

## EMERGING PATTERN OF LEISURE AMONG SCHEDULED CASTES: A CASE OF HARYANA

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**Abstract:** Leisure activities are part and parcel of everyone's life but different patterns can be observed among different socio-economic groups. In the case of India, caste is the most significant factor of social stratification. Its impact can also be seen in the practice of leisure activities. Earlier, scheduled castes which are positioned at the lowest strata had a very limited scope of leisure because of their social and economic backwardness. But, with an increase in urbanisation, education level, employability and the advent of new technologies new patterns of leisure are emerging among scheduled castes in particular and the society in general. Smartphone and their related activities have become the most common leisure activity among all sections of society including scheduled castes. However, many leisure activities are still away from the reach of scheduled castes due to social and economic constraints.

### Introduction

Leisure is essential for everybody, however, every society is heterogeneous so in the case of Indian society. There are many religious, ethnic, and other cultural groups. Traditional Hindu society is divided into numerous castes and sub-castes numbering in thousands. The scheduled castes are at the bottom of the hierarchy. They are a marginalised and deprived section of society in all social, economic and political affairs. These castes are usually doing menial jobs, labour work, and provide service as servants, drivers and watchmen etc. Lower castes leisure has always been neglected either by society or by themselves because of certain constraints. It may be because of their economic constraints,

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Socio-cultural exclusion, and the hierarchical division of society. Thus, the present paper tries to find out the numerous leisure opportunities and constraints among the scheduled castes in Haryana. The pattern of leisure is deeply influenced by the social structure which includes economic, cultural and political processes in the society. However, technology in terms of electronic media and print media has emerged as a strong arm for the diffusion and extension of information. It has given cultural symbols and recreational packages of various kinds of leisure to every section of society. However, it is important to see those who have accessibility to these provisions of leisure and related constraints along with them.

The study is based upon group interviews of Scheduled caste employees, social activists and all other categories of Scheduled castes' people located in rural and urban areas of Rohtak District to understand their leisure pattern. Further, from the point of view of the social composition of the respondents, the majority of them belonged to the Chamar and followed by Dhanak and Valmiki castes. Broadly in this paper, we will discuss the caste structure of Indian society, the concept of leisure and its pattern in India, and finally emerging patterns of leisure in relation to scheduled castes in Haryana.

### **Caste Structure of Indian Society**

Traditional Hindu society in India is divided into numerous castes and sub-castes numbering in thousands. The broad classification of castes into three categories: (1) The *Dwijias* or the Upper Castes, (2) The Middle castes, commonly known as backward Castes or Classes, and (3) The Lower castes or the Untouchables of the earlier times. The Scheduled Castes are officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged people in India. For much of the period of British rule in the Indian sub-continent, they were known as the depressed classes. The Scheduled Castes comprise about 16.60 per cent of India's population. The share of Scheduled Castes population was 19.75 per cent in 1991, which decreased to 19.35 per cent in 2001 and further rose to 20.17 per cent in 2011.

The castes are traditionally being ranked in a ritual hierarchy. The upper castes at the top of the hierarchy were the dominant castes. The untouchables at the bottom of the hierarchy can also be described as the marginalized castes. The untouchables were confined to degrading occupations like disposing of the dead animals, processing of skins, leather works, scavenging and work at cremation grounds. These castes worked as menial workers, labourers, servants and watchmen, they have always remained indispensable to the society whether rural or urban. Their housing settlements were generally at the periphery of the village. The untouchables are described as marginal in terms of the low rewards and prestige related to their occupation and their consequent deprivation. Generally, they are also lower in income, health and education.

