

Perception of Local Community and *Biradari* on *Panchayat*: An Exploratory Anthropological Study of *Biradari* in Village *Saroki*, District Gujranwala, Pakistan

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Abstract

The rural areas of Pakistan are well woven in the *Biradari* system which is also a social status carrier and an ethic attachment. The *Biradari* system is very much operational and playing a well participatory role in almost all kinds of community and local matters and issues ranging from very minor conflicts to big social disputes. The prime focus of the study was to explore the role of *Biradari* and community opinion regarding its respective role as *Panchayat*. The study was conducted in village *Saroki* of District Gujranwala where structured interview guide and participant observation were used as the key tools to explore the correlation of especially *Biradari* system with *Panchayat*. The research unveiled the role of *Biradari* by exploring the two sides of the pictures, including positive functions of *Biradari* and perception of communities about their negative role with a special focus on dispute management, resolving issues through traditional methods.

Keywords

Biradari, *Panchayat*, Social Class, Traditional System

1. Introduction

Biradari is an endogamous and inborn ethnic part of an individual occupying a social status of superior or infe-

rior position of social respect in distinction with other particular subdivisions (Velassery, 2005). *Biradari* is generally associated with denotative occupation and, is a congested social classification, which makes it endogamous (Hutton, 1963). *Biradari* represents the innate affiliation and social position of one's forefathers belongs to the analogous racial groups and the compilation of castes. "Aboriginal" group identities frequently debated, such as family bonding, kinship ties and caste association, or relationship with community faction, play an supplementary important role in determining voting behavior in the south Asia, than individual political affiliations (Wilder, 1999; Mughees, 2006).

India's history shows the caste system as stratification of people by class, religion, area, clan, gender, language, profession and social differentiation. Although this or further classes of differentiation exist in all human societies, problem originated when one or various dimensions overlap each other and become an exclusive source of structured ranking and inadequate access to treasured possessions like wealth, income, supremacy and status (Sekhon, 2000).

Biradari system is always a significant feature of rural culture in Punjab history. Due to insufficient social security arrangement and civilian benefits at national level, the obligation of kinship ties and caste is very much essential in the socio-economic and politico-cultural life of rural masses. The *Biradari* and village level mediation parties called "Parya" and "Panchayat" are very much functional in rural areas to solve the socio-cultural issues at primary level (Ahmed, 2013).

Panchayat is an old institution in south Asia forming on a body of supreme dominant authority of rural peoples, those were responsible for collection of taxes, resolution of social and material disputes/conflicts, and maintenance of law and rule in the particular society. In the *Mughal* period, *Panchayat* was also play an active and significant role, such as handling of financial issues, sacred/religious matters and other wide-ranging issues, the *Panchayat*, would make the ruling (Mughees, 2009; Saran, 1941).

In Punjab province of Pakistan, *Biradarism* is a key attribute of social organization and daily life. *Biradari* system affects the socio-political setup at national and community levels. *Biradarism* is a more authoritative factor of voting behavior than party attachment, apart from when the two candidates belong to same *Biradari* (Andrew, 1999). Caste/*Biradari* system has endured in Indian subcontinent for centuries. Persons of every *Biradari* are guided in their every day social lives by a set of rules and regulations associated with marriages, profession, pleasure, and most other social spheres (Ahmed, 2013; Chaudhry, 2012; Kolenda, 1985).

Biradari system goes forward to stay alive, while the chief castes would like to uphold their power and status. A piece of the explanation lays in the reality that caste chain of command and caste knowingness have been socially internalized in the course of centuries (Caste-Based Discrimination in South Asia, 2009).

