

CHANGING CASTE RELATIONS AND EMERGING CONTESTATIONS IN PUNJAB

PARAMJIT S. JUDGE

When scholars and political leaders characterised Indian society as unity in diversity, there were simultaneous efforts in imagining India as a civilisational unity also. The consequences of this 'imagination' are before us in the form of the emergence of religious nationalism that ultimately culminated into the partition of the country. Why have I started my discussion with the issue of religious nationalism and partition? The reason is simple. Once we assume that a society like India could be characterised in terms of one caste hierarchical system, we are essentially constructing the discourse of dominant Hindu civilisational unity. Unlike class and gender hierarchies which exist on economic and sexual bases respectively, all castes cannot be aggregated and arranged in hierarchy along one axis. Any attempt at doing so would amount to the construction of India as essentially the Hindu India. Added to this issue is the second dimension of hierarchy, which could be seen by separating Varna from caste. Srinivas (1977) points out that Varna is fixed, whereas caste is dynamic. Numerous castes comprise each Varna, the exception to which is the Brahmin caste whose caste differences remain within the caste and are unknown to others. We hardly know how to distinguish among different castes of Brahmins, because there is complete absence of knowledge about various castes among them. On the other hand, there is detailed information available about all the scheduled castes and backward classes. In other words, knowledge about castes and their place in the stratification system is pre-determined by the enumerating agency. Interestingly, the enumerating agency is state and enumeration began in the nineteenth century under the British rule. Various castes and their position in the hierarchy of castes were carefully and diligently worked out by the administrators with the help of two sources, namely, the available texts and the upper caste Indian civil servants, but might not have been constructed the way Dirks (2001) puts forward in his thesis that caste was essentially a construct of the British. Therefore, caste hierarchy has been handed over to us as episteme – whose textual and empirical bases are well articulated and argued with certain basic agreements among sociologists and social anthropologists. Thus we have two systems of hierarchy within the Hindu tradition. The first is Varna hierarchy comprised by four Varnas, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vashiya and Shudra. There have been differences of

opinion whether the untouchables are part of Shudra Varna. If we assume that four Varnas are inclusive, then we put untouchables in the sub-category of Ati-Shudras.

Thinking of and then constructing hierarchy among the castes within each Varna is the most complex and complicated process largely due to subjective factors such as each middle and lower caste tends to claim its existing caste position as a consequence of certain events in the mythical past – something coming close to the notion of sin committed accidentally. As a result, each caste claims high status, but rarely the Brahmin's status, and in the process, tends to create an exclusive social space for itself. Since most of the castes claim to be having royal (Rajput) origin, the virus of exclusiveness resulting from the construction of difference from others is endemic in the collective self-image of every caste. Therefore, it has been left to the experts in the field to construct a hierarchy of castes within each Varna with the exception of Brahmin Varna. We all know that caste in whatever manner has been defined by social scientists and administrators in 19th century essentially involves endogamy and birth based status, hereditary occupation, some kind of mutual repulsion/exclusiveness and a very complex set of rules on what to eat, where to eat and with whom to eat. Whether we call it graded inequality or hierarchical order, all these features have been prevalent among all castes – including those which wanted to improve their status.

Empirically speaking, caste hierarchy is a local phenomenon embedded in the all-Indian pattern of grading of castes. However, we have two kinds of hierarchy among castes if we keep its local character in mind. The first is the Varna-based hierarchy according to which each caste has to be first graded within the Varna system and then positioned in the hierarchy within each Varna. Following Weber it may be stated that such a kind of identification of hierarchy is ideal typical or a pure type. The second kind of hierarchy is the way the castes are positioned empirically. It is expected that there is a lack of fit between the ideal and actual types of hierarchy. It is interesting to note that though Srinivas (1977) argues that Varna is fixed but castes are dynamic, yet in order to explicate the actual variations in the caste hierarchy, he (1987) offers us the concept of 'dominant caste', which virtually covers all deviations from the Varna hierarchy. Dominant caste as a concept is too general to be used to distinguish between caste hierarchy and Varna hierarchy. This issue also has its ramifications for non-Hindu communities, such as Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, which are large in size and do not have Dharma-karma

doctrine to support the caste system. These religious communities also claim to be having social equality as a part of their creed. However, Indian state recognises only Sikhism among the above mentioned communities as caste-laden religious community. The Constitution of India (Article 25) recognises Sikhism along with Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, as the religion in which castes exist and provides for reservation for the untouchable castes. Thus, whatever the polemical and ideological claims and articulations of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), castes among the Sikhs and the untouchable castes classified as the scheduled castes are constitutionally recognised.

However, the existence of castes among the Sikhs should not be taken as the basis of argument that caste hierarchy among the Sikhs is similar to the one found among the Hindus where any deviance from the standard grading is considered caused by the existence of the dominant caste. My argument is that there is no dominant caste among the Sikhs; rather caste hierarchy is a system of domination, or to use Berreman's expression, "power and privilege". I have argued (Judge 2010) that the major contribution of Sikh movement is that it ruptured the correspondence between the binary opposition of physical and non-physical labour which bifurcated the caste hierarchy into "dwijjas" (twice born) and shudras including untouchables (once born). The Jats emerged as the topmost caste among the Sikhs, whereas it is dominant caste in Haryana. It should also be noted that the Jats, who have been essentially peasant proprietors, live in villages. Their presence in cities implicates occupational changes among them. The major point, I wish to raise is that occupational changes in rural India could be taken as the basic indicator of change in the caste hierarchy. As such occupational change is amorphous, because the issue is whether occupational change leads to the decline in the dependence of the people on agriculture. At the same time, it is important to see which particular caste is experiencing decline in the dependence on agriculture. In the case of landowning caste, it may be an indicator of pauperisation or horizontal shift in economic status. On the other hand, declining dependence of working class castes implies freedom from the dependence on landowning castes. Interestingly, overall decline in the dependence of working population on agriculture implies the major shift in the economy of the state.

Whereas occupational changes are experienced at individual level and seen in aggregation, the change in caste status has a corporate/community character. To think of a

complete change in the hierarchical structure of rural society due to occupational change is not logical conclusion. However, it may be argued that as a result of occupational changes there is not only an ideal typical end to class-caste correspondence, but also to the structure of economic dependence of the working class-cum-lower castes on the landowning castes. Once the umbilical chord of economic dependence is broken off, the social space becomes relatively autonomous from its economic base. It should be reminded that the capitalist development in agriculture may not necessarily bring uniform transformation in the economic conditions of the lower castes. Generally, classes begin to form within castes. The manifestation of such a situation gets expressed through political behaviour of various castes. Here emerges a paradox of functionality of hierarchy. The politics of caste revolves around a community in which the vertical heterogeneity is replaced by horizontal solidarity. The liberal democratic framework of Indian Constitution though provides for special treatment to certain social groups, but primarily focuses on the individual in terms of rights and duties. Caste politics in the liberal democratic framework is a negation of the individual-civic oriented Constitution. However, it should be reminded that the same Constitution identifies certain groups who require special attention. Such a situation creates functionality of collective identity in the political and public spheres. Interestingly, liberal framework recognises the individual liberty within the legal framework. In other words, an individual is at liberty to pursue his goals so long as he/she does not violate the law.