These castes may, however, vary from place to place in terms of being labelled untouchable. A caste such as Dhobi (Washerman) or Teli (Oil pressure) may be considered untouchable in one part of the country but not in another. The description of scheduled castes as a marginalized group focuses on a series of disabilities that are imposed on them. These disabilities manifest themselves in a variety of ways in Indian society even today because of restrictions on access to public facilities, such as cremation sites, temples, chaupals (community centres), and wells or water sources, etc. The social exploitation of the scheduled castes by the higher castes is revealed from the reported incidents of violence against them in different parts of the country. Preventing the Scheduled castes, such as Valmikies and Chamar in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra and so on, from using roads, entering temples, parading of their women naked in the streets, raping, looting, beating and burning of men, women and children are the regular features.

In many villages of Uttar Pradesh, one section of the scheduled caste known as Valmikis are not allowed to draw water from the well maintained by higher castes. In the villages of Moradabad districts, the marriage procession of scheduled castes is not permitted to pass through the streets inhabited by higher castes. In many other villages in Uttar Pradesh, the higher castes people force the scheduled castes to surrender their ration cards and use them for their own benefit. In the schools, children belonging to Scheduled castes are made to sit separately and even drink water from separate pitchers (Gandhi, 1973).

In some parts of central India, Scheduled castes were not allowed to use the goods indicating comfort or luxury. They were not allowed to ride a horse, use an umbrella, wear quality clothes, construct of *pakka* house and to have long moustaches etc. The scheduled castes women were not allowed to wear gold and silver ornaments and fancy clothes. Moreover, they were ordered to carry messages of birth and death of the higher castes to the far-away places, as and when required. In addition, they were required to play music in marriages of higher castes without any fixed remuneration for rendering these services and had to accept whatever was offered (Borale, 1968).

Social exploitation breeds not only economic exploitation but political also. The nature and extent of the exploitation of the scheduled castes are reported periodically by the Chief Election Commissioner preventing the Scheduled castes voters from going to the polling booths, threats of physical assault, social and economic sanctions against filling nominations to contest elections particularly at the panchayat levels, intimidations for not voting in elections or voting for rival candidates are the typical forms of political exploitations. Thus we can say that scheduled castes suffered oppression at the hands of the upper caste for centuries; their economic condition was extremely depressed, they were educationally backwards and the political field was closed to them. In other words,

the low rank of the scheduled castes resulted from cumulative inequalities in the economic, political and ritual system in Indian society (Sabharwal, 2011).

The British rule provided fresh avenues for social mobility altering the nature of pre-existing institutions such as schools and colleges which open their doors to all castes and established new ones such as the army and bureaucracy which recruited members based on merit and hence provided ample spaces of mobility. Under British rule, land became a saleable commodity and this had far-reaching consequences for their upliftment. The members of the low caste who could afford to buy land could now become upwardly mobile.

Also, westernization accelerated the mobility process in more than one way. On one hand, it was a desirable mechanism of attaining mobility, on the other, it in itself generated mobility because the 'westernized' become a model for emulation for the others. The British rule resulted in the political integration of the country into a single administrative unit with a uniform and homogenous pattern of law and order grounded in the principles of rationalism, humanitarianism and egalitarianism.

The principles of universalism and egalitarianism which have guided the legal system in India after Independence have fostered social mobility among the lower castes. The new civil, penal and procedural law has curtailed the prevailing inequalities. Similarly, another important contribution of the new legal system was the creation of consciousness of rights among educated scheduled castes. The abolition of untouchability and adoption of protective discrimination policy has proved immensely beneficial for the lower castes. The principle of Universal Adult Franchise, adoption of the *Panchayati Raj* System has altered the distribution of power strengthening the hands of the weaker sections and restricting the appropriation of power by upper caste. Similarly, land reforms have been a motor force affecting mobility. The ceiling of holding has proved a blow to the status and prestige of *Zamindars* and a boon for peasant cultivators who have attained ownership rights.

