



## Changing Interaction Patterns among Dalits and Jat Sikhs in Doaba Region of Punjab

Amanpreet Kaur\* and Shalini Sharma\*\*

### ABSTRACT

*Punjab's villages are predominantly Jat Sikh and Dalits. In several instances Dalits were discriminated by land owning Jat Sikhs. But due to benefits from affirmative action programme of government, NRI remittances and political mobilization, Dalits had improved their socio-economic status. This had impacted the interaction patterns amongst Dalits and Jat Sikhs of the region. Thus, the present study was conducted with a specific objective to analyze the changing interaction patterns among Dalits and Jat Sikhs, The study based on primary data collected from 320 respondents (160 Dalits and 160 Jat Sikhs) from all the four districts of Doaba region found that 5.6 per cent of high status Dalits had moved to the village locality inhabited by Jat Sikhs without any resistance from them. More than half of them attended the social ceremonies of Jat Sikhs as guests. Out of the sixteen villages under study, in fourteen villages Dalits had separate gurudwaras and nineteen per cent had started bearing the panchayat election expenses independently. Study found that though social distance between both castes had been decreased but Dalits particularly high status ones had heightened religious consciousness and were assertive about their political rights.*

**Key words:** Dalits, Jat Sikhs, Doaba, Interaction

**JEL Classification:** J62, Z10, Z12, Z13

### INTRODUCTION

Punjab is a Sikh majority state. The Sikhs constitute 59.9 per cent of the state's population. Their share in the rural population is 72 per cent. Dalits have a highest proportion of population in the state, i.e., 31.9 per cent among the states in India (GOP, 2010). Over 80 per cent of them live in the rural areas. Punjab's villages are, therefore, predominately Sikh and Dalit. Sikhism

appears to have experienced a significant liberating influence on Dalits in Punjab. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the socio-religious institutions of *sangat, pangat* and *langar*, absence of a caste based priesthood, and respect for manual labour aims at creating a harmonious community in which distinction of caste, creed and status are not relevant.

However, there is a wide gap between the teachings and social practice (Puri, 2003; Jodhka, 2004; 2009 and Ram, 2009). Though integral to the social structure, there are several instances where Dalits are being

\*Research Scholar and \*\* Professor of Sociology, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.

discriminated against by land owning Jat Sikhs. Restrictions on Dalits entry into upper caste houses had been one of the most strictly observed practices. Dalits are associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as scavenging and cleaning, leatherwork, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and attached laborers (*siris*). Besides some discrimination against them, the position of Dalits in Punjab is quite different than that of in other parts of the country (Ram, 2007 and Singh, 2012).

One of the distinguishing features of Dalits in Punjab is their numerical strength. In more than 3000 villages of *Doaba* region, proportion of Dalit population is over 40 per cent and in some villages it is as high as 65 per cent. This numerical preponderance of Dalits is a measure of their strength (Jodhka, 2000; Awasthi, 2003; Judge, 2003; Judge and Bal 2008). Secondly, the literacy rate among Dalits, which was 16.12 per cent in 1971, rose to 23.85 per cent in 1981. It further increased to 41.1 per cent in 1991 and 56.2 per cent in 2001 and 64.8 per cent in 2011 which is very close to the Dalit literacy rate at national level i.e. 66.1 percent (Census, various issues).

Another significant factor which made a major difference in the status and self-perception of the Dalits in Punjab is related to the large scale migration of Dalits, particularly *Ad Dharmis* of *Doaba* region, to foreign countries. It is estimated that on an average one member in every second Dalit family in the region is an NRI (Juergensmeyer, 1988; Tatla, 1999 and Judge, 2012). The remittances sent back home by NRIs and contributions made by them to the

enlargement of the community's autonomous cultural space is a distinguishing feature. Another notable factor responsible for their enhanced status is increased political representation at the grass root level of Panchayats to the legislative assembly. In year 2013-14, there were 28.5 per cent Dalit sarpanches and 33.6 per cent panches in 12726 village panchayats (GOP, 2013-14). Political movements such as *Singh Sabha* movement, *Ad-dharam* movement started in *Doaba* region had also contributed significantly to the change in their status (Kumar, 2004; Ram, 2009; Chana, 2012).

