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The Struggle for Recognition and the Dynamics of Marginalization in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahari Community

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ABSTRACT

The Pahari ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, concentrated largely in the border districts of Poonch and Rajouri, has been ignored, sidelined and consigned to the periphery when it comes to education, employment, health care and political representation despite its sizeability. Ongoing socio-economic inequalities and socio-cultural vulnerabilities catalyzed a decades-long Struggle for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The culmination of this search to be recognized came in February 2024 when the Paharis were recognized as a scheduled tribe community by the Government of India, marking a major milestone. The study is empirical in character with the researcher majorly using empirical methodology, especially questionnaires, semi structured interviews; focus group discussions, and participant observation in Poonch district. It looks closer at the everyday life of the feeling of marginalisation by the Pahari tribe and how important to be recognised. The results show that recognition cannot be reduced to either a legal or administrative tool, but rather it is an important strategy of social change in shaping identity, restoring dignity, and promoting social-economic ascendancy. The success of such recognition will depend on the success

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of the policies which are put in place, the removal of barriers that were in existence and how the community uses its new opportunities. By contextualising the Pahari recognition struggle in the backdrop of a marginality and recognition framework, this paper develops a case that the grant of ST status is a symbolic and practical redress of justice. It deals with the historical neglect, and rationalizes the future course of the Pahari community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Pahari community, marginalization, recognition, Schedule Tribe, Jammu and Kashmir, Poonch.

Introduction

The Pahari community in Jammu and Kashmir holds a marginal and distinctive position in the social-political set-up of the Union Territory. Paharis are people of diverse races, caste, and religions; their distinct historical characters, ways of life, and the native language form a multi-ethnic cultural identity of themselves. Pahari community is a multi religious ethnic group in the border district of Poonch, Jammu, Kashmir, India. Another instance of disruption in the socio-political history of the Poonch ethnic group was the 1947 Partition, where it resulted in differentiation and othering (Sharma, 2022).

The Pahari people inhabit either side of the Line of Control. Its focus on the Indian side is found in Kupwara and Uri region of the Kashmir region and Rajouri and Poonch region in the Jammu region. Its inhabitants are presented by those, who live in Poonch, Muzaffarabad, and Mirpur (the latter two on the Pakistan side of the Line of Control), although they are similar in their language, one can find slight differences in the dialect. Paharis are considered the native people of Jammu and Kashmir who are mostly settled in the border areas of Rajouri and Poonch. The 2011 Census shows that in Jammu and Kashmir the estimation of the Pahari community is 0.96 million people (Vaid, 2014). This is slightly less than eight percent of the total number of population in Jammu and Kashmir. Notably, 74 per cent of the total population of Pahari people in Jammu and Kashmir as one of the levels of predominance is located in the Poonch-Rajouri areas.

Until 1947, the most numerous population group in Jammu and Kashmir was the Paharis. In the Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir (IA J&K), the Pahari community saw a huge decline in population, falling to 890,000 in the 1941 Census to 232,000 in the 1961 Census after the loss of Mirpur-Muzaffarabad areas to Pakistan through establishment of the Cease Fire Line (CFL) in 1949. This research highlights how partition affected the population dynamics of the Paharis (Behera 2000, 236).

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Pahari community which is largely located in the border, districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla, and Kupwara, has experienced various levels of marginalisation owing to their geographic location, linguistic identity, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Despite their significant demographic stake, the Paharis have been disadvantaged in terms of education, health, work, political representation, and state resources. Their exclusion was also enhanced by the borderland environment which was characterised by constant violence, relocations and militarisation, which impeded everyday life and development. In this regard, the consistent need of the community to be recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) does not only indicate seeking legal and political rights but also a desire to enjoy dignity, equality, and social-cultural acceptability. The years of neglect given to them on the basis of ST denial further added to their perception of unfair treatment in comparison to other similar groups being granted ST status. This expanded exclusion mobilised a cultural politics of identity that linked cultural specificity to a social justice agenda. The impending bestowment of ST status to the Paharis in February 2024 raises fundamental questions of recognition, and redistribution, and scope of inclusive development in Jammu & Kashmir.

