

Ayesha Farooq \*

## **Caste, Trade or Class: Historical Transition in Stratification Structure in Rural Punjab**

### **Abstract**

*Dynamics of caste have modified over time due to occupational changes, economic positions and religious enlightenment. However, it is not entirely replaced by any new stratification structure, resulting in much confusion regarding the adopted caste titles in the community. The present research has been conducted in a village named Mohla in the Punjab, Pakistan. Findings revealed resistance of young generation towards the existing caste system and they were recognized by trades of their forefather. Economic factor found important for such differences, besides education and migration. There has been fluidity of caste perception over generation and across social strata; young, educated, economically better off craftsmen and women condemned caste division whereas most of the landowners emphasized the importance of caste system. Shift in basis of social differentiation, role of chieftain has become negligible as majority of them tend to resolve their issues by themselves and go to police or courts.*

**Keywords:** Caste system, Class structure, social stratification, intergenerational differences, economics, migration, infrastructure.

### **Introduction**

The present paper aims to assess stratification system in a rural community named Mohla, situated in District Gujrat of Punjab, Pakistan. Implications of caste on various aspects of social life are also observed. Eglar studied this village five decades ago and found caste stratification as foremost aspect in determining social status and life opportunities.<sup>1</sup> In this study, we intend to look into the differences between old and young villager's perception regarding caste system. Caste/trade of forefathers was also asked to see whether respondents acknowledge or liked to be called by trade of forefathers which was the case when Eglar studied the village. Social and occupational differentiation is mainly defined by caste system in Pakistani society.<sup>2</sup> Caste based social division has been having implications for life prospects of individuals in subcontinent. In India, caste is associated with religious ideology that is Hinduism and various castes are ranked and gain social prestige accordingly, this has its foundation in Hindu cultural prescriptions<sup>3</sup>, division of groups based on occupations includes priests, warrior, trader and labourer in the same order with reference to social status and prestige. On the contrary, social status of Muslim priest (*maulvi*) is not very privileged compared to Hindu Pandits (Brahmans) as there is no caste based hierarchical division in Islam. In Islamic

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ideology, caste is meant to identify ancestral lineage meaning not to consider these as superior or inferior. It has been learnt through history, people who belonged to disadvantaged groups and deprived sections of Indian society converted to Islam to improve their status and degradations imposed by caste system as Islamic ideology supports fraternity and is uncompromisingly egalitarian.<sup>4</sup> Discrepancies among the castes have given rise to many movements in India which were against social and economic exploitation and discrimination, underprivileged castes were not only concerned with their financial problems but also their social prestige and self-respect.<sup>5</sup> Islamic ideology is based on radical equality which totally contradicts the intrinsic hierarchies among the followers<sup>6</sup>, it also mentions that Islamic history shows evidences of caste/tribe-based ranking and that goes back to the era of Prophet Muhammad himself when Quraish assumed to have first place among the rest of the Arab tribes. Sayyads being successors of Prophet Mohammad also considered superior to other social groups in most of the Muslim communities. However, Quranic guidelines discourage discrimination against any group based on their lineage. Stratification among Muslims and associated practices completely negate the Quranic edict.<sup>7</sup> Ideological position of Islam is the fundamental question regarding social stratification as Islam mentions scheme of social differentiation based on sex, tribe and racial affiliations but excludes ranking on these grounds.<sup>8</sup> Everyone is equal before the Almighty in Islam though there is wide gap in Islamic ideology and practices of Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

History of subcontinent have left its marks on social and cultural practices of people in the two countries (India and Pakistan), these show some similarities even after separation that took place seven decades ago. In Hinduism caste system is backed up by religious ideology unlike Islam, there is no concept of purity and pollution of social groups in Islam as it is in Hinduism. Caste among the Muslims need to be studied with comparison to principles and traits of caste system in Hindu religion rather than merely on structural criteria.<sup>10</sup> Caste has been institutionalized by Hindu religion though its implications are far more social than religious.<sup>11</sup> Constant cultural contact with Hindus influenced the Muslims' way of living including caste system, the groupings of castes itself was a result of social distance between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Caste may exist in its peculiar form in the rural communities. Agrarian relations, material basis of caste system has become functional pre-requisites for the working of rural economy and much of it remained unaltered.<sup>13</sup> Status and honour associated with caste manifests socio-ritual hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> Material roles which are occupied by caste member signifies cultural attributes of caste, it not only symbolizes stratification but also identity. History of Pakistan reveals its religious and ethnic diversity, influence of which is reflected from various social norms and customs prevalent over the decades. It is contested that caste is a product of feudal system characterising division of labour, economic and social inequalities.<sup>15</sup>

There have been different perspectives on caste given by social scientists who were interested in history and structural aspects of caste. These include structural-functional approach by Berreman who viewed caste as vertically ranked stratification structure which is essentially a characteristic of pluralist society.<sup>16</sup> Fixed social status, limited interaction with outer group members and work opportunities are considered functional aspects of casteism<sup>17</sup>, as these stratified

social groups complement one another forming a structure of division of labour. Dumont paid attention to rigidity of caste status and association of power with each category.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Leach stressed the heritage of specialization which allocates every caste with some privileges in Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> Indigenous monism has also been associated with the system of caste segregation. It was stated that all social groups or living beings are fundamentally differentiated into various genera, each of which has some discrete elements of its own.<sup>20</sup> A study of Northern area (Swat) of Pakistan found caste system and the researcher oriented his analysis towards Middle Eastern World which was characterized by caste endogamy, skill specialization of groups separated and ranked differently.<sup>21</sup> As per rules governing caste system, sub-castes may accept brides from outside their group but don't give their females to other caste in Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> In Indian Punjab (North-West), people who used to work on fields and associated with agricultural work, no longer wish to continue their ancestors' occupation, the landholding class also employ few of these peasants as they have smaller pieces of land left after division over generations.<sup>23</sup>

