

THE JATS

Their Role and Contribution to the Socio-economic
Life and Polity of North and North-West India

Vol. 6

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Edited by
Dr. Rajendra Kumar



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Origin of The Jats: Looks Into the Image and Identity

Dr. Ambika Dhaka

The Jats are the largest group in north-western India. The demographic statistics reveals their pre-eminent position in the states of Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan. They are divided into clans and gotras which vary in number. The Jats, when commonly refers to, are Hindu Jats. But, studies have revealed that they are not a homogeneous ethnic group living in a particular area. Quite interestingly, a significant number of Jats are Sikhs and Muslims. They are not just located in North India but across the frontiers and some communities in European countries like Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Iran and Ukraine are closely associated with the Jats.

Antiquity of Word 'Jat':

The scholars and historians hold varied opinion about the origin of the word Jat. It is said that this word is of ancient origin and is found in many languages of the world. It is known as jatta in Sanskrit, jathar/jat in Prakrit, juta in Arabic, Jat in Tarikh-i-Masumi, yuti in Chinese, jети/jатиya in European language, gath/gat in Roman and geti in Latin. It is believed that the word Jat is distorted form of the Sanskrit word 'Yat'¹. In the Yadu dynasty, there was one, Prithu Shruva, who had a son named Dharma whose son Ushna was Yat of one hundred Ashvamedha yajnas. Here, Yat means one who performs yajna. With passage of time, Yat got deformed into Jat, similarly as we find Jamuna for Yamuna or *jajamana* for *yajmana*. This fact is further corroborated in *Srimad Bhagwat Purana*.

Another opinion which holds prominence among scholars is that this word Jat has its origin from the Sanskrit word *jñat*. In chapter 82, book XII of Shanti Parva, Mahabharat², we find reference of the word *jñat* has been cited in a number of places. Just to name few-

- 1 evam agrāhyake tasmūñ *jñātisambandhimandale*
mīresv amīresv api ca katham bhāvo vibhāvyate
- 5 dāsyaṃ aiśvaryaṃ vādena *jñātinām* vai karomy aham
ardhabhoktāsmi bhogānām vāg dur ukātni ca kṣame
- 12 manaiṃvām kliṣṭyamaṇasya nārado bhayataḥ sadā
vaktum arhasi yac chreyo *jñātinām* ātmanas tathā
- 16 krtamūlam idānīm taj *jātaśabdam* sahāyavat
na śakyam punar ādātum vāntam annam iva tvayā
- 27 dhanyam yaśasyam āyusyam svapakso dbhavanam śubham
jñātinām avināśah syād yathā kṛṣṇa tathā kuru

This clearly indicates that Lord Krishna constituted a *Jñati-Sangha* to counter imperialist forces. This unit '*sangha*' was initially political in nature. But later in Jaina Agamas, *Jñati-Sangha* has been mentioned as a popular kula of kshatriyas who gave birth to many great Rajas. However, these Rajas were known by their *jñati* name only.

The Sanskrit language gave way to Prakrit in the written records of the past. The letters '*ja*' and '*ta*' of Sanskrit are '*ja*' and '*ta*' in Prakrit. Not only this, even in the inscriptions of the great Mauryan king, Ashoka, the words '*krita*' and '*mrta*' have been written in Prakrit as '*kata*' and '*mata*'. On the basis of this information, it may be inferred that the word *jat* is deformed version of *jñat*. When this word came into prominence is a big question that looms large over our mind. Panini, the well known grammarian of his time, propounded a sutra '*jat jñat sanghate*' in order to explain the root '*jat*'. In this way, we see that this word came into being long back in 8th century B.C. He further explains that the root '*jat*' + *ghayan* = *Jat* + *a*' as only '*a*' remains of the suffix '*ghayan*'. '*Jat* + *a* = *Jata*' and when '*a*' gets added

to '*ja*' of '*jat*' then it is '*jaat*' + *a* = *jaata*'. Dr. S.S. Rana has proved that the term '*Jat*' is not Sanscritic in origin as referred by scholars. See S.S. Rana : Is the term '*Jat*' Sanscritic in Origin, : *The Jats*, Vol. 4 (Editor : Dr. Rajendra Kumar), New Delhi, 2014, pp. 1-5.

