

## CHANGING PATTERNS OF CASTE SYSTEM IN JAJMANI SYSTEM: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Present study is based on different factors in changing pattern of castes in Jajmani system. A society, for its smooth functioning essentially needs specialization of functions and exchange of goods. In the Indian society, specialization and exchange of services and goods are traditionally regulated by the institution of caste. The status of an individual is determined by the hierarchy of caste and occupation they hold. Each acquires the skills of his forefathers and inherits the profession and trade of his caste. The relationship between a food producing family and the other specialist families, which supply goods and services to it by receiving rewards were regulated by a socio-economic system known as the "Jajmani System". (Kumar, n.b.: 1 www.geocities.com) The prime focus of this research study is different changing pattern in agrarian social structure in the Jajmani system and those factors which have been affected to this system. After India acquired independence, changes in Indian society took place rapidly. The Jajmani system could not remain unaffected. With declining Jajmani system new inter-caste relationships are emerging due to various factors like; education, awareness, industrial growth, government programmes, policies etc.*

**Key words:** *Caste, Jajmani System, Zamidari, inter-caste relationship, Agrarian*

### **INTRODUCTION**

India is predominantly an agrarian economy. More than two-third of its population depends on primary sector. Many changes have been observed in agrarian social structure in pre and post independent era. The British administration introduced three different types of revenue settlement patterns (*Zamidari, Rayatwari and Mahalwari*) in the country which brought about changes in Indian agrarian social structure. After independence Land Reform Acts, Land Ceiling, Abolition of *Zamidari* System, Green Revolution and different developmental programmes also brought the substantive changes in

the pace of social and economic set up in Rural India. These changes rapidly developed during the past two-three decades. Traditional *Jajmani* system is one of the most important parts of the Indian agrarian social structure (Mohanty, 2000). The *jajmani* system reflects inter-caste relationship, particularly between the *jajmans* and working caste (Kameen). After independence, for the socio-economic development, Indian Government introduced several programs and policies that are beneficial for the upliftment of the serving caste but has brought several changes in the traditional *jajmani* system.

*Jajmani* system is a system of traditional occupational obligations. Castes in early India were

economically interdependent on one another. The traditional specialized occupation of a villager followed the specialization assigned to his caste. The specialization of occupation led to the exchange of services in the village society. This relationship between the 'servicing' and the 'served' caste was not contractual, individual, impersonal, temporary, or limited but it was caste-oriented, long-term and broadly supportive. This system in which the durable relationship between a landowning family and the landless families that supply them with goods and services is called the Jajmani system. Indian Society is structured on caste pattern and the economic and professional relationship between various castes in this setup is called Jajmani system. It is a pre-established division of labor among the castes sanctioned by religious and social traditions.

Jajmani is a peculiarity of Indian villages. In India, professions are generally hereditary and there is a long tradition of families carrying on selfsame professions over generations. Normally, there is no deviation from the hereditary professions. Thus, the son of a carpenter will become carpenter and the son of an iron-smith will become an iron-smith. Every Indian villager considers it natural and right to engage in professions peculiar to his caste and, on account of long tradition, feels at home in it and easily acquires proficiency.

## JAJMANI SYSTEM AND ITS ORIGIN

The institution was not unknown although more often referred to under the title of "Village community". William H. Wiser first coined the term "Jajmani system" using the Hindi word to describe the patrons as he observed it in a village called Karimpur in the Western part of Uttar Pradesh, sometime before 1930. The term Jajmani was originally used in the anthropological literature by William H. Wiser in his work, "*The Hindu Jajmani System*" (1936). He noted that there was no exact equivalent of this system in the west so he adopted what he asserted to be the North Indian terminology: the person providing the service calls

his entire clientele his *Jajmani* or birt- these terms being identical in meaning. The family or individually to the head of the family whom the carpenter provides services is called the carpenters' *Jajmans*.

## MEANING AND DEFINITION OF JAJMANI SYSTEM

The meaning and usage of the term *Jajmani* can be explained as follows. Neither the word "Jajmani" nor the term "Jajman" is used by those who are part of this system. However, the latter is very widely used to designate the employer or patron with respect to the person he employs. The term, *Jajman* comes from the Sanskrit word Yajamana, a participle having reflexive force and meaning sacrifice. This type of relationship is found all over India and is called by different names – Jajmani in North, bar – batute in Maharashtra, Mirasi in Tamil Nadu and adade in Karnataka.

According to William H. Wiser (1958: xviii), "Each caste at some time during the year is expected to render a fixed type of service to each other caste." He further states that these service relationships reveal that the priest, bard, accountant, goldsmith, florist Vegetable grower, etc. are served by all the other castes. They are the *Jajmans* of the other castes. In turn each of these castes has a form of service to perform for the others. Each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes, which is "Jajmani". This system of interrelatedness in service within the caste system is called the Jajmani system.

Green revolution also brought about a wide ranging readjustment in the social institution. Obviously a rigid caste hierarchy, a Jajmani arrangement and other similar institutions, which were suited to the present system no longer, fit into the changed society that is emerging (Aggarwal,1979). Caste by defining the occupations as permitted, preferred and prohibited for each of the various castes, has controlled the whole system

of the division of labour and the exchange of goods and services.

Thus, there are castes, which specialize in functions. The functions, which are traditionally regarded as polluted, can only be performed by the polluted castes. Besides, there're artisans who specialize the skills in their occupations. A farmer family requires services and goods from all these specialist castes. Therefore, they maintain interdependent relationship through the exchange of goods and services.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are several studies related to Jajmani system and caste system focuses on changing patterns of Inter caste relationship in rural or agrarian society. All the studies show to change in Jajmani system and emerging in inter-caste relationship. But there is hardly any study to focus on the comprehensive factors for bringing changes in Jajmani system.