The paradox involved engages two discourses and the two cannot pass each other by. For example, the exclusion of dalits is not only confined to public and political spheres, but also prevails in the way an individual sets his/her priorities and goals in his/her private sphere. Occupational change brings in individualisation of castes, but, at the same time, the private sphere of individuals does not radically alter as a result. Whereas the declining dependence of the lower castes on landowners may manifest through political assertion for power and identity, but such situations do not and cannot force the individuals to end exclusiveness. It may reflect on how an individual invites people on occasions of marriage and other ceremonies in the family. The state, within liberal framework, can definitely interfere in the conduct of individuals in public sphere, but the private sphere remains untouched. An interesting example may help us to understand the complexity involved in the situation. The use of the caste names of certain untouchable castes in public has been regarded as legal offence. However, the number of songs

in which sons of Chamars have been glorified is large and these are written and sung by Chamars.

It is therefore important that in the study of change in caste hierarchy in rural India, we must take cognisance of the following issues for the development of an adequate conceptual framework and methodological approach:

1. What is the criterion on which caste hierarchy in India could be constructed? I argue that caste hierarchy is essentially based on the opposition between physical and non-physical labour on which the binary opposition of impure and pure are constructed. The cognitive mapping of the notion of hierarchy tends to suggest the metaphor of ladder in which each caste has a specific position on a vertical continuum. Such an attempt at creating hierarchy requires rigorous empirical and statistical exercise – a task almost next to impossible. Among various difficulties in such an exercise, one is related to the way various castes have constructed their anthropological past on the basis of which they tend to claim their position in the caste hierarchy. Deliége (1999) has recorded many myths of origin of certain untouchable castes, which show that these castes tend to claim higher caste status through their mythical past. We, therefore, have dominant method of first creating the caste hierarchy by grouping them according to their Varna status and then may try to examine degrees of differentiation within each Varna.
2. Occupational change could be regarded as the starting point of alteration in the caste hierarchy. In certain respects, it amounts to essentialism, for modernisation of Indian tradition brought tremendous changes in occupational structure by way of emergence of various occupations. With the technological changes, certain occupations radically transformed due to which these were adopted by other castes. It is interesting to note that many low caste occupations underwent visible and radical status change after the introduction of technology. Bal (1995) has shown that after the introduction of technology, smithy – a caste occupation of the artisan caste of Lohars - was adopted by upper caste entrepreneurs. Occupational change has three dimensions. First, there is separation between caste and occupation in such a manner that members of one caste may be performing various occupations. Secondly, identified as low status occupations

technological change may transform them to capital intensive thus ending low caste stigma with them. And thirdly, both the situations may coexist with different statuses.

3. Economic change is linked with economic independence, but it has multiple trajectories. The important issue is whether occupational change has led to improvement in economic conditions or it is horizontal movement from one occupation to another of similar status. Diversification of occupations brings about economic heterogeneity and, in certain cases, emergence of classes within caste. It implicates the issue of degree of traditional economic dependence on the landowning castes. It is, therefore important to examine the degree of decline in the dependence of various lower castes on the landowning castes in the village.
4. As a corollary to the above, the likelihood of political assertion of lower castes after the decline in their dependence on landowning castes increases. Political assertion subsumes the fulfilment of two important conditions by the lower castes. These are: presence of one lower caste in substantial size and secondly, a minimum degree of organisation of that caste. Generally, the better off among the lower castes tend to initiate the process of political assertion.
5. Contemporary India fulfils conditions, largely due to the development of means of communication and transport, for a larger level of political assertion among the lower castes. To what extent, the local assertion takes the form of or gets affiliated with the state or national level political expression of dissent and assertion is an important issue for examination.

In the light of the above arguments of methodological concerns, the issue of caste hierarchy in Punjab, with special reference to the scheduled castes, has been taken up for discussion. The discussion has been divided into five parts. The first part takes cognisance of the caste structure of Punjab, whereas the second deals with the social anthropology of Jat Sikhs of Punjab the reasons for which are twofold. First, the Jat Sikhs constitute the two-third of the Sikh population and secondly, most of them live in villages because they are class of peasant proprietors implying that any reference to change in caste hierarchy entails the examination of the

relationship between Jat Sikhs and other castes. The third part takes stock of the changes that have taken place in the caste hierarchy it is largely based on my already published work. The fourth part outlines certain political consequences of changes in caste, whereas the final part concludes the discussion.

I. Caste Hierarchy in Punjab

In certain respects, Punjab is no different from rest of India having, at the same time, certain distinctive features from other regions. It is strongly embedded in caste system, but a majority of its population is not Hindu, but follows egalitarian ideology of Sikhism. Since Sikh community is comprised by “castes”, the influence of Hindu social organisation is empirically evident. A small population of Christians in the state is treated as coterminous with “Churha”, the scavenging caste. The still small presence of Buddhists assumes the existence of Ambedkarites who followed him till end. There are two kinds of Muslims in Punjab. First, there are Muslims who are living in Malerkotla and there is a widespread impression that most of them are Kamboh by caste. Secondly, spread all over Punjab are few families of Mirasis living in certain villages. Mirasis are Dums by caste.

Punjab, despite its small size, is still full of diversity in terms of caste, region and culture. Let us focus on region to explain certain axes of diversity in Punjabi social life. There are three broad regions of Punjab, namely, Doaba, Majha and Malwa. These regions are different from each other in terms of caste and religion. Doaba is predominantly the Hindu belt of Punjab. Though Jats are the major caste group, but like other regions, they are not all Sikhs. Most of the dalits except Bazigars and Julahas are Hindu. The expression Hindu may be highly contentious in light of the fact that the Ad-dharmis claim to be having their religion as Ad-dharm. Virtually all the Bhangis are Balmikis. On the other hand, the percentage of Chamars is very low in the Majha region and Balmikis are living in urban areas, but in rural areas Mazabis are the most numerous. However, among the landowners, the Jat Sikhs are the most preponderant. Malwa is the biggest region in size and population and thus its sub-regions resemble Doaba and Majha. The common denominator continues to be the prevalence of Jat Sikhs. Mazabis, Balmikis and

Chamars predominate in different sub-regions of Malwa. It should also be noted that there are other caste groups which belong to the class of landowners. In Doaba region, Thakur, Saini, Lobana, Ahluwalia and Mahaton are landowners. In Majha, Kamboh, Saini and Rajput are the main landowning castes after Jat Sikhs. In Malwa, Kamboh, Rajput and Saini are landowners. So far as the middle artisan castes are concerned, their distribution is uniform in the sense that almost every village has a few families of different artisan castes. I found that in village Basarke Bhaini in Amritsar district, there was a substantial population of Kumhars. There are such villages where a single middle caste is numerical preponderant, but it is rare in Punjab. In the Doaba region a majority of OBCs are Hindus except for Ramgharias and Chhimbas. In other regions of Punjab, most of the OBCs have adopted Sikhism. The other caste group which is not numerous, but could be found in most of the villages is that of Khatri/Arora/ Baniya, the business castes. Baniyas dominate in the Malwa villages, whereas Khatri and Aroras are more numerous in the Majha, Doaba regions and certain parts of Malwa. Most of the Baniyas are Hindus, whereas Khatri/Arora are both Hindus and Sikhs with the strong tradition of interfaith marriage within caste without any hurdle. In villages, many Khatri/Aroras are landowners. We are now left with Brahmin caste in villages. Long time back Parkash Tandon (1963) wrote a comment on Brahmins of Punjab as marginal to the Punjabi society. It particularly holds true for the rural Brahmins even now.

