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Seminar: Anti-Caste Movements in Colonial and Post-Colonial India

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Ideological Theory and Social Reality of Caste in Pakistan

Content:

I. Introduction	1
II. Caste.....	1
III. Legal status of caste in Pakistan	6
IV. Political status of caste in Pakistan.....	8
V. Social status of caste in Pakistan	10
VI. Conclusion.....	13
References.....	14

I. Introduction

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the State.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah

According to Pakistani official policy there are no castes in Pakistan. Being an Islamic country, all citizens are to automatically be granted equal rights by means of their common religion of Islam.¹ This very convenient view ignores two basic facts: firstly, not all Pakistanis are Muslims and secondly, caste on the Indian subcontinent is not confined to Hinduism.

In this paper, I will juxtapose the governing legal framework with the current political and social reality of caste in modern Pakistan. After a concise introduction to caste in general, based on information gathered over the course of the seminar “Anti-Caste Movements in Colonial and Post-Colonial India”, I will focus on the specific Pakistani situation. I will then give an overview of Pakistan’s castes’ current legal, political, and particularly social status. In conclusion, I will raise some questions on further research possibilities, as well as discuss an outlook on Pakistan’s near political and social future.

II. Caste

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines caste as a system of “ranked, hereditary, endogamous social groups, often linked with occupation.”² This rather technical understanding reflects only some aspects of the system of social stratification prevalent on the Indian Subcontinent. The second section of this paper will give a brief glimpse into the more general “What?” and “How?” of caste and shed light on the more revealing academic contributions of recent decades.

The term *caste* derives from Spanish and Portuguese *casta* or “race”³ – European colonialists in Latin America had an elaborate system of distinguishing “white conquerors” from indigenous tribes and their common offspring, which they labeled with different *casta*. When the Portuguese first set foot on the Indian Subcontinent in

¹ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 8.

² Madan, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.

³ Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 2.

1498 and became the first Europeans to establish a permanent settlement, they found the social order they encountered there to be somewhat similar to the one they had helped establish in what was later to become Brazil and referred to it as caste.

The origins of this Indian caste system itself, however, remain lost in the fog of history: sometimes they are traced back to Aryan invaders from Central Asia a few thousand years ago, bringing with them their Brahmanical literature⁴, e.g., the Rig-Veda (v. infra). Other scholars believe the caste system to be a quite natural form of social order related to functions and occupations within a social group that came into existence more or less on its own.⁵ For the purpose of this paper, it shall be accepted that when Portuguese, and later French and British settlers arrived in India from the 16th century onward, they found a system of social stratification⁶, which – for lack of a more adequate expression – shall be referred to as caste in the present sense.

The caste system in India essentially consisted (and consists) of thousands of endogamous groups throughout the subcontinent, referred to as *Jati* (or *Quom* in a Muslim context⁷) meaning “community”. Only later were these Jatis linked to – and often conveniently clubbed under – the system of four *Varnas* (Sanskrit for “to cover, to envelop”) – a theoretical classification of the Indian people based on their occupation.⁸ *Jati* and *Varna* have often been confused, but need to be distinguished.⁹ In contrast to the elaborate system of Jatis, the four Varnas manifest a form of social stratification described as the ideal in one of the oldest Hindu religious texts, the Rig Veda¹⁰:

1. *Brahmins* – priests, teachers, and preachers.
2. *Kshatryas* – kings, governors, warriors, and soldiers.
3. *Vaishyas* – cattle herders, agriculturists, businessmen, artisans, and merchants.
4. *Shudras* – laborers and service providers.

Dalits, often referred to as “untouchables” – the term meaning “downtrodden” or “crushed”¹¹ – fall outside of these aforementioned categories.

⁴ Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India*, 11; Macdonell, “The Early History of Caste,” 230f.

⁵ Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India*, 229.

⁶ see also Riser-Kositsky, “The Political Intensification of Caste: India Under the Raj,” 31f.

⁷ see also Barth, “The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North Pakistan,” 117. Arguably, the term *quom* is rather used to determine occupation, Ahmad, *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village*, 72ff.

⁸ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 14.

⁹ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 67.

¹⁰ Flood, “Hinduism - Hindu concepts,”; see also Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 66f.

¹¹ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 9.

