



Changing Caste-Class Dynamics in Rajasthan's Agrarian Landscape

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving interrelationship between caste hierarchies and class formations within Rajasthan's agrarian political economy, focusing on post-independence transformations that have shaped the traditional power structure. It engages with the political and economic perspective while borrowing insights from John Harriss (1982) and Purendra Prasad (2014). Drawing upon government reports, contemporary events, and historical context, the paper argues that caste and class relations in Rajasthan mutually constitute social and power relations that are continuously reconfigured through patterns of resource distribution, economic diversification, and political mobilization. The postcolonial economic processes, along with political transformation, have precipitated significant challenges to the dominance of upper castes while creating opportunities for intermediate castes to translate agrarian capital into political influence. Different social mobility patterns of castes like Jats, Yadav, and Gujjars have leveraged agricultural surplus for entry into bureaucracy and market spaces, while Dalits, even with enhanced political representation, continue to experience structural vulnerabilities. Similarly, the tribes have also articulated their distinct position within Rajasthan's social structure. Finally, the paper ends by demonstrating how traditional social categories are renegotiated within the changing agrarian contexts, economic processes, and political contestation.

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Introduction

The economic reforms of the 1990s have brought several transformations in the agricultural sector and rural society in India at large. In Rajasthan, these economic reforms have also produced important changes in the political economy. The expansion of the economy in rural society has also diversified the agrarian sector with new social dynamics. If we look at the works of two scholars, for instance, John Harriss (1982) and Purendra Prasad (2014), we can get some useful ideas about the study of political economy. In this study, I follow their works to provide a critical analysis of the agrarian change in Rajasthan in terms of caste and class relations. Harriss deploys the political economy approach to understand caste-class relations. He studied social relations of production to analyse the changes in Tamil Nadu's political economy. Similarly, Prasad (2014), in his study of Andhra Pradesh, looked at land ownership patterns and labour relations across regions. Both these studies provide a useful framework to contextualize diversification in the economy in Rajasthan and its impacts on caste and class relations.

The power structure of Rajasthan reveals that caste does, in fact, shape economic and cultural lives quite significantly even after 70 years of modern democratic form of politics. Caste is responsible for determining access to land, control over the labor process, and the forms of social relations of domination and exploitation. There have been extensive works by Rudolphs on the social history of domination and princely rule in Rajasthan, though they did not analyze the development aspects from a political economy perspective (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1984). Neither is much empirical literature available on agrarian relations in pan Rajasthan in the post-1990s. Narain and Mathur (1990) write that Rajasthan's agrarian relations were marked by its unique historical context of land tenures. During the pre-British period, the land was not that fertile to allow the large-scale settlement of different communities. Under the *Jagirdari* system of land tenure, the peasantry was under the dominance of *jagirdars*, who exploited them for many purposes other than cultivation and taxes. The social and economic condition

of the peasantry under the princely rule was largely vulnerable due to the challenges posed by the ecological landscape and cultural disabilities pronounced by caste and power relations (Narain and Mathur, 1990). This condition of the peasantry class was addressed by the popular movements of the nineteenth century in Rajasthan, i.e., Praja Mandal movements, agrarian mobilizations, and national independence movements led by the Congress party. The post-independence acts and government policies curbed the position of intermediaries, and the land was retained after *the* abolition of jagirdari. These events also influenced the caste and class relations in different regions of the state. If we take a look at the social development that has occurred over the course of the previous half-century, we can see that the identities of class and caste in Rajasthan are intricately intertwined with one another and contribute to the formation of a complex social and political order. Social change shapes the way development happens in regional contexts. It seems plausible to state that class and caste relations are not fixed or static but something that is molded and constructed via the distribution of resources and power relations. The theoretical question of caste and class embeddedness should be understood via the examination of material settings and cultural contexts of social relations in regional contexts (Prasad, 2014; Harriss, 1982). In the case of Rajasthan, for instance, one can try to understand the different kinds of social identities that are defined and articulated with each other in today's material contexts that are shaped by feudal histories. In the following section, we will discuss the regional context of Rajasthan and attempt to have a preliminary understanding of how its agricultural situation is shaped by the social diversities and geographic aspects of the region.