Due to these factors, socio economic status of Dalits has improved. This has impacted the interaction with their erstwhile Jat Sikh patrons. With this backdrop, the present study had been undertaken with a specific objective to analyze the changing interaction patterns among Dalits and Jat Sikhs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in *Doaba* region in year 2014-15 and based on primary data. *Doaba* region comprises of four districts of the state of Punjab i.e. Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar and Kapurthala. It had been purposively selected as it has the highest proportion of Dalit population i.e. 40 per cent. At the first stage two blocks from each of the four districts were selected randomly to obtain a total of eight blocks. At the second stage two villages from each block were further selected randomly and then at the final stage 20 respondents i.e. 10 Dalits and 10 Jat Sikhs from each village were selected randomly and interviewed personally with the help of

an interview schedule. Thus a sample of total 320 respondents i.e. 160 Dalits and 160 Jat Sikhs from sixteen villages was taken. Perceptions regarding inter generational changes had been obtained from respondents whose father could not be accessed to study the change in the interaction pattern. Socio-economic status of the respondents had been measured by using Kuppuswamy's Socio Economic Status (SES) scale after doing necessary modifications.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were focused on the status of the respondents and intergenerational change in interaction patterns. Interaction patterns had been studied within the framework of caste system and aspects such as social distance, interaction in religious and political institutions had been examined to map the changing interaction patterns amongst Dalits and Jat Sikhs.

#### Social Distance

Social distance describe the distance between different groups of society.

Traditionally various sorts of civil disabilities were imposed upon Dalit section of the society. They were socially segregated and lived in the separate areas meant for them (*chamrhli/vehrha/thathi*) and were *kameens* to their Jat Sikh patrons. The present study examined the social distance between Dalits and Jat Sikhs and took into consideration the social practices of segregation, of attending various social ceremonies, inter dinning to analyse the prevalent interaction and gauge the social distance.

#### Segregation

Segregation of individual castes or of groups of castes in a village is the most obvious mark of civil privileges and disabilities, and it has prevailed in a more or less definite form all over India. Southern India stands out distinct in the rigidity of these rules but in Northern India, generally it is only the low castes that are segregated and made to live on the outskirts of villages. The study investigated the change in this particular feature, by observing if there is any change

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF RESIDENCE

Status of the respondents	In the village		Outskirts of the village*				Chamrhli/ Vehrha		
	Respondent		Respondent		Father		Respondent	Father	
	Jat Sikh	Dalit	Jat Sikh	Dalit	Jat Sikh	Dalit	Dalits	Dalit	
Low	24	-	27	5	21	2	24	25	22
n=29,46	(17.39)	-	(17.53)	(22.73)	(20.39)	(33.33)	(23.76)	(52.08)	(37.29)
Medium	72	2	78	7	50	1	51	18	19
n=79,70	(52.17)	(22.22)	(50.65)	(31.82)	(48.54)	(16.67)	(50.50)	(37.50)	(32.20)
High	42	7	49	10	32	3	26	5	18
n=52,44	(30.43)	(77.78)	(31.82)	(45.45)	(31.07)	(50.00)	(25.74)	(10.42)	(30.51)
Total	138	9	154	22	103	6	101	48	59
n=160, 160	(86.25)	(5.62)	(96.25)	(13.75)	(64.37)	(3.75)	(63.12)	(30.00)	(36.87)
X <sup>2</sup>	9.23** (YC)		2.28		NA		6.50*		

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

\*\* Significant at 1 per cent level.

\* Significant at 5 per cent level.

