

THE DOMINANT CASTE IN HARYANA: MAPPING OUT THE DOMINANCE OVER THE YEARS

^[1] KUSHAGRA PRASAD^[1] M.Phil Scholar (MDU, Rohtak)

Abstract: - The paper looks at the concept of the dominant caste as has been propounded by M.N.Srinivas in his work on Dominant Caste. The critical analysis of the paper lies in the looking at how Jats are a dominant caste and force in Haryana. The reasons behind this dominance are also looked at critically which tends to provide insights into the contemporary status of the Jats.

Key Words: Dominant Caste, Haryana, Jats, Village

“While studying about rural India, we must look at the nature of the dominant caste in the village. It is very difficult to define what exactly dominant caste is and what all factors come under while defining the concept of dominant caste? The dominance of a caste is seen in varied ways be it political, economic or concerning maintaining order in the village. The paper will look at the dominance of Jats as a dominant caste and how the dominance is achieved and then reshaped in the subsequent years.

The dominance of the caste is showed in many ways which also includes the settlement of disputes and having authority at the village level. The term “dominant caste” was used by M.N. Srinivas in 1953 when he made two field trips to Rampura. On what might be termed as dominant, M N Srinivas puts forth that- A caste may be said to be "dominant “when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low (Srinivas 1955). Later in the same work, M N Srinivas puts that the definition of dominant caste omitted one important criterion which is the educated members of the caste and the government jobholders. Under these qualities, Srinivas argues, a dominant caste exercises control over the affairs of its village, commands respect from other castes, becomes a model for Sanskritization where the members of the dominant caste are consulted by other castes on important occasions including the ceremonial ones (Srinivas 1966). In a village, everyone is always attentive to the power or dominance of the dominant caste members, who, thereby, play a decisive role in the settlement of a dispute or the resolution of a caste conflict at the local level (Srinivas 1955). The leaders of a dominant caste evoked fear and

respect from the ordinary folk. Each leader was the head of a faction and relations between leaders of rival factions were distinctly unfriendly (Srinivas 1966). It is quite evident that for M.N. Srinivas, dominant caste needed to have 5 major characteristics which include numerical preponderance, political power, superior economic hold, predominance in securing higher education and occupation. The physical aggression of the dominant caste normally comes with it being numerically superior to other castes. All these five elements come together and what is played out ahead can be termed as “Decisive Dominance”. It can be said on the lines of Weber that the structure of dominance is a multidimensional social space consisting of symbolic practices in which the possession of economic, cultural and social capital is dramatically displayed.

There are others such as Louis Dumont who considered that the dominance consists solely in economic power rather than factors like numerical preponderance and that this power flows exclusively from the control of the land (L. Dumont 1970). The main feature of the dominant caste of both Dumont’s and Srinivas’s model is linked with the power of the castes to exercise their juridical authority mainly in the settlement of the disputes.

The following paper deals with the Jats in Northern India mainly Haryana and their dominance over the years coupled with the changes which have occurred over the last 60 years. The model of the dominant caste of Srinivas and Dumont might or might not hold as a historical approach to understand the dominant caste in Haryana.

The paper looks at an analysis of the newly formed state of Haryana in 1996 and then map the subsequent gains and changes that have resulted due to the Green Revolution. Further, the changes will be seen concerning the dominance

of Jats after the Panchayati Raj Reforms of 1993. By focusing on the turbulent changes which have occurred over the years and then looking at the arrival of SEZs and changes in the dominance of the Jats is central to understand the concept of “Dominant Caste” with reference

THE DEMARCATION OF STATE AND GREEN REVOLUTION

The demarcation of Punjab came up in 1966 following the Punjab Reorganisation Act which split the states into the Sikh majority Punjab state and Hindu majority state of Haryana (17th state of India) with Chandigarh being administered separate union territory, as the shared capital of both the states. Among the Hindu majority state of Haryana, it was the Jats who controlled the majority of the land and had numerical strength at the time of demarcation which is one of the parameters used by Srinivas while discussing the dominance of caste. The other agriculturist castes were Jats, Ahirs, Gujjar, Sainis and Bishnois (Singh 1979). The agriculturalist castes mentioned above constituted around 51% of the population and controlled 80% of the land which enables them to control the means of production and dominance over others. Among the agriculturist castes, the new state roughly had around 24% of the Jat population. While analyzing the land holdings in Haryana, it came out that most of the land exists with Jats and the amount of land will play a significant role in swinging their futures with the coming of Green revolution. Dipankar Gupta looks at the scenario of the Jats in the Northern Plains and accessed that these are the biggest landowning caste in Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh (Gupta 1997).

North Indian plains particularly the state of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh had the optimum production environments throughout the time being. The agricultural boost that came through the Green Revolution in the 1960s further strengthened the position of the farmers in these areas. The new technology would benefit producers who controlled the optimal production environments - good quality soil, access to irrigation facilities, and locations favourable to markets because of cheap transportations, communication, and other linkages to urban centres. Producers without access to such environments would not benefit; rather, they would lose competitiveness and be both absolutely and relatively disadvantaged compared to producers in the favoured zones (Poleman and Freebairn 1973). Another point worth mentioning is the fact that even in the favourable environment, it was the big landlords who reaped the most as the new technology was biased towards them. Jats as the agrarian community-controlled many tracts of the land in the region and the income flowed directly into

their pockets. The farm incomes of the landholdings with the Jats increased by more than 300 per cent during the period of the Green Revolution in 1965-66 (Mitra 2005).