Castes located at the bottom of the stratification system sought mobility by orienting themselves to emulate upper-caste behaviour ideologies and rituals. In such endeavours, seeking elevated status in the prevalent stratification system the aspiring categories were required to give up their traditional marks of inferiority especially such practices that were considered as polluting. The lower caste hierarchy, in order to seek upward mobility, emulates the lifestyle of the so-called higher castes. This strategy for cultural and social mobility in the traditionally legitimized ascriptive social order is termed '*Sanskritization*'. M.N. Srinivas (1966) who used the term first defines it as a process whereby a lower caste begins to imitate the lifeways of a higher caste with a view to claiming a higher status for itself in the traditional caste hierarchy. Srinivas emphasizes that *Sanskritization* presupposes an

improvement in the economic status and political strength of the group staking claims. Such urges are the product of intimate support of the Great Tradition of Hinduism. Inferiors in order to raise themselves up in the hierarchy have to be economically prosperous, politically dominant and socially assertive. It has to be noted that it facilitates positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. Shah (2005) has quoted studies to indicate that resorting to *Sanskritization* as a strategy for status elevation has found favour among the intermediate castes in different parts of the country. The Dhangar of Maharashtra, the *Kurmi* and *Yadava* of Bihar, the *Koli* of Gujrat, the *Lingayat* of Karnataka and *Teli* of Orissa are reported to have adopted *Sanskritization* as a strategy to seek elevated corporate status.

Radical changes have been taking place in the entire culture of purity and pollution due to the processes of industrialization, urbanization, westernization, modernization, secularization, rationalism, humanitarianism and mere exigencies of modern life, roughly with the beginning of the British rule in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Srinivas, 1966). The upper castes who were the first to take western education were also the first to change their purity/pollution behaviour, in the domestic as well as the public sphere. This change occurred first in urban areas and gradually affected rural areas. Its pace increased with the pace of urbanization during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is likely to be faster during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Shah, 2007).

The study shows that the *Jatavs* of Agra who was traditionally engaged in polluting leather works and their status was very low in the caste hierarchy. As the modern leather industry developed, some Jatavs became entrepreneurs and provided a job to their caste people. Their economic status improved substantially. Moreover, first, they took to *Sanskritization* and later politicization for attaining social mobility (Lynch, 1968). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, *Ramgarhias* took advantage of early opportunities mainly in their traditional skills in wood and metal which resulted in the growth of their wealth but it was only after independence that they could enter into industrial entrepreneurship in Punjab and gradually entered into upper-caste networks. *Jat* landowners had resisted the *Ramgarhia* aspirations for improvement in their social standing. But during the 1950's they found considerable political support and turned industrialists and thus getting upwardly mobile (Saberwal, 1976). Therefore, it has been proposed in this study to examine the emerging pattern of leisure among scheduled castes of Haryana.

## Leisure

Leisure is a complex phenomenon pervading every society. Recreation and leisure are the cultural universals, being found as the common elements in the behaviour of individuals in all societies (Miller and Robinson: 1963). Etymologically, the word leisure comes from

the old French *leisure* which means ‘opportunity to do something, which in turn derives from Latin *licere* meaning ‘be permitted’. In ancient Greece, Leisure meant freedom from the necessity *ponos* (work or sorrow) and freedom for engagement with *paideia* (culture). The origins of the current notions of leisure are found embedded in the traditions and practices of ancient culture.

Leisure has meant different things to different people and the concept of leisure has changed with time. It is generally constructed as freedom from work or absence of obligations and discretion to use that period of time at one’s sweet will. Joblin (1990) considers leisure as the experience of being freely, actively and responsibly involved in work, play and worship. Leisure as the experience of freedom is best described by De Grazia (1962) ‘as the freedom to do what one likes to do if one has the means to do it. Dahl (1971) feels that leisure is not simply a free time, but a free spirit. Recent literature defines leisure as a legitimate pleasure, social construction and means of social reproduction (Rojek: 1997). Leisure is seen as a place where individuals may resist, challenge and even transform oppressive and constraining social relations (Henderson *et al*, 2004).