\*Both castes resided in different localities on the outskirts of the village (mainly roadside).

in the pattern of residence in the sample area. The study highlighted (Table 1) that more than one third (36.9%) of Dalit respondents' father lived in the *chamarhli* (a separated living area of Dalits in a village) and the rest two-third (63.1%) lived on the outskirts of the village but that locality was also inhabited significantly by their own caste mates. On the other hand 96.2 per cent of the Jat Sikh's father had lived in village and rest 3.7 per cent on outskirts of the village. With economic and occupational mobility 5.6 per cent Dalit respondents from medium and high status had built up their residence within village and lived with Jat Sikhs as neighbours and that too without any resistance from them. The study observed a decline in percentage of Dalits who lived in *chamarhli*. Thus the study observed that the phenomenon of segregation of the erstwhile untouchable caste was on the decline. The Chi square values established a significant association between the caste and the place of residence of the respondents.

### Social Ceremonies

Social ceremonies (marriage, birth, death and *paths* etc.) are the occasions where whole village participate in the celebrations and sorrow of each other. An effort was made to find out whether Dalits were part of these celebrations or not. The study showed that 85 per cent of Jat Sikhs and 76.2 per cent of the Dalits attended the social ceremonies of each other (Table 2). Such kind of interaction was comparatively less during fathers' generation of Jats Sikhs (13.1%) and that of Dalits (21.9%). Caste wise analysis highlighted that more than half of medium status Jat Sikhs divulged of attending the

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT ON THE BASIS OF ATTENDING SOCIAL CEREMONIES**

Status of the respondents	Attending the social ceremonies			
	Respondent		Father	
	Jat Sikh	Dalit	Jat Sikh	Dalit
Low n=29,46	27 (19.85)	29 (23.77)	15 (71.43)	16 (45.71)
Medium n=79,70	71 (52.21)	49 (40.16)	4 (19.05)	14 (40.00)
High n=52,44	38 (27.94)	44 (36.07)	2 (9.52)	5 (14.29)
Total n=160,160	136 (85.00)	122 (76.25)	21 (13.12)	35 (21.87)
X <sup>2</sup>	3.80*		3.51*	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

\* Significant at 5 per cent level.

social functions of Dalit acquaintances where as 40.1 per cent medium and thirty six per cent high status Dalits attended the functions of Jat Sikh counterparts. Deeper investigation into the matter revealed that socio-economic status played a greater role in dictating such interaction pattern. Chi squares values too established an association between status and attending the ceremonies in both the generations.

The study took into consideration the interaction between the two castes at two different levels. Firstly, it was the interaction between the relatively equals (as guests only). Secondly, it was patron-client interaction (as workers only). The study highlighted that all Jat Sikh respondents attended the ceremonies of Dalits as guests only. The study (Table 3) revealed that 46.8 per cent of those who attended the functions at Jats' places as guest were from high status. Nearly forty per cent from medium and 13.8 per cent from low status were also part of these celebrations as guests.

**TABLE 3: ATTENDING THE CEREMONIES BY DALITS AS GUEST/WORKER OF JAT SIKH**

Status of the respondents	As guest		As worker	
	Respondent	Father	Respondent	Father
Low n=46	13 (13.83)	-	16 (57.14)	16 (47.06)
Medium n=70	37 (39.36)	-	12 (42.86)	14 (41.18)
High n=44	44 (46.81)	1 (100.00)	-	4 (11.76)
Total n=160	94 (58.75)	1 (0.62)	28 (17.50)	34 (21.25)
X <sup>2</sup>	NA		0.65	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.  
\*All Jat Sikh respondents attended the ceremonies as guest only.

The study further recorded the intergenerational change in patron client relationship between Dalits and Jat Sikhs. Dalit respondents divulged that they had found entry into the households of Jat Sikhs whereas their fathers' were denied such entry. They revealed that their fathers' too worked for Jat Sikhs but their work pertained to outside the household. Seventeen per cent of Dalit respondents and one fourth of their fathers' generation had such interactive ties. The data revealed that about half of low and

medium status Dalits were engaged by Jat Sikhs as cooks/halwai, waiters and domestic helpers. Chi square value did not found any association between status and attending the ceremony as guest or worker.