Following Prasad (2014), this paper looks at the regional context of political economy in Rajasthan.

Regional Contexts

Broadly speaking, the state can be divided into three main regions with different economic, social, and political conditions. Western Rajasthan's ecological landscape is shaped majorly by desert conditions. People depend upon monsoons across the year. The

geographical spread spans from desert to semi-arid zones, as the state does not have rivers flowing throughout the year.

a) *Western Arid Zones*

This region includes Barmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner, and the desert districts of Jaisalmer. Due to its ecological condition, most of the communities are dependent on livestock and cattle rearing. Farming communities, mostly comprising Jats, Rajputs, and Raikas, have shifted to modern tools of cultivation. Yet pastoralism is practiced. With a limited reach of canal irrigation, the agricultural sector has not expanded to cash crops. Water scarcity has impacted on the livelihood opportunities in the region.

b) *Eastern Zone*

Some of the districts of Rajasthan state lie in the eastern zone. It's mostly a plain area on the east of Aravali hills. Districts like Dholpur and Bharatpur are quite fertile for agricultural production. For instance, HYV seeds canal irrigation has been adopted. With the borders of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, this zone has also contributed to the industrial base of Rajasthan, i.e., regions like Alwar, Sikar, and Jaipur. This region has experienced an increase in industrial labour opportunities with the growth of industrial enterprises surrounding NCR territory. With the growth of animal livestock and proximity to Delhi, the dairy business has increased tremendously in this area.

c) *Southern Zone*

Rajasthan's southern areas are mostly rain-fed. Here, the problem is not the availability of water but infrastructure. Districts like Udaipur, Banswara, Karauli, Tonk, etc., are areas where farming communities like Gujjars, Meenas, and Bhils are prominent. They have experienced land alienation, and poorer sections of these tribes are forced to enter the market economy. But these tribal groups face problems related to the necessary technical skills needed to enter labour markets.

To this, we can add a small well irrigated region of Northern Rajasthan comprising mainly Sriganganagar district that has benefited from the gang canal construction. It also led to the establishment of canal colonies in the region in the 1930s. Migrant Punjabi-speaking groups from neighboring Punjab have moved to this region and contributed to its agricultural expansion.

The Changing Agrarian Landscape

With the formation of the state of Rajasthan, the state has been dealing with the structural challenges of the economy. As a primarily agrarian state, Rajasthan's socio-political landscape and way of life have been shaped by its feudal past and historical land tenure systems.

Agriculture

If we look at Rajasthan's economy, we find that it is predominantly agricultural and rural in nature. Over the years, there has been a drastic decline in the share of the agricultural sector from 47% in the 1980s to 29% in 2000 and to 28.95 percent in 2022 (Rajasthan Development Report, 2006; Economic Review, 2022-23). When we look at the land usage pattern in Rajasthan, we can find that during the 1960s, around 38% of the state reporting area was utilised for crop production. It increased to 46% by 2000. Similarly, the cultivable wasteland has decreased to 14% in the same time period. Another important factor for agriculture is irrigation. As already mentioned above, Rajasthan is in a dry and arid zone, and water resources are limited. There are several irrigation projects going on in Rajasthan, and several schemes have been initiated by the government to provide irrigation facilities. Over the years, the percentage of irrigated area to net sown area has increased to 31% in 2000. There are two major crops in Rajasthan: *kharif* and *rabi*. Kharif crops include bajra, jowar, maize, moth, and cotton, while rabi includes wheat, gram, and mustard. The cropping pattern has also experienced several changes over the last few decades. As per the Department of Agriculture of Rajasthan, from 1990 to 2000, Kharif crops experienced a negative growth rate while rabi crops growth rate was positive.

