Caste Based Endogamy in a Punjabi Village of Pakistan

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Abstract
Caste based endogamy is one of the main characteristics of traditional caste system practiced in rural Pakistan. Members of different quoms do not inter-marry or at least do not prefer to marry out of their quom. While social acceptance for inter quom marriages among different landowning quoms is increasing in Punjabi villages, inter marriages between landowning quoms and service providing quoms are normatively discouraged even at present. As a result, members of landowning quoms and service providing quoms do not form kinship associations, which reproduce them as two mutually exclusive social groups placing landowning quoms at a higher and service providing quoms at a lower status category. Caste based status differences across landowning quoms and service providing quoms and emphasis on collective life in rural setting are seen as the main reasons that reinforce caste based endogamy. Educational, economic or professional accomplishments of the members of service providing quoms do not affect the structure of caste based endogamy in Punjabi villages. Though a few incidents of elopement marriages among landowning quoms and service providing quoms are found, such marriages do not generally gain social approval.

Keywords: Caste, Endogamy, Punjabi Villages, Rural Punjab, Inter Quom Marriages, Landowning Quoms, Service Providing Quoms.

Introduction
This article examines the dynamics of caste based endogamy across traditional landowning quoms and service providing quoms in the contemporary Punjabi villages of Pakistan. Caste system in rural Punjab exists in the form of indigenous hierarchical groupings like quom or zaat and represents division of society into birth-ascribed status groups based on parentage occupations (Lyon, 2004). Contrary to classical categories of Hindu caste system i.e. Brahmans, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, the major caste divisions in Punjabi villages are found
between landowning *quoms* and service providing *quoms* (Ahmad, 1970; Eglar, 1960). Different landowning *quoms* traditionally associated with cultivation as their parentage occupation are called *zamindars*. Members of a *zamindar quom* residing in a village own land with varying size of their landholdings. On the other hand, members of different artisan and service providing *quoms* e.g. barber, carpenter, cobbler, blacksmith, weaver, potter, *Musalli* (labourer) are jointly called as *kammi*. Traditionally, *kammi* serve the villagers as labour or with the occupational crafts associated with their *quom* that they inherit from their ancestors (Ahmad, 1970; Alavi, 1972; Eglar, 1960).

Division of rural Punjab into landowning *quoms* and service providing *quoms* and the dynamics of their social relationships are traditionally organized around the birth-ascribed status in a *quom*, occupational specializations associated with different *quoms* by parentage, endogamy and kinship system (*biradari*), hierarchical positioning of different *quoms* and labour relations (Ahmad, 1970; Eglar, 1960; Lyon, 2004; Nadvi & Robinson, 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). The traditional labour relation between *zamindars* and *kammi* is known as Seyp system in which *kammi* used to work as labour for *zamindars* besides serving the villagers with their parentage crafts. *Kammi* earned their livelihood predominantly through their caste based occupations (Eglar, 1960). 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). 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). 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 *quom* membership and not the material possessions (Eglar, 1960; Lyon, 2004). The above discussion shows how at least two main characteristics of the traditional caste system practiced in Punjabi villages have transformed over time i.e. occupational specializations of *kammi* and labour relations. As a result, the dynamics of asymmetrical interaction among *kammi* *quoms* and *zamindar quoms* in the village sphere have changed, with less economic dependence of *kammi* on *zamindars* (Chaudhary, 1999). However, *zamindars* and *kammi* are always recognized and differentiated from each other in the village setting on the basis of their parentage occupations and *quom* membership and not through the occupations they opt for later in their life. It suggests that the caste occupations are still relevant in terms of identity where birth ascribed status remains the fundamental feature of the caste system in rural Punjab (Lyon, 2004).
Besides the above mentioned characteristics, a key feature of the traditional caste system practiced in rural Punjab is that different quoms are endogamous groups (Eglar, 1960). However, there are hardly any studies exploring the changing dynamics of caste based endogamy across kammi and zamindars and thus the changes in their kinship relations i.e. biradari formation. On the other side, while talking about the changing caste dynamics in modern India, Sharma (2004) mentioned that the inter caste marriages are increasing. Nevertheless, Sharma also highlighted that the inter caste marriages are not sanctified in the traditional Hindu communities even at present where endogamous form of marriage is used as a mean to preserve purity within the caste groups. Similarly, caste based endogamy is practiced in rural Pakistan as well and members of different quoms do not inter-marry or at least do not prefer to marry out of their quom (Alavi, 1972; Barth, 1960; Eglar, 1960; Leach, 1969). Eglar (1960) pointed out that a child in a Punjabi village learns about caste based endogamy as a part of his/her childhood socialization. While a few other studies suggest that the different landowning quoms in rural Pakistan inter-marry (Blood, 1994; Nadvi & Robinson, 2004), literature does not provide any evidence about marriages between landowning quoms and service providing quoms. The present study attempts to investigate the caste based endogamy and kinship formation across kammi and zamindar quoms and its changing dynamics in contemporary rural Punjab in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in two villages of Punjab province in Pakistan, one in the arid and other in the irrigated agricultural zone. The irrigated zone’s village is located in the Ferozewala tehsil of district Sheikhupura, whereas the arid zone’s village was selected from tehsil and district Chakwal. Since the present study intended to examine the inter-group relations between landowning quoms and service providing quoms, it was ensured that the selected villages are inhabited by the traditional zamindar and Kammi quoms. In the irrigated zone’s village, along with Virk Jats as the major landowning quom, Awan biradari has a few households. These traditional zamindar quoms, Virk Jats and Awans, have kinship relations through inter quom marriages. Kammi quoms residing in the village are barber, cobbler, carpenter, blacksmith, potter, Dindar (sweepers), weaver, and Mirasi (village bard). The irrigated zone’s village consists of approximately 325 households and 2500 individuals. Zamindars comprise around 82% of the total population, compared with 18% of kammi. An overwhelming majority of the kammi in the irrigated zone’s village is working as labourers for zamindars; only a few of them are educated and better off. On the other side, the arid zone’s village belongs to Minhas Rajputs. Kammi quoms living in the village are barber, cobbler, potter, carpenter, blacksmith, Musalli (labourers) and weaver. The arid zone’s village consists of around 265 households and 1900 individuals. Kammi of the village makeup only 25% of the total population, compared with 75% of
zamindars. Kammi in the arid zone’s village are more educated and better off than their counterparts in the irrigated zone’s village. However, quite a few of them still work as labourers and are associated with their caste based occupations.

