

# Patterns of Settlement on Caste Basis in Jammu and Kashmir: An Observation

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## Abstract

Traditionally, caste is a central aspect which determines the patterns of settlements. Historically, the lower section of society consists of scheduled castes that were exploited and segregated. Despite there being interdependency among them, they were discriminated against on the basis of caste. They were being coerced to do unclean occupations by giving religious justifications. If we look at the patterns of settlement in rural areas today, we can see that members of the scheduled caste are concentrated in areas with few basic services and infrastructure. There has been land reform after independence, and scheduled caste people were given those lands which were barren and unfertile. Despite having a large percentage of the population, their needs have yet to be met by successive governments in power. There is an urgent need to improve their living conditions in rural areas.

**Keywords** Land Settlement, Discrimination, Land Reforms, Interdependency, Roshni Act.

## Introduction

Caste has always been difficult to define due to its complexity. Certain researchers have attempted to define caste in terms of social status and race. Varna and caste are not usually connected to class and race. Despite the fact that the term caste derives from the Portuguese word "casta," which means "lineage" or "race," it brings to mind notions of fixed jobs and occupations, as well as social stagnation grounded by endogamy regulations. All of these characteristics are based on religiously imposed concepts of "purity" and "pollution," which ultimately lead to a social hierarchy. As a result, the caste system has emerged.

To begin with, there are just four castes in India, excluding the untouchables, according to the Varna system, and the number is consistent across the country. However, there were occupational categories that were not assimilated by Varna even during Vedic times, although it is uncertain whether these organisations were castes in the sociological sense. There are a lot of castes in today's world, in any geographical area. According to Ghurye, each linguistic region has around 200 caste communities, each of which is endogamous and serves as the individual's sphere of efficient social life.

## Caste in North India

Varna, in layman's terms, refers to the division of Hindu society into four classes: Brahmana (Brahmin, traditionally, priest and scholar), Kahatriya (ruler and warrior), Vaishya (trader), and Shudra (slave, peasant, labourer, and servant). The Shudras are not 'twice-born,' whereas the first three castes are. Outside the Varna system are the untouchables (Ghurye 1950). There are only four orders in the Varna system of the Vedas. It doesn't allow for the untouchables. Different degrees of any unitary quality are represented by the rankings. In different aspects, the Brahman and Kshatriya Varnas, for example, are mutually exclusive and incompatible.

Moreover, caste is one of the traditional concerns of the social sciences in India that persist to be relevant even today. As a general perception about caste is that it was an outdated concept until it was rejuvenated by the British government of India and after independence both Indian and foreign authors have more in-depth understanding about the Indian caste system especially in rural India. Before the 1930s and after 1950s the condition of the Scheduled Castes in the north to south states was miserable. In academia there is a sequence of events from the Scheduled Caste respondents, they exposed the originality of the caste system with following facts. Lower castes were not allowed to cover up the



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upper part of their body. They could not wear a turban or fresh clothes (especially white). Even during their marriages or any other special occasions, they were not allowed to sit on horseback. Lower castes could not take into service musicians and could not go for any public demonstration. Those who broke these social-religious rules had to face atrocities. They had to face socio-religious discrimination from different walks of life. Although the issue of caste exclusion and Scheduled Castes socio-political movements have become increasingly popular in academic research, especially in the North Indian context, there remains a complete silence about the Scheduled Castes experience in the northern-most region of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Religious justification to maintain caste system in India**

Untouchability was also condemned by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak during the independence fight. Tilak, for example, felt that untouchability had nothing to do with Vedic dharma and that it was the result of old Brahmins' machinations. He went on to say that untouchability was a sin against God, and that he couldn't respect a God who sanctioned religious penalties against a group of people by labelling them as "untouchable" (Rao 2009).

Gandhi was similarly adamant in his defence of caste structures. This may be traced back to two key factors. Here, we must remember Gandhi's personal devotion to the caste system, or varnashrama dharma. Furthermore, it may be explained by defending the caste system. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the group's leader, referred to the caste system as "religious federalism." In reality, Tilak argued that a patriot could only be a caste protector. He was also against the right of entry of non-Brahmin and untouchable children to school (Rao 2009).

There are so many restrictions against sudras, according to Dharma shastra, because brahmins want their regulations to remain and they are afraid that the sudras would organise a revolt against them. The practise of untouchability is used to keep their connection together. According to Manusmriti, in order to repress Manu, a brahmin pandit, he has established a series of inhumane and immoral rules against untouchables (sudras) in the name of religion.