This paper explores how marginalisation is experienced among the Pahari minority in the Poonch district and the consequences of this discrimination being recognised recently. With the aid of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations in Poonch district, the research provides a contextualisation of the day-to-day struggles of Paharis against those of recognition and justice. The methodology taps into the theories of Axel Honneth on recognition, which emphasises the moral and social dimensions of respect and brings into focus Iris Marion Young on structural marginalisation, who explains the institutional/ policy-based nature of exclusions. These theories allow an advanced understanding of the recognition as a symbol which gives back dignity and a concrete tool of social mobility.

Historical Background of the Pahari Community

Erstwhile, state of Jammu and Kashmir imbued with diverse cultural, linguistic and religious values is a different piece of the rich mosaic of Indian sub-continent. Amongst this complex tapestry are both sedentary and nomadic communities, the identities of both being bound up in the strands of history, geography and exchange of culture. Significant ethnic groups include Gujjars, Bakerwals, Dogras, Ladakhis, Kashmiris, and Paharis all with distinct social-cultural backgrounds to the Union Territory. One of the communities is in a special position and that is Pahari. The Paharis are a multi-linguistic and multi-religious group that inhabits primarily in the border and hilly regions of

Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla and Kupwara. They are predominantly Muslim, but there is also a great number of both Hindus and Sikhs. They are an encapsulation of cultures that have been coexisting over the centuries. The Pir Panjal range marks the way through which many cultural currents got access to Kashmir Valley in mainland India. This cultural fabric has been also contributed by the heritage of practices of Buddhist monks, Hindu saints, Muslim Sufis and the warriors and poets who traveled across this range in the past.

Literature Review

Theories of Recognition

A prominent thinker on recognition, Axel Honneth (1996) argues that the formation of identities depends on recognition in three areas of life: 'love', 'rights' and 'solidarity'. Identity in intimate relationship brings self-confidence, confirmation by law brings self-respect and recognition by society brings self-esteem. Misrecognition or a refusal, on the other side causes humiliation and deformed identities. The long-standing struggle toward achieving Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the Pahari community can be viewed as resource acquisition as well as a quest to regain dignity and equal citizenship.

Charles Taylor (1994) also emphasized the point that recognition is one of the most basic needs of the human beings. Taylor has explained that of finding a precise meaning in his essay *The Politics of Recognition* that misrecognition is a form of oppression along with that it prevents groups of people to have strong identities. In this light, the sheer fact that Paharis had been excluded as a ST category over the decades was not merely an administrative oversight but a moral indignity that caused them psychological harm as a collective.

The essential correction was flat provided by Nancy Fraser (1997, 2000) who held that recognition without redistribution would not suffice. The discussion offered is that cultural recognition must be accompanied by material provisions when readdressing economic inequality. This is especially important to the Paharis: despite being designated ST in 2024, the implications of the change remain unknown, in terms of substantial redistribution, in education, jobs and political representation.

Marginalisation, Stigma, and Identity

Marginalisation is conceptualised as a social process exhibiting elements of exclusion As Goffman (1963) has shown, stigma classifies certain categories of people as inferior, and labeling them as having a spoiled identity reduces opportunities and even affects self-concept. This is consistent with the general

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notion that Paharis were members of a culturally backward group, so their demand to be recognized as ST could be described as an act of resistance against stigmatization and a process of recovering their identity and putting it at equal levels with Gujjars and Bakerwals.

Peter Leonard (1984) referred to social marginality as outsider status with regression to peripheral and secondary structures in society and Park (1928) earlier conceived marginal groups as comprising outsiders located on the fringe of the society. The argument put forward by the scholarship that is relevant in this context is that marginalisation extends beyond the economic and includes symbolic aspects that are degrading and threaten security and dignity. The experiences of both material deprivation and symbolic invisibility of Paharis can be explained with the assistance of these frames.

Standpoint and Feminist Perspectives

Dorothy Smith (1987) put forward a standpoint theory of knowledge that the lived experiences of excluded groups (“subjugated knowledges”) were the foundation of sociological inquiry. This perspective challenges the presence of these competing narratives that cover the voices of minorities. Challenging the status quo, Patricia Hill Collins (2000), indicated how women especially the marginalised groups develop alternative epistemologies based on their reality. In the case of the current research, these perspectives are critical, because they bring to the fore Pahari voices and their struggles rather than the depiction of a group of people which happens to be recipients of government or official policy. Intersectional approaches help us to know more how marginalisation operates as a gendered experience. The Pahari women are faced with both the disadvantaged background of patriarchal norms that have been mitigated by the invisibility faced on ethnic grounds and thus it is only their voices that require analysis.

