A Study on Disparities derived from Caste System: Roopsi Village, Jaisalmer

Kar Nabendu Sekhar
Department of Geography, Ballygunge Campus, University of Calcutta, 35, Ballygunge Circular Road, Kolkata-700019, INDIA

Abstract

Village Roopsi is situated in the rocky and sandy terrain of Thar Desert plain (Marusthali), 35 km North-West of Jaisalmer town, Rajasthan with a total population of 1430 persons (Census 2001). The settlements of this village bear a reflection of the local caste structure. Three residential clusters have been identified according to the caste hierarchy based on their traditional occupations. These are i. Upper Caste Sector on the western end of the south-eastern part, ii. Other Backward Castes and Scheduled Castes on the southern end of the south-eastern part and iii. Tribal Population on the northern end of the south-eastern part of the village. A comparative study on socio-economic parameters (based on Census of India, 2001 and primary sample survey on 142 households covering all three residential sectors) reveals marked disparities in various aspects of life derived from caste structure among these settlement clusters.

**Keywords:** Caste system, demography, disparity, segregation.

Introduction

One of the most characteristic features of the Indian society is the caste system. About its origin, Rishi Aurobindo Ghosh[1] comments – *"Indian culture from an early stage seized upon a double idea for its own guidance which it threw into a basic system of individual life in the social frame. This was the double system of the four Varnas and the four Ashramas- four graded classes of society and four successive stages of developing human life......Indian society.......lost the true sense of the think with which it set out to embody and degenerated into a chaos of castes, developing evils which we are now much embarrassed to eliminate".* This *'degenerated…chaos of castes'* manufactured the concept of a rigid social hierarchy on the basis of the castes where an undesirable social issue of *untouchability* manifested itself upon the lowest caste group. These people, being repressed for generations, have been reduced to the state of living at the mercy of the people of higher castes. This was further aggravated by denigration of low caste group leading to social as well as residential segregation. Kardiner and Ovesey[1] remarked that *"Once you degrade someone in that way, the sense of guilt makes it imperative to degrade the object further to justify the whole procedure".*

In spite of several efforts by the Government of India, through strategies, and policies to i. eliminate this discrepancy and ii. empower the low caste groups, it has not been possible to eradicate the caste system which is very much embedded in the Indian society and becoming hindrance in the way of development. Cases of caste segregation in arid and semi-arid regions of India have been reported by various scholars[1,2,3,4,5]

and elaborated various aspects of disparities based on caste structure[7,8,9].

Study Area: Village Roopsi ($27^{\circ}30'$N, $70^{\circ}48'30''$E) of Jaisalmer Tehsil is located 35 km WNW of Jaisalmer Town in Jaisalmer Marusthali, Rajasthan, at the driest part of India (Figure-1) with a total population of 1430 persons (Census 2001). Roopsi has a heterogeneous caste composition.

