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## **RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, LOW CASTE HINDUS AND THE IDENTITY POLITICS: CONFIGURATION OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS SPACE FOR WEAKER SECTIONS IN JAMMU CITY, J&K (INDIA)**

### **Abstract**

Dawning of a new century has not been accompanied by the eclipse of religiosity among individuals and in public culture rather because of disenchantment with our increasingly rationalized society, religion continues to provide meaning and intertwine daily social, economic, and political activity of human world. Alongside, the popular religiosity is an important contemporary trend encompassing the world religions. The study of religion as a force in people's adaptation to and creation of landscape is certainly a proper and important endeavor in the field of sociology of religion. The present work aims at exploring the spatial expansion of subaltern groups in urban setting; socio-religious mobility among lower caste Hindus and the creation of sacred and secular space vis-à-vis higher Hindu caste groups in a sacred traditional Indian city. The broader findings reflect the creation of religious spaces and also the lower caste Hindu identity assertion through these places. The modern forces and the pace of urbanization had diluted the air-tight compartmentalized segregation of the weaker section and paved them way for secular living with the other high caste groups. It had not only brought democratic dwelling space but also provided them dignity with the new level of assertion.

**Keywords:** Religion, Socio-religious space, Weaker Sections, Identity Politics

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## Introduction

It is seen that the dawning of a new century has not been accompanied by the eclipse of religiosity among individuals and in public culture rather because of disenchantment with our increasingly rationalized society, religion continues to provide meaning and intertwine daily social, economic, and political activity of human world. The societal rites of the past are replaced by the religious practices in modern world and thus there occurs a simultaneous increase in the number of rites across the calendar, i.e. a shift in the contours of social time. The proliferation of rites and dispersion of the sacred thus encourage a more disciplined and even distribution of emotional energies over a wider spectrum of activities (Fenn 2001:120-125). Similarly, Jürgen Habermas has given considerable attention over his long career to the question of religion in modern society. Habermas replaced the hope for “disappearance” with a call for “privatization.” In texts such as “Post-Metaphysical Thought” (1988) he reminded his readers that religion is an existential necessity that is “indispensable in ordinary life.” In the face of suffering, it is only natural for people to turn to faith. In the late 1990’s Habermas’ in later works the Future of Human Nature and Naturalism and Religion. Later, Habermas supported the notion of “publicization.”, stressed that religion should not be limited to the private sphere. Rather, it should intervene in the public sphere and use its founding documents and traditions to refine “moral intuitions.” This third phase of Habermas’ thought predicts the coming of a “post-secular society,” in which individuals, without abdicating their autonomy, rediscover a sense of transcendence and religious belonging (see Portier; 2011). Thus, religion reflected the nature of the social system within which it is expressed. The universality of religion suggests that it corresponds to some deep and probably inescapable human need. Thus, rather than disappearing in an age of reason, religion seemed destined to transform itself. In the modern period, religion is no longer confined to an institutional form and took on a plurality of expressions including radical environmentalism, eco-feminism, holistic therapies and human potential groups, as communism, socialism and nationalism had taken on in the past.

Alongside, the popular religiosity is an important contemporary trend encompassing the world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. This is not to claim that popular religion is replacing mainstream religion; rather, for some people, popular religious forms offer viable alternatives. Fundamentalist and cultural groups are vehicles of popular religion. The former engage in the process of negotiating cultural transition, where the identity of certain groups is, according to group members, menaced during major cultural transitions; the latter, in contrast, function as organizations of cultural defence against challenges from unwelcome, intrusive, alien forces. In both cases, religion provides resources for negotiating transitions or asserting a new claim to a sense of worth; both involve political responses. Popular religions are community ex-

pressions of group desire to achieve a religious, social and political satisfaction not forthcoming from mainstream religions. In sum, popular religious organizations offer ways of affirming the autonomy and identity of a religious or ethno-religious community, especially in urban centres where traditional community ties are often sundered. Popular religion reflects the power of ordinary people to take charge of their own spiritual, and in some cases, material well-being. Because it is the religion of the 'ordinary' people, it is usually quite different in both conception and form to the religious orthodoxies propounded by the leaders of hegemonial religions (Haynes; 1997). Modernity, technology and religion one of the widest refrains in the social sciences in the latter half of the twentieth century must have been the secularization thesis that modernity has led to the substitution of religious traditions with rationalism, scientism and individualism. Public life, it is argued, has been secularized and that which is religious has been privatized (Kurtz 1995).

In south Asian countries like India, the impact of modernization too has led to the emergence of new religions, revivals, and reforms within the great traditions. In modern societies, with their complex fabric of social differentiations, not only among religion, but other groups and social activities, there appears a proliferation of rites. Since many rites are attached to the practices of specific groups and do not take on a societal-wide role, this proliferation does not necessarily impede societal integration. Even those rites that are societalized are combined with others in a larger number, with a reduced emotionality for each. The sum of societal rites themselves become routinized and more fully integrated into the workaday fabric of social order, reaching a variety of accommodations with other institutional spheres such as the state, the workplace, the market, the ethnic group and the family (Fenn 2001:120-125).

