

The Role of Traditional Governance Structures in Hasalaru Tribal Community Development

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Article Info

Article History:

Published: 31 Jan 2026

Publication Issue:

Volume 3, Issue 01
January-2026

Page Number:

710-719

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Abstract:

Traditional governance structures within indigenous communities have long played a pivotal role in shaping social order, community cohesion, and the overall development of the tribe. In the Hasalaru tribal community, these structures are deeply embedded in cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and a sense of collective responsibility. The Hasalaru people have historically relied on a decentralized, participatory system of governance where decision-making is based on consensus, respect for elders, and spiritual guidance. This traditional governance model is centred around leaders such as elders, shamans, and tribal councils, who hold significant influence in directing the social, economic, and spiritual affairs of the community. This journal explores the role of traditional governance structures in Hasalaru community development, examining how these systems contribute to the social, economic, and cultural growth of the tribe. It investigates the interplay between traditional leadership and contemporary governance models, assessing their effectiveness in addressing issues such as resource management, conflict resolution, education, and health. By analysing the strengths and challenges of Hasalaru governance, this study aims to highlight the continued relevance of indigenous political systems in fostering sustainable and culturally grounded development in the face of modern challenges.

Keywords: Traditional, Social, Culture, Community. Growth.

1. Introduction

Traditional governance structures within indigenous communities play a critical role in shaping social order, community development, and cultural preservation. In the Hasalaru tribal community, these structures are rooted in a decentralized, participatory system of leadership that emphasizes consensus, respect for elders, and spiritual guidance. Elders, shamans, and tribal councils hold key positions in governing the community, ensuring that decisions align with the values and beliefs that have sustained the tribe for generations. This system not only provides a framework for managing social, economic, and spiritual affairs but also fosters a strong sense of collective responsibility and unity. In recent decades, however, the Hasalaru tribe has faced increasing external pressures such as state interventions, globalization, and socio-economic changes, which have challenged traditional

governance practices. Despite these challenges, the traditional governance system has shown resilience, continuing to play an important role in addressing issues such as resource management, conflict resolution, and community development. This journal explores the evolving role of traditional governance structures in Hasalaru tribal development, examining how these indigenous leadership models contribute to the community's growth while navigating modern challenges. By studying the balance between traditional and contemporary governance, this research highlights the enduring relevance of indigenous systems in promoting sustainable, culturally grounded development.

2. Literature Review

Tribal governance structures, often based on customary laws and elders' councils, have historically ensured community welfare and dispute resolution. A study by Sharma & Verma (2016) examines how village councils (Gram Sabha) and tribal chiefs play a pivotal role in maintaining social order in Indian tribes such as the Gond, Bhil, and Santhal communities. The study argues that these structures foster a sense of collective identity and cultural continuity (**Sharma & Verma, 2016**). Tribal governance structures are often linked to resource management and economic sustainability. According to Kumar et al. (2019), traditional community-led forest management in central India has significantly contributed to biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. The study highlights the role of Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand, where tribal communities collectively manage forests and distribute resources equitably (**Kumar et al., 2019**). A related study by Mishra & Patel (2020) examines customary land tenure systems among the Munda and Ho tribes. The authors argue that traditional governance mechanisms prevent land alienation and protect indigenous land rights, thereby reducing exploitation by external actors (**Mishra & Patel, 2020**). Traditional governance structures have historically been male-dominated, but recent research indicates increasing female participation in decision-making. According to Devi & Sen (2019), tribal women's involvement in self-help groups (SHGs) and grassroots governance has enhanced their social and economic status, particularly in Jharkhand and Odisha (**Devi & Sen, 2019**). The literature suggests that traditional governance structures continue to be integral to tribal development, particularly in social organization, resource management, and conflict resolution. However, challenges such as modernization, legal recognition, and gender disparities require adaptive governance models that integrate indigenous traditions with formal institutions. Future research should explore strategies to strengthen traditional governance while aligning it with contemporary governance frameworks to ensure sustainable tribal development.