Borderland Studies and Identity Politics

The theme of identity that reflects on the borderlands has been one of the central tropes in academia. As Anderson (1983) explains, nations as well as communities are imagined through the use of shared narratives and symbols. Besides, borderland researchers such as Schendel (2005) and Paasi (1996) highlight the impact of national politics on and changing identities of borderlands regions. This is best illustrated by the example of the Paharis of Poonch, who exist in the periphery of the government and the national imagination. It is a constant negotiation of their identity through displacement, fight of conflicts and recognition. They are located on the border of the Line of Control.

Indian Context: Caste, Tribe, and Recognition

Much more marginalisation and identity studies are part of the long tradition of Indian sociology. The foundation of the study of stratification was laid in early studies in terms of tribes and dominant caste by G. S. Ghurye (1969) and M. N. Srinivas (1952). The tribal identity and recognition has been a political negotiation that has been worked out in more recent times through studies like that of Virginius Xaxa (2005) and Nandini Sundar (1999). In case of example, Xaxa (2005) proved that the process of being categorised into the ST group being highly political since it is a result of the community movements that influence the government system and policies but not a mere bureaucratic practice. This is the kind of dynamic, where identity politics and demands of state recognition are in a conflict, which the Pahari case falls into.

T. K. Oommen (2010) explained that social movements often unite on the basis of religion, caste, location and language to form identities. This point has been elaborated further by Singha Roy (2018), who showed how identities are dynamic, resilient to change, and can transform within the context of social movements and globalisation. An example is Kumar (2005) who in his study of the Northeast argued that tribal identity politics is difficult to grasp without a historical perspective since contacts with the colonial and postcolonial worlds left their stamp on ethnic consciousness and political activism. These opinions resemble the Pahari struggle which has been largely impacted by the Partition and the ensuing wars.

Regional and Comparative Studies

Numerous works highlight the general background of identity struggles between the borderlands and other marginalised groups. As an example, Dryland and Syed (2011) examined the Baltis of Baltistan in Pakistan who have been forced to assimilate and lose their civil rights. Their struggle to preserve their culture is analogous to the struggle that the Paharis have to preserve their culture and how they work to restore the culture. Sharma (2021) examined the reconfiguration of religious and ethnic identities in Poonch after Partition and Sharma (2022) explored the complicated marginalities of Dalits as a subdivision of the Pahari group. Compact review on the struggles of the Paharis to earn their place even in India was critiqued by author Vandana Sharma (2018) focusing on their physical isolation, and financial poverty. Ahmad and Amin (2021) discussed the role of Sufi traditions in the Pir Panjal area in supporting cultural integrity and, therefore, confusing the discourse of violence with histories of pluralism and fraternity.

Classical and Contemporary Perspectives on Identity

Classical thinkers also have good insight to offer Weber (1968) emphasised

the political interest of ethnicity when being put into mobilisation of groups. Inner-facing conceptualisation of identity, Rivers (1910) argued that identity is closely tied to a particular ethnicity, whereas the in-between approach tried to divide cohesion of one ethnicity into single and partial personalities (Hardy, 2001). Contemporary thinkers insist that identity is fluid, constantly re-affirmed and developed in response to changing social circumstances (Mennell, 2001).

Summary

Through the literature, we can see how identity, recognition, and marginalisation relate to one other so extensively. Honneth and Taylor put much stress on the moral and psychological dimensions of acknowledgement, Fraser states that recognition should be combined with redistribution, Goffman explains the results of stigma, and Smith and Collins present much attention to the importance of the voice of the marginalized. Sociology of Indian and the Borderland sociology demonstrate how geography and politics exacerbate the problem of identity dispute that is troubling. This literature review provides a solid framework on which I will analyze the Pahari group in that I will be able to view their struggle to be classified as a Scheduled Tribe as a multi-faceted quest towards dignity, cultural identification, equality, and representation.

Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative sociological approach to analyse the conditions of identity, recognition and marginalisation of the Pahari community in Jammu and Kashmir in the troubled border district of Poonch. Taken into the account that these issues are best understood when seen through personal experience of individuals, methods supporting the participants in expressing their own outlook, memories and aspirations were used. The key instruments that underpinned data collection were an interview schedule, questionnaire, focus group discussions, participant observation and narrative accounts. An interview schedule utilizing both open and semi-structured probes was used to probe the experiences of the community members with different age groups, gender, and occupations. These topics of enquiry focused on assertions of identity, perceptions of exclusion in educational and work contexts, political representation and perceptions of recognition after the granting of Scheduled Tribe status in 2024. Men, women and youth were discussed separately in focus group discussions in order to have open discussions and collect common community opinions. One of the components of the methodology was participant observation. The field has made use of involvement in community meetings, cultural events as well as political gatherings where the process of investigation has been able to look into the

manner in which identity is experienced and how marginalisation is evident in day to day activities and encounters. Also, narrative reports were recorded to underline personal experiences of pain, persistence and change. These accounts were highly rich and brought perspective and attention to the fact that the higher order of things, such as recognition and marginalisation, are interlaced with individual experiences. Intentionally the fieldwork was conducted in areas dominated by the Paharis, i.e., the Poonch district, especially in Buffleaz, Balakote, Lassana, Mendhar, Poonch, Surankote, and Poonch. The sample was selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in opinions as well as differing backgrounds of socio-economics and generations. The ethical aspects of the research were strictly considered: the required level of consent was obtained, anonymity was desirable, and special emphasis when including the marginalised population, especially women and youth, was placed on marginalised voices since they often do not have representation in the politics of the community. The available information was put through the thematic analysis and such tendencies as marginalisation, assertion of identity, and seeking recognition emerged.

Findings and Discussion

The Context of Borderland Marginality in Poonch

To understand Pahari identity it is important to understand the home land of the community named Poonch. Poonch has played a significant role in the history of the princely state as a trading center, military and cultural contact pathways. But its identity as an unresolved borderland has defined it since 1947. The first Indo-Pak war began in Poonch district in 1947-1948 behind it the division of its territory, destruction of families and the position of the Line of Control (LoC) in everyday life went deep. As a result of relocation, bombardment, and financial turmoil, numerous wars (1965, 1971, and 1999) and war like tensions (2001, 2014, 2019, and 2025) continued regularly to affect the civilian population. Located in the area close to the Line of Control, Poonch is a perfect example of what is being called borderland marginality the people that undergo not only geographical isolation but also exclusion. Lacks in infrastructure and limited access to education and medical services, and the looming threat of transnational violence all compound the difficulty of day-to-day life. The many Paharis are simultaneously ethnic minorities and borderlanders, an amalgamated form of marginalisation.

Among Pahari people in border districts, Poonch, etc, maintenance of identity is more complex. The district is typified by systemic neglect and socio-political marginalisation. A well-recognized Pahari writer in Poonch District and a social critic of the region suggests that the communities of these places

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face multitudes of disadvantage. Residents of border areas live in the perpetual insecurity due to artillery fire across the border and militarisation. Family unity is often divided by the Line of Control (LoC) and siblings on opposite sides (POK) corresponding to physical and emotional fragmentation. The casualties that are incurred by the civilian population are the result of crossfire as well as the psychological trauma of being in a militarized zone. The infrastructure of these locations is not sufficient yet Road networks, industrial activity, and healthcare services are pathetically lacking. The Pahari population suffers chronic underdevelopment and social exclusion, given the limited attempts by the state to advance these peripheries.

A focus group discussion in Poonch also showed the anomalous situation of a strategically important border district that is underdeveloped and neglected. Having a total of 467685 (Census 2011), 267194 of whom were Paharis, the district is deprived of basic infrastructural facilities. There is no rail connectivity and no medical college and also no women's college. The coincidence of daily life is also marred by the occurrence of cross border shelling and this leaves the residents with the sense of insecurity under constant attack.

Participants emphasized that among inequalities is geography and the conflict, but state policies have also contributed to that. Development funds have been earmarked to the border and tribal areas and mostly come in late, plus when distributed, Paharis are systematically left behind. In contrast to Gujjars and Bakarwals, Paharis, could not access tribal hostels, scholarships, or welfare schemes in the Tribal Sub-Plan. One of the respondents cited an interesting case in point, a water pump project under tribal development funds was established near the houses of Gujjar, but the adjoining Pahari settlement was obvious omitted.