Each caste of the village had to perform certain functions, which were interdependent and complimentary to each other, thereby weaving the economic system into a single integrated unit. Traditional occupations formed the basis of caste distinctions and the economic systems and its consequent bonds of mutual obligations that have been reflected in the settlement morphology. Three distinct residential sectors have been identified according to their caste hierarchy founded on traditional occupation. These are i. Cluster A: *Upper Caste Sector* on the western end of the south-eastern part who serve the community with socio-religious ceremonies. The Brahmins and agricultural castes like Jats, Bishnois, Rajputs etc. fall in this category, ii. Cluster B: *Other Backward Castes* and *Scheduled Castes* on the southern end of the south-eastern part who serve the needs of agriculturists, belonging to the manufacturing group like Suthars, Lohars, Raikas etc. and they also serve the other needs of the community like Nais, Darjis, Sunars, Khatis, Kumhars and Sansis etc. and iii. Cluster C: *Tribal Population* on the northern end of the south-eastern part of the village. They are the labourers and nomad groups like Bhills, Meenas, Banjara, Adivasi Gawaria etc.
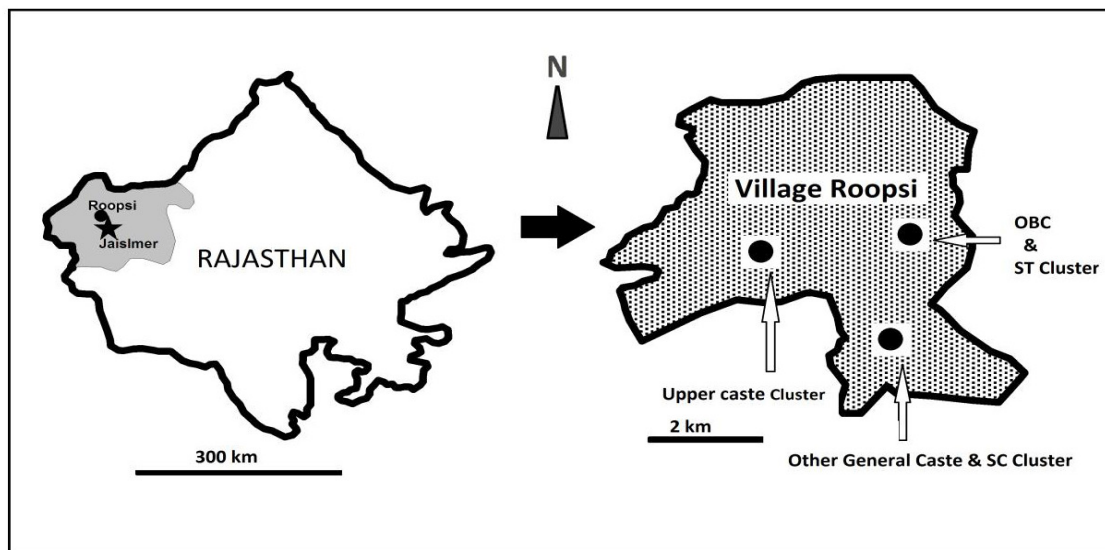
Figure-1
Location of Roopsi Village in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Material and Methods

The secondary database is prepared from Census of India, 2001 data[6]. For primary data household survey was conducted on 16th and 17th February, 2006 covering 142 households (Cluster A-36, Cluster B-71, and Cluster C-35). For cluster B a larger number of samples were taken than the other two as B is the largest cluster covering approximately two thirds of total population.

There were certain limitations regarding primary data collection. The initial constraint was that thesurvey period was short;secondly, cluster-wise share of total population and total number of households could not be recorded during that short period; thirdly, the respondents were not very keen in stating their exact income figures; fourthly, the caste 'Jat' (except Bharatpur and Dhaulpur dist.) is included in OBC schedule by Rajasthan Government[6] but 'Jat' responders of Roopsi claimed themselves as general caste and they also belong to the upper caste sector i.e. cluster A.

Here basic observations are made based on analysis of the primary and secondary data through a set of parameters like demography, literacy, occupational structure, landholdings, livestock and agriculture and basic amenities enjoyed by these three clusters through various quantitative methods. The resulting observation clearly reveals marked differences of socio-economic characteristics among these settlements showing disparities in all aspects of life emanating from the caste structure.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Features: Starting from an initial figure of 68 in 1951, the population of this village increased to 1430 in 2001(by almost 20 times), inhabiting an area of 5491.36 hectares[6]. The density of population of 0.260 persons/ha[6] is very low solely due to rocky and sandy pediment landscape, saltpans and infertile soils. Here over 75% of the total population constitutes of young people.

In Roopsi village, according to the 2001 Census data the total number of males were 746 and females were 684. The total number of S.C. Population was 600 (male-308, female-292) and the total number of S.T. population was 331(male-176, female-155). Therefore 41.9% of the population belongs to S.C. section and 23.1% of them belong to S.T. population[6].

From primary survey it is found that marital status of women (table 1) in all three clusters shows similar trends with higher percentage of married women. Widow remarriage is restricted in this upper caste group. Birth rate displays (table 2) that in three clusters most of the couples have 4-6 live births. Not surprisingly, higher birth rates are found in the tribal group. In the surveyed tribal households all couples are having more than four children. Most of them are involved in jobs of physical labour and they always appreciate an extra working hand.