Furthermore, the drama shastra enforced centuries of history on the lower castes and imposed a set of social, political, economic, and religious constraints, rendering them completely reliant on the higher castes. As a result, the untouchable had a happy life.

### **Objective of the Study**

To know the structure of caste in Reasi district of Jammu region and its settlement in the rural area, especially our focus on scheduled caste people's rights of land ownership. In this research, we will cover the agrarian relations of lower caste people in the Jammu region after the implementation of land reforms. There are observed development methods for scheduled caste people in rural areas. By analysing the agrarian social structure after massive land reforms in the region and also focus on basic amenities for people in rural areas of Reasi district.

### **Review of Literature History of caste in Jammu and Kashmir**

The political narratives surrounding a two-decade-old process of land acquisition and development in Rajarhat, a former rural community in the Indian state of West Bengal, are examined in this article. These stories are set against the backdrop of a neoliberal state working as a corporate facilitator, notably in land affairs, with the resulting dispossession. Rajarhat's complex politics emerged during West Bengal's former communist rule, creating an interesting paradox of a self-identified Left state engaging in aggressive and violent land acquisition. The article also disproves the long-held political fiction of caste racial discrimination (Das 2020).

Along with the dichotomy between Arya and Dasa, society is divided into three orders in the Rig Veda: Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya, or vis. The first two exemplified the poet's dual roles as "priest" and "warrior" leaders. The third section appeared to be a collection of all the ordinary folks. These three orders then evolved into the four divisions we recognise today: brahmin, Kshatriya, vaishya, and Shudra. The creation tale of the Purusha sukta in the eleventh mandala of the Rig Veda depicts the introduction of the chaturvarna in a symbolic fashion. It is

said that the creator created the first community (the Brahmins) from the mouth and the second community (the Kshatriyas) from the heart (Pankaj 2019).

As stated above, upper-caste Dogra Hindu, and mainly Rajput, are politically and economically the maximum effective network within the Jammu region. Their dominant role may be traced to the Dogra monarchs who dominated the country of Jammu and Kashmir from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Belonging to the Rajput caste, their rulers granted the incredible privilege to their caste and allied with different upper-caste Hindu which included Brahmins and Mahajans. Scheduled Castes and different lower-caste Hindu, collectively with the massive majority of Muslims, had been subjected to diverse styles of oppression.

### **Caste in Jammu and Kashmir**

Jammu and Kashmir is popularly known for regional disputes for a long time between India and Pakistan. State has been comprehensively examined in order to understand the conflict complexity of history and socio political elements. This works primarily focus on scheduled caste's benefit after the land reforms in Jammu region. It's objective is to go beyond Kashmir conflict-centric methods, researcher investigating the caste dynamics and lower caste struggle approach for betterment of daily lives. Historically, the Indian state (Jammu and Kashmir) was separated into three administrative regions but the Union government has removed the article 370 and divided the state into two union territories. Data shows the entire population of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, about 72.62 % live in villages in rural areas by Census Data of India, 2011.

Jammu has a predominately Dogra region and its Hindu majority population (about 65%), there is substantial Muslim minority (nearly 30%), and a small proportion of Christians and Sikhs (approximately 5%). Scheduled Castes are not politically organised to defend their caste and class interests in Jammu region. Apart from caste interests, such as avoiding physical and social marginalisation in Hindu population, as well as stigmatisation by upper and middle caste Hindus, they have other concerns. After land reform, Scheduled Caste people prepared the largest group of those who benefited from the land redistribution in Jammu. Around 1952, about 250,000 Hindu including untouchables in the Jammu area, had gained land for their livelihood, according to Brecher (Bhatia 2014).

This paper is preferred to discuss all implications of caste from history to contemporary in state. Caste plays an important role with religion and economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. As we discussed above this region is not different from other states but its popularity about caste is less like most dominated caste popular states, there is also caste consciousness of different caste based groups and caste based associations. This paper particularly focuses on scheduled castes population in the state and its importance of land reforms for weaker sections in the state. Historically, in the state, the depressed classes or weaker sections constituted almost one-fourth related to Hindu population of Jammu region. They were humiliated and badly treated socially and economically in all aspects. There is also the practice of untouchability by upper caste Hindus; they avoided contact with the Scheduled Caste people. If they get in touch with the Scheduled Castes compel them to purify themselves with the bath by Census of India, 1961. They excluded all socio-religious intercourse in the state. They had no right of entry into temples and public places, such as wells and tanks. This paper, thus, makes an effort to look into the deep rooted caste system in the region. We can see all these things through one Indological perspective lens. After independence we have written a constitution, it gives us several rights of freedom and expression for all its citizens but after independence we can see the situations of Scheduled Castes in the contemporary union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Lower Caste Benefit from Reforms in Jammu and Kashmir**