We have not yet got the latest information regarding the population of the scheduled castes in Punjab, they constitute 29.8 per cent of the total population of Punjab according to the 2001 census. There are 39 scheduled castes of which Rai Sikh/Mahatam and Mochi castes have been recently added. Most prominent scheduled castes in Punjab are two, namely, Chamar and Churha/Bhangi castes. What is called dalit politics of Punjab revolved around these two major players. We do not have percentage information about the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) though there are 69 castes among them. There are three major OBC castes in Punjab. They are Kambohs, Ramgharias and Lobanas. All these three castes are well off in general. The Ramgharias – carpenter caste – do not enjoy good living conditions in villages in comparison to their counterparts in cities. Both Kambohs and Lobanas are middle level peasants and are known as vegetable growers. Before partition of Punjab, Arains were also vegetable growers. Other OBCs are not living in exclusive localities in villages, because their number is low in every

village. Suniaras have become urbanised though some of them live in villages and are shopkeepers.

Among the upper caste landowning farming castes in villages Jats are the most numerous followed by Rajputs, Sainis and Mahtons. The spread of other castes such as Brahmins, Khattris, Aroras and Baniyas follows the pattern similar to the artisan OBCs. All of them are shopkeepers though in some villages they are also landowners. Brahmins own and cultivate land in some villages in Punjab, but such villages are countable on fingers. Sharma (2008) conducted a study on Brahmins in village Roopwali Brahminan Di in Amritsar district and found that all the Brahmin respondents were landowners and involved in farming. Villages Raurhian and Marhuli Brahmina in Hoshiarpur district have landowning Brahmins.

Is it possible to construct caste hierarchy in rural Punjab? Sharma (ibid.), in her study of Brahmins, found that though most of the respondents perceived Brahmins to be the highest caste, but they maintained that they did not have requisite respect in the society. Therefore, if we accept the ideal typical construction of caste hierarchy, then we shall have to follow the Varna scheme and the concept of dominant caste. Since these two concepts as developed by Srinivas mutually reinforce each others existence, I have rejected these two for the analysis. Moreover, Punjab is a Sikh majority state and in rural Punjab with few exceptions, the Sikhs are numerically overwhelming in number (about three fifth of the total population of the state according to 2001 census). Among the rural Sikhs, the peasant castes, namely Jats, Sainis, Mahtons, Kambohs and Lobanas, who own and operate land, dominate the social and cultural lives of villages. Among these castes Jat Sikhs are the most numerous and within the Sikh community constitute almost two-third of the total population. Therefore, Jats Sikhs are not simply the dominant caste, but also the upper caste in rural Punjab. Therefore we create a hierarchy of four groups of castes based on landownership, numerical size at the local level and the political visibility at the local as well as state levels, which could be stated as following:

1. At the top are the peasant castes which could be graded in vertical hierarchy. We thus have Jats, Rajputs, Sainis, Mahtons, Lobana and Kamboh having the high status in their respective order. It has been already informed that Kambohs and Lobanas are classified as OBCs.

2. Following the above are Brahmins, Khatri, Arora, Baniya, Ahluwalia and Ramgarhia castes. Ahluwalias formerly known by the name of Kalal are a caste of liquor distillers. At present they are upper caste without any traditional stigma. Ramgarhias were upper caste till the end of 20th century, but a section among them strived for OBC status purely for the purpose of benefits from the reservation policy for the OBCs. What facilitated their relegation to the OBC status was the occupational diversity among the Ramgarhias. Unlike other states where these artisan occupations, namely, carpenter, smith and mason are performed by different castes, in Punjab all the three activities are carried out by one caste. Generally called as Tarkhans, the Ramgarhias converted to Sikhism as a result of which they experienced tremendous corporate mobility.
3. The next set in the hierarchy is comprised by service/artisan castes of various names prominent among them are Suniars, Lohars, Chhimbas, Jheers, Kumhars, etc. Most of these castes are not involved in their traditional occupations, but in villages their traditional, in limited degree, calling is still going on.
4. All untouchable castes like Meghs, Chamars, Sansis, Bazigars, Mazabi/Balmiki, etc.

What kind of internal caste hierarchy could be constructed is a matter of perspective, but the post-colonial Punjab, particularly the one whose boundaries were finalised in 1966, has been characterised by the above mentioned hierarchy. What is notable is that within each set of castes vertical hierarchies exist in terms of certain subjective and objective criteria. There are castes claiming Rajput status and practicing exclusiveness. There is no such thing as horizontal differentiation, for each caste claims certain position within the vertical grading of prestige and status. Certain castes which have been put at the second place are predominantly living in urban areas and their number is small in villages.

II. Jat Sikhs and the Character of Their Dominance

The Jat Sikh of Punjab is without exception proud of its caste to the extent that he distinguishes himself from other Jats (Hindus and belonging to Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan) by claiming that he is the 'Jatt'. The rise of Jat Sikh to the top ladder of social, economic and political structure of Punjab society is linked to various subjective and objective conditions and dates back to medieval period. Habib (1976) regards the role of Sikhism in raising the social status of the Jats as crucial, for there was a lag between their economic mobility and social status. The otherwise lower caste Jats within the Hindu caste hierarchy faced the lack of fit between their economic and social positions. They worked hard and improved their economic conditions. Habib opines that their conversion to Sikhism helped them in raising their social status. It seems that Jats, through their hard work, transformed their conditions by becoming landowners. Waris Shah, who was a Sayyad, resented the rise of Jats as sirdar/chaudhary – the prefixes for the landowner. Waris Shah counts all the qualities of the Jats which situate them at the lower stratum of caste hierarchy (Judge 2008). Essentially commenting upon the Muslim Jats, Waris Shah points out that their women work in the fields, they have disgraceful manners and they offer their daughters to outsiders. He goes to the extent of saying that Jats have no god; only devil is their god. At the same time, he is immensely fascinated by their progress and rise. It is clear that Habib's thesis of status dissonance leading to their conversion to Sikhism is one sided view of the social mobility of Jats.