**Leisure in India:** India has had rich traditions of leisure through the ages: ancient, medieval and modern. Authentic evidence of it can be cited from various sources, including the archaeological, Indological, Philosophical, historical, literary, ethnographic and sociological. Archaeological sites of the Indus Valley civilization provide significant evidence of it in the precious kind of bronze statue of a dancing girl. Ancient Vedic literature is replete with revealing Indological evidence of leisure, both sensuous and contemplative. Medieval period accounts of leisure as a lifestyle of royalties and aristocracies. From the age of Buddha and Harsha, kings patronised the sports of hunting and the game of dice as their favourite leisure time. Hunting animals was regarded as one of the royal sports. Like the Kings and aristocrats, commoners had their leisure activities too. Wrestling, acrobatic, archery, animal fights, cart-race, horse-race, swimming and water sports were some of the popular past times of the commoners. Drinking, music, magic, fairs, folk tales, painting etc., were some of the leisure activities of the common man. Among the indoor games of royalty in the Mughal period, Chess occupied the pride. Another distinctive feature of the leisure life of the Mughal rulers was the maintenance of *Harems* (palatial quarters of women and courtesans), known for their colourful life, several Mughal rulers were polygamous and had the royal privilege of having a large number of wives and concubines. Mughals also patronised the aesthetic and artistic forms of leisure like music, dance and painting.

With the advent of British rule, Indian leisure was exposed to western games, music and dance. Volleyball, football, hockey, cricket and badminton made their appearance on Indian playgrounds. Western music and dance also became popular in an elite circle, however,

the traditional games, music and dance did not lose their popularity altogether. Earlier, the leisure patterns of rural masses include traditional games such as *Kabbadi*, *Kho-Kho*, *guli danda*, *Kanche*, *Pitboo*, and wrestling contests; folk-songs, folk dances, folk-tales, and folk-theatre, including *Nautanki* and *Ramleela*; visiting friends and gossiping. Some of the games are replaced by new ones like Cricket is played in every corner of India whether it is rural or urban, slum, hill or any other location. The character and complexion of leisure in modern India have changed in some significant ways. One, it has undergone a technology-inspired shift whereby it has acquired an electronic character. Today, significant leisure is characterized as virtual leisure. Tourism has emerged as a significant leisure activity. Leisure has moved from community place to marketplace under the garb of the entertainment industry. Leisure has now become a mark of the emerging lifestyle of the new middle-class (Sharma, 2017:62).

**Emerging Patterns of leisure:** The emerging pattern of leisure is deeply influenced by changes in social, economic, technological, cultural and political processes in society. Significant social and economic changes were initiated in the traditional society soon after independence. Caste-based village panchayats have been replaced by statutory Panchayat Raj Institutions. Technology has brought improvement in agriculture and industry. Information technology has altogether changed and emerged as an important source of diffusion and orchestration of information. Cultural symbols and recreational packages of various kinds are easily available. The emerging consciousness and quick information have consolidated various caste, class, tribe and ethnic groups. Its emergence is altering the pattern of leisure and leisure institutions in society.

The disintegration of the *Jajmani* System signifies a major change in the caste system because the purity/pollution and hierarchy are all involved in it. It constitutes three categories of people belonging to different castes: *Jajman*, *Kamin* and *Purobit*. Jajmans belonged to all castes. Kamins belong to some lower castes and purohits are Brahmins. Kamins and purohits provide services to jajmans. Purohits perform rituals and worship duties for jajmans; kamins perform manual work for jajmans like washing clothes, shaving, cutting and dressing hair, etc. In turn, jajman pay purohits in both cash and kind and kamins in kind on a yearly or half-yearly basis which was fixed.