There is no merit in the allegation that the land reforms were anti-Hindu. There were 233 Muslim Jagirdars in Jammu and Kashmir at that time and 173 non-Muslim Jagirdars. According to Meenakshi Moza, one more figure can be helpful in understanding this whole scenario in her research: out of the owners of more than 100 kanals in the valley, 8,408 were non-Muslims and 82,748 were Muslims. Now, if we look at the religious division of farmers with less than 100 kanals of land with this, then the situation can be understood properly. There were 2,60,541 Muslim farmers who owned less than 100 kanals of land.

On the other hand there were only 18,692 such non-Muslim farmers. The situation becomes very clear if we take into account about 4 percent non-Muslim and 96 percent Muslim population in the Valley at that time. The way the benefits were extended to their people during the Dogra Raj, they naturally had the ownership of the lands in the Jammu region.

Mir Qasim, who was a part of the process of these reforms, tells in his biography 'My Life and Times' that Harijans had benefited greatly from this reform in Jammu region. Brekhar writes in his book *The Struggle for Kashmir* that out of the total seven lakh beneficiaries, 2.5 lakh were Dalits from the Jammu region.

Featuring how the advantages of land changes arrived at the most underprivileged sections in Jammu and Kashmir, George Mathew states, As indicated by the research completed by Dr Ashish Saxena in Jammu region, during the 1950s-70s, out of the absolute surplus land where there are 672 kanals predominantly to take away from two castes Rajputs and Mahajans, 70.24% was assigned to Scheduled Castes tenant. An extremist intergenerational shift in the occupation example of the Scheduled Castes as far as landless agrarian workers to land-claiming labourers from grandfather's age (nil) to 47.1% in the current age has occurred in the district.

#### **Land Reform in Jammu and Kashmir**

The situation transformed from the 1940s to 1950s, when the Kashmiri movement against the kingdom in the region resulted in the end of kingdom rule. It was overthrown and the formation of a new participatory democracy in the post-independence era. Sheikh Abdullah, a well-known leader of the National Conference Party in Kashmir, was in the forefront of the battle (founded in 1932 as the Muslim Party). The transfer of political authority from the Dogras of Jammu to the Kashmiri leadership culminated in the abolition of the feudal structure in both areas. Under Sheikh Abdullah's leadership, the National Conference implemented revolutionary land reforms and extensive economic changes. The Big Land Estate was by far the most important.

Sheikh Abdullah, in the wake of turning into the PM of the state in 1948, chose to annihilate the force of the landed privileged, and to take the 1931 development to its obvious end result by satisfying the guarantees made to the workers of land changes in his Naya Kashmir announcement (1944). The reports guaranteed an extremist rebuilding of society and their economy in the state.

The Big Landed Estates Abolition Act in Jammu and Kashmir was passed on October 18, 1950, by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. The demonstration was pointed toward converting into training the standard of moving area to the "real tiller" of the earth (Prasad 2014).

In 1946, this party launched a mass campaign against the Maharaja's rule, and when elections were held in 1951, the National Conference won all 75 seats of the Constituent Assembly (which later became the state assembly) in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah became the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir at that time.

Sheikh Abdullah is also remembered for land reforms in Jammu and Kashmir and for allotment of land to lakhs of landless farmers. But when Sheikh Abdullah started raising the issue of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, his government was dismissed and he was arrested in August 1953. After that he was under house arrest for several years.

But, where this move led to the attraction of India to the majority Muslims of the valley. At the same time, the reason for the hatred of Sheikh for the Pandits of the Valley and the Dogras of Jammu, whose lands were lost? A hallmark of its protest in Jammu is found in the note 'The Situation in Jammu' sent by Karan Singh to Jawaharlal Nehru on December 22, 1952. He writes, about the effects the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act has not proved satisfactory in the Jammu province. The policy of the state is in favour of the farmer, be it right or wrong. As a result those who own the land have been completely destroyed. They have not been given any compensation. In fact, they have no land left with which they can feed their families. The small Jagirdars, most of whom are Rajputs, have been the worst affected, as they have no savings and are completely dependent on land.