Traditionally, caste has been linked with the concepts of “purity” and “pollution”¹², i.e. members of a particular caste would share neither bed nor meal with someone outside their caste group in order to avoid polluting contact or diluting genetic purity.¹³ All Jatis across the spectrum, from the so-called upper castes to the lowest of castes, including the Untouchables, tended (and often still tend) to avoid intermarriage, sharing of food and drinks, or even close social interaction with a Jati other than their own.

According to Gail Omvedt, caste was originally part of productive Indian villages’ natural hierarchy and social order, while not necessarily being linked to Hinduism.¹⁴ In stark contrast to the Western dogma of equality (and individualism) among people, the Indian society is often viewed as being inherently hierarchical (and holistic), especially by French scholar Louis Dumont.¹⁵ For him, as for many others, caste is the very essence of Indian society explaining endogamy and spatial segregation within the socially stratified villages modern India originated from.¹⁶ The status of a given caste within the caste hierarchy is, according to Dumont, determined by its ritual purity: the purer a caste, the higher its status and the impurer a caste, the lower its status within the overall caste hierarchy.¹⁷ Traditionally, this would place Brahmin castes at the top of the pyramid, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, while Dalits – since time immemorial linked to the impurest of occupations – would form the very bottom of the pyramid. The striking separation – both marital and spatial – of different caste groups is, according to Dumont, also rooted in the fundamental mutual exclusion between purity and pollution, since the pure castes can only stay pure if they stay separated from the impure/polluted castes.¹⁸

While there is a general agreement on the fact that caste is central to Indian society, what caste really consists of has been and remains a source of great controversy¹⁹: “Almost every statement of a general nature made by anyone about Indian castes may be contradicted”, Damodar Kosambi noted in 1944 and this statement still holds true today. Even the question of endogamy, traditionally accepted as one key demarcation of caste, has been contested, e.g., by Ambedkar, according to whom India before and

¹² Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, 63.

¹³ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 33; Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 2.

¹⁴ Omvedt, *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, 2.

¹⁵ Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 18; Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 4; 8f.

¹⁶ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, XXX; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 3; on the importance of endogamy as an essential feature of the caste system, see also Sharma, *Structure of Indian Society*, 37.

¹⁷ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 59f.; 79f.

¹⁸ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 43.

¹⁹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 120.

during British colonial rule, was a strictly exogamous society, because marriage within blood-relatives and class-relations was culturally forbidden.²⁰ This only changed later.

While Dirks treats caste as a social institution covering the entirety of the Indian Subcontinent²¹, it is by now widely established that there are regionally differing caste systems. This was already (and particularly?) the case when Europeans arrived in India and found that each and every region had its own system of social stratification.²² In itself strange to Europeans, the British colonialists found the prevalent social order to be very useful when it came to administering their new subjects. Thus, they showed a genuine interest in further fostering the caste system.²³

The influence of the British Raj on the Indian subcontinent's caste system has been subject to great academic (and political) debate. As Riser-Kositsky commented: "Colonial policies, through their structuring and politicization of caste, were one of the direct causes for the incessant and often deadly caste conflict in India today."²⁴ And Surinder S. Jodhka, too, suggests that "the idea of caste as we know it today through academic writings and popular imagination, began to be shaped only during the British colonial period."²⁵ Dirks goes as far as saying that "colonialism made caste what it is today."²⁶

According to Dirks, prior to British arrival, caste had only been one facet of India's social identity – others were religious affiliations, profession, lineage and loyalty, etc. He argues against a single theory of caste, suggesting that caste has always been a contingent social phenomenon. Caste used to result from volatile political power and only lost its dynamics during the colonial rule of the British, who "froze" the system by conducting censuses in which Indians were formally labeled according to their respective castes.²⁷ It was specifically the flexibility and tolerance of social system that allowed the British to turn caste into the one determining feature of an individual's social identity.²⁸ However, from the 1920s on, the colonial rulers regretted the influence their manifestation of the existing caste system had on overall Indian society and began

²⁰ Chitkara, *Dr. Ambedkar and Social Justice*, 223.

²¹ as alleged by Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 35.

²² Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 144.

²³ Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 6f.; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 138.

²⁴ Riser-Kositsky, "The Political Intensification of Caste: India Under the Raj," 31.

²⁵ Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 140.

²⁶ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 5.

