

## DYNAMICS AND DETERMINANTS: A STUDY OF INTRA - CASTE CONFLICTS

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**Abstract:** Caste or *biradari* system is integral to the basic social structure of the society in Pakistan. Intra-caste conflicts arise due to various reasons and social-cultural factors social factors. Thus, the objective of the study is to unravel the various dimensions and determinants of intra- caste conflicts. Moreover, the purpose of the study was to unravel the role played by women in conflict creation. The locale of the study was *Saigalabad* village in *Chakwal*, from where a sample of 110 sampling units was selected through purposive sampling. The study reveals that land, unfair division of property, intra-caste marriages, dowry, *watta- satta* and polygamy were found to be significantly effective in creating intra-caste conflicts. Moreover it was observed that certain intra-caste conflicts were flared by women leading to different type of disputes among *biradaries*.

**Key Words:** Caste, Caste Based Conflicts, *Biradari*, Intra-caste marriages

### INTRODUCTION

The caste system, a chief determinant of alliance formation is a major hindrance towards an egalitarian society. All countries are trying to liberate themselves from stratification based on "caste system" by outlawing it, however the larger part of the society is still under its influence, either "officially" or "unofficially" (Rao 2010). The Indian history confirms "caste system" as means of stratification. People are largely stratified into various groups on the basis of "class, religion, area, clan, gender, language and profession" (Chaudhry, et al. 2014). Although the classes of differentiation are not alien to any human society, however the problem originates when various dimensions overlap each other and lead to an "exclusive source of structured ranking and inadequate access to treasured possessions like wealth, income, supremacy and status" (Sekhon 2000). It is thus under such situations that conflicts arise. Conflict signifies a form of competition between people over goals, scarce resources and power, battling to acquire them. "Arousal of conflicts is rooted in the clash of interests, struggle to access resources and persuasion of power" (Nasir, et al. 2015). Competition gives rise to the formation of temporary and continuously oscillating groups that then compete in order to achieve resources leading to conflicts. These factional groups in case of South Asian countries are majorly formed on the basis of one's caste or *biradari*. "Factional groups formed

within the social setting of most of the South Asian countries are on the basis of "biradari" (Nasir, et al. 2015). Since the arrangements of "social security and civilian benefits at national level" are insufficient community feels obligatory to form "kinship ties and caste" essential for the "socio-economic and politico-cultural life of rural masses" (Chaudhry, et al. 2014). The *Biradari* system stays alive through the chief castes that work to "uphold their power and status". The strength of it can be explained by the course of centuries in which the caste system's "command" and "caste knowingness" is socially internalized. It has thus been widely accepted that caste system is one of the most key sources originating "tension between different segments of society" (Majeed 2013). Conflict is a socially fabricated cultural phenomenon which is referred to as "clash of ideas, principles, or struggle for threatened resources or to show power" (Nasir, et al. 2014). It is also defined as a "disagreement among individuals and groups on the basis of similar competing benefits, diverse identities and or differing attitudes" (Schellenberg 1996). Studies concur that "women issues", "land", "local power politics, caste (inter caste and intra caste)", and "honor" are main reasons behind the conflicts existed within a society (Nasir, et al. 2014).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The locale of the study was Saigalabad village of District Chakwal. A sample of 110 respondents was selected through convenience sampling. The

sampling units were interviewed with the help of a structured questionnaire that focused on determining the factors that led to intra-caste conflicts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table. 1: Factors Leading to Intra-Caste Conflicts**

Questions	Responses	Percentage
Land/ Property	Yes	84.5
	No	15.5
Unfair Division of Land	Yes	80.9
	No	19.1
Intra-caste marriages	Yes	82.7
	No	17.3
<i>Watta-Satta</i>	Yes	71.8
	No	28.2
Dowry	Yes	62.7
	No	37.3
Polygamy	Yes	89.1
	No	10.9

The table reflects the opinions of the respondents interviewed with the help of a structured questionnaire regarding the various factors that lead to inter-caste conflicts. The results revealed that, 84.5 % of the respondents considered “land and property” to be critically involved in defining the conflict formation among castes.