**Ghosh (2012)** has highlighted in his study "A Diachronic Study of the Political economy of Ranikhera village in Delhi", the changes that have taken place in the political economy of Ranikhera village between 1953 and 2008. Ghosh in his findings concluded that the village is still under the dominance of the Jats. This caste owns the maximum percentage of land. However, he has observed a decline in the percentage of landowning households. There is a sharp decline of 20 percent. Only 34% are involved in cultivation. The other landholders are the Brahmins.

**Sahay, G. R. (1998)** focused on the "caste system in contemporary rural Bihar". He examined that the caste system in India is dynamic and complex. The findings of the study revealed that seven castes along with the Muslim community were more than 50 percent and are involved in business activities. In all, there were 90 families who were involved in some or the other kind of business. 50 percent of the eleven castes (eight belong to the backward class and three to the scheduled class) hire labour power or agricultural laborers. It also revealed that if a

person wants to change his occupation, the society does not penalize him/her for changing the traditional occupation.

**Mishra N. (2008)** has evaluated the effects of the technological revolution particularly on the social and the cultural setting. The findings of the study as, the day to day relationship that was prevalent between *kamin* and the *jajmans* has certainly gone under several changes but the very characteristics if the Jajmani system has remained intact. The spirit of reciprocity has not seen the erosion. The ideology of the relationship holds a good position in the rural India. The relationship has accommodated with the changing socio-economic actuality.

**Sharma (1987)** has stated that the system of jajmani is related to the social, economic and cultural structure of different caste groups. The continuation of Jajmani system is because of the contact with towns, out and in migration, education, cultural and social awareness, and market forces on the part of the service castes. The pattern of jajmani has changed in a way that the upper caste which used to get their service done from the service caste now depends on the labors from town and cities.

**Miller D. (1986)** studied the "Exchange and alienation in the Jajmani system" is an ethnographic study that revealed that the Jajmani system is taken to mean of Universalist tendencies but generated at the local level in historically specific forms. Although the term Jajmani is not employed anymore but its roots are so deep that somewhere its existence is found in the actions and ideology of the local people.

**Wiser W. (1958)** explained that the inter caste solidarity is clearly evident in the Jajmani system. One of the factors that led to the disintegration of the Jajmani system was the declining economic condition of the service providers. In his study he found that the roles are interchangeable and not fixed. The Jajmani system is inter-relatedness of service, caste and rewards.

**Sharma K. L. (2012)** has explained in his paper "Is there Today Caste System or there is only Caste in India?" that within the caste structure all the castes

are equal in principle but the reality is different. The study conducted in the six villages of Rajasthan, the author found that there are three levels of mobility. Family, group, and an individual are the three level of mobility. A clear mobility was not evident in caste and sub- castes. The mobility was not even in equal measures.

**Jodhka S. S. (2017)** described in his paper "Social Dynamics and Exclusionary Rural Transformations" the changing patterns of caste, community and gender in social organization within non-farm economy. The non-farm economy in India has rapidly grown. This resulted into decline of the workforce in the agriculture sector. The author highlighted that in 2011 to 2012, there has been an increase from 19.2% to 37.6% in the non-farm sector and those employed in the agriculture sector has declined from 70% to 48.9%.

## FINDINGS & RESULTS

- ❖ Jajmani system is an example of solidarity in inter-caste relationship but at the same time it does not represent symmetrical interrelationship for the members.
- ❖ Technology and introduction of commercial crops are sufficient causes of bringing about a change in traditional agrarian relations.
- ❖ At present village people are dependent upon towns and cities for the services which earlier they used to get from the functionary castes.
- ❖ The villager neither understands nor trusts on the "professional" relationship that is characteristic of the urban-secular society.
- ❖ Jajmani system founded in village due to the counter pressures of corporate family life occupational differentiation, ritual evidence on the one hand and the requirements of functional integration of community life on the other.

- ❖ The system of embedded exchange may be understood as a praxis which ameliorates the alienation intrinsic to circulation which in the case of Jajmani may be fostered both by the division of labour and by monetization.
- ❖ In Jajmani system the right to serve a particular village is not always transmitted by inheritance.
- ❖ Unlike the common stereotype of village life, most transaction is on a contractual basis several different types of payments to racialists are made some involving cash.
- ❖ The role of the political system in bringing about the change in the occupational structure and in affecting the disposition of human labour in society is very vivid in the Indian case.
- ❖ Unequal distribution of power is not inconsistent with general solidarity, while pure coercion probably precludes both conflict and solidarity.
- ❖ Technological changes and the increasing land fragmentation have reduced the need of labour for help in agriculture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Jajmani system is related to other system like caste system, religious system of landownership, kinship system and the political structure of the village. As such the change in these systems has affected the functioning of the Jajmani system in the present scenario. The important changes in society that have affected the Jajmani system in the last five or six decades are: reduction in the power of the village elders' councils, effect of the factory system and industrialization on the quality of services rendered by the *Kamins*, changes in the rigidity of the caste system, spread of the education within all castes, migration of people of intermediate and lower castes to cities in search of jobs and material

amenities, abolition of the Jagirdari system, introduction of land reforms, better employment in urban areas, feasibility of market transactions due to the availability of modern transport, and so forth. The study also reveal that due to some factors which are responsible for changing in Jajmani system are as follows: Economic weakness, advanced technology, commercial crops, market forces and material attraction, easy contacts with towns, migration, education, and social and culture awareness, dependent upon towns and cities, modern improvements, governments developmental policies reformist movements, and political ideologies and more.

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