²⁷ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 79f.

²⁸ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 13f.

to establish a system of positive discrimination, reserving a specific quota of government jobs for disadvantaged castes.²⁹

Caste continues to be the primary form of local identity in India today³⁰ and even has great influence on Indian corporate life: “family background” is still seen as a key criterion by hiring professionals when it comes to identifying suitable candidates for a position.³¹ Many have regarded this as unjust. With the rise of the nationalist movement and anti-caste movements in the 1920s and 1930s, caste became part of the political debate, connected with different interests and strategies. Thus, activists recognized a need for representation of non-Brahmans and so-called “Depressed Classes” in the emerging electoral bodies of late colonial India. “In this process they were required to fashion their political constituencies as minorities.”³²

At the time of Indian independence in 1947, it remained up to individual Indian states to determine which social groups they would deem low and protection-worthy. Since state borders within India changed over the course of the first decade of independence, this led to the complicated situation of members of the same caste being considered “scheduled” in one state, but not so in another.³³ In legislation, “Scheduled Castes” (SC) replaced the term “Depressed Classes” and referred to Dalits, while “Other Backward Classes” (OBC) would also encompass other caste groups that were socially and educationally disadvantaged. Specific discriminated indigenous peoples were to become “Scheduled Tribes” (ST). A first report concerning backward classes was submitted to the Indian parliament as early as 1956, but faced substantial criticism.³⁴ After much debate over whether it should be implemented and who should fall under it³⁵, Prime Minister V.P. Singh somewhat surprisingly decided to implement a quota system for OBCs in 1990. The measures and reservations enforced were based on suggestions of a commission established in 1978, led by Bihar MP B.P. Mandal – the so-called “Mandal Commission”. Quotas were established in three main areas: legislative seats, education, and public employment.³⁶

²⁹ Cassan, *Affirmation Action, Education and Gender: Evidence from India*, 4.

³⁰ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 7.

³¹ Jodhka, *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions*, 166.

³² Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 271.

³³ Cassan, *Affirmation Action, Education and Gender: Evidence from India*, 2f.

³⁴ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 284.

³⁵ at some point, caste didn't even seem a reliable criterion to determine who should benefit from reservations for low castes, see Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 283f.

³⁶ Cassan, *Affirmation Action, Education and Gender: Evidence from India*, 4.

From the early 1980s, however, others perceived reservations and quotas for Scheduled Castes as primary reasons for their existence, promoting a rigorous descheduling instead.³⁷ Today, caste remains a terrain of incessant intellectual (and sometimes violent) debate. Although it is strongly connected to the colonial history of India, “caste in its present form(s) [...] is [...] a fundamental component of political struggles.”³⁸ The arguments on both sides, supporters and opponents of reservations for underprivileged castes, have stayed roughly the same over the past decades: on the one hand, caste as a social reality on the Indian Subcontinent cannot be ignored. On the other hand, such politicization could further cement differences between castes, thus perpetuating the British colonial policy of *divide et impera* through caste inequality.³⁹

While India struggles to find an appropriate approach to caste-related inequality, Pakistan remains in a state of denial. Pakistan is a Muslim majority country of 196 million people, three million citizens or four percent of which are Hindus. As stated above, the existence of caste has historically not been limited to Hindus. Caste in Pakistan – sometimes referred to as *zaat*⁴⁰ – has been studied less extensively than caste in India, but there remain great similarities between both countries “due to their long shared history. In particular, caste identity is embedded within occupational differences, which are associated with status and notions of purity and pollution. [...] Unlike the Indian context, there has been no official acknowledgement of caste-based discrimination in Pakistan and thus no affirmative action programs to mitigate its impacts.”⁴¹

After this introduction to the broader scope and meaning of caste, in the following sections I will discuss a widely neglected field of research on caste: the governing legal framework of caste in Pakistan, its political voice, and social status.

III. Legal status of caste in Pakistan

Jawaharlal Nehru's Congress Party had envisioned India as a secular state and this “Nehruvian consensus” was capable of winning a majority in India for at least a few decades. Although Pakistan's founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah also strove for the

³⁷ Riser-Kositsky, “The Political Intensification of Caste: India Under the Raj,” 31; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 280.

³⁸ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 301.

³⁹ Murthy, “Does India Really Need A Caste Census? [PROS & CONS]”; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 301f.