It has been observed in the field that the *jajmani* system is disintegrating because of various reasons. Firstly, the families belonging to Kamins (scheduled castes) who consider their traditional caste occupations less prestigious or non-prestigious and economically less beneficial have abandoned them at the earliest opportunity. Most of Chamars who were engaged in their caste-based traditional occupations earlier have given up their particular occupations. Because of carrying and skinning dead animals, their status was very low in the caste hierarchy. Secondly, as it has been observed that there is no compulsion of the

caste-based division of labour therefore families belonging to the low Kamin castes have taken up occupations that are traditionally supposed to be done by higher castes.

There is a considerable improvement in the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled castes. The abject poverty and absolute dependence on landowners and old patron-client relations have disappeared in the rural setting. Urbanization created many opportunities for employment for Scheduled castes. The study shows that many Chamar and Dhanak families migrated from rural areas and settled down in urban localities. Education and the process of Sanskritization brought upward mobility among Chamars. As far as the literacy rate is concerned it is higher among Chamars than Dhanaks and Valmikis. Now a section of urban elite is also emerging among the Chamars. Availing reservations, they are getting an education, joining government offices and white-collar jobs. It was found in the surveyed village that the proportion of Chamars in salaried employment has increased.

Similarly, if Dhanaks are concerned, they are also adopting secular and clean occupations, asserting upward mobility through education and change of occupational structure. But in contrast, Valmiki caste among scheduled castes has been far less mobile. In the rural and urban setting, the majority of them are still engaged in their traditional occupation of sweeping, cleaning and scavenging. In the rural areas, Valmikis have been closely associated with agriculture, and with their traditional occupation; most of them engaged as wage labourers or attached servants of the rich farmers and landlords. Jodhka and Kumar (2007) have also reported the same kind of pattern among the Valmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs of Punjab.

The consolidation and emerging identity of scheduled castes have started participating equally in the social, economic, political and cultural domain of the society. Modern technology in agriculture dictates its own time schedule independent of the traditional calendar cycle of work and leisure. It has, thus, rendered traditional work codes in agriculture redundant. The traditional work schedule of agriculture has been replaced by a work schedule determined by science laboratory, irrigation, and technology and market forces. The new agricultural pattern which has ushered in the green revolution in India robs people of their old style of work-leisure relationships and its ritualization. It also displaces several categories of workers, especially women, older folk and children from traditional roles in agriculture. Thus, communication participation in agriculture has been increasingly segmentized. The market has penetrated, where once community used to rule (Singh, 2017: 13-14).

At the village level, the *Chaupals*, community wells, temples or other sacred or cultural places had segregations on caste lines. The scheduled castes were excluded from going to the above-mentioned places which are only accessible to the twice-born castes. It is a case of social exclusion. However, due to the penetration of mass media, cinemas, mobile,

television the entertainment has become a part of “mass culture” or “popular culture”. These changes have introduced new dimensions to the emerging patterns of leisure among scheduled castes for which they were deprived off.

Technology-based agriculture has not only altered the social coordinates of leisure but also, sharpened the consciousness of social inequality and raised the level of aspiration among scheduled castes. The migration within the country in search of employment, education and work has also extended the process of social restructuration to the domains of leisure and lifestyle. The forces of social mobility, migration, caste and class restructuration and intensity of cultural contacts from within and outside the country, has resulted in changes in the pattern of leisure.

The youth in the different castes and classes is forming a major proportion of the population, who are intensely motivated towards new orientations in leisure and recreation. However, the traditional pattern still persists in the form of folk-songs and dances, eating joints on the pattern of rural habitation (i.e. *dhani, rasoi, sanjha chullab* etc.). Due to the expansion of market forces and commercialization, a large part of artefacts, cultural symbols, traditional dress styles and, leisure and recreational pattern are being incorporated in the mass-media forms. Marketing practices encourage new waves in fashion and lifestyle such as emphasis on ethnic designs, artefacts, traditional food and instruments of leisure.