The division of Jats according to religions did not perpetuate the caste hierarchy which had been in existence in the ideal typical form. The comments of Waris Shah make it clear that the Muslim Jats successfully raised their status. The partition of India has handicapped our understanding of comparative reality of caste divided in three religious communities. Habib's argument is not strongly supported by the historical evidence. The conversion of Jats to Sikhism is essentially a 20th century phenomenon as is clear from the Census of 1931 (Khan 1933). In 1881 the population of Hindu Jats was 1,445,374 and that of Sikh Jats were 1,122,673. Whereas the Sikh Jats in 1931 were 2,133,152, the Hindu Jats were 992,309. It is thus clear that certain factors contributed to the conversion of Jats to Sikhism. We may partly attribute the rise of the population of the Sikhs in general and Jats in particular in the first three decades of the 20th century to the proselytising activities of the Singh Sabha movement. Equally important factor was the British policy of army recruitment on the principle of martial race. Fox (1985) has lucidly explained how the construction of certain communalities as martial races and their

subsequent recruitment to the army by defining the Sikh in a particular manner created the defining element of religious identity. It may be commented that in Sikh regiments the keeping of “Five Ks” (kes-unshorn hair, kanga – comb, karha – iron bangle, kachha – long breeches and kirpan – sword) were strictly enforced during the British rule in the 20th century. Khan (1933) is of the view that the conversion to Sikhism from Hinduism was quite easy and makes it an explanatory principle. In fact, during the first two decades of 20th century, there were fluctuations in the population of Punjab due to epidemics such as plague and influenza, but the number of Sikhs continued to grow and interestingly the Jats constituted virtually two-third of the population of the Sikhs.

The emergence of Jat Sikhs in the post-independence period till today as the political force at all levels of political governance is a result of three major historical occurrences, namely, partition of Punjab at the time of independence, reorganisation of Punjab into Punjabi Suba in 1966 and the green revolution that began in 1967. The partition of Punjab led to the emergence of East Punjab without the majority population of Muslims who became the inhabitants of West Punjab in Pakistan. The formation of Punjabi Suba in 1966 created the state in which the Sikhs were in majority among whom Jat Sikhs were in overwhelming majority. Since Jats Sikhs constituted bulk of rural peasantry, the green revolution made them prosperous. It may also be mentioned that among the Punjabi diaspora the Jat Sikhs are more than 70 per cent of the total. During the Khalistan movement in Punjab most of the militants belonged to the Jat caste (Puri et. al. 1999). Some of these issues will be elaborated in the next part of the paper. The post colonial transformation among the Jats was linked with certain important occurrences in the colonial period. According to Marenco (1976), the Jat Sikhs experienced corporate mobility, whereas most of the other castes did not have such a change. There were cases of individual mobility among other Sikh castes in rural areas, but the Jats were the main beneficiaries of colonial political economy. The British policy towards Sikhs remained one of appeasement, for they had the mammoth task of rehabilitating the Sikh soldiers so as to prevent any future revolt/mutiny. Moreover, the British also chose to recruit the members of the same caste of Sikhs who abounded in the Khalsa army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors. Two measures of the British strengthened the power of the Jat Sikh in particular and the peasant proprietors in general. One, there was construction of canal networks in the Western Punjab and the impoverished peasantry from the eastern parts of Punjab were settled in the command areas of

Montgomery, Lyallpur and Sargodha districts. Among these resettled were also included the ex-soldiers the British army. Two, the enactment of the Land Alienation Act of 1901, did not only enable the peasant castes to keep land with them, but also put a virtual end to the path of social ability through landownership of the non-peasant castes.

In the light of the above discussion, it becomes clear that starting from the late-19th century to the post-colonial period up to 1970, policies of the government favoured, reinforced and reproduced the dominance of the Jat Sikhs in social, economic, cultural and political life of the present Punjab. In the previous sections two social facts about Punjab have been underlined. First, there is no one caste hierarchy cutting across religious lines implying that there are multiple caste hierarchies. Second, in the rural Punjab, the Jat Sikhs along with other landowning castes occupy top position in the caste hierarchy. Marengo (1976) was the first to identify the difference in hierarchies according to religion in Punjab, but she worked out her argument by arguing that the colonial intervention led to the emergence of classes which were comprised of heterogeneous castes. Marengo (*ibid.*: 295) comments, “The Sikhs afford an example of the perpetuation of a caste system, with a rearrangement of the caste hierarchy”. There are variations in the features of caste systems of Hindus and Sikhs. For instance, among the Hindus endogamy is the rule, whereas among the Sikh though endogamy is practiced, yet there are instances of intercaste marriages. Marengo (*ibid.*) further makes an interesting point, that is, even though caste and occupations are overlapping and some changes are there, but in the case of Sikhs, certain occupational changes have corporate character. The most important difference is in terms of tremendous decline in the commensal and ritual taboos.

What has demarcated the Jat Sikhs from their Hindu counterparts is the total absence of caste associations and Khap Panchayats among them. Punjab has caste associations of virtually every caste except the Jat Sikhs. Pettigrew (1978) has exhaustively dealt with the prevalence of factions among the Jat Sikhs. These factions are vertically linked at two levels. At the first level there is a vertical unity at the village level. Different classes of Jats are linked with the big landowner of village. There may be low caste members in the factions who are generally attached labourers of the landowners. The second level is the link this village level faction has at the regional and state levels, virtually connected to the political dynamics of the state. The two political parties, as it happened in the case of Kairon-Rarewala rivalry, may interact in terms of

the representation of their respective factions. The two political parties, which come to power alternatively, have been completely controlled by the Jat Sikhs. Pettigrew oversimplified the Jat politics, but the fact remains that the existence of factions within and between political parties is an empirical reality.

McLeod (1976) has vividly described the overall domination of the Jat Sikhs not only in the rural Punjab, but in Punjab as such. The important issue he underlines is that whereas other Sikh castes feel compulsions of religious identity to maintain at least unshorn hair failing which they lose their Sikh identity, such compulsions do not exist for the Jat Sikh. Even if he trims his hair or smokes tobacco, he continues to be a Sikh - the fact emphasises the overall domination of the Jat Sikh in Punjab. In fact, certain simple facts which still prevail ipso facto lead to this conclusion. First, by assuming that the castewise figures of 1931 census are still applicable, we may say that the Jat Sikhs constitute two-third of the Sikh population of Punjab. At present the population of Sikhs in Punjab is about sixty per cent, which implies that the population of Jat Sikhs in Punjab is almost 40 per cent. There is no other caste which is this numerous. The other numerous castes in villages of Punjab are Chamars and Mazabis. Secondly, most of the Punjabi popular songs mention Jat in terms of cultural ethos of Punjab. Most of the Punjabi singers belong to the Jat caste. The most important issue for politicians, fiction writers and singers is the farmer and his problems. The cultural ethos of Punjab have become synonymous with Jat ethos. In Punjab villages, the Jat Sikh is economically dominant and till recently all the service castes depended on him for their survival. The manifestation of social, cultural and economic domination of the Jats Sikhs occurs at all levels of formal political processes of the state. With the exception of the BJP (the BSP is almost extinct) every political party has overwhelming presence of the Jat Sikhs. After the formation of Punjabi Suba in 1966 there was only one chief minister of Punjab who was not a Jat, namely Giani Zail Singh. At the village level, the sarpanch would invariably be from the landowning caste. If the village is covered under 73rd amendment, then the Sarpanch would be the candidate of some Jat landowner. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) also controls the SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), which is an elected body and by inference the Jat Sikhs control it.