⁴⁰ Ahmad. *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village*, 76.

⁴¹ Jacoby/Mansuri, *Crossing Boundaries: Gender, Caste and Schooling in Rural Pakistan*, 6f.

new home of the subcontinent's Muslims to become a secular state following a Western model, he had much greater difficulties to socially cement the demand for religious tolerance. This certainly had to do with the fact that, unlike Nehru, he passed away barely one year after the founding of the new country. Thus, religious minorities in Pakistan needed to fend for themselves.

In March 1949, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan passed the “Aims and Objectives of the Constitution” or “Objectives Resolution”. The Objective Resolution was no law in itself, but rather a set of guiding principles for later legislation and greatly criticized by representatives of Pakistani religious minorities for they feared it would enshrine Islam as the exclusive state religion.⁴² In a response to a first draft constitution based on the Objective Resolutions in 1950, a report was submitted by the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Matters Relating to Minorities providing a comprehensive list of provisions of fundamental rights. These included equality of all citizens before the law, guarantee of non-discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and other guarantees of freedom of expression. This report, however, was widely ignored by the first constitution of Pakistan adopted in 1956.⁴³

Instead, the current Constitution of 1973 – after the secession of Bangladesh – declares the country an “Islamic Republic”, and in its Article 25 (1) speaks of equality only in very broad terms: “all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection.”⁴⁴ It fails to mention the protection of rights of disadvantaged castes and other marginalized sections of society. Protection for low castes could also derive from two other Articles. Article 36 stipulates: “the state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the federal and provincial services.” Similarly, Article 38 says that the state shall “secure the well-being of people, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race by raising their standard of living.” However, the Pakistani Constitution does not recognize the term “Dalit” as the Constitution of India does and has not declared caste-based discrimination a crime, tautologically arguing that there cannot be caste discrimination in a Muslim country. Moreover, as many other laws that could or should prevent caste-based discrimination in Pakistan, Article 38 might stipulate rights for depressed castes, but the Government of Pakistan never made any serious efforts to fully implement or enforce them.

⁴² Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 22f.

⁴³ Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 24.

⁴⁴ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 6.

Among those anti-discrimination laws that were never properly enforced is a presidential Scheduled Castes (declaration) Ordinance dating back to 1957 to provide a 6 percent quota in government jobs, which was never implemented until finally laid off in the late 1990s.⁴⁵ Pakistan has also ratified many international treaties for the protection of minorities⁴⁶, but has failed to actually implement the objectives expressed therein.

On the other hand, Pakistan has the necessary instruments to counter some of the worst forms of caste-based discrimination: national laws prohibit bonded labor and transnational human trafficking. The responsibility for legislation on labor, child protection, and women's protection, however, were devolved from the Federal Government to the provinces following a constitutional amendment in 2010 – and the provinces have yet to make the necessary laws on these issues.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, there are some silver linings when it comes to the rights of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan: honor killings of women by their natal families have become less prevalent and more severely punished by Pakistani superior courts over the past years. The old excuse of being “provoked by the sight of a female relative in a compromising position” for murders is no longer accepted at court.⁴⁸

Although Pakistani law neglects the existence of castes, there is clear evidence that the caste system stretches throughout the Pakistani social fabric and needs to be actively acknowledged. The following sections will outline political attempts made to change the government's stance on caste and its implications for Pakistani everyday life.

IV. Political status of caste in Pakistan

Confronted on caste-based discrimination by the UN Human Rights Council's monitoring mechanism Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2008, the Government of Pakistan assured that being a Muslim country, Pakistan was automatically “free from such kind of prejudices, and the existing norms do not contain discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.” A few months later, representatives of that same Government of Pakistan admitted that, indeed, some work needed to be done, promising that “efforts

⁴⁵ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 7.

⁴⁶ Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 19.

⁴⁷ Walk Free Foundation, *The Global Slavery Index 2014*, 78.