It is commonly observed that most of the people would like to show their caste and ethnic affiliation(s) in rural areas of Punjab and as well as in the middle class of urban areas. It is worth mentioning that the rural masses are keener about their sub-castes. In central and upper Punjab, more common castes who are involved in certain levels of authority and politics are ruling are *Gujjars*, *Jatts*, *Arain*, *Rajput*, *Rana*, and *Syed*, while in southern Punjab *Baloch*, *Arain*, *Syed*, *Qureshi*, and *Jatoi* are more notables. These castes are most of the time engaged in such activities that are either positive or negative to hold the power and prestige in their respective areas by participating in politics in local as well at national level.

Caste system is not always seen in a positive or productive way to achieve results and at times criticized as the unjust nepotism and favoritism. On the other hand, it is also observed that still a lot of people participate in negative activities such as racial discrimination with obvious lower castes, create conflicts with other caste on land and other social and material issues, and also hinder in community development if opponent caste is in power. In this research, both male and female respondents were selected as part of sample, so it may cover different aspects, opinions and perception of both male and female of the community.

2. Materials and Methods

The research was conducted in village *Saroki* of Tehsil Wazirabad, District Gujranwala (Pakistan). To collect the opinion from the targeted population a sample of 150 respondents were selected randomly from field.

A structured questionnaire along with an in-depth interview guide was developed to cultivate the information and data on the different dimensions of the *Biradari* system at local level. The tool(s) were piloted to ensure the quality and efficiency in the data collection. A formal meeting with the village elders and community leaders was conducted to build the rapport and to discuss the objectives of the research study. The data was collected with the consent was analyzed by using SPSS software.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by gender where around 72.7% were male side and 27.3% were females.

Table 2 shows the opinion of participants about the involvement of *Biradari* to resolve the disputes at community level where round 39.7% of the respondents were of the view that *Biradari* system is a strong and a very effective way to resolve the local disputes, where as 20% of the respondents think that it is somehow an effective part to tackle down the community disputes and conflicts. Results clearly show that the *Biradari* system plays a vital and effective role in rural communities to settle the dispute both at primary and communal level.

Table 3 presents the relationship of traditional method of *biradari's* decision and its acceptance level at the local community, where decisions are usually taken by the *Biradari* elders in different situations to maintain peace and effective dispute management of the community. The table is clearly evident that the majority of the villagers agree with the decisions taken by the *Panchayat* under the supervision of *Biradari* elders for a range of situations including peace building, resolving conflicts, land and property issues, inter and intra caste dealing and development work within the community.

It is worth mentioning that no respondent strongly disagree with the traditional method keeping in view the cultural complexities and respect of this method at communal level. It is also discovered that the respondents who disagree, usually criticize the structure and role of the *Panchayat* and *Biradari* elders instead of developing opinion on the traditional method itself.

Table 4 is showing the opinion of the respondent with respect to the role of *Biradari* system and how effective this system is in different area(s), which especially covers the area of positive role of *Biradarism* in social settings of the rural communities. Data show that 21.3% cases were of conflict resolving, 16% of the cases were

Table 1. Respondent distribution by gender.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Male	109	72.7
Female	41	27.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 2. *Panchayat (Biradari)* effectiveness to resolve local disputes.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Very Effective	59	39.7
Effective	30	20.0
Somehow Effective	52	34.7
No Response	9	6.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 3. Communities easily accept *Panchayat (Biradari)* decisions.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	22	14.7
Agree	76	50.7
No Response	33	22.0
Disagree	15	10.0
Strongly Disagree	4	2.7
Total	150	100.0

regarding the maintenance of law and order, 12.7% cases reported to support lower castes and class issues, 19.4% were about the development of community, in 5.3% cases *Biradari* helped the community to vocalize problem at higher level for the required solution, While 25.3% highlighted the participation of *Biradari* in politics for both community and national interests.