Keeping in view the above discussions, the present work aims at exploring the spatial expansion of subaltern groups in urban setting; socio-religious mobility among lower caste Hindus and the creation of sacred and secular space vis-à-vis higher Hindu caste groups in a sacred traditional Indian city i.e. Jammu city in Jammu and Kashmir state. The paper, in brief, explores the changing landscape of lower castes areas of worship and settlement, histories of their mobility, identity assertion and changing relationships.

### **Intersection of Space, Religion and Politics**

The study of religion as a force in people's adaptation to and creation of landscape is certainly a proper and important endeavor in the field of sociology of religion. Landscape, in a very broad sense, conveys the idea of land utilization and development by people, and it is important to realize that ideologies, for example, religious beliefs, are crucial in the direction and accomplishment of this process. In turn, landscape formation affects the development of such beliefs.

Human use of the environment has not only been directed towards people, it has also been oriented towards the sacred (Levine 1986). Religion, that is, experience of the supernatural, is an important motivating force in peoples' lives. Isaac suggests that there have been four groups of geographical studies which have dealt with religion. (Isaac 1963). One group deals with the effect of religion on cultural landscapes or regions; another studies religious structures, their locations, sites and orientations and designs; another considers demographic issues such as the distribution of religious groups, and the last attempts theoretical arguments which seek to define the concerns of the geography of religion of which the work of Deffontaines (1953) and Sopher (1967) would be examples.

Whereas Sopher's (1967) consideration of the spatial expression of religious phenomena could lead to a descriptive mode of apprehending the religious quest, his appreciation of the ecology of religion heralds a potentially dialectical method of analysis which would see religion as social force and social expression. In brief, Religion is a deeply personalized yet inter-subjective inspection of ultimately intimate and important questions and it is an institutionalized force which both legitimates and challenges social relations in society.

Increasingly, geographers have explored the politics of religious space, drawing attention particularly to the tensions between sacred and secular use and among religious groups over (often) urban space (Kong 2001). Within geographies of religion, it has been acknowledged that sacred space is contested space, just as the sacred is a 'contested category' (Needham, cit. in Chidester and Linenthal 1995). Characteristic of sacred space are 'hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession', involving 'entrepreneurial, social, political and other «profane» forces' (ibid. 1995, 17). Altogether, they constitute a politics of sacred space, in which power relations define sacredness of space.

### **Religion, Caste and Identity politics in India**

Communities are often characterized by various forms of oppression, 'protecting the prevailing value system including its moral code' (Smith 1999). There is also an 'intolerance of difference', since the 'ideal of community' relies on a desire for 'the same social wholeness and identification' (Young 1990 a & b). This is precisely the differentiation within modernity.

Locating the political connotation of 'identity' vis-à-vis religion it is interesting to find that even the identity theory links contemporary religion to identity in order to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for the large amount of data about religion in the social sciences discourse. The renewed interest in identity and the construction of knowledge from the 1990s onwards has provoked a shift from considering communities as 'given' to investigating the power relations and discourses by which they are constantly defined and redefined

(Pernau 2005). Adding further complexity to the community identity issue is the power play of religion in the contemporary world.

In the developing nations like India, the multiplicity of groups and tradition and various characters of their inter-relations provide much of the richness to Indian culture. The varieties of social collectivities such as castes, religion, class, clan, communities and interest groups have tended to be shaped in the name of ethnic and social identities. With the above backdrop, religion vis-à-vis identity politics appears to be a sensitive issue both at global and regional level. Thus it is high time to study the status of religio-cultural practices in the modern world and to identify their relevance in contemporary society. Referring Kothari's (1970: 232) statement that – "we shall examine the relationships between caste and politics as basically a relationship for the specific purpose of organizing public activity"; we also see the relationship between community and religion in the similar fashion.

Simultaneously, on the question of caste Kothari (1970: 229) rightly points that, everyone recognizes that the social system in India is organized around caste structures and caste identities. In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics, however, the tendency is to start at the wrong end of the question: Is caste disappearing? In reality, however, no social system disappears. A more useful point of departure would be: What form is caste taking under the impact of politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste-oriented society? A few who are free from a dichotomous view of caste and politics and are prepared to look into precise empirical relations suffers from another preconception and often a contrary theoretical construct. .... Politics, in this view, is an instrument wielded by a particular stratum in society to consolidate or raise its position; its function is to reproduce, or modify, existing states of superior-subordinate relationships. Such an approach blurs understanding of the developmental reality which consists not in any approximation to a preconceived framework but in the changing interactions of the constituent elements in a dynamic situation. But in the particular case of caste and politics, even this is only partly relevant. Where caste itself becomes a political category, it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste (1970: 230).