Societal causes of marginalisation and discrimination such as religion, caste or ethnicity have limited number of supporters and majority disparagers. Caste, indeed, got established as sort of legitimized system of division of labour, various groups face caste-based suppression in Pakistan, such as menial workers (*kammi*) particularly Muslim Sheikhs and Christians (*masihī*) in Punjab.' Official demarcation of castes with fixed labels were done in British period, the official standardization of caste grids renewed their identity of people by providing information like geographical coverage and demographic strength, these contributed to democratic politics and mobilization due to new consciousness.<sup>24</sup> Caste become a metaphor of rigidity and tradition, colonial writers developed various models and theories of caste system where it was written as an integrated and peaceful system which reproduces itself through concepts of purity and pollution.<sup>25</sup> Congruence of caste and class implies inclusion of power within the larger framework of caste; social disabilities, hindrances, inequality are features of caste system in India.<sup>26</sup> Occupation, eating customs, ritual behavior associated with various events, wealth and social interaction and other collective activities such as smoking with the same pipe (*huqa*) are included in the criteria of caste.<sup>27</sup> Ranking of caste is undergoing changes due to urbanization and industrialization as these have modified attitudes of city dwellers regarding caste system.<sup>28</sup> Momin observed the prevalence of endogamy among Muslims have also declined due to industrialization, spread of modern education and Islamic teachings, he added that decisions are mostly based on wealth, living standard, social status and education.<sup>29</sup>

### **Stratification Structure**

The spirit of caste comprised of three main aspects; repulsion, ranking and hereditary work specialization.<sup>30</sup> Differentiations in occupational practices has made the caste ranking more complicated as mostly people were divided based on their work affiliation such as landowners and craftsmen in North India.<sup>31</sup> Caste has long been associated with occupation in subcontinent and considered a basis of social stratification. It is considered an inherent identification or ascribed status of individuals which cannot be changed. However, this might not be perceived and

practiced in the same spirit as used to be few decades ago. To assess this, young respondents were asked about their castes and trade of their forefathers. Findings reveal some interesting information regarding changing dynamics of caste and its long association with occupation or trade in the village. Mohla comprised mainly of two strata, that were craftsmen and landowners<sup>32</sup>, this social division can also be categorized as agriculturists and non-agriculturists. The landowners belong to *Jat* caste who own most of the agricultural land in the village. Another agricultural caste is *Arian*, they are not called landowners as they own small pieces of land on which they cultivate vegetables and sell in the village and nearby market. All other castes/trades are of craftsmen who are mostly known by their forefathers' trades in the village. These include barbers, shoemakers, tailors, dyers, blacksmith, weavers, carpenters and unskilled laborers. Caste is considered an unalterable phenomenon as inherited from forefathers though this ascription of status is losing its ground, same with occupational affiliation. Table 1 shows that most of the landowners are *Jats* and *Arian* which are the castes of agriculturists in the village. However, there has been many discrepancies of caste of the respondents and trades/castes of their forefathers among craftsmen. Data show no change in the caste of landowners and the trade of their forefathers (agriculturists). Landowners has been very powerful as belonged to dominant caste and used to have high prestige due to their economic resources. They used to have important role in various matters of villagers and people of lower stratum who work under their influence, however changes are likely to follow modification of stratification structure in the village.

**Table 1: Old and Young Respondents Stating Their Castes and Caste/Trades of their Forefathers**

Caste of the Old Respondents	Forefathers' Trade/Castes	%	Caste of the Young Respondents	Forefathers' Trade/Castes	%
Jat & Arian	Agriculturists	36.7	Jat & Arian	Agriculturists	38.1
Kashmiri	Self Employed	3.7	Kashmiri	Self Employed	1.9
Nayee	Nayee	3.7	Chohan (Nayee)	Nayee	11.4
Ansari	Jolahay	10.1	Ansari (Jolahay)	Jolahay	10.5
Khokhar	Mochi and Rangasaz	10.1	Khokhar	Mochi, Rangasaz and Darzi	13
Gondal/ Khokhar	Machi	8.3	Ghaffari & Rahmani	Potter & Carpenters	6.7
Kumahr/Lohar	Kumhar and Lohar	2.8	Mughals	Lohar	8.5
Muslim Sheikh (Mussalli)	Mussalli/Labourer	24.8	Muslim Sheikh	Mussalli	10.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100.0</b>