It was further agreed by 80.9 % of the total sample that “unfair division” of land among various castes also led to various conflicts. Marriages within cast marriages were admitted to be one of the leading causes of conflicts as 82.7 % agreed to the fact.

*Watta-Satta*, an old Asian cultural tradition in which two families exchange hands in marriage of two siblings together (One groom from one family gets married to the bride, while the brides brother gets married to the first grooms sister) (Jacoby and Mansuri 2010). The tradition even though was followed to strengthen familial ties and caste based relationships, however, a majority i.e. 71.8 % of the respondents agreed that it led to various conflicts. Dowry is another custom specific to the South Asian countries, has been considered a leading cause of conflicts within and among castes by 62.7 % of the respondents. Further, polygamy was considered by 89.1 % of the sample as a causal factor behind various intra-caste conflicts.

**Table. 2: Causal Factors of Conflicts Associated With Females**

Questions	Responses	Percentages
Female education	Yes	75.5
	No	24.5
Working females	Yes	82.7
	No	17.3
Females in Politics	Yes	52.2
	No	45.1

The table reveals that educated women were considered to be a cause of major conflicts created

within castes. 75.5 % of the respondents agreed while 24.5 % disagreed.

Moreover, working women were also considered equally responsible as 82.7 % of the respondents agreed on the fact that women working freely and having an equal part in the family income became more prominent in decision making which led to various conflicts.

Women involved in politics were considered to be involved in creating conflicts, however, 52.2 % agreed to the fact while 45.1 % disagreed. Caste conflict is an eminent feature rural society in Pakistan. These conflicts within caste arise owing to land distribution or due to other social issues. Whatever is the reason behind intra-caste conflicts, it hinders the development of community (Nasir, et al. 2014).

One of the significant conflict leading factors is the practice of marriage within caste which most of the time leads to stranded relation within the *biradari* or caste. Marriage could be a way to overcome these social barriers but sometimes its results otherwise.

*Watta-Satta* or exchange marriage is beneficial for forming of alliances but at the same time it is also a cause of intra-caste conflict. In this type of marriages if one couple face any problem, this become a cause of disturbance in the relationship of second couple (Bearman 1997; Bourdieu 1998; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Molloy 1986). If exchange marriages are broken then they result in severe destruction than the conventional marriages.

Dowry is another cause of disputes among families. It kind of gift which is transfer of financial goods at the time of her marriage to made her life a bit easy in the new place. But now; a days it is also a cause of conflicts when poor parents are unable to give dowry to their daughter. If the dowry is less than the expectations of groom’s family then it also causes conflicts among family and caste.

Females have a significant part in rising of conflicts it household or *biradari* level this phenomena is not much studied though. The analysis finding show that females become cause for intra-caste conflicts and sometime they are also responsible to flare up disputes. Recently, issues related to educated and working females are becoming common cause for such disputes. Now the trend of educating females is becoming common and it challenges the tradition power relation. This leads to opposition within or outside family along age and gender lines. These disputes range from a mere family quarrels to intense conflicts on *biradari* or caste level. Too extremes are formed, one who encourage educating women while the other dislike literate

and working women. A sense of jealousy and competition arises because of this discrepancy in their educational status. Education and occupation outlines their status in the family. Such women are assumed to have more say while taking decisions in the family which some make other women uncomfortable leading to grudges between them. Education and job are not the only criteria to attain authority and say in the family but females gain a power full status on the basis of their age, knowledge, experience and wisdom. These women play a vital role in all social events like births, deaths weddings. These women can aggravate the conflicting issues also.

If women participate in politics it again gives way to quarrels and disputes within and between castes. Involvement of females in such non conventional activities is not much appreciated. For them it symbolizes breach in the honor of the family and *biradari*. As a result such disagreements among the members off *biradari* lead to disputes and factions within the caste.

### CONCLUSION

Conflicts are inevitable in any human society and caste conflicts are one of the common features of Pakistan. The study explores numerous factors stimulating intra-caste conflicts and factions within caste. The intensity these disputes range from family level to large scale level *biradari* and caste. Additionally the role of women in such conflicts was studied which is not an obvious aspect but a very crucial dimension of intra-caste conflicts.

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