We interacted with our respondents through group interviews to know what their idea of leisure is; how they perceive leisure; how they spend their leisure time and what their leisure activities are. It is interesting to note that for males the leisure time is sitting and gossiping with other persons in their neighbourhood at male-dominant common places. Interestingly, there is no bar in sitting with the higher caste people and sharing “*Bidi*” (cheap cigarette), and sometimes they take liquor and tea with them. While gossiping, generally, they discuss the village matters and, state and country politics.

Further, we probed them about the other leisure activities. Almost, all of them mentioned that while at home, they enjoy the news, filmy songs, and folk songs on television. Sometimes they also watch movies about their favourite hero. However, all of them accepted that they hardly go to the movie theatre for watching movies. The majority of them also mentioned that going to a movie in a theatre costs much which they cannot afford as it is a costly affair of leisure. Haryanvi society is famous for cracking jokes and it is one of the most popular forms of leisure among them. The people from scheduled castes also do not lack behind in it. While sitting in the group they equally participate in cracking jokes and listening to them. They enthusiastically quoted that “laughter is the best medicine for maintaining good health and we enjoy it the most.”

In principle, there is no particular categorisation of leisure activities according to different caste groups. If people of upper caste are going in marriage partying, the person

of scheduled castes also enjoys the same. The practice of dining separately has been abandoned. Thus, eating together which is also a leisure activity is prevalent among scheduled castes; however, there is class restriction. It depends on who invited whom. Within the caste hierarchy among scheduled caste, a section of downtrodden, oppressed and depressed suffers from the worst kind of discrimination in various spheres of life. It can be said that in the case of leisure and recreational activities class barriers have taken the upper hand over the caste barriers, especially among the youth section. From the fieldwork it was found that by and large scheduled caste youth are engaged in Whatsapp messaging and viewing, chatting, listening to music, songs, watching movies on their smartphone. Their priorities have changed, many times ignoring the family needs they buy new smartphones for entertainment purposes. They asserted that nowadays their best leisure activity is browsing the smartphone. Most of them have also utilized the free internet package of the “JIO” connection. On the wage day, they also enjoy the “hard-drinking” with their friends. However, these friends are from their own class category. Thus, there is a hiatus between scheduled castes i.e. among Chamar and Valmiki.

The segregation between Chamars and Valmikis is reflected in the accessibility and patterns of leisure. Since Valmikis could not be benefited from the reservation policy, thus they are negligible in the prestigious government jobs. It has also affected the recreation and leisure facilities provided by the government being in the job. The government provides leave travel concession (LTC) for tourism and leisure for its employees and thus Chamars are able to avail this being more in class-1 and class-II government jobs.

It was noted that although the expansion of industrialization and globalization has given way to a new type of leisure activities like a theme park (which includes a water park, animal park, green park, amusement park etc.), they are only accessible to the people of higher class because of economic constraints. Also, among scheduled castes, there is an expansion of space of leisure activity but these are only accessible to the peoples of higher class because of the same reason. People from scheduled castes especially Valmiki's who are neither in government jobs nor in higher positions in private companies are left with limited options of leisure activities. However, many of such scheduled caste people go to *Deras* (the place where saints preach). These Deras provide them with temporary shelter and food. Thus, this becomes a leisure activity for them in Haryana.

## Conclusion

The present study shows that there is considerable improvement in the socio-economic condition of Scheduled castes which has led to the expansion of space for leisure activities among them. The study shows that many *Chamar* and *Dhanak* families migrated to urban areas which have provided them employment opportunities. Also, the process of

**Sanskritization** and education has brought upward mobility among them. But, it was observed that there is a class division within the scheduled castes and also within the particular scheduled caste. **Chamars** are better off than **Valmikis** and **Dhanaks**. They have taken more benefit of reservation policy and are in higher class government jobs. This has resulted in a difference in accessibility to modern leisure activities like a theme park, amusement park, video gaming etc., which are attached to economics. While the lower section within them are confined to leisure activities which are needless expenditure. But one leisure activity that was found to be common among all sections is that of browsing smartphones.

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