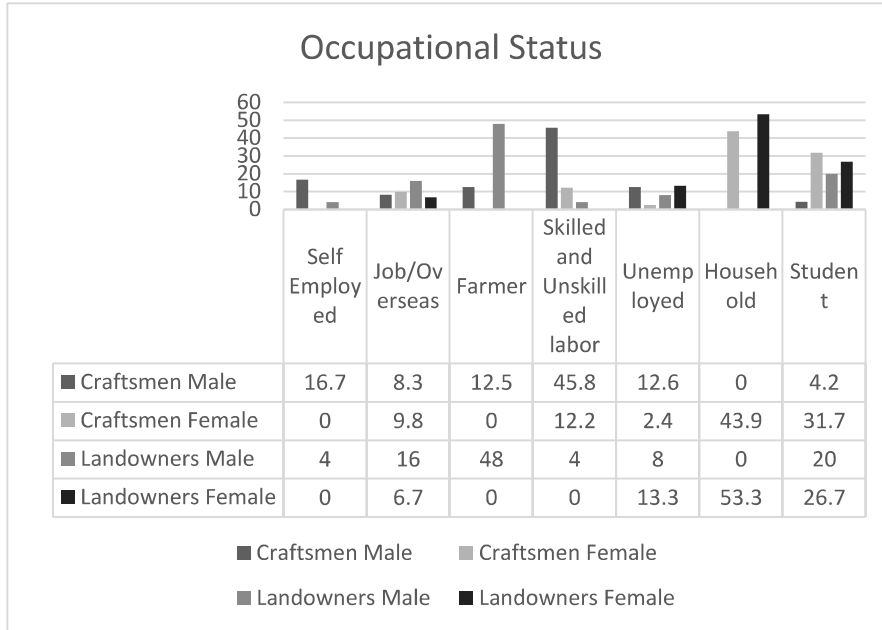


Results of the old respondents shows that forefathers of agriculturists or landowners were *Jat* and *Arian* and there is no change in caste over generation. Kashmiri was another caste who were self-employed and kept their caste unchanged. On the other hand, weavers, dyers, tailors, shoemakers, bread maker have changed their castes and call themselves as *Ansari*, *Khokhar*, *Gondal*, *Bhuttā* and *Muslim Shiekh* respectively. There are some respondents among old craftsmen who stated their caste as of their forefathers' occupation, these were *nayī*, *kumhār* and *lohār*. The most prominent change was observed among unskilled laborers (Muslim Sheikh) who are considered the lowest class in the village and were looked down upon. Majority of the young ones who belonged to craftsmen families have changed their castes' labels and titled themselves differently by adopting new or other so-called superior ones. These adopted castes titles by craftsmen include *Ansari*, *Khokhar*, *Bhatti*, *Chohān*, *Ghaffāri*, *Mughals*, *Warriāch*, *Gondal*, *Rahmāni* and *Muslim Sheikh*. They are observed to have changed their castes/trades as they were called '*kammi*' which is perceived a derogatory term by the villagers. This feeling is even stronger among the young adults who does not like to be called by their forefathers' trades. When Eglar studied the village *seyp* system existed in the community in which cash crop was given to craftsmen in reward to their work over the period of a year.<sup>33</sup> This way craftsmen remained dependent on landowner for their survival. This system has changed over time due to development of infrastructure, education, expansion in employment sector and migration.<sup>34</sup> These factors have collectively affected the structural division in the village. People who have attained education and joined some service in the cities, also those who have migrated to other countries and send remittances to their families in the village and are no longer ready to accept the supremacy of landowners in the village. The economic positions of craftsmen make fundamental difference in their perception and behavior towards the dominant caste of the village. The young generation does not wish to continue agricultural related work, even those who are not well-educated wish to pursue some other occupation and have city-like comforts of life.<sup>35</sup> Economic exploitation and occupational segregation are commonly found practices based on caste differentiation<sup>36</sup>, these are also important reasons why people no longer wish to continue the work of their ancestors.

Young respondents were also asked about their occupational statuses to assess the changes which are taking place in stratification structure of the village, these are likely to have many other social implications. Majority of craftsmen continue pursuing skilled and unskilled labor (about 46.0%), though some are self-employed (having some small business or shop) and few were involved in farming. The rest were unemployed or studying. Among craftswomen, majority of the young girls remain at home and do household work (44.0%). A significant proportion of females were students and were pursuing their education (one-third), these would have implications for gender roles and other social institutions in the long run. There were also cases among these who are doing some job (school teacher). Of landowners, one-half of their men were associated with agriculture, whereas some stated to be students (20.0%). There were few who were doing some job, though rarely but some females who belong to landowner families were also formally employed (school teachers). Over one-half remain at homes and take care of household chores. There were also a few young females who had

completed their studies and were wish to do some job. Over one-fourth of these females were students and some of them completed their studies and looking for opportunities.

**Figure 1: Young Respondents stating their occupational status by strata and gender**



Most of the laborers have changed their castes/trades and named after various dominant castes in the region (not in the village) as majority of the artisans have attained education and pursuing different occupations than forefathers. This has been equally acknowledged by the respondents from both the strata (landowners and craftsmen). An old craftsman stated education as main reason for occupational changes which are taking place in the village:

*“Sāde bac’hian kol talīm bohtī haigī, nokrī talīm dī bunyād te mildī, nā ke zamīn dī wajāh toun”.*

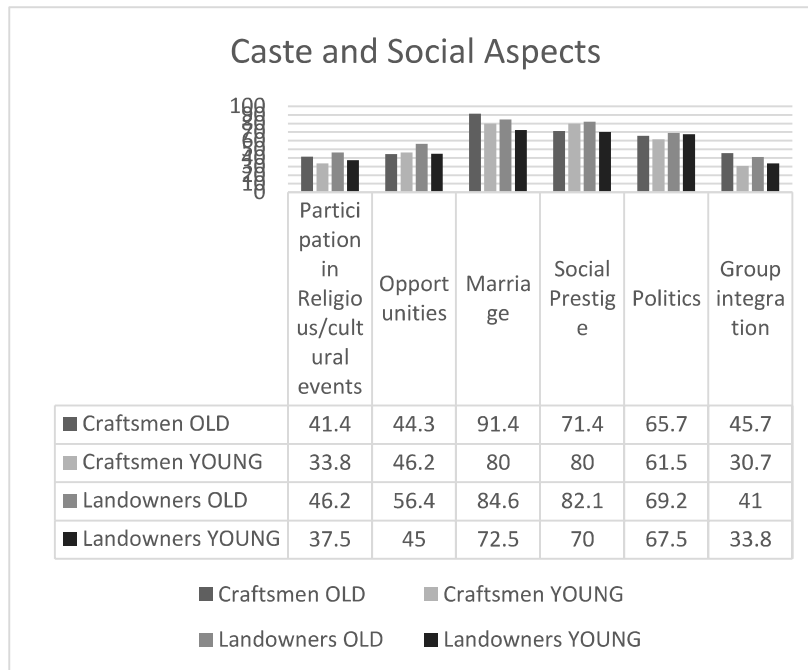
Our children are better educated; one gets job on the basis of education not due to land ownership.