Table 1: Agricultural Sector in Rajasthan

Year	Percentage share to State GDP
1993-94	35.77
1997-98	32.10
2001-02	32.00
2005-06	24.29
2009-10	22.61
2013-14	29.26
2018-19	25.85
2020-21	30.56
2022-23	28.95

Source: Rajasthan Economic Review 2022-23

Table No.1 shows above that the share of the agricultural sector, including fisheries, horticulture, and others in Rajasthan's economy, has been declining over the years. During 1951, the share of agriculture was more than 50 percent, which has come down to 35.77 percent during the 1990s. With the initiation of market reforms in India, the share of agriculture has dropped further down to 29.26 percent in 2013-14. This sectoral change reflects the transformation happening in agrarian society in Rajasthan. As observed by several studies, there is a shift away from agriculture to the urban labour market. The agriculture sector in Rajasthan experienced rapid changes with neoliberal reforms. Indian state brought new initiatives such as contract farming, and the input subsidies and government agricultural marketing aid were less emphasized. Farming communities' input costs soared due to decreasing seed, chemical fertilizers, and electricity subsidies. Farmers were more vulnerable to market price fluctuations and financial instability. It was during this time that contract farming became popular, especially for crops like cotton and mustard in Rajasthan. It secured farmers' markets but made them more dependent on agribusiness. These reforms shifted rural Rajasthan from conventional farming to a market-dependent model. The economic reforms challenged Rajasthan's traditional economy in deeper ways.

Table 2: Fertilizer Consumption in Rajasthan ((in mn tonnes)

Items	2011-12	2021-22
Tot Total Fertilizer Consumption	13,55,777	15,98,180

Source: Agricultural Statistics 2022 & Basic Statistics 2013

Rajasthan has experienced changes in the model of cultivation since the 1990s. It is significant to discuss some of the key changes that have happened. For instance, the use of fertilizers in Kharif and rabi crops in the year 2021-22 as per Agricultural Statistics. Fertilizer consumption has increased from 13,55,777 million tonnes to 15,98,180 in a decade's time (estimates based on Agricultural Statistics 2022). The main agricultural liberalization efforts in India have been in the area of the market sector, both domestic and international. The purpose of this structural policy change has been to ensure that the proper incentives are given to producers: that the prices of the services and of the commodities reach the proper levels. This policy involves two steps: a first one, closing the gap between home and overseas market pricing, and a second one, bringing the pricing of the inputs in line with the market view of overhead functions. Further, push for these measures has since been provided by the feeling that the development pattern followed by the emerging nations had been biased against agriculture and domestic agricultural prices had been artificially kept low to favor industry.

Table 3: Land Utilization Pattern in Rajasthan

Classification	2011-12 (000 Hectares)	2011-12 (percentage to total area)	2021-22 (000 Hectares)	2021-22 (percenta ge to the total area)
Reporting Area	34270	100	34292	100
Forest	2743	8	2777	8.10

Land put to non-agricultural use	1889	5.50	2030	5.92
Barren	2379	6.93	2366	6.90
Permanent Pastures and grazing land	1694	4.94	1655	4.83
Land under Misc Tree crops	21	0.06	28	0.08
Culturable waste Land	4233	12.35	3680	10.73
Fallow Land	2961	8.64	3624	10.57
Net Area Sown	18349	53.54	18129	52.87

Source: Agricultural Statistics 2022 & Basic Statistics 2013

Table 3 shows how, in the gap of a decade, things have changed in land utilization in Rajasthan. Forest area has remained almost the same with 8 percent of the total area. Land put to non-agricultural use has increased marginally by 0.42 percent from 2011-12 to 2021-22. Barren land area decreased slightly from 6.93 percent to 6.90 percent during the same time period. Culturable wasteland area has decreased by 2 percent, which reflects the changes in land being shifted to new usage. The net sown area has also decreased slightly by 0.67 percent. According to Agricultural Statistics (2022), Rajasthan continues to depend upon canals, tube wells, and wells for irrigation of cultivation. The net area that is irrigated by canals, wells, and tube wells together forms around 97 percent of the total area Agricultural Statistics (2022). Tubewells alone contribute around 49 percent of the total irrigated areas, while canals account for 23 percent and open wells for around 24 percent of the area.

