

# Role of Caste in determining Economic Status of an Individual: An Analytical Study of Villages in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh

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**Abstract-** Caste system in India is believed to have originated from Varna system which prevailed during Vedic era. 'Varna' is a Hindi word supposed to have roots in Sanskrit word 'Vri' which means 'to select' or 'to opt' hence this word is used for selection or for opting a particular profession or trade which essentially is based on one's aptitude and it had nothing to do with inheritance of a particular trade or profession from ancestors. During Vedic and Epic eras people were supposed to have four different needs i.e need of education or intellectual need, need of safety , need of livelihood or economic need and need of service and in order to fulfill these needs the whole society is divided into four different parts and each part or section was assigned with the responsibility of fulfillment of a particular need and this very division is known as 'Varna vibhajan' i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra and each one fulfills needs as per their responsibility or status also known as 'varna dharma'.

**Key words-** Vedic; Varna; Caste; Society; Economic.

## Introduction

Caste system in India is believed to have originated from Varna system which prevailed during Vedic era. 'Varna' is a Hindi word supposed to have roots in Sanskrit word 'Vri' which means 'to select' or 'to opt' hence this word is used for selection or for opting a particular profession or trade which essentially is based on one's aptitude and it had nothing to do with inheritance of a particular trade or profession from ancestors. During Vedic and Epic eras people were supposed to have four different needs i.e need of education or intellectual need, need of safety , need of livelihood or economic need and need of service and in order to fulfill these needs the whole society is divided into four different parts and each part or section was assigned with the responsibility of fulfillment of a particular need and this very division is known as 'Varna vibhajan' i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra and each one fulfills needs as per their responsibility or status also known as 'varna dharma'. As depicted in the following figure Brahmins occupy the top most place in social hierarchy as their sphere is deemed to be of prime importance Kshatriya , Vaisya and Shudras come lower down the order as per the importance of their particular domains.

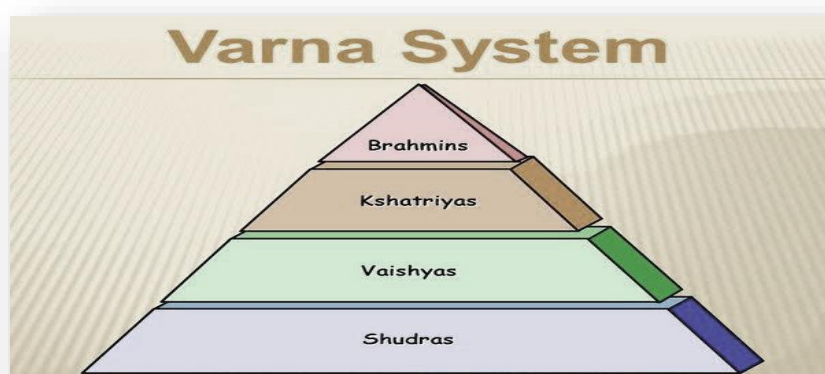


Figure 1 ( Varna System)

Various other theories also prevail simultaneously each one emphasizing that 'Varna vyavastha' has nothing to do with birth of an individual however it is entirely based on aptitude and traits of an individuals and it is opined that this system has been an open ended system where people had the option to choose the trade as per their aptitude.

**Origin of Caste System**

There is no uniformity among the scholars regarding the origin of caste system in ancient and medieval India. There are at least two different schools of thinkers.

- The first school of thought which was common among the scholars during British colonial era and led by Dumont perceived the roots of caste system in ‘Varna System’ which existed in Indian Society since Vedic and Epic Eras and they justify this proposition by citing the various descriptions of manusmriti {Gupta,p.181,}
- The second school of thought relies on socio-economic factors, claiming that these factors alone drive the caste system. It believes caste to be rooted in the economic, political and material history of India {Bayly(2001),pp.19-24}. This thought is prevalent among scholars of post-colonial era such as Marriot and Dirks describe the caste system as ever evolving social reality that can only be properly understood by the study of historical evidence of actual practice.

Hence it can be summarized that the prevalent caste system is attributed to multiple factors and with the changing times this system has acquired more of political shape than merely a social one. The existence of inter-caste relationship which is known as ‘jajmani system’ which was a system of mutual co-existence and mutual fulfillment of needs has lost its relevance with the passage of time.

**Objectives of the study**

The present study is conducted with the following objectives

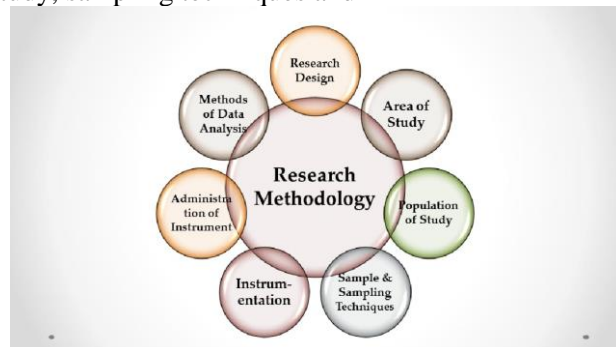
- The study aims at studying the various impacts of caste in determining the economic status of an individual in society.
- Study aims at finding correlation between position of a caste and corresponding economic status of individuals.