**The Roshni Act**

The Jammu and Kashmir State Lands (Grant of Ownership to Holders) Act, 2001 was brought to give ownership rights to the people occupied on government land and said that the proceeds from it would be used for investment in power projects. Along with this, the government started giving farmers the ownership of agricultural land free of cost, under which they had to pay only Rs 100 per kanal as documentation fee.

There is an allegation of a scam of 25 thousand crore rupees in the Roshni Act. After the order of the High Court, the Union Territory Administration completely abolished this law and cancelled all land transfers under the Roshni Act. The High Court has ordered a CBI inquiry, calling the Roshni Act unconstitutional.

**Outcomes of the Reforms**

Land reform, according to George Mathew (2011), was a turning point in the history of Jammu and Kashmir, and a evaluate, the first of its type in the subcontinent, was landed by many elements of society and individuals from all walks of life in the century. Land reform substantially aided marginalised groups, particularly scheduled castes, in becoming landowners.

According to another study on land reforms in the state by Ashish Saxena (Mathew 2011), between the 1950s and 1970s, 70.24 percent of excess land taken away from Rajputs and Mahajans was allocated to Scheduled Caste tenants. A significant inter-generation change in the structure of employment of the state. The credit for the complete implementation of land reform in Jammu and Kashmir goes to Sheikh Abdullah. It is because of them that every resident of Jammu and Kashmir has land. No one is landless.

**Methodology**

The current study attempts to consider the socio-religious and rural settlement after big land reforms among Scheduled Castes in the Reasi district of the Jammu region. In this research proper care was taken to collect both the applications of primary and secondary sources in sequence. Observation methods were also used for respondents to know their family background and socio-economic profile, and informal talks with the family members of the respondents for the purpose of data collection through the fieldwork. The researcher has chosen two villages from different blocks in the Reasi district. First village Bidda from Arnas block and second village Taleen from Panthal block, both villages chosen as a random basis for research. Apart from that, a small number of secondary sources are also used for data collection like census data, research papers, books and newspaper articles etc.

**Statistics Used in the Study**

Census Data 2011

**Analysis****Interdependency with Discrimination**

During fieldwork, a lot of things have been noticed about interdependency and discrimination. Different kinds of caste interdependency, especially in village areas, where mostly upper caste people need labour for any kind of housework, but lower caste people are probably invited. There are so many jobs like agriculture, house construction work including carpentry, any kind of religious ceremonies or village festivals including local deities they invite, especially the drum beater caste, and removal of dead animals' skins. On the other hand, the interdependencies of the lower caste are also different kinds of dependency on the upper caste. They mostly go and take money when they have a difficult situation in their day-to-day lives. Marriage and other religious problems, they go or invite a priest. They are interdependent in some ways, but both are kept in mind by caste norms. Nobody crosses the caste barrier in the village, even though both castes belong to the same religion. Both the upper and lower castes accept all these norms and values, so there is no question of oppression.

**Result and Discussion**

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### Conclusion

Because the overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries were poor, there was a huge backlash to the land reforms, as predicted. There were also allegations of the "Praya Parishad" launching an anti-reform agitation, but it remained silent. These changes were well-received not just in Jammu and Kashmir's impoverished Muslim-dominated districts, but also among scheduled caste and lower-middle-class Hindus. (Prasad 2014).

The occupational structure of rural society has undergone major changes. Service provider castes such as Kumhar, Tarkhan, Teli, Julaha, Masha and others are occasionally needed, but most of these caste categories have become outdated in the villages of the Jammu region. There have been a large number of castes associated with non-traditional works, non-caste-bound occupations and as well as these castes performing a social interaction with new occupational groupings. As a result, the connection between inherited practice, status and traditional professions has broken down, and it is no longer essential to explain one's occupation status in terms of its confirmation.

Finally, after fieldwork observation researchers find a comparative analysis of village land settlement in Reasi district. In rural areas, most of the villages land settlement is totally caste wise. Lower caste people have a land side of the village not in the centre of the village. It shows that after land reforms in the state. The results of agrarian social structure in the village level give the impression to be vastly different from the villages where traditional farming and agrarian relations are stronger. Thus, it was presumed that land reforms may have a degree of different implications for agrarian relations after land settlement in the region. The land was given through reform to the Scheduled Caste people in the village, and it was not too fertile. This land was also given to them outside of the village, where there were no basic facilities.

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