The 6th century Pali inscription spells this race as '*Jit*'.^{3, 4} Etymologically, the term seems to have originated from the epithet of their supposedly first King, *Jit Salindra*, mentioned in this inscription. In the opinion of Tod, in Panjab and Rajasthan, the people of this race retained their original name '*Jit*'. This inscription has appeared in the Appendix of James Tod's *Annals And Antiquity of Rajasthan*. But, it is yet to receive validity by the historians as a historical document of the Jats. This classic inscription provides us a good amount of information on ethnological clues, chronology, history, and religious matters and helps us to extricate *Jat* antiquities from the realms of speculation. It reads:

May the *Jit*'ha be thy protector! What does this *Jit*'h resemble? which is the vessel of conveyance across the waters of life, which is partly white, partly red? Again what does it resemble, where the hissing-angered serpents dwell? What may this *Jit*'ha be compared to, from whose root the roaring flood descends?

Such is the *Jit*'h, by it may thou be preserved. The fame of *Raja Jat*, now shall tell, by whose valour the lands of *Salpoora* are preserved. The fortunes of *Raja Jit* are as flames of fire devouring his foe. The mighty warrior *Jit Salindra* is beautiful in person, and from the strength of his arm esteemed the first amongst the tribes of the mighty; make resplendent, as does the moon the earth, the dominions of *Salpoori*. The whole world praises the *Jit* prince, who enlarges the renown of his race, sitting in the midst of haughty warriors, like the lotus in the waters, the moon of the sons of men. The foreheads of the princes of the earth worship the toe of his foot. Beams of light irradiate his countenance, issuing from the gems of his arms of strength. Radiant is his array; his rices abundant; his mind generous

and profound as the ocean. Such is he of Sarya race, a tribe renowned amongst the tribes of the mighty, whose princes were ever foes to treachery, to whom the earth surrendered her fruits, and who added the lands of their foes to their own, By sacrifice, the mind of this lord of men has been purified; fair are his territories, and fair is the Fortress of Tak'hya. The string of whose bow is dreaded, whose wrath is the reaper of the field of combat; but to his dependants he as the pearl on the neck; who makes no account of the battle, though streams of blood run through the field. As does the silver lotos bend its head before the fierce rays of the sun. Does his foe stoop to him, while the cowards abandon the field.

From this lord of men (*Narpati*) Saundra sprung Dev Angli, whose deeds are known even at *this remote period*.

From him was born Sambooka, and from him Degali, who married two wives of Ycew race, and by one a son named Vira Narendra, pure as a flower from the fountain.

Amidst groves of *amba*, on whose clustering blossoms hang myriads of bees, that the wearied traveller might repose, was this edifice erected. May it and the fame of his founder, continue while ocean rolls, or while the moon, the sun and hills endure. Samvat 597. On the extremity of Malwa, this minster (Mindra) was erected on the banks of the river Taveli, by Salichandra, son of Virachandra.

Whoever will commit this writing to memory, his sins will be obliterated. Carved by the sculptor Sevanarya, son of Dwariva, and composed by Butena, chief of the bards⁶.

An important information revealed by this inscription is that it clearly mentions the name 'Jit', which is a variant of 'Jat'. The location of this inscription (Kota, Rajasthan) helps us to ascertain that their capital was Salpoora, 'the city of Sal' and its probable location was 'at the base of the Siwalik mountains' in Punjab⁸, and their rule and settlements extended in the south to Kota and Malwa, and in the north to North-West Punjab.

Origin and Lineage: Different Theories and Perspectives

The origin of Jats is a very difficult question and shrouded with mystery. But, when we look into the past and make an attempt to pick the threads of information about historicity of Jats we find that their origin, history and dispersion spread far and wide. There are numerous theories which give information about the origin of the Jats. Some historians believe that they were descendants of the aboriginal Mlechhas, Dairyas, Dasas, Asuras and Pisachas. Some historians designate Scythians to be the ancestors of Jats. Some mythological interpretations about the origin of Jats say that they sprang from the matted locks of Lord Shiva. Due to lack of historical data, the problems persist. More than a dozen of theories were expounded about the origin of Jats by the end of 20th century. A brief discussion of some theories about the origin of Jats has been mentioned below:

Indo-Aryan origin of Jats: This theory has been advocated on the basis of ethnological, physical and linguistic standards by many historians like Ernest Binfield Havell, K.R. Qanungo, Chintaman Vinayak Vaidya, Sir Herbert Risley, Thakur Deshraj, Dr.Nathan Singh, Mangal Sen Jindal, etc. Sir Herbert Risley⁹ strongly puts forward the view that the Jats are true representatives of the Vedic Aryans.