**Hypothesis**

Hypothesis plays a very important role in any research. Hypothesis, something supposed or taken for granted or a temporary conclusion which is arrived at before conducting the actual research it helps in setting out on the journey with a blue print in hand. In the present study it is hypothesized that caste essentially plays an important role in determining one’s economic status and it is also hypothesized that caste is not a determining factor of one’s economic status in society.

**Methodology**

– Research Methodology as depicted in the following figure (Figure -2) embraces various facets i.e. research design, area of research, population of study, sampling techniques and



**Figure -2 ( Research Methodology)**

Instrumentation, their administration etc. The present study being conducted in three villages of district Kangra which are densely populated each one having a population of more than 3000 residents. These villages are Raserh, Tang Narwana and Jadrangal which comes under tehsil Dharamshala and also the community development block of Dharamshala. These villages have mixture of castes. A sample of 100 individuals both male and females is selected from each village for the present study.

**Analysis**

**Sex Composition**

**Table-1 (Sample Profile)**

Sr. No.	Name Of Village	No. of Males	No. of Females	Total
1	Raserh	65	35	100
2	Tang Narwana	61	39	100
3	Jadrangal	50	50	100

	Total	176	124	300
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As per the table 1 in each village 100 people are selected as sample both the males and females have been included in the study. Approximately 60% of the samples are from males as they are the bread winners in these families.

### Educational Profile

**Table-2(Educational Profile)**

Sr. No.	Level of education	Males	Females	Percentage
1	Matriculation	57	65	40.66
2	Intermediate	42	23	21.66
3	Graduation	45	25	23.33
4	Professional	32	11	14.33
	Total	176	124	100

Table-2 shows educational profiles of the individuals in these villages majority of the people i.e. 40.66% are educated up to the level of matriculation and merely 14.33% are having professional expertise whereas 23.33% are graduate in different streams 21.66% are educated up to intermediate.

### Caste Background

**Table-3 (Caste background)**

Sr.No.	Caste Status	Males	Females	Total	Percentage
1	Upper Strata(Brahmins,Rajputs)	34	22	56	18.66
2	Middle Strata(Choudhary)	99	78	177	59.00
3	Lower Strata(landless Castes engaged in traditional parental occupations)	43	24	67	22.33
		176	124	300	100

Table 3 gives a glimpse of caste composition of the study area 18.66% population belongs to upper strata of society comprising of brahmins and rajputs. 59% majority is of middle strata of society comprises of choudhary or locally known as Girths also having numerous sub-caste groups. They are the dominant caste of this region whereas 22.33% is the lowest strata of the society which is backward in the most of the spheres of life.

### Economic Status

For measuring economic status of different caste groups the standard measurements of BPL (below Poverty Line) and APL (Above Poverty Line) have been resorted to. The following table analyses the economic status of different caste groups.

**Table-4(Economic Status)**

Sr. No.	Caste Status	BPL	Percentage	APL	Percentage	Total
1.	Upper Strata(Brahmins,Rajputs)	04	07.14	52	92.85	56
2.	Middle Strata(Choudhary)	54	30.50	123	69.49	177
3.	Lower Strata(Landless Caste Groups engaged in traditional parental occupations)	45	67.16	22	32.83	67
	Total	103	34.33	197	65.66	300

### Findings

- 34.33% of the total population of these three villages lies below poverty line as they are barely having resources to have their two square meals.

- 65.66% people are having sufficient sources of livelihood and majority of them are working in government sector across all the three caste groups as agriculture is not that much developed in these areas. People engaged in agriculture are producing only for the fulfillment of their own needs
- Interestingly barely 07.14% of the population of higher caste groups is below poverty line whereas 92.85% are economically better off. These caste groups traditionally inherited rich property and also from educational point of view they do have an edge over other caste groups. Majority of these people are engaged in service sector occupying very higher positions.
- 30.50% of the middle caste groups popularly known as ghirth in these areas are in BPL as they are not having enough resources of livelihood. It is not that they are not having land but the land at their disposal is barren or which lacks proper irrigation facilities. 69.49% of this group is in APL having sufficient sources of livelihood at their disposal. This caste group happens to be the 'dominant caste' of this region and they are also having a very decisive role in local politics as they do have a vote bank. This section of society is engaged in agriculture primarily in potato cultivation which happens to be the cash crop of this particular region or working in service sector.
- 67.16% of the lower caste group belongs to BPL they do neither have land nor they are working in government sector, they are either engaged in their traditional petty occupations or working as laborers with upper and middle caste groups .32.83% of the population is in APL with reasonably good resources of livelihood and majority of them are working in service sector with having stable source of income.

### Conclusion

On the basis of present study and findings as listed above it can be concluded that caste is a determinant of economic status of individuals in our society up to a certain extent but it cannot be accepted as a universal truth alone. In present scenario education is far more important and especially if an individual is equipped with professional expertise he is more likely to be in a higher economic class and caste alone is not a determinant of economic wellbeing of individuals. However this is also an established fact that higher caste groups do have an edge over lower caste groups in providing an environment conducive to acquire quality education.

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