It may not be wrong to say that religion has been, and continues to be, a matter of absorbing interest for many in India still today. In former centuries no aspect of life was set apart from religion. All social relations were inevitably and legitimately suffused with religious ideas and acts. The possibility of religion in a modern world can be felt through altered functioning of religion. The marketization of religion by religious gurus performing miracles and fascinating public, the involvement of religious organizations in the building up of hospitals and schools, working for the victims of natural disasters etc. and politicization of religion by the outburst of fundamentalists reflect the altered character of it.

### Sacred space in Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir State

The Jammu and Kashmir State, which constitutes of three different regions i.e. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, has three different sub-cultures because of their own peculiar cultural heritage. The hilly tract of Jammu which reaches down to the plain land of Punjab from the south of Kashmir Valley is inhabited by 'Dogra' of Indo-Aryan stock who profess both Hinduism and Islam (Sharma 1995). According to legends, Jammu was founded about 3000 years ago by *Jambu Lochan*, who established his rule over the area and had his capital on the left bank of the *Tawi* river. According to the understanding of historians, "Jammu came into existence around 900 A.D". It is also about this time that the earliest references to '*Durgra Desha*' (from which the term 'Duggar' and 'Dogra' are derived and refers to Jammu region) in the form of two inscriptions on copper plates of the 11<sup>th</sup> century have been found (Wakhlu 1998). Geographically the whole of the region is divided into four major sub-divisions: The Eastern plains which include Jammu proper and erstwhile principalities of Jasrota, Balaur, Basholi, Babbur and lower parts of Reasi and Udhampur. These plains are popularly known as Duggar illaqa due to the dominant *Dogra* culture prevailing here. The Western plains comprises erstwhile Bhimbar, khari-kharyali and Mirpur, which now forms part of present day Pakistan. This area was once known as Chibhal after the *Chib* clan of Rajputs. The Eastern Hills comprise Kishtwar, Bharderwah and Dacchin areas where as the Western Hills include Rajouri, Punch and Kotli areas (Census Report of India 1911).

Commenting on the socio-economic system of the State, the Census Commissioner of J & K in his report on the census 1911 has remarked that "The caste system in its true sense exist only in the '*Duggar Illaqa*'. Here the influence of Brahmanism has always been the strongest and there the complete hierarchy of castes and sub-caste is met with its perfection (Gupta & Prabhakar 1988). Geographically, Jammu region is an intermediate zone lying between plains of Punjab and ascending hills that is the tract lying between river Jhelum and river Chenab to the south of pir panjal range of mountains. A major portion of the region now forms the part of Jammu province in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. According to Raychandhari (1972), culturally Jammu region appears to have made its first contact with brahmanical culture with the arrival of *Madra* people in the region. We know that *Madra* was a section of the famous *Anu* tribe that dwelt in central Punjab and its adjoining northern region. With the coming of the *Madra*, brahmanical culture was introduced in Jammu. Since then, the brahmanical culture appears to have penetrated into all the geographical sub-regions of Jammu region depending on its acceptability. At this juncture, Jammu region in Jammu and Kashmir State (India) have its own uniqueness. Jammu city being characterized as 'city of temples' happens to be a right place for religious activities; this is evident with the presence of various holy shrines such as *Mata Vaishno Devi* Shrine, Bhagwati Kalka of Jammu, Sukarla temple near Billawar, Shiva temple at Sudh



Mahadev near Chenani, Raghunath temple and Pir-kho temple. Apart from this, the residents of the remoter parts of Jammu & especially of the hilly (*Kandi*) tracts have not only specific Gods for each village (*Granh Devata*) but every family has its own family deity / guardian God i.e. *kul*-deity (*kul-devta* and/ *kul-devi*) which they worship during their community '*maile*' congregation. On the basis of above diversified forms of religious icons, one can understand the element of sacredness in the Jammu region (see Saxena 2009b).

### **Dynamics of Subaltern citizens in Jammu region:**

According to S.S.Soodan (1997) the numerical strength of the depressed classes, treated as untouchable, was recorded by the Census report of 1931 as 1,70,928 person i.e. 23.31 % of the entire Hindu population of the State, while in 1941, their total population in Jammu province was 1,13,422. The *Barwals* were most numerous in the Jammu and were found in Jammu province only; the *Basiths* predominated in Reasi and Mirpur districts, the *Chamar* mainly in Jammu district, the *Chura* in Poonch Jagir, the *Dhiyar* caste in all districts of Jammu province, the *Jolahas* in Reasi district only, the *Ratals* in Udampur & Reasi and *Wattals* in Srinagar district of Kashmir.