A young landowner was of the view that:

*“Jo log zamīndār khāndan ke hain wo yā to zamīndarī kerte hain yā phir bāhir c’hale jate hain kion ke unke pās wasāyal hain. Dosre logon (kammi) ko talīm hasīl kernī pertī hai tā ke koi nokrī yā kārobār ker sakain, unke pās apne bāp dādā ka kām kerne kā option nahin hotā jaise zamīndāron ke pās hai.”*

People who are from landowners’ families either do agricultural work or go abroad as they have resources. Craftsmen have to study and find jobs or do some business opportunities, unlike landowners artisans do not have option of pursuing trades of their forefathers.

It is



observed that the highest level of resistance comes from the social groups who were considered the lowest and weakest in the community. Particularly, young educated people do not show think that they are bound to show compliance to landowners. Overall, analysis of generations showed that many of craftsmen have changed their castes as they consider trade of their forefathers as derogatory, mostly change comes from the lowest strata and young ones of this group.

### SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CASTE

To assess various social implications of caste on everyday lives of villagers, both old and young respondents in the two strata were enquired. Aspects of one's life which might get affected by caste affiliation include participation of individuals in various religious and social events, opportunities related with work and education, marriage decisions, social prestige, politics such as voting behavior and group integration. High castes are concentrated in high social classes like professional white-collar groups (non-manual classes) who generally avoid any interaction with manual workers.<sup>37</sup> It was found that higher proportion of old respondents than young ones think that participation in various social events are influenced by caste one belongs to. This difference is almost the same between the two age groups among craftsmen and landowners. Many old and young craftsmen stated caste affects education and occupational opportunities (about 45%). Over one-half of the landowners emphasized caste as determining factor for various life opportunities as resources and status matters.

**Figure 2: Old and Young Respondents Stating Influence of Caste on Various Aspects of Social Life.**

Similar proportion of young craftsmen and landowners endorsed the opinion regarding educational and work opportunities whereas old landowners emphasized it even more. Landowners have better social and financial capital, therefore cannot be compared to artisan's in the village though changes in occupational statuses and economic positions have exposed them to city life and developing social capital which facilitate them in various matters. Caste endogamy has been observed among Muslims of West Bengal<sup>38</sup> and Muslims in Calcutta.<sup>39</sup> Another study of Muslims in Allahabad reveals that ritual regarding purity of blood is preserved by marrying within the same caste, outside the caste marriages are supposed to bring serious implications.<sup>40</sup> A very high proportion of old respondents belonging to two strata stated caste has great influence on marriage decisions. This is an acknowledgement of prevalence of caste endogamy in the village. An old male zamindar (*Jat*) stated it as:

*“Jat log apnī zāt to bāhīr shādī nahīn ker sakde, ade te kai aitarāz honge. Apni zāt de andar dosrī birāderī (subcaste) whic'h ker leinde. Sāde zamāne whic'h te cousin de nāl hī hondī sī shādī. Hun*

*paise dā farq agayā hai aur bac'hian dī talīm dā vi”.*

Jat people cannot marry outside their caste, there will be many objections on this. Within caste, some other subcaste can be considered. During our times, marriages were among cousins only. These days, money is making difference so does children's education.

A similar view by an elderly female landowner is:

*“Zamīndār khud ko sab se unchā samghte, mar jāyān ge apnī rawāyat ko nahīn chorian ge. Shādī kā to bāhīr soch bhi nahīn sakte, ye aglī nāl kā sawāl hotā hai”.*

Zamindar think themselves superior to all. They would rather die but wouldn't leave their tradition. Outside the caste marriage cannot be even thought of, this is the question of next generation.

On the contrary, an old artisan had somewhat different viewpoint:

*“Zāt dā asr hun ghatdā ja rahyā. Log apni zat to bahīr viyāh vī ker liende lekon kisay nun dasde nahīn. Jinke pās paisā hai, unko kisī dī koī parwā nahīn.”*

Influence of caste is diminishing with time. People are even getting married outside their caste, but they never disclose it to others. People who got money, don't care for anyone else.

Caste consideration become secondary when income, education and occupation are given priority for marriage decisions.<sup>41</sup> Caste patterns can be foreseeable through class patterns among the villagers in Northern India.<sup>42</sup> Majority of young respondents had a similar viewpoint, however older ones emphasized it even more. The intergenerational difference regarding marriage decisions might have reasons associated with education, desire to express their consent or liking and greater exposure outside the village and kinship circle. More young craftsmen stated that caste affects social prestige one earns in comparison with old craftsmen, this seemed to be the reason they are more inclined towards changing their castes and

adopting other castes (either do not exist or belong to landowner's caste). Many of the old respondents acknowledged the same but they might have considered it a social norm during their life time therefore found it less objectionable. More of the old landowners thought that prestige is directly associated with social group one belongs to (caste) than the young landowners. Young ones perceive structural aspects in somewhat different way compared to their parents, emerging opportunities and economic shift are relevant for attitudinal change.

Caste is also much talked-of political commodity; it is used in political campaigning by the politicians<sup>43</sup>, and people also feel biased about their own caste or certain other caste. About two-third of all respondents think that political activities are affected by caste, these may include selection of political candidate and voting behavior of the villagers. An old male landowner stated about voting and political matters as:

*"Log c'hāhnde nain ke nominated candidate de nāl direct rabtā howe, Chaudhry dī koī nahīn sundā. Hun nā te asī unhān kolon vote mangī dā te nā hī wo sādē kol masle hal karwān ande. Sir dard hī moqī."*

People wish to have direct contact with nominated candidate, no one listens to Chaudhry. Now, neither we go to them to ask for vote nor they come to us for their issues. No more headache.