**Inter-Dinning**

Preceding discussion had made it clear that both castes started attending others' social ceremonies and on these occasions, inter-dinning was very common. They did not exactly share food with each other but had food at same place from same servings and utensils. There were no restrictions on Dalits in having food with Jat Sikhs on religious and social functions. The study highlighted that (Table 4) one fourth of Jat Sikh and 83.1 per cent Dalit respondents took meals together whereas in their fathers' generation this was practised by only 3.1 per cent of Jat Sikhs and 18.1 per cent of Dalits. The study further highlighted that out of those who had inter dinned with Jat Sikhs about 49 per cent were from medium and 30.8 per cent were from high class status. It was found that one fourth of Jat Sikhs and one sixth of Dalits did not

**TABLE 4: INTER-DINNING BETWEEN DALITS AND JAT SIKHS**

Status of the respondents	Yes				No			
	Respondent		Father		Respondent		Father	
	Jat Sikh	Dalits	Jat Sikh	Dalits	Jat Sikh	Dalits	Jat Sikh	Dalits
Low n=29,46	19 (15.97)	27 (20.30)	2 (40.00)	7 (24.14)	10 (24.39)	19 (70.37)	27 (17.42)	39 (29.77)
Medium n=79,70	72 (60.50)	65 (48.87)	3 (60.00)	10 (34.48)	7 (17.07)	5 (18.52)	76 (49.03)	60 (45.80)
High n=52,44	28 (23.53)	41 (30.83)	-	12 (41.38)	24 (58.54)	3 (11.11)	52 (33.55)	32 (24.43)
Total n=160, 160	119 (74.37)	133 (83.12)	5 (3.12)	29 (18.12)	41 (25.62)	27 (16.87)	155 (96.87)	131 (81.87)
X <sup>2</sup>	3.43 <sup>NS</sup>		NA		14.07 <sup>***</sup>		6.86 <sup>**</sup>	

\*\* Significant at 1 per cent level.  
Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

share meals and this percentage was quite less than their fathers' generation when majority of Jat Sikhs (96.8%) and Dalits (81.8%) did not inter dine with each other. A significant association was observed between status and not having meals together in both castes.

### Interaction in religious institutions

The study found that besides at least one Jat Sikh gurudwara in the entire sample villages, there were separate Dalit gurudwaras in 87.5 per cent of villages. Beside these gurudwaras there were other religious places like *dera*, *jgah* (Muslim places of worship) etc. visited by both the castes. Majority of the respondents visited their respective gurudwaras only but occasionally they do visit each other's religious places also. Efforts were made to know the purpose of visit to each other's religious places to gauge the interaction. Majority of Dalit respondents revealed that (Table 5) though there was no restriction on their entry into Jat Sikh gurudwaras even then majority (95.6%) of them visited there only at the time of *gurupurab* celebration and on other *dharmik smagams*. One-fourth of Jat

Sikhs also visited Dalit gurudwaras on special occasions to pay obeisance (mostly on Ravidas Jayanti).

Having goods like big kitchen utensils, floor mats, loud speakers was another reason of visiting each other's religious places by Jat Sikhs (40.6%) and Dalits (84.3%). Dalits were always dependent on their patrons for meeting such needs during social functions and Jat Sikhs never had such ties due to prevalence of pollution norms. But study observed that now Jat Sikhs too had such interactive ties with Dalits. They also brought goods when needed from Dalit gurudwaras. Hence, study found that interactions were dictated more by norms of convenience than by norms of caste particularly pollution and purity.

Only 2.5 per cent Dalits reported that they were members in Jat Sikh gurudwara managing committees and even lesser (1.8%) percentage divulged that they went to gurudwaras when called to discuss the financial matters. An intergenerational change was observed that in the generation of the fathers' of Dalits they were never the members in committees and neither were called to discuss any financial matters.

