many Kuruba women by improving financial independence and social empowerment.

Table 4: Major Factors Influencing the Socio-Economic Status of Kuruba Women

S.N	Factors	Impact
1.	Education	Increased literacy, employment opportunities, and awareness
2.	Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	Improved savings, credit access, and entrepreneurship
3.	Government Welfare Programmes	Enhanced livelihood security and social welfare
4.	Modernization	Diversification of occupations and increased mobility
5.	Climate Change	Declining grazing lands and livelihood insecurity
6.	Patriarchal Norms	Limited ownership, leadership, and decision-making

Source: Compiled from Census of India (2011), NFHS-5 (2019–21), PLFS (2023–24), Government of Karnataka reports, and reviewed literature.

The socio-economic transformation of Kuruba women is influenced by both enabling and constraining factors. While education, welfare programmes, and SHGs have expanded opportunities for empowerment and livelihood diversification,

persistent gender inequalities, environmental challenges, and occupational insecurity continue to affect their socio-economic advancement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socioeconomic standing of Kuruba women in Karnataka has changed significantly over the last thirty years, according to a review of secondary literature and official reports. Kuruba women have expanded their sources of income through education, wage work, self-employment, and entrepreneurship. Traditionally, they have been involved in pastoralism, livestock rearing, agriculture, and household production. In addition to raising literacy rates, the expansion of educational opportunities has made it possible for many women to work in the public and private sectors as well as in skill-based occupations. The expansion of SHGs, microfinance organizations, and digital banking has also improved financial inclusion, increasing women's access to credit, savings, and economic independence.

Women's involvement in local government and community development has been reinforced by government welfare programs and reservations in Panchayati Raj institutions. Increased awareness of education, healthcare, sanitation, and social welfare programs has helped to raise living standards and promote social empowerment. However, the review reveals that the benefits of socioeconomic development are unevenly distributed between rural and urban areas. Women from economically disadvantaged households continue to have lower educational attainment, limited access to productive resources, and fewer job opportunities.

The results also imply that Kuruba women continue to play a dual role by juggling traditional agricultural and pastoral duties with household chores and revenue-generating endeavors. Even though they make a significant contribution to household livelihoods, a large portion of their labor is still unpaid and underappreciated in the formal economy. Their socioeconomic progress is still hampered by persistent gender disparities in household decision-making, leadership roles, land ownership, and income levels. The livelihood security of many Kuruba households has also been impacted by climate change, declining reliance on traditional pastoralism, and shrinking grazing lands, which has forced women to diversify their careers.

From a sociological standpoint, these results show how gender, caste, education, modernization, state welfare policies, and shifting rural livelihoods interact to shape Kuruba women's socioeconomic status. Women's full empowerment is still hampered by structural injustices stemming from patriarchy and unequal access to productive resources, even though modernization and government interventions have increased opportunities for education, employment, financial inclusion, and political participation. Therefore, the results show that Kuruba women's socioeconomic transformation is a process of gradual progress rather than full equality, underscoring the necessity of ongoing policy interventions that support gender justice, livelihood diversification, educational advancement, and inclusive rural development.

Continuing Challenges

Kuruba women still face a number of socioeconomic obstacles despite significant advancements in education, employment prospects, financial inclusion, and political engagement. Their empowerment is still hampered by enduring patriarchal norms, unequal land and productive asset ownership, wage inequality, restricted access to high-quality healthcare, and limited decision-making authority. Many rural households are experiencing increased livelihood insecurity as a result of the gradual decline of traditional pastoral livelihoods brought on by shrinking grazing lands, climate change, and rapid urbanization. Their economic progress is also hampered by low digital literacy, poor

vocational skills, restricted market access, and under representation in leadership roles. These challenges highlight the need for gender responsive policies, sustainable livelihood diversification, improved educational opportunities, skill development, financial inclusion, and stronger institutional support to ensure the inclusive and sustainable development of Kuruba women in Karnataka.

Major Findings

According to the study, Kuruba women's socioeconomic standing in Karnataka has significantly improved as a result of increased participation in non-farm occupations, government welfare programs, educational expansion, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Women are now more involved in local government, financial inclusion, and income-generating endeavors. However, the review also discovered that their socioeconomic empowerment is still hampered by patriarchal social norms, gender inequality, limited ownership of productive resources, wage disparities, declining pastoral livelihoods, and vulnerabilities related to climate change. According to the results, structural disparities continue to be major obstacles to Kuruba women's attaining inclusive and sustainable development, even though modernization has produced new opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Kuruba women's socioeconomic transformation is a reflection of the larger social change processes taking place in rural Karnataka. Women now have more opportunities for social mobility and empowerment thanks to the expansion of education, welfare programs, financial inclusion, and political participation. However, their socioeconomic status is still influenced by enduring disparities pertaining to gender, access to productive resources, livelihood insecurity, and patriarchal social structures. Integrated policy interventions that incorporate financial inclusion, social protection, education, sustainable livelihood development, and gender-responsive governance are necessary to address these issues. In addition to improving Kuruba women's well-being, strengthening these aspects will advance social justice, sustainable rural development, national development priorities, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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