⁴⁸ Baxi et. al., “Legacies of Common Law: 'Crimes of Honour' in India and Pakistan,” 1246f.

are made to eliminate discrimination wherever it exists and to give maximum support to scheduled castes.” However, not much has happened since.⁴⁹

Even though “Scheduled Caste Hindu” is an official category in the regular Pakistani census⁵⁰, the newly established Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has not yet incorporated caste-based discrimination in their work.⁵¹ In Sindh province alone, some 3 to 8 million people work under conditions of bonded labor, most of them belonging to Scheduled Castes. Laws dealing with bonded labor – Bonded Labor Act (1992), Sindh Tenancy Act (1950), and some ILO Conventions (No. 29 and 105) – have been passed and ratified, but are not properly implemented.⁵² The protection of Scheduled Castes is not very high on the Government of Pakistan’s list of priorities.

The fact that many members of Scheduled Castes are Hindus does not necessarily help them in voicing their concerns: as of 2013, none of the 10 Hindu minority seats in parliament were filled by a Dalit.⁵³ Those Hindus that do get elected as members of state and national assemblies are caste Hindus and completely indifferent to the fate of Dalits in their country whom they continue to treat as untouchables⁵⁴ – they are not deemed worthy of defense or protection.⁵⁵

Members of lower castes hardly have a political lobby for themselves: many are illiterate and fail to register for a National Identity Card (NIC), depriving them even of their right to vote.⁵⁶ Although there are some noteworthy civil society organizations working on behalf of Pakistani Scheduled Castes, e.g., the Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan or Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), they hardly have any national influence other than raising awareness with press and political leaders, but rather highlight their protégés’ plight internationally.

On the level of Pakistani political debate, there is no serious discussion about caste-based discrimination, either: right-oriented Pakistanis would argue along the

⁴⁹ PDSN/IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan: Key recommendations for the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan*

⁵⁰ Gazdar, “Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan,” 88.

⁵¹ PDSN/IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan: Key recommendations for the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan*.

⁵² PDSN/IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan: Key recommendations for the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan*.

⁵³ IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan*.

⁵⁴ Sikand, „Pakistan’s Forgotten Dalit Minority.“

⁵⁵ Gazdar, Haris, “Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan,” 87.

⁵⁶ Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 34.

government lines, saying that all Pakistani citizens were Muslims, and caste was only a genuine Indian issue, while the political left in Pakistan never succeeded in large-scale class mobilization either.⁵⁷ This public silencing of “caste” in Pakistan implies that unlike in India, there is not much political capital vested in that term.⁵⁸ In effect, minorities in Pakistani society virtually have no voice.⁵⁹

V. Social status of caste in Pakistan

Caste and caste-like structures were ubiquitous in pre-partition Pakistan among Hindus and Muslims alike⁶⁰ – something eminent poet cum politician Muhammad Iqbal also recognized: “there are castes and sub-castes like the Hindus.”⁶¹ As in India, castes in Pakistan will show endogamous marriage and social rank determined by profession linked to the respective caste⁶² – even though “the caste system among Muslims has never been quite the barrier to occupational mobility that it was among Hindus. More generally, its function has been to identify the groups among whose members one may look for a spouse.”⁶³ Interestingly, the prevalence of caste within Pakistan seems also to be dependent upon proximity to neighboring Hindu-influenced India, i.e. strong caste structures – or at least a social stratification that can be described as “a mixture between class and status”⁶⁴ – are to be found in Punjab, whereas virtually none in Khyber Paktunkwa and Balochistan, the provinces closest to Afghanistan and Iran.⁶⁵

However, again as in India, caste adherence in Pakistan is very diverse: while in many regions, one is born into a caste determined by one’s parents, this certainly is not always the case. It has been observed that in Swat (Northern Pakistan), for instance, individual mobility, i.e. changing of caste position during adult life, or intergenerational mobility (children belonging to different castes than their parents) sometimes occur and it is more rule than exception in the Western city of Peshawar.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Gazdar, “Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan,” 86.

⁵⁸ Gazdar, “Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan,” 88.

⁵⁹ see also Raina, “Minorities and Representation in a Plural Society: The Case of the Christians of Pakistan,” 690.

⁶⁰ Wilber, *Pakistan: its people, its society, its culture*, 61ff.

⁶¹ Wilber, *Pakistan: its people, its society, its culture*, 119.

⁶² Wilber, *Pakistan: its people, its society, its culture*, 120; 147; see also Beall, “Dealing with dirt and the disorder of development: managing rubbish in urban Pakistan.”

⁶³ Syed, *Pakistan – Islam, Politics, and National Solidarity*, 162.