In order to collect data, in-depth interviews were conducted with men and women from landowning quoms and service providing quoms residing in selected villages. The sampling strategy was guided by the theoretical and analytical considerations and thus implies theoretical sampling. A sample of 64 respondents was selected; 32 respondents from each of the arid zone’s village and the irrigated zone’s village. Along with caste and gender of the respondents, the factor of age was also considered in order to make the sample more diversified. While selecting the sample, representation was given to all zamindar and Kammi biradaris residing in the villages. Besides labourer Kammi, the sample included educated and better off Kammi who had left their caste based occupations, which helped to examine how the dynamics of caste based endogamy are changing as a result of Kammi increasingly leaving their traditional caste based occupations. Female research assistants were recruited and trained to conduct interviews with women research participants. Keeping in view the ethical consideration of the study, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents was protected. After conducting the fieldwork, the data was translated, transcribed, and coded using Express Scribe Software. Subsequently, the major themes and sub themes were identified by referring to the initial coding.

Research Findings

Most of the Punjabi villages in Pakistan are owned by either Rajputs or Jats who trace their heritage to their pre Islam ancestors in the region. Some of the other non-native quoms e.g. Awans also own some villages in the central and North Punjab and, along with Rajputs and Jats, constitute an occupational category that traditionally emphasize agriculture related occupations. They all are considered as the traditional cultivator quoms i.e. zamindars and inter marry (Blood, 1994; Nadvi & Robinson, 2004). While a few research studies highlight the existence of caste based endogamy across different zamindar quoms (Ahmad, 1970; Eglar, 1960), there is hardly any evidence of inter quom marriages between landowning quoms and service providing quoms in Punjabi villages.

The present study explored that the inter-marriages between zamindars and Kammi are normatively discouraged in the contemporary Punjabi villages. However, the rules of endogamy differ across zamindar quoms and Kammi quoms. Rajputs in the arid zone’s village and Jats in the irrigated zone’s village highlighted that they prefer to marry within their quoms i.e. Rajputs within Rajputs or Jats within Jats. Otherwise, they opt for some other zamindar quom e.g. Rajputs with Jats or vice versa. It was found that the Rajputs in the arid zone’s village and Jats in the irrigated zone’s village hesitate to marry within Arains, Kashmiris, and few other quoms that came into prominence later and are considered as lower, by
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Rajputs and Jats, on the hierarchy of zamindar quoms. However, such marriages are on the increase over time. The older respondents, in particular, were against marrying outside their quoms. For example, Mushtaq (62, zamindar man, irrigated zone) was of the view that:

Nowadays, young men do not take care that they should keep their lineage pure, by not marrying within other quoms. As a result, there is a lot of mixture of different quoms in villages. Jats are marrying even within Arains (laughter). In our times, Jats used to abstain from doing it since it was considered against caste pride. It does not matter nowadays. I can talk about many such marriages in our village or nearby villages.