It is quite clear from the above description of the empirical facts that the Jat Sikhs dominate in the every walk of life of Punjab. Thus anything that happens in Punjab villages has a

stamp of Jats on it. All struggles against landowners have been waged against Jats. All conflicts between the dalits and the upper caste during Panchayat elections involve Jats as one of the parties. It also implies that any mention of change in the caste hierarchy of rural Punjab will have take cognisance of whether the status of Jat Sikh has been affected or challenged. Keeping all these issues in mind, it is important to examine changes in the caste hierarchy in Punjab.

III. Making Sense of Changes in Caste Hierarchy

We may now look into the changes that have taken place in the hierarchy. The transformation in the rural caste hierarchy could take place as a result of two forces, namely, end of ascendant position of agriculture and diversification of occupations due to the development process. Without the decline in the dependence of the working population on land, the caste structure cannot change in villages. Punjab experienced the reverse process in the sense that it experienced high agricultural productivity – a process known as the green revolution. Seen retrospectively, the green revolution was the phenomenon of capitalist agriculture. We are all familiar with the mode of production debate in Indian agriculture that began in late 1960s and continued till the end of 1970s. The strengthening of agriculture in Punjab might not have necessarily reinforced the caste hierarchy, but it certainly raised the labour requirements in the initial phase. The introduction of multiple cropping and intercropping transformed the feudal mode of production into capitalist agriculture. Decline in the sepindari/jajmani system and the introduction of payment of wages in cash changed the relationship between the farmer and the labourer. The farmer developed market orientation and began to move away from his traditional obligation towards artisans and labourers. However, the decade following the onset of green revolution did not only benefit the farmer, but also improved conditions of the labourer.

The 1970s witnessed the unprecedented influx of the migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which helped the farmers to depress wages and dictate terms to the local labourers. The local labourers had already begun to move to other occupations. In fact, there was chain reaction to the development process in Punjab. The artisan classes, comprised by carpenters, masons, tailors, etc. started taking up new occupations. Education and the emerging new skilled

occupations provided opportunities to the artisan classes who were largely the middle castes. Once these castes began to slowly abandon their skills in favour of others, the void they left became opportunity for the lower castes, particularly the Chamars. In other words, education and occupation could be taken as two important variables in making conjectures about various ruptures in the caste hierarchy. However, there were also other forces influencing positively as well as negatively the changes in the caste hierarchy. International migration of Punjabis, particularly of the lower castes, has contributed towards the undermining of caste hierarchy in rural areas. On the other hand, the Khalistan movement, which employed terrorist means, contributed towards the sustenance of the domination of the Jat Sikhs in Punjab. Before we elaborate on changes in education and occupation, it is pertinent to comment on emigration and terrorism as factors influencing caste hierarchy.

Emigration is a process of movement of people from the country of origin to the country of destination. Most of Punjabi emigrants went to North America and Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. What is notable about this emigration is that there were some lower caste migrants among the numerically preponderant Jat Sikhs (Judge and Bal 2009 and Judge 2010). After independence the volume of emigration went up and dalits and other lower castes constituted a noticeable proportion among the emigrants. Till the end of 1960s emigrations were largely confined to the Doaba region of Punjab comprised by Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Kapurthala districts. The trend changed in 1970s when emigration to Canada started occurring from other regions of Punjab too. Migration to the Gulf countries for temporary period but for a considerably long time such as seven years began in a big way in 1970s and still continues. Among the labour migrants to Gulf countries middle and lower caste men constituted nearly half of them though the Jats Sikhs continued to be more numerous. The impact on caste hierarchy in Punjab due to migrations has not directly occurred in the sense that egalitarian values could be stated as important factors. In fact, the USA, Canada, England, Australia and New Zealand all practice birth based inequalities and exclusions based on race and ethnicity. The experience of Punjabis with regard to racism and ethnic discrimination in these countries has reinforced their perception of the existence of birth-based inequalities. Caste system is quite close to them except for the fact that it does not divide population into two broad camps like white and black or white and coloured. The impact of emigration could be understood in terms of the effect of foreign

money. Money brought prosperity to some dalit families who started constructing big houses, buying land and/or establishing businesses.

Emergence of the Khalistan movement took place in 1980s and it continued till 1995. Starting from various trends in the Punjab politics, its culmination into an insurgency was the culmination of various factors such as nation-building process in India, centre-state relations, national level parties versus regional parties and struggle for domination among parties. Among the socio-economic factors: green revolution in a Sikh majority state, sub-division of landholdings and the construction of identity discourse among the Sikhs contributed towards the emergence of terrorism in Punjab. Terrorism played a significant role in reinforcing caste-class inequalities in rural areas. In the light of egalitarian claims of Sikhism, it may be expected that the Sikh insurgency might have made an attempt to put an end to caste system. However, social dynamics had been quite different in this regard. In a collaborated study in which I participated (Puri et. al 1999), the data collected on the social background of the Sikh militants in 28 villages of Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts indicated that an overwhelming majority of them is Jat Sikhs. Most of them owned land and had been exposed to the landowner-worker relationships. They largely operated in the area to which they belonged and were intimately familiar with what was going on in their villages. Therefore, we did not witness any opposition to the landowning castes in villages by the lower castes. However, in 1980s the phenomenon of DS4 (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti) formed by Kanshi Ram before he organised the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) showed its presence through cycle marches with blue flags. Since cities were less affected by terrorism than villages, the village dalit youth also joined the process in cities. However, most of the villages remained stifled under the grip of terrorism. It is interesting to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the agricultural productivity went down in Punjab during these years. Most of the facts tend to suggest that terrorism did not touch upon the social fabric of Punjab so far as caste and caste relations were concerned; rather owing to the caste-class background of militants, the position of Jats was strengthened.