⁶⁴ Gough, “Introduction” to Ahmad, *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village*, 16.

⁶⁵ Malik, *Islamisierung in Pakistan 1977 – 84*, 347f.

⁶⁶ Barth, “The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North Pakistan,” 130; on this dynamism, see also Gazdar, “Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan,” 88.

There is need for even further differentiation: as mentioned in the introduction, there has never been a pan-Indian caste system, the groups – and criteria for belonging to them – being the same across the Subcontinent. Social stratification was and still is very diverse, in Pakistan as well as in India. While among Muslims in West Punjab, for instance, kinship and patrilineage (*biradari* – “brotherhood”⁶⁷) seems much more important in determining an individual’s social belonging and identity than being part of a larger caste group independent of common descent⁶⁸, in southern Sindh, people would identify with both their caste and their clan – an incoherence of social identity rendering political representation of discriminated castes all the more more difficult.⁶⁹

Whatever the prevailing local social order might be, over the past decades it has become subject to dramatic change: the existing caste system has been heavily influenced and diluted post-Partition by the influx of migrants from India⁷⁰, Pakistan integrated some 1.6 million refugees from neighboring Afghanistan, and former lower caste groups have shown increasing economic mobility.⁷¹ All this has led to some regions virtually seeing an end to the caste system they had known for generations.⁷²

Any form of caste system is inherently hierarchical, placing members of one caste group high in the overall social order and members of another low. Wherever there are castes in Pakistan, there are also lower castes, whose fate is widely ignored by government, jurisdiction, and politics (v. supra). This section on the social status of caste in Pakistan ends with some observations on the issue of low castes in Pakistan.

According to a 1998 census, there are 330,000 Dalits in Pakistan, but more recent research suggests that the numbers are actually considerably higher with some 2 million members of lower castes living in Pakistan – and even those figures account only for non-Muslims.⁷³ Their discrimination within Pakistani society is manifold:

Most Dalits live in the southern province of Sindh, where they generally belong to the approximately 1.7 million serfs of the province⁷⁴ ensuring Pakistan's third place (behind

⁶⁷ on the vagueness of terms like *quom* and *biradari* and how British colonialists still exploited these unclear social orders, see Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, 18; 26.

⁶⁸ Alavi, “Kinship in West Punjab Villages,” 1f.

⁶⁹ Khan et al., *Bonded Labour*, 7.

⁷⁰ Hasan, *The Unplanned Revolution*, xiv.

⁷¹ Hasan, *The Unplanned Revolution*, 97; 100.

⁷² Hasan, *The Unplanned Revolution*, xxxi.n.5.

⁷³ PDSN/IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan: Key recommendations for the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan*.

⁷⁴ Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 7.

India and China) competing for the country with most people living in conditions akin to slavery.⁷⁵ Debt bondage is the most prevalent form of modern slavery in Pakistan, mainly found in the brick-making, agriculture, and carpet weaving industries of Punjab and Sindh.⁷⁶ As in India, untouchability in Pakistan goes hand in hand with various forms of everyday discrimination: ghettoization, doctors refusing treatment of Dalits for fear of pollution, or denial of access to the village well and simple services like service in restaurants.⁷⁷

Contrary to India, there is no legislation to protect the Dalits in Pakistan⁷⁸ – the social question is simply ignored by the government. The vast majority of Pakistani Dalits are illiterate⁷⁹ – 87% of Dalit women and 63.5 % of Dalit men, according to a 2008 study⁸⁰ – with no means to supra-regional communication and exchange. They mainly live in rural areas⁸¹ and have no noteworthy lobby (v. supra). Four out of five Pakistani Hindus are Untouchables⁸², but Hindu Dalits experience that conversion to Islam will most often not change their caste status – they continue to be treated as Untouchables.⁸³

Especially in rural Pakistan, there is an acute shortage in women due targeted abortions of female fetuses and killing of young girls. It is estimated that every month, 20 to 25 Hindu women are kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and later married to Muslim men.⁸⁴ This is facilitated by the fact that Hindus lack a possibility of legal marriage⁸⁵, so that even married Hindu women are considered unmarried. So, not only young girls, but also mothers are kidnapped to then be married to Muslim bachelors. The current bill for a "Hindu Marriage Act", to be introduced in the Pakistan National Assembly⁸⁶ might

⁷⁵ Hume, "India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria on slavery's list of shame."; Walk Free Foundation, *The Global Slavery Index 2014*, 20.

