Social Exclusion and the Scheduled Castes: A Micro Study of Batwals Jammu and Kashmir

Yaser Irfan[1]

Abstract

In the Indian context, social exclusion is typically seen as a structural and systemic component of marginalisation based on language, caste, community, ethnicity, and religion. But, the most notable aspect of social exclusion in Indian society is caste, which is thought to be primarily determined by birth, prescribed standards, and somewhat rigid notions of rituals and beliefs. People experience discrimination in the socio-economic sphere as a result of the caste system. Following independence, numerous actions were taken to guarantee various rights in the socioeconomic sphere in the constitution of India under various articles, including 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25, 46, and 243D. Batwal is one of the castes in the Scheduled Caste category in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir that is still discriminated against, excluded and marginalized. According to primary and secondary sources, it can be said that the Batwal community ranks lower even among the Scheduled Castes in terms of education, income, land, occupation, and other aspects of social development. It continues to be socially excluded as it resides on the periphery of the already marginalised Scheduled Caste (SC) categorization. The Batwal is considered as the bottom most basically in social status, economic, and political power within the Scheduled Caste such as Ramdasia, Mahasha, and Barwala. The present paper focuses on the social exclusion of the Batwals and analyzes the factors responsible for their low status within the already marginalized Scheduled Caste category in Reasi district, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Key words: Exclusion, Caste, Batwal, Marginalization, development.

Introduction

Socio-economic development is impacted by the problems and socio-economic status of Scheduled Castes and other marginalised sections of society. The Constitution of India has made

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[1] PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology University of Jammu

efforts to uphold its legal obligations to protect the people through legislation and abolish the evil of untouchability. The Government of India has created a small number of welfare programmes and schemes to improve the status of Scheduled Castes but the majority of the advantages are taken by the upper section in the Scheduled Caste Category whereas some lower castes continue to live in poverty and hold very low social statuses.

The present study is an attempt to understand the social and economic conditions of the Batwal caste and analyse the problems and challenges faced by them. The Batwals come under the Scheduled Caste (SC) category of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Among the SCs, the Batwal community occupies a lower position on various parameters of social development like education, health, income, and ownership of land and other resources. The Batwal community stands at the margins of the already marginalised Scheduled Castes category and remains socially excluded. It stands at the margin of the already marginalised Scheduled Caste Category. This study has focused on the phenomenon of social exclusion as experienced by the Batwals. It has carried out in Seela village in district Reasi in Jammu and Kashmir.

Social-Exclusion

Social exclusion and inclusion continue to be critical challenges in democratic societies. Exclusion and inclusion both refer to particular groups of people who are minorities, marginalised, and deprived of having access to participation in the public domain, public goods, and public services. Although concerns of exclusion persist in advanced Western countries in terms of minorities and the underprivileged, the problem of deep-rooted social and cultural exclusion is significant in post-colonial countries such as India.

The term was first used in France in the late 20th century, and Rene Lenoir (1974) is given the credit for its authorship. It also refers to the denial of the fundamental human rights of individuals and groups or communities. Kumar says that in the Indian context, the term was first used in 1924 by Ambedkar as a Marathi word *Bahiskrit* which meant 'excluded'. Ambedkar formed an organization called 'Bahiskrit Hitkarni Sabha' and published a paper called Bahiskrit Bharat in 1927 (Kumar, 2021).

Social exclusion is similarly related to the concept of marginalization. Marginalization is a symbol for mechanisms that keep or drive individuals beyond groups to the outskirts of society. Social exclusion is a broader concept which includes all social aspects while marginalisation is narrow and focuses mainly on the economic aspect. Social exclusion is a state or condition in which certain communities are placed at the periphery or margins and marginalisation is the process of doing so.

In India, social exclusion has been widely used to explain caste-based prejudice. In the Indian subcontinent, caste is a unique factor of social exclusion. The Scheduled Castes face a variety of types of social exclusion in numerous fields. Historically, the scheduled castes were denied education, as well as the privilege to own property and resources. Manusmriti, the code of conduct that denied them these rights, was authored three thousand years ago. The Scheduled Castes suffered greatly from societal exclusion in social, economic, and political realms (Omvedt, 2006).

In India, the caste system constitutes a hierarchy of status, with the Brahmins at the top and the untouchables or Dalits or Scheduled Castes at the base. In Hindu society, the caste system is a social organisation based on grossly uneven entitlements to economic and social rights. This inequality involves the historic exclusion and discrimination of specific groups and castes, particularly the Scheduled Caste, in numerous societal relations, including economic, social, political, and cultural relations. (National Commission for SCs and STs, 1999-2001,6[th] report). One of Hindu society's most heinous evils was de-humanizing a sizable portion of the population known as the Untouchables. The inequality and discrimination caused a great deal of suffering for the untouchable victims.