Some Historian report the presence of Jats in India as early as 3102 BCE¹⁰. Dr. Nathan Singh¹¹, Hukum Singh Panwar believe that the original homeland of Jats was 'Saptasindhu' and consider Jats to be the Aryans. Russian scholar, Kutyotseva has identified Sindh region in India as early home of Jats. These scholars are of the view that Lord Shiva is basic deity worshipped by Jats. Based on this, they have identified the proximity of Pashupatinath seal of Harappans with Jats and believe that this race was existing during this period too.

Jats had to migrate from India due to economic, social and political reasons after Mahabharata war for some period but they returned to India. When they migrated, they carried their language and culture along with them. This view is also supported by Thakur Deshraj¹², who writes that on the basis of

ethnological, physical, cultural and linguistic characteristics, Jats are pure Aryans, who inhabited the areas on the banks of Ganga-Yamuna or Sarswati-Sindhu during Vedic civilization. Scholars believe that after the great Mahabharata war, Krishna formed a democratic federation or sangha of clans known as Jñātsangha (ज्ञाति-संघ). Initially, Vrishni and Andhaka clans were included in this sangha and later many clans joined it. In chapter 82, book XII of Shanti Parva, Mahabharat¹³, we find reference of this as follows-

25 bhedād vinaśah samngghānām samghamukhyo 'si keśava

yathā tvām prāpya notsided ayam samngghas tathā kuru

29 mādhavāh kukurā bhōjāh sarve cāndhakavrsnayah

(Andhaka+ Vrishni)

tvayy āsakatā mahābāho lokā lokeśvarāś ca ye

Another scholar, Maheswari Prasad of Banaras Hindu University believes that the Jats belong to the Proto-Vedic Aryan stock. But being settled on the periphery of Madhyadesha, the cradle of Vedic culture, they did not undergo the social transformation on the line of Varna system and monarchical political organization. The power of decision-making remained with elders and clan organizations.¹⁴

According to some historians, who quote a Pauranic tradition, it is said that the Jats originated from the locks of Shiva. This episode is found in Dev Samhita.

Jats were Indo-Scythians: Studies have revealed that the Jat people are the merged descendants of Indo-Scythian tribes of the region, merging with Indo-Aryans to form the Jat people. DNA studies have proved that Jat people are Indo-Scythian. According to this theory, the original home of the Jats was in Central Asia near the country we now call Ukraine. Many recent DNA studies have provided scientific confirmation a proof that the Jats came from Ukraine. DNA studies have proved that Jat people are Aryo-Scythians. Professor B. S. Dhillon states that Jat people are mainly of Indo-

Scythian lineage with composite mixing of Sarmatians, Goths & Jutes in History and study of the Jats. Dr. Dhillon confirms that the Sibs "mentioned in the Shorkot (Pakistan) inscription" are the modern Siboi who belong to a Jat clan.

A recent study of the people of Indian Punjab, where about 40% or more of the population are Jat people, strongly shows that the Jat people are Indo-Scythians. The genalogical DNA test of Indian Punjab Jats¹⁵ brought forth the fact that they share common features with Ukrainian people, Germanic people, Slavic people, Baltic people, Iranian people, and Central Asian groups. This strongly indicates that they originated from near or in Ukraine. It found Jat people share only two haplotypes, one of which is also shared with the population of present-day Turkish people, and have few matches with neighbouring Pakistani population. This haplotype¹⁶ shared between the two Jat groups may be part of an Indo-Aryan (or Indo-European people) genetic contribution to these populations, whereas the haplotypes shared with other Eurasian populations is due to the strong DNA contributions of Indo-European Scythians (Saka, Massagetae) and White Huns. In case of the female mitochondrial DNA, there is very little connection with Central Asian and northwest European populations, even though Jats share many Y-SNP markers¹⁷ with these populations. Therefore, this DNA Study proves that there has been male DNA into the Jat people from Ukrainian Scythians (Saka, Massagetae) and White Huns. A number of historians, archaeologists and researchers believe that Jats were Indo-Scythians.

In the light of different theories discussed above, one may infer that the problem still persists with regards to historicity and origin of this race. There are numerous literary evidences which deliver information about the origin of jats but in the light of limitations which literary records suffer, we cannot rely completely on the information given by them. The scientific study about Indo-Scythian origin of Jats does offer a solid and logical ground. More evidences from inscriptions and archaeological side shall make the picture clear. The issue offers scope for further research and probe.

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6. Tod, *op.cit.*, pp. 914-15.
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