S.D.S. Charak's (1979) work viz. History and Culture of Himalayan States, Vol. VIII, have explained the relatively heavy concentration of depressed classes in Jammu region. To him, it may be attributed to the fact that, here they could easily get land from Rajput and other High castes as tenant and they could earn their earnings by labour and other traditional occupations. They were not allowed to participate in social intercourse and have to suffer discrimination and untouchability. Before 1930s the condition of the SCs in the State was miserable. Narratives from the SC respondents revealed the following facts. They were not allowed to cover the upper part of their body. They could not wear turban or new clothes (especially white). During their marriages or any other occasions they were not allowed to sit on horseback and they could not hire musicians and could not go for any public procession. Those who broke these social rules had to face atrocities. They had to face discriminations in different walks of life.

Factually, high caste Hindus avoided contact with the Harijians and the touch of the Harijian obliged them to purify themselves with the bath (Census of India, 1961). They were, infact, debarred from free social inter-course. So much so, they had no access to temples and public places, like wells and tanks. Not only this, they were also denied admission to public schools. These classes had neither social status nor civic rights. The condition of this section of society was indeed pitiable (*Census of India, 1931, part-I, pp. 320-321*). Having been denied the basic rights; the depressed classes were forced to lead a precarious life in isolated localities. However, they were granted access to temples and other public places and admission

to Government schools only in 1931-32 A.D<sup>2</sup>.

However, Maharaja Hari Singh granted them access to temples and other public places and admissions in government schools in 1931-32. This removal of legal restrictions on the Harijans' entry in public places was probably the first in princely states of India. The grant of this right without any strong struggle of the Harijans or absence of any public reaction against this grant by the upper castes shows the non-rigidity of untouchability and discrimination against the Harijans in this State. The removal of restrictions by the Maharaja resulted into gradual end of denial and discrimination and improvement of their social situation.

It is an established fact that historical background must have had its impact in the shaping of socio-cultural aspect of present society. The socio-religious reforms, economic gains, role of the rulers and State and other dominant agent which has resulted into the flexibility in the religious practices and caste system and thus upliftment of scheduled caste population in the State (Saxena: 2009a) are as follows:

### **Socio-religious Reform Movement and the Subalterns**

The socio-religious reforms in J&K have a long history. According to S.C. Sharma (1985), the proximity of Jammu to that of the Punjab helped the spread of his Arya Samaji movement in this state and a branch of the Arya Samaj was established at Jammu in 1891. In Jammu province it had branches at Mirpur, Kotli, Bhember, Rajouri, Nowshera, Reasi, Rramban, Bhaderwah and Kishtwar.

Mainly a branch of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha known as the 'Shuddhi Sabha' carried out the proselytization programme of the Arya Samaj. Being in constant touch with the centre of the Arya Samaj, the 'Samajist' of the Jammu and R.S.Pura tehsil did commendable work as far as proselytisation among the depressed classes was concerned. Consequently, the number of Arya Samajis in the state rose to 93,944. In 1931 out of these 93,374 was in Jammu province (Census of India 1931: 290-91). Here the movement had taken a deep root particularly in Jammu & Kathua district because of the fact that these areas were situated near the Punjab border and people inhabiting these areas were highly influenced with the activities at main centre of Sialkot. Moreover, these two districts were permeated by good number of depressed class like Megh, Doods, Chamar and Bashiths, who easily accepted the *Shuddhi* movement to cut the shackles of untouchability. The credit for such proselytisation work in the district of Kathua goes to Rambhaji Dutt of Gurdaspur. He arranged a big Shuddhi Yajna at Kathua where thousand of Harijans were given sacred thread. This raised the strength of the Arya Samaj in the district from 7,930 to 16,271 at end of 1931 (Census of India

2 *Fortnightly Reports of the Resident of Kashmir for the first half of September 1930, G.O.I., P.D.F. No. 22-P (sec) of 1930, Crown's film A.C.C. No. 291, (N.A. I), p. 24: A brief Note on the administration of the Jammu and Kashmir for the year 1932, J&K Govt. Publication, p. 10; Govt. J&K, Vol. 4, No. 4, April, 1947, p.3).*



1931: 296). In continuation with the mission, the Samaj spread education among the depressed class. It started primary schools pathshalas for depressed classes at Rehari Mohalla, R.S.Pura in Jammu district. In addition, at Garh Andral and Kal Kur Kathua district. The role-played by various 'Singh Sabhas' and newspaper like 'The Ranbir' is also significant. However, it may be mentioned that the period between 1921-30 has witnessed a fierce crusade against the institution of caste. The movement against caste gained further momentum in 1931, when the '*Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal*' (organization to break caste) has been founded at Lahore and Punjab, which extended its activities to Jammu region. The most striking feature of the whole cause of social regeneration was the awakening on the part of depressed caste, which started organizing themselves with a view to demanding their due share in all lifestyles. In 1932, they submitted representation to Maharaja Hari Singh requesting for removing social evils. The first major steps that Hari Singh took in 1931 was throwing open all public educational institutions, temples and wells into public services (Census of India 1931, 319). He also ordered that the proclamation published in the Gazette Extraordinary of the government, which later amended as any kind of obstruction to the use of public tanks, wells and so on by Harijans as a penal and cognizable offence. In 1928, a provision was made for the grant of Rs.4000 in the form of scholarship for depressed class; unfortunately, 3-2 'Harijan' students were there in the Prince of Wales college of Jammu during 1936-37 and 1938-39 respectively. Even the seats were reserved for their representation in local bodies and State legislature called 'Praja Sabha'. Later his wife Maharani Tara Devi (1910-67) too emphasized that all the temples opened to Harijan. Thus, untouchability was abolished in the State long before Mahatama Gandhi took up the same.