Till the 1990s, more than half of the gross domestic product of the state was generated by the agricultural sector. As canal irrigation expanded after independence, the regions witnessed a manifold increase in productivity (see Economic Reviews of the 1990s). As the

public sector expanded during the 1970s-1980s, it contributed to the growth of the service sector. The major push for industrial development came during the 1990s after the green revolution period. Several regions within the state emerged as a hub of industrial manufacturing and production. During the 1960s, the high-yielding varieties seeds scheme was started in Rajasthan, and it contributed to an increase in the production of crops like wheat, bajra, maize, etc. As the Green Revolution spread to North India, it also increased the pace of mechanization in Rajasthan. From the 1970s to the 1990s, farmers extensively used modern tools and equipment. Tractors, crushers, electric pumps, usage of chemicals and fertilizers, etc., are some of the key tools that mechanized the agricultural sector.

Local dominant agrarian castes were able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by modern technology and innovative farming techniques. It also empowered them economically enough and opened their path to the political field as well. The Green Revolution had a favorable effect on the agricultural castes, particularly the middle and dominant castes, who experienced advantages from the technology-driven increase in agricultural output in Rajasthan (Prasad, 2014). In the case of Rajasthan, the advantages were more pronounced for castes and communities residing in the eastern and northern regions compared to those in the southern and western regions. Jats, in particular, benefitted from the agrarian changes, which strengthened their social and political clout. The lower and middle caste groups, who didn't own large land, also sought out non-farm job prospects. Due to their proximity to Delhi and Haryana, Dalits and tribes also began relying on urban marketplaces for their livelihood. The spread of modern education by the public sector simultaneously increased the socio-political consciousness of marginalized groups.

Industry

Rajasthan's industrial sector has been slow to catch up with the pace of other neighboring states. With its unfriendly climatic and geographical conditions, industries in Rajasthan have tended to be concentrated only in certain pockets. Since the infrastructure needed to support the heavy and large-scale industries was weak during the

1950s, Rajasthan's industrial development relied mostly on small-scale units. During this period, the state did not have sufficient technology and skilled manpower to process the minerals and the necessary skills to use industrial raw materials. These raw materials were sent to neighboring states for processing. With the basic technological resources, the units have produced low-value additions. In addition, the pressure of population growth also created hurdles for the industrial sector. As per the Census of India (2001), the population of Rajasthan increased from 16 million in 1951 to almost 57 million in 2001. This further challenged the potential to develop the private sector growth in the state. Private sector investments also contribute to the economy. The growth of public sector industrial units has been slow and has worked with a lack of basic infrastructure for industries such as road connectivity, power supply, water supply, etc. After the 1990s, the situation improved a lot, and due to state initiatives, several public-sector industrial enterprises have been performing well. For instance, Rajasthan State Mines and Minerals Ltd., Rajasthan Industrial Investment Development Corporation (RIICO), Rajasthan State Agriculture Marketing Board, Rajasthan State Bridge and Construction Corporation, etc., have been performing well. The majority of Rajasthan's large-scale industries are related to textiles, agro-food and allied products, plastics, chemical gases, minerals, stones, lime products, metal, and allied products (Economic Review, 2014-15). In the post-1980s period, four districts emerged as hubs of industrial production and employment generation in Rajasthan. These are Jaipur, Bhilwara, Alwar, and Jodhpur. As per the government reports, their share in industrial employment in Rajasthan during the 1990s was around 42 percent. In the post-economic reform period, special economic zones were also developed in Rajasthan. Till 2022, it was stated that there is a total of seven SEZs operating in the state. Most of these are in the eastern part of Rajasthan near Jaipur, except Bikaner and Jodhpur (Government of India, 2022, URL: <https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/178/AU3427.pdf?source=pqals>).