Mortality and morbidity occurrences are high among the lower caste people mainly because of their poor economic conditions and thus cannot afford quality medical treatments. Common morbidity incidences are in the form of fever, gastritis, arthritis, blood sugar, cataract, cardiac diseases, rheumatism, lever problem etc.

The dependency burden in the upper caste group is 63.1%, in the *O.B.C* and *S.C.* group 64.3% and among the *S.T.* populations it is 71%.

mortality and high illiteracy among females [6]. The sex ratio as recorded in the primary household survey in the *upper caste*

group is 704, in the *O.B.C.* and *S.C.* group is 824 and in the tribal group is 767 per 1000 males. The low sex ratio in the *upper caste group* reveals the existence of various superstitions and low status of females. However predominance of working females in the other general caste, *S.C.-O.B.C.* and *S.T.* groups is the main cause of comparatively higher sex ratio among them.

Literacy: In Roopsi village, the total literate population in 2001 was 641 (44.8%). Among them, literate males and females were 439 (68.4%) and 202 (31.6%) respectively[6].

Household survey data shows literacy is higher among higher caste groups but in all groups female literacy status is very low (Table 3). Educational status reveals that in all three groups many persons have education up to secondary level (table 4) but after that there is no provision of further education in and around the area. For higher education one has to go to nearest town Jaisalmer. Only creamy layer of the village can afford expensive higher education.

According to 2001 Census sex ratio of this village is 917/1000 male population which indicates very low status, aggravated by high

School-dropout is a serious problem of rural areas of India[10,11]. In a Government primary school in this village, students' record by cohort analysis reveals that out of 119 students admitted in class I in 1999-2000 waste for year loss was 93.87%. Besides waste for readmission was 6.13%, average academic year per student for passing up to class V was 8.66 years, cohort of passing was 48.33% and cohort of year loss was 51.67%. This situation exhibits the importance of working children as well as child labour in this village, not surprisingly most of them belong to lower castes.

Table-1
Marital status of women in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village

	Married	Never Married	Widow	Remarried
Upper Caste Group	65%	23.5%	10.7%	0.0%
Other backward caste and S.C. group	71%	16.4%	8.2%	4.4%
Tribal group	68.8%	11.6%	8.9%	10.7%

Source: Primary Household survey

Table-2
Birth rate per couple in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village

	None	1-3	4-6	7-9	Above 9
Upper Caste Group	8.9%	17.8%	50%	17.9%	4%
Other Backward Caste and S.C. group	8.5%	11.9%	54.2%	20.3%	5.1%
Tribal group	5.1%	0.0%	46.2%	20.5%	0.8%

Source: Primary Household Survey.

Table-3
Percentage of literate and illiterate population in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village

	Upper Caste Group	*Other Backward Caste and S.C. group*	*Tribal group*
Literate	58.5%	47.9%	38.3%
Male Literate	42.3%	28.4%	28.3%
Female Literate	16.2%	19.5%	14.3%

Source: Primary Household Survey

Table-4
Educational status of three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village

	Primary or below	Secondary or below	Higher Secondary and above
Upper Caste Group	28.2%	49%	11.7%
Other Backward Caste and S.C. group	20.6%	57.7%	5.7%
Tribal group	28.3%	58.5%	3.1%

Source: Primary Household Survey

Occupational structure: Various occupational patterns have been identified in this village. Apart from cultivation, pastoralism, labour and services, various types of handicrafts as small-scale and cottage industry, household industrial works, business, stone-work including excellent miniature by stone crushing etc. are found in this village.

According to 2001 Census, 35.2% of the total population of the village were working of which 69.4% were males and 30.6% were females. Out of this 35.2% of working population, 62.2% were main workers (47% cultivators, 0.64% agricultural labourers, 1.27% household industrial workers, 51.1% other trades), 37.8% were marginal workers (2.1% cultivators, 67.4% agricultural labourers, 0.53% household industrial workers, 30% other trades) and 64.8% are non-workers (42.8% males and 57.2% females)[6].