The Jats in Haryana grew economically prosperous as Haryana was the epicentre with Uttar Pradesh and Punjab of the Green Revolution. Although, it can be argued that not all Jats had better economic status but a vast chunk of community drew blood out of the Green revolution. There were disparities within the state where the areas along the Yamuna belt were much more prosperous as compared to other areas. The Jats now after having numerical strength got economic well-being which further made their position strong at the regional level. Going by the measures of M.N. Srinivas, the dominance is played out when the caste preponderates over another caste numerically, economically and have the political power (Srinivas, *The Social System of a Mysore Village* 1955). The Jats had the numerical strength due to the demarcation of the state and now had control over other castes economically. The relations in the villages are on the lines of the credit and it was the Jats who were the landed elites and controlled most of the economic resources in the village. The Jats then assumed the role of the creditors to the other castes in the village and also their numerical strength helped them to reap the maximum (Jeffery 2010).

The elections from 1967 till 1982 showed clearly that Jats have a strong dominance in the state. The number of legislative elites in state assembly went up to 30% (Singh 1979). Although the number of elected members from Jats fell a bit in 1972 due to Bansi Lal's strategy to widen the voter base but still the elected Jat members to the assemblies continued to show their dominance. The numerical strength was converted into the political power with the universal adult franchise in operation.

The Jats now had control over the political authority as well which completes the “trilogy” of M.N.Srinivas. The numerical strength preponderated over other castes due to demarcation of the state. The economic dominance came at the same time with the Green Revolution and the numerical strength led to political power. The relatively higher education and better articulation of agriculturist castes mainly Jats and the traditional leadership of the former in the predominantly rural society of Haryana, though all related to their economic position, seem to have further improved their political position (Singh 1979).

PANCHAYATI RAJ REFORMS AND THE DOMINANT CASTE

The 73rd amendment act led to the formation of the Panchayats in the rural areas throughout the country. The part IX of the Constitution envisages a three-tier system of Panchayats- at the village level, the district panchayat at the district level and the intermediate panchayat which stands between the village and the state level. The article 243D also provides that seats are to be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes where the reservation will be proportionate to their population. The added feature was that out of the seats reserved not less than one-third of the seats be reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively. Another point to be noted about the reservation for women, not less than one-third of the seats to be filled by direct elections in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women. The state legislature will have the legislative powers and authority to enable the panchayats to function as institutions of self-governance. They may be entrusted with the preparing plans and implementation of schemes for economic justice and regarding matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule (73rd amendment).

While introducing the Constitution (73rd) Amendment Bill in parliament on December 1, 1992, the then-rural development minister observed that "this casts a duty on the centre as well as the states to establish and nourish the village panchayats to make them effective, self-governing institutions And by introducing this act the government was fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Gram Swaraj". (Pal 2004).

This created new social fabric where even the factor of numerical preponderance failed to deliver political power to the Jats. With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj reforms, Jats felt a threat to the power they enjoyed over a long period. Jats were mainly concentrated in the rural areas of the state and the new reforms affected them directly. The Jats feared the loss of dominance which has continued since the formation of the state and this is where I argue that this has propelled the drive towards the Khap Panchayats. The Jats with the fear of losing out to the other marginalized groups resorted to the Khap Panchayats which worked parallel to the village panchayats. Although Jats still control the factors of production and others in the villages will be dependent on the landed elites but the grip of dominance loosened up a bit for the Jats. The situation at that time as I have argued would have led to the increase in the number of Khap Panchayats and the judgments which followed through them. The upsurge in the Khaps came as a counter to the Panchayati Raj reforms in which Jats somewhat lost their dominance but still

tried to be the major force in the settling of the disputes in the village areas. This was seen when the cases being decided by Khap saw a rapid increase after 1992. The archival records of the villages compiled by the local compiler show that there was an increase in the cases being decided by Khap and this was a reaction to the dominance that was slipping from the hands of Jats.

Another blow to the Jat dominance came in the form of SEZ Act (2005) and the reality sector boom of 2005-07. According to the SEZ Act (2005), A Special Economic Zone may be established under this Act, either jointly or severally by the Central Government, State Government, or any person for the manufacture of goods or rendering services or for both or as a Free Trade and Warehousing Zone. The land under such SEZ and other non-agricultural activities (includes the building of housing complexes, other settlements) rose to 10.14 in the period of 2002-05 as compared to 8.69 in 1998. The state of Haryana had around 46 SEZs which even covers some of the areas under agricultural use.

The real estate boom of 2005-07 was followed soon after where the land which was held by the villages was sold to the real giants. The land which was the source of power for Jats in northern India was slipping as the land was sold at higher rates to the investors. The example of such areas can be seen in form of Sonipat, Gurgaon, and Faridabad. The dominance which Jats had was primarily based on the land they owned as it was through the land, they reaped heavy profits in the Green Revolution. The source of power that the Jats enjoyed due to land was also fading away.

On the account of dominance, the dominance of the Jats still was there in the rural areas due to the money from real estate and the political power that the community enjoyed. The villages with the dominance of Jats are known as Jat villages and they are part of a traditional institution known as Khap. A Khap is a permanent clan-based body that consists of villages inhabited by people of the same clan (Gupta 1997). The Khap Panchayats tend to play out the dominance in the region through their outfit and tends to provide all kinds of support to the dominance which has been talked about in the paper through various methods.

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