Study Population

The study focuses on the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere, Karnataka, to examine the role of traditional governance structures in their development. The population includes tribal elders, village heads (Gowdas), community leaders, women representatives, and youth members to

understand intergenerational governance practices. The study also considers local self-governing institutions, traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms, and community-led resource management. A purposive sampling method is used to ensure representation across age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, interactions with government officials, NGOs, and researchers provide insights into external influences on Hasalaru governance structures and their adaptation to modern administrative systems.

According to the Census of India, the Hasalaru population was recorded as 20,820 in 2001 and increased to 24,466 by 2011, indicating steady demographic growth over the decade. Traditionally, the Hasalaru were hunters, and their food habits reflect a close relationship with the forest environment. They are non-vegetarian but do not consume beef. Their diet includes a variety of forest-based foods such as wild birds and red ants, which are collected from trees and considered a seasonal delicacy. Rice forms the staple food of the community, supplemented by locally available vegetables and forest produce. Certain social habits are common among both men and women. Tobacco is widely chewed with betel leaves, while men typically smoke beedies. The consumption of locally prepared intoxicants also forms part of their cultural practices. Fermented juice extracted from tale (palmyra palm) and baine (wild date palm) is commonly consumed. On some occasions, alcoholic beverages are distilled from fermented rice, cashew fruit, or jackfruit, and arrack is also consumed, especially during social gatherings and rituals.

Socially, the Hasalaru community is divided into nine subdivisions, namely Namadhari Hasala, Dodda Hasala, Upper Hasala, Karinumar Hasala, Belli Hasala, Baggaline or Antarangalu, Nada Hasala, and Male Hasala. These subdivisions play an important role in shaping social identity, marriage alliances, and community relations, reflecting the internal diversity and social organization of the Hasalaru community.

Finally, the analysis of challenges and opportunities in integrating traditional governance with modern administrative frameworks underscores the need for balance and mutual respect. While formal governance systems often overlook indigenous knowledge and leadership, traditional institutions continue to offer valuable insights into local social relations and cultural practices. Creating spaces for dialogue, recognizing customary authorities, and encouraging collaborative decision-making can help bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. The Hasalaru experience demonstrates resilience and adaptability, showing that inclusive governance is possible when traditional values and modern administrative structures are thoughtfully brought together.

Need for the Study

Understanding the traditional governance structures of the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere is crucial for preserving indigenous leadership systems, ensuring socio-economic

development, and strengthening cultural identity. As modernization and government policies influence tribal governance, studying these structures helps identify their relevance, challenges, and adaptability in contemporary governance. This research provides insights into community-led decision-making, resource management, and conflict resolution, contributing to policies that support tribal autonomy, sustainable development, and the integration of traditional and modern governance framework

Objectives

This study will focus on the aims and objectives of the selected phenomenon and will delve into the social, cultural, and contextual dimensions. It will focus on the structural and lived dimensions and how they shape behavioral and experiential responses, perception, and the change continuum within the study population. The aim of the study is to provide evidence-based contributions to the scholarly discourse on the identified issue.

- To examine the historical evolution of traditional governance structures within the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere
- To assess the impact of modernization, state policies, and external influences on Hasalaru governance systems.
- To identify challenges and opportunities in integrating traditional governance with modern administrative frameworks.