As per the primary household survey among the tribal group dependent population is highest owing to highest growth rate (table 5). But female work participation is highest among them. Compared to other two groups Females have a decent position among tribal people. i. In the *upper caste group* among the working population, 35.2% are engaged in cultivation, 18.4% in service, 17.9% as agricultural labour, 7.3% in household industrial activity, 7.3% in professional work, 9.5% in factory work, 2.8% in business and 1.7% as daily labour. ii. In the *O.B.C. and S.C. group,* among the working population, 18% are engaged in cultivation, 20% in service, 22% as agricultural labour, 3% in household industrial activity, 10% in professional work, 5% in factory work, 2% in business, 10% as daily labour, 7% in stone crushing and 3% as pastoralists. iii. In the *S.T. group,* among the working population, 0.3% are engaged in cultivation, 17.2% in service, 3.4% as agricultural labour, 1.7% in household industrial activity, 10.3% in professional work, 5.2% in factory work, 3.4% in business, 24.1% as daily labour, 24.1% in stone crushing and 3% in pastorals. iv. The occupational structure of the three caste based residential sectors of the village reveals that the upper caste group have more diversified occupation than the others. It has more working population, more lands that are cultivated and comparatively more sophisticated occupations. Therefore, the economic condition of this group is comparatively better than the other two.

Agriculture and livestock: The system of agriculture practiced in this village suffers from the limitations imposed by aridity. The subsistence farming is largely in vogue and it tends to be farmer security-oriented. Low capital investment, labour oriented cultural operations, inadequate means of transportation and marketing facilities impose further checks on the development of efficient agriculture. Average size holding of the farms is large (more than 9 hectares), of which 70% are cultivated. The small farmers have land holdings of 3-4 hectares. Almost all farmers have some kind of livestock. Small and marginal farmers extensively own sheep and goats. According to Census 2001 in this village, 13.8% are big

farmers, 25.3% are medium farmers, 35.6% are marginal farmers and 25.3% are sharecroppers. Household survey confirms concentration of agricultural land is in the hands of upper caste group leading to economic disparity (table 6).

Amenities: The amenities available are least due to both adverse natural conditions and poor financial condition of most of the villagers. There are no health centres or any other govt. medical facilities. Well and underground tanks are the main sources of drinking water. Recently drinking water through pipe lines supplied from Ramkunda and reservoirs are constructed in the upper caste residential area. However, this is not sufficient. i. In the upper caste group, 78.5% use tap water, 5.4% use tube well, 16.1% use well. ii. In the other backward caste and S.C. group, 64.5% use tap water, 11.8% use tube well, 20.3% use well and 3.4% fetch water from distant sources. iii. In the S.T. group, 35.9% use tap water, 23.1% use tube well, 33.3% use well and 7.7% fetch water from distant sources.

The water supply is very erratic and in summer months tube wells, wells and river water are completely dried up. There are separate taps for each group.

The traditional sources of energy may broadly be grouped under non-commercial energy sources. It includes fuel wood, agro wastes and animal wastes which are used extensively by the tribal group. In case of commercial energy sources, electricity is mainly generated by diesel and gas based thermal power. As this village receives the maximum solar radiation, the harnessing of solar energy by solar, thermal and photovoltaic conversion techniques are gradually being popularised. Besides wind energy, Biogas power system, energy plantation etc. are the other sources of energy in this village. Higher affluent caste groups mostly enjoy modern sources of lighting (table 7).

The villagers use different types of fuel for cooking. i. In the upper caste group, 38.1% use fuel-wood, 8.9% use crop residue, 17.9% use animal dung, 1.8% use charcoal, 3.8% use kerosene, 30.3% use LPG and 5.3% use biogas. ii. In the other backward caste and S.C. group, 37.3% use fuel-wood, 15.2% use crop residue, 22% use animal dung, 1.7% use charcoal, 8.5% use kerosene, 10.2% use LPG and 1.7% use biogas. iii. In the S.T. group, 61.5% use fuel-wood, 15.4% use crop residue, 15.4% use animal dung, 2.5% use kerosene and 5.2% of this group has no kitchen in their household.

Conclusion

After 60 years of Independence of India caste structure is still a hindrance in the way of development which is largely manifested in village Roopsi. Discrepancy in all aspects of life born out of a long history of caste segregation is clearly exhibited by the above discussion.