Major transformation was taking place in the economic arena in terms of occupational changes – a process that had begun earlier, but got crystallised and became visible in 1990s. The percentage of agricultural workers declined significantly. From 23.8 per cent in 1991 the agricultural workers declined to 16.4 per cent in 2001 in Punjab. Between 1991 and 2001, the

percentage of cultivators reduced from 31.4 to 23. It is the ‘Other Worker’ category that saw an increase from 43.5 per cent to 57.3 per cent in the state (Judge 2008). It happened as the result of the growth of service sector. Globalisation had arrived. The important research query with regard to the implication for caste hierarchy is whether the occupational changes led to the decline in the dependence of the various lower castes on agriculture or not. In pursuance of the above query, Table 1 was worked out on the basis of data collected at different points of time for different purposes, but containing the information about occupation of the people. In certain respects, the data in each column given in Table 1, contains exclusive information and may not be compared with each other due to time and space variations. Still the data are presented in percentages in order to have limited comparative understanding. The data have been worked out by constructing analytical categories in terms of their relationship with agriculture and village. Each category shows the nature and character of the occupation of the respondents in relation to the agriculture. There are only two pure types used here, namely cultivation and agricultural labour. Rest of the occupations are categorised in terms of whether the work of the respondent is dependent on agriculture or it takes him away to the city. Let us now examine the data in the Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of persons in terms of their occupation in relation to agriculture in villages of Punjab (Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts)

Relation to Agriculture	Scheduled Castes 1985 N ¹ = 400 (Hoshiarpur)	Scheduled Castes 2004 N ² = 800 (Jalandhar and Amritsar)	All Castes 2007 N ³ = 2090 (All Households) (Amritsar)	Mazabis Only 2010 N ⁴ = 140 (Amritsar and Gurdaspur)
Cultivation/Farming	2.5	0.62	24.35	0.71
Agricultural Labour	-	28.13	2.63	5.00
Partly Dependent	61.25	-	35.50	17.86

on Agriculture				
Non Agricultural Work in the Village	17.5	23.88	10.43	26.43
Non-Agricultural: Partly in village, Partly Outside	2.00	17.87	6.46	6.43
Non-Agricultural Work Outside Village	8.75	19.75	20.62	35.71
Not Applicable	8.00	9.75	-	7.86
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: 1. The Table has been compiled from four different studies conducted by the author at different points of time. See Judge (2010) for N¹, Judge and Bal (2009) for N², Judge (2010) for N³, and N⁴ has been taken from the ongoing study on the “Politics of Exclusion among the Sikhs” being conducted by the Paramjit S. Judge and Manjit Kaur.

2. N¹ consists of scheduled caste respondents belonging to Hoshiarpur district, N² is comprised by respondents hailing from Jalandhar and Amritsar districts, N³ covers all households of four villages in Amritsar district, and N⁴ consists of respondents from Amritsar and Grudaspur districts.

To start with 1985 data regarding dalits in Hoshiarpur district, the most notable characteristic of the dalits was that 61.25 per cent of the respondents were partly dependent on agriculture. All of them were agricultural labourers, but at the same time, they used to work as casual workers in the village as well as outside the village. They were also involved in the non-agricultural work in the village. Most of them had abandoned their traditional occupations. Only 8.75 per cent were working outside the village. In a way, the data showed certain trends for the future as the process of breaking away from agricultural labour had begun. The process became evident in 2004 when the data collected in Amritsar and Jalandhar districts in 2004, about dalits showed clear-cut decline in agricultural labour. Non-agricultural work in the village and working out of village became more pronounced. In the study of four villages of Amritsar district in 2007, the information regarding all the households was collected. Whereas 23.35 per cent of the household

were engaged in cultivation, the percentage of agricultural labourers was as low as 2.63 per cent. There were 35.50 per cent of the households, who were partly dependent on agriculture. Though all of them were not workers, yet there are unambiguous indications. There has been a continuous decline of exclusively dependent workers on agriculture. The Mazabis are considered the lowest of low among the dalits. They are Sikh Bhangis though they have been prominently engaged as attached labourers under the jajmani system in villages. The information about their occupation was collected in 2010 from ten villages of Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts, five from each district. The data clearly indicate that they are either engaged in non-agricultural work in the village or they depend on the work they do outside the village. Inferences that could be drawn from the data without applying any statistical technique are as follows.

1. There is a visible movement of the people away from agriculture as the main source of livelihood. Whereas the landowners are still involved in cultivation, the traditional caste of agricultural labourers, mainly dalits, have noticeably moved away from agricultural labour.
2. As a matter of common knowledge, the migrant labourers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have either facilitated the shift towards the non-agricultural occupations among the local dalits or filled the void created as a result of the movement of the local labourers to non-agricultural occupations. Both seem to have worked, though the former could be taken as more decisive and pronounced factor in this regard.
3. The movement away from the agriculture is also accompanied by the movement out of the village and, more importantly, to the cities. The workers are not only getting better wages in the cities, but are also getting exposed to different social worlds and ideologies.
4. The economic interdependence between the landowner and the worker including the artisan in which the latter had been trapped for centuries has considerably broken down. The process may not be complete yet, but the space for dalit assertion has been created.

We may now move to examine the implications of all these changes for the change in the caste hierarchy in rural Punjab. As such, the caste hierarchy does not seem to have disappeared. Two factors are reinforcing or sustaining caste hierarchy. First, the government has expanded its social interventionist strategy by clearly creating and legitimising caste hierarchy. From the

perspective of the Indian state we have threefold division of castes in India, namely, upper castes, other backward classes and the scheduled castes. Excepting the upper castes, all other castes are eligible for certain benefits/preferential treatment. Therefore, even when we do not want to have caste identity, the Indian state has ensured that it does not happen. Second, the caste hierarchy as it exists has become highly functional for those castes which seem to have stake in the due continuity of the caste hierarchy.

We may now focus on various forces that have consequences for the caste hierarchy in the form of its decline. Two important dimensions of change could be witnessed. First, occupational changes have reduced the dependence of lower castes on the agriculture leading to decline in the upper dominant landowning castes' ability to maintain the system of hierarchy in the economic sphere. Secondly, the state intervention despite its due recognition to the caste hierarchy has led to the decline in the caste based discrimination and atrocities. Based on its libertarian agenda, the Indian state has made provisions for equal rights to all the citizens of the country. Thus, there are reasonable grounds to argue that caste hierarchy is undergoing change but hierarchical structure as a mental construct continues to exist. Normatively, under the forces of change hierarchy should pave the way for differentiation without status inequalities. The process has started, but has not completely replaced hierarchy. Its most visible manifestations could be empirically observed in the political/public sphere, because the state intervention and occupational changes have created a public space for contestations. The proceeding discussion is an examination of political consequences of these changes in Punjab.

IV. Caste and Politics in Punjab

Punjab is a small state, but it is still regarded as part of the mainstream. Ever since the British rule, Punjab has been providing canon fodder to the both the colonial and post-colonial states in the form of soldiers. The other contribution of Punjab has been the green revolution and, at one point of time, it was regarded as the food bowl of India. However, in terms of social structure and process, it is one of those frontier states which are Hindu minority states. Sikhism is the prominent and dominant religion in Punjab. The Sikh political leadership has consistently

maintained ambivalent relationship with Hinduism. Starting from the 19th century to the present, the Sikh leaders have constructed a distinct identity of the Sikh, claiming that they are not Hindus. At the same time, they sought the Constitutional protection for the lower castes in the community similar to those among the Hindus. At the moment, the Akali party and the BJP are running the coalition government in Punjab.