### **Role of social organizations in amelioration of weaker sections**

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century important social and religious groups had begun forming their own organizations in Jammu province. Their efforts did have some influence in reforming the lives of the people. As pointed out in Kanchan Sharma's (1995:54-58) work, prominent organizations directly or indirectly working for the welfare of Harijans were-

**The Dogra Sadar Sabha:** In order to discuss various problems of the people of this State, a meeting of about 700 notable subjects belonging to different castes and religions was convened at Jammu on 12 June 1904. In this meeting it was unanimously agreed by those present to form a body known as Dogra Sadar Sabha to promote the cause of the people and to realize their cherished desires and aspirations. This was the first public platform organized in the State to deliberate, articulate and represent the aspirations and feelings of the people to the Maharaja. Out of the various objectives of the Sadar Sabha one was the need of imparting education to lower castes and of granting liberal scholarships to stu-

dents. The resolutions passed by the Sadar Sabha carried much weight with the Maharaja government since the members of the Sabha were mostly influential persons directly or indirectly associated with the government. Inclusion of the issue of education of the lower castes i. e. Harijans as one of the objectives of the first public organization formed by the ruling elites of Jammu clearly exhibits that the denial and discrimination against the Harijans was not institutionalized.

**All J&K Harijan Mandal:** The first organization of the Harijans in the State was All J&K Harijan Mandal that was organized in 1920s. The leaders of the organization derived their aspirations from All India depressed castes movements i.e. Adi- Andhra, New Bangle and Adharmi. Prominent leaders of the Mandal were Mahasha Nahar Singh, Choudhary Rangila Ram, Bhagat Chajju Ram, Mahasha Lal Chand, Mangat Ram Bhagat, Mahasha Tui Ram and others. The main purpose of the organization was to regain their lost social status in Hindu society particularly in Dogra Desh. In 1932 the Mandal organized a rally in which one lakh people participated. It was a non-political organization and was social in character. Main achievement of the appeals and representations of this organization was that for the first time in the history of the State of J&K the Harijans got entries into temples and schools and other public places. Gradually this organization got disintegrated. It barely remained noticeable up to 1952 and later on became redundant.

**Harijan Mandal:** In 1951, another organization was of the depressed castes of the State Harijan Mandal was established. This was formed on the pattern of Central Harijan Mandal. Milkhi Ram was its president. Unlike its predeceasing depressed caste organization- All J& K Harijan Mandal, it was primarily a political party. It participated in the first election organized in the State on the principle of adult franchise in the year of its formation i.e. 1951 to constitute the State's Constituent Assembly. It contested the 1951 election from 19 general seats because there was no political reservation for the depressed castes at that time. None of them were elected. In 1957 Assembly Election one of its candidates was elected to the State Legislative Assembly. The last Assembly Election that it participated was 1967. None of its candidates won in the election. As a result of not making any significant achievement in three successive elections the party started disintegrating and vanished by 1970. It got 2%, 5.82% and 1.89% of the total polled votes in the Assembly Elections of 1951, 1957 and 1962 respectively.

From 1952-57 this organization mainly played the role of an opposition. It articulated the interests of this community and presented their demands to the government. The main demands of the party were the adoption of political, educational and job reservations in the State as it was in the rest of India. The party began an agitation on the issue of job reservation in 1952 that included organization of public meetings, dharnas and hunger strike by its leaders. As a result of this agitation the State government provided 8% reservation to the depressed castes in government jobs.

**Depressed Class League:** All India Congress Party organized a front or-

ganization- Depressed Class League, to bring the Scheduled Castes closer to the party. A branch of the League was started in J& K in 1962. Prominent leaders of the League in J&K were Amar Nath Bhagat, Bhagat Chajju Ram, Parmanand and others. They demanded for the provision of complete facilities to the students from the community pursuing higher studies. They further demanded for housing subsidy, land to landless tenants, reservation as per SCs population etc. This organized functioned up to 1975.

**Creation of secular social space in Jammu City<sup>3</sup>:** It is a fact that considerable attention has been given to the development of areas based on ethnic groupings in the western cities and it is surprising that the inherent diversity of Indian urban places has not been able to prompt many studies of neighbourhood morphology (Noble & Dhausa, 1982: 81). To Sharma (1993: 129-30) historicity of majority of the urban places in India and development of the distinct socio-spatial units popularly called *mohallas*, the basic morphological functional unit and basis for personal interaction and community cohesion should have provided additional impetus for such studies.

Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu & Kashmir State is an important historic centre. It has experienced phenomenal growth in the last three decades and has gained tremendous commercial, social, and political significance. Its physical and population growth reflects its rising role in the regional economy, polity, and culture. The city has a history of mass migrations in different times; the most recent being the influx of Kashmiri Pundits from Kashmir Valley in 1989-90. Besides, it has been receiving a slow flow of people from the surrounding region. It has traditionally been a multi-religious and multi-castes urban settlement. The 1941 census provides a pre-independence picture of social composition of the city, with the Hindus forming the largest group (60.66 per cent), followed by the Muslims (31.60 per cent), the Sikhs (4.23 per cent) and the Jains and Christian both accounting 3.49 per cent. The population of Jammu had trebled during 1901-1961 from 36,130 to 1, 02,738. The population almost doubled in the decade of 1971-81 from 1.40 lakh to 2.28 lakh. The 2001 Census has recorded 607,642 persons for the city. In 1973, the Jammu city was spread over an area of about 41.78 sq. kms. which rose to 143.6 in 1995. Till 1950, its physical spread was confined to the right bank of the river Tawi and now an equally large city has come up to its left bank. It is this part which contains some of the planned and posh localities like Gandhi Nagar, Trikuta Nagar, Channi Hamit, and Sanik colony. Other large and unplanned localities include Nanak Nagar, Sanjay Nagar, Digyana, Gangyal and Bhitindi etc. (Figure 3). The phenomenal rapid growth in the western parts of the old city is associated with the recent migration of Kashmiri Pundits.

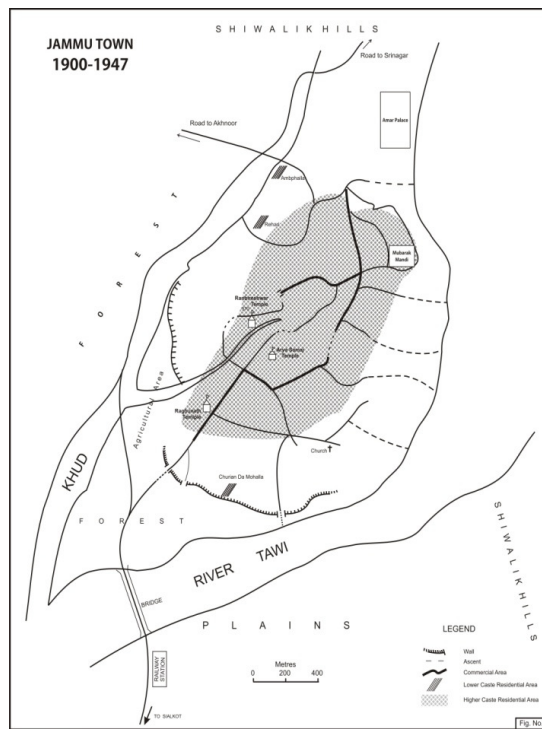
The density picture of the city resembles the old cities of India with the oldest parts being denser than the newer segments. The recently developed ar-

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3 For further detail see 'Urban Social Space and Weaker Sections: A Case Study of Jammu City', for Dr. Ambedkar Studies Centre, University of Jammu (jointly with Dr. Devinder Singh, Dept. of Geography, Univ. of Jammu), 2010.

eas to the southern and western sides of the old historic centre are less dense. Slums are temporary phenomena and only found in few vacant government or private lands and house migrants from other states. The city's Master Plan - 2021 shows 3.50 hectares occupied by 7825 squatters.

There is an intrinsic relationship between the social/ritual rank and place in a traditional Indian town. And, there is evidence to show that all over India urban places have shown conformity to this traditional pattern (Ahmad, 1999:35). The Jammu city seems no exception of this wide spread urban socio-spatial reality. The 1911 census documented the existence of separate colonies of depressed classes- *Chamars, Doms, Churas, and Meghs* etc. on the outskirts of the city (see Figure 1 & 2). These localities were Amphalla and Rehari on the north-west and Gandu Chowni, Jogi Gate and Churia mohalla on the south. It was not the simple relationship of socially marginal social groups on the margin of the town. In addition, the inferior qualities of these localities (generally, lower elevation and steep slope) added another dimension to this unequal and hierarchical urban social space.