3. Methodology

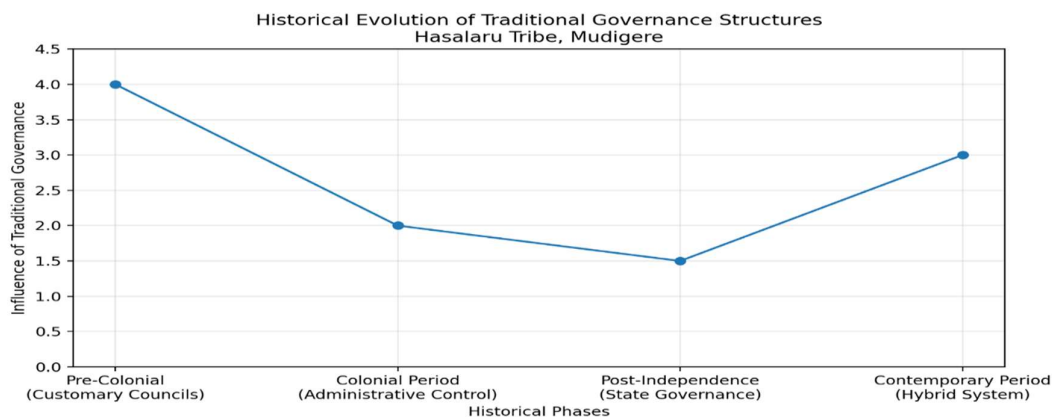
This study employs ethnographic fieldwork to explore the traditional governance structures of the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere. Participant observation allows direct engagement with governance practices, including village meetings, dispute resolution, and decision-making processes. In-depth interviews with tribal elders, Gowdas (village heads), and community members capture oral histories and leadership transitions. Focus group discussions (FGDs) explore the impact of governance on social cohesion and development. Comparative analysis with other tribal governance systems highlights unique and shared practices. Archival research examines historical records and legal documents. The study follows ethical considerations, ensuring informed consent and cultural sensitivity in all interactions with the community.

4. Findings and Discussion

Historical evolution of traditional governance structures within the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere

The historical evolution of traditional governance structures within the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere reflects a living process shaped by long-standing indigenous traditions as well as outside influences. In the pre-colonial period, governance among the Hasalaru was closely tied to everyday community life and based on kinship, customary laws, and shared decision-making. Elders and respected leaders were not merely authority figures but trusted guides who oversaw land use, social behaviour, ritual practices, and the resolution of disputes. Through these roles, traditional institutions helped maintain social harmony, ensured fair use of resources, and safeguarded cultural values passed down through oral traditions.

Figure 1: Historical evolution of tribal governance Structure among Hasalaru community



The arrival of colonial administration gradually disrupted these systems. New revenue practices, legal procedures, and administrative structures reduced the authority of indigenous leaders and weakened community councils. Over time, formal legal frameworks replaced customary methods of governance and conflict resolution. Following independence, the expansion of state governance, Panchayati Raj institutions, and development programmes further transformed traditional structures. While official recognition improved access to education, political participation, and economic opportunities, it also led to the gradual erosion of customary governance practices. Today, traditional governance among the Hasalaru survives in adapted forms. Although formal authority lies with state institutions, elders and informal councils continue to play meaningful roles in cultural life, rituals, and community mediation. This evolution highlights the Hasalaru community's resilience and their ongoing effort to balance tradition with modern governance systems.

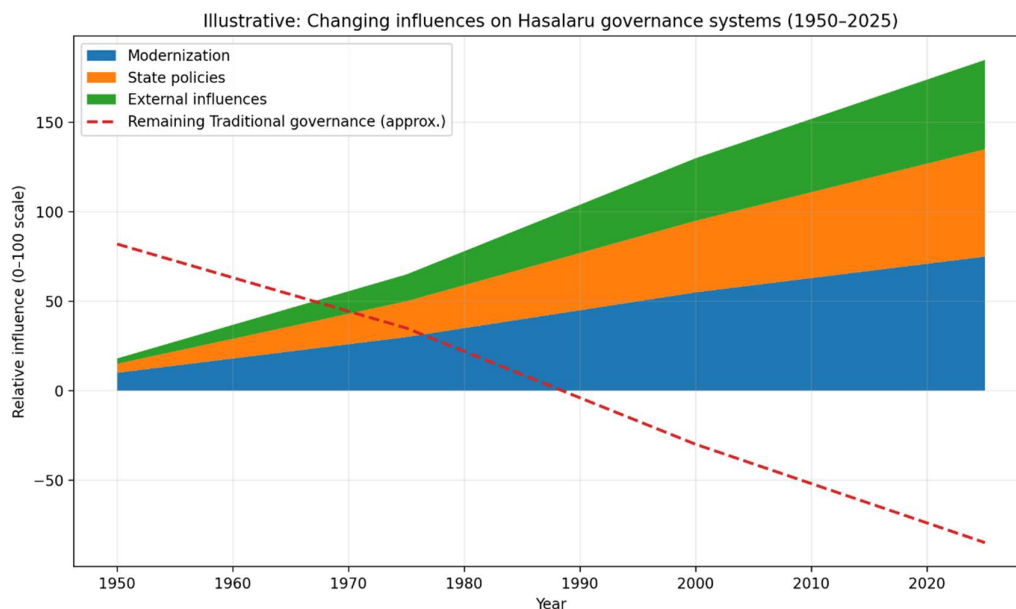
In the present day, traditional governance among the Hasalaru has not disappeared but has adjusted to changing circumstances. Although formal decision-making power now largely lies with state institutions, elders and informal community councils continue to hold respect and influence, especially in matters related to culture, rituals, and the resolution of everyday disputes. People often turn to these traditional figures for guidance and mediation, as they are trusted for their knowledge of

