

INHERENCE OF CASTE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON NAIS

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Abstract: Caste plays an imperative role in this part of the world- the south Asia. People cannot change their occupational castes on their will, and the status remains attached to them for many generations to come. The research was an attempt to study the traditional *Nais*. This occupational group is extremely hardworking and provides multifaceted services to the community, ranging from cooking and dish washing to circumcision and minor surgeries. The data was collected using snowball sampling technique, while the sampling frame included exclusively Nais and their families. The study was conducted over a period of one month. The data was then analyzed through percentile analysis. The locale of the study was under union council Dhudial district Chakwal. A sample of 60 respondents was gathered from the locale where each sampling unit stands for a single "Nai household". Though they are a part of a discriminated caste, are still proud of their professional services which they offering to their community. The data reveals a mere tinge of caste mobility among a few families who were motivated by status mobility to which an occupation is a major hindrance.

Key Words: Caste, Kammi, Nais, Occupational caste, Cooking, Dish Washing

INTRODUCTION

The word barber is derived from a Latin word *barbawhich* means "Beard". A barber is a person whose job is to cut, dress, shave do styling of men hair. In past, barbers started with hair dressing but, their low income forced them to adopt some other allied roles which could help them earn a better livelihood. The entire hair dressers were refereed as barbers. In present era the word barber is used for hair dresser who cuts men's hair as well as a professional title. Their income is very low which cannot fulfill their basic needs. For this reasons some of them opted for other professions like brick making. They also perform various other tasks like dish washing, cooking meals on special occasions like wedding ceremonies, death ceremonies and also performed birth rituals such as shaving of a new born a head and circumcision of male kids. It has also seen observed that barbers traditionally *Nais* played a significant role by being a messenger on wedding ceremonies of the local population. They also did minor surgeries required for the treatment of skin related issues.

Since occupational castes play an important role in this part in the world, the concept of closed caste

system has been diffused into our culture too. It was borrowed from the phenomenon of Hindu *jati* system which was prevalent in this part of the world for centuries. Though, the effects of diffusion should have worn off after the partition, yet we see a deep rooted influence of caste system in our society. No one can change his/her caste with his own will. "The term 'caste' is derived from the Latin word "castus" which means clean. The word "castus" became the root word of the French word *casta* meaning 'breed,' 'race' or a complex of traditional qualities (Parinthirickal 2006). Caste is often termed as a class. "In Hindu caste system there are four prevailing classes i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, similar to this concept there are caste variances in villages of Punjab too. The two classes zamindars and Kammisthat are classified as high class and low class" (Ahmad 1970; Eglar 1960). *Zamindars* are those members of the community that own lands passed down from their forefather and are involved in farming. They are landlords of their native village and enjoy this status along with various benefits like services from the working class. In return of these services the working class or *Kammisare* provided with raw food, grain i.e. *Annaj*. The working class

includes *Nais*, *Mochi*, *Kumar*, *Julaha*, *Musalli* and *Lohaars*. They are collectively known as *Kammis*. "Different landowning *quom* traditionally associated with cultivation as their parentage occupation are called *zamindars*. Members of a *zamindarquom* residing in a village own land with varying size of their landholdings. On the other hand, different artisan and service providing *quom* e.g. barber, carpenter, cobbler, blacksmith, weaver, potter, *Musalli* (labourer) are jointly called as *kammi* (Ahmad 1970; Alavi 1972; Eglar 1960).

Traditionally, "*kammi-zamindar*" has been used as by lateral relationship, indigenously known as "*Seyp*". *Nais*, have usually inherited these skills from their forefathers. They keep on struggling, laboring, provide services only to please their landowner and gain favors in return. The conservative work about linking property-owners and the service class is familiar like as *Seyp* organization that includes *kammis*, who struggle as labor for the landowners. They work throughout the village by offering their heritage skills as services to the villagers. The labor involved in *seyp*, not only works in the fields of the *zamindar* family but also serves as his household labor. "However, the caste system in rural Punjab has changed over time and its characteristic need revision e.g. labour relations "(Chaudhary 1999; Lyon 2004). However, the caste system in rural Punjab has changed over time and its characteristic need revision e.g. labour relations "(Chaudhary 1999; Lyon 2004). "*Kammie* earn their source of income for the most part throughout these caste based profession "(Eglar 1960). When they are unable to make a good living out of their traditional occupation, they prefer occupational shift. The study revised that major reason behind their abstinences from status shifting is their lack of education. When engaged in the manufacturing and production professions, they are faced with issues related to lack of vocational training. Thus there is a trend in the service class to move around the cities and serve as foreign labor in Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore there is a rising tendency among *kammis* to migrate to cities or abroad to earn a living. "Different studies have explored that the caste based occupations of *kammi* are in decline because of the availability of alternative employment opportunities e.g. industrial and government jobs. Moreover, there are increasing trends among *kammi* to migrate towards cities and foreign countries for earning purposes. As a result, the traditional labour relations between *kammi* and

zamindars have been transformed and are coming to an end with the passage of time" (Chaudhary 1999; Hooper and Hamid 2003).