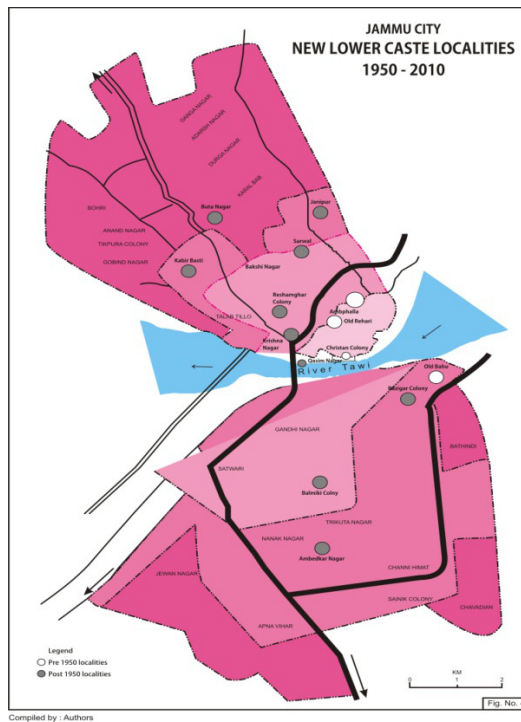


**Figure 1: Jammu Town 1900-1947**

Similarly, Sharma (1993) has also reported occupation of disadvantaged sites by lower castes in some Himalayan towns in Himachal Pradesh. The roots of traditional seclusion of these groups in urban India lied in stigma

conveyed by the spatial association with untouchable (Duncan, 1980:280). This traditional principle of pollution by touch or proximity shrunk their social and religious spaces of these lower castes. For example, none of the low castes, such as Meghs, Dooms, Chamars, etc., were allowed to enter the court-yard of a Hindu temple, nor any Hindu would like to come in contact with them (Census, 1901:78).

Against the placement of the depressed castes in the urban social space and exclusionary social relationship, the area also witnessed significant initiatives both at social and government levels to bring about reforms in the social system. These reforming initiatives were part of the liberal atmosphere created by development of the democratic and political ideas and the advancement of education in the country as whole. As discussed earlier, the noteworthy influences came from the Arya Samaj Movement and Christian Missionaries. The Arya Samaj established its first branch in Jammu and Kashmir at Jammu in 1891. The role of Arya Samaj movement in the upliftment of the submerged castes is reflected in the fact that out of 1047 Aryas in Jammu and Mirpur, no less than 429 were Megh (Census of India, 1911: 91). The Christian Missionaries opened the Alexander Missionary School in 1892. The Christian population in the state rose from 204 in 1891 to 422 in 1901. Of the total in 1910, over 202 were converts. The erstwhile Churian mohalla and now Christian colony seems to be hub of Christians in the city in Pre-independence period (See Fig. 2).



**Figure 2: Old and New localities of lower castes 1950-2010**

Another new element of expansion of secular social space has been the assertion of identity by creating symbolic religious landscapes (Figure 3). This aspect has shown a close link between social space and politic. Whelam (2002: 508) rightly suggests that where cities evolve in contentious political circumstances, aspects of the urban landscape such as political monuments, street nomenclature, buildings, city plans and urban design initiative take on particular significance. Collectively they demonstrate the fact that the city is a product of a struggle among conflicting interests groups in search of dominion over an environment. About the contested space an illustrations is as follows - Buta Nagar, a small locality in the west Jammu was named after a venerated old community member of the lower caste group in 1980's. A banner was put up at the main entrance in presence of a local political leader. In 1990's, this locality experienced rapid growth due to migration of Kashmir Pandits and other migration. A group of new inhabitants made several attempts to give new name to the locality. They removed the old banner and put another banner with new name. The conflict about identification of space persisted for few days and finally resolved in favour of lower caste Hindus with the intervention of local authorities and local political leaders (Raj 2003).

### **Emerging religious space for weaker sections in Jammu city**

One finds temple-based religious activities are the most exciting; it is no exaggeration to characterize temples as the motor of popular religious revivals. Temples typically sponsor and «stage» a wide range of folk cultural activities, including performances by folk dance troupes, musical bands and storytellers, folk opera, «offering presentation» processions, animal sacrifices, temple festivals, and so forth. Besides being a site of both individual and communal worship, a temple is also a political, economic, and symbolic resource and a generator of such resources. A beautifully built temple and a well attended temple festival attest not only to the efficacy of the deity but also to the organizational ability of the temple association and the community. The lower caste Hindus of the Jammu city has evolved their own religious spaces on the lines of higher castes. They have constructed temples of saints and reformers belonging to the lower caste Hindus. The prominent temple includes Valmiki temple, Kabir temple, Guru Ravi Das temple, Guru Nabha Das and others (see figure 3). It is interesting to note that most of the temples are located in the heart of the city. They are in the posh localities with huge areas and made marvelously (see figure 4). Normally the sacred space is used by the scheduled castes of Jammu region that come together for the celebration of birth anniversaries and 'shoba yatra' of great persons of their community. Religious congregations, processions and celebration of anniversaries or '*prakash divas*' of the personalities like Ambedkar, Ravi Dass, Kabir, Nabha Das and others are significant because this collectivity and its demonstration is in



public sphere i.e the main city area and they are allowed now without any obstacles and also sometimes with the support of few political leaders.