Such cases portray what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as structural exclusion, whereby access to institutional resources is disproportionately found thereby favoring a few. The Paharis, who have the same border conditions, experience being delegitimised in terms of their social and cultural capital in the bureaucratic procedures. This marginalization in its turn strengthens their marginal status.

Therefore, the example of the Paharis in Poonch reflects how state negligence, partisan enforcement of welfare programs and miscategories of cultural values harmonise to become a layered form of marginalisation. The importance of recognition in the form of scheduled tribe status remains a compensatory measure in 2024, and historical neglect has left an ugly scar that only long-term policy corrections could help correct.

Thematic analysis portrayed a sense of institutionalized marginalization where the participants identified poor implementation of government-sector reforms and policies primarily in the area of education and healthcare. Their socio-economic terrain is shadowed by institutionalized marginalization in a long and widespread shadow. Disproportionate exclusion and neglect on the part of institutional arrangements have established a system that disadvantages Pahari community relative to other communities in terms of access to essential resources, opportunities, and representation. Educational institutions tend to provide evidence of these exclusions, as well, with little facilities, poor infrastructures and poor chances to progress on the academic fronts. On equal terms, in the sphere of employment, biases within the institutions can lead to limited employment opportunities and possible career advancements on the part of Pahari populations. This loop of marginalization finds its way to the political world so that the community might not get the best representation and this will impair their capabilities of influencing policies directly affecting them in direct ways. Overcoming institutionalized marginalization in the area of Poonch district is a demanding and multifaceted task that requires a radically broadened range of actions aimed at redressing past wrongs and securing equal opportunities among the Pahari population in the context of the overall structure of the society.

Language as a Marker of Identity

Language acts as a major indicator of culture and is used to distinguish oneself and to be distinguished by others in addition to its use as a tool of communication. Unlike religion that is changeable through conversion, language is stable and remains throughout generations and identifies people with specific lands. Language is an important tool of expression to the Pahari-speaking people of Jammu and Kashmir and acts as reinforcement of ethnicity, memories of the collective and cultural pride. Pahari is a sub-family of the Indo-Aryan languages and has been documented in the Linguistic Survey of India, in the work by George Grierson which identifies various dialects. Folk poetry, oral narratives and songs reflect the splendor of the culture, its life values of hospitality, kinship and resiliency have been sustained. The language also develops like a living being, integrating new words and pruning others, and yet always ensuring continuity between a mountain community that shares common history, folklore and literature. The discourse of Pahari includes the semiotic of continuity, as well as the element of marginalization. Pahari speaking people who live in the fragile borderlands bordering Line of Control have faced a lot of disruptions. Improper family and community arrangement, along with prolonged wrangles in Jammu and Kashmir contributed to the heightened vulnerability created by the conflicts of 1947, 1965, and 1971. Death,

displacement, and insecurities along the borders limits their capability to participate in the development and politics in the states. Language in this case of exclusion has dual-meaning. Pahari is not only a communication medium but is a statement of existence as well, which means that in spite of radical political indifference and developmental marginalisation, the minority group continues to carry a distinctive identity. Demand of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, first aroused in the mid-1970s, gained force after the inclusion of Gujjar-Bakkarwal in 1991. This moment led to a new awareness among Pahari speakers, emphasising their sharp sensitivity to marginalisation in the politics of recognition. This rivalry is an example of how marginalised groups appeal to cultural symbols, especially language, in order to express their dignity and entitlement. Lack of exclusive census sources or dedicated surveys on Pahari-speaking people speak of the structural invisibility of the population that has characterized it over decades. As a response, they employed their language as a source of political power gaining political support through making demands of equal treatment, social justice, and inclusion.

Pahari serves as a source of culture and hence a political instrument, which has brought together the people of a given borderland to collaborate as a cultural group and to provide them with the required terminology to wage their struggle against marginalisation. It speaks of the mutual impacts of shared world and historical neglect and shows how languages are not simple systems of words but that they carry the life experiences and hopes of people.