Upper castes' inhuman attitude has exploited and discriminated against them in many areas of life. The Indian caste system is a complex social structure in which social positions such as professions have become hereditary, resulting in limited social mobility and the establishment of status hierarchies. Additionally, we argue that the essential characteristic of caste strengthens group affiliation with one's own caste. When group norms are violated, highly visible members of the group will protect the group's identity.

Jammu and Kashmir, as one of India's most racially and ethnically diverse populations which are home, to a sizable number of endogamous hereditary groups known as the *Jatis*. The Dogras, Kashmir's, Gujjars, Paharis, and other ethnic and religious groups in J&K, including those who practise Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity, are divided into a number of castes and sub-castes. For more than a century (1846-1947), J&K was controlled by Rajput clans of the Dogra dynasty before becoming a part of Independent India (1947).Various provisions were made for the SCs in J&K, though at special times as the State was under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. In his report on the census 1911, the Census Commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir made a comment about the socio-economic system in Jammu, stating that the caste system, in its truest sense, only existed in the *Duggar Illaga*. Here, Brahmanism has always had the biggest impact, and the entire caste system, including its sub-castes, is perfectly in place (Gupta and Prabhkar, 1988).

There are 13 different castes those have been traditionally untouchables and are currently inder Scheduled Castes in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir specified in the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Castes Order 1956, are as under:

- *Barwala*
- *Basith*
- *Batwal*
- *Chamar or Ramdasia, Chamar-Ravidas, Chamar-Rohidas*
- *Chura, Bhangi, Balmiki, Mehtar*
- *Dhyar*
- *Doom or Mahasha, Dumna*
- *Gardi*
- *Jolaha*
- *Megh or Kabirpanthi*
- *Ratal*
- *Saryara*
- *Watal*

The Scheduled Castes are present in all districts of Jammu and Kashmir Province, but their number is higher in Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua, Rajouri, and Doda districts (Shekhawat, 2008).

Due to their extreme poverty, the exploitation of lower castes continued from generation to generation. Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir regions have been socially, economically, and educationally backward as compared to other communities. Various social organisations like

Mahasha Sardar Sabha, Guru Ravi Das Sabha, and Megh Mandal have been formed to promote and strengthen their respective caste identities. The Constitution of India has made efforts to uphold its legal obligations to protect the people through legislation and abolish the evil of untouchability. The Government of India has created a small number of welfare programmes and schemes to improve the status of Scheduled Castes but the majority of the advantages are taken by the upper section in the Scheduled Caste Category whereas some lower castes continue to live in poverty and hold very low social statuses.

Among the SCs, the Batwal community (come under the Scheduled Caste (SC) category of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir) occupies a lower position on various parameters of social development like education, health, income, and ownership of land and other resources. The Batwal community stands at the margins of the already marginalised Scheduled Castes category and remains socially excluded. It stands at the margin of the already marginalised Scheduled Caste Category. This study has focused on the phenomenon of social exclusion as experienced by the Batwals. It has carried out in Seela village in Reasi district in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Batwal

The Batwal, a near landless community in Jammu and Kashmir, is known by this name only. There are different versions of the origin of the word. The Punjabi Batwals can trace their ancestors back to the town of Batwal in the Kashmir Valley, and the word "Batwal" in Punjabi literally means "the dweller of Batmalu". As per another narration, they were the landless agricultural labourers or ploughmen of the landowning Rajputs and were tied to them as bonded labourers through the system called *Bat in the* Dogri language. Hence, they are known as *Batwal*. Another view says that they are the *Bat Rajputs* and, due to some historical events, lost their lands to others. Only the name *Batwal* remained. It is not a large group and mostly resides in the Jammu, Udhampur, and Kathua districts of Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu, they live in the new Bahu Fort colony, Trikuta Nagar, and Bishna in the Jammu district**.** Beside Jammu and Kashmir Batwal reside in Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Hoshiarpur districts of Punjab and the Kangra and Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh (Singh, 2003).

Objectives of the Study

The study will be carried out with the objectives of:

- ❖ Study the social status of the Batwal community in relation to education and family.
- ❖ Examine the economic conditions of the Batwals in matters of land, occupation, and income that produce and sustain their marginal status.
- ❖ Understand the state and process of social exclusion of Batwals in a structural and holistic manner.
- ❖ Explore the reasons as to why the benefits of development programmes, government schemes and reservations are not reaching out to this community.

