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Kaanu Center: A convergence of South Indian Adivasi voices and aspirations

The Kaanu collective is committed to ensuring Adivasi voices remain at the forefront, with non-Adivasi allies playing supportive roles.

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Kaanu center launch event at Chamrajnagar BR, Hills

The hills guarding the boundaries of Chamarajanagar resonated with the echoes of ancient Soliga folk songs as the Kaanu Center was officially launched on Sunday, 25 August.

The event, attended by a diverse gathering of villagers, volunteers, and representatives of various Adivasi tribes, marked the beginning of a significant initiative aimed at preserving and promoting Adivasi knowledge and identity.

The launch was a vibrant affair, with the Soliga tribe performing traditional songs that underscored the cultural richness the centre seeks to preserve.

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The Kaanu vision

The Kaanu Center, as outlined during the event, is a collective endeavour with three primary goals: to publish a book on Adivasi identity in southern India, establish a physical and online centre for dialogue on Adivasi issues, and create an annotated bibliography of important writings for scholars working on South Indian Adivasi issues.

A meeting among the members of the Kaanu Collective followed the launch, leading to the creation

of a simple yet profound “charter.” This charter opens membership to three categories: Adivasi scholars, Adivasi community members, and Adivasi allies.

The collective is committed to ensuring that Adivasi voices remain at the forefront of the initiative, with non-Adivasi allies, like Prof Werner Soors, playing supportive roles.

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Need For Documentation

Dr Krishnamurthy, an Irula Adivasi researcher with a PhD in history currently at the Karnataka State Tribal Research Institute, Mysore, highlighted the erosion of traditional knowledge.

He stressed the urgent need for Adivasi researchers to create frameworks that better document their oral knowledge traditions. His sentiments were echoed by many, who emphasized the importance of preserving these traditions for future generations.

Dr C Madegowda, a Soliga Adivasi researcher currently with ATREE, spoke passionately about Adivasi science as an expression of the various forms of tacit knowledge their elders possess.

His words served as a powerful reminder of the deep connection between the Adivasi communities and their natural environment.

Dr Susheela, a PhD student from the Koraga community, shared her personal journey, detailing the exclusion and untouchability she had to overcome to pursue research in social work.

Her story resonated with the audience, shedding light on the numerous challenges faced by first-generation Adivasi learners. Other Adivasi researchers also shared their struggles, painting a vivid picture of the barriers that still exist in academia.

Focus on South Indian tribes

Divya, a representative of the Paniya Tribal Community, also shared her experience of joining the Kaanu Collective with **South First**. Her involvement with Kaanu began when she was invited to visit BR Hills and understand the community’s needs.

“This is the first time I’m hearing about something like this being set up in South India, especially focused on the southern tribes,” she said, expressing her excitement about the potential impact of the centre.

Prof Soors, a Belgian public health researcher with a rich background in working with indigenous communities, shared his journey to the Kaanu Center.

His involvement in social health insurance research in India brought him into close contact with Adivasi communities, particularly the Soliga people.

“Building trust has been the biggest challenge,” he admitted, acknowledging the delicate balance of being a non-Adivasi contributing to a predominantly Adivasi initiative. However, his commitment is unwavering, as he continues to work on expanding the centre’s collection of literature and resources.

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Charter for inclusivity, empowerment

The event highlighted the collective's commitment to inclusivity and the empowerment of Adivasi communities. As the Kaanu Center moves forward, it aims to bring together a broader range of Adivasi groups, fostering a space where their voices can be heard and their knowledge preserved.

The challenges are many, but the enthusiasm and dedication of those involved suggest a promising future for this unique initiative.

With plans for future events and ongoing efforts to secure funding and staff, the Kaanu Center is poised to become a vital resource for Adivasi communities and scholars alike.

As Prof Soors aptly puts it, "This will be one of the challenges for the future—ensuring Adivasi ownership and making the centre truly theirs, while allies like myself work in the background as support."

The Kaanu Center is not just a repository of knowledge; it is a living, breathing space where Adivasi culture and identity can flourish, guided by the very communities it seeks to serve.

(Edited by Majnu Babu)

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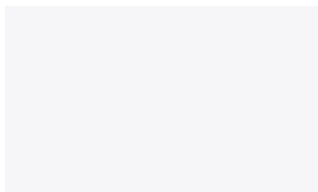
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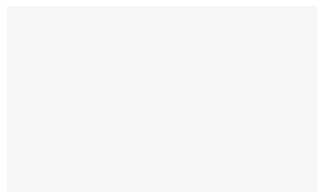
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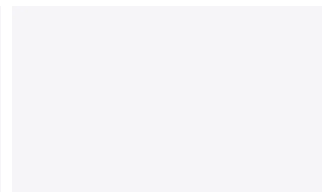
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