This suggests that the social acceptance for inter quom marriages among zamindars is increasing. While such marriages are on the increase, villagers may criticize the families marrying within quoms considered lower on the hierarchy of zamindars. Talking about one such marriage that recently took place in their village, Furkan (28, zamindar man, arid zone) said:

Villagers gossip that Rajput family have given their daughter in Arains, a lower quom. No one is considering that groom’s family is highly educated and better off; they only talk about their quom.

The above discussion shows that the criterion of endogamy among zamindars is quite flexible and they may marry within other landowning quoms. Conversely, the rules of endogamy among Kammi are strict and they do not marry outside their occupational quoms. While looking at the patterns of political patronage in Punjabi villages in Pakistan, Lyon (2004) described that marrying within one’s own occupational quom is not an absolute rule of endogamy among Kammi and they may marry within other Kammi quoms 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. Rejecting the idea of marrying outside their occupational group, a barber Sharif (56, Kammi man, irrigated zone) emphasized that:

We prefer to marry within our relatives, with children of our brothers and sisters. If we do not have a match in close relatives, we go for the ones who are also barbers or we do not marry. We would not accept a proposal even from zamindars
because we marry only within our occupational group.

The Kammi villagers considered it a matter of honour to remain attached to their caste based parentage identity and biradari membership, especially while living in the forefather’s village. Sajid (24, Kammi man, irrigated zone) highlighted that Kammi maintain the exclusive identity of their forefathers in village by not marrying outside their occupational group by parentage. Similarly, Riaz (48, Kammi man, arid zone) described that:

We consider it against our caste based pride to marry outside our occupational group. If zamindars do not marry with Kammi, we Kammi are even stricter; we abstain from marrying not only in other Kammi quoms but in zamindars as well. There is no question of being higher or lower in case of marriages, it is the issue of honour and pride of one’s quom and parentage.

Riaz emphasized that their lineage is purer than zamindars who may get marry out of their quoms e.g. a Gujjar man with a Jat woman. Conversely, a few of the young Kammi respondents (e.g. Fahad, 28, arid zone) suggested that they would marry a woman from another Kammi quom considering the financial position of her family, or even a zamindar woman, since everyone aspires for higher social status. However, they were critical of allowing their own women to marry outside their occupational quoms, and considered it against their caste based pride. It suggests how Punjabis associate honour with the women in family/biradari and these notions of honour play a role in defining the rules of caste based endogamy, especially among Kammi.

Factors Strengthening Caste Based Endogamy

The study found two main factors strengthening the caste based endogamy between Kammi quoms and zamindar quoms i.e. caste based status differences and emphasis on collective life in the village setting. The majority of respondents suggested that they prefer to marry within those equal to their social status while caste was seen as the primary factor determining one’s social status in the village life. After that, the villagers may give consideration to the ownership of economic assets of other family, and educational/professional accomplishments of the men/women in the process of spouse selection. Correspondingly, 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. Lifelong stigma of being Kammi
always keeps Kammi inferior in terms of identity and status in the village setting. Zahida (63, zamindar woman, irrigated zone) discussed it as follows:

Marrying within Kammi will bring shame upon our family name. People will gossip about us that “they have established kinship relations with Kammi, whose forefathers used to polish the shoes of their forefathers, who used to sit in their feet, and who used to get grains from their grain pots”.

It is a commonly held belief among zamindars in the Punjabi villages that inferiority becomes part of Kammi’ blood and habits, even if they leave their caste based occupations. Kandeel (21, zamindar woman, arid zone) repeatedly mentioned that even if they acquire education or attain professional accomplishments, Kammi would always reflect their inferiority in their dealings with relatives. Hence, it is not appropriate for zamindars to marry within Kammi. Correspondingly, the researchers were interested to know the views of Kammi respondents about inter quom marriages between zamindars and Kammi. The researchers asked it from both categories of Kammi i.e. who had left low graded tasks and those still working as service providers. Interestingly, the responses of both categories were similar and they considered that marriages between zamindar quoms and Kammi quoms are not encouraged because of their status difference on the caste hierarchy and thus the social standing. Kaneez (46, Kammi woman, arid zone), a housemaid in zamindar’s houses, said that:

Better to remain within your own ones. If you make friendships with camels then you need to higher the doors of your entrance and there emerge complexities. We do not marry within zamindars because they are higher and we are lower.