During study it was reported by only 8 per cent of the respondents that instituting *Amrit Bani* (a separate religious granth containing *Shlokas* of Guru Ravidas originally found in Guru Granth Sahib) in Ravidas gurudwaras by Dalits had been opposed by upper caste Jat Sikhs and in some places their attempts resulted in conflict. Religious celebrations particularly Ravidas Jayanti was the major bone of contention between Dalits and Jat Sikhs. The study observed that

**Table 5: PURPOSE OF VISIT OF DALITS AND JAT SIKHS TO EACH OTHER'S GURUDWARAS**

Purpose of the visit	Respondents		Fathers	
	Jat Sikh	Dalit	Jat Sikh	Dalits
Pay obeisance	45.00 (28.12)	153 (95.62)	23 (14.37)	121.00 (75.62)
Member committee	15.00 (9.37)	4.00 (2.50)	4.00 (2.50)	-
Participate in financial matters	12.00 (7.50)	3.00 (1.87)	5.00 (3.12)	-
Have goods	65.00 (40.62)	135 (84.37)	-	115.00 (71.87)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages.

Ravidas Jayanti was celebrated with great fervour in the sample area. An attempt was made to investigate the interaction between the two castes on such occasions. As was divulged in the preceding discussion that the social distance had decreased and it was expected to impact interaction in religious spheres. But contrary to this, study found widening of gap between the two.

A majority (88.7%) of Dalit respondents revealed that (Table 6) Jat Sikhs did not participate and support them in these celebrations though they did not openly came against these celebrations. On the other hand 91.3 per cent of Jat Sikhs objected to the undue flaunting and ostentatiousness during *nagar kirtans*. Jat Sikhs had issues with the pomp and show during such processions and considered their act of distributing fruits, sweets etc. unruly. Not given opportunities to be the member in Jat Sikh gurudwara managing committee, inspite of their numerical strength was another reason

**TABLE 6: RELIGIOUS INTERACTION BETWEEN DALITS AND JAT SIKHS (Multiple responses)**

Reason	Respondent		Z values
	Jat Sikhs	Dalits	
Instituting separate Dharm Granth	5 (10.86)	5 (8.06)	0.5
Celebration of Ravidas Jayanti	42 (91.30)	55 (88.70)	0.44
Member Management Committee	-	28 (45.16)	5.30**
Separate religion	39 (84.78)	57 (91.93)	1.17

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.  
\*\* Significant at 1 per cent level of significance.

behind Dalits distancing from Jats. Saints of DSB and other *deras* and Dalit community of *Doaba* region proclaimed the birth of new religion. Dalits asserted for the new faith, Guru Ravidas Dharm, and were trying to institute their own religious book, *Amrit Bani Shri Guru Ravidas Maharaj Ji*, had their communal flag (*Har*) and greeted each other by saying *Jai Guru Dev Ji*. Differences calculated were found to be significant at one per cent level of significance.

**Village Panchayat and elections**

73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993 provided for statutory reservation of elected posts in local bodies for women, besides the SCs and the STs. This generated a lot of hope about empowering the weaker sections. Study found proportionate representation of Dalits in all the sample villages and 43.7 per cent villages had Dalit sarpanch.

The study recorded the perceptions of Dalits regarding their interaction with Jat Sikhs in the functioning of village panchayats and cooperation from Jat Sikhs. It was revealed by the three fourth of Dalit respondents that Jat Sikhs cooperated with them at each stage (Table 7). Dalits felt that Jat Sikhs had accepted them as equal partners in political institution due to their numerical strength. Jat Sikhs had well realized the fact that without Dalit votes they could not succeed in election, hence the cooperation was more a compulsion than a choice for them. Announcement of Rs. 100 crores for Ravidas Memorial by present SAD-BJP government at *Khuralgarh* village in Hoshiarpur district also is the testimony of the fact that they had well realized the power of Dalit vote bank and program to cash upon

**TABLE 7: PERCEPTIONS OF DALITS REGARDING FUNCTIONING OF PANCHAYATS**

Particulars	Dalit		X <sup>2</sup> value
	Respondents	Father	
<b>Cooperation in panchayats</b>			
Yes	121 (75.60)	98 (61.20)	7.65**
No	39 (24.30)	62 (38.70)	
<b>Who spent money on elections</b>			
Jat Sikhs	107 (66.80)	149 (93.10)	34.46**
Dalits	30 (18.70)	6 (3.70)	
Both	23 (14.30)	5 (3.10)	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

\*\* Significant at 1 per cent level.

it through such political tactics. Two third of the Dalits divulged that Jat Sikhs spent money on panchayat elections whereas a large majority (93.1%) revealed that during their fathers' generation election expenses were bore by Jat Sikhs. Mobility in socio-economic status had enabled Dalits to spend money on panchayat elections as was divulged by one fifth of them.

