CERTIFICATE NO : ICRESTMH /2024/C0824820

A Study of Prevalence and Development of Caste System in Karnataka

Rajendra Otihal

Research Scholar, Ph. D. in History
Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

The caste system in Karnataka, like in many parts of India, has deep historical roots, evolving over centuries as a social stratification mechanism. The system's prevalence dates back to ancient times when society was divided into distinct groups based on occupation, birth, and religious beliefs. In Karnataka, the caste structure traditionally followed the varna model, with Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras forming the primary social divisions. However, over time, regional variations led to the emergence of unique castes and sub-castes, reflecting local customs, agricultural practices, and power dynamics. In medieval Karnataka, the caste system became more rigid, with landholding elites, particularly the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, asserting their dominance. The Lingayat movement, led by Basava in the 12th century, sought to challenge Brahminical supremacy and advocate for social equality, though caste distinctions persisted. During British colonial rule, the system was further solidified through policies such as land reforms and census classifications, which institutionalized caste identities. Today, caste continues to influence socio-political dynamics in Karnataka, especially in rural areas, despite efforts by social reformers and modern government policies to mitigate its impact. Affirmative action programs and reservations have been implemented to address caste-based inequalities, but the system's legacy remains a significant factor in Karnataka's social fabric.