customs and community values. This ongoing coexistence of traditional and modern systems shows that Hasalaru governance is not a story of loss alone, but one of adaptation. It reflects a continuous effort to balance long-held traditions with the demands of modern administration, highlighting the community's resilience and its ability to selectively preserve indigenous institutions while responding to contemporary realities.

Impact of modernization, state policies, and external influences on Hasalaru governance systems.

The Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere has experienced great changes in their community governance systems and structures as a result of external systems influence, state policies, and modernization. An example of modernization is the introduction of new and better systems of education, infrastructure, and communication channels, which have all facilitated the gradual development of new systems of authority and decision-making. The community's youths, especially as a result of new levels of education and a higher standard of living, tend to illustrate high levels of confidence in systems of governance as opposed to the traditional councils. This new development is resulting in changes in the leadership structures of the community and the support for community initiatives, as well as new levels of community advocacy for systems of governance.

Figure 2: Changing Influence on Hasalaru governance system (1950-2025)



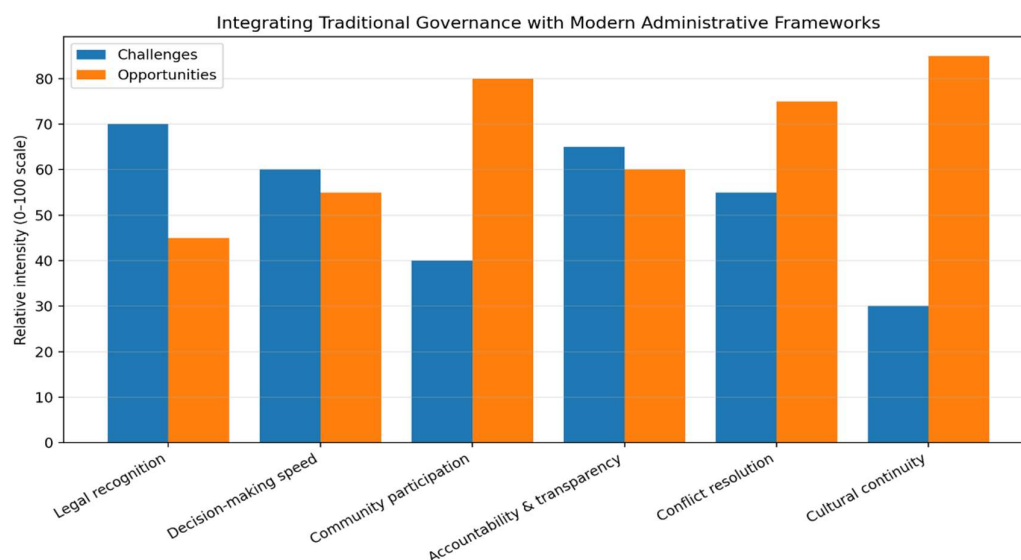
State policies have had the greatest level of influence in the development of the Hasalaru governance systems. Increased community engagement with state governance systems as a result of new policies that support social welfare, political inclusion through the Panchayati Raj system, and new policies aimed at the protection of the community have resulted in improved education, health

care services, and overall employment and community development. The everyday activities of traditional leaders have diminished as community governance systems cease to rely on customary laws and instead focus on state legal frameworks. There is further development and system changes as a result of increased influence from systems outside of the community, including faith-based organizations, agencies, and other non-governmental system developers. By creating new systems, these external actors have, in some instances, influenced and enhanced the community's advocacy, increased support, and civic engagement.