Educational and professional accomplishments or financial well being of the caste members do not affect the structure of caste based endogamy between zamindar quoms and Kammi quoms. Even if a Kammi woman or man is highly educated, zamindars do not opt to marry with them. When asked about the option of choosing an educated Kammi woman as her daughter in law, Kaoser (50, zamindar woman, arid zone), mother of 3 sons, replied:

Even if a Kammi woman becomes a doctor or an engineer or her family is well off, Rajputs will never ask for the hand of that woman in marriage with their sons. We may go for an uneducated and a poor woman within our quom but never an educated or a rich Kammi woman.
Kalsoom (35, zamindar woman, arid zone) narrated how a Kammi woman of their village having a law degree was married in a distant village to a man having high school education, only for the reason that he belonged to her occupational caste i.e. cobbler. Similarly, Asif (28, Kammi man, irrigated zone), an educated Kammi man having a government job, stressed that zamindars would never accept Kammi in kinship relation through marriages, even if a Kammi family is wealthy and does not work as service provider anymore.

Furthermore, the respondents explained how the emphasis on collective life in villages reinforces the caste based endogamy. Even if a member of zamindar biradari wishes to marry within Kammi, or vice versa, the social pressure from the family and other villagers would not let it happen. Abdullah (29, zamindar man, irrigated zone) said that:

A zamindar family will not marry in Kammi for the reason that the people in biradari and village would gossip and it brings shame upon family name.

Similarly, Jannat (51, Kammi woman, arid zone) mentioned that:

If someone wants to do it, our own brothers and sisters, biradari and other villagers will not let it happen. In villages people cannot take such decisions on their own, without the consultation and support of brothers and sisters (relatives).

This reflects how the social pressure compels villagers to conform to the caste based endogamy. Maintaining caste based pride in the village setting can be seen as central to Punjabi’s identity. Zamindars do not marry in Kammi since society disapproves it. Similarly, Kammi considered it a source of pride to maintain the exclusive identity of their parentage by not marrying outside their occupational group.

In Punjabi villages, marriage is considered as a ritual that ties two families, and not two individuals. Zamindars stressed that they would not like to establish kinship relations with a Kammi family through marriage and interact with them as relatives in the village setting.

If we marry within Kammi, they will be visiting our houses, and we will be required to visit their houses like relatives and equals, it is not respectable among Rajputs (Raheel, 44, zamindar man, arid zone).

In conclusion, caste based endogamy persists as a clear divide between kammi and zamindars in the contemporary Punjabi villages. However, the rules of caste
based endogamy differ across kammi and zamindars. While different landowning quoms inter-marry, kammi quoms get marry only within their occupational groups by parentage. Caste remains the primary criterion in the process of spouse selection in terms of endogamy between kammi quoms and zamindar quoms. Educational and professional achievements and financial well being of the caste members do not affect the structure of caste based endogamy. The emphasis on group living strengthens the caste based endogamy in Punjabi villages.

**Elopement and Marriage - the Consequences**

While the inter quom marriages among kammi and zamindars are socially discouraged, a few incidents of elopement and marriages among them were found. However, such marriages do not gain social approval. Ulfat (45, zamindar man, irrigated zone) suggested that zamindar men generally abstain from taking such step because:

> Zamindar biradaris do not accept such marriages, and nor do the children as a result of that marriage would get an acceptance and respect in that zamindar biradari.

Ulfat explained how at times zamindar men fall in love with a Kammi woman for her beauty, elope with her and marry outside the village. Similarly, a zamindar woman may elope with and marry a Kammi man. However, the consequences of a zamindar man eloping with a Kammi woman were suggested to be totally different than a zamindar woman eloping with a Kammi man. If a Kammi woman elopes with a zamindar man, the majority of respondents thought that, in spite of the feelings of being humiliated, Kammi will be helpless to retaliate against zamindars who are dominant in the village context. While a few of the young Kammi emphasized that they would commit honour killing in such cases, it seems unlikely. Besides, there was no incident of revenge killing against zamindars committed by Kammi in the villages under study or surrounding villages. Conversely, the respondents believed that a zamindar woman and a Kammi man will elope and marry at the cost of their life:

> There are life threats for both of them. For this reason, it rarely happens that they elope and marry. There can be illegal sexual relations between a zamindar woman and a Kammi man but elopement and marrying is rare because it is dangerous for them (Falaksher, 35, zamindar man, irrigated zone).