No doubt money whitens everything, but people are known by their ancestry especially in the area to which they belong to. "The traditional labour relation between *zamindars* and *kammi* is known as *Seyp* system in which *kammi* used to work as labor for *zamindars* besides serving the villagers with their parentage crafts. *Kammie* earned their livelihood predominantly through their caste based occupations "(Eglar 1960). However, it is important to note that though *kammi* in contemporary rural Punjab are increasingly opting for other professions, they are always identified in the village setting through their parentage occupations e.g. barber, carpenter etc. (Lyon 2004).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in district Chakwal with particular focus on the significance of traditional *nais* in rural areas. The data was gathered from a sample of 60 respondents both males and females. The sampling units included *Nais* and their families selected through snowball sampling. The study was conducted in a period of one month with the help of semi structured questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table: Percentile results regarding Social Life of Nais

QUESTIONS	Responses	Percentage
Nais work for zamindars	Yes	90
	No	10
Nais wish to change their status	Yes	90
	No	10
Nais change their caste	Yes	0
	No	100
Nais having their own land	Yes	10
	No	90
Nais perform endogamy	Yes	94
	No	6

According to percentile analysis 90 % of the respondents agreed that *nais* have been working for *zamindars* for centuries. Those people who have changed their profession, education, gone abroad and doing a better earning have started purchasing agricultural land even they were known by the same caste in the village. A few *kammi* in a Punjabi village may own some land and thus cultivate. Nevertheless, they are not given the status of being *zamindars* since

this status is associated with the *quommembership* and not the material possessions” (Eglar 1960; Lyon 2004).

90 % of the respondents said that they wanted to change their status to gain a better position in the society but no matter how hard they tried the caste and its status remains attached with them as long as they remain in their native area. According to some permanent settlers, some people have changed their status and profession by migrating from one place to another.

According to percentile analysis 0% respondents said that they change their castes. They believed that since they all were *Nais*, and the stigma attached is unchangeable they felt proud of their caste and profession “Caste expressed as a patrilineage whereby “all men can trace their relationship to a common ancestor”, no matter how remote, they may belong to the same biradari “(Eglar 1960). However, the key informant and the old settlers informed that all those who had migrated from the area changed their castes.

Only 10 % respondents had their own land while 90 % *Nais* were those who worked as tenants or *kammis* for *zamindars* for the fulfillment of their subsistence needs. The *Nais* having their own land belonged to the category who had an opportunity to gain education and search for better employment.

94 % respondents revealed that they strictly follow the tradition of endogamous marriage i.e. within their own *qoum*. A minor proportion of 6 % were also practicing exogamy. Marrying within one’s own occupational *quomis* not an absolute rule of endogamy among *Kammi* and they may marry within other *Kammiquom* e.g. barbers within cobblers. On the contrary, all of the *Kammi* respondents in the present research stressed that they marry only in their occupational *quoms* by parentage e.g. barbers within barbers, or carpenters within carpenters” (Lyon 2004).

Majority of the respondents suggested that they wish to marry within their own group as well as those who are compatible with their social status, though caste was seen as the primary factor determining one’s social status in the village life. Lifelong stigma of being *Kammi* always keeps “*Kammi* inferior in terms of identity and status in the village setting. The impact of learning lying on structure of the community morals could be distorted some place conventionally community structure survive at the side of a contemporary financial system including

unbending variety of the epoch and the sexual characteristic stratification were maintain (Loscocco and Kalleberg 1988). Nevertheless, the villagers may give consideration to the possession of financial assets of other family, and educational/professional activities of the men/women in the process of partner selection. Similarly, *zamindar* respondents highlighted the parentage occupational identity of *Kammi* and thus their lower standing on the status hierarchy as the major reason of caste based endogamy between *Kammi* and *zamindars*.

CONCLUSION

Lack of resources is considered as an impediment in growth of individuals. Education is considered as the most empowering and enlightening element that can groom and develop us to transform in a better society. Yet, in the 21st century there still exist societies where caste system is innately embedded in the social fabric to an extent that it restrains the growth of individual by undermining their abilities on the basis of their ancestral linkages.

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