Table 4: Industry and Manufacturing in Rajasthan

Year	Percentage share to State GDP
1993-94	15.25
1997-98	22.10
2001-02	24.59
2005-06	26.54
2009-10	31.03
2013-14	25.18
2018-19	26.27
2020-21	26.41
2022-23	27.31

Source: Rajasthan Economic Review 2022-23

Table No.4 demonstrates the trend in the industrial and manufacturing sector in Rajasthan. When the state was formed in the 1950s, the share of the industry was minimal and less than 10 percent, which has gone up to 15.25 percent in the 1990s. This change was due to the growth of power sectors and construction industries in the state. Even though this shift is quite slow and shows the sluggish growth of the industrial sector's contribution to Rajasthan's economy even after the decade of the green revolution. With the state's policies on small-scale industries that observe more labour, the share went up to 31 percent in 2009. However, it reduced a little bit to 25.18 percent during 2013-14 as the wider market trend also dropped during the post-2009 economic depression.

Service Sector

With the expansion of the service/tertiary sector comprising transport, trade, hotel, banking, communication, and administration, the share has increased tremendously in the past five decades. In comparison to 1993-93, its share has increased by almost 10 percent in 2013-14. The state's road infrastructure has expanded in the past five decades. Major highways, state highways, district roads, and village connectivity roads are expanded under the state's schemes,

such as Rajasthan Road modernization projects and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Similarly, the growth of hotels and the tourist sector in Rajasthan has contributed to the employment generation and the gross domestic product. The heritage sites, palaces, and forts are now being turned into commercial projects for tourist attractions across the state.

Table 5: Services in Rajasthan

Year	Percentage share to State GDP
1993-94	36.61
1997-98	41.10
2001-02	43.37
2005-06	44.43
2009-10	46.36
2013-14	45.56
2018-19	47.88
2020-21	43.13
2022-23	43.74

Source: Rajasthan Economic Review 2022-23

Table No.5 depicts the growth of the service sector in Rajasthan. The service sector shows an increasing trend and contributes almost half of the state's GDP.

NSS 70th round and Agricultural Census

Agricultural Census (2011) data on Rajasthan suggests that the ownership of agricultural land by caste is highly skewed. It is reported that the upper castes, etc., own much more land than their percentage of the total population. For instance, it is noted that members of the SC and ST, which represent 17% and 13 % of the rural population of the state, respectively, own only 10.2 and 9 % of agricultural land. It is reported that throughout the state, almost 70%

of households' landholding is not more than 2 hectares. As per the NSS 70th round survey (2013) report, Rajasthan has the highest percentage (78%) of agricultural households among rural households in India, and the total number is 64,83,500. However, one interesting thing is that out of these 78 percent of agricultural households, more than 47 percent of households are earning a livelihood from sources other than agriculture. That shows the increased trend of rural non-farm economic activities. Rajasthan is much ahead of Uttar Pradesh (74 %) and Madhya Pradesh (70 %) in the share of its agricultural households in total rural households. In Rajasthan, more than 65 percent of rural households had MGNREGA. It shows that rural households are aware of and prepared to utilize opportunities provided by government schemes for rural employment. Out of the total agricultural households in Rajasthan, around 61 percent are indebted and have taken loans across all classes of size of land owned by agricultural households. Out of the total agricultural households in Rajasthan, around 17 percent are ST households, around 19 percent belong to Scheduled Castes, 48 percent belong to OBCs, and around 13 percent belong to other castes groups (NSS, 70th round, 2013).

Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011

In this study, we analyzed the SECC (2011) data to identify the primary sources of income in the districts of Rajasthan. According to the research findings, there are three significant sources of revenue. The first one is households involved in cultivation, followed by manual physical work, and finally, domestic service.

The SECC data shows that around 41.74% of Rajasthan's families depend on farming for livelihood. There is variation across districts. For instance, districts like Pratapgarh (61.91%), Banswara (59.89%), and Churu (58.77%) show a high number of households relying on farming. Meanwhile, districts such as Rajsamand (25.54%), Pali (29.1%), and Ajmer (30.05%) show less dependence on cultivation. These regional variations also depict the changing agrarian conditions across regions in Rajasthan. The SECC data shows that around 41.74% of Rajasthan's families depend on farming for livelihood.

