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**Topic of Research: Formation of Status and Social Change in Depressed Communities Among Kashmiri Muslims**

## **FINDINGS**

This dissertation investigates the formation of caste and status of Sheikh Community, considered Dalits/ depressed class in Jammu and Kashmir. How various castes and religious communities evolved and their interactions with each other are traced under different rules including Mughal and pre-Mughal rule in various chapters. It discusses in details the arrival of Islam-particularly Sufi tradition and its impact on the society, particularly on Hindu communities and its caste system. The study of current socio-economic conditions of the Sheikh Community, their perceptions about their lives and future is based on extensive interviews conducted in the rural and urban areas of Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir. As it is widely known, the state has been witnessing insurgency and violence since past three decades. This research examines the socio-economic conditions of the Sheikh Community in the context of this insurgency, and various forms of state and non-state violence. It argues that there is little change that has happened in the conditions of the Sheikh Community, though some political awareness is witnessed. While the caste historically has evolved, and transformations in the social stratification have occurred, it is argued that the conditions of Sheikh Community as a depressed class or Dalit is a result of both the social dimension of caste and nature of the political economy around which community life is organized based on discrimination and prejudices.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters besides an Introduction and conclusion. The Introduction puts forth the analysis of the concepts and theories pertaining to research, literature review and methodology used for this study. The first chapter titled, Analysis of Jammu and Kashmir's Political History and Its Impact on Its Social Stratification analyses the political history of Kashmir and how political process in Kashmir impacted the social stratification in Kashmir. It further discusses various historical phases such as - the ancient Hindu and Buddhist period, Muslim rule of Shah Miri dynasty (1339–1561 A.D) and later the Mughal (1586–1752 A.D), Afghan (1752– 1819 A.D), Sikh (1819–1846 A.D) and Dogra (1846–1947A.D) periods through which the caste system survived and flourished in Kashmir. It further provides a comprehensive understanding of the caste system in Kashmir and its impact on the cultural practices of people. The second chapter titled, Arrival of Islam in Kashmir and Its Impact on the Formation of Communities and Their Caste Structures examines the castes and communities that form the main constituents of social stratification in Kashmir and resided in the valley from the 14th century onwards in the post-Islamic period. It analyses various Kashmiri caste names (Krams) in the pre and post Islamic periods that signifies the

influence of caste system on the Kashmiri society even after the conversion to Islam. The chapter has also dealt with the existing ethnic groups in the region which gives a broader understanding of Jammu and Kashmir's demographic composition. The third chapter is titled, Jammu and Kashmir State Policies Since Post 1947 to the Early Period of 1990s: Land Reforms and Transformations of Caste and Communities, mainly among Muslims and Non-Muslims. It has analysed the state policies during the post-1947 period which led to a significant social and political transformation in Kashmir. The chapter further discusses the role of Sheikh Abdullah in bringing various reforms to the Kashmiri society most importantly the land reforms and their impact on the socio-economic condition of Kashmir and its caste structure. It also examines the constitutional protection that is given under the Article 370 and the subsequent attempts to abrogate it. With the onset of insurgency in Kashmir, violence impacted people from all walks of life and many social changes occurred during that period. These changes and their impact on the caste system in Kashmir constitutes the central theme of the fourth chapter titled, Analysis of the Impact of Post 1990s Insurgency and Violence on Caste and Communities in Kashmir. Tracing the roots of political conflict that started in Kashmir in the late 1980s, it furthers the narrative. It analyzes the events that led to the militancy and militarization of Kashmir that not only resulted in the massive human rights violations of the Kashmiri people and brought violence and destruction to the region but also brought demographic changes in the form of migration of large number of Kashmiri Pandits. The fifth chapter is titled, Analysis of Social Change and Mobility in the Sheikh Community. It analyses the social change and mobility in the Sheikh Community based on my findings. The findings are divided into three parts: social, political and psychological findings. The findings are mainly based on the field work that I conducted in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir from 2016–2018. I conducted in-depth one to one interview with about fifty individuals from these villages and towns. In Conclusion, final analysis and the policy recommendations are presented.

This research was carried out to investigate the formation and social status of Sheikh community in Jammu and Kashmir. Based on the analysis of findings, it is concluded that Sheikh Community is socio-economically the most underprivileged community of Jammu and Kashmir. It is further concluded that they continue to face social and economic discrimination despite various forms of policy interventions of the state over the years and they have remained at the lowest strata in the Kashmiri society. Not only the manual scavenger Sheikhs but the Sheikh community as a whole is considered as impure and polluted by other caste groups in Kashmir despite some Sheikh families achieving good economic status. To this end, the institutional bias has also contributed towards their dismal social position and poverty. Although, the last three decades of insurgency have reduced the intra-community gap in the Kashmiri society but the Sheikhs continue to face discrimination, but there is enhanced political awareness, and signs of assertiveness in matters for asking for their rights and self-respect.