The Sikh movement has played an important role in shaping the cultural and political consciousness of the people in Punjab. Owing to the Sikh ideology and practice of equality of worship, the Sikhs opened their religious places for the lower castes, but Sikhism could not eradicate caste inequality though towards the end of 19th century the Sikh ideologues began to argue that Sikhism did not believe in caste. The formation of Sikh community in Punjab created three kinds of caste societies, namely Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, which interpenetrated only with regard to the untouchable castes. In the post-independence period, the Hindus and the Sikhs remained as the two main communities. Whereas the Hindu upper castes were more or less confined to the cities, the Sikhs predominated in the villages. The Jat Sikhs were not only the dominant caste, but also constituted the upper caste within the Sikh community. Jat Sikhs continue to be the dominant upper caste in Punjab even today. Therefore, the notion of dominant caste does not apply in Punjab. Since the Jats are both the upper caste and the dominant caste, the opposition to them or contestation against them signifies questioning the caste hierarchy.

There is no serious effort on the part of any low caste to improve its status through sanskrtisation, though attempts at claiming Rajput status are numerous. Punjab got a different model of status mobility – a model which combined landownership with religious conversion. The importance of Sikhism lies in providing an avenue for social mobility while at the same time remaining in broad Hindu world-view in which beef eating was regarded as sin. All these conceptions underwent a radical irrelevance in 1990s when religion remained important, but politics of identity began to surface in a big way. The earlier developments had already prepared the platform for the identity politics. Let us see how it happened in the case of the dalits in Punjab, as the contestation against the landed castes started from them.

Shah (2002) has rightly emphasised the importance of numerical strength of a caste as an important factor in democratic politics, but it is not necessary that more than one caste would join together to make a political front. The Ad-dharma experiment of 1920s has failed in Punjab

on this score. Over a period of time, the Ad-dharmi and Chamar have become overlapping identities. Shah (ibid.) examines caste politics in terms of the dynamics of caste associations as pressure groups and political parties as actors competing for power and the interface between the two. Except for the Republican Party of India which became active in Punjab in 1960s in particular and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the 1990s, the obvious and direct connection between political party and caste has not been institutionalised in Punjab. The initial success of the BSP is history and whatever was left of the party is slowly coming to an end through splits and merger with any of the main political parties of the state, namely the SAD and the Congress party. One may conclude that what is left of any consequence in caste politics in Punjab is pressure politics through caste associations.

Interestingly, caste associations in Punjab are mostly divorced from pressure group politics. Most of these associations are busy in claiming Rajput lineage and working hard on it. Many middle castes covered under the OBCs have changed their caste names. These names clearly show the motive involved in the process. Now Jheers (waterman) insist on their being Kashav Rajput, Kumhars (potter) are Prajapati Rajput and Chhimbas (tailor) claim to be Tonk Kshatriya. Virtually every caste insists fiercely on its being Rajput. The most important example is that of Mahtons. The Mahtons have the dubious distinction of being the first caste group to have formed the caste association in the 19th century. Before we go into the story of their caste association, it is worthwhile to inform that they are an upper caste. Mahton caste is comprised by various clans whose names correspond with the Rajput clans. The Mahtons are small landowners, but have excelled well in all walks of life. Virtually all Mahatons originally belonged to the Doaba region. In the Census of 1881, the Mahtons were recorded as Mahatams. Was it a correct enumeration? It is not clear. Mahatam is a caste of untouchables whose occupational status was not clear. They handled skin of the dead animals, but in the popular perception of Punjabis, stealing was their main occupation. Till recently they were covered under OBCs, but a couple of years back they were categorised as the scheduled castes. Most of them converted to Sikhism and they are now called Rai Sikh. The Mahtons reacted to this enumeration by organising an association and fought legal battle for the martial status. It should be noted that the British had the policy of recognising certain castes as martial race, thereby eligible for the recruitment to the army. The enumeration of the Mahtons as Mahatmas implied that they were not eligible for recruitment to the British army. Finally, they won the case and were recognised

as martial race and eligible for recruitment in the army. Thus began the claim for the Rajput status. However, it was during the last three decades that they have become aggressively insistent about their Rajput status. Now they claim to be Sikh Rajputs and have uncomfortable relationship with the Jat Sikhs.

It is among the dalits that the caste associations are assertive and aim at influencing the political process of the state. Virtually every dalit caste of note has a caste association. At the same time, the dalits of Punjab are divided along caste lines, both politically and socially. Some of the dalit castes have been asking the government to be categorised as the scheduled tribes. The Punjab government had transformed the status of all the de-notified tribes into the scheduled castes. The caste associations of Bazigars, Sansi, Bourias, to name the few are clamouring for proportionate reservations for the jobs in the government and interestingly, the Balmikis and the Mazabis are also demanding for the same – a demand which has been recently conceded in the Punjab Civil Service examinations. The Chamar/Ad-dharmi caste has been adversely affected by this proportionate reservation and ironically they are articulating the argument against this practice which has been consistently used by the upper castes against the reservation policy. It is also important to know that the Chamar/Ad-dharmi caste is the major beneficiary of the reservation policy. Along with Balmiki/Mazabi caste the Chamars are the most numerous in Punjab, but the former remained at the lowest step of the ladder so far as education and development are concerned.

The caste whose collective actions could be justifiably put under the category of “change in the caste hierarchy” leading to political implications is Chamar/Ad-dharmi. For the sake of clarification and to avoid nomenclatural confusion we may add Ramdasia and Ravidasia also. Since they are all Chamars, the subsequent reference to all these caste names would be covered under the umbrella term, ‘Chamar’. The Chamars have been consistently organising themselves to challenge the domination of landowning castes, particularly the Jats. However, 73rd amendment of the constitution has blurred our understanding with regard to whether participation in the local political process on the part of dalits has been enabled by the 73rd amendment or it is a case of dalit assertion. The conflict between the landowning Jats and the dalit agricultural workers over wages has more or less disappeared, but the dalit assertion has been taking place in two contexts. The first is the Panchayat elections and the second is religious

places. I have already dealt with these issues in a great detail (see Judge and Bal 2009 and Judge 2010).

During the Panchayat elections the dalit-Jat clash occurred at Domeli (Kapurthala district) and Pandori Khajoor (Hoshiarpur district) villages in 2003 and was widely covered by newspapers. In a study conducted by Thakur and Singh (2009), it was clear that a considerable amount of threat of violence comes from the landowners who are divided along the political lines. Five villages which they studied had a history of clashes between the dalits and the landowners in 2003. They concluded that in the case of Amritsar villages, 73rd amendment had failed to empower the dalits. However, they studied villages where the Mazabis and Jats were situated in asymmetrical power relations. The situation in Doaba region is quite different though it might not be concluded that the Jats have completely lost their domination. Chamar assertion is manifesting over religious issues. At the local level, the Chamars have begun to assert to either control the religious place or insist on equal participation in the management of religious place. In the former case, they are reclaiming the religious place which they were earlier controlling, but the Jats forcibly wrested the control from them. The case of conflict between the Jats and the dalits in village Mahem in Nakodar tehsil of Jalandhar district involving the Baba Khazan Singh Udasi Dera in 2003 is one such example. It was looked after by the Ad Dharmis of the village, but the Jats Sikhs forcibly took over its control. They removed all the symbols of Udasis and installed the Nishan Sahib and Guru Granth Sahib in the Dera's building (Judge and Bal 2009). Ironically, the Udasis are considered part of the Sikh tradition. However, after the construction of the Sikh orthodox tradition in the 19th century through the Singh Sabha movement, the Udasis have been marginalised.