The origin of any language is hard to establish in a precise way; but, the linguists and historians work to trace its development to gain the view of the culture that the group speaking the language builds upon. The Pahari language is another successful embodiment of the interconnected description of changing religions, the struggle of powers and the unique geography of the Pir Panjal area. Lying at the foot of the Pir Panjal hills that are covered in snow, the region of Pahari-speaking people within Jammu and Kashmir has always been geographically and culturally strategic. These proximate surroundings exposed the population to a lot of religious factors, trade routes, and territorial powers that influenced their language. Such a case is of Buddhism embracing Pahari as a language of dissemination as well as encouraging other languages to be adopted in order to keep its textual form. Oral traditions, chants and folk stories were among ways ordinary Pahari-speaking people could read up on philosophy without forgetting their native dialects. When the Ashoka took over Kashmir, he assisted Pahari to become more stable by rendering the new scripts official as well as to grow in its literature. This was not only the change of language within the community but the cultural self-expression which people commonly call as the epitome of Pahari literary blossom. Language

had not just been a way of ruling or religious matter; it was an identifiable social asset that made people come together and form a social identity. A watershed occurred in 1947 when a disastrous burst happened. With the formation of the Line of Control, not only was the sub continent of India divided but also the region of Pahari speaking population. The speakers became part of the fragmented global world with families and kin networks and cultural flows being distorted. Consequently, the border transformed into an experienced political boundary as it alienated the Pahari community of South Asia and shaped their identity and sense of belonging to the postcolonial world.

Along the way, the people who speak Pahari have maintained their culture of hospitality, straightforwardness and openness there are issues though. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians co-exist in the same valleys. They form a composite society in which religion differences are not unacceptable but rather a shell of the social culture. Pahari as a language therefore is not only a historical legacy but also a living statement to togetherness and survival. It demonstrates the challenges, beliefs, and ordinary lives of a borderland community that managed to maintain the voice of hundreds of years of transformation.

Educational Disparities and Intergenerational Backwardness

The greatest challenge that the Pahari ethnic group faces is a lack of access to good education. Government schools in those border districts often lack sufficient teachers and are underdeveloped in terms of buildings and functioning teaching equipment. Due to this reason, Pahari children perform significantly poorer in school as compared to other students in the Kashmir Valley or in Jammu city. The absence of infrastructure is not the only cause of this educational deficit; the social and economic drawbacks of the community also play a part in it. Most children are the first in their families to attend school, and poverty is a common cause of early drop outs. There is also the widespread feeling among Pahari children of being shyness backwardness and lack of quality education, which makes it more difficult for them to clear entrance test or pursue higher studies. Such forms of the situation increase the chances of people remaining poor over an extended period of time. Since they are not able to compete with more powerful groups, particularly in terms of language mastery, digital literacy, the ability to pass exams, Pahari youth have had a difficult time advancing in the world. This lack of access to mainstream schooling and gainful employment is a worsening consequence to the socio-economic gap.

Pahari community has been long excluded as Scheduled Tribe (ST), it has led to the impact of losing house an affirmative action. The community is

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geographically isolated and socio-economically deprived and remained invisible to institutions over decades. Lack of formal recognition led to not being included in reserved quotas in the education arena, employment in government, hostels, scholarships, and legislative representation in the political arena. Other communities with similar levels of underdevelopment were granted constitutional protection. This created a feeling of injustice and inequality among the population of the Paharis. The denial of ST status only reinforced daily forms of discrimination where Pahari students were often marginalised or under-represented in merit and policy-based opportunities.

The Struggle for Scheduled Tribe Status and its Aftermath

Paharis have been marginalised in political discourse and social development. They have been demanding the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for decades on their part, and their demand became even stronger after the 1991 granting of this status to Gujjars and Bakerwals. This led to the rise of new ethnic boundaries whilst at the same time encouraging unity amongst the multi-religious Paharis who were organised through Jammu and Kashmir Pahari culture and welfare forum (JKPCWF), the Pahari People Movement (JKPPM), Pahari tribe ST forum Jammu and Kashmir (PTSTF), along with students and youth organisations. The struggle to achieve ST status was also a matter of reservations, but a deeper search of the efforts was to find dignity, identity, and equality that were not witnessed despite a non-uniform development of the state. This aspect was highly changed with the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. Afterwards, Paharis got four percent reservation within education and employment. In February 2024, their long-standing demand of Scheduled Tribe status was conceded. This was not only signifying a change of policy among the community, but a moment of historical celebration and recognition that legitimised years of concerted action, and sacrifice.