Significance of the Study

The goal of the current study is to understand the process of "social exclusion" experienced by one of J&K's most marginalised Scheduled Caste communities, the Batwals. The socio-economic condition of the Batwal community has been examined. The study is important for understanding how the Scheduled Castes are ranked, why some communities prosper and enjoy the greatest benefits while others, like the Batwals, continue to face social, political, and economic exclusion. This study has provided insights into the actions that ought to be taken to make the Batwal more inclusive. The study will be a contribution to the various sub-fields of sociology like social stratification, caste system, social exclusion, social mobility, and social change.

Methods of Study

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to gather information for this study. Research data is any information that has been acquired, discovered, produced, or made particularly to support an initial study finding. In other words data are the facts from which additional facts can be inferred.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

Sociological research is a methodological use of rules, principles and procedures that guide scientific investigations. Sociologists use a variety of research methods and systematic techniques for gathering and analysing facts about phenomena (Rao 2003). In the present study mixed methods are used to collect data including interviews, interview schedules, observation and questionnaires.

Socio-demographic Profile of Seela Village

Seela village is located in Reasi District in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). According to a survey conducted during fieldwork, Seela is a large village in the Reasi district and has a total population of is around 3,180. Seela village has a higher literacy rate compared to Jammu and Kashmir. According to the survey, the literacy rate of Seela village is 81.78%, and Jammu and Kashmir it is 67.16% in 2011.

Seela village in Reasi District has a substantial number of households of Scheduled Caste (mainly Batwal, Ramdasi, Mahasha, and Barwals), Brahmin (Sharma), Rajput (Sambyal), and Scheduled Tribe.

Seela village in Reasi District has a substantial number of households of Scheduled Caste (mainly Batwal, Ramdasi, Megh, Mahasha, and Barwals), Brahmin (Sharma), Rajput (Sambyal), and Scheduled Tribe. Scheduled Caste (SC) constitutes 34.97%, while Schedule Tribe (ST) forms 13.14 % of the total households of Seela village. Rajputs constitute 18.01%, Brahmins constitute 16.27%, and others constitute 13.66%. Of the 461 households in Seela village, 161 belong to the Scheduled Castes. Out of 161, Ramdasia (Chamar) makes up 35.40% (57) of the household, and Mahasha makes up 31.68% (51) of the households. On the other hand, Megh constitute 6.83% (11) households, Batwals make up 21.12% (34) of households and Barwals have least number of households at 4.97% (8). All 34 households are the part of sample for the present study. Thus, the total sample size is 34 households. Each household is represented by one respondent, usually the head of the household. Aside from that, a survey of 50% of the Households in all other communities is being conducted.

Gender

Gender is a significant factor in the specific socio-economic circumstances of the nation and state. Both social inclusion and social empowerment are significantly impacted by gender. As a result, the present study looked into the variable gender.

Table: 4.1.Gender of the Respondents

Sex	No. of Respondents	Percent
Male	32	94.1

Female	2	5.9
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

Table 4.1 shows that majority of the respondents 94.1% are male while remaining 5.9% are female. The female respondents involve were the Head of the household and are small in number, as compared to male because of that, they were widows. These findings reveal the fact that Batwal community is still a patriarchal dominated society. Head of the households are largely males.

Occupation

Several changes in the vocations of rural workers from agriculture to non-agricultural jobs have been noticed in recent years. In Seela village the people have different occupations like some are involve in agriculture, some are work as labourer. An attempt has been made to know the occupational status of the respondents in Seela village district Reasi.

Table 4.2 Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percent
Service	1	2.9
Farmer	9	26.5
Labor	21	61.8
Self-Employed	0	0
Unemployed	3	8.8
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

According to the Table 4.2 In Seela village, out of the total of 34 respondents in the Batwal community, 61.8%, or 21 of the respondents, are labourers, followed by 26.5%, or 9 of the respondents, who are farmers, and a few of the respondents, 8.8%, or 3 of the respondents, are unemployed. Interestingly, it is to be noted that only 2.9% of the respondents, or 1 person, are in government service. None of the respondents are self-employed. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of people in the Batwal community in Seela village are labourers. It clearly shows that they (the Batwals) are doing marginal work to continue their livelihood.

House

Housing is regarded as a crucial indicator of the socio-economic well-being and status of individuals in society. Simply, a place to live is one of the most basic needs, and the type of house you live in and the standard of your household reflect your financial situation. In the study, the housing status comprises of *kacha* house, *semi-kacha* house (mixed house), and *pacca* house.