A lesser proportion of young craftsmen found caste as source of group unity, particularly when caste members face some issue, they try to resolve it collectively. There is a significant difference of opinion between old and young respondents in this regard. Young craftsmen compared to landowners, were more change oriented and differences of economic statuses within the caste have negatively affected the social ties and group integration. Over one-third of landowners stated that they get united as a group in the time of need. It can be observed that lesser landowners as compared to craftsmen endorsed the integration factor within the groups though generational differences were found in both the strata. It indicates that there is more unity among under privileged than the resourceful group and that could be due to rivalries and differences on the basis of land and power. Differentiation among social groups is also an important trait of rural social structure in Northern India, various social groups also share class interests and have different level of influences over social, political and economic relations in the community.<sup>44</sup> An old woman from landowner family said that economic position has become more important:

*"Hun zāt which'h vī log unhān dā botāh khayāl kerde jinhān kol paisā howe. Pehle log wādī to wādī qurbani dein nun tayār rehde san per hun nahīn".*

These days, people look after those in caste who are well off. In earlier times, people were always ready to make big sacrifices but no now.

Another expression of old female from artisan's family regarding social integration and changing attitudes of people is:

*"Pehle kisī ek dī dhī pore pind dī dhī hondī sī, per ajkal kon poc'hdā kīse nun".*

In earlier times, daughter of one used to be considered daughter of the whole village but no one concerned these days.

Caste ties has weakened and caste identities have waned as they are less significant in garnering financial and political resources.<sup>45</sup> A young craftsman emphasized the importance of land and money in politics:

*“Zāt kī saiyasī faisloon mein koī khās ahmiyat nahīn hai ajkal. Log zyadā ahmiyat zamīn aur paisa ko deite hain. Hamāre gaon mein do amīr khānadan hain, Jat aur Butt. Jat tāqatwar hain kionke unke pās bohat zamīn hai jabke Butt bahār gaye hue hain aur ab bohat paisa wale hain. Pichlī dafē dono election mein khare hue jo pehle kabhi nahin huā”.*

Caste is not important in political decision these days. People usually give more respect to land and money. We have two well off families (castes) in the village which are *Jat* and *Butt*. Jat are powerful as they own huge amount of land whereas Butts are working abroad (European countries) and are very rich now. Last time, both contested the elections which never happened before.

Influence of caste is diminished on most of the life aspects in the rural community. There were no striking differences between the old and young respondents belonging to landowners and craftsmen strata. Economic positions of the people mainly have caused this change in attitudes, education has also played pivotal role in this. Marriage remains the only institution which seemed to have the highest influence of caste though class within caste is given importance while taking marriage decisions.

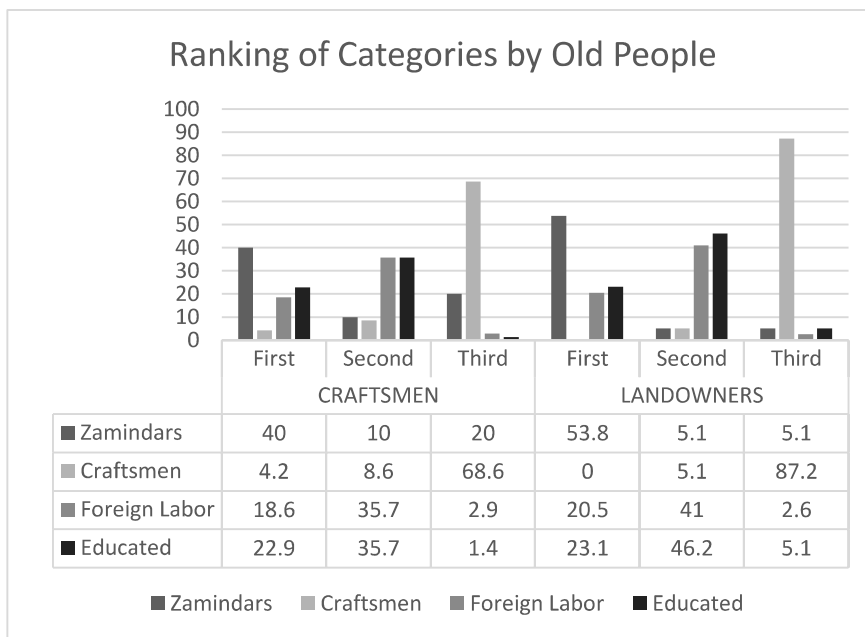
### **RANKING BY SOCIAL CATEGORIES**

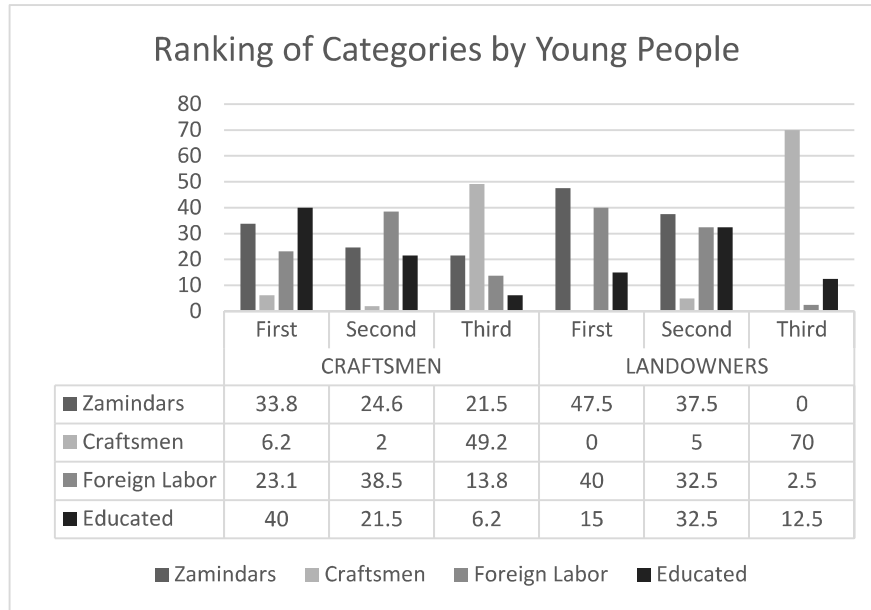
Hierarchical separation of manual and non-manual work defines caste system<sup>46</sup>, caste having high status with degree of power is referred as dominant caste. In a typical caste system, various caste groups are ranked on the basis of social respect and occupational affiliation. Social hierarchy is defined by occupation, strength of a group and descent, ranks and professions used to be determined by familial contexts<sup>47 & 48</sup>. Many of the craftsmen ranked educated people first on social hierarchy (40.0%), one-third of them stated *zamindars* as the most prestigious social group in the village. Overseas workers were also mentioned by about one-fourth of the craftsmen stating them as the most respectable. There were some exceptions among craftsmen who consider themselves as highly respectable group due to their economic position. Most of the craftsmen stated themselves as members of least respectable in the village, some of them also thinks that *zamindars* does earn much respect (about 20.0%). Overseas laborers and educated were ranked the lowest by the rest. Among the middle ranked and moderately respectable stated by craftsmen were foreign laborers and then educated people. One-half of the craftsmen acknowledged that they were considered least respectable, however a significant proportion of these also stated educated among the most respectable people. Many of the craftsmen, particularly those who can afford to get education are inclined to do so and this way they wish to change their status in the community. Those among the craftsmen whose younger generation has attained education are treated differently such as *Ansari* (weavers). Weavers have relatively better position as compared to other craftsmen in the village, the main reason is education whereas *Eglar* found barbers on the top among the artisans due to multiple functions they used to perform.<sup>49</sup> Besides, haircutting and