Second, as per the SECC database, manual casual labor is a significant source of income in Rajasthan. Approximately 43.62% of total households in the state are involved in this activity. It shows the dependence upon manual labor. For example, Rajsamand district has been found to have the highest percentage at 56.34%. Second comes Kota, with a percentage of 55.65%, and Dhaulpur, with a percentage of 54.83%. On the other hand, Banswara has the lowest percentage of manual labor households, at 29.73%. Similarly, Barmer also has a lower percentage of 30.83%, and Churu has a percentage of 30.24% of manual labor households. This trend shows that in these regions, several small-scale industries are operating, and cultivation has not been attracting labour.

Thirdly, both part-time and full-time domestic service are not popular sources of livelihood in Rajasthan state. Only 2.54% of the total households in the state are occupied in this activity. The low level of domestic work in the state suggests that either people prefer alternative activities or that domestic work does not offer sufficient returns. With the urban expansion, this share may increase in the future. It makes it clear that agriculture and manual labor are two major sources of income for households.

Caste and Tribe in Rajasthan's Political Field

The Princely class had sacrificed significant stakes as part of accession treaties and the state of Rajasthan building process in the 1950s. The princely kings had just one choice: engage in electoral politics to restore their political supremacy and power. Princely monarchs had great support in elections as the populace was still under the control of feudal responsibilities to the king. Out of 160 members, about 54 princely kings were chosen at the 1952 elections. Many of the Rajput princes and jagirdars maintained their political legitimacy and contested elections independently after the 1950s and 1960s. It was only after the 1980s, with the rise of the BJP, that they shifted toward BJP. Due to the spread of modern education, the representation of other groups grew in the assembly, and the share of royal families dropped significantly gradually over the years. When the Green Revolution started in the late 1980s, Jats had already established themselves as rural elites in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab. They also began negotiating for higher

agricultural commodity pricing from the national government. Often referred to as the farmers' movement era in India, the Bharatiya Kisan Union was founded during the 1980s. Jats were given OBC classification in the state during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA government, which drew some of them nearer to the BJP.

The challenge to their identity emerged in the 1990s when supporters of economic reforms questioned the subsidy systems with the start of fresh economic policies. Political parties started organizing groups with a promise of reservation following the election victory during the Mandal Commission's recommendation of reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1991. For instance, the Congress party supported the Jats' desire to be included in OBCs from Rajasthan as they were economically and socially deprived. Jats gave Congress the public backing. Jaffrelot and Robin (2009) explain that in Rajasthan's political field, even though there is little fragmentation of upper castes in political leadership, their hold still remains in both Congress and BJP, the two major political parties in the state. They argue that Jats have strengthened their political position in Congress as well as in Rajasthan's politics after the 1990s (Jaffrelot & Robin, 2009). Similarly, Jats demanded the OBC quota in the 1990s to seek reservation in government employment education. Rajasthan government had included the Jats in Rajasthan in the OBC category in 1999. However, it excluded the Jats of two districts, Dholpur and Bharatpur, as they were the rulers of this area before the merger of this princely state in Rajasthan. Jats from these two districts have been demanding reservation for the past several years and putting pressure on state governments.

Along with Jats, scheduled castes and upper castes have been the core constituency of the Congress party. The BJP has been led primarily by Brahmins, Baniyas, and Rajputs in Rajasthan. In recent years, they have garnered the support of OBC groups like Gujjars, Sainis, and scheduled castes. With the rise of Ashok Gehlot in the Congress party and Vasundhara Raje in the BJP, the political dynamics of caste have shifted. Jats are a major political power in the state, although they have not been able to claim central leadership in Rajasthan. They may assert a hegemonic claim to choose Paras Ram Maderna as the main ministerial candidate during the 1998 elections,

but another party leader, Ashok Gehlot, a Mali, from a lower OBC background, was chosen as the chief minister owing to competing factions inside the Congress Party. This was a historic shift in the increasingly competitive electoral politics in Rajasthan, where Jats could win 42 seats throughout the state in Legislative elections but have not had their chief minister till today. Out of 18 general Lok Sabha seats in the state (excluding 4 SC and 3 ST from a total of 25), Jats have been elected from seven constituencies in Rajasthan in the parliamentary election of 2013.