Table: 4.4 Type of the House of the Respondents

Housing Status	No. of Respondents	Percent
Kacha	6	17.6
Semi kutcha	20	58.8
Pacca	8	23.6
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

An in-depth analysis from the Table 4.4 reveals that approximately 77% of the respondents are living in *Semi Kacha* house, followed by 23% percent living in *Pacca* house. None of the respondents lives in a prefabricated house. It demonstrates that their socio-economic situation is poor.

Income

The socio-economic standing of an individual in society is also indicated by their income. The availability of things like food, clothing, and shelter all heavily depend on one's income level. It determined the family's social class within society. Therefore, it is crucial to understand their income in order to determine their position.

Table 4.5 Income of the Respondents

Income (in Rupees)	No. of Respondents	Percent
up to 5,000	14	41.2
5,001 to 10,000	15	44.1
10,001-15,000	4	11.8
Above	1	2.9
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

According to the Table 4.5 out of the total 34 Batwals respondents, 41.2% or 14 of the respondents earn income upto Rs 5,000 or less than Rs 5,000 per month, 44.1% or 15 of the respondents earn income ranging between Rs 5,001-10,000, 11.85 or 4 of the respondents have the range between Rs 10,001-15,000 per month and 2.9% or 1 of the respondent said that they earn above the Rs 15,000 per month.

This shows that majority of the sampled household income level is Rs 10,000 and below. The income data indicates the inferior economic status of the Batwal community.

Education

Upward mobility is significantly influenced by education, which also has huge potential as a tool for social change. Education not only imparts knowledge but also newly acquired abilities, passions, attitudes, aspirations, and values. Education promotes social evolution and raises the cultural standing of the populace. Education and occupation have a connection. Briefly, there is an association between education and occupation.

Table 4.6 Education level of the Respondents

Education	No. of Respondents	Percent
Illiterate	14	41.2
Primary	10	29.4
Middle	6	17.6
Matric	4	11.8
Above	0	0
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

The Table 4.6 shows the level of the respondents. As per Table the out of the total 34 respondents of which 41.2% or 14 are illiterate, 29.4% or 10 of the respondents have studied up to primary level, 17.6% or 6 of the respondents have passed upto the middle standard and 11.8% or 4 respondents fall under the category of matric level. Interesting fact is that none of them studied above the high school. It means they (Batwals) are educationally backward. They do not have good educational status.

Family Size

Family size is a measure of societal structure that may change over time, which has implications for how individuals develop and how different cohorts interact socially. Size of the family has a

significant impact on academic. People from the small families spent about two more years in school as compared to large size family. It strongly impacts income and earnings. Large families were more likely to have lower status jobs.

Table 4.10 Family Size of the Respondents

Family Size	No. of Respondents	Percent
Up to 4 Members	16	47.1
Up to 6 Members	12	35.3
Up to 8 Members	6	17.6
Total	34	100

Source: Field Study

Table 4.10 demonstrate that 47.1% or 16 of households in the Batwals community have upto four members, 35.3% or 12 of the respondents said that they have upto six members and 17.6% or 6 of the respondents have upto eight members. Thus, it is evident from Table that more than 50% of the Batwal respondents affect the family's income, educational level, and other developmental indicators due to large size family.

Awareness about Reservation

The Batwal people are largely illiterate; they are unaware of the reservation in politics as well as in education and government jobs. At the moment, only one person works for the government. During our interview, the Panch of this ward explained that we are working on raising awareness and assuring me that we will be able to improve our conditions in the future.

Finding of the Study

On the basis of the data analyses and interpretation the following findings are drawn:

❖ The social status of the Batwal community is assessed using various social indicators such as education, occupation, income, housing status, land ownership, and so on. All indicators point to the Batwal community being socioeconomically backward.

❖ To measure the socio-economic status of the Batwal community, the "Updated Modified Kuppuswamy SES" scale for the year 2021 is used. The large number of households, i.e., 97.06% of the households, falls in the lower and lower middle classes. Only 2.94% of households are middle-class. This shows that the socioeconomic status of the Batwal community is deplorable.

❖ In terms of education, occupation, income, and housing status, the Batwals community has a very low social status when compared to other Scheduled Castes categories.

❖ Batwals community experience severe social exclusion means that they are forced to live in substandard conditions with low income, no landholdings, no jobs, and Kacha and mixed house in village.

❖ The Batwal people are largely illiterate; they are unaware of the reservation in politics as well as in education and government jobs.

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