shaving, they used to cook on important occasions (marriages, funerals etc.), also work as match makers for all the castes.

Majority of old craftsmen stated *zamindars* at top of the social hierarchy, educated people were also ranked first by one-fourth of them. In view of some elderly craftsmen, overseas laborer occupies the highest position as prestige is concerned. Overseas workers and educated people were ranked second by majority of this strata (about 36.0%). Over two-third of old craftsmen thought their own category is considered the least respectable in the village. Some of them also stated *zamindars* as lowest on social ladder (20.0%), artisans are from underprivileged stratum but no longer accept the supremacy of landowners. Among old landowners, over one-half stated *zamindars* as the most respectable social group in the village whereas a very high proportion stated craftsmen as the least respectable ones. Foreign laborers and educated were recognized as moderately respectable in the community (over 40.0%) while a sizable proportion also mentioned these two categories among the highly respectable.

**Figure 3: Old Respondents Stating Ranking by Social Categories in the Village by Strata.**



**Figure 4: Young Respondents Stating Ranking by Social Categories in the Village by Strata**

Young females from landowner families had some critical remarks on the hierarchical categorization of various social groups in the village, also suggested a solution:

*“Her koī apnī zāt ko achā samghatā lekon zamīndār apne ap ko sabse uper samghate, apne bac’hon ko bhī pehle dīn se yahī batāte. Unko mehnat se kuc’h hasīl kernā nahīn sakhate. Masla talīm kā hai, jab ye talīm kī taraf ayain ge to soc’h badle gē”.*

Everyone thinks that their caste is better, but landowners think themselves superior to all. This is what they tell their children from day one. They don’t teach them how to achieve them something with hard work. Problem is of education, when they will come towards education then attitude will change.

Prevalence of social equality and discrimination among various social groups were also inquired and people in different categories were asked about their viewpoints. An elderly male landowner acknowledged caste discrimination in the village as:

*“Farq to hai kion ke kammī log zayādā parh likh gaye hain aur nokriān bhī in ke pās hain (both males and females).”*

Difference does exist as craftsmen have attained more education and they have got jobs (both males and females).

Social discrimination many a times also grounded in economic and political differences as expressed by an old craftsman:

*“Jat Kashmīrion ke khilāf hain kionke ye log dosron kī madad kerte hain, isliye Jat Kashmīrion ke liye masle banāte”.*



Jat are against Kashmiri as they help other people, that's why Jat create issue for Kashmiri.

A young craftsman expressed his views on caste discrimination as typical of rural life and lack of education a main reason of myopic vision of the villagers:

*"Shehron mein aisā farq nahin, kisī ko ap ke bāp dādā kā nahīn patā hotā. Yahān log bohat farq kerte, sārī taleem kī kamī hai. Gaon kā bandā (kammi) judge bun gayā achi taleem hasīl kerke per log use i'zzat nahīn deīte yahān tak ke wo sher chalā gayā hameshā ke liye."*

There is no such caste discrimination in cities, nobody knows about your forefathers there. Here, people practice much discrimination. One of the villager (craftsman) become judge after attaining good education but nobody gave him any respect, he shifted to city forever.

A young male artisan mentioned importance of land ownership in earning level of respect in the rural community, particularly among landowners:

*"Zāt kā farq kerne kī bunyādī wajah zamīn hai, jis ke pās zayadā zāmīn hogi wo zayādā tāqatwar zamīndar hogā. Jiski lāthi uski bhains"*

Cast discrimination is based on amount of land one possesses, one who owns more land is more powerful landowner. Stick belongs to the person who owns the buffalo.

Caste norms differentiate and grade various caste groups and associate degree of honour with each one of these.<sup>50</sup> Caste differences were acknowledged by both landowners and craftsmen in the two age groups. Craftsmen emphasized discrimination and unequal treatment by the landowners towards artisans, they thought education would bring about positive change in attitudes of people. Caste division has not vanished from Punjab though its influence and prejudices have reduced.<sup>51</sup> Findings of the present study also reflect that caste is no more the only basis of identity and determining factor of life opportunities. Economic shift and educational achievements are making differences in people's attitudes though certain stereotypical notions are also compelling people to leave village.