The above diagram (figure-2) of income structure is clearly showing that the upper caste group is comparatively more

affluent and enjoys all the facilities available in village. Income disparity is clear among all three groups but in case of upper caste group it is lowest as Ginny concentration of coefficient is 0.1929, 0.43, and 0.789 for upper caste group, O.B.C. and S.C. group and S.T. group respectively.

Table-5
Work participation status in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village.

	Working Population		Dependent Population	
Upper Caste Group	36.1%		63.9%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	92.7%	7.3%	39.4%	60.6%
Other Backward Caste and S.C. group	24.7%		75.3%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	82%	18%	45.9%	54.1%
Tribal group	22.5%		77.5%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	63.8%	36.2%	54.5%	45.5%

Source: Primary Household Survey

Table-6
**Distribution of farmers in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village.**

	Big Farmers	Medium Farmers	Small and marginal Farmers	Sharecroppers
Upper Caste Group	17.5%	25.4%	38.1%	19%
Other Backward Caste and S.C. group	5.6%	22.2%	22.2%	50%
Tribal group	0.0%	33.3%	50%	16.7%

Source: Primary Household Survey.

Table-7
Distribution of households based on energy source in three settlement clusters of Roopsi Village

	No Lighting	Kerosene	Solar	Electricity
Upper Caste Group	3.6%	3.6%	7.1%	85.7%
Other Backward Caste and S.C. group	8.5%	13.6%	1.6%	76.3%
Tribal group	30.8%	10.3%	0.0%	58.9%

Source: Primary Household Survey.
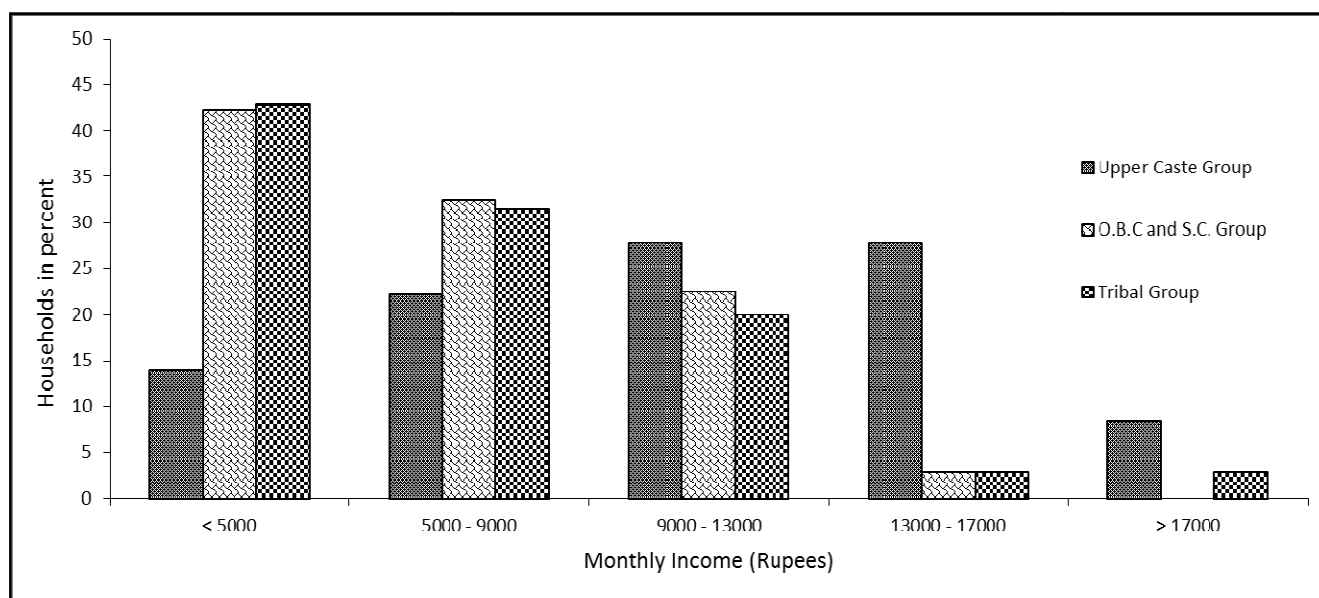
Figure-2
Caste group wise income structure of Roopsi Village, Jaisalmer (n=142)

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