Gujjar community in Rajasthan has been demanding the reservation for ST status. They are already included in the OBC category. During 2007-08, Gujjars announced that they had been promised this ST status by all political parties during different elections, but the promise has not been fulfilled. They indulged in statewide blocking of national highways and stopping trains to draw the attention of the central government and state governments to their issue. Their agitation also consolidated their political position in Rajasthan and further challenged the domination of traditional upper castes.

In the state assembly elections of 2013, another interesting case of caste and agrarian dynamics emerged. The formation of the Nationalist Unionist Zamindara Party (NUZP) in 2013 by B D Agarwal changed the caste dynamics in Sriganganagar district. Sunny Sebastian (2014) explained that NUZP, led by a Bania leader who became popular by earning huge amounts of money from the *guar* crop, captured the caste alliances of the region and reconfigured it through agrarian interests. He attracted farmers of both Jat and lower castes and forged business interests with agrarian prospects.

These movements and agitations for reservation show that the agrarian communities have been exploring the caste reservation route to gain benefits in government jobs and enter into regional politics as a dominant local force. It demonstrates how the intermediate caste mobilizes through different modes to assert their position in local politics. The recent farmers' movement in North India also symbolizes this resistance against the market integration of agriculture. Several other landless intermediate castes, i.e., *dhobi*, *nai*, *kumhar*, and *saini*, have not been able to assert their position

because of their lack of numerical strength as well as the absence of any political leadership at the regional or national level.

Dalits and Tribes are near totally landless, crippled with agricultural labour. In many districts in Rajasthan, over 60% of Dalit households are landless. The ever-growing consciousness and activism among the marginalized sections with respect to land rights and employment-related welfare measures have led to numerous social movements. In 1971, the Scheduled Caste (SC) population in Rajasthan was around a little over four million, accounting for 15.8 percent of Rajasthan's total population. The figure had risen to 12.2 million by 2011 and accounted for around a quarter (17.8 percent). While STs had a population of 3.1 million (12.1%) in 1971, and it increased to 9.2 million, constituting around 13.5 percent of the total population. As per the Socio-economic and Caste Census 2011, Scheduled Castes households constitute around 18.5 percent of the total population, while Scheduled Tribes households comprise around 17.6 percent of the total population.

There has been a lack of coherent political and intellectual mobilization among Dalits in Rajasthan against the caste-discriminatory policies that have been in place. The existence of feudal and Brahminical cultural norms and exclusions continues to be a source of suffering for Dalits. For example, the districts of Bikaner and Ganganagar have a Scheduled Caste population that is greater than twenty percent; nonetheless, there is a dearth of Ambedkarite politics. Meghwals and Nayaks are numerically dominant in the districts of Bikaner and Sriganganagar in Rajasthan. In the state of Rajasthan, even the mainstream political parties, such as the Congress and the BJP, have not introduced any new policies on caste discrimination. Neither party shares political leadership with the Dalits and Tribe leaders. The trend among Dalit political leadership has been to build a parallel clientele system among Dalits in order to maintain their own status and obtain certain posts. This is happening in order to gain some positions. It is difficult for them to move about socially and educationally. The parties like CPM or CPI have been dominated by agrarian castes like Jats and lower OBCs, and even they have not accepted Dalit leadership.

Similarly, the case of the scheduled tribe's political role in Rajasthan, with the dominant Meenas shaping the tribal politics in Southern Rajasthan. After the 1990s, Meenas experienced social change in their profile and contributed to several key political leaders like Kirori Lal Meena, a farmer leader who was in BJP and, in 2013, formed his own National People's Party and won 4 seats in assembly elections. Meenas have been experiencing social mobility by entering government employment and gaining educational opportunities in tribal regions of the Dausa district. This also explains the social attempts by another scheduled tribe from Rajasthan, known as Bhils, with the formation of the Bharatiya Adivasi Party to establish their own political party¹. With BAP winning three seats in 2024, it represents a profound social transformation in the political consciousness of Rajasthan's tribal communities. Rajkumar Roat won the reserved seat with a margin of more than 2 lakhs (Hindustan Times, 2024). He voiced out the need for more employment opportunities for tribal youth in the districts of Banswara and Dungarpur to prevent migration to Gujarat. His rise indicates the spread of educational awareness among the tribal groups for its own autonomous political force. Similarly, the demand for 'Bhil Pradesh' also signals the significance of leadership that can speak for its own community and region. This above discussion underscores the fact that caste and agrarian relations are key to shaping political dynamics in Rajasthan with sub-regional permutations and combinations.