The issue of equal participation in the management of gurdwara led to a serious clash in 2003 between Jat Sikhs and the Chamars in village Talhan which drew lot of attention. Why did it happen? It is for the first time in Punjab that the political unity between the urban and the rural Chamars came to the fore. The Chamars living in Boota Mandi in Jalandhar virtually took the movement in the village in their hands. The Chamars of Boota Mandi are economically powerful enough to sustain such movement anywhere in Doaba. The most crucial element in the conflict was that it involved a gurdwara and the Chamars in Talhan were Hindus. The clash facilitated

the inclusion of a Chamar in the management of the gurdwara provided he became a gursikh and stopped smoking tobacco.

The most recent occurrence is the violent agitation of the Chamars (again the rural and urban Chamars banded together) that occurred in reaction to the murder of a Sant in Vienna, Austria. He was the close aide of the chief of Sach Khand Ballan Dera, Sant Niranjana Das. The role of activists of the Ambedkar Sena comprised of young Chamars who actively engaged in arson and other violent activities and came on motorcycles to do all this was the most noticeable dimension of the agitation.

One common factor between the two events separated by long six years was that in the initial period the state government remained a mute witness to the violence. In the first even when the Congress party was in power in Punjab, the state intervened only when the threat of fundamentalist Sikh organisation taking over the gurdwara loomed large. In the second case, the violence stopped not because the SAD-BJP government sought to do this, but it happened because other people started clashing with the activists of the Ambedkar Sena. The reason for state indifference was quite clear. In the absence of the BSP as a political power, the Chamars in Doaba are seen as potential allies. However, there is always a limit to which political interests of any party could allow the Chamars to mobilise without state intervention, for there is always a danger of alienating other pressure groups. Political space is much broader than the elections and votes. The dalit organisation making efforts to assert their identities may not necessarily bring about change in the caste differentiation and since caste system is both structural as well as ideology, the mindset may perpetuate hierarchy leading towards exclusions in the private space and exclusiveness in the public space. For example, during all cases of mobilisation of the Chamars, the Balmikis and Meghs remained indifferent to what was going on. Exclusiveness of each caste of dalits looks like the replica of the middle and upper castes.

V. Conclusions

Despite the changing caste scenario in the rural Punjab, it is not easy to arrive at definite conclusion that political assertion is the direct result of the occupational change. Caste hierarchy has certainly undergone a change due to education and occupational changes, but the dalit assertion may not necessarily be the direct consequence of this change. All castes have not experienced change in their conditions uniformly, but political mobilisation is not a corollary to the economic transformation in every case. Therefore, political implications of changing caste hierarchy in Punjab are not characterised by a major shift in party politics. Changes are not leading towards an inclusive society. With the sole exception of ideological commitment to the equality of worship among the Sikhs, all developments are indicating towards the emergence of exclusive caste groups. The direction of development is towards less disintegration of intercaste boundaries, but tremendous decline in the forces maintaining hierarchy. Such a process is not leading towards political assertion of dalits as a united front. Ignatieff (1994) conceptualises Freud's concept of 'narcissism of minor difference' in order to show how ethnic nationalisms emerge. In the case of various dalits the similar kind of narcissism exists and prevails in their internal castewise relationships. None of the castes is moving towards inclusive approach within the context of dalits to confront domination of upper castes. In the hands of the upper castes the narcissism of minor difference turns into the politics of difference, as these differences are exploited along religious and social lines. The consequence of the politics of difference is exclusiveness of each dalit caste paving the way for the political domination of the traditional political parties, namely, the SAD and the Congress party, and both are controlled by the Jat Sikhs. Thus we have ruptured social hierarchy with the perpetuation of pattern of political dominance the consequence of which is the reinforcement of caste identities and formation of exclusive caste communities.

References

- Bal, Gurpreet. 1995. *Development and Change in Punjab*. New Delhi: National Book Organisation.
- Berremen, G.D.1979. *Caste and other Inequities: Essay on Inequality*. Meerut: Folklore Institute.

- Deliége, Robert. 1999. *The Untouchables of India*. New York: Berg.
- Dirks, Nicholas B. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Fox, Richard. 1985. *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Habib, Irfan. 1976. "Jats of Punjab and Sind", in Harbans Singh and N. G. Barrier (eds.) *Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh*. Patiala: Punjabi University. Pp. 92 – 103.
- Ignatieff, Michael. 1994. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalisms*. Penguin Books.
- Judge, Paramjit S. 2008. "Impact of LPG on the Agrarian Structure" in S. R. Ahlawat (ed.) *Economic Reforms and Social Transformation*. Jaipur: Rawat. Pp. 25 – 42.
- Judge, Paramjit S. 2008a. "Religion and Caste in 18th century Punjab: A sociological Analysis of Heer of Waris Shah", in Paramjit S. Judge and Gurpreet Bal (eds.) *Reconstructing Identities: Society through Literature*. Jaipur: Rawat. Pp.23 – 41.
- Judge, Paramjit S. and Gurpreet Bal. 2009. *Mapping Dalits: Contemporary Reality and Future Prospects*. Jaipur: Rawat.
- Judge, Paramjit S. 2010. *Changing Dalits: Exploration across Time*. Jaipur: Rawat.
- Khan, Khan Ahmad Hasan. 1933. *Census of India, 1931, Volume XVII: Punjab Part I*. Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press.
- Marenco, Ethne K. 1976. *The Transformation of Sikh Society*. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.
- McLeod, W. H. 1976. *The Evolution of Sikh Community*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Pettigrew, Joyce. 1978. *Robber Noblemen: A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats*. New Delhi: Ambika Publishers.
- Puri, Harish, Paramjit S. Judge and Jagrup S. Sekhon. 1999. *Terrorism in Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality*. New Delhi: Har Anand.
- Shah, Ghanshyam. 2002. "Introduction: Caste and Democratic Politics", in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.) *Caste and Democratic Politics*. New Delhi: Permanent Black. Pp. 1 – 32.
- Sharma, Ridhima. 2008. 'Brahmins: A Sociological Study', M. Phil. Thesis, Department of

Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

Srinivas, M. N. 1966. *Social Change in Modern India*. Bombay: Allied Publishers.

Srinivas, M. N. 1977. *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*. Bombay: Asia.

Srinivas, M. N. 1987. *Dominant Caste and Other Essays*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Tandon, Prakash. 1963. *Punjabi Century, 1857 – 1947*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Thakur, Bhupinder and Singh, Rajwinder Pal. 2009. “Empowerment or Exclusion: Exploding the

Myth”, *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology*, 30 (1 & 2). Pp. 41 – 62.