### **Role Of Chieftain**

Landowner possessing major part of village land is referred as village chieftain. As agriculture, has been a main source of income, therefore status of landowners remains powerful and influential. Due to regard gained by the villagers, they rely on him for various matters such as resolution of disputes among families or *biraderi* in the village. Village chieftain also participate in welfare work and facilitate people in various matters such as arranging marriage of someone belonging to underprivileged family. Both old and young respondents were asked whether village chieftain has any role in matters associated with the villagers. Some of the villagers mentioned role of influential landowner in the village. They also mentioned that in cases of serious conflicts, *Chaudhry* accompany the disputing members for registering the case in the police station in nearby city. There have also been cases of water supply issue and administration of billing system that had been taken care by the chieftain.

An old landowner highlighted the difference between past and present situation regarding role of chieftain in various matters of villagers as:

*“Pehle log sunte the chaudhry kī tu wo bhī unkā bāhot khāyal rakhte the, jaise bijlī kī maslā honā, kisī kī nokrī lagwānī, court yā thāne kī maslā (koī police walā tang kertā ho). Ab sab kī apnī merzī aur paisā chaltā hai.”*

Previously, people used to listen to chieftain, therefore he also took care of them such as electricity issue, to arrange job(employment) for someone, any issue regarding court or police station (if some police man is disturbing them). These days people do as they wish and money works.

Many young ones had critical views about role of chieftain in the village as following statement by young male craftsman:

*“Chaudhry kī role hai, kāfī negative role hai. Misāl ke tour pe ek aur zamindār kī zamīn ko rastā jatā thā jo is ne bund kerwā dyā sirf apnī anā ke liye”*

Chaudhry does have role, very negative role. For example, he blocked the path to fields of another landowner, just because of his ego.

Another sarcastic expression by a young educated female is:

*“Chaudhry kī koī role nahīn, wo kisī dosrī zāt ke bande ke salām kī jawāb tak nahīn deitā. Muje nafīrat hai jaton se, ye dosron ko insān nahīn samghte. Ye sirf inkī jhutī anā hai jo hamre mazhab mein manā hai”.*

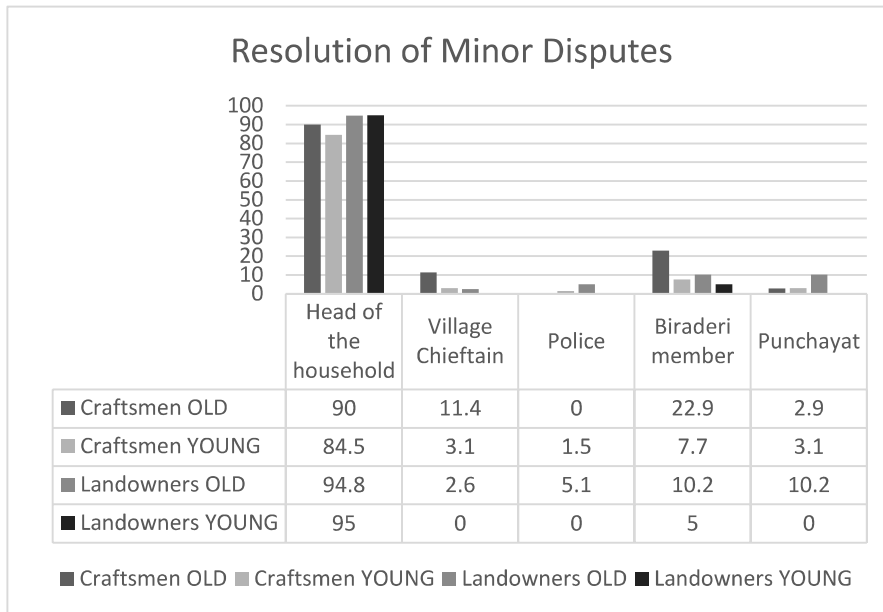
Chaudhry has no role, he does not even bother to reply greeting extended by any other caste fellow. I hate *Jat* people, they do not think others as humans. This is just their false pride which is forbidden in Islam.

Big landowners used to be very powerful, villagers find no role of chieftain as no one cares about Chaudhry anymore. Role of chieftain used to be influential and helpful some decades ago. This seemed to have changed, many old and young ones thought landowner has nothing to do with lives and issues of villagers particularly those who are underprivileged. Young people emphasized it more than old ones, percentages of young people appeared to be elevated in some categories because there were few cases reporting the role of chieftain. Young respondents have gained exposure to life outside the community and have learned many things through religious education, these are the reasons that they condemn caste division more compared to their elders.

### **Resolution Of Disputes**

Questions were asked regarding resolution of disputes from both the age groups belonging to two strata to learn about the prevailing practices in the village. Disputes were divided into two categories; minor and major ones. Trivial matters and cases of minor theft are referred as minor disputes whereas major disputes include cases of murders, robbery, theft and other land disputes. Findings show that most of the minor disputes are generally solved by head of the household as families do not wish to take such trivial matters outside the four walls of the house as emphasized by both the age groups.

**Figure 5: Respondents Stating Role Players in Resolution of Minor Disputes in the Village by Strata.**



Some of the respondents also stated that certain elderly *biraderi* member at times play significant role in resolution of such matters (about one-fourth). More old than young respondents mentioned the role of elderly caste member for whom they have regard and show compliance to his decisions. It might also reflect that young ones are less inclined towards division of *biraderi*'s, however they cannot deny its influence in the village. A few old landowners also mention the role of *panchayats* for resolution of these matters, particularly, when people find it difficult to solve on their own. *Panchayāt* is an informal traditional way of resolution of conflicts between the disputing parties in the presence of some other *biraderi* members from both the sides and the villagers. It is generally headed by the village head (*Chaudhry*) who listens to verdict of both sides and then gives decision which is accepted by them. Some elderly craftsmen had negative views regarding the role of chieftain in such decisions as an old artisan stated:

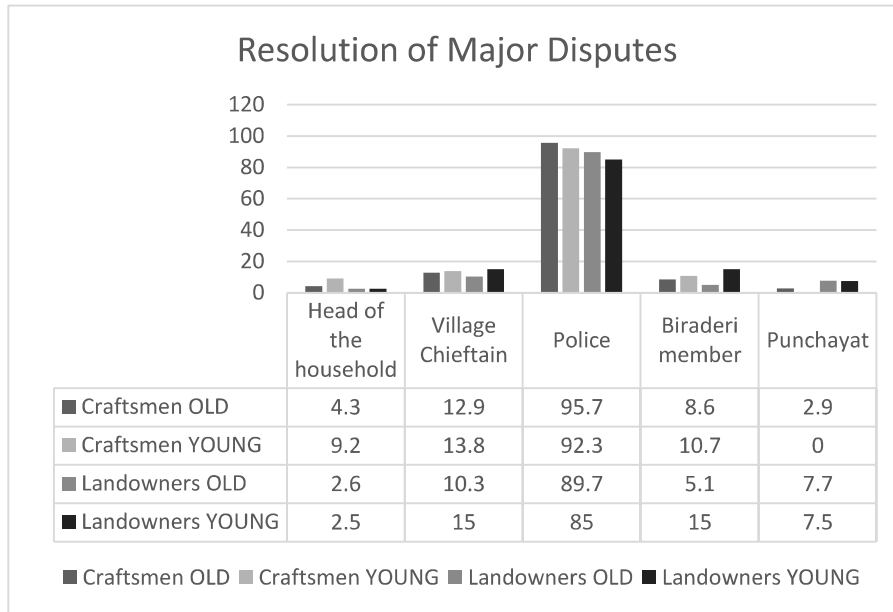
*“Chaudhry sirf apni bīraderī/zāt nūn support kerdā hai, beshak mazlūm nūn mujram sābit kerwā dawe”.*

Chaudhry only considers his own caste, no doubt he would prove victim as criminal.

*Panchāyat* system was considered significant for serious matters or conflicts in the village. It has lost its importance over previous decades. The main reasons included better economic positions of the artisans, the weakening of caste system and availability of law enforcing agencies in the nearby city. A very high proportion of both young and old belonging to craftsmen and landowners' families stated that serious crimes are registered with police for further investigation and solution. More of the old respondents than young ones endorsed role of formal

institutions than informal ones. A significant proportion of young craftsmen (about one-third) also acknowledged the role of chieftain in arbitrating major disputes of the villagers. Few among the old respondents and young landowners agreed to it.

**Figure 6: Role Players in Resolution of Major Disputes in the Village by Strata**



*Panchāyat* used to be called in the cases of serious disputes and conflicts which was headed by village chieftain. In *panchāyat*, verdict of both sides (conflicting parties) is heard and decision is taken by village head in the presence of some villagers. *Panchāyat* used to be a prompt and inexpensive way for settling disputes as well as imparting social stability.<sup>52</sup> This informal mechanism of dispute resolution used to be very effective for many decades, however, it seemed to have changed. Similar proportion of both young and old craftsmen also mentioned the role of elderly *bīraderī* member and *panchāyat* system (about 13.0%). There were no significant differences between landowners and craftsmen in this regard. Old Landowner on decision regarding people's problems:

*“Ajkal logon kī anā bohat hai wo kab kisī kī sūnte hai, paise ne logōn ke demgh kharāb ker dīye hain”*

People have high ego these days, they don't listen to anyone. Money has ruined their minds.

Young male landowner views on resolution of disputes:

*“Gāon mein kuc'h bare aise hain jo logōn ke masle hal kerwā deite. Panchāyat ka faisalā merit pe hotā hai”.*

There are some village elders who resolve people's disputes. *Panchāyat* decision is on merit.

Role of chieftain seems negligible in both minor and major disputes. A young male craftsman even stated:

*“Yahan koī aisā barā zamīndar nahīn. Jo hai who logon se bāt kerna pasand nahīn kertā. Log apne masle khud hal kerte aur police se bhi khudī rabtā ker leite agr zarorat ho to”.*

There is no such chieftain (big landowner). The one who exists don't even like to talk to people. People tend to solve their problems by themselves and also contact police if required.

Another view by a young male artisan was:

*“Ajkāl paisā chaltā hai, koī tīsrā maslā hāl nahīn kerwatā. Ghar wale khud yā police jhagrūn ke faisale kerte. Chaudhry kī kon sūntā hai ajkāl, aur usko kion kisī kī parwā ho.”*

Money is important these days, no third person tries to solve any issue/dispute. Family members themselves or police resolve the dispute. Who listens to Chaudhry (Landowner) these days, and why would he care for anyone.

Findings show that role of influential landowners in the village is diminishing these days. Young educated people and those who have better economic statuses as compared to their forefathers in the village are no longer dependent on landowners for resolution of issues and getting their work done. Moreover, people do not wish that someone outside their immediate network interfere in their matters. Role of senior caste members and *panchāyat* system are no more important due to lack of reliability and trust. People tend to prefer formal means if face some issue or conflict, this had been acknowledged by both old and young respondents.

## CONCLUSION

It is found that influence of caste has declined and this seemed true for both old and young villagers though young ones raise their voice against caste-based discrimination unlike to the previous generation. Artisan's have labelled themselves with different castes and sub-castes and do not like to be called by trade of their forefathers. Role of chieftain has become negligible, formal institutions are replacing informal ones. Achieved statuses have become more important than ascribed statuses. Caste system used to be an integral part of social differentiation is less recognized by villagers for social identification. Dominant caste has lost its popularity due to increased awareness and change in economic structures. There had not been separation between caste-based status and economic position though landownership and political power remained combined and social inequalities reinforced to an extent. Monetization of economy has brought shift in the material basis of castes. However, it would be fallacious to assume that caste ceased to exist and its influence on various social aspects has vanished, though there are evidences which show that caste system no longer as strong as during earlier times. Socio-cultural relations enacted through rules of marriage and commensality based on caste do exist. Education, mobility, migration, occupational changes have threatened the caste system and made it an ambiguous and imprecise phenomenon.

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