### CONCLUSION

The study highlighted a significant intergenerational change in interaction patterns amongst Dalits and Jat Sikhs. Social distance between both castes had been decreasing. It was observed that both castes were coming socially closer to each other. Restrictions on Dalits' entry into Jat Sikhs' kitchen and on attending each others' social ceremonies as well as taking meals together was on decline. Dalits had constructed their own gurudwaras in order to attain a certain degree of cultural and religious autonomy

from the dominant Jat Sikhs. Government's affirmative action program had enabled proportionate political representation of Dalits in village panchayats and Jat Sikhs had accepted well this fact. The change in interaction patterns was not by choice for Jat Sikhs but it was a compulsion for them. They had realized that Dalits had become a force to reckon with, at least in the political arena. The increasing level of Dalit assertion, benefits of affirmative action program, remittances and diversification in the realm of economy had given Dalits a strong sense of equality inspiring to assert for share in the local and state power structure and sometimes met with resistance from upper caste. This had created a sort of confrontation between the dominant and the downtrodden.

### REFERENCES

- Awasthi, S (2003) Why Funds for SCs Remain Unspent. *Times of India*, Chandigarh, April 19.
- Chana, S (2012) Diaspora and Development (A Case Study and Review of Existing Projects). In: *Indian Diaspora: Migration and Development with Focus on the State of Punjab*, (ed): Sahai P S, Chand K and Kumar P. CRRID Publication, Chandigarh.
- Jodhka, S. S. (2000) Prejudice Without Pollution: Scheduled Castes in Contemporary Punjab. *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 12 (3&4): 65-71.
- Jodhka, S. S. (2002) Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab. *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(19): 1813-23.
- Jodhka, S. S. (2004) Dissociation, Distancing and Autonomy: Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab. In: *Dalits in regional context*, (ed): Harish K Puri. Rawat Publication, New Delhi.
- Jodhka, S. S. (2009) The Ravidasis of Punjab: Global Contours of Caste and Religious Strife. *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (24): 79-85.



- Judge, P. S. (2003) Hierarchical Differentiation among Dalits. *Economic and Political Weekly* 38 (28): 12-18.
- Judge, P. S. (2012) Between Exclusion and Exclusivity: Dalits in Contemporary India. *Polish Sociological Review* 2 (178): 265-279.
- Judge, P. S. and Bal, G (2008) Understanding the Paradox of Changes among Dalits in Punjab. *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (41): 49-55.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (1988) Religious Rebels in Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchables, Ajanta Publication, Delhi.
- Kumar, A. (2004) Electoral Politics in Punjab. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39 (14-15):1515-20.
- Puri, H. K. (2003) Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective. *Economic and Political Weekly* 38 (26): 2693-2701.
- Ram, R. (2007) Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras- Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab. *Econ Political Wkly* 42 (40): 4066-74.
- Ram, R. (2009) Ravidass, Dera Sachkhand Ballan and the Question of Dalit Identity in Punjab. *Journal of Punjab Studies* 16 (1) University of California, Santa Barbar.
- Ram, R. (2009) Regional Specificities and Caste Hierarchies in Punjab. *Indian Journal of Politics* 43 (2): 15-29.
- Singh, G (2012) Religious Transnationalism and Development Initiatives: The Dera Sachkhand Ballan. *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (1): 53-60.
- Statistical Abstract of Punjab. Economic and Statistical Organisation, Government of Punjab (Various Issues).
- Tatla, D S (1999) *The Sikh Diaspora: Search For Statehood*. UCL Press, London.

---

Received: October 3, 2015

Accepted: November 18, 2015