Economic Reforms of the 1990s

One of the first impacts of market reform policies on agriculture was observed in the late 1980s in Rajasthan. Whatever the changes that were brought in – retrenchment in input subsidies, withdrawal in a phased manner of the state from agricultural marketing, and introduction of contract farming in some districts-impacted Rajasthan's agrarian society. The most important effect of this policy was the rise in the input costs of cultivation for farmers. With the

¹ See a newspaper report, The rise of BAP in Tribal Land of Rajasthan, *The Hindustan Times*, June 04, 2024 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/the-rise-of-bap-in-tribal-land-of-rajasthan-101717501708493.html>

state's relaxing of its regulation of agricultural marketing, the prices and costs of seeds, fertilizers, and tools have increased by putting an extra burden on farmers. Further, the notion of contract farming was introduced through the covering of some selected crops, which provided a market. It only provided more opportunities for becoming dependent on agribusiness, which in turn had ways of manipulating the markets at cost elsewhere. These steps heralded the beginning of the changeover from sustenance to sustainable agriculture in Rajasthan. Economic liberalisation reforms of the 1990s gave new prominence to the tertiary sector, and they became important in the further growth of the Rajasthan economy. The significant expansion put up over time has been experienced. The era of liberalization post-1991 was critical in changing the course of India's economy, leading to implications that would create rural distress in states like Rajasthan. It was also a time of decreased rural power, as traditional hegemonies were upturned by economic changes that marginalized agriculture in the agricultural heartland.

By contrast, the period after 2005 was one of more accelerated changes with greater mechanization and a push for commercial crops. After MGNREGA was implemented in 2006, it had a huge implication on the rural labor markets. Great emphasis was placed on high-yielding varieties of seeds, which led to heavy chemical inputs in terms of fertilizers and pesticides accompanied by massive mechanization. The productivity changes in farming benefited some farmers, but they also raised costs and risks for all of them, especially small and marginal ones. Commercialization of crops led to higher market integration but also accelerated exposure to risk emanating from both markets and climate. Meanwhile, agrarian distress grew - input costs were rising while farm incomes stagnated; indebtedness was furiously percolating through rural areas, leading to farmer suicides. As the NSS data shows, around 61 percent of agricultural households in Rajasthan are indebted.

Conclusion

With the changes in land ownership, economic activity, and social dynamics, Rajasthan's agricultural sector has experienced transformation. Upper castes, i.e., Brahmins and Rajputs, domination has been challenged, but they have been able to

maintain their positions despite democratic politics. On the other hand, though there has been a rise in new leadership among Dalits, they remain vulnerable. Intermediate castes have seen mobilisations and a rise in their negotiation power. Castes like Jats, Gujjars, and Yadavs have diversified into different sectors. They have entered bureaucracy and business and are challenging traditional upper-caste elites. While tribes in Rajasthan are experiencing social mobility, they are now exploring their own political force, i.e., the recent emergence of NPP and Bharatiya Adivasi Party (BAP), beyond the mainstream political parties. Similarly, the formation of NUZP also shows the instances where business and agrarian interests collide with the political aspirations of the Bania caste. State policies of affirmative action and initiatives for industrial development, such as RIICO, have also opened new avenues for diversification. It also led to the formation of an economically privileged section among intermediate castes in Rajasthan. The growth of erstwhile agrarian castes into agro-business has also allowed them to bargain with the state. They have been leading farmers' movements in Rajasthan. In other words, changes in Rajasthan's economy also impact the caste and class relations in the state. The changes in the political economy of development in Rajasthan have diversified the resource bases of different castes and classes. To understand the changes in political domination and cultural domination, one must look into the changing political economy of agrarian development in Rajasthan.

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