Table 5 shows the perceived and reported negative role of *Biradari* system in a rural community where around 18.0% of the respondents believe that *Biradari* is a reason of conflict, nearly 32% were of the view that it is only multiplying superior thinking of the *Biradari* leading to certain disputes and discriminations, round 12.7% respondents take it as a source of discrimination with lower castes leading to violating their rights, nearly 8.7% highlighted it as barrier in development, around 13.3% consider the *Biradari* as the key to fulfill self interests leading to biased favoritism, while 15.3% respondents were of the view that the power politics of *Biradari* create an atmosphere of unease in the community.

Table 6 presents the support for *Biradari* from different social status holder classes of community where around 27.3% of the respondents were of the view that the lower class supports the *Biradari* system for certain interests. On the other hand 30% were believe that the middle class favors the *Biradari* system, which shows that there is less support by the upper class of the community as it has various urban avenues to support and vice versa.

Table 4. Positive role of *Biradari* system in local communities.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Resolving conflicts	32	21.3
Maintain law and order	24	16.0
Support lower class's	19	12.7
Participation in development	29	19.4
Highlight problems at upper level	8	5.3
Political participation	38	25.3
Total	150	100

Table 5. Negative role of *Biradari* system in local communities.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Reason of conflicts	27	18.0
Superior Thinking	48	32.0
Discrimination of lower caste	19	12.7
Barrier in development	13	8.7
Self interests	20	13.3
Power politics	23	15.3
Total	150	100

Table 6. Perception regarding social class support for *Biradari* system.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lower class	41	27.3
Middle class	45	30.0
Upper class	16	10.7
All	48	32.0
Total	150	100.0

4. Discussion

The fundamental function of caste cannot be ignored both in traditional set up can within the rural settings and also an effective tool in urban settings. People throughout the country are more certain about their caste ties as it serves various functions such as providing pool for matrimonial bonds, resolution of inter-caste and intra-caste conflicts/disputes, creating a nexus of social linkages for extending the web of social contact and also as a source of identifications and claiming a social respect and prestige enjoyed by a particular caste in Punjabi culture (Ahmed, 2013).

Panchayat is an old and active form of diplomatic institution in the sub-continent comprising on a body of supreme of villagers, those were responsible for collection of revenues, adjudication of all disputes, and maintenance of law and order in the community. Later in the Mughal era *Panchayat* was also institution for cases concerning financial matters, religious affairs and other general cases, the *Panchayat*, would make the ruling. This system is the ancient shape of democracy (Saran, 1941; Sultan, 1997).

Particular social group's especially key *Biradar*ies encourage ideas, beliefs and thoughts for their own ends as a source of holding and justifying socio-economic and political power. In some complex societies, having many different groups, a belief may produce cultural supremacy, the ideological control by one leading group over values, myths, and norms (Scupin, 2012).

Biradari system's significance is seen in various forms ranging from small rural societies to highly populated urban areas. It is evident from the range of opinions by the respondents that this traditional system is still working efficiently and is considered effective in creating productive decisions, however, the critiques think the other way and believe in the rudeness of the application of this system.

In Pakistani society, the *Biradari* system is dominant and well embedded. The *Arains* of central Punjab, the *Makhdoom* of Hala and *Jatts* of Gujrat generally vote for their own caste and *Biradari*. During the elections caste based conflicts generally reported. In Pakistani political scenario, it was observed that caste system plays significant role than the political parties. Political parties in Pakistan are vehicle of the castes to acquire power. Caste system is one of the most important sources to originate tension between different segments of society. Caste system not only rules rural politics but also the politics of urban areas (Gulshan, 2013).

5. Conclusion

The ethnicity and caste affiliations are embedded both as a source of identification and necessity which serves with its limitations at rural and urban levels by providing a support and pressure group on various domestic and communal issues. It was discovered that this traditional system and its style of making decisions are embedded in the local wisdom and stand on the structure of inborn ethnicity.

Most of the respondents believe that *Panchayat* system of a *Biradari* is indeed operational and fulfills the services on various issues including dispute management, inter and intra caste issues, land disputes etc. It was also found that the *Biradari* system has its limitations which majorly include racial discrimination.

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