⁷⁶ Walk Free Foundation, *The Global Slavery Index 2014*, 78.

⁷⁷ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 33ff; Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 32; see also Young, *Upholding the veil: Hindu women's perceptions of gender and caste identity in rural Pakistan*, 100.

⁷⁸ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 6f.

⁷⁹ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 30.

⁸⁰ IDSN, *Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan*.

⁸¹ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 12.

⁸² Sikand, "Pakistan's Forgotten Dalit Minority."

⁸³ Khalid, *A White Trail*, 98; Gazdar, Haris, "Class, Caste or Race: Veils over Social Oppression in Pakistan," 88.

⁸⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Pakistan International Religious Freedom Report for 2012*, 14.

⁸⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Pakistan International Religious Freedom Report for 2012*, 6.

⁸⁶ Haider, "Draft bill seeks end to forced marriages of Hindu girls."

finally enable legitimate non-Muslim marriages (and divorces) is a promising legislative initiative potentially helping some. However, this bill has been pending for months.⁸⁷

Most untouchable women become victims of sexual violence at some point in their lives and rarely do offenders have to worry about arrests or convictions at all. Hindu women belonging to lower castes are particularly vulnerable and often considered “sexually available” by men of Muslim-dominated communities.⁸⁸ For a young Dalit girl in Pakistan, it is five times more likely to be raped during her lifetime than to learn to write and read.⁸⁹

Nearly seven decades after the founding of the “Islamic Republic”, caste is still going strong in Pakistan. Across Pakistani society, it determines an individual’s identity and status.⁹⁰ However, as long as the government refuses to accept the sheer existence of caste-based discrimination in the country, there is little hope the deplorable situation of Pakistani Dalits will change any time soon.

VI. Conclusion

Caste as a social phenomenon remains hard to grasp – as much in Pakistan as in neighboring India. As shown above, there are various forms of social stratification across Pakistan: from systems very similar to what would be referred to as caste across the Indian border to more flexible roles in tribal surroundings closer to Pakistan’s western borders.

From what could be gathered from the sources at hand, two observations can be made, serving as both preliminary findings of this paper and propositions for more in-depth and verifying research on the topic:

1. Castes and caste-based discrimination do exist in modern Pakistan.
2. Caste structures give way to tribal roles further removed from the Indian border.

From its early days, Pakistan has been struggling to mold its citizens into a coherent nation. The existence of tribes and caste just did not fit this picture, so that the

⁸⁷ Hassan, “Hindu citizens looking for Jinnah’s Pakistan.”; Asad, “No private members’ bill passed in National Assembly.”

⁸⁸ Faruqi, *A Question of Faith*, 55.

⁸⁹ see also Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 73f.

⁹⁰ Shah, *Long Behind Schedule. A study on the plight of scheduled caste – Hindus in Pakistan*, 10.

Government of Pakistan appears to exist in a state of official denial. Although there is a legal framework for protection against caste-based discrimination, it is yet to be implemented. Many Pakistani untouchables face a double-discrimination for being non-Muslim and Dalit. Their situation is dire. Particularly, since their plight is not on the Pakistani government's political agenda.

Pakistan's greatest problem is its weak statehood. There is hardly any public support for democracy as such: whenever the elected government is deemed too weak, the military stages a coup and an army General becomes the country's new military ruler. In the first years of its existence, Pakistan was governed without a constitution, which has since been suspended repeatedly. Moreover, the country has been torn between democracy and theocracy for decades: every day its sheer existence is questioned by fundamentalist Islamic groups like the Taliban. The current Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is facing tremendous domestic and international pressure to show swift success in fighting terrorist groups close to the Afghan border – in 2001 he himself was toppled by a military coup.

Of course, these challenges are no excuse for the Government of Pakistan to not protect those citizens that are in need of protection. And as has been shown above, members of low castes in Pakistan most definitely are in need of protection. First steps would include following up on the promises made in the form of passed national laws and ratified international agreements. In the words of Thomas Hobbes: “covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.”⁹¹

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⁹¹ Leviathan, The Second Part, Chapter 17.

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