The history of the Pahari bid to become a Scheduled Tribe (ST) has depicted a web of political forces and the sheer power of the human spirit. The participants unanimously stated that the movement, which has its roots in the 1970s, was a response to the process of socio-political othering and cultural marginalisation. One respondent who was in his 80s thought about the 1961 Census that merged Pahari and Gojri and led to the identity uncertainties and administrative neglect. The effort of the community was more than just material benefit; it entailed a strong sense of cultural pride and conservation of language. During the initial phase of mobilisation, government officials tended to ridicule rather than endorse the movement. One respondent remembered "Secretariat vich log hasde san, Pahari drama hai," ("people used to laugh at us in the Secretariat") a rebuff that amounts to a stigma of identity as Goffman (1963)

defines it; cultural expression becomes normatively unreal. The participants described the campaign as the search of recognition. One of the respondents stated that, "It is the kind of war we are known by and we shall fight it to the last gasp." This is comparable to the ideas of Honneth (1996) of recognition as an ethical bound of respect and disclosure.

In 1991, there was a major twist when Gujjars were granted Scheduled Tribe status, excluding Paharis, although they are at the top of the recommendation list. The respondents interpreted this marginalization as a political conspiracy in which there were narratives that paharis are an elite class. They also highlighted unity saying that 95 percent of the neighbouring Gujjar community came to their support. The interaction between exclusion and liaison reinforced ethnic consciousness on Paharis and sustained the movement across Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, Uri and Kupwara. Since much earlier, leaders and activists resorted to petitions, protests, and cultural statements to mobilize the people into action. Many of them as people died in the fight of the pahari cause. Although politics marginalized the movement, it had built a community around common memories of injustice and common dreams of dignity.

In February 2024, a long process of struggle, which lasted 40 years, finally culminated in recognition. Participants spoke of their experiences in existential language. "The government gave us the food when we were at the end of our revolution, when we were gasping, struggling for the last breath." In this regard, acknowledgment was not just a matter of policy, but also a necessity of survival of a community at the margins. However, issues persist even after the recognition. One respondent warned, "Our children have adapted to life after reservation but 3 percent is ready to cut this platform using axes". This depicts the fact that recognition is constantly subjected to contradiction and danger, and is always vulnerable to surfacing conflicts as indicated by Fraser (2000). Even though ST status name reflects both symbolic and structural equity, the wounds of not belonging remain very deep. These problems should be dealt with through policies, cultural empowerment and development works to transform recognition into the actual equality.

Political Representation and Electoral Dynamics

The Pahari community has been the politically underrepresented community despite being more in number than Gujjars. Gujjars have come to dominate the politics of Poonch since the 2002 Assembly elections, and their representation not only in the bureaucracy as well as in state and central services is highly disproportional to the Paharis. Without Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, a young respondent perceived this disparity as structural caused by

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the four decades of denial of ST status to the paharis one that, according to him, would not be overcome until 2024, when the paharis too were granting ST status. Another respondent stated that: "Agar mere pass bhi us waqt ST status hota tu ajj ma kisi achi post pa hota." (If I had ST status at that time I would have secured a good position.) Most young men my age are unemployed, living in conditions of small-scale farming.

This is the statement of the anger of a whole generation of Pahari Youth which were found to be blocked in the path of upward mobility. Gujjar and paharis people live in the same locality; they share the same type of social-economic status, but they had a structural advantage since 1991. They could avail of reserved seats, favored entry, and promotions so that they enjoyed representation at the different levels of the institutions. A respondent expressed it in its denuded form:

We Paharis are usually ignored in recruitment and promotions even when we bear the same qualification and experience. A majority of Pahari employees who have retired have done so at lower ranks due to the failure to be included in the Scheduled Tribe category and this creates a feeling of marginalization and frustration of employees."