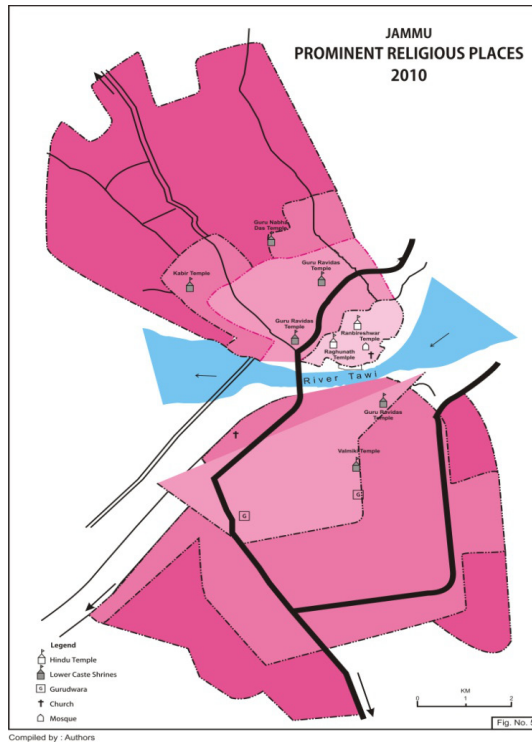


Figure 3: Prominent Religious places 2010



Figure 4: Guru Ravi Das Temple at prime location in Jammu city

The formation of community organizations has been another prominent religious practice in the city. These politico-religious institutions, emulated from the high castes, have been used as platform for assertion and development of new identities at macro-level. For example, merging of Megh Sabha into Kabir/Bhagat Sabha, and so called Chamar Sabha into Guru Ravi Dass Sabha. And, this new mergeance has given rise to the political mobilization and assertion through annual processions (*shobha yatra*) in the memory of the prominent iconic figures of the downtrodden community<sup>4</sup>. These processions are perceived by the communities as means to enhance the political visibility and identity assertion of the community. Besides, it is also perceived as the reflection of freedom for the social space. Viewing urban social space in this sense, one finds it as becoming more contested, fragmented and attained more complexity.

In conclusion, the above deliberations and exemplifications reflect the creation of religious spaces and also the lower caste Hindu identity assertion through these places. Population growth and territorial expansion of scheduled castes in Jammu city is indicative of their emerging new localities in urban sphere. One may deduce that historically, the so called scheduled castes were residing in the periphery of Jammu town but with the gradual pace of urbanization they have become part of the main city. One can infer the spatial mobility of the weaker sections in terms of there proximity to the main city. Few localities like Valmiki colony, Kabir Nagar, Krishna nagar, Talab Khatika etc are heartland of the Jammu city and are dominated by the inhabitation of weaker section. Although government had rehabilitated them in separate colonies, and which un-intentionally segregate them from the mainstream localities. However, the modern forces and the pace of urbanization had diluted the air-tight compartmentalized segregation of the weaker section and paved them way for secular living with the other high caste groups. It had not only brought democratic dwelling space but also provided them dignity with the new level of assertion. Needless to mention that the new governmental and civil society initiatives too are also resulting into the erection of new monuments, temples, buildings, memorials and statues symbolizing their identity and assertion. Collective socio-religious gatherings and congregations in these spaces reflects high level of mobilization and assertion among the weaker sections belonging to Jammu city and its surroundings.

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4 For further detail see 'Urban Social Space and Weaker Sections: A Case Study of Jammu City', for Dr. Ambedkar Studies Centre, University of Jammu (jointly with Dr. Devinder Singh, Dept. of Geography, Univ. of Jammu), 2010.

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**ВЕРСКИ ПЕЈЗАЖ, НИЖЕ ХИНДУ КАСТЕ И ПОЛИТИКА  
ИДЕНТИТЕТА: КОНФИГУРАЦИЈА ДРУШТВЕНО – ВЕРСКОГ  
ПРОСТОРА У СИРОМАШНИЈИМ СЕКТОРИМА ГРАДА  
ЏАМУ У ИНДИЈИ**

**Резиме**

Рађање новог века није било праћено опадањем религиозности међу појединцима и јавној култури највише због разочарања нашим рационализованим друштвом па религија и даље наставља да обезбеђује смисао свакодневном преплитању друштвене, економске и политичке активности људских бића. Заједно са тим, популарна религиозност је важан савремени тренд који прати светске религије. Истраживање религије као силе у људској адаптацији и креирање њихових оквира је свакако битан напор у социологији религије. Овај рад намерава да истражи просторно ширење подређених група у градском окружењу, друштвено – религијску мобилност нижих хинду касте и креирање светог и секуларног простора *vis-à-vis* више Хинду касте у светим индијским градовима. Шири налази одражавају стварање верског простора и како се идентитет нижих Хинду каста потврђује кроз ова места. Модерне силе и темпо урбанизације су разределе густу сегрегацију сиромашнијих сектора и отворили им пут за секуларан живот са припадницима виших каста. Они нису само донели демократизацију стамбеног простора, већ су им и обезбедили већи ниво достојанства.

**Кључне речи:** религија, друштвено – религијски простор, сиромашнији сектори, политика идентитета

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