At times, a couple elopes and settles away from the village. They may not show up for a long time, or life time, owing to the risks of being killed. Akmal (33, zamindar man, arid zone) narrated how a few years ago a man from Musalli
biradari eloped with a Rajput woman and after getting married the couple settled in the city. All of the zamindar biradaris of the village united and announced that they would kill the man, the day he enters the village. Moreover, the family of a Kammi man who elopes with a zamindar woman is generally forced to leave the village; otherwise zamindars may commit violence against them. Jameela (57, Kammi woman, irrigated zone) talked about a recent incident in their village, when a zamindar woman eloped with and married a cobbler man and the cobbler family was displaced from the village.

A woman brings shame to the family when she elopes. Punjabis say that the woman has sold the respect of whole family by taking this step. On adopting such taboo ways of getting married zamindars may kill their women. It becomes humiliating especially for the male members of the family to face others in the village setting since they move more in the public sphere compared with their females. Moreover, in Pakistani society, men are considered as responsible for protecting the honour of the family that resides in the body and sexuality of their women (Encyclopaedia of Women’s History, 1994; Irfan, 2008). Rukhsana (22, Kammi woman, irrigated zone) suggested that if zamindars do not kill such rebellious women, they are considered as dishonourable and everyone in the village points at them. Hence, they kill them in order to protect their honour. This reflects how the social norms act as a social pressure and force the members to abide by the cultural constructs of a society. Describing the feelings of his Rajput friend on elopement of his sister with a Musalli, Kamran (50, zamindar man, arid zone) said:

When his sister eloped with and married a Musalli, it was so embarrassing for my friend that he did not step out of his house for a few months; he was not able to face anyone. We (friends) used to take him out of his house and console him, but it took him a long time to get comfortable around in the village setting.

Discussing another dimension of the phenomenon, the respondents explained how Kammi change their caste identity after migrating to cities and thus they become eligible to marry in zamindar quoms. However, such marriages mostly terminate, as soon as the actual caste of Kammi is revealed. Sharing his family experience, Mushtaq (62, zamindar man, irrigated zone) said:

One of my cousins living in Lahore gave his daughter in marriage to a family who were weavers in their preceding generation in a village of Gujranwala district. After two years of marriage their actual caste was revealed; we asked those Kammi to divorce our woman and be away from our eyes forever.
It reflects the importance of caste based endogamy even in the urban settings of Punjab. Few such marriages were reported to have survived but only after a serious dispute among concerned families.

The above discussion shows while marriages between Kammi and zamindars following customary ways of getting married are unlikely in the Punjabi villages, a few incidents of elopement marriages can be found. However, such marriages generally do not gain social approval and may, at times, result in honour killing. Similarly, if Kammi marry within zamindar quoms in urban settings hiding their caste identity, the marriage usually terminates once the actual caste of Kammi is revealed. Caste based endogamy existed in both villages under study and was practiced in similar ways.

Conclusion

Caste based endogamy persists as a clear divide between Kammi quoms and zamindar quoms in the contemporary Punjabi villages and, as a result, they do not form a biradari, kinship association. Caste based endogamy and principles of biradari formation place Kammi quoms and zamindar quoms in two mutually exclusive social groups, with zamindars at a higher and Kammi at a lower status category. However, the rules of caste based endogamy differ across Kammi and zamindars. While the different zamindar quoms inter-marry, Kammi quoms prefer to marry only within their occupational groups by parentage. Educational and professional achievements and financial well being of the members of service providing quoms do not affect the structure of caste based endogamy. Difference in caste based status across Kammi and zamindars and communal life creating social pressure on villagers strengthen the caste based endogamy in Punjabi villages. Though the marriages between Kammi and zamindars following customary ways of getting married are unlikely, a few incidents of elopement marriages can be found. However, such marriages generally do not gain social approval and, at times, may result in honour killing. Similarly, if Kammi marry within a zamindar quom in urban setting hiding their caste identity, the marriage usually terminates once the actual caste of Kammi is revealed.

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