This discriminative representation continued to exist till the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Amendment) Bill 2023, provided reserved representation in the Legislative Assembly to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. The same was applicable to Panchayats and DDCs. Gujjars and Bakarwals received such recognition, Paharis were systematically discriminated against. After 2024, Paharis were qualified to be treated as a Scheduled Tribe, for the first time that came with some political reservation.

In Poonch district where I have carried out my field work there are three Assembly constituencies. After the latest delimitation, two of these seats are reserved to ST candidates. Being newly recognised as part of the same category, Paharis are now in a position to fight these seats something that they were not supposed to do in the past. To respondents, this change was not only a political arithmetic but one of dignity and justice. Articulated one young participant, in a phrase that summarized the entire attitude of younger colleagues: "Ab hamari nasal bhi vote dene ke sath kursi par baithne ka haq rakhta hai." (Now our generation also has the right not only to vote but also to sit in power.)

This transition displays the force of recognition as a means of turning marginalization into ability and power. However, the history of political peripherization has left some visible wounds that will not be easy to heal. The big challenge ahead is to make sure that formal recognition is not just symbolic inclusion but that it leads to real representation.

Identity and Resilience

The Pahari people have demonstrated a remarkable strength despite the instability and disregard. The partitions, displacement, and violence along the border have resulted in similar experiences that unite people of different religions to support each other. This identity not only defines Pahari people but it also helps to identify themselves with a fighting history that makes people unite regardless of their religions, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhs. According to any sociological perspective, Paharis are an example of the liminal identity, the one that takes part in the fringe of the nation-state and local power structures, but can be keenly aware of its uniqueness. Their historical journey, marked by wars, partitions and political mobilisation, exemplifies not only the trauma of marginalisation but also the sustaining ethos of a people who have made out of their language, memory, and enduring experience as a borderland people, an instrument of identification and survival.

Conclusion

This study examined the lives of Pahari in the Jammu and Kashmir borderlands and has looked at the themes of recognition, marginalisation, and identity formation. Drawing upon the real-life experiences of the participants of the study, this paper explains how the combination of geographical isolation, lack of socioeconomic and political access as a result of displacement due to conflicts, and disparities in education impacted the everyday life of Paharis. This analysis has revealed that marginalisation is a complex phenomenon and it has spatial, cultural, economic and gendered aspects. The recent grant of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in 2024 is a huge achievement towards gaining justice in the long struggle the community was indulged in. Still, the discourses of the respondents show that the issue of recognition is not only viewed as a way to have access to the social redistribution through reservations in education and employment but also as a means of re-establishing a sense of dignity, history, and identity. In this sense, Pahari example supports the claim made by Honneth (1996) that individual recognition is a key aspect of self-realization in both social and individual sense. At the same time, Fraser (1997) reaffirms her claim that, unless there is big shift in the distribution of resources like education, healthcare and infrastructure, the symbolic victory of recognition might not be achieved.

The findings highlight the complexities of recognition politics in multi-ethnic context. The conferment of ST status on the Paharis brings new prospects but it also is raising tensions with the Gujjars and Bakerwals who feel their existing entitlements could be diluted. This dynamic comes out as a showcase of multicultural justice issues in multicultural societies where state recognition

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policies may be changed unwillingly, changing the relations between the communities.

Concisely, this research augments knowledge on recognition and marginalisation by focusing on the lived experiences of a border community of a historical period. It demonstrates that recognition is symbolic and material, collective and individual and always contextualized in larger systems of inequality. Future research should analyse the long-term effects of Scheduled Tribe status on the Pahari community and mobility, intra-group interactions, and on gender politics, as well as place it within a comparative context of other tribal and borderland peoples in South Asia.

The fight of the Paharis demonstrates a broader principle not that acknowledgement is the end of marginalisation but that it is the commencement of a new space of struggle, bargaining and opportunity. The Pahari struggle is about both sides of justice material upliftment through reservation, and the symbolic dignity through recognition. Prior to their ST status they were mocked, derided, unheard of, and marginalised. Once they were recognized, new hope and identity were instilled in them. However, there is still a struggle to overcome.

Sociologically, the Pahari movement is a manifestation of the continuity of marginalised people in borderlands who struggle not merely on the issues of resource distribution but also on the issue of dignity, language, and identity. It is humanly the story of a people which before suspected of mockery at Secretariat finally breathe with dignity as a group of recognised people.

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