Challenges and opportunities in integrating traditional governance with modern administrative frameworks.

The Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere faces significant challenges, but also meaningful opportunities when attempting the integration of traditional governance systems with modern administrative frameworks. Social systems such as enduring modern governance, pinned down by bureaucracy and administrative theory, obeying the rules to the letter, very little wiggle room for indigenism and local knowledge, and traditional governance systems, with their own systems of social control, community policing, communalism, and the authoritative primacy of the elder, civil relations, and social peace, comes to a head. Traditionally rooted systems of governance, with their own systems of civil relations and social peace, hold community relations and their social order in a peaceable way. Admin systems, of their own governance, through bureaucracy, and administrator theory, with rules to the letter, allow no indigenism nor locally centered knowledge.

Figure 3: Traditional Governance with a modern administrative framework



Lacking legal approval of customary law, traditional governance systems arrive at traditional leaders' roles being limited within the frameworks of modern systems of decision making. Socio, and

civil relations of community systems operate at dimensions very different from those found in modern systems of state administration. Importantly, contrasting systems do capture the attention of the governance systems of modern administrative systems, as a compliment of traditional systems to modern systems of governance. Systems of contemporary governance, with systems of civil relations and social peacemaking, are best articulated through the traditional councils of elders and community councils at local levels of civil governance. The Hasalaru community attributes their successful integration to the collaborating of traditional institutions and state authorities with mutual respect and constructive dialogue. Documenting the practices of indigenous leaders and customs, and acknowledging their governance roles facilitate the closing of the gaps between the old and the new. Integration of traditional governance and contemporary administration can promote inclusive development, social justice, and the preservation of culture and traditions amidst changing social and political dynamics.

5. Conclusion

The present study shows that traditional governance structures among the Hasalaru tribal community in Mudigere continue to hold deep significance in everyday life, even after long periods of colonial rule, state intervention, and modernization. For generations, Hasalaru governance was rooted in customary laws, collective decision-making, and the respected authority of elders. These institutions were not separate from daily life but closely tied to cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and shared responsibilities. Through this system, the community maintained social harmony, resolved conflicts locally, and managed resources in ways that supported collective well-being. Over time, colonial administration and later post-independence state governance reduced the formal power of these traditional institutions. Legal systems, bureaucratic procedures, and Panchayati Raj institutions gradually replaced customary councils in official decision-making. Yet, this shift did not erase traditional governance from Hasalaru society. Instead, these institutions adapted to changing circumstances. Elders and informal councils continue to be trusted figures, especially in matters related to rituals, moral guidance, community disputes, and maintaining social cohesion.

Modern influences such as education, welfare schemes, and the involvement of NGOs have brought both benefits and challenges. While they have improved access to healthcare, political participation, and economic opportunities, they have also weakened the autonomy of traditional leadership and overlooked indigenous knowledge. A major challenge remains the lack of formal recognition for customary governance within modern administrative systems. At the same time, the Hasalaru experience highlights the value of hybrid governance, where traditional institutions work

alongside state structures. By respecting and documenting indigenous practices, it is possible to bridge tradition and modernity, ensuring development that is inclusive, culturally rooted, and socially just.

Acknowledgement

I sincerely thank **Prof. M. R. Gangadhar** for offering the course The Evolution of Traditional Farming Practices in Hasalaru Tribal Society and for his invaluable guidance throughout my research. His encouragement, insightful advice, and examples greatly enriched my understanding of the subject. His mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my academic journey, and I deeply appreciate his support and motivation in helping me complete this study.

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Figure 1: Historical evolution of tribal governance Structure among Hasalaru community

Figure 2: Changing Influence on Hasalaru governance system (1950-2025)

Figure 3: Traditional Governance with modern administrative framework



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